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Qatar, US sign up 'Pax Silica' tech alliance

**Strategic partnership
targets AI and
semiconductors,
supply chain security**

Qatar and the United States signed the "Pax Silica" Declaration yesterday, marking a strategic step to enhance bilateral co-operation in advanced technologies and supply chain security while supporting global economic stability. The declaration reinforces the partnership between the two countries and contributes to building a more resilient and sustainable global economic ecosystem.

HE the Minister of State for Foreign Trade Affairs Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al-Sayed signed on behalf of Qatar, while US Under Secretary of State for Economic Affairs Jacob Helberg signed for the United States. The agreement reflects both countries' shared commitment to

strengthening secure and reliable technology supply chains, safeguarding critical resources, and ensuring the resilience of global supply networks.

Qatar's accession to Pax Silica aligns with its national priorities to consolidate its position as a regional and international hub for advanced technologies and artificial intelligence, while supporting Qatar National Vision 2030 and the Third National Development Strategy 2024-2030, which aims to foster a competitive and sustainable digital economy.

Through this initiative, Qatar will expand international partnerships in semiconductors, advanced computing, cybersecurity, and digital technologies, enhancing its technological capabilities and supporting economic diversification.

At the signing ceremony, Dr al-Sayed described the declaration as "a new milestone in the Qatar-US partnership, founded

on trust, shared interests, and a unified vision for advancing stability and prosperity". He noted that Qatar takes pride in its role within leading international partnerships dedicated to strengthening secure and reliable supply chains in semiconductors, artificial intelligence (AI), and advanced technologies.

"The world is undergoing a profound transformation driven by artificial intelligence, rising demand for energy and critical minerals, and rapid technological advancement," Dr al-Sayed said, stressing that success requires close cooperation to reinforce technological ecosystems and deepen partnerships based on trust and shared responsibility.

He emphasised Qatar's investments in the future digital economy's foundations, including digital infrastructure, advanced industries, and research and innovation ecosystems. Cloud computing centres launched by US companies have contributed significantly to positioning Qatar as one of the region's most advanced digital hubs, he noted.

Dr al-Sayed highlighted the Qatar AI Initiative (QAI) as a national platform promoting innovation, expanding cooperation in artificial intelligence, and ensuring alignment of advanced technologies with the highest standards of safety, governance, and technological security. **To Page 5**

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More than 51,000 secondary school students will receive booster jabs against three potentially fatal diseases as health authorities launch their 2026 immunisation drive across Qatar's schools.

The Ministry of Public Health is co-ordinating with education officials and healthcare providers to administer the Tdap vaccine – protecting against tetanus, diphtheria, and whooping cough – to all ninth- and tenth-graders in 278 schools nationwide.

Consent forms have been sent home to parents as vaccination teams begin visiting both government and private institutions to reach the 51,772 students enrolled in the programme.

Dr Hamad Eid al-Romaihi, who heads the Health Protection and Communicable Disease Control Department, said the annual campaign has delivered consistently strong results since beginning 15 years ago.

"Over the past fifteen years, the National Vaccination Programme has succeeded in attaining high and sustainable coverage rates,

thanks to the efforts of healthcare professionals, the support of partners, and the co-operation of the community," he said. **To Page 5**

by regulations tied to its country of origin. **To Page 5**



Dr Rania Mohamed

by regulations tied to its country of origin. **To Page 5**

Qatar continues to strengthen its position as a vibrant hub for global events, from major sports, business and tech forums to live entertainment and culture showcases," said Sheikh Ali Alwaleed al-Thani, CEO of Invest Qatar. "Our partnership with Fever reflects the strength and potential of Qatar's innovation ecosystem. With its strategic location, world-class infrastructure and a tech-driven national vision, Qatar offers an ideal platform for Fever to introduce its cutting-edge, tech-enabled experiences and accelerate its expansion across the region."

Fever plans to generate dozens of high-skilled jobs in Qatar over the

coming years, supporting the nation's talent development and economic diversification goals while bringing innovative cultural and entertainment formats to Doha.

Rachid Elameri, Regional General Manager APAC & MEA at Fever,

PM meets US undersecretary of state



HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani met yesterday with US Undersecretary of State for Economic Affairs, Jacob Helberg, who is visiting the country. The two sides discussed the close strategic relations between Qatar and the US and ways to support and strengthen them, in addition to a host of topics of common interest. **(QNA Page 2)**

Mass school vaccination drive targets over 51,000

By A Staff Reporter

Doha

More than 51,000 secondary school students will receive booster jabs against three potentially fatal diseases as health authorities launch their 2026 immunisation drive across Qatar's schools.

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Qatar launches Media Library at GCO forum



He the Minister of Environment and Climate Change Dr Abdullah bin Abdulaziz bin Turk al-Subaie, HE the Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Ibrahim bin Ali bin Issa al-Hassan al-Mohannadi, and HE Dr Abdulaziz bin Nasser bin Mubarak al-Khalifa, President of the Civil Service and Government Development Bureau and Secretary-General of the National Planning Council. **PICTURE: Shaji Kayakulam**

By Santhosh V Perumal

Business Reporter

Qatar yesterday launched Media Library, a national digital platform serving as the official portal for government visual content, as "Newsroom" platform has become a practical model for integration among government and semi-government entities.

The library – which supports government entities in accessing approved, high-quality photos, videos, and media materials, helping unify visual identity and enhance the effectiveness of communication campaigns and messages across platforms – was launched at the Third Government Communications Forum.

The two-day forum under-

scores the pivotal role of the government communications system in supporting the national narrative, enhancing institutional coordination, and keeping pace with rapid transformations in the media and digital landscape.

The opening day featured HE the Minister of Environment and Climate Change Dr Abdullah bin Abdulaziz bin Turk al-Subaie, HE the Minister of Labour Dr Ali bin Saeed bin Smaikh al-Marri, HE the Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Ibrahim bin Ali bin Issa al-Hassan al-Mohannadi, and HE Dr Abdulaziz bin Nasser bin Mubarak al-Khalifa, President of the Civil Service and Government Development Bureau and Secretary-General of the National Planning Council. **To Page 5**



we're excited to bring fan-first, tech-enabled experiences to Doha, using data and creativity to help people discover, connect with, and enjoy world-class entertainment while contributing to the country's evolving experiential economy."

Qatar's strategic investments in live entertainment, tourism, and the creative economy have created fertile ground for Fever's arrival.

Initiatives including Startup Qatar – an online platform inviting global startups to establish presence in Doha – and Media City Qatar,

which provides state-of-the-art infrastructure for creative industries, complement the expansion.

The Ministry of Culture continues curating large-scale cultural programs and festivals celebrating Qatar's heritage.

Fever is unveiling an extensive calendar featuring art

exhibitions, live performances, and sporting spectacles. Fever's data-driven approach to experience curation will bridge the gap between event organisers and audiences, bringing top-quality content to Qatar and driving growth in the entertainment sector.

With a proven track record of curating and promoting successful events worldwide, Fever is positioned to contribute significantly to Qatar's entertainment landscape, reinforcing the nation's appeal to global tourists, residents, and business leaders.

Fever will participate in Web Summit Qatar on February 1-4, 2026, showcasing how its technology and creative capabilities can contribute to Qatar's vision, particularly within cultural programming and sports-related live experiences. **(QNA)**

Fever pitch for tech-powered entertainment in Qatar

Global platform eyes regional growth through Doha hub

Fever, the world's leading tech platform for discovering culture and live entertainment in all private schools and kindergartens in Qatar has been finalised and will be circulated shortly, a senior education official has said.

Dr Rania Mohamed, director of the Department of Private Schools and Kindergartens and acting director of the Private Schools Licensing Department at the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE), said the policy establishes a single behavioural framework

for private schools despite wide differences in curricula and educational systems. In its first version, the document sets out general provisions for student behaviour, alongside clear mechanisms, controls and procedures that private schools are required to follow. These include how schools should address issues such as absenteeism, attendance monitoring and dismissal procedures, ensuring consistency across the private education sector.

Dr Mohamed noted that more than 24 different educational systems operate within Qatar's private schools, each governed

by regulations tied to its country of origin. **To Page 5**

coming years, supporting the nation's talent development and economic diversification goals while bringing innovative cultural and entertainment formats to Doha.

Rachid Elameri, Regional General Manager APAC & MEA at Fever,

emphasised the natural alignment between Qatar's vision and Fever's mission. "Qatar's vision for culture, sports, and live experiences makes it a natural fit for Fever's growth in the region," he said. "Through our partnership with Invest Qatar,



PM meets CEO of US International Development Finance Corporation



HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani met yesterday with visiting CEO of the US International Development Finance Corporation (IDFC) Ben Black. During the meeting, relations were reviewed, in addition to a number of topics of common interest. (QNA)

PM meets US undersecretary of state for economic affairs



HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani met yesterday with visiting US Undersecretary of State for Economic Affairs, Jacob Heberg. During the meeting, the two sides discussed the close strategic relations between Qatar and the United States and ways to support and strengthen them, in addition to a host of topics of common interest. (QNA)

Forum underlines strategic communication's key role in national discourse

A high-level session held yesterday as part of the Third Government Communications Forum underscored the pivotal role of government communication in supporting major national initiatives, advancing the priorities of Qatar National Vision 2030, and guiding public behaviour.

Held under the title "The Role of Strategic Communication in Enhancing the Impact of National Discourse", the session brought together a number of ministers and was moderated by Director of the Studies and Strategic Planning Department at the Government Communications Office (GCO), Saud Ahmed al-Buainain.

Participants emphasised the importance of aligning communication strategies across government and semi-government entities to ensure consistency of messaging and coherence of national discourse.

In this context, HE the Minister of Environment and Climate Change Dr Abdullah bin Abdulaziz bin Turki al-Sabaei stated that government communication is a powerful strategic tool for influencing societal behaviour and achieving sustainable impact, rather than merely a means of raising awareness or disseminating information. He affirmed that the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change is working to move beyond environmental awareness toward embedding responsible practices, through clear



and simplified communication messages that link environmental issues to quality of life, public health, and societal well-being.

In his intervention during the session, His Excellency added that diversifying communication channels constitutes a fundamental pillar of successful environmental campaigns, ensuring outreach to all segments of society through digital platforms, field campaigns, and engagement with educational institutions.

HE the Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Ibrahim bin Ali bin Issa al-Hassan al-Mohammadi stressed that the success of public policies should not be measured by the plans approved, but by what people understand and how they experience their impact in daily life.

He noted that effective government communication is that which explains decisions before they are misunderstood and leads the public dialogue rather than re-

acting to it.

Meanwhile, HE the President of the Civil Service and Government Development Bureau and Secretary-General of the National Planning Council, Dr Abdulaziz bin Nasser bin Mubarak al-Khalifa, emphasised the importance of delivering information accurately, timely, and to the right audience, taking into account the specific characteristics of each group -whether citizens, residents, or investors- to ensure effective message delivery and enhance public appreciation of government efforts.

He explained that communication is not merely about transmitting messages, but about building awareness and understanding of government initiatives, and linking the four pillars of national development to tangible outcomes on the ground, enabling individuals to feel the direct impact of these efforts in their daily lives. (QNA)



MoI wins media innovation award at Government Communications Forum

Ministry of Interior (MoI), represented by the Public Relations Department, has won the Innovation in Media Campaigns Award at the Government Communications Office (GCO) Awards during the Government Communications Forum 2026, which saw wide participation from governmental and semi-governmental entities.

HE Director of the Government Communications Office Sheikh Jassim bin Mansour bin Jabor al-Thani

presented the award to Director of the Public Relations Department at the MoI Major General Abdullah Khalifa al-Muftah.

MoI earned this recognition for its innovative media messaging, integrated use of tools and platforms, and its effective outreach to diverse segments of society, enhancing public awareness on safety and prevention, and strengthening the overall efficiency of government communication. (QNA)

Shura Council reviews draft laws, education initiatives

The Shura Council of Qatar has held its regular weekly session in Doha, reviewing a number of draft laws and government statements on national policy issues.

The meeting took place yesterday at the Council's headquarters in the Tamim bin Hamad Hall and was chaired by HE the Speaker, Hassan bin Abdulrahman al-Ghanem.

At the start of the session, HE the Secretary-General Nayef bin Mohammed al-Mahmoud read out the agenda, after which members approved the minutes of the previous meeting.

During the session, the Council examined a draft law on international treaties and agreements, which had been referred by the government. Members decided to forward the draft to the Internal and External Affairs Committee for further study and for a report to be submitted to the Council at a later date.

The legislature also approved a draft law amending certain provisions of Law No 24 of 2010, which governs pesticide regu-



lations in the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) states. The amended draft was endorsed following a review of a report by the Health, General Services and Environment Committee and detailed discussions by Their Excellencies the Council members. It has now been referred back to the government.

In addition, the Council reviewed a report by the Education, Culture, Sport and Information Committee concerning the government's response to a proposal on the role of teachers in promoting national identity. Members took what was described as the appropriate decision on the matter.

