



As for luxury amber rosaries, prices can reach extremely high levels, especially if they are made from rare materials such as Kaliningrad amber. **To Page 2**



Al-Muraikhi holds talks with Saudi deputy minister of foreign affairs



HE the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sultan bin Saad al-Muraikhi met with Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Saudi Arabia, Engineer Waleed bin Abdulkarim al-Khuraiji. The meeting took place on the margins of the extraordinary session of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Organisation of Islamic Co-operation (OIC), convened in Jeddah on Saturday. Discussions during the meeting focused on ways to advance bilateral co-operation between the countries, as well as on a range of matters of shared interest. **(QNA)**

Amir, Deputy Amir and PM congratulate Sultan of Oman

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, His Highness the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani and HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani sent yesterday cables of congratulations to Sultan Haitham bin Tariq of the sisterly Sultanate of Oman on the anniversary of assuming the reins of power. **(QNA)**

PM receives phone call from Iraq deputy PM

HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani yesterday received a phone call from Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iraq, Fuad Hussein. During the call, they reviewed bilateral relations and ways to support and strengthen them, discussed the latest regional developments, and addressed a host of topics of mutual interest. HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs reiterated Qatar's keenness on supporting Iraq in achieving the aspirations of its people for stability, development, and prosperity. **(QNA)**

Qatar to host 298th session of IPU executive committee

Qatar, represented by the Shura Council, will host on Tuesday and Wednesday, the 298th session of the Executive Committee of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), as part of its ongoing support for multilateral parliamentary work and its efforts to strengthen international dialogue and co-ordination among parliaments. The meeting is set to discuss a range of topics on the agenda, foremost among them the evaluation of the progress made in the the implementation of the Union's current strategy, and the general directions for the next five-year strategy, as well as several

organisational and parliamentary issues related to enhancing the Union's role and the effectiveness of its mechanisms.

Qatar's hosting of this session underscores its firm approach to supporting joint international action and reinforcing the role of parliamentary institutions- particularly the Executive Committee - in guiding international parliamentary work, contributing to addressing regional and global challenges, and promoting peace and development, in line with its vision based on dialogue and constructive collaboration. **(QNA)**

QNL lecture puts focus on contemporary history of nation

Qatar National Library (QNL) hosted a two-day lecture and workshop on Qatar's contemporary history on January 10-11, examining the political, social, and cultural transformations that have shaped the nation in recent decades.

HE Dr Hamad bin Abdulaziz al-Kawari, Minister of State and QNL president, attended the lecture, which also drew a large gathering of researchers and academics specialising in Qatar's modern history.

Professor Abdullah Baabood, chair of Qatar for Islamic Area Studies at Waseda University in Tokyo, delivered the lecture, with historian and Community College of Qatar lecturer Jassim Alshamari moderating the discussion.

Drawing on academic research and historical analysis, Prof Baabood traced Qatar's modern trajectory, highlighting key developments within broader regional and global contexts.

A workshop held alongside the lecture offered participants a practical, reflective introduction to the methods used to ana-

Drawing on academic research and historical analysis, Prof Baabood traced Qatar's modern trajectory, highlighting key developments within broader regional and global contexts

lyse and document the nation's contemporary history within the wider Gulf context.

In her opening remarks before the lecture, Eiman Saleh Alshamari, manager of National Collection, National Collection and Special Initiatives, and manager of IFLA's Mena Regional Office, said: "Reading contemporary history not only involves reviewing past events but also opens a broad window into understanding our present and grasping the context in which our nation's institutions have evolved.

"Our recent history helps us interpret the social, economic, and institutional transformations from which we benefit today, and provides us with a deeper understanding of the de-

velopment paths our society has taken."

She added: "This lecture and the accompanying workshop reflect our firm belief in the importance of making historical knowledge accessible to the public and enhancing the presence of contemporary history in public discourse. This contributes to building societal awareness grounded in research and documentation, and moves beyond a superficial reading of events towards a more profound understanding of our national experience."

Prof Baaboud said: "This lecture represents an attempt to understand the profound transformations that Qatar has witnessed since independence, by highlighting pivotal moments in



HE Dr Hamad bin Abdulaziz al-Kawari (right) with Bilal Kabalan (second left), Lebanon ambassador to Qatar. **PICTURES:** Shaji Kayamkulam



Professor Dr Abdullah Baabood (left) with moderator Jassim Alshamari.

the process of building the modern state. "I have sought to present a comprehensive analytical reading grounded in local, regional, and international contexts, demonstrating how policies, economic

discoveries, and national visions have contributed to shaping Qatari identity and the state's growing regional and international role?"

The event is part of QNL's ongoing efforts to promote historical

awareness, academic research, and lifelong learning. Through such lectures, workshops, and discussions, the Library serves as a hub for knowledge exchange and cultural exploration.

Web Summit Qatar 2026 startup programme sells out

Event expected to draw more than 30,000 attendees from over 120 countries

Web Summit Qatar has announced that the event's startup programme is officially sold out, with over 1,600 startups from around the world set to gather at the Doha Exhibition and Convention Centre (DECC) from February 1-4, 2026.

The event floor is also at full capacity, with leading global companies including IBM, TikTok, Microsoft, Huawei, Qatar Airways, Snapchat, and many more confirmed to partner. With demand continuing to rise, Web Summit expects the event to reach full capacity in the coming weeks.

Returning to Doha for its third edition, Web Summit Qatar showcases Qatar's leading role in the region's growth as a global tech hub, driven by smart-city innovation, digital transformation, and diversification beyond oil. Discussions will explore how technology can tackle financial inequality, healthcare gaps, and climate challenges, reinforcing Web Summit's mission to unite people and ideas that can deliver real-world impact.

From Lisbon to Doha, Vancouver, and Rio de Janeiro, Web Summit has evolved into the world's largest technology and innovation event series and the biggest gathering of entrepreneurs, policymakers, researchers, cultural figures, and global decision-makers.

This year, Web Summit Qatar also expects more than 30,000 attendees from over 120 countries, and more than 700 investors and



File photo of Web Summit Qatar 2025.

over 600 media to gather in Doha.

A Web Summit spokesperson said: "We're delighted to see an unprecedented level of interest in Web Summit Qatar 2026, especially from the startups which represent the future of technology.

"Web Summit has always been the place where you meet the next decade's most influential people, and with our unique combination of founders, investors and leaders across every sector, it is uniquely placed to help drive technological and economic progress."

Artificial intelligence (AI) is expected to dominate discussions at Web Summit Qatar 2026. AI is fuelling some of the biggest conversations shaping the world, influencing software, healthcare, sports, energy, creativity, and even space.

AI will continue to take centre stage, with discussions about who is steering its development, who is funding it, and how executives, innovators, and investors can get real value from the technology. With a strong mix of content creators, media executives, and creative leaders attending, the event will

also look at how technology is changing the way content is made, shared, and consumed. As AI transforms how people create content, new strategies are required for how to break through the noise. Beyond this, Web Summit Qatar will dive into the rise of quantum computing and its growing influence on the tech world, along with breakthroughs in fintech, energy, government, health, and manufacturing that are pushing global innovation forward.

The 'Web Summit Qatar Meetups' will connect attendees with the people that matter to them. After introducing meetups in 2023 in Rio de Janeiro, Web Summit continues its mission to help build meaningful connections through meetups, powered by its proprietary software, Summit Engine. Aiming to create a more intimate and community-driven experience, the objective is to invite attendees to at least one personalised meetup.

Qatar Museums Chairperson Her Excellency Sheikhha Al Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani and Sheikh Ali Alwaleed al-Thani, the CEO of the Investment Promotion Agency Qatar (Invest Qatar), are among the confirmed key Qatari voices to grace the event.

HE Sheikhha Al Mayassa brings deep sporting, cultural, financial and organisational expertise to Al Shaqab, where her lifelong commitment to culture, education, and outreach has shaped numerous local and international initiatives.

Sheikh Ali, a board member of Katara Hospitality, Media City Qatar, Qatari Diar, and the Qatar Free Zones Authority, is a leading voice in the country's economic diplomacy. He previously worked at the Prime Minister's Office on Qatar's economic and investment agenda.

Korea's National Assembly Speaker meets Qatar's envoy



Speaker of the National Assembly of Korea Woo Won-shik met with Qatar's ambassador to Korea Khalid bin Ibrahim al-Hamar. During the meeting, aspects of co-operation between the countries were reviewed. **(QNA)**

Amber prayer beads – a timeless status symbol

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Al-Wadhan clarifies that there are different sizes of rosaries to suit various tastes and uses. Classic rosaries come in sizes ranging from 8-10mm and are the most common amongst users, as they combine ease of use with suitability for different tastes.

As for prayer beads, they range from 5-7mm in diameter and usually consist of 66 or 99 beads, making them suitable for the traditional method of reciting remembrances of Allah. Formal and luxurious prayer beads, on the other hand, are larger, starting at 12mm and sometimes reaching 14mm or 15mm, giv-

ing them special prestige. These beads are considered a symbol of elegance and prestige and are often used at special occasions such as weddings or celebrations, or as luxurious pieces that highlight the refined taste of their owner.

Al-Wadhan explained that crafting a rosary usually takes one to three days, depending on the complexity of the design and the condition of the material used. Rosaries in Qatar remain a symbol of authenticity and beauty, and with the increasing interest in them, whether as an investment or a hobby, this ancient craft continues to develop, ensuring its continuity and brilliance for generations to come.

Qatar Olympic Committee steps up half-marathon preparations with 30 days to go

The Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC) is stepping up its administrative, technical, and logistical preparations for the second edition of its annual Half Marathon 2026, set to take place on February 10 at Lusail Boulevard. Held in conjunction with National Sport Day, the event underscores the QOC's dedication to spreading sports culture and encouraging an active lifestyle among all members of the community.

Alongside the marathon, a diverse range of sports and entertainment activities will take place at the Team Qatar Village in Al Sa'ad Plaza, organised in co-operation with national sports federations and supported by a distinguished group of partners, including Qatari Diar

as the host, Asics Japan, a global leader in sports equipment, Doha Bank, the Ministry of Interior, Hamad Medical Corporation, and a team of dedicated volunteers.

The race will feature categories for different age groups and fitness levels.

These include: Children (ages 6-14): 1km; Youth (ages 15-17): 5km; General category (ages 19-39): 5km, 10km, and 21km; General category (ages 40 and above): 5km, 10km, and 21km; Team Qatar category (ages 19-39): 5km, 10km, and 21km; Team Qatar category (ages 40 and above): 5km, 10km, and 21km.

The event ensures wide participation and a comprehensive sports experience for all age groups.

The QOC invites participants of all ages to register online via the official QOC website in accordance with the approved terms and conditions.

The committee aims to expand the event's reach, increasing participation from 6,000 runners in the first edition to 10,000 in 2026, attracting competitors from both inside and outside the country, highlighting the event's international and competitive nature.

In a press statement, Half Marathon Organising Committee vice-chairman Salah al-Saadi said that the QOC is committed to delivering an exceptional experience for all participants and ensuring the long-term sustainability of this annual event, in line with its vision "To

become a Leading Nation in Bringing The World Together Through Sustainable Sport Development".

He highlighted that the race is one of the flagship community and sports events on the QOC's calendar.

The organising committee of the annual Half Marathon is working to deliver a second edition that meets the highest technical standards, ensuring a comprehensive and outstanding sporting experience for participants.

The event also aims to promote a culture of physical activity in Qatar and encourage all segments of society to actively engage in sports, in alignment with the goals of Qatar National Vision 2030.



Salah al-Saadi



QNA launches 'Editorial Policy' course

Qatar News Agency (QNA) has launched a three-day training course on "Editorial Policy".

The course, part of the QNA's professional development programmes, is aimed at enhancing employees' editorial awareness and improving overall work performance, and comes as part of QNA's commitment to reinforcing an institutional understanding of its editorial policy, helping unify media discourse and ensuring adherence to professional standards and credibility in news reporting.

The course aims to familiarise participants with the foundations of the QNA's editorial policy, its general principles, and the frameworks governing news work, in addition to clarifying the proper handling of news and sources according to professional and ethical standards.

The course covers topics including editorial rules, publishing regulations, news writing techniques, and procedures for processing different types of news content, in alignment with the agency's mission and media vision.

It also emphasises strengthening co-ordination between different editorial departments and raising awareness of the importance of adhering to internal policies, positively reflecting on the quality of news content and institutional performance.

The course includes interactive training sessions designed to exchange experiences and discuss practical examples, contributing to a stronger practical understanding of the editorial policy and its effective application in the daily work environment.

Training courses organised by the QNA are part of its strategic vision to qualify its national media workforce and raising the standard of journalistic work according to best professional practices. - QNA

Central Main Veterinary Laboratory project progressing well: official

Construction and development works for the Central Main Veterinary Laboratory project in the Old Airport area are progressing well, with around 30-40% completed, a Ministry of Municipality official has said.

Engineer Abdulaziz al-Ziyara, director of the ministry's Livestock Resources Department, said that the full completion is expected to take about 1-1/2 years, in accordance with the approved timeline.

It is one of the most prominent strategic projects aimed at strengthening Qatar's animal health system.

Once completed, the laboratory will include specialised units for advanced testing, and efforts are underway to qualify it as a regional reference laboratory for several tests.

Al-Ziyara said that it will be incorporated into global laboratory networks accredited by the World Organisation for Animal Health.

He noted that while the laboratory falls under the Livestock Resources Department, it will serve various sectors in the country, including the Ministry of Public Health, particularly in relation to diseases shared between humans and animals, stressing that such integration strengthens the country's health security and preventive systems.



Engineer Abdulaziz al-Ziyara



He stressed that the development plans aim to transform the laboratory into a global reference authority to which parties may resort in the event of dispute or disagreement between countries over the results of disease testing of animal shipments.

Such technologies, al-Ziyara added, will directly contribute to selecting appropriate treatments and vaccines for livestock in the country, achieving significant financial savings by importing targeted vaccines for strains present locally only, rather than general, multi-strain vaccines.

