



Qatar partakes in extraordinary OIC meeting to discuss developments in Somalia

QNA
Jeddah

Qatar took part in the extraordinary meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Organisation of Islamic Co-operation (OIC) to discuss developments in the situation in Somalia, convened yesterday in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

HE the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sultan bin Saad al-Muraikhi led Qatar's delegation at the meeting. In Qatar's speech before the meeting, HE al-Muraikhi noted that the meeting is being held at an extremely sensitive time amid rapid developments, prompting OIC member states to uphold a collective responsibility in defend-

ing the principles of sovereignty and respect for international law, in addition to protecting security and stability in the region, the Horn of Africa region, and the Red Sea.

Al-Muraikhi reiterated Qatar's vehement condemnation of Israel's recognition of the "Somaliland" region of the Federal Republic of Somalia as an independent state. He stressed that this move constitutes a unilateral measure that contravenes the very essence of international law, undermines the sovereignty, national unity, territorial integrity, and internationally recognised borders of the Federal Republic of Somalia, and represents a grave precedent that goes in contrast with the principles of international law, as well as the United Nations and OIC Charters.

HE the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs stressed Qatar's full and unflinching support for the sovereignty of the Federal Republic of Somalia, its enduring commitment to its national unity and territorial integrity, and its flat-out rejection of any attempts that compromise these immutable constants.

Qatar stresses that the "Somaliland" region is part and parcel of the Federal Republic of Somalia, that it has no international legal status, and that any attempt to recognise its secession is null and void under the provisions of international law, HE al-Muraikhi underlined. This position, al-Muraikhi stressed, is fully consistent with the outcomes of the 15th Islamic Summit held in Banjul

in 2023, which called for the unequivocal rejection of any breach of Somalia's sovereignty and for unwavering support for the sovereign rights of the Federal Republic of Somalia over its entire territory, airspace, and territorial waters.

Al-Muraikhi went on to assert that Qatar backs the legitimate institutions of the Somali State and is committed to safeguarding the security and stability of Somalia, as well as the interests of its brotherly people. Qatar forged ahead to marshal constant efforts to undertake a pivotal role in backing peace, security, stability, and development in Somalia, including the provision of development support in areas such as health, education, and economic empowerment, in addition to responding to emer-

gency relief needs and other types of support, he pointed out.

Al-Muraikhi elaborated that Qatar continues to advance diplomatic relations with the Federal Republic of Somalia in service of shared interests, objectives, and aspirations. He reaffirmed Qatar's standing with Somalia and its government in rejecting any measures that would compromise the unity of Somalia, its territorial integrity, and its sovereignty over its entire territory, renewing Qatar's call for concerted global efforts to maintain security and stability in the Horn of Africa region.

HE al-Muraikhi outlined that the recognition of the Somaliland region by the Israeli occupation authorities came as a continuation of a series of acts that violate

the rights of the Palestinian people, extending to countries of the region. He warned that such practices will only lead to serious consequences for regional and global security.

In addition, HE Minister of State for Foreign Affairs stressed Qatar's unequivocal rejection of any attempt to link this measure with any plans to displace the Palestinian people outside their territory. He reiterated Qatar's enduring position in supporting the Palestinian cause and the resilience of the brotherly Palestinian people, based on resolutions of international legitimacy and the two-state solution, to ensure the establishment of an independent Palestinian State on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Qatar guest of honour at New Delhi book fair

Qatar's participation in New Delhi World Book Fair as guest of honour showcases deep ties with India: Culture minister

QNA
New Delhi

HE the Minister of Culture Sheikh Abdulrahman bin Hamad al-Thani has said that Qatar's participation in the New Delhi World Book Fair as guest of honour reflects the role of culture and knowledge as bridges for human communication as well as the deep ties between Qatar and India.

This came during HE the minister's participation in the opening of the New Delhi World Book Fair, in the presence of Indian Minister of Education Dharmendra Pradhan; Minister of Culture of Spain, Ernest Urteasu; ambassador of Qatar to India, Mohammed Hassan al-Jaber; and Undersecretary



of the Ministry of Culture, Dr Ghanem bin Mubarak al-Ali; along with a lineup of officials, diplomats, and intellectuals.

HE the Minister of Culture said that Qatar takes pride in being a guest of honour in this international cultural event that celebrates books as holders of collective memory, fundamental tools for creating awareness, and channels for dialogue and rapprochement among cultures. He expressed his thanks and appreciation for the Indian side's warm reception and support for Qatar's participation.

HE Sheikh Abdulrahman added that this participation reflects the

strength of bilateral relations that are based on mutual respect and a shared belief in the role of culture and knowledge in interconnecting peoples, noting that investing in knowledge is a fundamental part of advancing societies and consolidating development and national security.

HE the minister added that the New Delhi World Book Fair embodies books' pivotal role in shaping human awareness and building civilisations, something that aligns with Qatar's vision of supporting reading and the publishing industry, in addition to strengthening the presence of culture in



HE the Minister of Culture Sheikh Abdulrahman bin Hamad al-Thani with other dignitaries at the opening ceremony of New Delhi World Book Fair in New Delhi, India.

sustainable development.

For his part, the Indian minister of education highlighted Qatar's participation as a guest of honour and said that it reflects the depth of bilateral cultural relations, enriches the book fair's cultural programme, and boosts cultural and intellectual dialogue between the peoples of India and Qatar.

In turn, the Spanish culture minister said that the event is not limited to showcasing books alone; rather, it represents a vibrant space for the exchange of ideas and expertise, support for the publishing industry, and an encouragement to reading, being an essential part in creating aware societies that are capable of facing future challenges.



Gulf-European Cultural Forum begins at Katara

QNA
Doha

The second Gulf-European Cultural Forum commenced yesterday at the Katara Cultural Village Foundation, where the two-day forum is being held under the title 'Katara and the Bridge of Andalusian Heritage: Enhancing Cultural Communication between the Gulf Arab States and Spain'. The opening was attended by a number of cultural officials and academics, alongside a distinguished group of creatives and culture enthusiasts.

The organisation of the forum underscores Katara's pioneering role in consolidating cross-border cultural dialogue and reviving shared civilisational and human values, particularly the Andalusian heritage, which historically served as a bridge of knowledge and culture between the Arab world and Europe.

The second edition of the forum brings together 25 researchers and creatives from the Gulf Arab states and Spain, with the aim of enhancing intellectual partnerships and fostering civilisational understanding among peoples. The forum opened with an official ceremony that included a brief documentary presentation highlighting the forum's journey since its first edition, which was held in Granada, Spain.

In this context, Director of Events and Cultural Affairs Department at Katara, Khaled Abdulrahim al-Sayed expressed his



pleasure at the launch of the forum at Katara, which continually seeks to strengthen communication among peoples through culture and the arts. He noted that Katara serves as a platform that brings together heritage and contemporary creativity, acting as a living bridge connecting civilisations.

The General Co-ordinator of the forum, Dr Mohammed bin Abdullah Boudi said that the launch of the second Gulf-European Cultural Forum follows the success of its first edition, which was held in Granada in co-operation with the University of Granada. He stressed that such forums represent bridges of culture and knowledge between peoples and civilisations, strengthening fraternal, human, and cultural relations between intellectuals in Europe and the Arab world, particularly the Gulf states.

He added that the forum consti-

tutes an important step reflecting the vital role of culture in promoting dialogue, mutual respect, and understanding among different cultures. The first day of the forum witnessed the convening of the first intellectual seminar, which discussed the forum's cultural and intellectual themes, with the participation of a number of academics and researchers, including Dr Safaa al-Alawi, Dr Jaime Ratia, Dr Susana Calbo, and Dr Mohammed Boudi. Their presentations addressed dimensions of cultural communication and manifestations of Andalusian heritage in shared human thought.

The first day concluded with a poetry evening featuring several Arab and Spanish poets, including Trinio Cruz, Saeed al-Saglawi, Shumaisa al-Nuaimani, Nabila Zubari, Maria Jose Munoz, and Francisco Javier, accompanied by

musician Jose Agudo. The event offered a creative experience reflecting the richness of poetic convergence between the two cultures.

The second day of the forum will be devoted to a book-signing event for a number of participants, including Dr Rashid al-Najm, Engineer Saeed al-Saglawi, Salma Boudi, and Dr Jose Puerta. This will be followed by the second intellectual seminar, featuring Dr Jose Puerta, Dawood al-Bousafi, Dr Mashael al-Okaili, Ada Romero Sanchez, and Dr Anwar al-Saad, before the forum concludes with a poetry evening affirming shared human values and the importance of culture as a unifying language among nations.

The closing poetry evening will feature Dr Rashid al-Najm, Emilio Ballesteros, Maria Jose Munoz, Francisco Javier, accompanied by musician Jose Agudo.

Katara Amber Festival kicks off on Jan 13

By Tawfik Lamari
Staff Reporter

The sixth edition of the Katara International Amber Festival 2026, organised by the Katara Cultural Village Foundation, will kick off on Tuesday, January 13, and will run until January 16 at Katara Hall, Building 12, according to Katara's Instagram account.

The festival will open its doors to visitors, inviting them to explore the world of amber (Kahraman in Arabic) and its historical, cultural, and aesthetic value.

The Katara International Amber Festival is the first-of-its-kind in Qatar and the largest in the Middle East. It holds a prominent position on the map of specialised international exhibitions, thanks to its wide and rare collections of natural amber and luxurious amber beads, which attract enthusiasts, collectors, and experts from both within Qatar and abroad.

The festival attracts enthusiasts, collectors, and experts from within Qatar and abroad. The festival annually attracts a distinguished group of exhibitors, specialists, and enthusiasts of amber, offering visitors the opportunity to explore the history of this ancient natural material, learn about its sources and various types, and highlight its presence in traditional crafts, ornaments, and human and spiritual heritage across civilisations.

The Katara International Amber Festival continues to strengthen its position as a platform that combines commercial and cultural dimensions. It not only showcases products, handicrafts, and artistic artefacts but also contributes to documenting and archiving the history of amber production and fostering direct communication between exhibitors, the public, researchers, and those interested in this field.

Previous editions of the festival witnessed broad participation from numerous countries, with exhibitors presenting rare collections of natural amber.

The festival also included information sessions and discussions with the public on methods of identifying amber, its geological history, and the most prominent amber mining regions worldwide.

The festival highlights amber as a material that holds within it stories of time and nature, as some types of amber were formed millions of years ago, giving it a cognitive and cultural value that goes beyond being an element of decoration or acquisition.



Sidra Medicine positions into regional paediatric reference centre

From Page 1

Dr Huda said Sidra Medicine is expanding its focus on system-level resilience in paediatric emergency and women's healthcare with several new initiatives.

"New initiatives include deeper integration of simulation into clinical governance, enhanced data-driven quality improvement, and

stronger regional and international academic partnerships. There is also increasing emphasis on leadership development, interprofessional training, and cutting-edge research that addresses real-world challenges such as crowding, workforce sustainability, and high-acuity care delivery. These efforts aim to ensure that paediatric care at Sidra Medicine contin-

ues to evolve in step with the needs of children, families, and health systems both locally and beyond," he highlighted.

Dr Huda, who is the lead of the Scientific Planning Committee for QPEM 2026, said that from its early years, QPEM has evolved from a teaching forum into a platform that actively supports research, quality improvement, and knowl-

edge translation. "The conference encourages participants to present original work, audits, and system-level innovations grounded in real clinical environments. By bringing together clinicians, educators, and researchers, QPEM facilitates collaboration across institutions and disciplines, allowing ideas tested locally to be refined, evaluated, and shared regionally," he said.

QIB's new 'Transfer & Win' campaign to reward customers launched

Qatar Islamic Bank (QIB) has launched a new 'Transfer & Win' campaign, fortifying its fast, convenient, and affordable Direct Remit transfer services available to customers 24/7 through the QIB Mobile App, the QIB Lite App, and QIB Internet Banking.

Through QIB's digital channels, customers can send money in real time to their beneficiaries at competitive exchange rates, offering a cost-effective alternative to traditional transfer methods. As part of its ongoing commitment to delivering easy to use and rewarding transfer experience, QIB is introducing a new campaign running for three months until March 31, 2026.

During the campaign period, customers who make international transfers of QR100 or more to Direct Remit countries: Jordan, Egypt, India, Pakistan, the Philippines, Bangladesh, or Nepal will have the opportunity to win cash prizes. The campaign applies to transfers made through QIB's Direct Remit services, including bank-to-bank transfers, bank-to-wallet transfers, and cash pickup services, to beneficiaries in the above-mentioned countries.



With every eligible transfer to one of the above mentioned participating countries, customers will receive one entry into a monthly draw, where 75 winners will be rewarded with QR2,500, with 25 winners announced each month. In addition, for every three qualifying transfers made during the campaign period, customers will earn one entry into the grand draw, where five winners will each receive a cash prize of QR10,000, to be announced at the end of the campaign.

D Anand, QIB general manager - Personal Banking Group, said: "QIB continues to enhance its international transfer services to provide customers with a fast, secure, and cost-effective way to send

money anytime and anywhere.

"This campaign reflects our commitment to rewarding customers for using our digital channels while reinforcing QIB's position as a trusted banking partner that understands and supports their everyday financial needs."

The initiative targets QIB's diverse retail customer base, including Qataris and expatriates who regularly transfer funds abroad for family support, savings or investments, and expenses, offering them greater convenience along with attractive rewards. For more information on QIB's international transfer services and campaign details, customers can visit www.qib.com.qa/en-TransferOffer



Breeders prepared for surge in Ramadan livestock demand



As part of early preparations for the holy month of Ramadan, livestock breeders have confirmed that extensive planning and readiness for the season have been completed months in advance.

Ramadan is considered one of the most important annual seasons for the livestock market, as demand rises sharply due to families' traditions of hosting banquets, communal gatherings, and social occasions during the holy month.

Breeders explained that preparation for Ramadan does not begin shortly before its arrival, but rather through long-term planning that includes proper animal care, balanced nutrition, controlled fattening programmes, and selecting livestock at ages most preferred by consumers. They stressed that early preparation and full readiness are key factors in ensuring a successful season and meeting market demand with high-quality products.

For the current Ramadan season, breeders have introduced a range of premium livestock varieties, including locally produced Syrian lambs, local lambs, as well as young, well-fattened rams and goats. These categories are the most sought-after during Ramadan due to the tenderness, quality, and suitability of their meat for large gatherings and festive meals.

Ramadan also represents a critical marketing period for breeders, during which a substantial portion of annual production is sold. To ensure optimal quality, breeders rely on carefully planned feeding programmes and continuous veterinary care.

As for the retail prices, breeders pointed out that local lamb prices start at around QR1,600 per head, while Syrian lambs range between QR1,800 and QR2,000. Jordanian lambs are priced around QR1,400. Local and Syrian rams range from QR1,600-2,000. Cypriot goats are priced between QR900 and QR1,000, while local goats range

from QR1,500-1,700. Price variations are attributed to differences in type, age, and degree of fattening.

Breeders highlighted that livestock is sold directly to consumers without intermediaries, allowing buyers to save between QR200 and QR300 per head compared to purchasing through markets or traders. This direct-sales approach also ensures livestock of known origin and local upbringing.

Despite breeders' efforts to meet growing demand, peak season, particularly Ramadan, often see demand exceeding available supply.

This imbalance, coupled with rising fodder costs, contributes to higher prices. Breeders noted that price increases during Ramadan are natural under these conditions. They also stressed the importance of continued government support for animal feed and the need for sustainable solutions to reduce the financial burden on livestock breeders.