Separately, the legislature considered a government statement on a proposal to launch a summer work programme for secondary school students. The proposal was referred to the Social Affairs, Labour and Housing Committee for further examination and recommendations. (QNA)

Spotlight on 'Strategic Storytelling in Digital Age'

A session within the third edition of the Government Communications Forum discussed the topic of "Strategic Storytelling in the Digital Age", with the participation of a select group of experts and speakers in the fields of communication and media.

During the session, Director of the Studies and Strategic Planning Department at the Government Communications Office (GCO) Saud Ahmed al-Buainain emphasised that building media content must first start from a clear objective that aligns with national trends and serves the state's strategic priorities.

He indicated that diversifying narrative methods, whether through real stories, comparisons, or creative approaches, contributes to delivering messages to the widest possible audience. He stressed the importance of keeping up with developments on digital platforms and benefiting from global expertise to develop Qatari cadres and enhance the country's presence on the media scene.

Director of Communications and Public Relations at Qatar Rail Abdullah Ali al-Mawlawi pointed to the challenges the company faced in establishing a culture of using public transport before the project was launched. He noted that society was heavily



dependent on private cars, and trust in public transport was limited.

He added that innovative media campaigns and simplified messages contributed to gradually changing public behaviour. He explained that success was not only linked to building modern stations and trains, but also to the ability of the content to convey the benefits of public transport, such as reducing traffic congestion, limiting pollution and accidents, and improving the public experience on the media scene.

For his part, Director Public Sector Mena at LinkedIn Rami Sabri praised the third Government Communications Forum, describing it as one of the largest government gatherings specialising in digital communication in the region. He emphasised that the

effectiveness of messages is linked to their credibility and source.

In turn, Creative Lead Mena at Google Andreas Mielenhausen highlighted the importance of designing digital content that is relevant to the cultural context of the audience. He stressed that users make the decision to follow the content only within the first three seconds, and that this decision is highly emotional.

Head of Service Industries for Mena at Meta Joachim Marciiano indicated that short videos now constitute half of the time that users spend on social media platforms, making it crucial to attract attention within the first three seconds.

He added that effective content should be diverse and deliver multiple messages in different formats. (QNA)

Frontiers of AI in cinematic animation explored

The third Government Communications Forum held a panel discussion to examine the new frontiers of AI-powered cinematic animation.

The session offered a glimpse of the Legacy of Light project - an AI-animated docudrama that explores the life of the distinguished Muslim scholar Muhammad ibn Musa al-Khwarizmi, along with the tremendous intellectual renaissance

that Baghdad experienced in the ninth century. The project combines rigorous historical research with AI-powered technologies to deliver an innovative model of evidence-based cinematic storytelling.

Spencer Striker, Professor of Digital Media Design at Northwestern University, highlighted that AI-powered tools have brought radical changes to production techniques, emphasising that this tech-

nological edge cannot supersede human creative guidance, as classic skills in design thinking have become more significant than ever.

During a keynote panel on new frontiers in AI-powered cinematic animation, Striker highlighted that the 'Legacy of Light' project enables the integration of meticulous historical research with complete control over every visual and audio

element of the film, showcasing the new possibilities of AI in filmmaking and animation.

Striker further emphasised that AI acts as an accelerator of creativity, yet it does not replace the artistic and creative decisions made by humans, making the future of cinematic content production dependent on the seamless integration of technology and human creativity.

In essence, the forum's agenda showcases panel discussions and specialised workshops that drill down on pivotal subjects, including informed leadership engagement, unified communication, visual identity, the role of women at the pinnacle of the communications field, applied sessions on data unpacking, news verification, creating digital content, and leveraging AI in government communications. (QNA)

QRCS set to launch Disaster Management Camp in February

The camp is being held under the patronage of HE the Prime Minister

Under the patronage of HE Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani, Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS) will organise the field training 10th Disaster Management Camp (DMC-10) between February 3-11, 2026.

Held under the theme "Effective Preparedness and Better Response", the nine-day training event will be attended by representatives of many Qatari government organisations and NGOs, 200 trainees from QRCS volunteers and Arab National Societies, and 100 trainers and administrative staff.

Launched by QRCS in 2006, DMC involves a theoretical and practical training curriculum, as well as multiple daily disaster simulation scenarios. Over the years, this extensive and specialised program has established itself as Qatar's and the region's top disaster preparedness and response training event.

To be held in Mesaieed (Seaside), DMC-10 is sponsored by

QFFD, as part of the fruitful strategic partnership between QRCS and QFFD in numerous humanitarian, relief, and community activities, both locally and internationally. This reflects their shared commitment to encouraging and empowering various initiatives and programs that contribute to the goals of Qatar National Vision 2030.

Building on the resounding success of the previous nine editions of DMC, QRCS is set to launch this highly anticipated event, with a complete list of lectures, training sessions, and scenario drills that simulate real-world humanitarian situations. This offers the participants a unique opportunity to acquire knowledge and skills that no other organisation or event can give.

At both the individual and institutional levels, DMC is a crucial asset of community capacity-building. It helps develop the potential and skills of the participating volunteers, facilitate sharing of expertise with different Movement partners, and strengthen coordination and engagement among the competent Qatari organisations to deal with unforeseen risks or disasters. (QNA)

The agenda comprises two main parts, with the first being a Specialised Training, covering Emergency Shelter; Water and Sanitation; Food Security and Livelihoods; Emergency Health Care; Emergency Planning and Operations Room; and Field Assessment and Co-ordination.

The second part is General Training on Media and Communication in Emergencies; Restoring Family Links (RFLs); Safer Access; Psychosocial Support (PSS); Disaster Management and Basic Humanitarian Standards; and Humanitarian Data Analysis.

During training sessions, there will be daily unannounced drills designed to assess the trainees' learning and responsiveness. One day before the closing ceremony, there will be a large-scale field training in preparation for the final comprehensive scenario. On the sidelines of the camp, a humanitarian and social tent will receive the trainees, school students, and the public, who will attend informative lectures on a variety of topics related to humanitarian and social work, to be delivered by a select group of humanitarian, legal, social, and diplomatic experts and VIPs. (QNA)

Al-Khulaifi meets Somali officials



HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Mohammed bin Abdulaziz al-Khulaifi met yesterday with Somali President's Envoy, Farah Sheikh Abdulkadir Mohamed, and State Minister for Foreign Affairs of Somalia, Ali Mohamed Omar. During the meeting, they discussed co-operation between the countries and ways to support and enhance them, in addition to the latest developments in the region, as well as a range of other topics of mutual interest. HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs renewed Qatar's firm position in support of the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Somalia, affirming Qatar's full support for the legitimate state institutions, and its keenness to preserve Somalia's security and stability, and to safeguard the interests of its brotherly people. (QNA)

Qatar named guest of honour at Cairo International Book Fair 2027

Egyptian Minister of Culture Dr Ahmed Fouad Henno announced that Qatar has been chosen as the guest of honour at the Cairo International Book Fair in 2027, noting that this selection is part of the Egypt-Qatar Year of Culture. This was revealed during a press conference held by the Egyptian Minister of Culture to announce the events of the 57th Cairo International Book Fair, which will take place from January 21-February 3. Henno announced that the upcoming edition of the fair will feature 1,457 publishing houses from 83

countries, totalling 6,637 exhibitors. The large participation of publishing houses in the fair reflects its established international standing, he said, pointing out that it also includes a cultural and intellectual programme of 400 events, 100 book signings, and 120 artistic events, with the participation of 170 Arab and international guests and more than 1,500 intellectuals and artists. He noted that Romania is the guest of honour at this year's exhibition, bringing with it a rich cultural programme. (QNA)

Safety for children in digital space stressed

HE Secretary-General of the Arab Network for National Human Rights Institutions (ANNHRIs) Sultan bin Hassan al-Jamali said that the digital space has become an inseparable part of the lives of children and adolescents, offering opportunities for learning and communication, while simultaneously opening the door to increasing cyber threats, ranging from cyberbullying to hacking personal data, particularly in conflict zones that lack adequate legal and digital protection. This came during his speech to the 25th General Assembly of ANNHRIs, held in Doha (headquarters) yesterday, while the General Assembly's accompanying annual conference took place in

Bahrain, under the theme of protecting children in the digital space: challenges, legislation, and preventive measures. The secretary-general of ANNHRIs said that despite governments and national institutions' efforts, legislative and regulatory gaps still exist, adding that the rapid pace of technological development outstrips the ability of legislation to keep up, which calls for integrated institutional responses based on international standards and the activation of regional and international partnerships to ensure a safe and inclusive digital space that preserves children's dignity and protects their rights at all times and in all places. (QNA)

Qatar takes part in meetings on Arab youth, sports programmes

The Technical Youth Committee and the Technical Sports Committee, both assisting the Council of Arab Ministers for Youth and Sports, weighed in on a variety of proposals on Arab youth and sports programmes for 2026 during meetings convened at the headquarters of the Arab League in Cairo. A delegation from the Ministry of Sports and Youth, led by Director of the Youth Affairs Department, Fawaz Abdullah al-Musaifri, took part in the Technical Youth Committee assisting the Council of Arab Ministers for Youth and Sports, with Director of the Clubs and Sports Bodies Administration, Mohammed Ahmed al-Othman, leading the ministry's delegation

participating in the assisting Technical Sports Committee. The meetings of the two committees aim to forward recommendations to the executive office of the Council of Arab Ministers for Youth and Sports to take the essential decisions and act accordingly throughout 2026. The 72nd session of the council's executive office is set to convene today, ahead of the convention of the 49th session on the same day at the headquarters of the General Secretariat of the Arab League. The council's agenda includes proposals for youth activities that serve Arab youth in terms of programmes, activities, and panel discussions. (QNA)

Qatar Charity's economic empowerment project concludes in Syria



The 'Kafi' economic empowerment and livelihood support project in Idlib concluded with a ceremony held in Saraqib, Syria. The event, attended by the head of the Saraqib city and several community leaders, showcased the project's key activities and phases. The final batch of production equipment was also delivered to the beneficiaries, marking their transition to self-reliance and launch of their own businesses. The 'Kafi' project, supported by Qatar Charity and implemented by the Ata'a Humanitarian Relief

Association, aimed to enhance the economic empowerment of affected families, support early recovery, and improve livelihoods, particularly in areas that experienced widespread displacement and where families have returned without stable sources of income.

The project focused on supporting skilled tradespeople and, enabling them to revive or establish their small businesses. This was achieved by providing them with the necessary equipment, along with training and ongoing support, thereby contributing to the sustainability of economic ac-

tivity and achieving a lasting impact on individuals and the local community.

The project encompassed support for a wide range of professions, including various forms of trade, food processing, tailoring, electrical and solar energy work, carpentry, blacksmithing, painting, construction, heating and air conditioning, as well as vocational work using three-wheeled vehicles, covering several areas in Idlib.

Mahmoud al-Othman, the Saraqib District responsible, said: "Such projects help families se-

cure their daily sustenance, especially since the targeted areas were completely displaced and returned to their homes without even the means to provide for themselves. The families have transformed from waiting for monthly aid to becoming productive families who work hard for their children."

The 'Kafi' project is considered an effective model for transitioning from relief to development. It has contributed to transforming families from aid recipients into productive families capable of generating income and achieving greater economic and social stability."

Labour minister meets Jordanian envoy



HE the Minister of Labour Dr Ali bin Smaikh al-Marri met yesterday with Jordan's ambassador to the State, Zaid Mufleh al-Lawzi. The two officials discussed the strong bilateral ties between Qatar and Jordan, exploring opportunities to further enhance co-operation, exchange expertise, and promote development across the labour sector. (QNA)

Civil Defence offers tips for fire prevention during winter season

By Joseph Varghese
Staff Reporter



The General Directorate of Civil Defence at the Ministry of Interior has cautioned the public to be vigilant about the use of heaters or wood during winter to prevent any instances of fire.

"Fire related accidents during this season usually occur as a result of inattention, lack of awareness, recklessness, ignorance, and lack of care to apply and comply with safety requirements, especially inside homes, Majilis, and also at the winter camping sites," said Lt Yousef Muhammed Qamber, officer, Operations Department, General Directorate of Civil Defence.

Lt Qamber was addressing a webinar on the topic of 'Fire Prevention during Winter Season' yesterday that highlighted some of the common reasons for fire incidents due to some inappropriate methods used for heating the places during winter.

The official said that during the winter, many people tend to set fire for heating or lighting inside the tent which may result in fire.

"This can cause the emission of toxic carbon dioxide that may re-

sult in suffocation and poisoning if the required caution is not taken.

In addition, putting the heaters in a place close to the clothes or keeping the stoves near the beds inside the tent, can cause fire," he explained.

He also advised that the lamps used inside the tents should be kept away from the clothes used for the tent and they should be fixed in a safe place. Another aspect that he highlighted, is the quality of the heater.

"Sometimes we may be buying some cheaper heaters but it can cost our lives. So whenever you are going to purchase any electrical items, make sure about the quality of those items and it meets the set standards," stressed Lt Qamber.