The project encompasses a comprehensive infrastructure upgrade, including structural repairs, the development of laboratory units, and the construction of modern support facilities, such as a fully equipped veterinary pathology building, to enhance the efficiency of diagnostic operations and scientific research.

He stressed that the development plans aim to transform the laboratory into a global reference authority to which parties may resort in the event of dispute or disagreement between countries over the results of disease testing of animal shipments.

In the meantime, al-Ziyara noted that the number of reference laboratories at the regional level is limited, with only 20-30 facilities, which enhances Qatar's position as a leader in this field.

During 2024, the department established, equipped, and brought into operation veterinary centres in the barns of Abu Nakhla and Al Shamal complexes.

Further, the building permit for the veterinary centre in the barns of Al Wakra complex has been received, and the tender for construction works has been launched.

Similarly, the land plot has already been allocated and designs prepared for the proposed veterinary centres in the Al Karaana

area, the barns of Al Khor complex, and the barns of Al Sheehaniya complex, which have been submitted for approval and tendering.

In addition, al-Ziyara said, the land has been allocated for fencing the barns of Abu Nakhla complex and developing its infrastructure, and preparations are underway to finalise the tender for construction works.

Regarding veterinary quarantine facilities, the official affirmed that the Al Ruwais and Hamad Port quarantine stations represent the first line of defence to protect the country's livestock wealth and prevent the spread of diseases.

Marathon Village opens at Hotel Park ahead of Doha Marathon by Ooredoo

The Doha Marathon by Ooredoo 2026 will officially open its Marathon Village at Hotel Park from January 13-16, welcoming runners, families, and supporters to the beating heart of the marathon experience.

Operating daily from 3pm-9pm, the Marathon Village will serve as the central gathering point, where participants collect race kits, take in the atmosphere, and immerse themselves in the excitement ahead of one of Qatar's most anticipated sporting events.

On Friday the Village will serve as the focal point of the event from 5am-2pm.

Runners will have access to free physiotherapy services, dedicated recovery areas, and a medal engraving station, allowing finishers to add a



personal touch to their achievement.

On Thursday, the Village will host the Blue Fun Race Run at 3pm, a dedicated run for children with autism organised in partnership with the Autism Parents Platform.

This will be followed by the Kids' Fun Run at 3.30pm, welcoming children aged 4-10 in staggered groups and reflecting the marathon's strong commitment to inclusivity and community participation.

Sabah Rabiah al-Kuwari, vice-chairman of the Doha Marathon by Ooredoo committee, said: "The Marathon Village reflects the true spirit of the Doha Marathon by Ooredoo - bringing people together in a welcoming and inclusive environment that celebrates sport, wellbeing, and community."



Dr Mustafa Osman Ismail with participants in the course.

QPC concludes course on political negotiation

By Tawfik Lamari
Staff Reporter

The Qatar Press Centre (QPC) has concluded a three-day course on political negotiation, delivered by former Sudanese foreign minister Dr Mustafa Osman Ismail, equipping media and government professionals with analytical and practical negotiation skills.

The course, dubbed "Methods and Techniques of Political Negotiation" and held from January 6-8 in co-operation with the Qatar Media Corporation (QMC)'s Media Development Department, was presented by Dr Ismail, who is also professor of Islamic Studies at Hamad Bin Khalifa University, specialising in international relations, peace issues, and conflict resolution.

Dr Ismail shared with the participants the essence of his experience in combining academic work and diplomatic practice, presenting a comprehensive model for understanding political negotiation from both scientific and practical standpoints.

During the course, the instructor presented negotiation methodologies as a science based on analysis and planning, not merely an improvisational skill.

He explained that successful negotiation relies on a precise assessment of the balance of power, an understanding of intertwined interests, and an analysis of political, social, and economic contexts, as well as the ability to manage time, language, and situations effectively.

The course is part of a series

of specialised training programmes aimed at developing professional skills and enhancing the knowledge and practical competence of those working in the media and administrative sectors.

The course seeks to equip national cadres with the tools of political analysis and a systematic understanding of negotiation processes, in line with the requirements of the current stage, which is witnessing an increasing complexity in the political landscape and a growing role for the media as a key partner in disseminating knowledge, interpreting events, and shaping public awareness.

The session brought together a select group of media professionals and administrators, including representatives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Qatar News Agency.

This added a rich interactive dimension to the programme and contributed to the exchange of experiences and diverse perspectives on discussion.

The QPC is committed to providing a stimulating training environment based on dialogue, critical thinking, and practical application.

This broad participation reflected the institutions' awareness of the importance of negotiation as a fundamental skill not limited to diplomats and decision-makers, but extending to various professionals in the media and administrative fields who deal daily with shared files, co-ordination meetings, and discussions that require tactful communication, precise presentation, and flexibility in managing disagreements.



Record number of visitors at Qatar's booth at New Delhi World Book Fair

A record number of visitors are pouring into Qatar's booth at the New Delhi World Book Fair, where the nation is participating as a guest of honour.

The Ministry of Culture's booth presents an

overall picture of the cultural scene in Qatar through a display of the ministry's releases, with many of them translated into Indian languages, Libraries Department director Jassim Ahmed al-Buainain said.

The booth also features a display of folk crafts, showcasing traditional Qatari handicrafts, alongside an Arabic calligraphy exhibit highlighting the beauty and artistic value of the script.

The presentation, al-Buainain added, emphasises Qatari cultural heritage and offers visitors an interactive experience that reflects its authenticity and diversity.



The Libraries Department director said that the cultural agenda, alongside Qatar's participation as guest of honour, includes thoughtful and cultural panel discussions, with Qatari publishers participating in the publisher platform, where they meet their Indian counterparts to explore avenues for co-operation in the areas of translation and sharing copyrights.

The fair, which continues until January 18, features broad participation from cultural publishing houses and institutions from various countries, alongside a variety of cultural and thoughtful programmes. - QNA



Israeli fire kills three in Gaza

Reuters/AFP
Cairo

Israeli fire killed at least three Palestinians in two separate incidents across the enclave, local health authorities said, as tension rises over continued violence since an October ceasefire. Medics said one Palestinian was killed in the Tuffah neighbourhood in Gaza City, in an area under Palestinian control, while two others were killed in southern Gaza in the town of Bani Suhaila east of Khan Younis, an area Israel still occupies.

The Israeli military said forces fired at a “fighter” who crossed into the area under their control in the northern Gaza Strip, posing an immediate threat.

In the southern Gaza Strip, the Israeli military said it killed another “fighter” in an air strike after he approached troops operating in the area.

Fighting has largely abated since Israel and Palestinian fighter group Hamas agreed



Mourners hug each other during the funeral of Palestinians who, according to medics, were killed in an Israeli strike yesterday, at Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis, southern Gaza Strip, yesterday.

to a ceasefire in October, two years into the war, but it has not stopped entirely. Israel and Hamas have traded blame over the violations of the deal.

A Hamas official told Reuters yesterday that the group urged mediators to intervene to stop “daily Israeli killings that aim to derail the ceasefire deal.”

More than 440 Palestinians, most of them civilians according to Gaza health officials, have been killed since the truce, as well as three Israeli soldiers.

Ministry recalls Jeep Wrangler, Gladiator models

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI), in co-operation with United Cars Almana, Qatar's Jeep dealership, has announced the recall of Jeep Wrangler and Gladiator 2018-2021 models.

The recall is due to the possibility that the check engine light or malfunction indicator light (CEL/MIL) on the instrument panel cluster may not function, which could result in the driver not being alerted to the presence of engine emissions. The ministry said the recall campaign comes within its ongoing efforts to protect consumers and ensure that car dealers follow up on vehicle defects and repairs.

The ministry said it will co-ordinate with the dealer to follow up on the maintenance and repair work and communicate with customers to ensure the necessary repairs are carried out.

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

Israeli army strikes south Lebanon after warning

AFP
Beirut

The Israeli army struck an area of southern Lebanon yesterday after issuing an evacuation warning, Lebanese state media said, with the military saying it attacked Hezbollah infrastructure.

The strikes came days after the Lebanese military said it had completed disarming Hezbollah south of the Litani River, the first phase of a nationwide plan, though Israel has called those efforts insufficient.

Lebanon's official National News Agency (NNA) reported that “enemy warplanes launched more than 10 raids on the threatened location” in the town of Kafr Hatta, which lies north of the Litani, noting “significant damage” to buildings there.

The Israeli military said it was “striking Hezbollah infrastructure in several areas” shortly after issuing an evacuation warning for Kafr Hatta.

Israel has kept up regular strikes in Lebanon despite a November 2024 ceasefire that sought to end more than a year of hostilities between it and Hezbollah.

Earlier yesterday, the Israeli army announced it had carried out strikes on what it said was Hezbollah infrastructure elsewhere in the south “in response to Hezbollah's continuous violations of the ceasefire understandings”.

In Gaza hospital, patients cling to MSF as Israel orders it out

AFP
Khan Yunis

At a hospital in Gaza, wards are filled with patients fearing they will be left without care if Doctors Without Borders or Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) is forced out under an Israeli ban due to take effect in March.

Last month, Israel announced it would prevent 37 aid organisations, including MSF, from operating in Gaza from March 1 for failing to provide detailed information on their Palestinian staff.

“They stood by us throughout the war,” said 10-year-old Adam Asfour, his left arm pinned with metal rods after he was wounded by shrapnel in a bombing in September. “When I heard it was possible they would stop providing services, it made me very sad,” he added from his bed at Gaza's Nasser Hospital.

Israel's Ministry of Diaspora Affairs and Combating Antisemitism, which oversees NGO registrations, has accused two MSF employees of links to Palestinian fighter groups Hamas and Islamic Jihad, allegations MSF vehemently denies.

The ministry's decision triggered international condemnation, with aid groups warning it



File photo shows a Palestinian man walking on his crutches to the Doctors Without Borders clinic, in the Al-Rimal neighbourhood of Gaza City.

would severely disrupt food and medical supplies to Gaza, where relief items are already scarce after more than two years of war.

Inside the packed Nasser Hospital in southern Gaza, one of the few medical facilities still functioning in the territory, MSF staff were still tending to children with burns, shrapnel wounds and chronic illnesses, an AFP journalist reported.

But their presence may end soon.

The prospect was unthinkable for Fayrouz Barhoum, whose grandson is being treated at the facility.

“Say bye to the lady, blow her a kiss,” she told her 18-month-old grandson, Joud, as MSF official Claire Nicolet left the room.

Joud's head was wrapped in bandages covering burns on his

cheek after boiling water spilled on him when strong winds battered the family's makeshift shelter. “At first his condition was very serious, but then it improved considerably,” Barhoum said. “The scarring on his face has largely diminished. We need continuity of care,” she said.

AFP spoke with patients and relatives at Nasser Hospital, all of whom expressed the same fear: that without MSF, there would be nowhere left to turn.

MSF says it currently provides at least 20% of hospital beds in Gaza and operates around 20 health centres.

In 2025 alone, it carried out more than 800,000 medical consultations and over 10,000 deliveries.

“It's almost impossible to find an organisation that will come

here and be able to replace all what we are doing currently in Gaza,” Nicolet said, noting that MSF not only provides medical care but also distributes drinking water to a population worn down by a prolonged war.

“So this is not really realistic.”

Since the start of the war in October 2023, triggered by Hamas's storming of southern Israel, Israeli officials and the military have repeatedly accused Hamas of using Gaza's medical facilities as command centres.

Many have been damaged by two years of bombardments or overcrowded by casualties, while electricity, water and fuel supplies remain unreliable.

Aid groups warn that without international support, critical services such as emergency care, maternal health, and paediatric treatment could collapse entirely, leaving hundreds of thousands of residents without basic medical care.

Humanitarian sources say at least three international NGO employees whose files were rejected by Israeli authorities have already been prevented from entering Gaza through the Kerem Shalom crossing.

“For now, we will continue working as long as we can,” said Kelsie Meaden, an MSF logistics manager at Nasser Hospital, adding that constraints were already mounting.

Syria govt forces take control of Aleppo's Kurdish neighbourhoods

AFP
Aleppo

Syria's government was in full control of Aleppo yesterday after taking over the city's Kurdish neighbourhoods and evacuating fighters there to Kurdish autonomous areas following days of deadly clashes.

Residents of the Ashrafiyeh neighbourhood, the first of two areas to fall to the Syrian army, began returning to their homes to inspect the damage, finding shrapnel and broken glass littering the streets.

The violence started earlier this week after negotiations stalled on integrating the Kurds' de facto autonomous administration and forces into the country's new government.

A Syrian security official told AFP on condition of anonymity that 419 Kurdish fighters, including 59 wounded and an unspecified number of dead, were transferred from the Sheikh Maqsud neighbourhood to the Kurdish-controlled zone in the northeast.

Auction Announcement

ARPM Tender and Auction Committee announce the following Auction:

Auction Subject				
Sale of Reinforcement Steel at al Masrouheya				
Launching Date	Closing Date	Auction Bond QR.	Auctions Documents Price QR.	Auction Method
12/01/2026	25/01/2026	10,000 (Qatari Riyals Ten Thousand) (refundable subject to conditions)	200 (Qatari Riyals Two Hundred only)	One Closed Envelope

Auction description:

Auction purpose is for the following:

Sale of Reinforcement Steel at al Masrouheya

The awarding will be made to the highest bid among the applicants.