Qatar Camel Festival 'Jazilat Al-Atta' begins in Lbuseir today

The fifth Qatar Camel Festival "Jazilat Al-Atta" 2026, will kick off today in the Al Mazayen area in Lbuseir and will continue until Feb 10, 2026.

The event attracts record participation from across the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) states and has become a landmark and luminous event in the history of local and Gulf camel competitions, building on previous editions.

The participating camels will compete over 31 days for 119 titles across three categories: 37 rounds for Al Magateer, 44 rounds for Asayel, and 38 rounds for Mujahim.

Today's contests will kick off with three rounds of Al Magateer for the production of Al Azbah in the Shual Safr, Shaqeh Hamar, and Wadh classes.

The camels will compete in the dedicated rounds: Al Azbah production for Wadh, Shual Safr, and Shaqeh Hamar.

Participants in these three rounds will be awarded three symbolic trophies, three vehicles, and 12 cash prizes, including a Tank 500 for first place and monetary awards for second through fifth places.

The Al Magateer contests will last for 10 days, concluding on Jan 21, after which the Asayel category will commence, running for 13 days until Feb 1, followed by the Mujahim category for 11 days until Feb 10. Substantial cash and in-kind prizes have been allocated to participants, including 56 vehicles, 149 symbolic awards, and additional monetary prizes. In total, 1,090 winners will be recognised, with awards presented to the top ten in all rounds except the Khanjar, Shalfa, Bundug, and Saif rounds, where only the top five will be awarded.

The organising committee has spared no effort to ensure the event is showcased in its most magnificent form. (QNA)

17,000 eye injuries in Gaza war, children hit hardest

QNA
Gaza

The Gaza Strip is facing a severe health crisis that threatens eye patients after thousands of civilians were injured during the Israeli war.

Among them are children who may permanently lose their sight due to the critical shortage of medicines and medical supplies, and the disruption of specialised surgical procedures.

Thirteen-year-old Mohammed Shaheen, who lost sight in his right eye, is trying to move around with his mother's help inside the eye hospital in Gaza, seeking treatment to save his left eye from damage after it was injured during an Israeli bombing that targeted his home in the recent Israeli aggression.

Shaheen's mother told this QNA correspondent: "Since my son lost sight in one eye, we have been trying with all the doctors and specialised hospitals to save the other one from damage caused by the severe injury. However, the reality of the situation in the hospitals and the suspension of eye surgeries due to the shortage of equipment, medicines, and medical supplies threatens my son with lifelong blindness."

The case of Shaheen is one of thousands of Palestinians who sustained eye injuries during the two years of the Israeli war on the Gaza Strip. A large percentage of these victims are children, and their lives are threatened by the ongoing repercussions of the Israeli aggression and the imposed siege on the Strip. The occupation prevents critical cases from travelling abroad for treatment and blocks the entry of medicines, medical equipment, and supplies necessary for doctors to perform specialised and complex surgeries, including eye surgeries for both the injured and the sick.

LACK OF EQUIPMENT
Director of the Eye Hospital in the Gaza Strip and a consultant in ophthalmology, Dr Abdulsalam Sabah confirmed that those in-



Children make their way through the rubble of destroyed buildings in Jabalia, in the northern Gaza Strip, yesterday.

jured in the Israeli war face a real risk of losing their sight due to the lack of appropriate treatments and equipment. He noted that the hospital records daily cases of vision loss among the injured and sick as a result of the inability to provide them with suitable treatment or perform the necessary surgical interventions, while the Israeli occupation continues its siege of the Strip and prevents the entry of medicines, supplies, and medical equipment.

Speaking to Qatar News Agency (QNA), Dr Sabah stated that many eye injuries require immediate medical intervention, particularly those involving penetrating eyeballs and the entry of shrapnel. This can lead to serious infections that may result in complete vision loss and necessitate enucleation (removal of the eye). He emphasised that delaying immediate intervention in such cases leads to irreversible and total vision loss. He explained that, according to health statistics, the number of injuries sustained during the war on Gaza exceeded 171,000. He noted that approximately 11% of these injuries were eye injuries, amounting to roughly 17,000 cases.

Children constitute 20% of these injuries and are the most vulnerable to vision loss due to their weaker immune systems. This situation foreshadows a rise in the number of visually impaired individuals in the commu-

nity. Sabah pointed out that the number of those who lost their sight during the war on Gaza has exceeded 3,000, although accurate final statistics are not yet available. He anticipates that the actual number of eye injuries, once officially and definitively tallied, will be significantly higher and more shocking.

The director of the Gaza Eye Hospital stressed that specialised eye surgery teams are suffering from a severe shortage of resources due to the lack of necessary medical equipment and the continued Israeli occupation's prevention of thousands of eye patients from receiving treatment outside the Gaza Strip.

PERMISSION DENIED
He explained that eye patients are often denied permission to travel for treatment outside Gaza under the pretext that they are not considered a "life-saving priority", despite the permanent visual impairments they face, which threaten their lives.

Dr Sabah stated that the specialised eye hospital in Gaza, which was recently rebuilt after being destroyed during the last Israeli military operation in Gaza City before the ceasefire, is currently focusing its efforts on performing emergency and life-saving surgeries for the eyeball and vision, such as repairing and closing wounds, and attempting to provide treatment with the limited resources available.

inflicts permanent disabilities on Palestinian civilians, including directly targeting them with sniper fire aimed at their eyes, in addition to injuries resulting from shelling and the use of projectiles that disperse large quantities of shrapnel.

He pointed that approximately 5,000 patients with eye injuries are at risk of total or partial vision loss due to the denial of treatment. This is a result of the Israeli occupation's destruction of the eye hospital's infrastructure, including generators and surgical equipment, and its prevention of the entry of medicines, supplies, and medical consumables. The shortage of treatments has exacerbated serious conditions such as glaucoma, corneal problems, retinal issues, and cataracts, threatening patients with permanent blindness.

WAITING LISTS

Khairi explained that approximately 2,400 patients are on waiting lists and urgently need surgeries that are unavailable in Gaza. He emphasised that the Israeli army not only inflicts injuries but also deliberately denies the injured access to treatment by preventing travel and obstructing the entry of necessary medical equipment and supplies.

The co-ordinator of the human rights centre pointed out that the eye hospital in Gaza is suffering from a severe shortage of essential diagnostic equipment needed to treat war injuries. This is due to the Israeli occupation's refusal to allow the entry of such equipment, despite international organisations' willingness to cover the full cost. As a result, medical staff are forced to provide initial treatment using basic tools and rudimentary equipment inadequate for the scale and severity of the injuries.

He emphasised that the continued prevention of the entry of medical equipment and supplies constitutes a crime of collective punishment and a flagrant violation of international humanitarian law, particularly the Fourth Geneva Convention.

Second fragment of Al Khor meteorite found

The second fragment of the Al Khor meteorite has been found after a four-month search, Sheikh Salman bin Jabor al-Thani, head of Qatar Astronomical Centre, has announced on his X account.

After testing, it was confirmed to be an iron meteorite, he said. The search was conducted along the identified trajectory using drones and by walking long distances in the desert. Preliminary estimates indicate that the identified path extends for more than 10km. Sheikh Salman explained that specialised teams were able to locate the new fragment after continuous efforts that included using drones to track the likely meteorite fall path, as well as walking long distances in desert areas under challenging field conditions that required great precision and patience. He added that preliminary tests conducted on the meteorite revealed that it is an iron meteorite, a rare type of great scientific importance due to the valuable information it provides about the formation of planets and the history of the solar system. He pointed out that the trajectory determined for the meteorite's fall extends initially over 10km, reflecting the magnitude of the challenge faced by the search teams, while also confirming the success of the scientific methodology. He further stressed that the search efforts are still ongoing, with a focus on scientifically documenting the phenomenon and collecting as much evidence as possible to support astronomical research and enhance scientific knowledge in this field within Qatar and the region.



US urges fresh talks between Syria govt, Kurds after clashes

AFP
Aleppo

The US yesterday urged the Syrian government and Kurdish authorities to return to negotiations after days of deadly clashes in the northern city of Aleppo.

Conflicting reports emerged from the city, as authorities announced a halt to the fighting and said they began transferring Kurdish fighters out of Aleppo, but Kurdish forces denied the claims shortly after.

An AFP correspondent saw at least five buses yesterday carrying men leaving the Kurdish-majority Sheikh Maqsud district accompanied by security forces, with authorities saying they were fighters though Kurdish forces insisted they were “civilians who were forcibly displaced”.

AFP could not independently verify the men's identities.

Another correspondent saw at least six buses entering the neighbourhood and leaving without anyone on board, with relative calm in the area.

It came as US envoy Tom Barrack yesterday met with Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa, and afterwards issued a call for a “return to dialogue” with the Kurds in accordance with an integration agreement sealed last year. The violence in Aleppo erupted after efforts to integrate the Kurds’ de facto autonomous administration and military into the country's new government stalled.

Since the fighting began on Tuesday, at least 21 civilians have been killed, according to figures from both sides, while Aleppo's governor said 155,000 people have been displaced.

Yesterday evening, state television reported that Kurdish fighters “who announced their surrender... were transported by bus to the city of Tabqa” in the Kurdish-controlled north-



People evacuate from Sheikh Maqsud neighbourhood following the collapse of an agreement between the Syrian government and the Syrian Democratic Forces, in Aleppo, Syria, yesterday.

east. In a statement to the official SANA news agency, the military announced earlier yesterday “a halt to all military operations in the Sheikh Maqsud neighbourhood”.

A Syrian security source had told AFP that the last Kurdish fighters had entrenched themselves in the area of Al-Razi hospital in Sheikh Maqsud, before being evacuated by the authorities.

Kurdish forces said in a statement that news of fighters being transferred was “entirely false” and that the people taken included “young civilians who were abducted and transferred to an unknown location”.

On the outskirts of Sheikh Maqsud, families who were unable to flee the violence were leaving, accompanied by Syrian security forces, according to an AFP correspondent.

Men were carrying their children on their backs as women and children wept, before boarding buses taking them to shelters.

Dozens of young men in civilian clothing were separated from the rest, with security forces making them sit on the ground, heads down, before being taken by bus to an unknown destination, according to the correspondent.

At the entrance to the district, 60-year-old resident Imad al-Ahmad was

waiting for permission from the security forces to return home.

“I left four days ago... I took refuge at my sister's house,” he said. “I don't know if we'll be able to return today.”

Nahed Mohammad Qassab, a 40-year-old widow also waiting to return, said she left before the fighting to attend a funeral.

“My three children are still inside, at my neighbour's house. I want to get them out,” she said.

The clashes, some of the most intense since Syria's new authorities took power, present yet another challenge as the country struggles to forge a new path after the ousting of longtime ruler Bashar al-Assad in December 2024.

Both sides have blamed the other for starting the violence in Aleppo.

In neighbouring Iraq's Kurdistan region, thousands of people had gathered yesterday to protest against Damascus' campaign in Aleppo.

A flight suspension at Aleppo airport was extended until late yesterday.

The Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) control swathes of the country's oil-rich north and northeast, much of which they captured during Syria's civil war and the fight against the Islamic State group.

Severe cold claims infant's life in Gaza

QNA
Gaza

Spokesperson for the Civil Defence in the Gaza Strip, Mahmoud Bassal has stated that a seven-day-old infant died as a result of the extreme cold in the Gaza Strip, which has been experiencing a storm since Friday.

Bassal confirmed to the Qatar News Agency (QNA) that the infant died in his family's tent in Deir Al-Balah, in the central Gaza Strip. This brings the number of victims of the cold in tents in Gaza to four children, in addition to 19 people who died as a result of the collapse of buildings bombed during the Israeli aggression.

Bassal explained that the current storm affecting the Gaza Strip has caused

severe damage to temporary shelters, noting that thousands of tents have been completely destroyed, while many others, especially those on the beach, have been blown away by the strong winds.

He pointed out that thousands of tents remain at risk of being blown away at any moment, given the continued unstable weather conditions and the lack of any means of securing or protecting them.

He added that civilians are living in catastrophic conditions inside tattered tents and dilapidated houses, lacking even the most basic safety and human dignity. He pointed out that they were forced to pitch their tents on the beach due to the lack of space within the cities after the widespread destruction of residential neighbourhoods and the absence of alternative shelters.

Bassal confirmed the existence of

thousands of houses on the verge of collapse, posing a direct threat to the lives of residents, especially with cracks and partial collapses that worsen with rain and wind.

He warned that every new storm turns into a genuine humanitarian disaster, given the ban on the entry of building materials and the continued obstruction of reconstruction efforts.

He added that what the Gaza Strip is witnessing today falls far short of the minimum humanitarian standards and constitutes a blatant violation of humanitarian principles and international humanitarian law.

He explained that civil defence teams are working with extremely limited resources, amidst increasing reports of collapses, tents being blown away, and rainwater leaks.

Pro-Sisi parties dominate Egypt parliament vote

AFP
Cairo

Egypt's election body yesterday announced the final results of a months-long parliamentary election, with a pro-government coalition dominating a vote critics said would further cement President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi's grip on power.

Half of the seats were filled through closed party lists and the other half by individual candidates, while 5% of MPs are appointed directly by the president. A quarter of the seats are also reserved

for women. Of the half for individual candidates, the three main parties of pro-government coalition ‘National List for Egypt’ won 164 seats, the election body said. A total of 596 seats make up the Egyptian parliament.

The majority of the remaining individual seats went to smaller parties or independent candidates who are also considered close to the government.

The pro-Sisi Mostaqbal Watan (Nation's Future) party and the National Front party – headed by former minister Essam al-Gazzar – lead the 12-member coalition. The election body cancelled the results of the vote in more than 30

constituencies across the country in November and December, ordering a re-run following appeals over counting procedures. Critics have long denounced the very limited role of parliament in the absence of any real opposition and the dominance of parties linked to the ruling party. Analysts said the timing of the elections gives them unusual weight as they will be the last before Sisi's third and final term ends in 2030.

Under the 2019 constitutional amendments, Sisi's term was extended from four to six years and his previous term was retroactively counted as his first, allowing him to stay in office until 2030.

China opposes foreign interference in Tanzania

AFP
Dar es Salaam

China's top diplomat yesterday warned against foreign interference in Tanzania at the end of a visit to the East African country, whose relations with the West have soured in recent months.

Wang Yi is the first foreign minister to pay an official visit to Tanzania since the bloody crackdown on election protesters late last year.

The Tanzanian opposition says at least



This handout photograph released yesterday by State House Tanzania shows Tanzania's President Samia Suluhu Hassan posing for a photograph with China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi (left) at the State House in Dar es Salaam.

2,000 people were killed by security forces in the violence that followed the October 29 legislative and presidential elections which international observers deemed fraudulent.

China, which has invested heavily in Tanzania in recent years, did not comment on the crackdown that sparked a wave of global criticism and pushed the US to reassess its bilateral relationship with the country.

In a statement shared after the visit, Tanzanian authorities said Wang had congratulated the country for the “successful conduct” of the elections.

“China reiterated its full confidence in Tanzania's leadership and institutions to manage internal affairs independently,” they added.

Meanwhile, a Chinese foreign ministry statement said Beijing “opposes any external force interfering in Tanzania's internal affairs” and stressed its support for the country's “national sovereignty and security”.

After Tanzania, Wang is expected to continue his tour of African countries in Lesotho, where US tariffs have strained relations with Washington.

On Friday, Wang skipped what would have been a historic visit to Somalia – the first by a Chinese foreign minister since the state collapsed in 1991.