Another point he highlighted was the use of the same socket for various gadgets.

"Don't connect a heater with a joint socket using an extension cable with other devices. Nowadays people tend to use a socket

for many connections which is a hazard and risk for our life. It is all the more dangerous. Be cautious as operating a heater using bad electrical connections or loading it with more than its capacity, can cause fires," he warned.

The official also advised that the materials used for making the tents in the winter camps should be fire and heat resistant with necessary security and safety standards.

"The kitchen must be isolated from other tents and the gas stove should be isolated from the edges of the tent with an insulating material. There should also be a fire extinguisher along with a fire blanket made of fire resistant materials," he added.

Meanwhile, Capt Ayyoub Saleh al-Shat, trainer, Fire Prevention Education Section, General Directorate of Civil Defence highlighted several tips such as keeping the gas cylinders at a secluded and shaded place in a winter camp, the importance of not switching on or off any electrical switches if there is gas leakage among others.

"When a fire breaks out in an oil pan, avoid pouring water into the pan because it ignites the fire. Instead, cover the burning pan by placing a lid on it or covering it with a fire blanket," he added.

Qatar Authors Forum holds workshop on novel writing

The Ministry of Culture's Qatar Authors Forum (QFA) organised yesterday a workshop on the foundations of the art of the novel with Dr Amir Taj El-Sir, running from January 12-15.

The workshop aims to provide participants with a solid foundation in novel writing, from the initial idea through to the final text, with a focus on practical experience and engagement with real texts.

This approach helps enhance narrative skills and artistic awareness among participants. The workshop is primarily directed towards young people and those with a tendency towards literature and the novel, including secondary school and university students, as well as budding writers seeking to advance their writing tools based on correct artistic principles.

The event covers core themes such as sources of fictional ideas and methods of transforming inspiration into a narrative topic. It also addresses character development with strong human depth and artistic appeal, plot techniques and the structuring of events,

and style and language in novel writing.

In addition, the workshop features contributions drawn from the personal experience of Dr Amir Taj El-Sir in developing a text from the first draft to the final version, along with a practical session on writing a novel excerpt and reviewing it within an interactive panel discussion.

Participants are expected to produce an excerpt, a fictional story, or a full draft ready for completion, while also mastering the basics of fiction writing, developing self-critical skills, and learning literary editing techniques.

This is the second-level workshop in a series of foundational workshops that QFA is organising as part of its ongoing efforts to discover literary talent, elevate writers' cultural knowledge, and enhance the literary product by deepening artistic and professional foundations for innovative writing.

The series thus contributes to nurturing the cultural scene and energising literary production. (QNA)

Qatar Charity's economic empowerment project concludes in Syria



The 'Kafi' economic empowerment and livelihood support project in Idlib concluded with a ceremony held in Saraqib, Syria. The event, attended by the head of the Saraqib city and several community leaders, showcased the project's key activities and phases. The final batch of production equipment was also delivered to the beneficiaries, marking their transition to self-reliance and launch of their own businesses. The 'Kafi' project, supported by Qatar Charity and implemented by the Ata'a Humanitarian Relief

Association, aimed to enhance the economic empowerment of affected families, support early recovery, and improve livelihoods, particularly in areas that experienced widespread displacement and where families have returned without stable sources of income.

The project focused on supporting skilled tradespeople and, enabling them to revive or establish their small businesses. This was achieved by providing them with the necessary equipment, along with training and ongoing support, thereby contributing to the sustainability of economic ac-

tivity and achieving a lasting impact on individuals and the local community.

The project encompassed support for a wide range of professions, including various forms of trade, food processing, tailoring, electrical and solar energy work, carpentry, blacksmithing, painting, construction, heating and air conditioning, as well as vocational work using three-wheeled vehicles, covering several areas in Idlib.

Mahmoud al-Othman, the Saraqib District responsible, said: "Such projects help families se-

cure their daily sustenance, especially since the targeted areas were completely displaced and returned to their homes without even the means to provide for themselves. The families have transformed from waiting for monthly aid to becoming productive families who work hard for their children."

The 'Kafi' project is considered an effective model for transitioning from relief to development. It has contributed to transforming families from aid recipients into productive families capable of generating income and achieving greater economic and social stability."



RAG Global Meet 2026 brings global leaders together in Doha today

RAG Global Meet 2026: RAG Global Business Hub will host the RAG Global Meet 2026 on today, January 13 at the Grand Hyatt Doha, bringing together global leaders to discuss collaboration and growth aligned with Qatar National Vision 2030.

The high-level gathering will showcase RAG's future roadmap across key sectors, highlighting its commitment to supporting Qatar's economic diversification and global positioning.

The agenda features strategic panel discussions with representatives from ministries, embassies, investors and key stakeholders, fostering dialogue on cross-border opportunities.

The event is expected to be graced by



Snooru founder and chief executive Hamad Mubarak al-Hajri and RAG director-general Sheikh Mubarak al-Thani, alongside delegated ambassadors from over 35 countries and prominent global investors.

Nationwide inspection drive to ensure the well-being of local environment

The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change (MoECC)'s Wildlife Development Department has carried out an extensive inspection campaign covering various regions of the country, in co-ordination with the Environmental Security Group of the Internal Security Force (Lekhwiya).

The campaign aimed to monitor environmental violations and infractions and to take the necessary legal action against them, in addition to verifying the extent to which the inspected sites comply with approved environmental requirements and standards.

The campaign also focused on reducing the negative impacts resulting from certain activities, particularly the phenomenon of dust dispersion.

J. B. Al-Kuwari and
Qatar Foundation

INVITATION TO TENDER

Tender Reference	Description	Tender Fee (QAR)	Tender Max Value (QAR)	Elig. Closing Date
QF-RFQ-01-152	Provision of Support Services to Qatar Foundation Call-off Basis for 3 Years with Option to Extend for 1 More Year	1,000.00	10,000.00	February 2, 2026, 2:00 PM
QF-RFQ-1130	Pharmaceutical Software Implementation & Testing with Licenses	600.00	N/A	February 19, 2026, 2:00 PM
QF-RFQ-1136	Provision of APM Management and Storage Services to Qatar Foundation on a Call-off Basis for 3 Years with Option to Extend Up to 1 Year	1,000.00	10,000.00	February 14, 2026, 2:00 PM

Qatar Foundation (QF) Procurement Directorate is inviting tenders for the following tenders:

1. Supplier Registration: It is mandatory to be registered as a supplier in QF's e-procurement system. One QF supplier can register all its business units. The User Guide, license and User Manual can be found at www.qfprocurement.qa under the Supplier Registration section.

2. Tender Fee: The tender fee is required to be paid in QAR via the e-procurement system before the tender closing date. Payment methods are available on the e-procurement system.

3. Tender Submission: Tenders must be submitted online via the e-procurement system.

4. Tender Fee Payment Dates: Payment date is the date of the tender closing date (2026-01-26).

5. Tender Fee Waiver: Waiver of tender fee is applicable for tenders submitted by small and medium enterprises (SMEs) under the QF tender system.

6. Tenders and contracts: Tenders are evaluated and awarded on a 'tender by tender' basis. An SME tenderer involved in the tender will be evaluated on its own merit.

7. Tender Fee: The tender fee is required to be paid in QAR via the e-procurement system before the tender closing date (2026-01-26).

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Qatar's largest fishing contest at Old Doha Port from March 25-27

Qatar's largest fishing competition, alongside the fishing exhibition, is set to return to Old Doha Port this March, offering prizes worth more than QR600,000, including cars.

At a press conference yesterday, Old Doha Port also announced a partnership agreement with Teyseer Motors WLL, which will serve as the exclusive sponsor of the first awards for the third edition of the fishing competition. The partnership follows a landmark year for the competition, which witnessed a remarkable turnout of 578 participants across 132 teams.

The fishing competition will take place from March 25 to 27, with the awards ceremony scheduled on March 28. Participating teams will set sail from Old Doha Port, competing over three days to catch the largest kingfish (kan'ad) in Qatar's waters.

The competition invites fishing enthusiasts to catch the kingfish (kan'ad), a prized regional catch. Organised in collaboration with the Doha Marine Sports Club, the competition reflects Qatar's deep-rooted fishing traditions through a modern, competitive format.

The grand prize winner will receive a Tank 500, second place a Tank 300, and third place a Haval H9, all provided by Teyseer Motors WLL with additional cash and in-kind prizes awarded to the top 10 teams, marking the competition's most valuable prize offering since its launch.

In a press statement, Old Doha Port CEO Engineer Mohammed Abdulla al-Mulla said: "The fishing competition is fundamentally about supporting fishermen and preserving a tradition that sits at the heart of Qatar's identity. By recognising skill and local talent, Old Doha Port aims to honour the fishing community while ensuring



Old Doha Port and Teyseer officials at the press conference yesterday.

PICTURES: Thajudheen



these traditions continue to thrive in a modern, competitive setting. Our partnership with Teyseer Motors further strengthens this commitment."

Participants will set sail from Old Doha Port for the first three days of the competition for a full day at sea. Each team will submit a video documenting their largest catch, including the fishing process, boat registration, and weight verification.

The deadline for video submissions will be announced by the judging committee on the second day of the competition.

On March 28, participants will gather at Old Doha Port for live fish weighing and verification, followed by the awards ceremony

held during the fishing exhibition. Winners will be determined by the weight of their top kingfish catch, with the first valid submission used as a tie-breaker where applicable. The top 10 teams will be awarded.

Teams must be led by a Qatari captain (nukhatha), though residents and fishing enthusiasts from GCC countries may join as team members. Registration requires submitting a completed entry form, valid identification for all team members, and a valid boat registration.

Further details regarding registration openings, contact numbers and the registration website will be announced in the coming period.

Mass school vaccination drive targets over 51,000

From Page 1

The campaign supports Qatar's National Health Strategy running through 2030, which places population health improvement at its core.

Alongside the jabs themselves, health officials are running educational sessions for families to address vaccine hesitancy and dispel myths about immunisation safety.

Authorities are urging parents not to miss the opportunity to protect their teenagers, noting the booster represents a crucial component of Qatar's approved childhood vaccination schedule. The Tdap dose is particularly important for adolescents as immunity from earlier childhood jabs begins to wane.

Preparing for the rollout, the ministry assembled 240 doctors and nurses last Saturday for training on current best practices in vaccine delivery and managing common reactions.

Healthcare workers received updated guidance on addressing mild side effects including slight fever and injection site soreness, with instructions for parents on home care. The session also covered logistical planning to ensure smooth operations across the diverse school network.

The three diseases targeted by the vaccine can cause serious harm. Tetanus attacks the nervous system and can be fatal. Diphtheria creates a thick coating in the throat that blocks airways and damages the heart. Pertussis – whooping cough – poses grave risks particularly to infants who contract it from older siblings and adults.

Health officials say maintaining high vaccination rates among teenagers not only protects them directly but also shields vulnerable younger children who rely on community immunity until they complete their own immunisation series.

Qatar launches Media Library at GCO forum

From Page 1

semi-government entities.

The Ministry of Labour won the Government Visual Identity Compliance award, and the Ministry of Municipality received the Most Engaged Entity award on the Newsroom platform among government entities. The Communications Regulatory Authority won the same award among semi-government entities.

Sheikh Jassim bin Mansour bin Jaber al-Thani, Director of the Government Communications Office, said the "Newsroom" platform has become a practical model for integration among government and semi-government entities.

"It has unified media messaging and strengthened coordination in managing national communications, covering achievements, and handling challenges and crises. The participation of over 60 entities in the platform reflects the level of engagement and its direct impact on the government communications system," he said.

Highlighting that the forum represents a strategic milestone in developing Qatar's government communications system, he said it serves as a national platform bringing together communications leaders from government and semi-government entities, contributing to institutional integration, unifying the national narrative, and advancing communications practices in line with rapid developments and societal aspirations, in accordance with Qatar National Vision 2030.

The first day saw the forum's award winners, which aim to honour outstanding entities and individuals and highlight practical models and inspiring achievements contributing to the development of Qatar's government communications system throughout the year.

The awards included several categories: the Ministry of Interior won the Innovation in media campaigns award among government entities, while Qatar Rail "The Rail" won the same award among

QNB Group, Daman partner for community initiatives

QNB Group and the General Retirement and Social Insurance Authority (Daman) have announced the signing of a strategic sponsorship agreement aimed at supporting the authority's community programmes and initiatives, enhancing engagement with contributors and retirees, and aligning with national development plans and Qatar National Vision 2030.

The agreement was signed by QNB Group chief executive Abdulla Mubarak al-Khalifa and Daman director-general Ahmed bin Ali al-Hamadi.

Under the agreement, QNB Group will act as a strategic sponsor for a range of community activities and events, supporting the implementation of initiatives led by Daman and enhancing their reach to target audiences. The partnership aims to support community programmes and events scheduled for implementation



Abdulla Mubarak al-Khalifa, QNB Group CEO, and Ahmed bin Ali al-Hamadi, director general of Daman, during the agreement-signing ceremony.

throughout 2026, contributing to greater awareness of available services, reinforcing the principles of social responsibility, and expanding outreach to various segments of society.