General Conditions:

- Auction Documents / Conditions shall be obtained from Purchasing Department, **ARPM Co.**, located on the 9th Floor, Al Rayyan Building, Old Salata, Zone 18, Al Muthaf Street, Next to Al Bustan Hotel during working hours 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. (Fri. & Sat. Closed).
- Auction Documents Fee (QR 200 – Qatari Riyals Two Hundred only) - non-refundable, will be paid in cash in ARPM Co. Headquarter.
- Site visit for the Reinforcement Steel and its Location shall be according to the Auction Conditions and the attendance of the visit shall be limited to those who obtain the Auction documents and pay the prescribed fees as per Item 2 above.
- To obtain Auction documents, the following documents are required: Authorization letter from the bidding company in Arabic signed by the officially authorized manager and stamped with the company's seal - Copy of the establishment card - ID of the authorized person to receive the documents - Copy of the valid company's commercial registration - Company's classification certificate (if any).
- The Bid must be submitted according to the Conditions stated in the bidding documents. The Bid shall be enclosed with an Auction Bond in the name of Al Rayyan Project Management Company (to be placed in separate envelope inside the Bid envelope) in the form of a payable cheque certified by one of the banks operating in the State of Qatar of only 10,000 (Qatari Riyals Ten Thousand), and it will be returned back within 90 days from the closing date subject to the Terms & Conditions, noting that no bid shall be accepted unless it has been enclosed with Auction Bond document.
- The bid (Price of the Sale of Reinforcement Steel at Al-Masrouheya) shall be submitted in local currency (Qatari Riyal) and shall be valid for 90 days from the closing date of the bid and cannot be revoked within that period.
- Deadline for accepting bids is 12:00 pm of the closing date (Sunday 25/01/2026).
- All forms attached to the Auction documents including the form of undertaking, shall be filled, completed and authorized as stated therein and returned with the other documents.
- All necessary data for the company (contacts & follow-up) must be attached: Mobile - Phone - Fax - Email - company address of where the correspondence to be sent, clarifying the tasks of each individual (when purchasing Auction documents) and within the company bid.
- For any queries related to documents and bidding, contact Al Rayyan Project Management Co. - Tel: 40341865 – 40341804, Fax: 40341899 – email: m.aseef@arpm.com.qa ; j.castillo@arpm.com.qa
- Deadline for accepting inquiries and requests 20/01/2026.
- The extension of the closing date may be requested in case of necessity (with justifications), not less than (3) working days prior to the closing date for Tender and Auction committee desertion and decision.
- In case the closing date is extended or any modifications are made during the announcement period, the company will be notified by fax or e-mail formally.

**Tenders and Auctions Committee
ARPM**

Deaths from Iran protests 'reach more than 500'

Unrest in Iran has killed more than 500 people, a rights group said yesterday, as Tehran threatened to target US military bases if President Donald Trump carries out threats to intervene on behalf of protesters. Reuters reported from Dubai/Jerusalem. With the nation's establishment facing the biggest demonstrations since 2022, Trump has repeatedly threatened to intervene if force is used on protesters. According to its latest figures - from activists inside and outside Iran - US-based rights group HRANA said it had verified the deaths of 490 protesters and 48 security personnel, with more than 10,600 people arrested in two weeks of unrest. Iran has not given an official toll and Reuters was unable to independently verify the tolls. Trump was to be briefed by his officials on Tuesday on options over Iran including military strikes, using secret cyber weapons, widening sanctions and providing online help to anti-government sources, the *Wall Street Journal* said yesterday. Iranian Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf warned Washington against “a miscalculation”. “Let us be clear: in the case of an attack on Iran, the occupied territories (Israel) as well as all US bases and ships will be our legitimate target,” said Qalibaf, a former commander in Iran's elite Revolutionary Guards. The protests began on December 28 in response to soaring prices, before turning against the rulers who have governed since the 1979 Revolution.



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.

China voices support for Somalia after top diplomat postpones visit

Reuters
Beijing

China's foreign minister said Beijing supported Somalia in safeguarding its sovereignty and territorial integrity in a phone call yesterday with his Somali counterpart, a Chinese ministry statement said.

Foreign Minister Wang Yi held the phone call

during his visit to Africa, and said China opposed so-called Somaliland's "collusion with Taiwan authorities to seek independence", referring in the statement to Somalia's breakaway region.

Somalia was scheduled to be part of the Chinese diplomat's annual New Year tour of Africa, which also includes Ethiopia, Tanzania and Lesotho, but the visit to the East African nation was postponed due to what the Chinese embassy said was a "schedule change".

Ugandan opposition turns national flag into protest symbol

AFP
Kampala

Hundreds screamed with excitement as Uganda's opposition leader passed by a rally where the crowd waved a sea of national flags that have become a dangerously politicised symbol ahead of a presidential election this week.

Analysts say it is almost a foregone conclusion that President Yoweri Museveni, 81, will win a seventh term in Thursday's vote, given his near-total control over the state apparatus in the east African country.

But his opponent, 43-year-old Robert Kyagulanyi, better known as Bobi Wine, has framed the election as a protest vote and canily turned the national flag into a symbol of resistance.

Police last month warned against using the flag "casually and inappropriately".

Wine's supporters have faced frequent intimidation by security forces during the campaign, according to the UN Human Rights Office and other observers.

But the flag is "the only weapon we have," said woodworker Conrad Oluwenyi, 31, at the Wine rally just outside Kampala this week where the national symbol was brandished.

"We cannot fight the security, because they have a gun. We only have the flag," he said. But "if they shoot you when you have the flag, they are shooting the country."

Winnie Byanyima, wife of imprisoned opposition leader Kiiza Besigye, said Wine and his supporters were using the flag as a symbol for national unity.

"And guess what? The reaction of President Museveni has been to say, you may not use the flag," she said.

"So in fact, in doing that, they



Christian worshippers raise their hands as they praise and pray for a peaceful election at Victory church in Kampala, yesterday, ahead of the 2026 Ugandan general election.

have completely delegitimised President Museveni, that he now is trying to use force to stop people carrying the national flag. Who does that?"

Uganda's flag — created when the country achieved independence from Britain in 1962 — has stripes of black to represent Africa, yellow for its sunshine, and red to represent African brotherhood, with a grey crowned crane overlaid.

In the 2021 elections, Wine's National Unity Platform (NUP) adopted red berets as a symbol, but the government ruled that was illegal since they were part of the military uniform, and used that ruling to justify raids on the party's offices.

The flag is a clever alternative and a way of "reclaiming patriotism," said Uganda expert Kristof Titeca.

"It's kind of taken the government by surprise, and so that's why they started this clamp-down," he said.

Like many countries in east Africa, there are laws governing how the national flag may be used, though these were rarely enforced in Uganda in the past.

"It shows the panic," prominent cartoonist Jimmy Spire Ssen-

tongo said. "I don't think they are threatened by misuse of the flag. They are threatened by the visibility of the support towards NUP," said Ssentongo, adding that as Museveni ages and nears 40 years in power, "the space for freedom of expression also shrinks".

"Everyone has a right to use the national flag, but it depends on in what context they're using it for. I believe the opposition is politicising it," said Israel Kyarisiima, a national youth co-ordinator for Museveni's National Resistance Movement party.

Security services have repeatedly been accused by Wine's supporters of targeting those carrying the flag at rallies. Wine urged followers in his Christmas address to "come to the defence of anyone assaulted for carrying the flag".

And the threats from police have not stopped Wine's supporters waving the flag at rallies.

"Now we've got something that can really show our unity as Ugandans, and they are trying to make it criminal," said Ruth Excellent Mirembe, 25, waving a flag this week's rally.

Trying to stop its use is "oppression in the highest form," she said. "This represents us as Ugandans."

Benin votes a month after foiled coup attempt

AFP
Cotonou

Benin voted yesterday in parliamentary and local elections, just one month after a failed coup plot shook the west African country and three months ahead of presidential polls.

President Patrice Talon's ruling coalition is expected to strengthen its already powerful hand in the elections, with the main opposition Democrats party barred from the local polls.

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 by the military, with support from Nigeria and France.

Talon, 67, who is nearing the end of his second five-year term, called on all voters to "do their duty" as he cast his ballot.

"Today is the beginning of a better life," he said.

The legislative elections will define the political landscape ahead of April's presidential polls, from which the opposition has also been struck from the ballot for failing to obtain the required number of signatures.

Talon, who has served the constitutional two-term limit, is barred from running in April's elections.

His hand-picked successor, Finance Minister Romuald Wadagni, is a strong favourite to win.

Talon has presided over strong economic development across his nearly one decade in power, but critics accuse him of restricting political opposition and basic rights.

The single-round legislative polls will elect the 109 seats in the National Assembly, where Talon's three-party bloc hopes to strengthen its majority.

The Democrats, only running in the parliamentary races, risk ceding ground to the ruling coalition, which currently holds 81 seats.

Some observers say the opposition may lose all its 28 seats, given the current electoral law's



People wait in line to cast their vote at a polling station during the parliamentary election, in Cotonou, Benin, yesterday. **Below:** A man casts his vote at a polling station during the parliamentary election, in Cotonou.



tough requirement for parties to gather signatures from 20 percent of registered voters in each of the country's 24 voting districts to stand for parliament.

The streets of economic capital Cotonou were calm as polling stations opened, AFP reporters said.

"I'm proud of the process and the organisation, and I hope everything goes well until the end," said craftsman Claude Somakpo.


The campaign unfolded without large rallies, with most parties opting for grassroots strategies like door-to-door canvassing.

"All measures have been taken to guarantee a free, transparent and secure vote. No political ambition can justify violence or endanger national unity," the head of the electoral commission (CENA), Sacca Lafia, said on Saturday.

Ecowas, Guinea-Bissau junta discuss release of detainees, transition timeline

African leaders representing regional bloc Ecowas held talks on Saturday with Guinea-Bissau's junta government on the release of detainees and the transition to constitutional rule, sources said. AFP reported from Bissau. They also met two opposition figures, one of whom is in detention and another who was forced to take refuge in a foreign embassy. Sierra Leone President Julius Maada Bio, who currently holds Ecowas's rotating chairmanship, and Senegal President Bassirou Diomaye Faye met

officials from the country's new ruling junta, which is being led General Horta N'Tam. The talks were aimed at achieving rapid progress on the country's transition back to constitutional order, a source close to Guinea-Bissau's foreign ministry told AFP. "Our discussions were constructive", Bio posted on Twitter after the meetings, calling "for a short transition led by an inclusive government reflecting Guinea-Bissau's political spectrum and society".



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
RFO-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@qulhelicopters.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@qulhelicopters.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@qulhelicopters.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 Areesh Street,
Ras Abu Abboud, Doha, Qatar
Tel: +974 44 333 888
Attention: Supply Chain Manager
Attach a copy of tender bond to the technical offer. Offer without Tender Bond will not be considered.

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

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

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

FREE VEHICLE RECALL



Jeep Wrangler and Gladiator

Manufacturing Year	2018 - 2021
DEFECT	The check engine light or malfunction indicator light (CEL/MIL) on the instrument panel cluster may not work, which may result in the driver not being alerted to the presence of emissions from the engine.
PROCESS	Contact the dealer for the free required repair
CONTACT	UNITED CARS ALMANA 8007552 crmautomotive.aa@almanagroup.com



وزارة التجارة والصناعة
Ministry of Commerce and Industry
دولة قطر
State of Qatar



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Germany, Sweden warn Trump over fresh Greenland threats

AFP/Reuters
Berlin/Washington

Germany and Sweden have pushed back as US President Donald Trump again suggested using force to seize the self-governing Danish territory of Greenland.

Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson (pictured) condemned the US's "threatening rhetoric" after Trump repeated that Washington was "going to do something on Greenland, whether they like it or not".

"On the contrary, the United States should thank Denmark, which over the years has been a very loyal ally," he said at a conference on Swedish defence. "Sweden, the Nordic countries, the Baltic states, and several major European countries stand together with our Danish friends."

Kristersson stressed that a US takeover of the mineral-rich Arctic territory would be "a violation of international law and

risks encouraging other countries to act in exactly the same way".

"It is a dangerous path to take," he added.

Meanwhile, Germany reiterated its support for Denmark and Greenland ahead of meetings in Washington today.

Before talks with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, German Foreign Minister Johann Wadepul was due to stop in Reykjavik to address the "strategic challenges of the Far North", according to the foreign ministry statement.

"The legitimate interests of all Nato allies, as well as those of the inhabitants of the (Arctic) region, must be at the centre of our discussions," Wadepul said in the statement.

"It is clear that it is exclusively up to Greenland and Denmark to decide questions of Greenland's territory and sovereignty," he previously told Germany's *Bild* daily.

"We are strengthening security in the



Arctic together, as Nato allies, and not against one another," German Finance Minister Lars Klingbeil said ahead of a global summit on critical raw materials in Washington.

European capitals have scrambled to co-ordinate a response after the White House said this week that Trump wanted to buy Greenland and refused to rule out military action.

Trump says controlling the island is crucial for US national security given the rising military activity of Russia and China in the Arctic.

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

The vast majority of its population and political parties have said that they do not want to be under US control and insist Greenlanders must decide their future.

Meanwhile, the *Financial Times* reported yesterday that Nordic diplomats rejected Trump's claims of Russian and Chinese vessels operating near Greenland.

There have been no signs of Russian or Chinese ships or submarines around Greenland in recent years, the *FT* said, cit-

ing two senior Nordic diplomats with access to Nato intelligence briefings.

Reuters could not immediately verify the report.

The White House and Nato did not respond to Reuters requests for comment.

"It is simply not true that the Chinese and Russians are there. I have seen the intelligence. There are no ships, no submarines," the *FT* quoted one senior diplomat as saying.

Another Nordic diplomat said claims that waters around Greenland were "crawling" with Russian and Chinese vessels were unfounded, adding that such activity was on the Russian side of the Arctic.

Trump has repeatedly said Russian and Chinese vessels are operating near Greenland, a claim Denmark disputes.

He has not provided evidence to support it.

Vessel tracking data from MarineTraffic and LSEG show no Chinese or Russian ship presence near Greenland.

Thousands protest across US over fatal ICE shooting

Reuters/AFP
Minneapolis

Tens of thousands of people marched through Minneapolis on Saturday to decry the fatal shooting of a woman by a US immigration agent, part of more than 1,000 rallies planned nationwide this weekend against the federal government's deportation drive.