UN says 53 Congolese refugees have died in Burundi

More than 50 refugees fleeing fighting in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo have died in neighbouring Burundi, the United Nations Refugee Agency, Reuters reported from Kinshasa. Of a total 53 deaths recorded, 25 people died due to a cholera outbreak, the agency said, while six others died from anaemia and other complications related to malnutrition, it said. The UN said it was working with the health ministry and other partners to investigate the cause of the other deaths. More than 100,000 Congolese have sought refuge in Burundi since fighting near the border intensified in early December and rebels seized the town of Uvira, the UNHCR said. Jean Jacques Purusi, governor of South Kivu province where Uvira is located, described the situation in Burundi as “misery” and “a crisis completely forgotten by the international community and media.” Congo's state and social affairs ministry said it was leading a humanitarian mission to help displaced Congolese in Burundi, providing food and medicines. A spokesperson for Burundi's National Office of Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons did not answer calls or respond to a texted request for comment.


South Africa's ANC launches 'most pressing' reform drive

AFP
Rustenburg

South Africa's African National Congress (ANC), the once-proud party of Nelson Mandela, yesterday unveiled an ambitious six-point reform drive aimed at transforming public frustration into votes at local government polls later this year.

Founded more than a century ago, the ANC led the struggle that toppled apartheid and held power ever since South Africa transitioned to democracy in 1994. But in 2024 it suffered a bruising setback, losing its parliamentary majority for the first time, forcing it into a coalition government. “We cannot blame our people if they question whether our democracy, our constitution, our economy and indeed the ANC and the Alliance really work for them,” President Cyril Ramaphosa said, referring to the party's long-standing coalition with trade unions.

He was speaking at a ceremony marking ANC's 114th anniversary in the northwestern town of Rustenburg, where thousands of supporters draped in the party's black, green and yellow filled the venue with song and dance.



QATAR FERTILISER COMPANY
INVITATION TO TENDER

QAFCO ANNOUNCES THE FOLLOWING TENDER

TENDER NO.	DESCRIPTION OF WORKS	TENDER FEE (QAR)	TENDER BOND (QAR)	TENDER FEE RECEIPT SUBMISSION DATES	TENDER CLOSING DATE
RFQ-6000004530	Servicing of Control Valve & Relief Valves during shutdown-5 years frame contract Renewal.	500/- (Non-refundable)	1,239,126.9/- (one million two hundred thirty-nine thousand one hundred twenty-six Qatari Riyals)	11-1-2026 12-1-2026 13-1-2026 14-1-2026 15-1-2026	18.02.2026

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

- During the period this tender is offered, the interested bidders shall first deposit appropriate Tender Fee amount in cash (Cheque will not be accepted) into Company's following Account at any QNB branch:

- Account Name : **QATAR FERTILISER COMPANY P.S.C. (QAFCO)**

- Account Number : **0013-025828-058**

- IBAN : **QA51QNBAA00000000013025828058**

- Bank Name : **QATAR NATIONAL BANK**
- The interested Bidders shall mention their company's name and Tender Number on the payment receipt provided by the bank and submit it as Tender Fee receipt.
- Besides the Tender fee receipt (which should have the Tender Number and bidder's name clearly mentioned on it), interested bidders shall also submit a copy of the valid Commercial Registration, an authorization letter from their company with the name, telephone, fax and e-mail ID of the focal point for this tender (**Very Important**), during the submission of Tender Fee Receipt for ensuring electronic receipt of the Tender Document.
- Tender Fee Receipt along with the specified documents shall be submitted to purchase@qafco.com.qa and on the dates indicated above, after payment of Tender Fee (nonrefundable).
- After submission of the above documents to the above email, Tender Document will be provided through an electronic platform separately.
- For any queries related to non-receipt of the tender documents after the submission Tender Fee receipt at the QAFCO Supply Chain, you may contact at 'purchase@qafco.com.qa or on 44227797
- Technical & Commercial details and Submission Procedures will be specified in the Tender Documents.
- The Company will not consider any offer without the enclosure of Tender Bond. -Not Applicable
- The Tender shall be strictly submitted using the QAFCO's Supply Chain Portal – SAP / Ariba, on or before the "Tender Closing Date". Tenderers who fail to adhere to this requirement will result in the disqualification of their Tender.



QatarEnergy LNG
Tender Invitation

No.	TENDER NUMBER / DESCRIPTION	TENDER ISSUE PERIOD	TENDER FEE (QAR)	TENDER BOND (QAR)	TENDER CLOSING DATE
1	LTC/C/OML/7424/25 PROVISION OF ELECTRICAL EQUIPMENT AND BATTERY BANKS TESTING ON CALL OFF BASIS	11/01/2026 to 12/02/2026	0	100,000	19/02/2026

Scope of Work:

This tender is for on-site electrical testing of generators, transformers, HV motors, GIS/switchgears/circuit breakers and protection relays of various power and voltage ratings by various manufacturers and battery discharge testing of all equipment installed at QatarEnergy LNG's onshore & offshore locations. The testing is required as quality assurance tests on electrical components in meeting the desired specifications, diagnostic testing to detect minor fault symptoms before timely and costly failures occur, fault finding on electrical plant, condition assessment, as an acceptance test after repair or refurbishment and routine safety checks etc. following QatarEnergy LNG's operational objectives and requirements.

Bid Validity: Bid Offer should be valid for **180** calendar days from the Tender Closing Date.

Place for Tender Collection and Bid Submission:

ITT document for this tender will be available in QatarEnergy LNG website under Suppliers tab >Current Open Tenders. The bids shall be submitted through the QatarEnergy LNG online platform (SMART by GEP).

Note: Local Companies (established under the Laws of State of Qatar with local Commercial Registration) are advised to refer to the tender documentation and In-Country Value (ICV) Digital Portal: - <https://icv.qa/en-US/> for details of ICV compliance that may be applicable.

Rattled by coup plot, Benin votes in legislative polls

AFP
Cotonou

One month after an attempted coup shook Benin, the west African country will hold parliamentary and local elections today, set to define the political landscape ahead of presidential polls in April.

President Patrice Talon's ruling coalition is expected to strengthen its already powerful hand in the ballots, with the main opposition Democrats party barred from the local polls — and from April's presidential race — for failing to gather enough signatures to register.

The Democrats will be running in parliamentary races today, but risk ceding more ground to Talon's three-party bloc, which currently holds 81 of the 109 seats in the National Assembly.

The elections come at a fraught moment for Benin, still reeling from a deadly coup attempt by army mutineers on December 7, which was put down in a matter of hours by the military, with support from Nigeria and France.

Talon, 67, has presided over strong economic development

across his nearly a decade in power, but critics accuse him of restricting political opposition and basic rights.

Security is also expected to be a key issue for voters.

Northern Benin has been hit hard by a spillover of militant violence by Al Qaeda-affiliated groups from neighbouring Burkina Faso and Niger.

While Talon, who is nearing the end of his second five-year term, is barred from running in April's elections, his hand-picked successor, Finance Minister Romuald Wadagni, is a strong favourite to win.

Wadagni will face a single rival for the presidency, moderate opposition figure Paul Houankpe of the smaller FCBE party, which has signed a number of agreements with parties in the ruling bloc.

FCBE parliamentary candidates are set to form a coalition with the ruling bloc if elected today. Under a November constitutional reform, the presidential term was extended to seven years, with a two-term limit.

Under the tweak, after today's elections and April's presidential race, Benin will go years with-

out any elections — a fact the Democrats attacked as putting “freedoms in quarantine”.

Some observers say the opposition may lose all its seats in parliament, given the current electoral law.

The rules require parties to gather support from 20% of registered voters in each of the country's 24 voting districts to stand for parliament.

For all but the ruling coalition, “that 20% threshold looks relatively insurmountable,” said Beninese political scientist Joel Atayi Guedegbe.

He also pointed out that the Democrats have been riven by recent infighting.

“It's not as united and determined a party as it was in the last elections, in 2023, when it won 28 seats,” he said.

Ahead of the vote, Amnesty International's executive director in Benin, Dieudonne Dagbeto, warned that “civic space is shrinking” in the country, “with a wave of attacks on independent media and people arbitrarily arrested and detained for expressing differing opinions.”

Members of the ruling majority reject those accusations.



The South African (left) and China flags fly on the Chinese guided-missile destroyer Tangshan (Hull 122), which is moored in Simon's Town harbour, near Cape Town, yesterday.

South Africa defends naval drills with Iran, Russia as ‘essential’

AFP
Simon's Town

South Africa yesterday began naval drills with Russia, Iran and China, describing the manoeuvres off its coast as not merely a show of force but a vital response to rising maritime tensions.

The week-long ‘Will for Peace 2026’ exercises come just days after the US seized a Russian flagged oil tanker in the North Atlantic, saying it carried crude bound for Venezuela, Russia and Iran in violation of Western sanctions.

The seizure followed an American raid that toppled Moscow's ally Nicolas Maduro in Caracas.

The drills — led by China — were more than a military exercise and a statement of intent among the Brics group of emerging nations, Captain

Nndwakhulu Thomas Thamaha, South Africa's joint taskforce commander, told the opening ceremony.

“It is a demonstration of our collective resolve to work together,” he said.

Brics, originally made up of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, has expanded to include Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and, more recently, Indonesia.

China and Iran deployed destroyer warships, while Russia and the United Arab Emirates sent corvette vessels. Host South Africa dispatched a frigate.

Indonesia, Ethiopia and Brazil joined as observers.

“In an increasingly complex maritime environment, co-operation such as this is not an option, it is essential,” said Thamaha. The exercises were to “ensure the safety of shipping lanes and

maritime economic activities,” he said.

Previously known as Exercise Mosi, the drills were initially scheduled for last November but postponed due to a clash with the G20 summit in Johannesburg, boycotted by the US.

Washington has accused South Africa and the Brics bloc of ‘anti-American’ policies and warned members they could face an additional 10% tariff on top of existing duties already applied worldwide.

South Africa has also drawn US criticism for its close ties with Russia and a range of other policies, including its decision to bring a genocide case against Washington ally Israel at the International Court of Justice over the Gaza war.

South Africa drew criticism for hosting naval drills with Russia and China in 2023, coinciding with the first anniversary of Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

The three nations first conducted joint naval drills in 2019.

UN warns Uganda against violence at elections

AFP
Nairobi

The UN has called for upcoming presidential and parliamentary elections in Uganda to be safe for all involved and warned against the use of violence against protesters.

Veteran leader Yoweri Museveni, 81, has been in power since 1986 and is aiming for a new term of office in the January 15 vote. His main opponent is the popular 43-year-old singer Bobi Wine — real name Robert Kyagulanyi — who has become the face of the opposition. But the UN Human Rights Office said repression and impunity have become entrenched in Uganda since the last vote in 2021, with restrictions on free speech and the right to protest.

Rights chief Volker Turk said authorities in Kampala should ensure that everyone can take part “fully and safely”. “They must... ensure that no unnecessary force, including lethal force, is used to disperse peaceful protests,” he said in a statement.

His office detailed in a report that a number of laws have been used in the last three years to “silence those



Opposition leader and presidential candidate for the National Unity Platform Robert Kyagulanyi Ssentamu, popularly known as Bobi Wine (centre), waves a Ugandan flag atop a car as he is welcomed by a crowd of supporters during a campaign rally in Mukono.

with dissenting views” and the vote was taking place “in an environment marked by widespread repression and intimidation”.

Opposition leaders and activists have been arrested and detained, political party officers raided and property confiscated.

Wagner stronghold in CAR holds the line despite Kremlin shakeup

AFP
Libreville

A mural depicting Vladimir Putin and fatigue-clad Russian paramilitary fighters appeared in the Central African Republic before the recent presidential and parliamentary elections as the country looks to recover from decades of violence.

The Russian embassy in Bangui called the work of a local artist that also features President Faustin-Archange Touadera and CAR military officers “a sign of our common victory over chaos and instability”.

The colourful mural in the bustling capital could be seen as a comment on the importance of the Russian military presence for the government of 68-year-old Touadera, who was easily re-elected in the December election, according to provisional results.

The resource-rich former French colony remains the last bastion of paramilitary group Wagner, which has established itself as one of the CAR government's main security partners in exchange for lucrative contracts to mine gold and diamonds.

“For the first time in the long history of armed conflict, Central

Africans have the opportunity to stop fearing for their lives,” Alexander Ivanov, the head of CAR-based Russian military contractors — who is under EU and US sanctions — said in written comments. Sergei Eledinov, a retired Russian military officer and expert on African security, said Wagner forces had helped improve security in the CAR.

“The CAR was, in fact, the only successful positive case,” Eledinov told AFP, referring to Russia's military presence in Africa.

“The security situation has improved, stability has been achieved, roads have become safer, there are fewer attacks,” said the Senegal-based founder of Convoy Africa, a consultancy which advises Russian and foreign companies.

“It would not be true to say that everyone is happy. But if we talk about the process as a whole, then of course the situation is improving.”

After Wagner founder Yevgeny Prigozhin died in a plane crash in 2023 following a short-lived mutiny against Moscow, the Russian defence ministry has sought to replace Wagner in Africa and co-ordinate security operations through an umbrella group known as the Africa Corps. But unlike in

countries such as Mali where the Africa Corps took over, Russian private military contractors in the CAR have not come under control of the defence ministry.

“They have failed to convince Touadera to give up Wagner in the CAR,” a European military source said, referring to Russian authorities.

Wagner has been paid in mining concessions, which the source said suited Touadera well. “If he accepts the Africa Corps, he has to pay in cash,” the source added.

Deployed in 2018 at the request of Touadera to strengthen a ramshackle military, Wagner's fighters have played a key role in ensuring stability in the struggling strategically located country whose resources also include uranium and timber. While pockets of violence remain, particularly in the east and northwest, the Russians have helped drive armed groups out of major cities.

Wagner was instrumental in 2020 when Touadera was last re-elected in a vote marred by allegations of fraud and an uprising by six rebel groups. The attempt to overthrow the government was pushed back thanks to the intervention of the Rwandan army and the Russian mercenaries.

The Russians also worked to ensure security in the runup to the December 28 ballot.

Ivanov, head of the Officers' Union for International Security (OUIS), said the Russian contractors took any threats to the elections “extremely seriously” given the experience of the 2020 polls.

Ivanov has been sanctioned by the European Union and the US as the head of the OUIS, an entity EU and US officials describe as a Wagner front company in the CAR.

The group has sought to present itself as a responsible security partner and has regularly published Telegram posts about everything from assisting local residents to disarming militants.



A mural depicting Vladimir Putin and fatigue-clad Russian paramilitary fighters appeared in the Central African Republic ahead of presidential and parliamentary elections.



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

Invites prospective suppliers to participate in the following tender

Tender Reference and Description	Submission of information & willingness for bidding	Tender fee (non-refundable)	Tender publication	Tender Bond	Bid Closing Date
RFQ-GHC/SCO/004/2026 Provision of Supply and Installation of Bird Netting System for Maintenance Hangars (412 and 139)	Until 14 th January 2026	QAR 500/- Until 18 th January 2026 12:00 pm	20 th January 2026	QAR 20,000/-	Until 22 nd February 2026 12:00 PM

Brief Scope: GHC hereby invites reputable and qualified suppliers to submit their bids for the Supply and Installation of Bird Netting System at Maintenance Hangars 412 and 139. The scope of work includes the provision of high-quality bird-control netting suitable for aviation and maintenance environments, along with all necessary accessories, and complete installation in the specified hangars. Suppliers are expected to ensure consistent quality standards, deliver materials and services in a timely manner.

i. Interested bidders to communicate their willingness to bid and send contact details to GHC email (procurement@gulfhelicopters.com) indicating company name, address, telephone, official email, authorized company representative, etc. latest by 14th January 2026.