The agreement also seeks to enhance beneficiary well-being and improve the overall customer experience by delivering more accessible, inclusive, and efficient services. These initiatives complement Daman's premium programmes

tailored for retirees within its broader community services framework, reflecting an institutional approach that places people at the heart of development.

Daman affirmed that the agreement represents an extension of its approach to embedding social responsibility as a core component of its institutional role, strengthening national partnerships that serve the community across all segments.

Qatar, US sign up 'Pax Silica' tech alliance

From Page 1

"Doha's rapidly evolving skyline stands as a testament to Qatar's accelerated development and readiness to play an influential role in shaping the future of the global digital economy," he said.

The minister affirmed that Pax Silica opens new horizons for cooperation in artificial intelligence, semiconductors, cloud infrastructure, and secure supply chains while supporting Qatar's transition toward an innovation-driven economy and enhancing US supply chain resilience.

Helberg welcomed Qatar's accession, describing it as "a pivotal moment for US-Qatar relations and for the global economy as a whole." He

stated the initiative reflects a fundamental shift as the region transitions from an oil-based system to one centred on technological innovation and "silicon diplomacy."

"While the 20th century was driven by oil and steel, the 21st century is being shaped by computing power and critical minerals," Helberg said. Under this co-operation, the US and Qatar will work together on strategic investments, including critical minerals security initiatives, modernisation of global logistics infrastructure, and strengthening partnerships in artificial intelligence.

He highlighted Qatar's transformation from a traditional energy supplier into a hub for computing and connectivity, noting the alliance is "defined by

capabilities rather than traditional alignments, bringing together countries with the resources and strategic vision to secure a shared technological future."

Closing his remarks, Helberg invited Qatar to an upcoming ministerial meeting in Washington focusing on critical minerals, stating: "Welcome to the alliance. Let us build together the operating system for the 21st century."

Pax Silica is an international initiative led by the US Department of State, prioritised during 2024-2025, aiming to enhance security and integrity of advanced-technology supply chains associated with the artificial intelligence era, in partnership with countries across Europe, East Asia, the Middle East, and the Americas. — QNA

Unified code of conduct for all private schools in the offing

From Page 1

This diversity, she said, has resulted in variations in culture, rules and disciplinary procedures, prompting the Ministry to develop a flexible, overarching framework that can be applied uniformly.

"The document is designed to be compatible with all educational systems," she said, adding that it does not override individual schools' behavioural assessment policies. Instead, it provides a governing reference that outlines general standards, while allowing schools to retain detailed internal procedures aligned with their curricula.

She stressed that private schools will continue to follow the educational systems of their respective countries of origin, but all will operate within a single regulatory framework defined by the new Code of Conduct. There is no conflict, she said, between the document's provisions and the policies currently applied by schools.

As part of its development, the draft policy was shared with 21 private schools representing a range of educational systems. Feedback was collected and incorporated, a process Dr Mohamed said helped ensure

the document remains practical and aligned with existing school frameworks.

Once circulated, the unified behavioural policy will serve as a reference point for all private schools and kindergartens, outlining the general regulations governing student conduct across the sector.

On oversight and enforcement, Dr Mohamed said the ministry has launched the "Ab'adi" campaign as an initial step in monitoring private schools' compliance with regulations. In addition, monthly supervisory visits are carried out across the sector.

Each month, administrative specialists from the Private Schools Department visit all 352 private schools and kindergartens operating in the country. These visits are complemented by academic inspections, during which specialists provide guidance and monitor the teaching of compulsory subjects, including Arabic Language, Islamic Education, and Qatari History and Citizenship.

In total, around 4,000 supervisory and academic visits to private schools and kindergartens are conducted annually, she said, as part of the Ministry's efforts to ensure compliance, consistency and educational quality.

ANNOUNCEMENT

I, YALLAPPA KASHINATH

holder of

Indian Passport No. P1753058
QID No. 28435681616

hereby change my name

from

YALLAPPA KASHINATH

to

YALLALING BIRADAR

Any objection, please contact

THE PERMANENT COMMITTEE FOR
NATIONALITY AFFAIRS

within 15 days from the publication of this notice.

ANNOUNCEMENT

I, SHEHNA SHAJAHAN ALIKUTTY

holder of

INDIAN Passport No. V4012901
QID No. 30235601396

hereby change my name

from

SHEHNA SHAJAHAN ALIKUTTY

to

SHEHNA SHAJAHAN

Any objection, please contact

THE PERMANENT COMMITTEE FOR
NATIONALITY AFFAIRS

within 15 days from the publication of this notice.



The United States has revoked more than 100,000 visas since President Donald Trump took office on an anti-migrant platform, a record for a single year, the State Department said yesterday.

"The Trump administration has no higher priority than protecting American citizens and upholding American sovereignty," State Department spokesman Tommy Pigott said.

US revoked 100,000 visas since Trump return

The figure since Trump's second inauguration on January 20, 2025 is two and a half times the number revoked in 2024, when Joe Biden was president.

The State Department said that "thousands" of the visas were revoked over crimes, which can in-

clude assault and also drunk driving.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio has proudly highlighted his revocation of visas from students who protested against Israel.

Rubio used a McCarthy-era law that allows the United States to block entry to foreigners seen as go-

ing against US foreign policy, although some of his high-profile targets successfully challenged deportation orders in court.

The State Department said 8,000 of the revoked visas were for students.

The Trump administration has also tightened vetting for visas, including moving to screen social media postings of visitors. - AFP

Cuba denies being in talks with US on deal

AFP/Reuters
Havana

Cuba's leader has reacted defiantly to President Donald Trump's threats to "make a deal" or pay the price in the aftermath of key ally Nicolas Maduro's ouster in a US military raid.

Trump has been ramping up pressure on Cuba, one of the few Latin American countries still run by an authoritarian leftist administration after Venezuelan leader Maduro's capture on January 3.

"We're talking with Cuba," Trump said aboard Air Force One on Sunday, hours after urging Havana to do a deal to head off unspecified US actions.

The Republican president, who says that Washington is now effectively running Venezuela, earlier vowed to cut off all oil and money Caracas had been providing to ailing Cuba.

"THERE WILL BE NO MORE OIL OR MONEY GOING TO CUBA - ZERO!"

Trump said on his Truth Social platform.

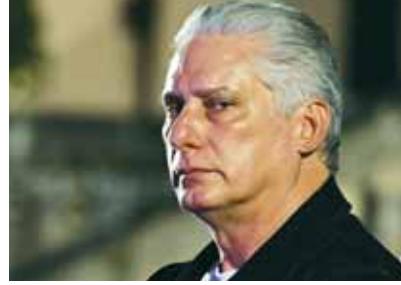
"I strongly suggest they make a deal, BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE," he said, without specifying what kind of deal he was promoting or what would happen if Cuba refused to negotiate.

Cuba, which is struggling through its worst economic crisis in decades, has reacted defiantly to the US threats even as it reels from the loss of a key source of economic support from Caracas.

Yesterday President Miguel Diaz-Canel (pictured) denied being in talks with Washington, saying that there are "no conversations with the US government except for technical contacts in the area of migration".

"As history demonstrates, in order for the relations between the United States and Cuba to advance, they must be based in international law instead of hostility, threats and economic coercion," Diaz-Canel said on X.

On Sunday, he vowed that the Caribbean island's residents were "ready to defend



the homeland to the last drop of blood".

Cuba has been a thorn in the side of the United States since the revolution that swept communist Fidel Castro to power in 1959.

Tensions are rapidly escalating between the two neighbouring nations, just 90 miles apart across the Straits of Florida.

The deployment of Soviet nuclear missile sites on the island triggered the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, when Washington and Moscow took the world

to the brink of nuclear war.

During his first presidential term, Trump walked back a detente with Cuba launched by his predecessor Barack Obama.

Immediately after the US capture of Maduro in a dramatic raid in Caracas, Trump stated that Cuba was "ready to fall".

He noted that the island, which has been plagued by blackouts due to crippling fuel shortages, would find it hard to "hold out" without heavily subsidised Venezuelan oil.

The Financial Times reported last week that Mexican oil exports to Cuba had surpassed those of Venezuela last year.

Trump's Secretary of State Marco Rubio, a child of Cuban immigrants who is a sworn foe of the communist government, has long had Havana in his sights.

"If I lived in Havana and I was in the government, I'd be concerned at least a little bit," he told reporters on January 3, after Maduro's capture and transfer to the United States on drug trafficking and weapons charges.

Aboard Air Force One on Sunday, Trump

referred to the generations of Cubans, like Rubio's parents, who had fled the island to the United States.

"Most importantly, right now, we're going to take care of the people that came from Cuba, that are American citizens, or in our country," Trump said, without saying how he would achieve that.

He also reposted a message that jokingly suggested Rubio could serve as president of Cuba.

Trump also said on Sunday that he "wanted to take care of" Cubans who were "forced out" of Cuba or who "left under duress," calling them "great citizens of the United States".

Diaz-Canel lashed back, saying yesterday that his country's citizens had been enticed to migrate to the US under laws that favoured Cuban migrants, and now were suffering the consequences of that "failed policy".

"They are victims of a change in policy towards migrants and the betrayal of Miami politicians," he said.

Mexico rules out US troops, Sheinbaum tells Trump

Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum said she ruled out a US military intervention to combat drug cartels, following a "good conversation" yesterday with President Donald Trump on security and drug trafficking.

In her daily press conference, Sheinbaum said she declined offers of military action from Trump and "ruled out" US military intervention in Mexico.

She said she told Trump that any US troop deployment in Mexico was "not on the table".

"We spoke about various topics, including security with respect for our sovereignties, reducing drug trafficking, trade, and investments," Sheinbaum said on social media.

She would seek another call if the US made statements to the contrary, she added.

"We continue to collaborate within the framework of our sovereignty... we seek co-ordination without subordination," she said.

Trump said in remarks to Fox News last week that cartels were running Mexico and suggested the US could strike land targets to combat them.

His comments were the latest in a series of escalating threats to deploy US military force against drug cartels within Mexican territory.

Mexico extradited dozens of cartel leaders to the United States in 2025 and reinforced border cooperation, but Sheinbaum has repeatedly voiced opposition to any military intervention from outside.

Trump recently told Mexico that it had to "get their act together", following months of pressure over drugs and trade on the United States' southern neighbour.

He said that Sheinbaum - whom he met in Washington in December - was a "terrific person" but added he was pushing her to let him send US troops to tackle drug cartels in Mexico, an offer he said she has previously rebuffed.

On Sunday, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio spoke with Mexican Foreign Minister Juan Ramon de la Fuente about the need for stronger co-operation to dismantle Mexico's violent narco-terrorist networks and stop the trafficking of fentanyl and weapons, State Department spokesperson Tommy Pigott said.

Sheinbaum said at her press conference that fentanyl trafficking from Mexico to the United States had fallen by about 50% over the past year.

She also said that she had not discussed Cuba with Trump, following his comments that the island nation would no longer receive Venezuelan oil or money, following the capture of Venezuela's president Nicolas Maduro by US forces in early January.

Mexico is ready to assist communication between Cuba and the US if requested, Sheinbaum said.

She said Trump asked her about Mexico's position on Venezuela and she responded that the country opposes military interventions under its constitution.

- Reuters/AFP



A firefighter works to extinguish a wildfire in El Coihue, in the Patagonian province of Chubut. - Reuters

Wildfires spread to 15,000 hectares in Argentina

Forest fires in southern Argentina have scorched more than 15,000 hectares (37,000 acres) this week, authorities said, though rain began falling in parts of Patagonia on Sunday to the relief of residents.

The largest blaze, burning since January 5 near the small town of Epuyen in the Andes, has charred some 11,980 hectares, the Chubut provincial fire service said in a statement.

Another fire of unspecified size is burning nearby in the Los Alerces National Park.

Firefighters are also battling to contain another two fires in Chubut and neighbouring Santa Cruz provinces that have burned some

3,800 hectares, Argentina's emergency management agency said.

On Sunday afternoon, rain fell in some parts of the region, to the relief of residents like Attila Misura, a 59-year-old who leads horseback tours.

"We are very happy; hopefully it will stay this way," Misura told AFP by telephone from Rincon de Lobos, one of the most affected areas.

More than 500 firefighters, rescuers, police officers, and support personnel were combating the blazes, while dozens of local people supported operations on the front lines.

The governor of Chubut, Ignacio Torres,

said in a radio interview that the situation in the area was "calmer" on Sunday morning but it "remains very critical".

Torres urged people "never again to downplay the implications of climate change" and emphasised that the province is experiencing "the worst drought since 1955".

A volunteer firefighter working near Epuyen was in intensive care due to severe burns, health authorities told local media.

Approximately 3,000 tourists have been evacuated from the area in recent days, and at least 10 homes have been destroyed by the fire, Torres said.