The massive turnout in Minneapolis despite a whipping, cold wind underscores how the fatal shooting of 37-year-old Renee Good by an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officer on Wednesday has struck a chord, fuelling protests in major cities and some towns.

At the start of the protest, a voice called out, "Say her name!" The crowd shouted back: "Renee Good!"

Her death has sparked strong emotions in this Democratic stronghold, and across the nation.

"We got ICE shooting women in the face for self-defence. It doesn't make any sense," said Alex Vega, a protester in Boston. "Let them come around here with that, and let's see what's really going to happen to ICE."

Minnesota's Democratic leaders and the administration of President Donald Trump, a Republican, have offered starkly different accounts of the incident.

Led by a team of Indigenous Mexican dancers, demonstrators in Minneapolis, which has a metropolitan population of 3.8mn, marched towards the residential street where Good was shot in her car.



Indigenous dancers perform as people gather for a march to memorialise Renee Good and against the influx of federal agents in the city, at Minneapolis's Powderhorn Park. - AFP



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 prompted a coalition of progressive and civil rights groups, including Indivisible and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), to plan more than 1,000 events under the banner "ICE Out For Good" during the weekend.

The rallies have been scheduled to end before nightfall to minimise the potential for violence.

In Philadelphia, protesters chanted "ICE has got to go" and "No fascist USA" as they marched from City Hall to a rally outside a federal detention facility, according to the local ABC affiliate.

Left: A woman with a sign beside her feet takes part in a protest outside the ICE facility in Portland, Oregon, US. - Reuters

Right: A counter-protester wearing a mediaeval helmet shouts at protesters who gathered during a vigil outside the Portland ICE facility. - Reuters



People wearing inflatable costumes demonstrate outside the Portland ICE facility. - Reuters

In Manhattan, several hundred people carried anti-ICE signs as they walked past an immigration court where agents have arrested migrants following their hearings.

"We demand justice for Renee, ICE out of our communities, and action from our elected leaders. Enough is enough," said Leah Greenberg, co-executive director of Indivisible.

Minnesota became a major flashpoint in the administration's efforts to deport millions of immigrants months before the Good shooting, with Trump criticising its Democratic leaders amid a massive welfare fraud scandal involving some members of the large Somali-American community there.

Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey, a Democrat who has been critical of immigration agents and the shooting, told a press conference earlier on Saturday that the dem-

onstrations have remained mostly peaceful and that anyone damaging property or engaging in unlawful activity would be arrested by police.

"We will not counter Donald Trump's chaos with our own brand of chaos," Frey said. "He wants us to take the bait."

More than 200 law enforcement officers were deployed Friday night to control protests that led to \$6,000 in damage at the Depot Renaissance Hotel and failed attempts by some demonstrators to enter the Hilton Canopy Hotel, believed to house ICE agents, the City of Minneapolis said in a statement.

Police Chief Brian O'Hara said that some in the crowd scrawled graffiti and damaged windows at the Depot Renaissance Hotel.

He said the gathering at the Hilton Canopy Hotel began as a "noise protest" but escalated as

DHS to send hundreds more officers to Minnesota

Reuters
Washington

The US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is sending "hundreds" more officers to Minnesota a day after tens of thousands of people marched through Minneapolis to protest the fatal shooting of a woman by an immigration agent, Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem (pictured) said in remarks that aired yesterday.

The officers would be deployed to bolster the safety of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Border Patrol officials already in Minnesota, Noem said on Fox News's *Sunday Morning Futures*.



Some 2,000 federal officers have already been dispatched to the Minneapolis-St Paul area in what the DHS has called its largest operation ever.

The new deployments were scheduled to begin even as more than 1,000 rallies were planned nationwide this weekend to protest the federal government's deportation push and Wednesday's fatal shooting of 37-year-old Renee Good by an ICE officer.

Minnesota officials have called the shooting unjustified, pointing to bystander video that they say showed Good's vehicle turning away from the agent as he fired.

Noem and other US officials have maintained that the agent acted in self-defence because Good, a volunteer in a community network that monitors and records ICE operations in Minneapolis, drove forward in the direction of the agent who then shot her, after another agent had approached the driver's side and told her to get out of the car.

In a separate appearance yesterday on CNN's *State of the Union*, Noem said that other video footage showed Good protesting ICE agents at other locations earlier on Wednesday morning, but did not say if or when it would be publicly released.

Minnesota authorities said on Friday that they were opening their own criminal investigation into the incident, after some state law enforcement officials said the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) was refusing to co-operate with state investigators.

White House Border Security Czar Tom Homan said on *Fox News Sunday* that he wanted to let the investigation play out, but added that he "truly believe that officer thought his life was in danger to take that action".

more than 1,000 demonstrators converged on the site, leading to 29 arrests.

"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.

Three Minnesota congressional Democrats showed up at a regional ICE headquarters near Minneapolis on Saturday morning, where protesters have clashed with federal agents this week, but were denied access.

Legislators called the denial illegal.

"We made it clear to ICE and DHS that they were violating federal law," US Representative Angie Craig told reporters as she stood outside the Whipple Federal Building in St Paul with Representatives

Kelly Morrison and Ilhan Omar.

Federal law prohibits the DHS from blocking members of Congress from entering ICE detention sites, but the DHS has increasingly restricted such oversight visits, prompting confrontations with Democratic lawmakers.

"It is our job as members of Congress to make sure those detained are treated with humanity, because we are the damn United States of America," Craig said.

Referencing the damage and protests at Minneapolis hotels overnight, DHS spokesperson Tricia McLaughlin said the congressional Democrats were denied entry to ensure "the safety of detainees and staff, and in compliance with the agency's mandate".

She said DHS policies require members of Congress to notify the ICE at least seven days in advance of facility visits.

The future of the Chrysler Building, a unique monument to art deco architecture on the Manhattan skyline, remains in limbo as it awaits a possible sale.

The building, affixed with gargoyles, stainless steel design nods to early Chrysler vehicles and a celebrated crown and needle top, has been put up for sale after a New York judge expropriated the property in September 2024 from prior leaseholders who were in arrears.

The famed skyscraper, which began hosting tenants in April 1930 and was once the world's tallest building, continues to draw tourists to its blue-chip address of 405 Lexington Avenue in the heart of Manhattan.

New York's Chrysler Building seeks new owner

Ut real estate insiders say the property is badly in need of remodeling, with ageing office spaces, tiny windows, fickle elevators and a pesky rodent population among its ills.

"The beautiful (Chrysler Building) has lots of technical issues but it's unclear what the best use for the building is," said Ruth Colp-Haber, a partner at Wharton Property Advisors, who believes costly investment is needed to update the structure.

"Everything's on hold there until they figure out who's the owner and what's his game plan," she said. "They are not showing spaces."

The Chrysler Building was first envisioned in the roaring 1920s, prior to the 1929 Wall Street crash, and completed in just two years.

It opened with fanfare and hosted an observation deck until 1945.

The building stood as the tallest structure in the world prior to the completion of the Empire State Building in 1931.

The land on which the building sits has been owned since 1902 by the Cooper Union, a private college that specialises in art, architecture and engineering.

The school's most recent tenant, a

consortium of real estate firm RFR and Austrian firm Signa, had reached an agreement in 2019 to buy the building for \$151mn with a promise of \$250mn in upgrades.

However, Signa filed for insolvency in 2023 and RFR stopped paying rent in May 2024, according to legal documents reviewed by AFP, with the latter owing \$21mn when the property was expropriated.

Cooper Union leaders have said the Chrysler Building's travails will not result in higher tuition rates or fewer scholarships.

"We have built important reserves and surpluses over the last seven years," Cooper Union interim president Malcolm King said in a message to employees and students, adding that they had "planned for a range of scenarios, including this one".

The Chrysler Building faces tough competition from newer buildings, like the nearby One Vanderbilt Avenue or the gleaming Hudson Yards structures.

Further complicating the situation is the structure's 1978 designation as a New York City landmark, a distinction that means significant changes must be approved by the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission. - AFP

Trump tells Cuba to ‘make a deal, before it is too late’

AFP/Reuters
Washington/Havana

US President Donald Trump told Cuba to “make a deal” or face unspecified consequences, drawing an angry retort from its leader who said “no one” tells the communist-ruled country what to do.

The island nation near Florida has been a US foe and ally of Caracas for decades, but Trump has ramped up his threatening language in recent days – particularly after Washington toppled Venezuela’s leftist leader Nicolas Maduro.

“THERE WILL BE NO MORE OIL OR MONEY GOING TO CUBA – ZERO!” Trump wrote on his Truth Social platform. “I strongly suggest they make a deal, BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE.”

He provided no details about what potential deal he referred to, or what such an arrangement would achieve.

His remarks come a week after US forces seized Venezuela’s leader Maduro in a nighttime operation in Caracas that killed dozens of Venezuelan and Cuban security forces.

A week ago, Trump stated that “Cuba is ready to fall”, noting that the island’s economic crisis was worsening and that it would be difficult for Havana to “hold out” without receiving heavily subsidised Venezuelan oil.

Earlier yesterday the president reposted a message suggesting that US Secretary of State Marco Rubio – a child of Cuban immigrants – could become the president of Cuba.

Trump shared that post with the comment: “Sounds good to me!”

In a separate message soon afterwards, Trump said that “Cuba



Diaz-Canel: Cuba is a free, independent, and sovereign nation. Nobody dictates what we do.

lived, for many years, on large amounts of OIL and MONEY from Venezuela. In return, Cuba provided ‘Security Services’ for the last two Venezuelan dictators, BUT NOT ANYMORE!”

“Most of those Cubans are DEAD from last week’s U.S.A. attack, and Venezuela doesn’t need protection anymore from the thugs and extortionists who held them hostage for so many years.”

Cuba’s President Miguel Diaz-Canel rebuffed Trump’s threatening language, saying that the Caribbean island’s residents were “ready to defend the homeland to the last drop of blood.”

“Cuba is a free, independent, and sovereign nation. Nobody dictates what we do,” he said on X. “Cuba does not attack; it has been attacked by the US for 66 years, and it does not threaten; it prepares, ready to defend the homeland to the last drop of blood.”

Foreign Minister Bruno Rod-



Trump: I strongly suggest (that the Cuban government makes) a deal, before it is too late.

riguez also weighed in to stress that Cuba is within its rights to import fuel from any willing exporter, “without interference or subordination to the unilateral coercive measures of the United States”.

Under a US trade embargo, Havana since 2000 has increasingly relied on Venezuelan oil provided as part of a deal struck with Maduro’s predecessor, the firebrand leftist Hugo Chavez.

Trump’s provocative language on Cuba comes as the emboldened American leader has hinted he has other countries in his sights after capturing Maduro.

Trump, who had openly sought last year’s Nobel Peace Prize, has recently threatened Colombia, Mexico, Iran and Greenland.

Some Republican US lawmakers have lauded Trump for his aggressive comments on Cuba, including Mario Diaz-Balart, a US congressman from Florida.

“We are witnessing what I am

convinced will be the beginning of the end of the regime in Havana,” Diaz-Balart posted in Spanish yesterday on X. “The tyranny in Cuba will not survive the second term of President Trump, and Cuba will finally be free after decades of misery, tragedy, and pain.”

Trump’s push on Cuba represents the latest escalation in his move to bring regional powers in line with the United States and underscores the seriousness of the administration’s ambition to dominate the Western Hemisphere.

Trump’s top officials, including Rubio, have made no secret of their expectation that the recent US intervention in Venezuela could push Cuba over the edge.

US officials have hardened their rhetoric against Cuba in recent weeks, though the two countries have been at odds since former leader Fidel Castro’s 1959 revolution.

Cuba relies on imported crude



Cuban and US flags flutter in front of the US embassy in Havana. – AFP

and fuel mainly provided by Venezuela, and Mexico in smaller volumes, purchased on the open market to keep its power generators and vehicles running.

As its operational refining capacity dwindled in recent years, Venezuela’s supply of crude and fuel to Cuba has fallen.

However, the South American country is still the largest provider with some 26,500 barrels per day exported last year, according to ship tracking data and internal documents of state-run PDVSA, which covered roughly 50% of Cuba’s oil deficit.

Even before Maduro’s capture, Cuba had been struggling to keep the lights on.

Vast swaths of the island live

without electricity for much of the day, and even the capital Havana has seen its economy crippled by hours-long rolling blackouts.

Shortages of food, fuel and medicine have put Cubans on edge and have prompted a record-breaking exodus, primarily to the United States, in the past five years.

Mexico has emerged in recent weeks as a critical alternative oil supplier to the island, but the supply remains small, according to the shipping data.

Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum last week said her country had not increased supply volumes, but given recent political events in Venezuela, Mexico had turned into an “important supplier” of crude to Cuba.



This handout picture released by the official El 19 Digital news outlet shows political prisoners hugging relatives following their release during a ceremony at the headquarters of the Jorge Navarro National Penitentiary System in Tipitapa, Managua. – AFP

Nicaragua frees ‘tens’ of political prisoners

AFP/Reuters
San Jose/Mexico City

Nicaragua’s government said on Saturday that it had freed “tens” of detainees, following US pressure and a week after American forces seized Venezuelan leader Nicolas Maduro, a close Managua ally.

“Tens of people who were in the national penitentiary system have gone home to their families,” the government said in a statement published online, calling it a gesture to commemorate 19 years of rule by President Daniel Ortega, 80.

Opposition leader and former prisoner Ana Margarita Vijil, head of the UNAMOS political movement, told Reuters that those released “are political prisoners, and several of them are our friends”.

Vijil said she did not know the number of those involved but said they include former mayor Oscar Gadea and Evangelical pastor Rudy Palacios along with four of his relatives.

Palacios was detained in July after criticising the government for human rights violations.

He had also supported demonstrators who took to the streets in 2018 to demand Ortega’s ouster.

Ortega responded to the protests with repression that left at least 350 dead and hundreds detained.

Liberales Nicaragua, a coalition of opposition groups, praised the inmates’ release in a statement.