GHC tender reference numbers and description must be mentioned in the email.

ii. Non-refundable tender fee of QAR 500/- is payable to GHC, only through QNB account # 0013-036531-001 IBAN # QA80QNBAA00000000013036531001 via online or at any QNB branch. Interested bidders shall attach the evidence of the tender fee payment and send it via bidder company official email to GHC email: procurement@gulfhelicopters.com, latest by 18th January 2026, 12:00 pm for GHC approval.

iii. Tender package will be sent via email to the confirmed participants from procurement@gulfhelicopters.com by 20th January 2026. GHC shall provide the necessary instructions and guidelines for the bid submission.

iv. Original of the Tender Bond (Bank Guarantee) must be submitted by hand to the following address:

Gulf Helicopters Company,
P O Box: 811, Al Areeesh Street,
Ras Abu Abboud, Doha, Qatar
Tel: +974 44 333 888
Attention: Supply Chain Manager

Attach a copy of tender bond to the technical offer. Offer without Tender Bond will not be considered.

v. For any clarifications on the above, please send your queries (with the tender reference and description) to procurement@gulfhelicopters.com

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

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



Trump calls for one-year cap on credit card interest rates at 10%

Reuters/AFP
Washington

President Donald Trump said on Friday that he is calling for a one-year cap on credit card interest rates at 10% starting on January 20 but he did not provide details on how his plan will come to fruition or how he planned to make companies comply.

Trump also made the pledge during the campaign for the 2024 election that he won but analysts dismissed it at the time, saying that such a step required congressional approval.

Lawmakers from both the Democratic and Republican Parties have raised concerns about high rates and have called for those to be addressed.

Republicans currently hold a narrow majority in both the Senate and the House of Representatives.

There have been some legislative efforts in Congress to pursue such a proposal but they are yet to become law and in his post Trump did not offer explicit support to any specific bill.

Opposition lawmakers have criticised

Trump, a Republican, for not having delivered on his campaign pledge.

“Effective January 20, 2026, I, as President of the United States, am calling for a one year cap on Credit Card Interest Rates of 10%,” Trump wrote on Truth Social, without providing more details. “Please be informed that we will no longer let the American Public be ‘ripped off’ by Credit Card Companies.”

Senator Elizabeth Warren, a Democrat in the Senate Banking Committee, said Trump’s call was meaningless without a bill being passed by Congress.

“Beggining credit card companies to play nice is a joke. I said a year ago if Trump was serious I’d work to pass a bill to cap rates,” Warren said, while criticising Trump’s attempts to gut the US Consumer Financial Protection Bureau.

The White House did not immediately respond to a request for comment on details of the call from Trump, but said on social media without elaborating that the president was capping the rates.

Some major US banks and credit card issuers like American Express, Capital One Financial Corp, JPMorgan, Citigroup and Bank of America did not re-

spond to a request for comment.

Five associations representing US banks responded that they shared the president’s goal of helping Americans access “more affordable credit”.

“At the same time, evidence shows that a 10% interest rate cap would reduce credit availability and be devastating for millions of American families and small business owners who rely on and value their credit cards,” the associations said in a joint statement late on Friday. “If enacted, this cap would only drive consumers toward less regulated, more costly alternatives.”

The statement was issued by the American Bankers Association, Bank Policy Institute, Consumer Bankers Association, Financial Services Forum and Independent Community Bankers of America.

Rates reflect the risk that issuers take, said Brian Jacobsen, chief economic strategist at Annex Wealth Management, noting that credit card lines are “unsecured loans”.

“When companies can’t price the risk properly, they’ll just reduce credit lines or cut off access to credit entirely,” Jacobsen wrote in an e-mail.

“Buy now pay later firms and payday

lenders might love this proposal” to cap rates.

Senator Bernie Sanders, a fierce Trump critic, and Senator Josh Hawley, who belongs to Trump’s Republican Party, have previously introduced bipartisan legislation aimed at capping credit card interest rates at 10% for five years.

This bill explicitly directs credit card companies to limit rates as part of broader consumer relief legislation.

Democratic US Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Republican Congresswoman Anna Paulina Luna have also introduced a House of Representatives bill to cap credit card interest rates at 10%, reflecting cross-aisle interest in addressing high rates.

Billionaire fund manager Bill Ackman, who endorsed Trump in the last elections, said on X that the US president’s call was a “mistake”.

Credit cards are the primary source of consumer credit in the US.

Costs and outstanding balances have soared in recent years as people increasingly rely on them to maintain spending, even for basic necessities.

According to data from the Federal Re-



Trump: We will no longer let the American public be ‘ripped off’ by credit card companies.

serve, the total outstanding credit card debt exceeded \$1.23tn at the end of September – the fourth-largest source of household debt, after mortgages, student loans and auto loans.

Interest rates on credit cards are at least 21% and can reach as high as 38% for borrowers with a higher risk profile, according to the Fed.

This is up from an average of around 12% a decade ago.

Minneapolis mayor tells activists not to counter ‘chaos with chaos’

Reuters/AFP
Minneapolis

Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey has urged demonstrators protesting the fatal shooting of a motorist by a US immigration agent to stay peaceful, saying that any unlawful actions would play into US President Donald Trump’s hands.

Frey, a Democrat, cautioned them as civil liberties and migrant-rights groups prepared nationwide rallies to protest the killing of 37-year-old Renee Good by an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officer on Wednesday.

Minnesota and US officials have offered starkly different accounts of the shooting.

Twenty-nine people were arrested overnight in Minneapolis as police responded to protests, including a gathering of demonstrators outside a hotel believed to be lodging a visiting contingent of ICE agents, city Police Chief Brian O’Hara said.

One police officer was injured in the response, O’Hara told a news conference yesterday.

Frey, who has been critical of immigration agents and the shooting, said that the demonstrations to date have remained mostly peaceful and that anyone causing damage to property or engaging in other unlawful activity would be arrested by the police.

“We will not counter Donald Trump’s chaos with our own brand of chaos. He wants us to take the bait,” Frey said at the news conference.

The fatal shooting of Good, a 37-year-old mother of three, came soon after some 2,000 federal officers were dispatched to Minneapolis in what ICE’s parent agency, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), called the “largest DHS operation ever”.

Minnesota Governor Tim Walz, a Democrat, condemned the deployment as a “reckless” example of “governance by reality TV”.

O’Hara said that more than 200 law enforcement officers were dispatched to the Hilton Canopy Hotel on Friday night to respond to what started as a “noise protest” but then escalated, with more 1,000 demonstrators gathered on site.

“We initiated a plan and took our time to de-escalate the situation, issued multiple warnings, declaring an unlawful assembly, and ultimately then began to move in and disperse the crowd,” O’Hara said yesterday.



Two protesters sit on the road in downtown Minneapolis, in front of Minnesota Conservation officers. - AFP

Left: Mariam Hassan, who is a Somali American, attends a protest outside a hotel in Minneapolis. - Reuters



People gather outside a hotel during a demonstration against increased immigration enforcement, days after the fatal shooting of Renee Nicole Good by a US Immigration and Customs Enforcement agent, in Minneapolis. - Reuters

The Trump administration has sought to paint Good as a “domestic terrorist”, insisting that the agent who fatally shot her was acting in self-defence.

This narrative is strongly disputed by local officials, who say footage of the shooting shows Good’s vehicle was turning away from the agent and did not pose a threat to him.

Cellphone footage apparently taken by the officer who fired the fatal shots shows him interacting with Good as he approaches and circles her car, and her saying: “I’m not mad at you.”

After he passes in front of the car, another agent can be heard ordering Good to exit the vehicle before she tries to drive off and shots ring out.

The agent filming the video can be heard saying an expletive at the end of the clip.

The White House insisted the video gave weight to the officer’s claim of self-defence – even though the clip does not show the moment the car moved away, or him opening fire.

Federal-state tensions escalated further on Thursday when a US Border Patrol agent in Portland, Oregon, shot and wounded a man and woman in their car after an attempted vehicle stop.

Using language similar to its description of the Minneapolis incident, the DHS said the driver had tried to “weaponise” his vehicle and run over agents.

The two DHS-related shootings this week have drawn thousands of protesters to the streets of Minneapolis, Portland and other US cities, with many more demonstrations under the banner “ICE Out For Good” planned for the weekend.



People gather in front of the Minnesota State Capitol to protest the fatal shooting of Renee Good. - AFP

The slogan is also a reference to Renee Good.

Protest organisers said that more than 1,000 weekend events have been planned across the country demanding an end to large-scale deployments of ICE agents, mostly to cities led by Democratic politicians.

The rallies were being organised by a coalition of groups including the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), MoveOn Civic Action, Voto Latino, and Indivisible, some of which were at the forefront of “No Kings” protests against Trump last year.

According to The Trace, a media outlet focusing on gun violence, Good was the fourth person killed by federal immigration agents since the launch of the Trump administration’s deportation policy, and seven others have been injured.

Trump signs emergency order to protect US-held revenue from Venezuela oil

US President Donald Trump has signed an executive order protecting US-held money derived from sales of Venezuelan oil, after the ouster of Nicolas Maduro, the White House said.

In an order signed on Friday, Trump – who has made clear that tapping Venezuela’s vast oil reserves was a key goal in the US ouster of Maduro – is acting “to advance US foreign policy objectives”, the White House said in a fact sheet accompanying the order.

The action follows a meeting on Friday in Washington where Trump pressed top oil executives to invest in Venezuela, and was met with a cautious reception – with the chief executive of ExxonMobil describing the country as “uninvestable” without sweeping reforms.

ExxonMobil and ConocoPhillips exited in 2007 after refusing demands by then-president Hugo Chavez to cede majority control to the state.

They have been fighting to recoup billions of dollars they say Venezuela owes them.

Chevron is currently the only US firm licensed to operate in Venezuela.

Trump’s executive order declares a national emergency “to safeguard Venezuelan oil revenue held in US Treasury accounts from attachment or judicial process”, the White House fact sheet said.

In effect, it places those revenues under special protection in order to prevent them from being seized by courts or creditors.

The action is decreed to be necessary for US national security and foreign policy.

“President Trump is preventing the seizure of Venezuelan oil revenue that could undermine critical US efforts to ensure economic and political stability in Venezuela,” the fact sheet said.

Sanctioned by Washington since 2019, Venezuela sits on about a fifth of the world’s oil reserves and was once a major crude supplier to the United States.

However, it produced only around 1% of the world’s total crude output in 2024, according to Opec, having been hampered by years of underinvestment, sanctions and embargoes.

Trump sees the country’s massive oil reserves as a windfall in his fight to further lower US domestic fuel prices.

The executive order comes one week after US forces seized authoritarian leader Maduro in a nighttime operation in the Venezuelan capital that killed dozens of Venezuelan and Cuban security forces. - AFP

Six slain in Mississippi

At least six people were fatally shot on Friday night in Clay County, Mississippi, and the suspect is in custody, according to local news outlets and law enforcement.

The deaths occurred at three different shooting locales, according to WTVA, an NBC News affiliate.

The suspect is in custody “and no longer poses a threat to our community”, Eddie Scott, the Clay County sheriff, posted on social media.

His post did not provide a specific figure for the number of fatalities, but WTVA said that six people died. - Reuters

ANNOUNCEMENT

I, MHOAMMED DALIR

holder of

IRAN Passport No. B97445531
QID No. 29636400179

hereby change my name

from

MHOAMMED DALIR

to

MOHAMMAD DALIR

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

Nasa, SpaceX set target date for Crew-11’s return

Nasa said on Friday that the space agency and SpaceX are targeting to undock the agency’s SpaceX Crew-11 mission from the International Space Station (ISS) no earlier than 5pm ET (2200 GMT) on Wednesday, January 14, pending weather conditions.

Earlier this week the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (Nasa) said it was mulling an early return of the crew of the ISS over what it described as a “medical concern” with an astronaut.

Details of the medical evacuation, the first in ISS history, were not provided by officials, though they said it did not result from any kind of injury onboard and that the unidentified crewmember is stable and not in need of an emergency evacuation.

The four astronauts on Nasa-SpaceX Crew 11 have been on their mission since August 1.

Expeditions last six months, and the crew was already due to return to Earth in the coming weeks.

American astronauts Mike Fincke and Zena Cardman, as well as Japan’s Kimiya Yui and Russia’s Oleg Platonov, would be returning, while American Chris Williams will stay onboard the international body to maintain a US presence. - Reuters/AFP

Musk’s X sues music publishers over alleged licensing conspiracy

Elon Musk’s X Corp sued 18 major music publishers and a leading US music industry trade association on Friday, alleging that they conspired to block competition and force the social media platform to purchase licences for musical works at inflated rates.

The lawsuit, filed in federal district court in Texas, accused the National Music Publishers’ Association, Sony Music, Universal Music, Warner Chappell and other music publishers of violating federal antitrust law by refusing to negotiate individual licensing deals with X.

“X has been denied the ability to acquire a US musical-composition licence from any individual music publisher on competitive terms,” the lawsuit said.

David Israelite, the president and chief executive officer of the National Music Publishers’ Association, said in a statement that X is the only major social media company that does not license the songs on its platform.

“We allege that X has engaged in copyright infringement for years, and its meritless lawsuit is a bad faith effort to distract from publishers’ and songwriters’ legitimate right to enforce against X’s illegal use of their songs,” Israelite said.

Sony Music referred Reuters to the association’s statement and declined further comment.

Universal Music and Warner Chappell did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

X did not immediately respond to a similar request.

The lawsuit alleges that publishers representing more than 90% of US copyrighted music joined forces through the National Music Publishers’ Association in conspiring against X.

X said the publishers have flooded the platform with weekly take-down notices targeting thousands of posts containing copyrighted music – including content from high-profile accounts – to pressure the platform into accepting industrywide licensing terms.

The complaint said X has removed thousands of posts and suspended more than 50,000 users, harming its user base and advertising revenue.

It asked the court to restore competitive conditions in music licensing and compensate X for lost advertising revenue. - Reuters



An elderly woman gestures during a vigil by relatives of political prisoners demanding the release of their loved ones, outside of El Rodeo I prison in Guatire, Miranda State, some 30km east of Caracas. - **AFP**

Number of prisoners released in Venezuela now 18: rights groups

Reuters
Caracas

The number of prisoners released in Venezuela has risen to 18, human rights groups said yesterday, from nine on Friday afternoon.

The release of hundreds of political prisoners in the South American country is a long-running demand of human rights groups, international bodies and opposition figures, including Nobel Peace Prize winner Maria Corina Machado, who has several close allies imprisoned.

Both US President Donald Trump and Venezuela's top lawmaker Jorge Rodriguez, the brother of acting President Delcy Rodriguez, have said the releases are a gesture of peace.

Trump added in a post on Truth Social that he had cancelled a second wave of attacks on Venezuela following co-operation from the South American nation.

For years, Venezuela's opposition and human rights groups have said the government uses

detentions to stamp out dissent, a charge authorities have consistently denied.

There is no official list of exactly how many prisoners will be released, nor who they are.

Local rights group Foro Penal estimates there are 811 political prisoners in the country.

That figure includes more than 80 foreign detainees, including two from the United States and one with American residency.

Five Spanish citizens, including Venezuelan Spanish rights activist Rocio San Miguel, were the first confirmed releases on Thursday.

They arrived in Madrid the following day.

Former Venezuelan opposition presidential candidate Enrique Marquez is also among the prisoners who have been released

The families of both prominent and little-known detainees began gathering outside prisons on Friday, or visited multiple detention centres in an attempt to discover the location and status of their loved ones.