The region lost 32,000 hectares to wildfires in early 2025. - AFP

Venezuela releases dozens more political prisoners

AFP
Caracas

Venezuela said yesterday that it had freed dozens more political prisoners as rights groups questioned the numbers and family members clamoured for speedier releases after the US military ouster of long-term autocrat Nicolas Maduro.

Under pressure from Washington, the government in Caracas last week said that it would free people jailed under Maduro - many of them for taking part in protests after his contested in the 2024 re-election.

Relatives have been camping out at prisons ever since and have grown increasingly restless as their loved ones have failed to appear.

Venezuela's interim President Delcy Rodriguez, despite being a staunch Maduro ally, is negotiating on several fronts with Washington, which is looking to take advantage of Venezuela's vast oil reserves.

On Sunday, Trump said he was open to a meeting with Rodriguez and said his administration was working "really well" with hers.

US envoys visited Caracas on Friday to discuss reopening Washington's embassy there seven years after diplomatic ties were severed.

Yesterday Venezuela said that 116 political prisoners had been

Machado asks Pope to intercede over political prisoners

Venezuelan opposition leader Maria Corina Machado has urged Pope Leo, during an audience at the Vatican, to "intercede" on behalf of more than 1,000 political prisoners in her country.

"I asked him to intercede for all Venezuelans who remain kidnapped and disappeared," she said after the meeting, which came just over a week after the US military ouster of long-term leader Nicolas Maduro.

"With the accompaniment of the church and the unprecedented pressure from the United States government, the defeat of evil in the country is closer," she added in a statement posted to X by her team.

The Vatican confirmed the meeting in its daily press release yesterday, but did not offer comment or further details about the encounter.

In a brief video clip released by the Vatican, the two were seen shaking hands and

Pope Leo with Machado at the Vatican. - AFP

smiling as they sat across from each other at the Pope's desk in his official office in the Vatican's Apostolic Palace.

Leo, the first US pope, has called for Venezuela to remain an independent country after the capture by US forces of Maduro on the orders of President Donald Trump.

In a major foreign policy speech on Friday, the Pope decried the use of military force as a means of achieving diplomatic goals and called for human rights to be protected in Venezuela.

Venezuela's government said on Monday

that 116 prisoners had been released, although rights groups reported a lower figure (see accompanying report).

The release of hundreds of political prisoners in the South American country is a long-running demand of human rights groups, international bodies and opposition figures.

Machado, a former National Assembly member, has been one of the leading voices calling for prisoner releases.

She was barred from running in Venezuela's 2024 general election by authorities aligned with Maduro.

Machado backed a stand-in candidate who was widely considered to have won the vote, although Maduro claimed victory.

Ballot audits by independent observers showed irregularities in the official results. - AFP/Reuters

released in recent hours, though opposition and rights groups report lower figures.

A total of around 50 people have been freed since Thursday, according to an AFP tally based on figures from non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the opposition.

The government said those freed had been jailed for "acts related to disrupting the constitutional order and undermining the Nation's stability".

Human rights groups estimate there are between 800-1,200 political prisoners in Venezuela.

Over the weekend, Trump cele-

brated the initial releases and said he hoped the freed prisoners "will remember how lucky they got that the USA came along and did what had to be done".

Experts mandated to a UN fact-finding mission said in a statement yesterday that the number of people freed so far, about 50 by its own count, "falls far short of Venezuela's international human rights obligations".

Pointing to the "widespread and systematic use of arbitrary detention as a tool of repression" in Maduro's Venezuela, it urged the "immediate and uncondi-

tional release of all political prisoners".

The government in Caracas said a review of prisoner files was on-going.

Frustration was growing among about 40 relatives still camped out yesterday outside El Rodeo prison, about 30km (19 miles) from Caracas.

Rights NGO Foro Penal said 15 people had been released from the facility, but family members told AFP that they were whisked away through a back exit without seeing the loved ones waiting for them.

"Other families are telling us that they're taken to a place near El Rodeo, asked to remove their uniforms, given civilian clothes, and even sprayed with perfume," said Daniela Camacho, who was waiting for her jailed husband Jose Daniel Mendoza.

Mendoza's father, Manuel, had driven six hours to be at the prison for his son's release, and said his patience was running low.

"We simply ask that they (the authorities) keep their word," he said. "It's already been four nights waiting out in the open air, suffering."

Mexico is ready to assist communication between Cuba and the US if requested, Sheinbaum said. She said Trump asked her about Mexico's position on Venezuela and she responded that the country opposes military interventions under its constitution. - Reuters/AFP

Virginia Commonwealth University School of the Arts in Qatar Community Education Spring Programs Now Open

Virginia Commonwealth University School of the Arts in Qatar (VCUarts Qatar), a QF partner university, has launched its Spring 2026 Community Education program, now open to the public for enrollment. The program offers nine courses running from January 2026 to May 2026, with topics ranging from artificial intelligence entrepreneurship, digital illustration, animation, branding, interior design, and 3D modeling.



The short format courses emphasize experiential learning that bridges traditional and emerging creative practices. They are designed to spark creative exploration across disciplines and are open to a wide range of learners, from teenagers to working professionals.

January kicks off with The Painter's Walk: Observing, Reflecting, Creating (ages 16+), a two-part oil painting workshop that combines outdoor observation with guided studio practice. Participants will develop their understanding of brushwork, color application, and personal style through experimentation.

On Feb. 4, a one-day Zine-Making Workshop (ages 16+) introduces participants to the history and purpose of zines while guiding them through the creation of both personal mini-zines and a collaborative group publication using collage, illustration, and rapid creative prompts.

From Idea to Startup Using AI Tools (ages 16+) offers a hands-on introduction to AI-driven



entrepreneurship, guiding participants through transforming creative ideas into venture-ready concepts. The workshop, to be held on Feb. 9, 2026, will explore real-world AI applications and invites participants to identify and respond to challenges connected to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

For more information on additional courses running through May 2026, including schedules and registration details, visit qatar.vcu.edu/community-education or contact vcucommunity@vcu.edu.

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DECISION

Australian parliament to return to pass hate speech laws

Australia's national parliament will cut short its summer break to pass laws tackling hate speech after the Bondi Beach mass shooting. Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said yesterday, as concerns were also expressed over free speech. The December 14 shooting in Sydney claimed 15 lives. Police say the alleged gunmen were inspired by the Islamic State militant group. The federal parliament will return next Monday, and Albanese said he wanted legislation to step up penalties for hate speech and authorise a gun buyback to pass the following day. The proposed laws will also ease visa denials on the ground of racial bigotry.

DATA

Australian job ads fall in December

Australian job advertisements fell for a sixth straight month in December, private-sector data showed yesterday, adding to signs that the labour market is gradually weakening. The number of job ads fell 0.5% in December from November, when they dropped by 1.5%, data from Australia and New Zealand Banking Group and employment website Indeed showed. Job ads in December were 7.4% lower than a year earlier, and remained just 6.2% higher than pre-pandemic levels. There were big declines in retail, sales and food sectors as seasonal hiring wound down, but hiring in logistics, beauty and wellness and physicians and surgeons rose.

CRITICISM

N Korea slams multilateral sanction monitoring activity

North Korea has lashed out at a special sanctions monitoring team composed of multiple countries, calling its activities "illegal" and irrelevant to the United Nations, state media KCNA reported yesterday. The Multilateral Sanctions Monitoring Team, composed of 11 countries including South Korea and the US, is aimed at monitoring and reporting Pyongyang's violations and evasions of sanctions imposed by United Nations Security Council Resolutions. A press statement by North Korea's permanent mission to the United Nations said that the US was planning to hold a briefing session at UN headquarters, KCNA reported.

MILITANCY

Bangladesh detains 53 ARSA rebels, issues border alert

Bangladesh issued a "high alert" along its Myanmar border after detaining 53 members of the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) militant group for crossing into its territory, Dhaka paramilitary officials said yesterday. At least two people have been injured since Sunday, including a 12-year-old girl who suffered a gunshot, in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar. "We are on high alert and have already detained 53 people for trespassing," Colonel Moinuddin Ahmed of paramilitary Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) said. Local witnesses said ARSA fighters were detained on Sunday after crossing into Bangladeshi territory.

Rohingya 'targeted for destruction' by Myanmar, ICJ hears

AFP
The Hague

Myanmar deliberately targeted the Rohingya minority with "horrid violence" in a bid to destroy the community, Gambia's justice minister told the International Court of Justice yesterday at the start of a genocide hearing.

"It is not about esoteric issues of international law. It is about real people, real stories and a real group of human beings. The Rohingya of Myanmar. They have been targeted for destruction," Dawda Jallow told ICJ judges.

Gambia brought the case accusing Myanmar of breaching the 1948 Genocide Convention during a crackdown in 2017.

Legal experts are watching closely as it could give clues for how the court will handle similar accusations against Israel over its military campaign in Gaza, in a case brought to the ICJ by South Africa.

Hundreds of thousands of Rohingya Muslims fled violence by the Myanmar army and Buddhist militias, escaping to neighbouring Bangladesh and bringing harrowing accounts of mass rape, arson and murder.

"They were subjected to 'the most horrific violence and destruction one could imagine,'" said Jallow.

Paul Reichler, a lawyer representing Gambia, laid out searing allegations from witnesses, including gang rapes, sexual mutilation, and infants being burned alive.

Today, 1.17mn Rohingya live crammed into dilapidated camps spread over 8,000 acres in Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh.

From there, mother-of-two Janifa Begum, 37, said: "I want to see whether the suffering we endured is reflected during the hearing."

"We want justice and peace," she said.

A final decision could take months or even years, and while the ICJ has no means of enforcing its decisions, a ruling in favour of The Gambia would heap more political pressure on Myanmar.

"We did not bring this case lightly," said Jallow.

"We brought this case after reviewing credible reports of the most brutal and vicious violations imaginable inflicted upon a vulnerable group that had been dehumanised and persecuted for many years," added the minister.

The Gambia, a country in west Africa, brought the case in 2019 to the ICJ, which rules in disputes between states.

Under the Genocide Convention, any country can file a case at the ICJ against any other it believes is in breach of the treaty.

Myanmar has always maintained the crackdown by its armed forces, known as the Tatmadaw, was justified to root out Rohingya insurgents after a series of attacks left a dozen security personnel dead.

Myanmar's junta spokesman could not be reached for comment yesterday.

In 2020, the ICJ said Myanmar must take "all measures within its

power" to halt any acts prohibited in the 1948 UN Genocide Convention.

These acts included "killing members of the group" and "deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part."

The US officially declared that the violence amounted to genocide in 2022, three years after a UN team said Myanmar harboured "genocidal intent" towards the Rohingya.

The ICJ hearings wrap up on January 29.

"When the court considers... all of the evidence taken together, the only reasonable conclusion to reach is that a genocidal intent permeated and informed Myanmar's myriad of state-led actions against the Rohingya," said Philippe Sands, arguing for The Gambia.

The ICJ is not the only court looking into possible genocide against the Rohingya - other cases are underway at the International Criminal Court and in Argentina under the principle of universal jurisdiction.

Outside the court, Tun Khin, president of the Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK, said: "We have been waiting for justice for many years.

"What's happening to the Rohingya is genocide, intentionally destroying our community. And we want to get justice. And when justice is done, we want to go back to our homeland with all our rights. And we want compensation," he added.

Coming of Age Day celebrations



Participants light up their smartphones during their Coming of Age Day celebration ceremony in Yokohama, Japan, yesterday.

Xi stresses need to win fight against corruption

Reuters
Beijing

President Xi Jinping yesterday said China's anti-corruption fight was a battle the country cannot lose, striking a firmer tone in a long-term drive to tackle the graft that has plagued many parts of Chinese society.

Beijing's "high-pressure campaign" in recent years has led to many high-profile investigations, reflecting Xi's more than decade-long drive to root out corruption and enforce discipline in the ruling Communist Party.

The arrests last year ranged from the former securities regulator chief Yi Huiman, the ex-chairman of China Eastern Airlines Liu Shaoyong, to nine top military leaders, including the country's No.2 general He Weidong.

The fight against corruption remains "severe and complex," Xi said at the start of a three-day plenary session of the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection, the country's top anti-graft watchdog, while calling for an "unwavering high-pressure stance."

"Corruption is a roadblock and stumbling stone to the party and nation's development. The fight against corruption is a major battle that we cannot afford to lose and must not lose," Xi was quoted as saying in a read-out from the state news agency Xinhua.

A record number of 65 high-ranking officials, dubbed "titans," were probed last year, up from 58 in 2024, CCDI said in early January, with the list expanding from senior government officials to former leaders of universities and state-owned enterprises.

Meta urges Australia to rethink social media ban

AFP
Sydney

Tech giant Meta yesterday urged Australia to rethink its world-first social media ban for under-16s, while reporting that it has blocked more than 544,000 accounts under the new law.

Australia has required big platforms including Meta, TikTok and YouTube to stop under-age users from holding accounts since the legislation came into force on December 10 last year.