“We have no doubt that such a decision is the result of political pressure exerted by the US government on the dictatorship and of the political chess moves triggered by events in Venezuela.”

On Friday, the US embassy in

Nicaragua posted a statement on X that hailed a promised release of political prisoners in Venezuela.

It said that in Nicaragua, however, “more than 60 people remain unjustly detained or disappeared”.

“Peace is only possible with freedom!” the embassy said.

State media in Nicaragua published images on Saturday of detainees signing release papers and embracing relatives.

The statement did not identify those freed or explain the reasons for their detention.

A non-governmental organisation (NGO) and exiled media reported on Friday that at least 61 people had been arrested for celebrating or supporting the capture of Maduro, a close ally of Ortega and his wife, co-president Rosario Murillo.

Maduro was seized by US troops in Caracas a week ago and taken to New York to face drug trafficking charges.

The US State Department has branded the Murillo-Ortega government a dictatorship, accusing it of seizing total power with a constitutional rewrite and crushing dissent since unrest during 2018 protests that left 300 people dead.

“Today, the brutal Murillo-Ortega dictatorship ‘celebrates’ 19 years of what should have been a five-year democratic term,” the State Department’s Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs posted on Saturday on X.

“Nicaraguans voted for a president in 2006, not for an illegitimate lifelong dynasty,” it added.

According to opposition reports, with Ortega facing mounting health issues, 74-year-old Murillo has launched an internal purge to ensure she retains power.

Young mum seeks five relatives in Venezuela jail

AFP
Guatire, Venezuela

Lorealbert Gutierrez, 19, was seven months pregnant when security agents detained her along with six family members in eastern Venezuela.

They seized her brother, accused of links to an attempted attack in Caracas last year. They had threatened to kill her unless he surrendered.

Security forces also arrested her mother, teenage sister, aunt and cousin.

And they used Gutierrez, pregnant with her second child, to pressure her partner to surrender.

Gutierrez herself was released hours later and her sister after three days.

The remaining five have not been heard from since they were detained in Cumana, a city on the Caribbean coast, in August 2025.

On Thursday the Venezuelan government announced the release of a “large number” of prisoners following the US capture of the country’s leader Nicolas Maduro.

However, human rights groups estimate that around 800 people still remain jailed in Venezuela for political reasons.

Gutierrez went to El Rodeo I prison east of Caracas hoping to find her mother and the other relatives still held.

She spent the night outside as she and dozens of others waited for news of their loved ones.

“My mum means everything to me,” Gutierrez told AFP.

Waiting near the jail in Guatire, she recounted the torture her brother suffered.

She heard about it from her 16-year-old sister, who spent three days in prison witnessing it, being harassed by guards, and hearing her mother crying in the distance.

“My sister came out of there deeply disturbed by everything she saw them do to my brother,” she said.



Family members hold a candlelight vigil outside the El Rodeo jail, in El Rodeo, Guatire, Miranda state, Venezuela. – Reuters

“He suffers from asthma, and they put a white sheet over his face. He started screaming... and they ignored him.”

Unrest during protests against Maduro’s reelection in July 2024 left 28 people dead and 2,400 detained.

Maduro labelled them “terrorists”, while the opposition and international powers accused him of rigging his election win.

About 2,000 of those detainees were later released, mostly under conditions requiring regular check-ins and banning them from speaking to the press.

Since Thursday’s announcement of prisoner releases, just 21 have been freed, according

to unofficial non-governmental organisation (NGO) figures.

Gutierrez and her sister have survived thanks to help from their aunts.

Her sister cannot work because she is underage, and Lorealbert because she has two babies.

Authorities have not confirmed the whereabouts of their relatives but one aunt managed to trace them to Rodeo I, which holds around 500 detainees.

Gutierrez spent the night under a tree. She plans to go home today.

“If it were up to me, I’d stay here until I see my mum,” she said. “What I long for most is to give my mum a hug.”

6 tankers that had left Venezuela in ‘dark mode’ are back in its waters

At least six oil tankers, most of them loaded, that had departed Venezuela in early January in “dark mode” – or with their transponders off amid a strict US blockade – are now back in the South American country’s waters, according to state company PDVSA and monitoring service TankerTrackers.com.

A flotilla of about a dozen loaded vessels and at least three other empty ships left Venezuelan waters last month in apparent defiance of an embargo imposed by US President Donald Trump since mid-December, which has dragged down the country’s oil exports to minimum.

One of the ships, the Panama-flagged supertanker M Sophia, was intercepted and seized by US forces this week when returning to Venezuela and sent to US waters; while another, the Aframax tanker Olina with a flag from Sao Tome and Principe, was intercepted but released to Venezuela on Friday, state company PDVSA said.



The silhouettes of children carrying a net at a fishing pier are seen in a picture, while in the background a crude oil tanker is docking in the Maracaibo Lake in Maracaibo, Venezuela. – AFP

Five more of the vessels that had departed in that flotilla, Panama-flagged Merope, Cook Islands-flagged Min Hang, Panama-

flagged Thalia III, Guyana-flagged Vesna and Palau-flagged Nayara, were spotted by TankerTrackers.com in Venezuelan waters between

Friday and Saturday through satellite images.

US authorities had said on Friday that Olina – previously known as Minerva M – would be freed.

The next step for the country, which remains under strict US supervision after it captured and extracted President Nicolas Maduro last week, would be the beginning of organised crude exports as part of a \$2bn oil supply deal Caracas and Washington are negotiating, they said.

In a meeting with top oil company executives on Friday, US President Donald Trump said arrangements for the supply had progressed.

Global trading houses Vitol and Trafigura received this week the first US licences to negotiate and carry Venezuela’s crude exports, and to provide naphtha to the OPEC country, sources said.

The first naphtha cargo from the deal, to be supplied by Vitol, is expected to arrive in Venezuela next week, sources said on Saturday. – Reuters



Homes razed, one dead in Australia bushfires

AFP
Sydney

Bushfires have razed hundreds of buildings across southeast Australia, authorities said yesterday, as they confirmed the first death from the disaster. Temperatures soared past 40C as a heatwave blanketed the state of Victoria, sparking dozens of blazes that ripped through more than 740,000 acres combined. Fire crews tallied the damage as conditions eased yesterday. A day earlier, authorities had declared a state of disaster. Emergency management commissioner Tim Wiebusch said over 300 buildings had burned to the ground, a figure that includes sheds and other structures on rural properties. More than 70 houses had been destroyed, he said, alongside huge swathes of farming land and native forest. “We’re starting to see some of our conditions ease,” he told re-

porters. “And that means firefighters are able to start getting on top of some of the fires that we still have in our landscape.” Police said one person had died in a bushfire near the town of Longwood, about two hours’ drive north of state capital Melbourne. “This really takes all the wind out of our sails,” said Chris Hardman from Forest Fire Management Victoria. “We really feel for the local community there and the family, friends and loved ones of the person that is deceased,” he told national broadcaster ABC. Photos taken this week showed the night sky glowing orange as the fire near Longwood tore through bushland. “There were embers falling everywhere. It was terrifying,” cattle farmer Scott Purcell told ABC. Another bushfire near the small town of Walwa crackled with lightning as it radiated enough heat to form a localised thunderstorm. Hundreds of firefighters from



Smoke rises from a burning forest on a hillside behind a home near Longwood as bushfires continue to burn under severe fire weather conditions in Longwood, Victoria, Australia.

across Australia have been called in to help. Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said he was talking with Canada and the US for possible extra assistance. Millions have this week sweltered through a heatwave blanketing much of Australia. High temperatures and dry winds combined to form some of the most dangerous bushfire conditions since the “Black Summer” blazes. The Black Summer bushfires raged across Australia’s eastern seaboard from late 2019 to early 2020, razing millions of hectares, destroying thousands of homes and blanketing cities in noxious smoke. Australia’s climate has warmed by an average of 1.51C since 1910, researchers have found, fuelling increasingly frequent extreme weather patterns over both land and sea. Australia remains one of the world’s largest producers and exporters of gas and coal, two key fossil fuels blamed for global heating.

Myanmar votes in second phase of junta-run poll

AFP
Kawhmu, Myanmar

Myanmar’s junta held the second phase of elections yesterday that democracy watchdogs warn will let the military prolong its rule, opening polling in the constituency of deposed democratic leader Aung San Suu Kyi. The armed forces have ruled Myanmar for most of its post-independence history, snatching back power in a 2021 coup after a decade-long democratic thaw, nullifying the previous poll, detaining Suu Kyi and plunging the country into civil war. With Suu Kyi sidelined and her massively popular party dissolved, democracy advocates say the vote has been rigged by a crackdown on dissent and a ballot stacked with military allies. Polls opened yesterday morning in dozens of constituencies, including Suu Kyi’s former seat of Kawhmu south of commercial hub Yangon. Farmer Than Than Sint acknowledged Myanmar’s “many problems” but said she voted in pursuit of peace. “We know it will not come right away. But we need to go step-by-step for our future generations,” the 54-year-old said after voting. The junta has pledged the three-phase election will return power to the people after it ends on January 25. The Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), described by many analysts as the military’s prime proxy, won nearly 90% of lower house seats in the first phase late last month. “I think the results lie only in the mouth of the military,” a 50-year-

old resident of Yangon, where voting also took place, said. “This election has absolutely nothing to do with escaping this suffering,” said the resident, who spoke on condition of anonymity for security reasons. The first phase had a turnout of around 50%, far below the roughly 70% of the 2020 election when most voters backed Suu Kyi’s party. A truck blasted loudspeaker messages along the main road in Kawhmu, urging voters to come out. Kyaw Than, a 72-year-old farmer, said it was better to vote. “It would be weird to sit by and do nothing,” he said. There is no polling in large enclaves carved out by rebel factions, who the military accused of staging drone, rocket and bomb attacks during the first phase of voting that killed five people. Analysts say the junta is attempting to launder its image, aiming to improve diplomatic relations, increase foreign investment and sap momentum from rebels. “The junta engineered the polls to ensure victory for its proxy, entrench military domination in Myanmar, and manufacture a facade of legitimacy while violence and repression continue unabated,” UN rights expert Tom Andrews said in a statement. The military justified its coup by alleging that Suu Kyi’s National League for Democracy (NLD) won a landslide over pro-military parties in 2020 through massive voter fraud. Election monitors say those claims were unfounded. Parties that won 90% of seats in 2020 - including the NLD - have been dissolved, according to the Asian Network for Free Elections.

North Korea seeks ‘explanation’ from Seoul over drone incursion

AFP
Seoul

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un’s powerful sister has demanded a detailed “explanation” from Seoul over a drone it accused South Korea of flying over its territory, state media reported yesterday. The North alleged on Saturday that a craft crossed from the South Korean border county of Ganghwa into the North Korean city of Kaesong in early January, and released photos of wreckage from the drone it claimed to have shot down. Seoul rejected the claim, with its defence ministry saying the drone was not a model operated by its military. “Fortunately, the ROK’s military expressed an official stand that it was not done by itself and that it has no intention to provoke or irritate us,” Kim Yo-jong said, using South Korea’s official name in a statement carried by

the state-run Korean Central News Agency (KCNA). “But a detail [sic] explanation should be made about the actual case of a drone that crossed the southern border of our Republic,” she said, according to KCNA. In response to the North’s accusation, Seoul’s military said its own investigation had revealed it does not “possess the unmanned aerial vehicle in question, nor did it operate any unmanned aerial vehicles at the time and date specified by North Korea”. President Lee Jae Myung ordered a “swift and rigorous investigation” by a joint military-police investigative team. 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.” But Kim said she did not care whether it was a military or civilian drone, saying “that is not the one (detail) we want to know”. “Clear is just the fact that the drone from the ROK violated the airspace of our country,”

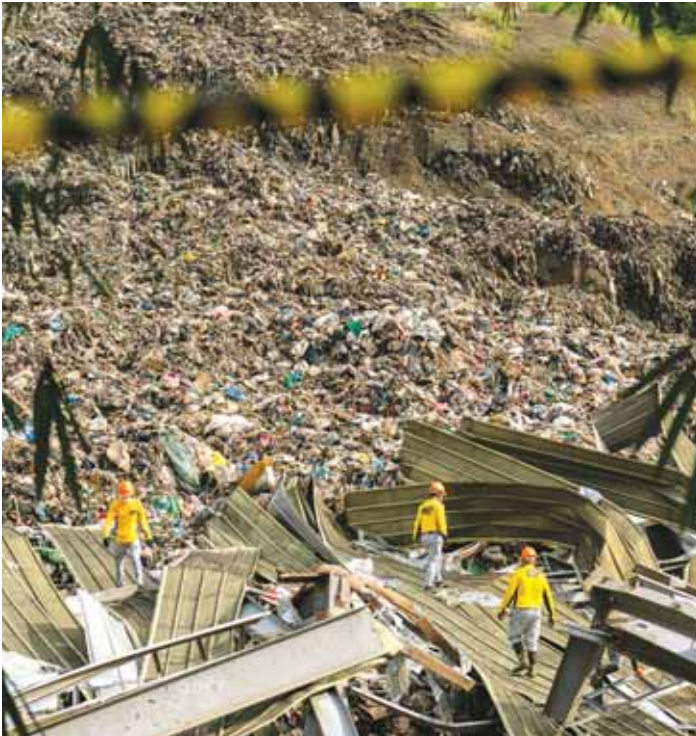
she added, according to KCNA. Kim ended her statement calling South Korea “a group of hooligans and scrap”. Analysts said Kim Yo-jong’s statement suggested Pyongyang wanted to treat the issue as a diplomatic matter. “Pyongyang has indicated it has no intention of turning this into a military issue through Kim’s statement,” said Hong Min, an analyst at the Korea Institute for National Unification. But her demand for an explanation “signals a shift toward a diplomatic offensive by holding the authorities accountable” for the incursion, he said. The new drone allegation comes as former president Yoon Suk-yeol is standing trial on charges that he illegally ordered drone operations, hoping to provoke a response from Pyongyang and use it as a pretext for his short-lived bid to impose martial law. Yoon was impeached and removed from office in April last year over his martial law attempt.