US agents join survey of Bolivia's coca fields, says deputy minister

US drug enforcement officials joined an aerial survey over a coca-growing region in Bolivia to support the country's fight against drug trafficking, the government said on Friday.

The US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) was expelled from Bolivia in 2008 by its then-president, leftist Evo Morales, but the new administration since 2025 has moved closer to Washington, seeking economic and security co-operation.

On Thursday, US officials and DEA agents flew over Chapare, Bolivia's main cocaine-producing area, the country's Deputy Social Defence Minister Ernesto Justiniano told AFP.

The region produces coca, a crop that is legal but closely regulated as it also serves as the prime ingredient for cocaine.

The reconnaissance flight aimed to identify clandestine airstrips and drug labs, he said.

Justiniano said the mission could pave the way for a co-operation agreement.

"We need it urgently... our resources are miserable," he said.

A leading coca producers' representative, Isidro Auca, condemned the move, calling the government "a US puppet" in comments broadcast by radio.

US President Donald Trump has threatened further action against drug-producing countries in Latin America after US forces seized Venezuela's leader Nicolas Maduro on January 3 and took him to face narcotics charges in New York.

Bolivia is the world's third-biggest cocaine producer, with 34,000 hectares of coca under cultivation, above legal limits, according to the UN. - **AFP**

Venezuela 'in talks with US to restore diplomatic ties'

AFP
Caracas

Venezuela was set to hold talks with US envoys in Caracas on restoring diplomatic ties, days after US forces deposed Nicolas Maduro as its president.

Venezuela said on Friday that it had launched discussions with US diplomats in the capital, the latest sign of co-operation following the leftist leader's capture and US President Donald Trump's claim to be "in charge" of the South American country.

Officials said the US envoys were in Caracas to discuss reopening the country's embassy, while in Washington Trump met with oil companies over his plans to access Venezuela's huge crude reserves.

The government of interim President Delcy Rodriguez "has decided to initiate an exploratory diplomatic process with the government of the United States of America, aimed at re-establishing diplomatic missions in both countries", Foreign Minister Yvan Gil said in a statement.

John McNamara, the top US diplomat in neighbouring Colombia, and other personnel "travelled to Caracas to conduct an initial assessment for a potential phased resumption of operations", a US official said on customary condition of anonymity.

Venezuela said it would be reciprocating by sending a delegation to Washington.

Rodriguez in a statement condemned "the serious, criminal, illegal and illegitimate attack" by the United States and vowed: "Venezuela will continue to confront this aggression through the diplomatic route."

Trump said earlier on Friday that he had called off a second wave of attacks on Venezuela due in part to the release of political prisoners.

The US president had suggested he might use force again to get his way in Venezuela, which has the world's largest proven oil reserves.

At a White House meeting on Friday, he pressed top oil executives to invest in Venezuela's reserves, but was met with a cautious reception - with ExxonMobil chief executive Darren Woods dismissing the country as "uninvestable" without sweeping reforms.



View of the US embassy building in Caracas. - **AFP**

vestable" without sweeping reforms.

Trump said foreign firms had enjoyed no meaningful protections under Maduro, "but now you have total security. It's a whole different Venezuela".

He also stressed that the companies would deal only with Washington, not Caracas, when exploiting Venezuela's oil resources.

Trump earlier said that oil companies promised to invest \$100bn in Venezuela, whose oil infrastructure is creaky after years of mismanagement and sanctions.

He had earlier announced a plan for the United States to sell between 30-50mn barrels of Venezuelan crude, with the money to be used at his discretion.

He promised any funds sent to Caracas would be used to buy only US-made products.

In the meanwhile, Washington has maintained maritime pressure on oil tankers in the Caribbean, where it seized a fifth tanker carrying Venezuelan crude - oil that would be sold, Trump said.

State-owned oil company PDVSA confirmed in a statement that one vessel was returning to Venezuelan waters, describing it as the "first successful joint operation" with Washington.

Anxious relatives meanwhile waited outside Venezuelan jails for a glimpse of their loved ones as the authorities began releasing political prisoners - a move Washington claimed credit for.

"When I heard the news, I broke down," said Dilsia Caro, 50, waiting for the release of her husband Noel Flores, who was jailed for criticising Maduro.

Venezuela began releasing prisoners on Thursday in the first such gesture since US forces removed and detained Maduro in the deadly January 3 raid.

Trump told Fox News that he would meet next week with Venezuelan opposition leader Maria Corina Machado, whom he earlier brushed aside as lacking the "respect" to lead Venezuela.

Exiled Venezuelan opposition figurehead Edmundo Gonzalez Urrutia said that any democratic transition in the country must recognise his claim to victory in 2024 presidential elections.

Maduro was proclaimed the winner of the vote, but his re-election was widely seen as fraudulent.

Maduro was seized in a US special forces raid accompanied by airstrikes, operations that left 100 people dead, according to Caracas.

US forces took Maduro and his wife Cilia Flores to New York to face trial on drug-trafficking and other charges.

Rodriguez insisted on Thursday that her country was "not subordinate or subjugated" despite her pledge to co-operate with Trump.

Angry protesters rallied in the streets of Caracas on Friday demanding Maduro's release in the latest of a daily series of demonstrations.

"We don't have to give one little drop of oil to Trump after all that he has done to us," said one protester, Josefina Castro, 70, a member of a civil activists' group. "Our Venezuelan brothers died (in the attack), and that hurts."

Nicaragua arrests dozens for reportedly supporting capture of Maduro

Authorities in Nicaragua have arrested at least 60 people for reportedly celebrating or expressing support for the capture of Venezuelan president Nicolas Maduro, a human rights watchdog group and local media outlets said on Friday.

Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega and Vice-President Rosario Murillo are staunch allies of Maduro, who was captured by US military personnel in Caracas on January 3 and taken to New York to face trial on drug and weapons charges.

Since the arrest of Maduro and his wife Cilia Flores, "at least 60 arbitrary arrests" have occurred over alleged support for the operation, the non-governmental organisation (NGO) Blue and White Monitoring, which compiles reports of human rights violations in Nicaragua, said in a post on X. The group said 49 people remained in detention on Friday "without information about their legal status", while nine people have been released and three others were temporarily detained. "This new wave of repression is carried out without a judicial order and is based solely on expressions of opinion: comments on social media, private celebrations, or not repeating official propaganda," the group said.

According to *Confidencial*, a Nicaraguan newspaper published outside the country, the arrests took place under a "state of alert" ordered by Murillo following Maduro's capture - including surveillance in neighbourhoods and on social media.

La Prensa, another local newspaper, said the arrests occurred due to "posts in favour" of the US operation. - **AFP**

Colombian rebel leader calls for guerrilla unity

The head of the largest dissident branch of the former Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Farc) guerrilla group has called on other rebel groups to come together to fight US interventionism in the region, in a video message confirmed by the group as authentic on Friday.

The call from leader Nestor Gregorio Vera, better known by his nom de guerre "Ivan Mordisco", follows the US incursion into neighbouring Venezuela, which resulted in the capture of President Nicolas Maduro.

"The shadow of the interventionist eagle looms over everyone

equally. We urge you to put aside these differences," Vera said in a video in which he appeared dressed in camouflage and surrounded by two heavily armed guerrillas.

Colombian President Gustavo Petro - a former guerrilla who vowed to bring peace to the country after more than six decades of internal armed conflict - is set to meet US President Donald Trump in Washington in February, Trump said on Friday.

The planned meeting comes days after Trump threatened Colombia with military action.

Trump has repeatedly accused

the administration of Petro, without evidence, of enabling a steady flow of cocaine into the US, imposing sanctions on the Colombian leader in October.

"Destiny is calling us to unite.

We are not scattered forces, we are heirs to the same cause. Let us weave unity through action and forge the great insurgent bloc that will push back the enemies of the greater homeland," Vera added in the video addressed to the National Liberation Army (ELN), the Second Marquetalia and the Bolivarian Army Guerrilla Co-ordinating Board, which also emerged from the former Farc.

However, it did not include the second-largest Farc dissident group, known as the Central General Staff, which broke away from Vera's group in 2024.

In total, the groups the insurgent leader proposed joining have more than 11,000 members.

Their primary criminal activities are drug trafficking and illegal gold mining, according to security sources.

Colombian Defence Minister Pedro Sanchez said that by calling for rebel unity, Vera was looking to protect himself from being hunted down by the armed forces. - **Reuters**

Venezuela's furious street forces ready to 'fight' after US raid

By Paula Ramon
AFP

When explosions boomed in the night and US warplanes roared in the sky over Caracas, Jorge Suarez and his companions rushed fearfully for their guns.

For these members of the "colectivos" - armed loyalists of the leftist leadership - the US raid that ousted Nicolas Maduro as their president was the most dramatic challenge yet.

"We're not used to it - it was like a best-seller, like something out of a movie," said Suarez, in black sunglasses and a cap bearing the slogan: "Doubt is treason."

"We took to the streets, waiting for instructions from our leaders."

As proud defenders of the Venezuelan leadership's socialist "Bolivarian revolution", the ousting of Maduro has left them furious and bewildered, convinced that he was betrayed by close allies.

"There is frustration, anger and a will to fight," said a 43-year-old member of one collective the Boina Roja - which translates to Red Be-



A member of '3 Raices', a pro-government group known as 'colectivos', stands guard with an assault rifle at the organisation's headquarters in the working-class neighbourhood of 23 de Enero, in Caracas. - **AFP**

ret - who identified himself only as Williams, in a black cap and hooded jacket.

"It's still not really clear what

happened... what is clear is that there were many betrayals," he added - pointing to implausible failures in Maduro's defences.

the shantytowns from rising up," he said.

The colectivos also claim to run sports programmes, co-ordinate with hospitals and transport networks, and visit traders to keep price speculation in check.

Fiercely committed to the "Chavista" cause, they felt the sting of betrayal in Maduro's capture.

"The betrayal must have come from someone very close to our commander" Maduro, said Canchica. "It was so perfect we didn't notice, and we still don't know who betrayed us, how they betrayed us - it happened so fast."

In his office with images of independence hero Simon Bolivar, Chavez and Maduro on the wall, and books, bullets and a sound-wave bomb on the table, Suarez bitterly recalled watching animated reconstructions of Maduro's capture published online.

"It makes you angry," he said. "Despite all the support Commander (Vladimir) Putin, China and North Korea have given us militarily, how can we react in real time when (the US) has more advanced technology than we do?"

"I don't think anyone would betray her father," said Alfredo Canchica, leader of another collective, the Fundacion 3 Raices. "You can betray the people, but not your father."

Colectivo members declined to be drawn out on how the post-Maduro phase might play out under Trump and Rodriguez, however.

"We don't believe the threats that the Americans are going to come, dig in and take us out," said Canchica. "They'll have to kill us first."

Fearful by opponents as a rifle-wielding, motorbike-mounted shock force, the colectivos are welcomed in some neighbourhoods where they are credited with preventing crime - and where authorities hand out subsidised food parcels.

Speaking at the Chato Candela baseball stadium in the working-class 23 de Enero district, Canchica rejected the negative image they have gained.

When opposition demonstrators and some world powers were accusing Maduro of stealing an election in July 2014, "we stopped



New Zealand’s rare flightless parrot begins breeding again

AFP
Wellington

New Zealand’s critically endangered flightless parrot, the kakapo, started breeding last week for the first time in four years, the government conservation department said.

Only 236 of the rotund and regal-looking green parrots remain in three breeding populations on some of New Zealand’s most remote southern islands. That includes 83 breeding age females, with high hopes this year could bring the most hatched chicks since records began. “It’s always exciting when the

breeding season officially begins, but this year it feels especially long-awaited after such a big gap since the last season in 2022,” said Deidre Vercoe, the department of conservation’s kakapo recovery operations manager. “Now it is underway, we expect more mating over the next month and we are preparing for what

might be the biggest breeding season since the programme began 30 years ago.” In 1995 the department of conservation and indigenous Maori tribe Ngai Tahu launched the Kakapo Recovery Programme, with a population of just 51 birds at serious risk of extinction. By 2022, numbers had rebound-

ed to 252, but 16 birds died over the past four years. This mating season is the 13th in the past 30 years, with the bird breeding every two to four years. “Kakapo are still critically endangered so we’ll keep working hard to increase numbers,” Vercoe said. “But looking ahead, chick

numbers are not our only measure of success. We want to create healthy, self-sustaining populations of kakapo that are thriving, not just surviving. “This means with each successful breeding season we’re aiming to reduce the level of intensive, hands-on management to return to a more natural state.”

North Korea accuses South of another drone incursion

AFP
Seoul

North Korea yesterday accused the South of flying another spy drone over its territory this month, a claim that Seoul denied. The North Korean military tracked a drone “moving northwards” over the South Korean border county of Ganghwa in early January before shooting it down near the North Korean city of Kaesong, a spokesperson said in a statement carried by the state-run Korean Central News Agency (KCNA). “Surveillance equipment was installed” on the drone and analysis of the wreckage showed it had stored footage of the North’s “important targets” including border areas, the spokesperson said. Photos of the alleged drone released by KCNA showed the wreckage of a winged craft lying on the ground next to a collection of grey and blue components it said included cameras. South Korea said it had no record of the flight, and Defence Minister Ahn Gyu-back said the drone in the photos was “not a model operated by our military”. The office of South Korean President Lee Jae Myung said a national security meeting would be held to discuss the matter. Lee had ordered a “swift and

rigorous investigation” by a joint military-police investigative team, his office said in a later statement. On the possibility that civilians operated the drone, Lee said: “if true, it is a serious crime that threatens peace on the Korean Peninsula and national security”. Located northwest of Seoul, Ganghwa County is one of the closest South Korean territories to North Korea. KCNA also released aerial images of Kaesong that it said were taken by the drone. They were “clear evidence” that the aircraft had “intruded into (our) airspace for the purpose of surveillance and reconnaissance”, Pyongyang’s military spokesperson said. They added that the incursion was similar to one in September when the South flew drones near its border city of Paju. Seoul would be forced to “pay a dear price for their unpardonable hysteria” if such flights continued, the spokesperson said. South Korea is already investigating alleged drone flights over the North in late 2024 ordered by then-president Yoon Suk-yol. Seoul’s military has not confirmed those flights. Prosecutors have indicted Yoon on charges that he acted illegally in ordering them, hoping to provoke a response from Pyongyang and use it as a pretext for his short-lived bid to impose martial law.



The remains of a burnt out shipping container frame a destroyed car, amid bushfires, in Upton Hill, Victoria, Australia, yesterday.

Australia declares state of disaster as bushfires rage

AFP
Sydney

Australian authorities declared a state of disaster yesterday after bushfires destroyed houses and razed vast belts of forest in the country’s southeast. Temperatures soared past 40C as a heat-wave blanketed the state of Victoria this week, with hot winds fanning some of the most dangerous fire weather since the “Black Summer” bushfires of 2019-2020. One of the most destructive bushfires ripped through almost 370,000 acres near Longwood, a region cloaked in native forests. State premier Jacinta Allan yesterday declared a state of disaster, giving fire crews emergency powers to force evacuations.