Companies face fines of A\$49.5mn (\$33mn) if they fail to take "reasonable steps" to comply.

Billionaire Mark Zuckerberg's Meta said it had removed 331,000 under-age accounts from Instagram, 173,000 from Facebook, and 40,000 from Threads

in the week to December 11. The company said it was committed to complying with the law.

"That said, we call on the Australian government to engage with industry constructively to find a better way forward, such as incentivising all of industry to raise the standard in providing safe, privacy-preserving, age appropriate experiences online, instead of blanket bans," it said in statement.

Meta renewed an earlier call for app stores to be required to verify people's ages and get parental approval before under-16s can download an app.

This was the only way to avoid a "whack-a-mole" race to stop teens migrating to new apps to avoid the ban, the company said.

The government said it was holding social media companies to account for the harm they cause young Australians.

'Genius' chimpanzee Ai dies in Japan at 49

Ai, a "genius" chimpanzee who could recognise more than 100 Chinese characters and the English alphabet, has died aged 49, Japanese researchers said. "Ai, which means love in Japanese, took part in studies on perception, learning and memory that advanced our understanding of primate intelligence," the Centre for the Evolutionary Origins of Human Behaviour at Kyoto University said in a statement. She died on Friday from multiple organ failure and ailments related to old age, the school said.

Aside from mastering Chinese characters and the alphabet, Ai could also identify the Arabic numerals from zero to nine and 11 colours, primatologist Tetsuro Matsuzawa said in 2014. In one study, Ai was presented with a computer screen displaying the Chinese character for pink, along with a pink square and an alternative purple square. The chimpanzee correctly chose the pink square, Matsuzawa said.

Indonesia ex-minister's corruption trial



Indonesia's former education minister Nadiem Makarim attends his trial at the Corruption Court in Jakarta yesterday. Makarim, who is also a co-founder of ride-hailing app Gojek, is on trial for his involvement in a \$124mn corruption scandal linked to a government procurement project for school laptops during his tenure as education minister.

S Korea's Lee heads for Japan summit a week after meeting Xi

Reuters
Seoul

South Korean President Lee Jae Myung is set to meet with Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi today, a week after meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping, as Seoul seeks to balance ties with both neighbours.

The summit in Japan's Nara City comes amid a growing diplomatic dispute between Beijing and Tokyo, and analysts expect Takaichi to highlight the stability of three-way ties between the US, Japan and South Korea.

Lee is seeking to balance ties with China and Japan which could make it easier to reach pacts in business fields such as artificial intelligence (AI).

Lee said the conflict between China and Japan was not desirable for regional peace, but Seoul would not meddle in the ongoing row.

"It's clear that Chinese President Xi Jinping has a very negative view of Japan's position on the matter of Taiwan," Lee said during an interview with Japanese broadcaster NHK. "I think it's a matter between China and Japan, not something we should deeply involve ourselves in or

interfere with." Beijing was infuriated after Takaichi said in November a Chinese attack on Taiwan could be deemed an existential threat to Japan, which could trigger a military response from Tokyo.

China regards Taiwan as part of its territory, a claim the island's government rejects.

In the face of the tension with China, Japan may seek to bolster diplomatic ties with South Korea, possibly through a strategic partnership, said Lee Chang-min, a Japan expert at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies.

"Not only has Japan's relationship with China deteriorated,

the US has also put a little distance from Japan in its (Taiwan) stance," said Lee. South Korea's Lee and Takaichi may discuss the Japan-China dispute during their meeting, a security adviser to Lee, Wi Sung-lac said on Friday. However, South Korea is unlikely to take sides, analysts said.

Perennial concerns, such as the denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula and the fate of Japanese nationals abducted by neighbouring North Korea are also expected to figure on the agenda.

However, analysts said the areas offering the easiest scope for concrete agreements may lie in business, such as co-operation in AI and chips, and easing travel for business executives between the countries.

The two leaders are expected to extensively discuss "areas directly related to people's livelihoods... such as intellectual property and AI," Wi said.

The summit in Takaichi's home prefecture of Nara also offers Lee an opportunity to take up issues of regional cooperation, as part of a pledge to spur development in areas outside Seoul.

Ties are still plagued by long-standing tension on topics such as Japan's colonisation of Korea. Such historical issues have

moved from the centre stage of relations for now, analysts said, though some in South Korea still want them to stay high on the agenda.

Lee said South Korea's long-standing ban on seafood from Japan's Fukushima region would be a key topic discussed at the summit, though resolving the issue in the short term would be challenging due to a lack of public trust in Korea.

The South Korean president's two-day visit to Japan, shorter than his four-day trip to China, is part of "shuttle diplomacy" efforts that the two countries agreed last year.

UK investigates Musk's X over Grok deepfake concerns

Reuters
London

Britain's media regulator yesterday launched an investigation into Elon Musk's X to determine whether intimate deepfakes produced by its Grok AI chatbot violated its duty to pro-

tect people in the UK from content that could be illegal.

"There have been deeply concerning reports of the Grok AI chatbot account on X being used to create and share objectionable images of adults and children," Ofcom said in a statement.

When asked for comment yesterday on the launch of the formal

investigation, X pointed to a previous statement in which it said it takes action against illegal content on the platform, including child abuse material, by removing it, permanently suspending accounts, and working with local governments and law enforcement as necessary.

"Anyone using or prompting

Grok to make illegal content will suffer the same consequences as if they upload illegal content," it said.

The regulator is under pressure to act after Prime Minister Keir Starmer said on Thursday the images produced by Grok were "disturbing" and "unlawful".

Musk's X had to "get a grip" on

Grok, Starmer said.

Asked yesterday whether X could be banned, Business Secretary Peter Kyle said: "Yes, of course," but he noted that the power to do so lay with Ofcom.

Fellow minister Liz Kendall welcomed Ofcom's formal investigation, adding that it must be completed swiftly.

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

Additionally, tech platforms must prevent British users from encountering illegal content and remove it once they become aware of it.

Germany's Merz floats possibility of EU-India trade deal by end-Jan

Reuters
Ahmedabad, India

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz yesterday floated the possibility that the European Union and India could sign a landmark free trade agreement by the end of January, a move that could reshape global trade ties as protectionism rises and US-India talks remain stalled.

Top EU leaders would travel to India to seal the deal if negotiations wrap up in time, Merz told reporters in the western Indian city of Ahmedabad yesterday after meeting Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"In any case, they will take another major step forward to ensure that this free trade agreement comes into being," Merz said during his first trip to India since becoming chancellor.

European Union officials have yet to comment.

A trade deal, under discussion for years, is seen as a chance for both sides to strengthen economic ties and cut reliance on China and Russia. Bilateral trade between India and the EU totalled 120bn euros (\$140.21bn) in 2024, making the bloc India's biggest trading partner.

Talks have gathered pace since the US, under President Donald Trump,

raised tariffs on Indian goods and pressured New Delhi to stop buying Russian oil.

A separate India-US trade deal collapsed last year after a breakdown in communication between the two governments.

The EU-India pact would follow on the heels of the European Union's recent agreement with South America's Mercosur group and support Europe's push to build new trade networks as global rules shift.

Indian Trade Minister Piyush Goyal, speaking at a separate event in the western state of Gujarat, said an agreement was almost at its final stages.

German officials said the latest talks between Merz and Modi were "very intensive", raising hopes for a breakthrough.

The EU is pushing for steep tariff cuts on cars, medical devices and meat, along with stronger intellectual property rules, while India is seeking duty-free access for labour-intensive goods and faster recognition of its growing autos and electronics sectors.

An Indian official familiar with the talks said last month that disputes over steel, carbon levies and market access would need further compromise. The two countries signed agreements on minerals, healthcare and artificial intelligence.

(AI) during Merz's visit.

Germany, which relies on India as a growing market, is also urging New Delhi to reduce its dependence on Russian energy and arms. India still works closely with Russia, where much of its military equipment originates, on security policy, and it is one of the largest buyers of Russian gas and oil alongside China.

"We are in complete agreement in our assessment of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine," Merz said. At the same time, he understood how dependent India still is on Russian oil and gas. "Obviously, it is not that simple in India, and I am the last person to visit other countries wagging my finger at them."

Merz chose India for his first Asian trip as chancellor, highlighting a shift in strategy among European leaders, who previously focused on China.

The German chancellor said the world is experiencing "a renaissance of unfortunate protectionism" that harms Germany and India. He did not name any countries.

While the US has imposed tariffs on trading partners, China introduced export controls on minerals used in areas such as autos, causing months of supply chain disruption last year due to the US-China trade war and affecting German carmakers.

International kite festival at Sabarmati



Tourists take part in the international kite festival at the Sabarmati riverfront in Ahmedabad, India, yesterday.

India to be invited to join US-led AI initiative

AFP
New Delhi

India will be invited next month to join a new US-led initiative aimed at securing AI supply chains, the new US ambassador to New Delhi said yesterday.

Ties between the allies have plummeted after US President Donald Trump slapped 50% tariffs on most Indian imports in August over New Delhi's purchases of Russian oil, even as officials continue to negotiate a long-delayed trade agreement.

Speaking to reporters at the US embassy, ambassador Sergio

Gor said India would be asked to become a full member of the Pax Silica initiative, launched by the US last month.

The US-led endeavour includes key Asia-Pacific allies - Japan, South Korea, Singapore and Australia - as well as Israel, and is meant to counter China's growing dominance in AI supply chains.

Dubbed the "Pax Silica", after the Latin terms for peace and silicon, the alliance aims to secure supply chains of key components independent of China.

"As the world adopts new technology, it is essential that India and the US work hand-in-hand from the very start of this ini-

tiative," said Gor, ahead of his first day at work.

Gor, who described India as "no partner more essential" to the US, said he had arrived with a mandate to take ties "to the next level", calling the relationship an intersection of the "world's oldest and world's largest democracies".

The ambassador highlighted the personal rapport between Trump and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"The US and India are bound not just by shared interests, but by relationship anchored at the highest levels. Real friends can disagree, but always resolve their differences in the end," he said.

Indian rocket hits snag during launch

An Indian rocket hit a snag during its launch yesterday, forcing a deviation in flight path as it carried an Earth observation satellite and commercial payloads, the country's space agency said. The PSLV-C62, a four-stage launch vehicle, "encountered an anomaly" towards the end of the third stage, the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) posted on X, without saying exactly what went wrong. "A detailed analysis has been initiated," it added. A live stream of the launch shows the rocket blasting into the sky. However, a glitch led to a deviation in its flight path, ISRO chief V Narayanan said. India's PSLV rocket, long considered the workhorse of the national space programme, has launched several of the country's flagship missions, including its first lunar and Mars orbiters. In 2017, it set a world record by launching 104 satellites in a single mission.

Britain's premier visits Ikea store



Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer poses for a photo with members of staff during a visit to a branch of Swedish furniture store Ikea in Croydon, south London, yesterday.

Former UK envoy urged to apologise to Epstein victims

AFP
London

UK Business and Trade Minister, Peter Kyle, yesterday urged former British ambassador to Washington Peter Mandelson to apologise to the victims of his ex-friend, convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein.

Mandelson on Sunday called their friendship "a terrible mistake" but declined to apologise for his association with Epstein in his first broadcast interview since being sacked as UK envoy in September by Prime Minister Keir Starmer.

The ex-spin doctor and government minister was removed from his diplomatic post in Washington following fresh revelations about his friendship with Epstein, notably that he had maintained contact even after the American was convicted of offences.

Mandelson said he had stayed in touch because he had mistak-

enly believed Epstein's story that he had been "falsely" convicted, something he now deeply regretted.

But he insisted: "I never saw anything in his life when I was with him, when I was in his homes, that would give me any reason to suspect what this evil monster was doing in preying on these young women."

"I was not culpable," Mandelson told the BBC's Sunday with Laura Kuenssberg.

"I was not knowledgeable of what he was doing, and I regret and will regret to my dying day the fact that powerless women... were not given the protection they were entitled to expect from the American system."

But Kyle told LBC radio yesterday that anyone connected with Epstein should be "apologising whenever they are asked to do so".

"Peter Mandelson did express remorse and regret, but I just think every time you're asked to apologise, just do it," Kyle said.

Ex-Tory finance minister defects to Farage's Reform UK

AFP
London

Former UK Conservative minister Nadhim Zahawi yesterday announced he had defected to Nigel Farage's hard-right Reform UK, the latest and highest profile switch by an ex-Tory MP to the anti-immigration party.

Iraq-born Zahawi, who served briefly as finance minister in 2022 and also as chairman of the centre-right Conservatives, said Britain was "broken" and "really does need Nigel Farage as prime minister".

"I am inspired by his willingness to say difficult truths rather than

hide behind a comfortable lie," he told a news conference attended by both men.

Farage's upstart Reform - founded in 2021 from the ashes of his Brexit Party - has been leading by double-digit figures in the polls for the past year and won the most number of seats at last year's local elections in England.

That has prompted predictions the fledgling party could seize power from the ruling centre-left Labour at the next general election, due by August 2029. The party is also hoping to make serious gains in fresh local elections slated for May.