Japan holds annual military drill



Ghost Robotics Vision 60 takes part in an annual New Year military drill by the Japanese Ground Self-Defence Force 1st Airborne Brigade at Narashino exercise field in Funabashi, east of Tokyo, Japan, yesterday.

Hopes wane for survivors in Philippine garbage site collapse



Workers conduct a rescue operation at the collapsed landfill in Binaliw, Cebu, Philippines, yesterday.

AFP
Cebu, Philippines

Hopes of finding survivors days after the collapse of a massive mountain of trash in the central Philippines were fading, officials said yesterday, as rescue workers dug through tons of rubble. The recovery of a body yesterday brought the confirmed death toll to seven, with at least 29 people still missing as the crucial 72-hour window since the landslide in Cebu City came to an end. About 50 sanitation workers were buried on Thursday when the mountain of garbage toppled onto them from an estimated height of 20 storeys at the Binaliw Landfill, a privately operated facility that handles refuse for the city of nearly 1mn. “On Saturday, we detected two signs of life through our specialised radar. There were still heartbeats 98 feet below the debris, but right now, there are no reports of that anymore,” local fire officer Wendell Villanueva said yesterday. He said it was unlikely “for people to still be alive” three days after “tonnes of debris and trash had collapsed over them”. So far 12 employees have been pulled alive from the garbage and hospitalised. On Saturday, a rescue official said emergency workers had faced the danger of further collapse

by the still-shifting mountain of refuse, forcing pauses in their efforts. Rain had only increased that danger, Villanueva said. The focus was expected to turn from rescue to recovery today, Villanueva said adding that the final decision would be up to an inter-agency team. A public information officer separately said the focus was likely to shift to recovering bodies. Outside the disaster site, dozens of family members huddled under tents provided to shield them from the sun, while others found spots nearer the facility to watch the rescue efforts. “What we want now is to find them. Alive or dead - so we can properly take care of them,” said Jezille Matabid, whose brother Junelle, a welder at the site, was among the missing. Another woman, who declined to give her name, said the lack of information about her older sister, a landfill employee, had been agonising. “We feel like we’re going crazy here just waiting for an update. She’s three-months pregnant,” she said. Elmer Aguilar, whose brother Larry, a welder, was among the missing, said he had come with 10 others hoping to aid in the search effort, only to be turned away. “We went here because we thought we could help dig, but when we arrived, the guards did

not allow us to enter.” Joel Garganera, a Cebu City council member, described the height from which the trash fell as “alarming”, estimating the top of the pile had stood 20 storeys above the area struck. Images released by police showed a massive mound of trash atop a hill directly behind buildings that officials contained administrative offices and housing for employees. In an interview with local media, Cebu mayor Nestor Archival pointed to a recent earthquake and typhoon-driven rains as potential precipitating circumstances. But Garganera said the mountain of garbage had been an obvious danger. “Every now and then, when it rains, there are landslides happening around the city,” with “a landfill or a mountain that is made of garbage” posing a particular danger, Garganera said. “The garbage is like a sponge, it really absorbs water. It doesn’t (take) a rocket scientist to say that eventually, the incident will happen.” He said the disaster was a “double whammy” for the city, noting that the facility was the lone service provider for Cebu and adjacent communities. According to the website of operator Prime Integrated Waste Solutions, the landfill processed 1,000 tonnes of municipal solid waste daily. Calls to the company went unanswered yesterday.

India eyes new markets with US trade deal limbo

AFP
Mumbai, India

India is aggressively seeking trade deals to open markets for exporters and soften the blow of steep US tariffs, as efforts to secure an agreement with Washington remain elusive.

Relations between Washington and New Delhi plummeted in August after President Donald Trump raised tariffs to 50%, a blow that threatens job losses and hurts India's ambition of becoming a manufacturing and export powerhouse.

That pressure, experts say, has pushed New Delhi into a rapid diversification drive beyond its biggest market.

India signed or operationalised four trade agreements last year,

including a major pact with Britain - the fastest pace of dealmaking it has seen in years - and is now eyeing fresh deals.

Negotiations are underway with the European Union, the Eurasian Economic Union, Mexico, Chile and the South American Mercosur trade bloc, either for new deals or to expand existing agreements.

If successful, India would have trade arrangements with "almost every major economy", said Ajay Srivastava, from the New Delhi-based Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI). Srivastava said 2025 was "one of the most active years" for trade agreements, which he said aimed to "spread risk" rather than to pivot from Washington.

Washington's punishing tariffs aimed at stopping India's purchases of Russian oil - which it says finances Moscow's invasion

of Ukraine - have driven New Delhi's desire to grow other markets.

"The strategy was a reaction, as I read it, to what Trump did," trade economist Biswajit Dhar said. "This has now become an imperative for India to actually expand its destinations."

Major deals will help labour-intensive sectors hurt by tariffs.

India's apparel export promotion council projects that the UK trade deal could help double garment exports to Britain over the next three years.

The gains from a potential EU agreement could be even bigger.

European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen, expected to visit New Delhi later in January, has said it would be the "largest deal of this kind anywhere in the world".

Although the two sides missed

a deadline to conclude talks by the end of 2025 - reportedly over disputes related to steel and auto exports - Indian negotiators remain optimistic.

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz will visit India and meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi today, holding talks on "intensifying cooperation in trade and investment", Modi's office said in a statement.

Smaller agreements also matter.

Trade between Oman and India totalled less than \$11bn last financial year, but a December deal with Muscat offers "a gateway to the broader Middle East and Africa markets", and a template for a wider "Gulf engagement strategy", analysts at Nomura suggested.

And while a free trade agreement (FTA) with New Zealand added little to Indian export

growth, it secured \$20bn in foreign investment, increased visa access and showed Washington that New Delhi is willing to compromise.

"The New Zealand FTA makes concessions on agricultural produce like apples, even though farmers here may have concerns," said an Indian commerce ministry official, who declined to be identified. "Who says we can't be flexible?"

India's goods exports rose a surprising 19% in November 2025, reversing an October decline.

While the surge was helped by electronics shipments - still exempt from US tariffs - marine product exports also posted gains.

"Diversification has certainly happened," K N Raghavan, of the Seafood Exporter Association of India said.

"We have increased exports to the EU and China," he said, adding they were the top markets after the US.

But exporters caution that alternative markets cannot fully replace the US, with Raghavan saying a US deal is "paramount".

That remains in limbo.

India's imports of Russian oil fell sharply in December to 1.2mn barrels per day from 1.8mn per day in November, according to Kpler trade data.

It is unclear if that will be enough for Trump.

Pankaj Chadha, chairman of the Engineering Export Promotion Council, said diversification had become a necessity to lessen dependence on the "biggest and the most lucrative" market. "It's better not to put all your eggs in one basket," he said.

German chancellor arrives in India today to bolster trade, security ties

AFP
Berlin

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz left for India yesterday for a visit to bolster economic and security ties between the top EU economy and the Asian population giant.

Both Berlin and New Delhi face a turbulent world order and a set of economic and geopolitical challenges from the world's two largest economies, the US and China.

Merz's visit from today - his first to an Asian country since he took office last May - comes two weeks ahead of a planned EU-India summit and as India and the bloc are working on a free trade agreement.

"This agreement is envisioned not just as a trade deal, but as a comprehensive partnership that addresses modern economic realities," India's commerce ministry said.

During Merz's two-day visit, Prime Minister Narendra Modi will host him in Ahmedabad, in the premier's western home state of Gujarat, before Merz travels to the southern technology hub of Bengaluru.

The two leaders will attend a traditional kite festival and visit the Sabarmati Ashram, the spiritual retreat where Mahatma Gandhi, the leader of the Indian independence struggle, lived for many years.

That Merz chose India for his first trip to Asia as chancellor "demonstrates how India, the world's largest democracy, is an important strategic partner for Germany," a government spokesman said in Berlin.

European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen and European Council president Antonio Costa will be in New Delhi on January 26 for India's annual Republic Day parade.

For India and Germany, security links could also be bolstered by a potential deal for German's Thyssenkrupp Marine Systems to build six submarines for the Indian Navy in a partnership with Indian state-run Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders.

That deal remains under negotiation, but would allow India to replace its ageing fleet of Russian-built submarines and likely include technology transfer provisions that would help build up its domestic defence industry.

According to informed sources, the contract is not expected to be signed during the chancellor's

visit, but it should help move the discussions forward.

Merz will be accompanied by a large business delegation, including executives from corporate giants such as Siemens and Airbus.

"One of the main objectives of this trip is to deepen economic relations with India," a German government official said.

For Germany's exporters, India and its 1.4bn inhabitants represent significant opportunities, with a bilateral trade volume of almost 50bn euros.

Sales have slumped in China, and German firms now face fierce global competition from Chinese rivals in many industries.

German-Chinese relations have also become strained, with Beijing limiting supplies of semiconductors and some rare earth elements.

"German foreign trade is looking for growth markets, and India is precisely that," said Florian Wenke of the state-run agency Germany Trade & Invest.

In India, high US tariffs are creating uncertainty and the country is also re-evaluating its stance towards China, said economist Samina Sultan from the German Economic Institute.

"This is certainly a time when India is striving to expand trade relations, such as with Germany or with Europe as a whole," Sultan said.

India offers potential growth markets for German green energy technology and defence exports, Sultan said, with India interested in broader partnerships "so as not to become so dependent on Russia, China or even the US".

Jan Noether, head of the Indo-German Chamber of Commerce, said the timing of Merz's visit is "absolutely ideal" - especially as an EU-India free trade agreement appears within reach.

Discussions will also focus on the recruitment of skilled labour, according to the German government official.

With ageing Germany facing a chronic labour shortage, its companies have long relied on skilled Indian personnel, particularly in the IT sector. Germany is also looking to recruit more workers in the healthcare sector from India.

German universities are also a popular destination for Indian students, and Merz and Modi are expected to discuss mobility rules for workers and students as well as cooperation on research.

Celebrations ahead of the harvest festivals



Women perform a folk dance known as 'Giddha' around a bonfire during celebrations ahead of the harvest festivals Makar Sankranti and Lohri, in Amritsar, India, yesterday.

India eyes smartphone makers' source code in security overhaul

Reuters
New Delhi

India proposes requiring smartphone makers to share source code with the government and make several software changes as part of a raft of security measures, prompting behind-the-scenes opposition from giants like Apple and Samsung.

The tech companies have countered that the package of 83 security standards, which would also include a requirement to alert the government to major software updates, lacks any global precedent and risks revealing proprietary details, according to four people familiar with the discussions and a review of confidential government and industry documents.

The plan is part of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's efforts to boost security of user data as online fraud and data breaches increase in the world's second-largest smartphone market, with nearly 750mn phones.

IT Secretary S Krishnan said: "Any legitimate concerns of the industry will be addressed with an open mind", adding it was "premature to read more into it". A ministry spokesperson said it could not comment further due to ongoing consultation with tech companies on the proposals.

Apple, South Korea's Samsung, Google, China's Xiaomi and MAIT, the Indian industry group that represents the firms, did not respond to requests for comment.

Indian government requirements have irked technology firms before. Last month it

revoked an order mandating a state-run cyber safety app on phones amid concerns over surveillance. But the government brushed aside lobbying last year and required rigorous testing for security cameras over fears of Chinese spying.

Xiaomi and Samsung - whose phones use Google's Android operating system - hold 19% and 15%, respectively, of India's market share and Apple 5%, Counterpoint Research estimates.

Among the most sensitive requirements in the new Indian Telecom Security Assurance Requirements is access to source code - the underlying programming instructions that make phones work. This would be analysed and possibly tested at designated Indian labs, the documents show.

The Indian proposals also require companies to make software changes to allow pre-installed apps to be uninstalled and to block apps from using cameras and microphones in the background to "avoid malicious usage".

"Industry raised concerns that globally security requirement have not been mandated by any country," said a December IT ministry document detailing meetings that officials held with Apple, Samsung, Google and Xiaomi.

The security standards, drafted in 2023, are in the spotlight now as the government is considering imposing them legally. IT ministry and tech executives are due tomorrow for more discussions, sources said.

Smartphone makers closely guard their source code. Apple declined China's request

for source code between 2014 and 2016, and US law enforcement has also tried and failed to get it.

India's proposals for "vulnerability analysis" and "source code review" would require smartphone makers to perform a "complete security assessment", after which test labs in India could check their claims through source code review and analysis.

"This is not possible... due to secrecy and privacy," MAIT said in a confidential document drafted in response to the government proposal. "Major countries in the EU, North America, Australia and Africa do not mandate these requirements."

MAIT asked the ministry last week to drop the proposal, a source with direct knowledge said.

The Indian proposals would mandate automatic and periodic malware scanning on phones. Device makers would also have to inform the National Centre for Communication Security about major software updates and security patches before releasing them to users, and the centre would have the right to test them.

MAIT's document says regular malware scanning significantly drains a phone's battery and seeking government approval for software updates is "impractical" as they need to be issued promptly.

India also wants the phone's logs - digital records of its system activity - to be stored for at least 12 months on the device.

"There is not enough room on device to store 1-year log events," MAIT said in the document.

India Republic Day parade rehearsal



Indian Air Force cadets participate in a rehearsal ahead of the Republic Day parade, on a cold winter morning in New Delhi.

Thirty-metre vessels battle for pride in Kerala's traditional 'snake boat' races

Reuters
Kochi, India

Crews of more than 60 rowers splashed their oars in unison, steering boats more than 30 metres long through the serene waters of Ashtamundi Lake as the traditional "snake boat race" season concluded in Kollam in the Indian state of Kerala.

Thousands gathered on the shores or watched from houseboats as the largest water vessels used for races anywhere in the world competed for the President's Trophy over a 1,100-metre course.

The lean wooden boats, with raised bows that make them look like snakes, were originally designed as war vessels in the 13th century. They have since become

cultural icons in Kerala, which has a riverine terrain where several villages have developed rivalries between local boat clubs.