“It’s all about one thing: protecting Victorian lives,” she said. “And it sends one clear message: if you have been told to leave, go.” Three people missing inside one of the state’s most dangerous fire grounds had been found, Allan said. Emergency management commissioner Tim Wiebusch said at least 130 structures had been destroyed across the state, a figure that includes houses, sheds and other buildings. “We’ve seen significant livestock, cropping land and vineyards that have also been impacted or destroyed,” he told reporters. Wiebusch said 10 major fires were still burning despite conditions easing. “Importantly, many of these major fires will continue to burn for days, if not weeks. “We are expecting more fires as a result of

lightning that occurred throughout yesterday afternoon and overnight.” The worst blazes have largely been confined to sparsely populated rural areas where towns might number a few hundred people. Photos taken this week showed the night sky glowing orange as the fire near Longwood ripped through bushland. “There were embers falling everywhere. It was terrifying,” cattle farmer Scott Purcell told national broadcaster ABC. Another bushfire near the small town of Walwa crackled with lightning as it radiated enough heat to form a localised thunderstorm, fire authorities said. Hundreds of firefighters from across Australia have been called in to help. Millions have sweltered through this week’s intense heatwave.

6.5-magnitude quake strikes Indonesia’s Talaud Islands

An earthquake of magnitude 6.8 struck off the coast of Indonesia’s Talaud Islands yesterday, the German Research Center for Geosciences (GFZ) said. The quake was at a depth of 77km, the German Research Center for Geosciences (GFZ) said. The Indonesian geophysics agency BMKG reported 7.1 magnitude reading, at 17km depth. It also reported a few subsequent quakes. BMKG said the quakes do not have the potential to trigger tsunami waves. Some people in Manado on the northern tip of Sulawesi island said the quake was felt strongly there. Authorities have not immediately reported damages or casualties, and the region remains under observation. Indonesia straddles the so-called Pacific Ring of Fire, an area of high seismic activity where multiple tectonic plates meet and earthquakes are frequent.



A woman waits as rescuers continue search operations after a landslide at a landfill in Barangay Binaliw, Cebu City, yesterday.

Death toll climbs after trash site collapse in Philippines

AFP
Manila

Hard hat-wearing rescue workers and backhoes dug through rubble in search of survivors yesterday in the shadow of a mountain of garbage that buried dozens of landfill employees in the central Philippines, killing at least six. About 50 sanitation workers were buried when refuse toppled onto them on Thursday from what a city councillor estimated was a height of 20 storeys at the Binaliw Landfill, a privately operated facility in Cebu City. Rescuers were now facing the danger of further collapse as they navigated the still-shifting wreckage, Cebu rescuer Jo Reyes said yesterday. “Operations are ongoing as of the moment. It is continuous. (But)

from time to time, the landfill is moving, and that will temporarily stop the operation,” she said. Cebu City councillor Dave Tumalak, chairman of the city’s disaster council, said another two bodies had been uncovered yesterday by crews working in 24-hour shifts. The discovery brings the death toll to six, while 32 people remain missing. “We found another two bodies, but we cannot retrieve the bodies because of the heavy metal beam that fell on them, so we are trying to cut the metal,” he said. To assist in the rescue operation, 20 trucks equipped with hydraulic cranes and specialised cutting attachments were being sent to help rescuers forced to crawl to reach areas blocked by debris. “Our rescuers are struggling because the metal beams are big,” he said. “With (the trucks), the metal can be lifted and our rescuers can navigate the site more efficiently.”

Chinese villagers struggle for heat as gas subsidies fade

AFP
Xushui, China

Almost a decade after China began curbing coal burning to stop thick winter smog, villagers in northern Hebei province are struggling to afford their heating bills with most gas subsidies now phased out. In 2017, Beijing mandated that dozens of northern areas wind down the use of coal-fired stoves in favour of electric and natural gas-powered systems. China’s central government allocated funds to refit stoves, but subsidies faded after three years and ad-

ditional aid has drastically declined, local media reported this week. In Xushui, a district in Hebei roughly 100kms outside Beijing, villagers said they avoided turning on the heating because it drained their incomes. “Regular folks can’t afford it... Spending 1,000 yuan (\$143) per month on heat - no one can stand that,” a resident in his 60s said at a farmers’ market. “Everyone likes that (the air) is clean. There’s not one person that doesn’t like it,” he said, asking not to be named for fear of “trouble”. “But...the cost of clean (air) is high,” he added. Restaurant worker Yin Chunlan said that her elderly in-laws need to

pay up to 7,000 yuan per year to heat their six-room village home. Yin, 48, lives in an apartment in town and says her annual bill is a third of that. “But it’s not the same in the village,” she said. “They have to set their heating much higher, and the temperature still isn’t as warm, so it wastes gas and wastes money.” Yin’s in-laws often pile on extra blankets to stay warm. “When I see it, it’s quite pitiful,” said Yin, wiping away a tear. “Nothing can be done.” In one village, a woman in her 70s wore a green padded jacket underneath an apron as she crossed her outdoor courtyard. Heating in her home is not turned

on during the daytime, she said, showing the system’s switchboard mounted above her stove displaying “off”. The woman, who did not give her name, said the dial could reach 60C. When asked if the temperature inside could feel as warm, she laughed. Reports that villagers in Hebei were layering up under quilts to avoid costly heating peppered Chinese social media in the first week of the new year. An article by Farmers’ Daily re-shared in state media CCTV’s opinion section said in rural Hebei natural gas costs up to 3.4 yuan per cubic metre compared to 2.6 yuan in rural areas of Beijing. Villagers said they

felt the huge price gap was unfair. But the original article was quickly taken down, with republications, including the CCTV article, inaccessible days later. China’s ministry of finance said in 2021 a total of 13.2bn yuan in funds had been distributed for clean heating across Hebei. But subsidies to support the installation of new systems and for gas bills, which had lasted three years, would not be renewed, it said in a letter. The move came around the same time that international gas prices were driven up by Russia’s war in Ukraine. Last year, Chinese authorities reported national gas consump-

tion growth had slowed. The ministry, responding to a local proposal to increase financial support for provincial pollution control, said special funds would be arranged for additional subsidies in rural areas, but gave no details of the rollout. A local Xushui government platform said in 2017 that some households would be eligible to receive 300 yuan in gas subsidies. For villager Zhang Yanjun, that amount hardly made a dent in his bill of several thousand yuan per season. The 55-year-old labourer said he had already spent more than 5,000 yuan on heating his home since October.

EU, India say ‘good progress’ made towards trade deal

AFP/Agencies
Brussels, Belgium

The EU and India's trade chiefs yesterday said after talks that they were getting closer to a trade deal between the 27-nation bloc and the world's most populous nation.

Brussels is pressing to seal an agreement with New Delhi as US President Donald Trump has rocked the global order.
EU trade commissioner Maros Sefcovic said the two sides were getting nearer after an “intense two-day marathon of talks” with Indian counterpart Piyush Goyal in Brussels. “Our shared goal: a bal-

anced, mutually beneficial trade and investment agreement to boost relations,” Sefcovic wrote on X.
“Good progress made. Open issues narrowing. Full steam ahead in the coming days,” he added.
Goyal echoed the upbeat assessment. “We made good progress and provided strategic guidance to our negotiating teams and reaffirmed

our strong political resolve to deliver a fair, balanced, and ambitious agreement,” he wrote.
According to India's ministry of commerce, the ministerial talks covered several critical aspects of the agreement. Progress across negotiating tracks such as market access for goods, rules of origin and services was reviewed with both

sides acknowledging steady movement on these front.
The ministerial engagement was built on earlier discussions held on January 6 and 7, 2026, between Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal and European Commission Director-General for Trade Sabine Weyand. The leaders of the EU and India are expected to hold a summit

at the end of January and the two sides have been pushing to wrap up negotiations for that event.
The talks with India came as the EU on Friday gave a long-delayed go ahead Friday to a huge trade deal with South American bloc Mercosur championed by Brussels as key to boosting the bloc's global standing.

India defends antitrust penalty law in Apple fight

Reuters
New Delhi

A law used to calculate fines on the basis of a company's global turnover will discourage breaches by multinationals, India's antitrust watchdog told a court in opposing Apple's high-profile challenge to the measure.

In November, Apple asked New Delhi judges to strike down the 2024 law, which could also have implications for global giants such as Pernod Ricard, Publicis, Amazon and other foreign companies facing antitrust scrutiny.

The law “aligns Indian competition law enforcement with established international practice”, the Competition Commission of India (CCI) said in a court filing, which is not public, as it laid out a detailed rationale for the first time.

Weighing only India-specific turnover as the basis for the calculation of penalties, especially in the case of global digital firms, fails to deter the impugned behaviour, the regulator added.

“This approach ensures that penalties retain real deterrent value in complex, digital and cross-border markets, rather than becoming nominal or easily absorbable for large multinational players,” the CCI said in the filing.

Apple and the CCI did not respond to request for comment

on the filing. In its lawsuit, Apple said the law, which reflects practice in the European Union, could lead to disproportionate fines for breaches that happened only in India.

The company fears it could be fined up to \$38bn if the global turnover calculation is used, after a CCI investigation found it had abused its position on its app store. Apple denies the accusations.

Apple accuses the competition body of illegally applying the new law retrospectively in another case.

The CCI denied this, saying it always had powers to impose a fine as high as a tenth of a company's turnover and the law changes merely clarified how it defines turnover.

“Clarificatory provisions operate retrospectively as they explain the true intent of the legislature,” the CCI said.

In its own filing, the CCI accused Apple of trying to misguide the court, saying that despite its power to calculate penalties on the basis of global turnover, it had sought only “India-specific financial details” from Apple.

Apple disagrees, saying the turnover details sought by the watchdog in line with the new law could expose it to a much higher penalty, its court filing shows.

The Delhi High Court is set to hear the lawsuit on January 27.



Demonstrators hold signs as they take part in a farmers' protest against the EU-Mercosur free trade agreement, in Athlone, Ireland, yesterday.

Thousands of Irish farmers protest EU-Mercosur deal

AFP
Athlone, Ireland

Thousands of Irish farmers yesterday protested against the European Union's trade deal with the South American bloc Mercosur, a day after EU states approved the treaty despite opposition from Ireland and France.

Tractors streamed into the roads of Athlone, in central Ireland, for the demonstration, displaying signs including “Stop EU-Mercosur” and ones with the European Union flag emblazoned with the words “sell out”.

Farmers on Friday also marched in Poland

and blocked roads in France and Belgium as the EU gave the green light to the trade deal, which has been welcomed by business groups but heavily criticised by European farmers.

The accord, more than 25 years in the making, would create one of the world's largest free-trade areas, boosting commerce between the 27-nation EU and the Mercosur bloc comprising Brazil, Paraguay, Argentina and Uruguay.

Major Mercosur exports to the EU include agricultural products and minerals, while the EU would export machinery, chemicals and pharmaceuticals with lowered tariffs applied.

But many European farmers fear their livelihoods will be undercut by a flow of cheaper goods from agricultural giant Brazil and its

neighbours, prompting Ireland, France, Poland, Hungary and Austria to vote against the accord. The agreement is widely opposed by Irish farmers for fear it will result in an influx of an extra 99,000 tonnes of cheap beef from South America, disrupting Irish agriculture.

The Irish Farmers' Association (IFA), Ireland's main farmers' lobby group, called the result “very disappointing”.

It said it would “renew” focus on securing a majority against the deal in the European parliament.

“We expect Irish MEPs to stand behind the farming community and reject the Mercosur deal,” said IFA president Francie Gorman in a statement.

Six people injured as plane crash-lands in Odisha's Rourkela

Odisha's Commerce and Transport Minister, B B Jena, yesterday said six people sustained minor injuries after a private airline's small aircraft made a crash landing near Rourkela.
“One A-1 nine-seater private flight carrying six passengers from Rourkela to Bhubaneswar met with an accident. The passengers have sustained minor injuries and are stable. It took place at Jalda, about 10km from Rourkela. This is not a major accident,” Jena told reporters.
Biju Patnaik International Airport director Prasanna Pradhan disclosed: “The flight was on its way from Bhubaneswar to Rourkela. It made a crash-landing 10km before Rourkela. There were four passengers and two crew members. All are safe. The flight is IndiaOne Air. The number of the light is C-208.”
The minister said the state government has apprised the director general of civil aviation of the situation.

David Bowie's 10th death anniversary



Women take a selfie at a mural for David Bowie marking the 10th anniversary of his death in Brixton, London, Britain, yesterday. Bowie, an iconic and visionary artist whose career spanned decades, died from liver cancer. The musician, actor and one-time internet pioneer continues to fascinate millions of admirers.

India's 2025 rice exports surge to near record

Reuters
Raipur, India

India's rice exports jumped 19.4% last year to the second-highest on record after New Delhi lifted all export curbs, making shipments more competitive, government and industry officials said yesterday.

The recovery came after a period of subdued exports when New Delhi limited shipments to protect domestic availability and keep food prices in check following erratic monsoon rains and rising inflationary pressures.

An improved flow of rice from the world's largest exporter of the grain curbed shipments from rivals Thailand and Vietnam and drove prices in Asia to their lowest in nearly a decade, easing costs for poor consumers in Africa and other regions.

“Indian shipments rebounded quickly after the government lifted export restrictions” in March, said a government official, who asked not to be named as he was not authorised to speak to the media.

As supplies improved with record production, India removed the last of the export curbs imposed in 2022 and 2023.

Exports rose to 21.55mn metric tonnes from 18.05mn in 2024, near the 2022 record of 22.3mn tonnes, the official said.

Non-basmati rice shipments jumped 25% to 15.15mn tonnes, while basmati exports increased 8% to a record 6.4mn tonnes, he said. Non-basmati rice shipments rose sharply to Bangladesh, Benin, Cameroon, Ivory Coast and Djibouti, while Iran, the UAE and Britain increased purchases of premium basmati rice during the year, said another government official.

UK earmarks £200mn to prepare for Ukraine deployment

Reuters
London

Britain said it was allocating £200mn (\$270mn) to fund preparations for the possible deployment of troops to Ukraine, after pledging its soldiers this week to a multinational force for the country in the event of a ceasefire.

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, French President Emmanuel Macron and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on Tuesday agreed a declaration of intent at a summit of the “coalition of the willing” of Ukraine's allies, outlining a potential future deployment.

Visiting the Ukrainian capital Kyiv on Friday, British Defence Minister John Healey said the money would be spent on upgrading vehicles and communication systems and counter-drone protection, as well as ensuring troops are ready to deploy.

Britain made the announcement hours after Russia fired a powerful hypersonic missile, in what Kyiv's European allies described as an attempt to intimidate them from supporting Ukraine.
Macron has said France could

send thousands of troops to the Multinational Force for Ukraine (MNFU), aimed at firming up security guarantees to reassure Kyiv.

The “UK is now accelerating £200mn to equip UK armed forces with new kit to be ready to deploy as part of the MNFU,” the ministry of defence said in a statement.

That would include vehicle upgrades, communication systems and counter-drone protection.

Britain has not said how many troops it would send; Starmer said on Wednesday Britain's plans were still being finalised.

Healey said the funding announcement for the MNFU showed

the government was “surging investment” into preparations for Ukraine.

“This capital spending is being funded from the core defence budget and sends a clear signal to allies and adversaries of the UK's intent to lead the MNFU, (and) fulfil our promises to secure the peace in Ukraine,” the statement from the ministry of defence said.

Healey also told Zelensky that production of Octopus interceptor drones, based on a Ukrainian design but made in Britain, would start in January. Britain will send thousands of them back to Ukraine

each month to help the country defend itself against Russian drone attacks.

London has said its MPs will be able to debate and vote on the number of troops that would be sent if there is a ceasefire.

But Moscow rejected the post-war peacekeeping plan, saying such troops would be “considered legitimate military targets”.

The announcement comes as UK media reported the ministry of defence was facing a £28bn shortfall over the next four years, despite government pledges to boost military spending amid rising tensions with Russia.

The Times newspaper first reported that the head of Britain's armed forces Richard Knighton warned Prime Minister Keir Starmer about the funding black-hole last month.