Zahawi, who was sacked as Tory chairman in January 2023 after a

scandal about his tax affairs, is just the latest of about 20 ex-Conservative lawmakers to switch to Reform in recent years.

A Conservative spokesman said Reform was "fast becoming the party of has-been politicians looking for their next gravy train".

The statement noted 58-year-old Zahawi, a former refugee who came to Britain as a child speaking no English, had previously said on social media he would be "frightened to live in a country" run by Farage, with one of his other past posts branding the Reform leader racist.

Farage has also been critical of Zahawi previously, but insisted

yesterday he had long been "a fan" of the former businessman, who co-founded the polling company YouGov before entering politics.

In the wide-ranging press conference, Farage also reiterated his opposition to Prime Minister Keir Starmer's bid to reset ties with the European Union.

Reports suggest Brussels wants a clause inserted in any deal for greater UK-EU dynamic alignment to prevent Farage rippling up the pact if he wins power.

Farage said any such clause would be "treacherous" and not in "the national interest", while arguing again that "the tragedy of Brexit is we didn't do it".



Reform UK leader Nigel Farage (left) and former Conservative Party chancellor of the exchequer, Nadhim Zahawi, share a joke after Zahawi was unveiled as a new member of Reform UK at a press conference in London yesterday.

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GULF TIMES

Trump's Greenland threat triggers search for shelter beyond gold, defence

Investors have piled fresh bets on gold and European defence stocks in response to US President Donald Trump's threats to take control of Greenland, fearing a geopolitical rift that could end Nato, shatter the global order and damage the dollar.

Although gains in both are expected to continue regardless of what happens to Greenland, investors face the dilemma of how to position for any longer-term fallout.

Trump wants to gain control of the Danish territory, through a purchase or even military means, while Greenland does not want to be part of the US, a stance supported by Europe and Canada.

While investors have previously largely ignored these aspirations, the US seizure of Venezuela's Nicolas Maduro in a surprise military raid has suddenly made them more tangible. For investors hoping for less risk after last year's tariff turmoil, the news makes for an uncomfortable start to 2026.

The US administration's threat to indict Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell has reignited concerns about its independence.

Gold jumped more than 4% last week after Maduro's capture and hit a new record high yesterday.

European defence stocks hit fresh all-time highs yesterday and last week posted their biggest weekly jump in over five years, with a 10% gain.

The soaring gold prices indicate global markets are concerned about the rising geopolitical risk.

Non-yielding gold is traditionally seen as a safe haven for investors during wider market uncertainty or volatility. Many investors have already been calling for a large exposure to gold.

The US ambitions on acquiring Greenland could have far-reaching implications, not just for Nato but also efforts to end war in Ukraine and China's tensions with Japan and Taiwan.

The US ambitions on acquiring Greenland could have far-reaching implications, not just for Nato but also efforts to end war in Ukraine and China's tensions with Japan and Taiwan

German tank maker Rheinmetall rallied 19% last week, while Sweden's Saab surged 22%.

Beyond buying gold and defence stocks, other trades are more difficult for investors to pick.

Political (and) geopolitical risk is very hard to price and markets typically do a very poor job of it, given that these are big-impact, but low-probability events. Positioning an investment portfolio for something that has a 1%, 5% chance of being realised is akin to assuming 'well, 95% of the time I'm going to be wrong.'

That helps explain why there has been little broader impact, with world stocks at near record highs and Danish government bonds rallying alongside European peers. Denmark's closely managed crown currency has been weakening, but rate differentials are a major factor and it is still close to the central rate at which it is pegged to the euro.

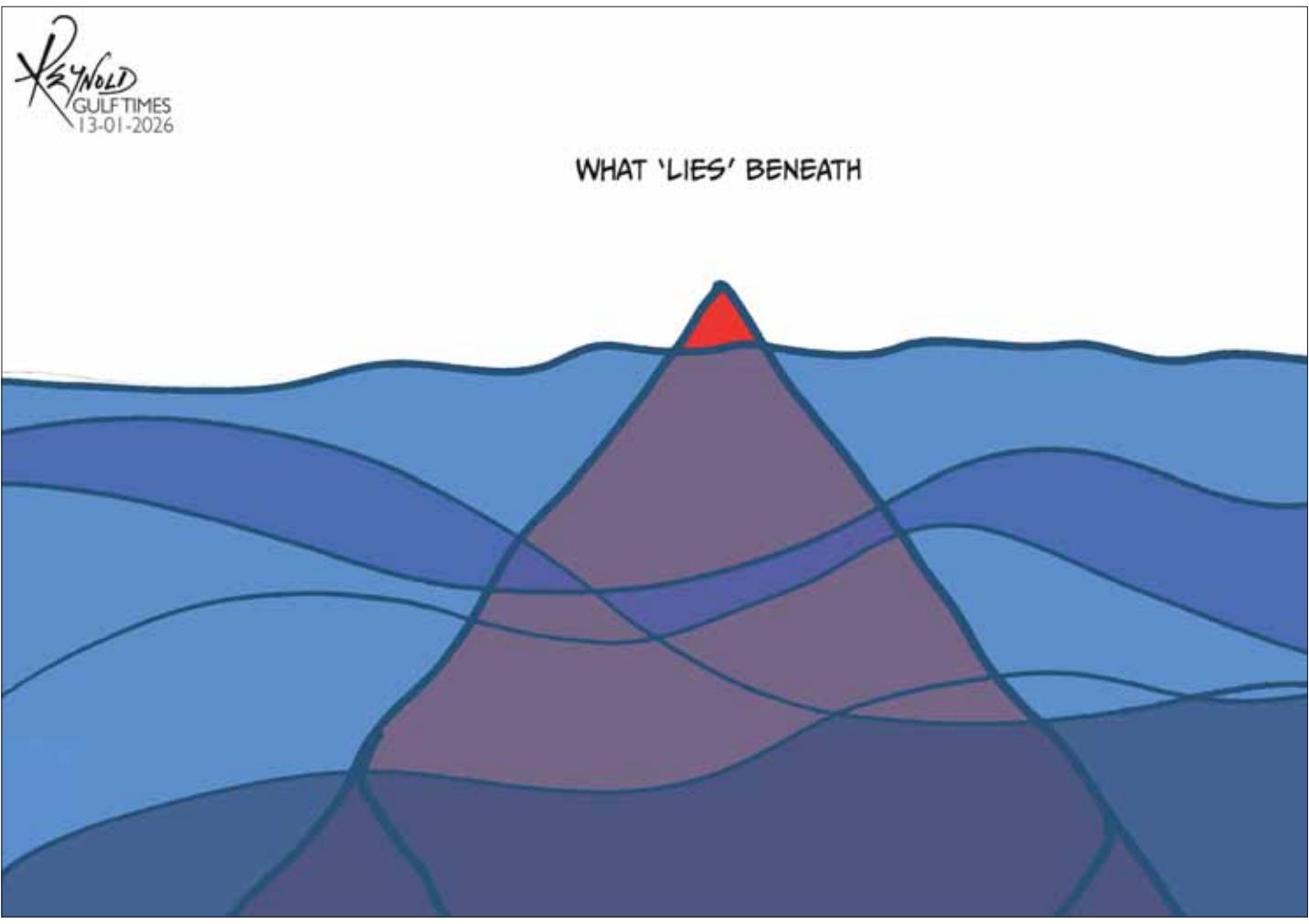
Things could change quickly if the US took a military approach to Greenland. Unlike Venezuela it would be a big deal, sparking risk aversion in equities and (the) dollar.

Traders reacted immediately when Moscow acted on its Ukraine threats, sparking major moves in oil, the euro and stocks.

If the US were to seize Greenland by force, or maybe not by force, but under some sort of coercion, a rally towards Treasuries and a sell-off in European government bonds, which quality investors wouldn't see as a haven, is quite likely.

Investors reckon that short-term, the dollar and Treasuries would benefit from a rush to safety. However, a breakdown in transatlantic relations could see that US pull fade and a return of worries about the dollar's status, which flickered around last April's tariff announcement.

It is too soon to see any signs of that shifting on the back of the US action in Venezuela or its Greenland threats, with some saying it could prompt money to move out of the US. — Reuters



Qatar-Japan co-operation 'exceptionally strong, working to develop strategic partnership'

QNA

Doha

Japan's Minister for Foreign Affairs Toshimitsu Motegi stressed that the co-operative relationship between Japan and Qatar is exceptionally strong, bound by multifaceted and robust ties, and building upon this long-standing friendship, it is crucial that the two countries further strengthen collaboration as "strategic partners".

In an interview with Qatar News Agency (QNA) on the occasion of his upcoming visit to Doha, the minister said the co-operation between Japan and Qatar dates back to the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1972. Ever since, for over half a century, relations between two countries have developed remarkably across a wide range of fields, including politics, economy, culture, and sports, he said.

Motegi added this marks his second visit to Qatar after his earlier visit in 2021, and presents an important opportunity to broaden the horizons of co-operation and coordination between the two countries and to discuss a number of important economic and political issues, including efforts to achieve peace in the region, especially in light of the developments in regional and international situations.

The minister described the co-operative relationship between the two countries as exceptionally strong, bound by multifaceted and robust ties. "Building upon this long-standing friendship, it is crucial that our two countries further strengthen collaboration as strategic partners," he said.

The minister reaffirmed the long-standing traditional friendship between Tokyo and Doha which dates back to the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1972.

"It is said that 'a friend in need is a friend indeed.' This proverb perfectly represents the relationship between our two countries. For example, Japanese companies started importing LNG from North Field ahead of companies from other countries, contributing to the development of the LNG industry that has served as the foundation of Qatar's remarkable economic development and prosperity.

During the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, Qatar extended tremendous support, including an additional supply of 4mn tonnes of LNG and \$100mn in financial aid.

Furthermore, amidst the unstable international situation, Qatar has assisted Japan in the evacuation of Japanese nationals overseas. Qatar has consistently been a true friend of Japan, helping and supporting us in times of need. The Japanese people will never forget the spirit of friendship and solidarity demonstrated by Qatar," the minister said.

He added that in the economic sphere, which forms the core of bilateral co-operation between Japan and Qatar, the two countries have mutually contributed to each other's development. Japan has done so through the development of natural gas plants and other projects, while Qatar has contributed by ensuring a stable supply of energy to Japan.

In recent years, economic activities have expanded beyond cooperation on energy and into a broad range of fields, including infrastructure development, he said.

The minister added that cultural exchanges are also active, including regional exchanges, sports, and academic exchanges.

Furthermore, at the Expo 2025 Osaka, Kansai, Japan, the Qatar pavilion attracted many visitors, showcasing Qatar's rich culture through impressive exhibits and performances.

The minister congratulated Qatar on its qualification for this year's FIFA World Cup and wished both teams - Qatar and Japan - the best of luck.



Toshimitsu Motegi

He reiterated that Japan-Qatar economic relations have developed from a basis of long-standing co-operation in the LNG sector. Japan has been deeply involved in the formation and operation of LNG projects in Qatar from their initial stages, while also ensuring stable procurement.

"Japan recognises that this co-operation has formed the foundation of our bilateral economic relationship based on trust, which goes beyond mere resource transactions. From here onward, we look forward to co-operation with higher added value, including in the LNG-related sector," he noted.

Amid the recent international discussions on energy transition, the importance of stable supply, implementation feasibility, and predictability is being reaffirmed, he added.

Under such circumstances, Japan has engaged in the development of the LNG market in Asia, emphasising the continued role of LNG while leveraging Japan's expertise in long-term contracts, infrastructure development, and operational management.

Building on this experience, he said, Japan aims to further deepen practical and constructive dialogue with Qatar, "who we consider to be a key partner."

He pointed out that Japan has contributed to Qatar's economic development in areas of critical infrastructure, such as urban transportation, air transport, power generation, and desalination. This includes the construction of the Doha Metro and Hamad International Airport. "We look forward to further deepening economic co-operation between our two countries in a wide range of areas, in addition to the energy sector, especially in light of recent developments relating to long-term investment from Qatar to Japan."

Talking about the future of economic co-operation, he emphasised that Japan holds a strong interest in the long-term course of action outlined in Qatar National Vision 2030, which emphasises industrial upgrading and human resource development.

Japan has accumulated significant experience in addressing industrial structural transformation, human resource development, and the social implementation of technology. "We can expect the economic partnership between Japan and Qatar to become more robust and substantive, by leveraging each other's strengths," the minister said.

On the bilateral level, working groups have already been established between Japan and Qatar under the ministerial-level strategic dialogue, focusing on improving the business environment and promoting investment, he said.

"Practical discussions through such frameworks serve as a crucial foundation for giving concrete form to economic co-operation between our two countries, and it is expected that the role of such frameworks will continue to grow in importance," he added.

Furthermore, long-term investment co-operation aimed at foreign direct investment to Japan is emerging between the Qatar Investment Authority and Japanese companies, he said, pointing out that Japan views long-term foreign direct investment as a

key growth factor and hopes that by improving the business and investment environment, direct investment from Qatar to Japan will continue to increase, further strengthening our bilateral economic relationship.