Boat races have been held in Kerala for decades, with the 73-year-old Nehru Trophy being the most prestigious event.

But the local government in 2019 structured them into the Champions Boat League to further boost its popularity in the soccer-mad southern state and beyond.

Colourful team jerseys replaced the traditional 'mundu' - a white cloth worn around the waist - and a points table ranked teams across 11 races in the league season. Niranam Boat Club won the President's Trophy after finishing in three minutes 40 seconds, but the Champions Boat League title went to Veeyapuram.

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TIMES

Can the US put a price tag on Greenland?

Despite Denmark’s repeated insistence that Greenland is not for sale, US President Donald Trump and his team are “talking about what a potential purchase would look like”, according to a White House spokeswoman. But even as a thought experiment that assumes the presence of a willing seller, discussion of the hypothetical sale of an autonomous territory such as Greenland rapidly encounters imponderables such as how a meaningful price tag could even be established.

“There’s not a market for buying and selling countries,” said Nick Kounis, chief economist of Dutch ABN AMRO bank, noting there was no accepted framework for valuing countries.

Attempts to find historical benchmarks for fair value also run into difficulties.

In 1946 the US offered to buy the vast, mineral-rich Arctic island from Denmark for \$100mn - an offer that was rejected back then. In today’s money, that is around \$1.6bn. But that figure, already paltry, is of no use as a baseline because of the massive growth in both US and Danish economies over eight decades since then: it does not reflect any relative “value” of Greenland and its resources in the global economy of the 2020s.

America’s \$15mn purchase of Louisiana in 1803 and \$7.2mn acquisition of Alaska from Russia in 1867 are also not useful precedents. First and most obviously there is the fact that both France and Russia actually chose to sell.

And while it is clear that those figures would be vastly higher in today’s money, how much more would depend on how and whether you factored in variables like inflation, appreciation in land prices and growth in local economies.

So how about if you tried a method akin to the valuation of a corporate takeover based on the income the target is capable of generating? Still tricky. Denmark’s central bank put the size of Greenland’s fishing-based Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at a tiny \$3.6bn in 2023 - about a tenth that of its smaller Arctic neighbour Iceland. Even if that was a starting point for a valuation, what multiple would you use to determine a price based on that?

How too would you account for the fact that Danish subsidies cover about half Greenland’s public budget, funding hospitals and schools and underpinning infrastructure for the sparsely populated territory?

Estimates put the value of Greenland’s mineral and energy reserves in the hundreds of billions of dollars or more. Proper geological studies of the entire island have not been fully conducted but a 2023 survey showed that 25 of 34 minerals deemed “critical raw materials” by the European Commission were there.

Mining and energy companies have a long history of putting price tags on assets around the world. But here, at least two complications emerge. First, the extraction of oil and natural gas is banned in Greenland for environmental reasons, and development of its mining sector has been snarled in red tape and opposition from Indigenous people. Is that a political constraint that a buyer would want a discount for? If so, how much?

And second, mining and energy deals crucially do not include the transfer of national sovereignty — in this case complicated further by the presence of Greenlandic Inuits who assert ownership claims of their own. “Because you are adding the intangible notions of Indigenous peoples’ culture, history, then you can’t — there is no way to price it,” said Andreas Osthaugen, Research Director for Arctic and Ocean Politics at the Fridtjof Nansen Institute in Norway. “It’s why that notion is ridiculous.”

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio’s scheduled meeting with Danish leaders next week may yield further insights into the US game plan on Greenland. ABN AMRO’s Kounis suggested Trump could be using a similar playbook to one he has used in other situations such as talks on trade tariffs, where an extreme scenario is put on the table simply to soften up the other side.

If one possible outcome is an agreed settlement that the US sees as being to its military and economic advantage, then “part of this might well be about getting leverage for future negotiations”, Kounis said. — Reuters

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Marmi Fest consolidates falconry heritage and passes it on to younger generations

QNA
Doha

The Qatar International Falcons and Hunting Festival (Marmi) attaches great importance to consolidating the heritage of falconry as an integral part of Qatar’s popular heritage, in addition to its status as a global legacy since it was inscribed on Unesco’s Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2011, thanks to the efforts of the State of Qatar along with a number of Arab and foreign countries.

Since its launch in 2010, the festival has been keen in every edition to engage children and young people in the atmosphere of its events through competitions and championships dedicated to them. This has helped build an early connection between younger generations and their heritage. Initially, the festival included two main competitions: the Young Falconer competition, which consists of simplified educational programmes explaining the basics of falconry, methods of caring for falcons, their types, and the tools used; and the Promising Falconer competition, which moves from introducing this heritage to its practical application by young participants.

The Promising Falconer competition is designated for the age group from 5-16 years and takes the form of a Da’w (lure) competition over a distance of 200 metres, in accordance with specific conditions for the falcon, including that its size does not exceed 15 inches. The competition features two categories: the first includes Kubaj, Qarmousha, and Wokri falcons, while the second includes Taba’ and Jebiliya (Shaheen) falcons.

Commenting on the festival’s commitment to passing this heritage on to future generations, Chairman of the Committees and Official Spokesman for the Marmi Festival, Mohammed Mubarak al-Ali told to QNA that the festival is keen to promote and entrench this popular heritage in the consciousness of young people. He noted that in its early stages, the festival featured two competitions for children: the educational Young Falconer competition, which focused on knowledge-based competition about falcons, and the Promising Falconer competition.

He added that, after the festival’s legacy



Mohammed Mubarak al-Ali

has grown over the years and with the festival reaching its 17th edition this year, organisers decided to shift children toward practical application in the Promising Falconer Championship, as the Young Falconer competition had fulfilled its role in introducing children to this heritage. “Today, they are practising falconry in reality, which confirms that the festival has successfully transferred this heritage across generations throughout its history,” he said.

The official spokesman also pointed out that children who once participated in these competitions have now become youths and men and have moved on to professional-level competitions such as Al Tala’a, Da’w, and Haddad Al Tahadi championships, underscoring the festival’s success in achieving its objectives of preserving Qatar’s popular heritage.

For his part, Saad Ali al-Muhamnadi, a falconry heritage expert and member of the Promising Falconer Committee at the Marmi Festival, said in similar remarks to QNA that falconry represents one of the most prominent authentic Qatari heritages passed down from fathers and grandfathers to sons generation after generation. He stressed that preserving this heritage and transmitting it to new generations is a shared responsibility and a national duty.

He explained that falconry is not merely a hobby or a traditional practice, but rather a system of human and educational values

that contributes to the sound upbringing of children by instilling discernment, alertness, discipline, and a sense of responsibility from an early age.

Al-Muhamnadi added that practising falconry helps children make constructive use of their time and keeps them away from excessive use of electronic devices and digital games. He noted that falconry is a physical activity that enhances fitness and develops self-reliance and daily commitment, whether in training or in caring for the falcon.

He further pointed out that the Promising Falconer Committee is keen to instil the principle of balance between practising the hobby and academic achievement, emphasising that education remains the top priority, while falconry serves as a positive way to fill leisure time in a manner that benefits children and strengthens their connection to their heritage and national identity.

In turn, Nasser Rashid al-Nuaimi, a member of the Promising Falconer Committee at the Marmi Festival, said in a statement to QNA that falconry is one of the most important pillars of Qatari heritage that has distinguished society throughout its history. He noted that passing this legacy on to new generations contributes to preserving cultural identity and strengthening the sense of belonging among children and youth.

He explained that the Marmi Festival, through the Promising Falconer competitions and accompanying activities, plays a pivotal role in introducing young people to the fundamentals of falconry and the proper ways of handling and caring for falcons, ensuring that knowledge and expertise are transferred in a correct and organised manner.

Al-Nuaimi added that practising falconry has a positive impact on a child’s character, as it nurtures wisdom, patience, and calmness, in addition to developing mental and physical abilities. He emphasised that this hobby helps direct young people’s energies toward beneficial activities and instils in them a love of learning, exploration, and research, opening broader horizons of knowledge.

He also praised the role played by the State of Qatar in supporting this sector, noting that falconry-related events and competitions witness remarkable development year after year in terms of organisation and participation, contributing to safeguarding this heritage and ensuring its continuity for future generations. — QNA



Falconry is a physical activity that enhances fitness and develops self-reliance and daily commitment, whether in training or in caring for the falcon.

Russian troops capture village in Ukraine’s Zaporizhzhia

Reuters
Moscow

Russian forces took control of the village of Bilohirya in Ukraine’s southeastern Zaporizhzhia region, the TASS state news agency reported yesterday, citing the defence ministry.

Moscow’s troops carried out strikes targeting a Ukrainian military-industrial enterprise and energy facilities, TASS cited the ministry as saying.

Meanwhile, Ukraine’s military yesterday said it had struck three drilling platforms in the Caspian Sea belonging to Russia’s Lukoil oil firm.

“We’ve had no electricity, heat or water for the past 42 hours. But we’re surviving, as you can see”

The military said it hit V. Filanovsky, Yuri Korchagin and Valery Grayfer platforms.

“These facilities are used to support the Russian occupation army. Direct hits have been recorded. The extent of the damage is being assessed,” it noted.

Meanwhile, nearly four years into Russia’s full-scale invasion, Ukrainians are enduring another gruelling winter of heat and electricity cuts.

Massive Russian strikes on the capital on Friday killed at least four people and left half the city’s residential buildings without heat, at a time when temperatures are around -10C and expected to drop further.

Kyiv mayor Vitaliy Klitschko, the former world heavyweight boxing champion, warned that the situation was “very difficult” and urged residents to temporarily evacuate.

But braving sub-zero temperatures, her heat cut off, Natalia has no plans of leaving.

Natalia, who responded to Russia’s February 2022 invasion by making Molotov cocktails to defend her city from Moscow’s approaching army, said she was

staying put, despite the hardships.

“I haven’t left Kyiv a single second since the full-scale invasion,” she said.

“What did we do then? We made Molotov cocktails. I won’t leave... I have my house here, I have my job and I love my city,” said the 45-year-old manager, who declined to give her last name.

“We’ve had no electricity, heat or water for the past 42 hours,” she said. But “we’re surviving, as you can see”

Her one concession to the upheaval of war: early in the invasion, she moved to a flat on a lower floor.

“It’s less scary when the missiles fly overhead,” she said.

Klitschko yesterday morning said 1,000 buildings in Kyiv were still without heat - down from an initial figure of 6,000 after the strikes.

Many residents’ main heat source is electric, and Ukraine’s power grid has been battered by Russian strikes since the start of the war.

In the capital’s Desnyansky district, AFP visited one of the tents set up by emergency services for residents to get warm, eat, connect to the internet and charge their devices.

Olena, a 50-year-old English teacher, said she was forcing herself to be optimistic in order to hang on.

Emergency tents and neighbourly solidarity help “a lot”, she said. “We support each other, dress warm, smile and wait.”

One piece of clothing in particular sustains her, she said: a scarf that belonged to her grandmother, a World War II survivor.

“You put it on and you remember all that our people have endured. We will endure, too. We can’t give up,” she said.

Yesterday marked the 1,418th day of Russia’s war on Ukraine, matching the length of what is known here as the “Great Patriotic War”, when the Soviet Union fought off Nazi Germany’s World War II onslaught, from 1941-1945.

Sweden to spend \$1.6bn to bolster air defences

Sweden will invest 15bn kronor (\$1.6bn) on bolstering its air defences, notably potential civilian targets, the government said yesterday, the latest European country to beef up military spending since Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. The money will go to ground-based aerial defence systems, the government said, as Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine and the US’ increasingly strained ties with Nato allies under US President Donald Trump prompt a European rush to rearm.

“Experience from Ukraine demonstrates the importance of a robust air defence,” the Swedish government said.

The announcement follows similar moves by countries including Germany, where parliament approved \$59bn in new defence spending in December.

The initial purchases under Sweden’s new plan will be made in the first quarter of 2026, the government said.

“With this broad investment in air defence,

we are protecting the whole of society, from our military units to urban areas and critical infrastructure,” Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson said in a statement.

“It is a matter of people’s lives, our freedom and our ability to withstand attacks in all parts of the country.”

Sweden had announced in November it was spending around \$366mn on IRIS-T surface-to-air short-range missiles to protect itself against missiles, drones and combat aircraft.

Berlin shivers in sub-zero temperatures



People skate on the ice covering the Neukoelln Ship Canal in Berlin's Treptow district in Berlin yesterday, as the German capital continued to experience sub-zero degrees centigrade.

EU ‘should consider forming combined military force’

AFP
Brussels, Belgium

EU countries should weigh whether to set up a combined military force that could eventually replace US troops in Europe, the bloc’s defence chief said yesterday.

EU defence commissioner Andrius Kubilius floated creating a “powerful, standing ‘European military force’ of 100,000 troops” as a possible option to better protect the continent.

“How will we replace the 100,000-strong American standing military force, which is the back-bone military force in Europe?” he asked

in a speech in Sweden. The suggestion comes as US President Donald Trump has heightened fears among Nato allies over Washington’s reliability by insisting he wants to take over Greenland.

Worries over Trump’s commitment to Europe have already spurred countries to step up efforts to bolster their militaries in the face of the threat posed by Russia.

Ideas about establishing a central European army have floated around for years but have largely failed to gain traction as nations are wary of relinquishing control over their militaries.

The US has pushed its European allies to

increasingly take over responsibility for their own security, and raised the prospect it could shift forces from Europe to focus on China.

“In such times, we should not run away from the most pressing questions on our institutional defence readiness,” said Kubilius, a former Lithuanian prime minister.

In his speech Kubilius also advocated for the creation of a “European Security Council” of key powers - including potentially Britain - that could help the continent take decisions over its own defence quicker.

“The European Security Council could be composed of key permanent members, along with several rotational members,” he said.

11 militants killed in security operations by Pakistani military

The Pakistan army has announced the killing of 11 militants in two security operations in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, northwestern Pakistan.