“We recognise demands on defence are rising, with growing Russian aggression, increasing operational requirements and preparations for a Ukraine deployment,” Downing Street said on Friday, without directly addressing the reports.

The UK has committed to increase defence spending to 3.5% of GDP by 2035, in line with a Nato target.

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GULF TIMES

As Saks Global teeters, department stores bet on shopping experiences

From Paris to New York, department stores are sharpening their focus on curated shopping experiences - ice-skating shows, food tasting and architectural tours - to try to win back shoppers. The push has gained urgency as Saks Global's mounting troubles highlight the sector's struggle to stay relevant amid competition from luxury brands' own boutiques and fast-growing e-commerce platforms.

Analysts say the trend is more than cosmetic. It reflects a structural shift in a sector under pressure from changing consumer habits and declining foot traffic.

"In today's market conditions, selling luxury goods requires an outstanding experience, which works best in outstanding venues," said Benjamin Sebban, head of retail investment at Knight Frank in Paris.

Printemps' new Manhattan store features paper replicas of French landmarks - a reminder of its Parisian heritage - and hosts exclusive launches. "This is more than a place to shop - it's a space to live, linger, and immerse yourself in a new kind of luxury lifestyle," Printemps America CEO Thierry Prevost told Reuters, highlighting the store's fine dining restaurant, and talks with designers.

In Paris, Galeries Lafayette spent more than 100mn euros (\$117mn) restoring its stained-glass cupola, crediting the revamp with lifting visits above pre-pandemic levels. The push aligns with research from consultancy Bain that found experiential sectors like hospitality and fine dining drove luxury market growth between 2023 and 2025. Success isn't guaranteed, however.

LVMH poured around 750mn euros into refurbishing the art nouveau building of its La Samaritaine department store facing Paris' Rue de Rivoli. But the store still struggled after its 2021 reopening in comparison with LVMH's Le Bon Marche Paris store, and the pair were combined in a restructuring last year. Analysts say department stores are betting that curated events and architectural upgrades can revive their relevance amid tougher trading.

Department store sales seen down 4-6% in 2025, Bain says; Saks' financial problems highlight sector challenges; stores investing in shopping experiences, partnerships

acquisition-related debt as key factors, they say Saks' plight reflects a deeper structural squeeze: department stores are losing ground to mass-market chains offering value and luxury brands' own boutiques promising exclusivity. "What you're seeing with Saks is a symptom of a much larger problem," said UBS analyst Jay Sole.

Bernstein analysts say US department stores should move toward concession-heavy models - providing multi-brand sales staff while letting brands manage operations and inventory.

Milan's Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II offers a template: the city leases prime store spaces through a bidding process, and says values have quadrupled in a decade.

"Multi-brand retailers need to reinvent themselves and go back to their scouting and discovery mission," said Bernstein analyst Luca Solca.

Some stores are experimenting with partnerships. In November, Parisian retailer BHV hosted the first physical outlet for Chinese budget brand Shein, although the move drew criticism from some competitors and consumers. "The right answer would be for department stores to build out their own online offering, with their own identity," Knight Frank's Sebban said.

Global department store sales are projected to have declined by 4% to 6% in 2025 and to show little recovery through 2030, Bain forecast in November, lagging growth estimates for the luxury sector overall. US retailer Macy's warned in December of weaker-than-expected holiday-quarter profits due to cutbacks in discretionary spending.

London's Harrods in October reported a 17% decline in underlying operating profit for 2024. By contrast, e-commerce players are thriving. MyTheresa, owned by LuxExperience, more than doubled quarterly core earnings in November, offering similar products to Saks but with perks like free shipping for orders over \$400. — Reuters

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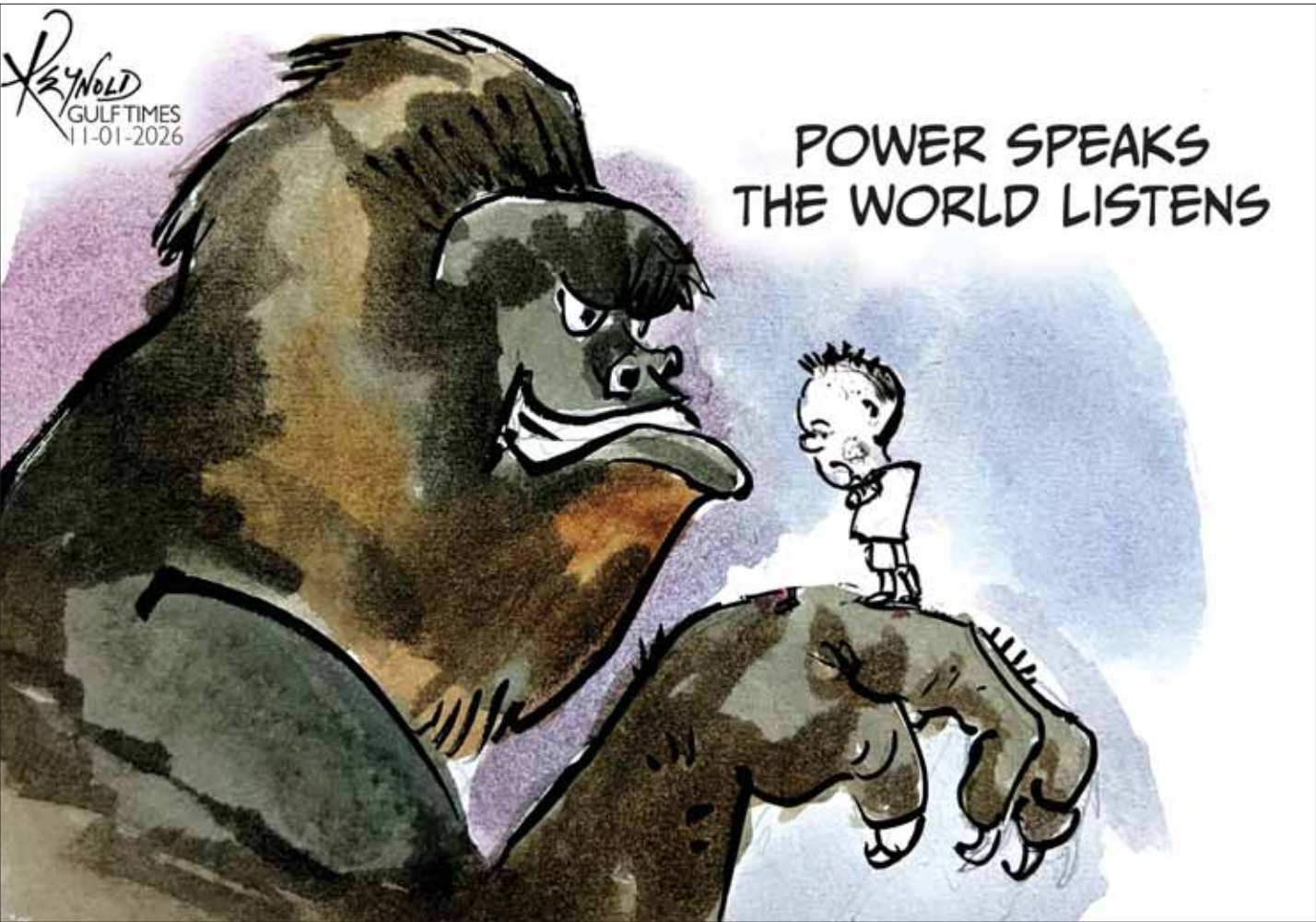
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US factory headcount falling despite Trump's promised manufacturing boom

US manufacturing jobs continue to decline Unemployment rate falls slightly, but job creation estimates revised lower Black unemployment rate rises, manufacturing sector loses 70,000 jobs since April

Reuters
Washington

US manufacturing jobs in December continued an eight-month skid that began last spring after President Donald Trump rolled out aggressive import taxes that he pledged would lead to a resurgence of blue-collar jobs by reshuffling world trade to favour US workers.

The reshuffling has certainly occurred, with the US collecting around \$30bn a month in tariff revenue, spread among US consumers, importers, and overseas exporting firms, and as firms first frontloaded goods abroad to stock their shelves with tariff-skirting inventory, then slowed their purchases and brought down US import levels. But the blue-collar jobs boom hasn't materialised, adding to the soured sentiment about Trump's economic policies among households concerned about still-rising prices and uncertainty about the labour market.

Data released on Friday showed the unemployment rate fell slightly to 4.4% in December from 4.5% in November, though estimates of job creation in prior months were revised lower, presenting US Federal Reserve officials with a mixed message of a jobless rate that remains low by historic standards, but hiring trends that seem weak and job growth that seems narrow.

The latest data "is very much in line with the businesses I am talking to, which is that the low-hire environment continues. Some of it is uncertainty. A lot of it is productivity", Richmond Fed President Tom Barkin said in

comments to journalists. "It is hard to find businesses outside of the AI ecosystem or healthcare that are talking about hiring."

The pace of job creation in the first year of Trump's second term has fallen more than two-thirds from what it was in the final year under President Joe Biden, to an estimated 49,000 per month in 2025 versus 168,000 per month the prior year.

The unemployment rate has increased only modestly because the number of people looking for jobs has remained flat under Trump, with tougher immigration and deportation rules and enforcement curbing what had been steady labour force growth under Biden's looser immigration policies.

"The healthcare sector is the only sector that is adding jobs right now, and it always does. It's completely insensitive to the economic cycle," Luke Tilley, chief economist at Wilmington Trust, said at a Maryland Bankers Association event on Friday.

"What has happened since the tariffs were put into place in April? The healthcare sector has added 30, 40, 50,000 jobs per month," he said. "All of the other non-government sectors, since the Rose Garden announcement that there was going to be a huge change in business costs, combined from April until December this year, have cut 150,000."

Some parts of the economy have felt the pressure more than others. The Black unemployment rate has risen from 6.2% as of January, when Trump resumed office, to 7.5% the past two months. The white unemployment rate by contrast has been between 3.5%

and 3.8% since April of 2024, and was below that for more than two years prior. Hiring in manufacturing, meanwhile, has been in the doldrums. The sector lost another 8,000 jobs in December, the Bureau of Labor Statistics estimated, and factory employment has dropped more than 70,000 since April to 12.69mn as of last month - the lowest reading since March of 2022. Construction jobs by contrast, while dropping in December, have continued the slow but steady growth seen throughout the post-pandemic era, goaded along recently by a boom in data-centre investment.

The much smaller mining and logging industry has also been losing jobs, down to 608,000 as of December versus 626,000 in April. That was the month Trump rolled out the "Liberation Day" tariffs that, while quickly scaled back after a brutal market reaction, set the stage for an upheaval in world trade and investment patterns that is still unresolved.

The US Supreme Court is expected to rule soon on a case that challenged the legality of many of the tariffs imposed under national security laws but touted by Trump as a source of revenue and meant to reclaim US manufacturing supremacy.

The path of employment since the new strategy was put in place, however, shows if anything how difficult it is to reshape labour market dynamics in a \$30tn economy whose population is ageing and in need of ageing-related services, where growth is dependent on consumer spending that tends to be concentrated on services like education, healthcare, leisure, and

restaurants, and whose workers command a wage premium that causes firms and managers to invest in productivity so they can make goods with fewer man-hours.

Manufacturing employment in the US is now lower than it was for much of Trump's initial term, which ran from 2017 until his loss to Biden in the 2020 election.

Overall, hiring has been narrowly focused, with a measure of hiring breadth showing more industries shedding employment than adding. The economy is generating jobs based on what people want to buy and what firms can profitably sell, and so hiring patterns haven't shifted all that much.

"Highly concentrated job growth only helps to further sideline and lengthen the job hunt for job seekers looking for work outside of the small handful of growing sectors," Laura Ullrich, director of economic research in North America at the Indeed Hiring Lab, wrote after the release of the December employment data, noting also the rise in the number of long-term unemployed, who have been looking for work for more than half a year. The number of people employed part time for economic reasons, typically read as a sign of labour market weakness, is also increasing.

"Nothing in the... data points towards significant, near-term change to this now familiar pattern," she wrote. "That said, a low-hire/low-fire environment can't last forever in a growing economy. While a long-stagnant labour market might not be as directly alarming as an obviously broken one, it can still feel quite broken for many job seekers."



An employee works inside a Nucor steel factory in Blytheville, Arkansas, US. — Reuters

4 die in mine accident in northern Afghanistan

Four miners in northern Afghanistan were suffocated to death by fumes this week while digging for gemstones, a local official told AFP yesterday.

"The incident occurred in Khash District of Badakhshan province where four workers at a mine died," Ehsanullah Kamgar, the spokesman for Badakhshan's police told AFP, adding that the deaths occurred on Friday.

The miners were searching for precious stones underground and "died due to suffocation caused by fumes emitted from a stone-crushing machine", he added.

Authorities did not respond to AFP's request for comment on whether the mine was operating officially or illegally.

Afghanistan mines marble, minerals, gold, and precious stones as well as coal.

Resources, including copper and lithium, buried across Afghanistan's rocky landscape are estimated to be worth a trillion dollars, according to US and UN assessments from 2010 and 2013. - **AFP**

New UK death after storms; 100,000 French homes without power

AFP
London

A man was killed after a tree fell on a caravan in England after record winds brought by Storm Goretti, as 100,000 homes in France were still without power yesterday.

Some 15 people have died in weather-related accidents this week across Europe as gale-force winds and storms caused travel mayhem, shut schools, and cut power to hundreds of thousands in freezing temperatures.

Ankara city hall says water cuts due to 'record drought'

Water cuts for the past several weeks in Turkiye's capital were due to the worst drought in 50 years and an exploding population, a municipal official told AFP, rejecting accusations of mismanagement.

Dam reservoir levels have dropped to 1.12% and taps are being shut off for several hours a day in certain districts on a rotating schedule in Ankara, forcing many residents to line up at public fountains to fill pitchers.

"2025 was a record year in terms of drought. The amount of water feeding the dams fell to historically low levels, to 182mn cubic metres in 2025, compared with 400-

The storm barrelled through southwest-ern Cornwall and parts of Wales overnight Thursday to Friday, with gusts of up to 160kph (100mph) downing trees and leaving tens of thousands of homes without power.

A man was found dead in the town of Helston in Cornwall on Friday after a tree fell onto a caravan, UK police said.

"Tragically, a man aged in his 50s was located deceased within the caravan," Devon and Cornwall police said in a statement.

Most of the UK remains under a weather warning for snow and ice yesterday, the Met Office national weather agency said, warn-

ing that black ice could cause "disruption" in Scotland and northern England.

Heavy snowfall followed by the storm meant that some 250 schools in Scotland were closed for the much of the first week back after the Christmas break.

Around 28,000 homes were still without power at the start of the weekend in southwestern England and the Midlands, according to the network operator National Grid.

Storm Goretti also ploughed through other parts of northern Europe, with nearly 100,000 homes in France still without power yesterday morning.

Meanwhile, long-distance rail traffic

slowly resumed yesterday in northern Germany, after being completely suspended on Friday due to another storm named Elli, rail operator Deutsche Bahn said.

In the far north of the country, the port city of Hamburg, heavily affected by a large amount of snow, remains particularly impacted by the disruptions, it added.

A number of rail services were still not restored, notably those linking Hamburg to Copenhagen, Amsterdam and Hanover.

Services from Hamburg to the western Ruhr region or to Berlin are expected to be restored over the course of the weekend, it said.

Swiss canton leader voices anger over lack of checks at club that caught fire

The leader of the Swiss canton where a club fire killed 40 people voiced anger over local authorities' failure to inspect the venue for six years, as prosecutors step up efforts to hold those responsible to account.