According to the Pakistan News Agency, the first operation was conducted based on intelligence regarding the presence of militants in North Waziristan, resulting in the killing of six of them.

A second joint operation with the police in Kurram led to the killing of five militants, along with the seizure of weapons and ammunition.

The army said it continues its security operations in the region to eliminate any remaining hideouts, affirming that the comprehensive campaign against terrorism will continue. - **QNA**

House damaged in gas cylinder blast



Forensic officials use metal detectors to inspect amid the debris of a damaged house after a gas cylinder explosion in a residential area in Islamabad, Pakistan, yesterday.

Germany rejects Covid claims by US health chief

AFP
Berlin

Germany’s health minister has rejected “baseless” claims by her US counterpart that doctors in Germany have faced legal action for issuing vaccine and mask exemptions during the Covid-19 pandemic.

In a video posted Saturday on X, US health chief Robert F Kennedy Jr said he had written a letter to Health Minister Nina Warken calling for an “end to politically motivated prosecutions”.

The long-time vaccine sceptic accused Germany of prosecuting more than 1,000 doctors - and thousands of their patients - for issuing exemptions from vaccines and wearing masks during the pandemic.

“The German government is now violating the sacred patient-physician relationship, replacing it with a dangerous system,” he said in the video.

“No democracy grounded in confidence and transparency should move in that direction,” he added.

Kennedy also misspelled Warken’s name as ‘Workin’ in the text attached to the clip.

Meanwhile, the German health minister rejected the accusations as “baseless” and “factually inaccurate” in a statement.

During the pandemic, doctors who chose not to offer vaccines “were not criminally liable and did not have to fear penalties”, she added.

President Donald Trump’s return to the White House has tested the long-standing bond between Germany and the US.

Denmark’s dilemma: Defending a territory on its way out

Reuters
Copenhagen

When US Secretary of State Marco Rubio meets his Danish and Greenlandic counterparts next week, Denmark will be defending a territory that has been moving steadily away from it and towards independence since 1979.

President Donald Trump’s threats to seize Greenland have triggered a wave of European solidarity with Denmark. But the crisis has exposed an uncomfortable reality - Denmark is rallying support to protect a territory whose population wants independence, and whose largest opposition party now wants to bypass Copenhagen and negotiate directly with Washington.

“Denmark risks exhausting its

foreign policy capital to secure Greenland, only to watch it walk away afterwards,” said Mikkel Vedby Rasmussen, a political science professor at University of Copenhagen.

Denmark cannot let Greenland go without losing its geopolitical relevance in the Arctic territory, strategically located between Europe and North America and a critical site for the US ballistic missile defence system. US President Donald Trump said on Tuesday he wants to make mineral-rich, strategically placed Greenland a part of the US.

Yet it may ultimately have nothing to show for its efforts if Greenlanders choose independence - or strike their own deal with Washington.

The stakes extend beyond Denmark’s national interests. European allies have rallied behind Denmark not just out of solidarity, but because giving up Greenland

would set a dangerous precedent that could embolden other powers to pursue territorial claims against smaller nations, upending the post-1945 world order.

Denmark’s foreign ministry declined to comment, but referred to joint remarks by Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen and Greenlandic Prime Minister Jens Frederik Nielsen on December 22.

“National borders and the sovereignty of states are rooted in international law,” the two leaders said. “They are fundamental principles. You cannot annex another country... Greenland belongs to the Greenlanders.” This week, Frederiksen said: “If the US chooses to attack another Nato country, everything stops, including Nato and the security the alliance has provided since World War II.”

For now, the Trump administration says all options are on the ta-

ble, including buying the territory or taking it by force.

Copenhagen professor Rasmussen said any discussion of whether holding on to Greenland is worth the cost has been drowned out by outrage at Trump’s threats.

“It is not part of the political debate in Denmark. I fear we have gone into patriotic overdrive,” he said.

During the Cold War, Greenland’s strategic location gave Denmark outsized influence in Washington and allowed it to maintain lower defence spending than would otherwise be expected of a Nato ally.

This became known as “the Greenland Card”, according to a 2017 report by the University of Copenhagen’s Centre for Military Studies.

But Greenland’s aspirations for self-determination have been brewing since the former colony got greater autonomy and its own par-

liament in 1979. A 2009 agreement explicitly recognised Greenlanders’ right to independence if they choose. All Greenlandic parties say they want independence, but differ on how, and when, to achieve it.

Trump’s pressure has accelerated a timeline that was already in motion, forcing Copenhagen to spend political capital and financial resources on a relationship with an increasingly uncertain endpoint.

“How much should we fight for someone who doesn’t really care about us?” Joachim B Olsen, a political commentator and former Danish lawmaker, said.

Copenhagen provides an annual block grant of roughly 4.3bn Danish crowns (\$610mn) to Greenland’s economy, which is near stagnation with GDP growth of just 0.2% in 2025. The central bank estimates an annual financing gap of approximately 800mn Danish

crowns to make current public finances sustainable. Denmark also covers police, the justice system and defence - bringing total annual spending to just under \$1bn. In addition, Copenhagen last year announced a 42bn Danish crowns (\$6.54bn) Arctic defence package in response to US criticism that Denmark has not done enough to protect Greenland.

Some reject framing the relationship in transactional terms, pointing to Denmark’s legal and moral obligations under international law and centuries of shared history.

“We’re talking about family relations, long history of relations between Denmark and Greenland,” said Marc Jacobsen, associate professor at the Royal Danish Defence College. “So this is much more, it’s not just about defence and economy, it’s about feelings, it’s about culture.”

QIFF 2026 celebrates cross-cultural collaboration through gastronomy

The Qatar International Food Festival (QIFF) 2026, organised by Visit Qatar, is the first major event of the Qatar-Canada and Mexico 2026 Year of Culture, showcasing how gastronomy celebrates shared traditions, techniques, and stories.

QIFF 2026 will host award-winning chefs from Canada and Mexico whose work reflects deep cultural roots, contemporary craftsmanship, and a commitment to community-centred food traditions.

From Mexico, chef Esdras Ochoa, known as the Taco King, will feature in the opening ceremony, the Cooking Studio, and the QIFF Ring, alongside chef Lupita Vidal, who will take part in both the Cooking Studio and the QIFF Ring. Canada's participation will be led by chef Christian Gosselin (sous executive chef, Rosewood), who will repre-

sent Canada in the opening ceremony and the QIFF Ring, with chefs Eric Chong and Andy Hay appearing in the Cooking Studio.

Mohammed al-Kuwari, Years of Culture adviser on Latin America and Qatar's former ambassador to Mexico, said: "I have always had a deep personal love for Mexican food, its flavours and the stories, memories, and emotions embedded in it. When people share a meal together, barriers disappear very quickly.

"Food creates connection faster than words, and it reminds us how much we have in common. At QIFF, seeing chefs from Mexico and Canada cook side-by-side with our culinary community in Qatar is a powerful reminder that culture lives at the table, in conversation, and in the friendships that begin over food."

Chef Vidal, an acclaimed ambassador of cuisine from the T-basco region and one of Mexico's

most celebrated research-driven chefs, will represent Mexico's culinary heritage. Through her philosophy of agua y humo (water and smoke), Vidal preserves ancestral cooking techniques and elevates the voices of traditional producers and communities. Her participation at QIFF offers audiences rare insight into the diversity of Mexican gastronomy.

Chef Ochoa is internationally recognised as a pioneer of contemporary Mexican street food and taco culture. From founding influential taquerias in Los Angeles to leading global culinary collaborations, Ochoa brings a spirit of authenticity, creativity, and cultural storytelling that reflects the movement of people, traditions, and flavours across borders.

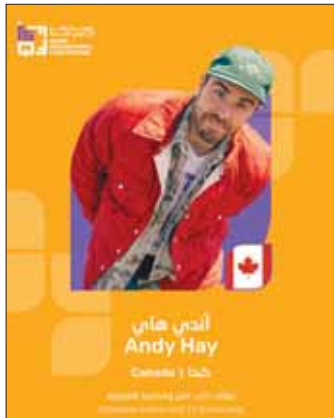
Among the featured Canadian participants is chef Gosselin, a distinguished chef with more

than two decades of international culinary experience across North America and the Middle East. Gosselin is known for his respect for ingredient-driven cuisine and his interest in sustainability and local sourcing, values that resonate strongly with Qatar's evolving food culture. Another Canadian participant is chef Hay, best known for turning East Coast comfort food into fun, approachable recipes with a big personality. A self-taught cook from Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, he first gained national attention on MasterChef Canada after leaving a career in tech.

From Canada's innovative culinary scene, chef Chong, one of the country's most exciting young chefs and a Michelin-recognised restaurateur, will showcase a cuisine shaped by heritage, experimentation, and multicultural identity. His work



Lupita Vidal



Andy Hay



Eric Chong

reflects how modern Canadian gastronomy continues to evolve through dialogue between cultures, techniques, and personal history.

Marmi 2026: Five falconers in finals of Al Tala'a Championship today

The 17th edition of the Qatar International Falcons and Hunting Festival (Marmi 2026) will see the finals of the Al Tala'a Championship today, featuring five falconers who qualified from the semi-final round.

Abdulhadi Jaber Hussein, Ali Hassan al-Saei (with two falcons), Abdulhadi Obaid al-Marri, and Shaheen Salem al-Dosari qualified from the semi-final round yesterday in the morning session, with competitions involving 20 falconers divided into five groups. Ali Ayyash al-Mansouri, chairman of Al Tala'a Championship Committee at the Marmi Festival, said the semifinal round witnessed strong competition among 20 falcons distinguished by strength and climbing ability. As a result, the elite Al Tala'a falcons advanced to the final. He explained that the strength of the qualified falcons was evident in their recorded times, ranging from 15 seconds for Abdulhadi Obaid al-Marri's falcon to 1 minute and 21 seconds for Ali Hassan al-Saei's falcon. The falcons' ascent and sighting of the houbara demonstrated their power and high level of training. He added that the final results would determine today the top three positions among the five finalists.

Al-Mansouri wished all qualifiers success and thanked all participants in the semifinal round, noting that they delivered an outstanding performance. Even if some were not successful in the end, he emphasised that they are partners in the success of the championship and the Marmi Festival as a whole.

Several falconers who qualified for the final, as well as others, expressed pride in the championship's results, affirming that the strongest falcons always claim the top positions. They



also praised the Marmi Festival's efforts to promote falconry, noting that the Al Tala'a Championship reconnects them with the heritage of their fathers and grandfathers. Meanwhile, last evening saw the competitions of the tenth group in Haddad Al Tahadi Championship, resulting in the victory and qualification of only one falconer, Salem Abdullah al-Nabet. Accordingly, Muteb Mubarak al-Qahtani, Chairman of

the Marmi Festival, crowned him at the festival site. Meanwhile, Shawi al-Kaabi, chairman of the Haddad Al Tahadi Committee, said that the tenth group delivered satisfactory performances amid excellent weather conditions and moderate wind speeds. However, only one falcon succeeded in hunting, bringing the total number of qualifiers for Haddad Al Tahadi final to 16 falconers. He noted that

the championship will continue on Monday, with the eleventh group during the evening session, urging participants to arrive early to enable the committee to perform its duties efficiently and ensure better organisation. In the meantime, Marmi 2026 announced the opening of registration for the International Mazayin (falcon beauty) Championship, which will continue until January 21 via WhatsApp



number: 0097433053334. The Mazayin Championship includes two categories: the first for white and blond wild falcons, and the second for black and dark wild falcons. In addition, the Marmi Festival celebrates hunting tools and falcons. It supports entrepreneurs in the hunting and camping equipment trade by providing dedicated spaces and shops for falcon supplies at the festival site.



Qatar Charity supports 284,000 people in Burkina Faso in 2025

Qatar Charity delivered extensive humanitarian and development assistance in Burkina Faso throughout 2025, benefiting 284,257 people across various regions of the country, implemented through over 230 projects.

Qatar Charity's interventions focused on improving living standards and strengthening community resilience by combining long-term development initiatives with emergency responses, reflecting its unwavering commitment to humanitarian excellence.

The projects covered vital sectors such as water and sanitation, education, health, food security, housing, and emergency response, with special attention supporting internally displaced persons (IDPs) and vulnerable families, in addition to orphan sponsorships.

Qatar Charity implemented three projects in the water sector, benefiting 9,000 people through the provision of safe drinking water, construction of sanitation facilities, and hygiene awareness campaigns.

To strengthen social cohesion, Qatar Charity completed



11 projects for building mosques and Qur'an memorisation centres, benefiting 1,681 people. In education, Qatar Charity carried out one school construction project, benefiting 120 students, aimed at expanding access to education and reducing dropout rates. Under seasonal projects, Qatar Charity provided food assistance to 208,034 people through Ramadan food baskets and Eid al-Adha meat

distributions. Additionally, two emergency relief projects supported 12,900 IDPs with food and non-food items.

Through its 'Rofaqa' initiative, Qatar Charity currently sponsors 8,282 orphans in Burkina Faso, ensuring access to education, nutrition, and healthcare.

Qatar Charity implemented 215 integrated projects to support IDPs and vulnerable families, including

the provision of relief kits, tricycles, cooking tools, school desks, tents, mills, and sewing machines. These projects benefited 44,240 IDPs and needy families.

President Ibrahim Traore praised Qatar Charity's significant role in supporting development and resettlement efforts for displaced persons in Burkina Faso, affirming that its interventions align with the country's na-



tional strategy. This came during his meeting with Qatar Charity's team at the presidential palace.

Minister of Humanitarian Affairs, Cdt, Passowende Pelagie Kabore emphasised that Qatar Charity is a trusted partner of the Burkinabe government, noting that its interventions are consistent with the country's humanitarian and development goals and the

vision of the president.

Khadija Zongo, director general of the Office for NGOs, stated that Qatar Charity is among the best humanitarian organisations operating in the country. She highlighted her visits to several Qatar Charity projects and participation in its activities, stressing that the government gives special attention to its interventions.