The mayor of the ski resort of Crans-Montana said this week that "Le Constellation" club had not been inspected since 2019, and Mathias Reynard, head of the Canton Valais government, expressed dismay at this in a local newspaper interview.

"I was angry, obviously," he told *Le Temps*, when asked about the missing checks. "At these serious failings. And I think it's normal to be angry. But we have to let justice take its course."

This week the Valais head of security said soundproofing foam in the basement of the club that caught fire during New Year celebrations should have been subject to safety checks by law, contradicting Crans-Montana's mayor. Most victims were teenagers.

Prosecutors on Friday ordered the detention of Jacques Moretti, one of the club's two French owners.

A court will decide soon whether to place him under formal arrest.

Prosecutors are investigating the owners on suspicion of crimes including homicide by negligence. Victims' families have filed legal complaints over the fire.

Jessica Moretti, Jacques's partner, apologised to victims on Friday. The pair have said they are devastated by the tragedy.

Calls have intensified in Switzerland for those responsible to face justice.

Critics of the investigation have questioned why both owners were free for so long.

"Those responsible will have to take responsibility, including the relevant authorities," Reynard said. - **Reuters**



This picture taken last week shows a woman lighting a candle at a makeshift memorial outside Le Constellation. - **Reuters**

Greenland's political parties say they don't want to be under US

Reuters/AFP
Oslo/Nuuk

Greenland's parliament will bring forward a meeting to discuss its response to US threats to take control of the Arctic island, the leaders of the five political parties in the Greenlandic assembly said in a joint statement.

President Donald Trump has said that the United States must own Greenland, an autonomous part of the Kingdom of Denmark, to prevent Russia or China occupying the strategically located and minerals-rich territory in the future.

Both Russia and China have increased military activity in the region in recent years, but neither has laid any claim to the vast icy island.

"We emphasise once again our desire for the US contempt for our country to end," the leaders of all five political parties elected



This picture taken on September 17 last year shows members of the Danish armed forces practice looking for potential threats during a joint military drill involving Danish, Swedish and Norwegian home guard units together with Danish, German and French troops, in Kangerlussuaq, Greenland. - **Reuters**

Denmark cut asylum figures to historic low in 2025: govt

Denmark's strict immigration policies drove asylum admissions to a historic low in 2025, with 839 requests granted by the end of November, the government announced yesterday.

"It is absolutely critical that as few foreigners as possible come to Denmark and obtain asylum. My main priority is to limit the influx of refugees," said Immigration Minister Rasmus Stoklund in a press release.

According to the ministry, "there have been very few years when the annual total remained below 1,000... 2025 will be a year with a historically low number of residence permits granted on asylum grounds".

Denmark registered 1,835 asylum requests by November 2025.

Copenhagen has over the years implemented a slew of initiatives to discourage migrants and make Danish citizenship harder to obtain.

In 2024, the country of 6mn people accepted some 860 of the 2,333 asylum requests lodged that year. - **AFP**

to Greenland's parliament said in their joint statement late on Friday.

"We do not want to be Americans, we do not want to be Danes, we want to be Greenlanders," they said in the statement, posted on social media by Greenland's premier, Jens-Frederik Nielsen.

A meeting of Greenland's parliament, the Inatsisartut, will be brought forward to ensure that a fair and comprehensive political debate takes place and that the people's rights are secured, the leaders said.

The date of the meeting has not yet been determined.

Greenland's parliament last met in November and had been scheduled to meet again on February 3, according to its website.

Trump said on Friday that he would "do something on Greenland whether they like it or not" and that the US military presence in the island under a 1951 agreement with fellow North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato) mem-

ber Denmark is not enough to guarantee the island's defence.

Trump's renewed push for Greenland, after US military intervention in Venezuela, worries many of the island's 57,000 inhabitants, whose widely held goal is to eventually become an independent nation.

A 2009 agreement between Greenland and Denmark explicitly recognised Greenlanders' right to independence if they choose, but while all five parties say they want independence, they differ on how and when to achieve it.

"We must decide the future of our country ourselves, without pressure for a quick decision, delay or interference from other countries," the party leaders said, adding that they sought dialogue based on diplomacy and international principles.

Julius Nielsen, a 48-year-old fisherman in the capital Nuuk, told AFP: "American? No! We were a colony for so many years. We're not ready to be a colony again, to be colonised".

A Danish colony until 1953, Greenland gained home rule 26 years later and is contemplating eventually loosening its ties with Denmark.

Many Greenlanders remain cautious about making this a reality.

"I really like the idea of us being independent, but I think we should wait. Not for now. Not today," Pitsi Mari, who works in telecoms, told AFP.

"I feel like the United States' interference disrupts all relationships and trust" between Denmark and Greenland, said Inaluk Pedersen, a 21-year-old shop assistant.

The coalition currently in power is not in favour of a hasty independence.

One dead, 7 missing after migrant boat sinks off Turkiye

One person died and seven others were missing yesterday after a migrant boat sank in the Aegean Sea off the coast of Turkiye, the Turkish coast guard said.

Thirty-seven passengers on a rubber din-

ghy which took on water before dawn off the western city of Dikili, north of Izmir, were rescued alive, the coastguard stated.

Dikili, a small seaside resort, faces the Greek island of Lesbos, some 20km (12 miles) away.

"Search operations... are continuing to find the seven missing irregular migrants," the coastguard said.

Shipwrecks are common for perilous crossings to the Greek islands, which are a gateway to the European Union. - **AFP**

Winter pierces Kyiv homes after Russia knocks out heat

Reuters
Kyiv

Kyiv residents huddled against bitter winter cold inside their unheated apartments yesterday as engineers struggled to restore power, water and heat knocked out in the latest salvo of Russian strikes.

Russia has regularly conducted intense bombardments of Ukraine's energy system since it invaded its neighbour in 2022.

The war's fourth winter could be the coldest and darkest yet, with the accumulated damage to the grid bringing utilities to the brink, and temperatures already below -10° Celsius (14°F) and set to plunge further this week.

Yesterday Kyiv's heat, power and water, hit hard by a strike two nights earlier, were shut down

again as engineers tried to repair the ruined power grid.

Galina Turchin, a 71-year-old pensioner living on Kyiv's badly affected eastern bank, had a window covered by plastic sheeting after it was blown out when drone debris hit another part of her building during the last overnight attack.

She said she had not cooked food for two days, eating whatever had been left in their kitchen before the power, water and heat went out, and would now try to cook on a gas camping stove.

"We hope they will give us heat. If not power, then at least heat," she said, standing wrapped in layers of jumpers in her kitchen.

The city administration said around noon local time (1000 GMT) yesterday that the state grid operator Ukrenergo had ordered the city's power system to be shut

down, and that the water and heating systems, as well as electrified public transport, would also stop working as a result.

Less than an hour later, Ukrenergo said engineers had managed to remedy the immediate issue, which had been caused by damage from previous Russian strikes, and that power was coming back online in parts of Kyiv.

Prime Minister Yulia Svyrydenko said the heating system, which in Ukrainian cities is centralised and pumps hot water to homes in pipes, was also coming back on, and that she expected heat supply to be fully restored.

However, she said that the power situation in the capital was still difficult, as the grid was badly damaged and people were using more electric heaters because of the cold.

On Friday, with about half



Women charge their devices inside a 'Point of Invincibility' centre in Kyiv, a government-run shelter that offers basic services and heat during blackouts. - **Reuters**

of Kyiv's apartment blocks left without heating after the latest Russian missile and drone attack, Mayor Vitali Klitschko urged residents who had a warm place to go to temporarily leave the city.

Turchin, the pensioner in her

cold apartment, said she had a village cottage in another region but it was unheated and would take three days to warm up with logs.

"The neighbour wrote. She said it was already -17° (Celsius) there last night."

Pakistan Citrus Festival opens in Doha, fostering trade and cultural bonds



By Shaima Sheriff
Doha

Pakistan's world-renowned citrus industry took centre stage in Qatar yesterday as the 'Pakistan Citrus Festival 2026' officially opened at Old Souq Al Wakrah, highlighting growing trade links, cultural exchange, and agri-food diplomacy between the two nations.

The festival, organised by the embassy of Pakistan in Doha, in co-ordination with Old Souq Al Wakrah administration, was inaugurated by Muhammad Aamer, the ambassador of Pakistan to Qatar, in the presence of diplomats, officials, and business representatives.

Running until January 18, the free-entry exhibition showcases Pakistan's premium citrus varieties, including kinnows, mandarins, and oranges, alongside food stalls and family-friendly activities. The festival is open daily from 4pm-9pm.

Speaking at the opening, Aamer said the initiative builds on the success of previous mango festivals held in Qatar, which signifi-

cantly boosted Pakistan's fruit exports across the GCC.

"We have had two mango festivals in Qatar, and they were very successful. Pakistan's exports of mangoes and other fruits have increased considerably in the GCC, especially in Qatar, because of these festivals. This time, we wanted to introduce another iconic fruit of Pakistan, citrus, and share its taste with the world," he said.

He noted that such events go beyond commerce, serving as platforms for cultural and people-to-people engagement. "With these products coming to Qatar, the taste and culture of Pakistan come with them. This festival is not only about trade but also about strengthening cultural and economic relations between Pakistan, Qatar and other nations," he said.

The ambassador encouraged residents and visitors to attend, describing Pakistani citrus as "one of the most unique in the world" and expressing hope that strong public support would make the festival an annual fixture. The choice of Old Souq Al Wakrah by the beach added to the festival's appeal, drawing families and tour-

ists in pleasant winter weather. The general supervisor of Old Souq Al Wakrah, Hamad Rashid al-Kaab, said the exhibition marks the first time a citrus-focused festival has been hosted at the venue.

"About 30 companies are participating, including businesses from Pakistan and local partners. Citrus fruits are very popular in South Asia, and this exhibition offers much more than oranges and lemons. We expect strong footfall and a positive outcome," he said.

For participating businesses, the festival offers direct market exposure. Vendor Jannat Shah, representing Souvenir Trading Company, said nearly "75%" of her company's imports come from Pakistan. "This is a great way to introduce Pakistani products to people from all nationalities. It helps us showcase the quality and variety of our citrus, especially mandarins, which are highly popular in Qatar," he said.

Restaurants have also adapted their offerings to reflect the festival's theme. Babar, owner of Sarhad Premium Restaurant, said the event allows food businesses to connect with the community while supporting a broader cultural initiative.



"We are presenting citrus-based juices, desserts, and dishes to match the theme. Such events help restaurants like ours gain exposure, meet new audiences and contribute to initiatives led by the Pakistan Embassy, Visit Qatar, and Old Souq Al Wakrah," he said.

Visitors praised both the concept and the location. Farhan al-Sheikh al-Sayyid, founder of Art, Fashion, and Cultural Diplomacy, said the festival also promotes Al Wakra as an emerging tourism destination. "It's refreshing to experience an event here instead of the usual locations. Al Wakra is beautiful, close to the airport and full of life. This festival introduces not only Pakistani citrus but also this city to tourists," he said.

He added that the wide range of citrus varieties was an eye-opener: "I had no idea there were so many types of oranges, some produced only in Pakistan. This is a wonderful cultural and culinary experience."



Winter in Qatar draws more GCC tourists



Doha has been seeing strong tourism activities during the month of January with a growing influx of Gulf families visiting Qatar, as Doha has consolidated its position as a preferred destination in the region thanks to the diversity of its facilities, the excellent services, and its mild winter climate that offers visitors a comfortable and safe experience.

According to some Gulf visitors, Qatar has succeeded in presenting a tourism model that combines authenticity and modernity, where traditional heritage elements blend with contemporary designs. A wide range of entertainment, cultural, and sports options is available to suit all age groups, while the warmth of reception and Qatari hospitality stand out as an added value that leaves a positive impression on families.

The most prominent family-friendly destinations in Doha are spread across the Katara Cultural Village, Souq Waqif, the National Museum of Qatar, and Aspire Park, in addition to modern developments, such as Msheireb Downtown Doha, The Pearl Island, and the Doha Corniche. These areas offer a comfortable environment



with a variety of events and open-air activities, supported by advanced infrastructure and diverse options for restaurants, cafes, and recreational walkways.

During January, Doha transforms into a vibrant, lively canvas with a packed calendar of cultural festivals, artistic programmes, and entertainment shows, alongside the hosting of major sporting tournaments that reinforce Qatar's position on the global map of event organisation. These events include equestrian, fencing, and table tennis championships, as well as running challenges, marathons, and desert adventure activities, while beach activities and family-

oriented programmes continue as part of the Sealine season and other outdoor destinations.

Shehab al-Alawi from Oman emphasised that Doha has become the heart of Gulf tourism, noting that the diversity of destinations and the integration of services provide an experience suitable for families and young people alike. He added that the mild winter weather, along with a clear respect for Gulf customs and traditions, gives visitors a sense of familiarity and comfort without the need to travel to distant destinations.

Similarly, Khaled al-Alawi from Oman expressed his admiration for Msheireb Downtown Doha,

which is built on the concepts of sustainability and the smart city, considering it a model that could be replicated in regional capitals. He also affirmed that Souq Waqif remains an essential stop for any visitor, due to its shopping options, traditional restaurants, and family activities set in an authentic heritage atmosphere.

Further, Majid Sultan from Saudi Arabia said during his first visit, he was keen to explore major modern destinations, such as Katara, Msheireb, the Qanat Quartier, and the Gewan Island, noting that these projects offer a balanced mix of entertainment, shopping, and activities suitable for all.

Shooting contest winners felicitated at Marmi 2026

The shooting competitions for the junior and amateur categories were held yesterday morning as part of the events of the 17th edition of the Qatar International Falcons and Hunting Festival (Marmi 2026). The festival, held under the patronage of HE Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani and supported by the Social and Sports Activities Support Fund (Daam), is taking place at Sabkhat Marmi in the Sealine Area until January 24. Ahmed bin Mubarak al-Kuwari, chairman of the Shooting Committee at the Marmi Festival, said: "We participate annually in the festival to promote the sport of shooting within the community. These events provide an opportunity to discover talents in this sport, and they also enjoy strong public attendance at Marmi." He noted that the objective of the juniors' competition is to attract these age groups to the national team, in addition to providing recreation for participants and diversifying the activities of Marmi.



He explained that the shooting competition is divided into two categories: a juniors' championship for 14- to 18-year-olds, followed by the amateurs' competition. He said the professionals' competition will be held on Saturday, January 17, noting



that the organising committee has allocated valuable prizes for each championship. In the meantime, Metab Mubarak al-Qahtani, chairman of the Marmi Festival, awarded the winners of the shooting championship. In



the juniors' category, Mohamed Ali al-Adhba took first place, while Rashid Mohamed Abu Shraida came second, and Ali Masoud al-Adhba finished third. In the amateurs' category, Tamim Hamad al-Marri won first place, Badr Kefah al-Youssef

took second place, and Khaled Khalifa al-Muhamnadi secured third place. Meanwhile, during the evening period, the competitions of the Hadd Al Tahadi Championship for Group Nine were held, where



the pigeon of Abdullah Fakhro outperformed the falcons. Shawi al-Kaab, chairman of Hadd Al Tahadi Committee, said Fakhro's pigeon once again proved its superiority over the falcons, demonstrating the pigeon's strength, experience, agility, light weight, and the intensive training that enabled it to evade the falcons' talons. On Sunday, January 18, the semi-final qualifiers of Al Tala'a Championship will be held in the morning, while competitors will enter Hadd Al Tahadi arena for Group 10.