"Furthermore, while our economic relationship is the linchpin of our bilateral relationship, Japan is also interested in the potential for further expanding the geographical scope of the bilateral co-operation between our two countries. In this connection, Japan sees opportunities for Japanese companies to co-operate with Qatar in its recent active pursuit of investment and business expansion in third countries, such as its initiatives in Africa. Thus, it is expected that Japan and Qatar will advance their economic relations across a wide range of fields."

The Japanese foreign minister said that his first visit to Qatar was marked by the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Japan and Qatar. During that visit, the first "Strategic Dialogue" between foreign ministers was held.

During the upcoming visit, the minister intends to engage in discussions during the Strategic Dialogue on bilateral relations, including further economic co-operation in addition to various topics of international concern, including the situation in Gaza, building on his recent visit to Israel and Palestine, and exchanging views on how to co-operate for regional and global peace and prosperity with Qatar, which has been playing a constructive role toward the peace and stability of the region.

The minister said he is looking forward to having an open and frank exchange of views with HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani to further extend co-operation between Qatar and Japan.

He noted the important role played by Qatar in its regional and international environment, stressing Qatar has continuously mediated negotiations, including the ceasefire and release of hostages between Israel and Hamas, the peace negotiations between the US and the Taliban, and the negotiations over the exchange of detainees between the US and Iran, thus making significant contributions to regional stability.

Japan deeply respects the constructive role Qatar has played and highly appreciates its diplomatic efforts, the minister said while expressing solidarity with Qatar, which became a target of attacks last June and September, amid heightened tensions in the Middle East.

On the situation in Gaza, he said Japan intends to play an active role in the early recovery and reconstruction of Gaza, aiming to contribute to the realisation of a two-state solution and, by extension, to peace and stability in the Middle East.

In this regard, Japan has decided on a new assistance package worth approximately \$170mn, covering humanitarian assistance in areas such as health and food, as well as recovery and reconstruction support, including debris removal, he added.

The minister added that Japan will actively play its part through the three pillars of "Japan's efforts for sustaining peace": continuous engagement in the governance mechanism of Gaza; comprehensive support for Palestinian state-building efforts; and expanding the network of assistance through Japan's own initiatives, such as the Conference on co-operation among East Asian countries for Palestinian Development (CEAPAD).

Taking this approach, Japan is resolved to further strengthen its co-operation with Qatar, he said, adding that Japan will continue to play an active role in efforts toward achieving peace and stability in the Middle East, while working closely with Qatar and other countries concerned.

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Pakistan, Indonesia closing in on jets and drones defence deal

Deal includes sale of combat jets and drones, say sources; Indonesia defence ministry confirms air force chief in Pakistan; interest in Pakistan's JF-17 Thunder jet spiked after 2025 conflict with India

Reuters
Islamabad/Jakarta

Indonesia's defence minister met Pakistan's air force chief in Islamabad to discuss a potential deal that includes the sale of combat jets and killer drones to Jakarta, three security officials with knowledge of the meeting yesterday said. The talks come as Pakistan's defence industry moves forward with a series of defence procurement negotiations, including deals with Libya's National Army and Sudan's army, and looks to establish itself as a sizeable regional player.



A JF-17 Thunder fighter jet of the Pakistan Air Force takes off from Musahab base in Sargodha (file). The talks between Pakistan and Indonesia revolved around the sale of JF-17 jets, a multi-role combat aircraft jointly developed by Pakistan and China, and killer drones designed for surveillance and striking targets.

more than 40 JF-17 jets. One of them said Indonesia was also interested in Pakistan's Shahbar

drones. The sources did not share any discussions about delivery timelines and the number of

years a proposed deal would span. The Pakistani military's public relations wing did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

One additional security source with knowledge of military procurement talks said Pakistan was discussing the sale of JF-17 Thunder jets, air defence systems, training for junior, mid-level, and senior Indonesian air force officials, and engineering staff.

"The Indonesia deal is in the pipeline," retired Air Marshal Asim Suleiman, who remains briefed on air force deals, told Reuters, adding that the number of JF-17 jets involved was close to 40.

Indonesia's President Prabowo Subianto was in Pakistan last month for a two-day visit for talks on improving bilateral ties, including defence. Indonesia has put in a slew of orders for jets in the past few years, including 42

French Rafale jets worth \$8.1bn in 2022 and 48 KAAN fighter jets from Turkey last year to strengthen its air force and replace its ageing air force fleet. Jakarta has also considered buying China's J-10 fighter jets and is in talks to purchase US-made F-15EX jets. Interest in the Pakistani military's weapons development programme has surged since its jets were deployed in a short conflict with India last year. The JF-17s have been at the centre of that growing attention, figuring in a deal with Azerbaijan and the \$4bn weapons pact with the Libyan National Army. Pakistan is also eyeing a defence pact with Bangladesh that could include the Super Mushshak training jets and JF-17s, as ties improve with Dhaka. Reuters has also reported that Islamabad was in talks with Riyadh for a defence deal that could be worth between \$2bn and \$4bn and involves the conversion of Saudi loans into military supplies.

Pakistani students stuck in Afghanistan permitted to go home

AFP
Jalalabad

After three months, some Pakistani university students who were stuck in Afghanistan due to deadly clashes between the neighbouring countries were "permitted to go back home", Afghan border police said yesterday.

"The students from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (northwest Pakistan) who were stuck on this side of the border, only they were permitted to cross and go to their homes," said Abdullah Farooqi, Afghan border police spokesman.

The border has "not reopened" for other people, he said.

The land border has been shut since October 12, leaving many people with no affordable option of making it home.

"I am happy with the steps the Afghan government has taken to open the road for us, so that my friends and I will be able to return to our homes" during the winter break, Anees Afridi, a Pakistani medical student in eastern Afghanistan's Nangarhar province, told AFP.

However, worries remain for the hundreds of students about returning to Afghanistan after the break ends.

"If the road is still closed from that side (Pakistan), we will be forced to return to Afghanistan for our studies by air."

Flights are prohibitively expensive for most, and smuggling routes also come at great risk.

Anees hopes that by the time they return for their studies "the road will be open on both sides through talks between the two governments."

Seven Pakistani police officers killed in targeted bomb attack

Reuters
Dera Ismail Khan

Seven Pakistani police officers were killed in a targeted bomb blast on their armoured vehicle yesterday, police in the northwestern Tank district said, as Islamabad contends with a rising wave of militancy. Images of the attack showed the mangled wreckage of the vehicle overturned on the roadside. In a statement, the Islamist militant group Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan claimed responsibility for the attack. Tank deputy police chief Pervez Shah said five police personnel were killed on the spot after the remote-controlled bomb went off, while two others had died in hospital. "The brave policemen

sacrificed their today for the peaceful future of the nation," Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi said in a statement.

Pakistan's northern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, where Tank is located, has battled a resurgence of militant violence carried out primarily by Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan.

Pakistan has blamed the Afghan Taliban for providing a safe haven to TTP militants, saying they use Afghan soil to plan their strikes on targets in Pakistan. Kabul has denied the charges, saying Pakistan's security is an internal problem.

Pakistan and Afghanistan are in the midst of a fragile truce following border clashes in October that killed dozens, their worst fighting since the Taliban took power in 2021.

Le Pen's political fate hangs in the balance as French appeal begins

Reuters
Paris

French far-right leader Marine Le Pen begins a crucial appeal in Paris this week that will determine whether she can run in the 2027 presidential election, after being barred from public office over a conviction for misusing EU funds.

Le Pen, the long-time leader of the far-right National Rally (RN), was seen as a likely frontrunner in the 2027 race until she was found guilty last year of misappropriating more than 4mn euros (\$4.7mn) of EU funds and given a five-year ban from running for public office, effective immediately.

Le Pen appealed, as did the RN and 10 others found guilty of diverting European Parliament funds. The hearing begins on today and should end on February 12. A ruling is expected before the summer, meaning her hopes of running



Marine Le Pen

in 2027 remain alive if her five-year ban is revoked or drastically curtailed.

If she cannot run, Le Pen has said her protege, 30-year-old RN party president Jordan Bardella, will do so in her stead.

US President Donald Trump and senior members of his team voiced support for Le Pen after her conviction, and any move to stop her from running would likely be seized on by them in their campaign to portray Eu-

ropean courts and officials as seeking to unfairly block far-right politicians from power. Trump officials last year held internal discussions about sanctioning French prosecutors and judges involved in barring Le Pen, four sources told Reuters, although those talks no longer appear to be active.

The news, first reported by German magazine Der Spiegel, was denied by Under Secretary of State Sarah B Rogers on X on Thursday, describing it as a "fake story". A State Department spokesperson said: "We do not preview potential actions."

French government spokeswoman Maud Bregeon said on Thursday the government would remain vigilant to potential US meddling after Peimane Ghaleh-Marzban, the president of the Paris judicial court, said any move against a French judge would "constitute an unacceptable and intolerable interference in the internal affairs of our country".

Ukraine civilian deaths in 2025 highest since 2022, says UN

AFP
Kiev, Ukraine

United Nations monitors recorded more civilian deaths in Ukraine in 2025 than in any other year except 2022, as hostilities flared along the frontline and Russia expanded its use of long-range weapons, the UN's top rights body said yesterday.

The data comes as US-led diplomatic attempts to end the war have stalled, with Russia last week rejecting a draft plan that would see European countries deploy soldiers in Ukraine once the war ends.

"The total civilian casualties in Ukraine in 2025 reached at least 2,514 killed and 12,142 injured, which is a 31% increase compared to 2024," the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) said in a report published yesterday.

"Our monitoring shows that this rise was driven not only by intensified hostilities along the frontline, but also by the expanded use of long-range weapons,

which exposed civilians across the country to heightened risk," the head of the OHCHR's monitoring mission in Ukraine, Danielle Bell, said in a press release attached to the report.

There is no reliable figure as to the total number of civilians killed in Ukraine since Russia invaded in February 2022.

The UN has verified almost 15,000 civilian deaths, it said in the report, but added that the "actual extent of civilian harm ... is likely considerably higher" since it is impossible to verify many cases and there is no access to areas that have come under Russian occupation.

Those places include the port city of Mariupol, where thousands are estimated to have been killed during a weeks-long siege by Russian forces at the start of the war.

Russia's battlefield gains in Ukraine last year were also higher than in any other year except 2022, according to an AFP analysis of data from the US-based Institute for the Study of War, as Moscow pressed its advantage against outgunned and overstretched Ukrainian troops.



Professional associations in Qatar keen on community service and helping others

Professional associations in Qatar are expanding their role beyond regulation, launching social initiatives that channel legal, engineering and financial expertise into community service and support for vulnerable groups.

For instance, the Qatar Lawyers' Association launched an initiative to provide legal support to the most vulnerable groups, particularly those unable to afford litigation fees.

The Qatar Certified Public Accountants Association (QCPA) also launched the second edition of the "National Auditor" initiative for government entities, as part of the association's mission to advance the accounting and auditing profession.

It also aims to provide the necessary national workforce to serve various entities and institutions, given the significant growth witnessed by the Qatar economy.

Similarly, the Qatar Society of Engineers recently launched the "Engineers without Borders" programme, aimed at promoting a culture of institutional volunteerism and harnessing national engineering expertise to support projects with humanitarian and developmental dimensions, both inside and outside Qatar.

Some experts in the field said that the importance of these initiatives lies in their ability to put specialised professional expertise in the service of society, whether in public health, occupational safety, education and training, or environmental protection.

Moreover, these initiatives promote a culture of social responsibility, support the values of volunteerism and national belonging, and help build trust between society and professional institutions.



National Human Rights Committee deputy chairman Dr Mohamed bin Saif al-Kuwari stressed that professional associations in the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) and Arab countries have become effective contributors to social development.

He noted that their role has expanded beyond regulating professions to include growing social responsibilities through social and developmental initiatives that enhance social stability and improve quality of life.

Dr al-Kuwari explained that these initiatives are essential because they harness specialised professional expertise to serve society in areas such as public health, occupational safety, education and training, and environmental protection.

They also promote social responsibility, volunteerism, national belonging, and trust between society and professional institutions.

Dr Ahmad al-Owain, dean of Graduate Studies and Assistant Professor at the College of Sharia and Islamic Studies at Qatar University, stressed the importance of social initiatives launched by professional associations, noting that they represent a core role in serving society.

He explained that professional associations such as those of engineers, lawyers, and doctors have significantly benefited from state and community support in education and professional development, placing

them on a responsibility to give back and strengthen social cohesion.

Dr al-Owain noted that these initiatives go beyond material gains, reflecting that professions are integral to the social fabric and exist primarily to serve society.

Mubarak Abdullah al-Sulaiti, chairman of the Qatar Lawyers Association's board of directors, said that the association's role extends beyond professional and legal matters to a strong social and humanitarian commitment, rooted in its belief in social responsibility and in supporting justice, equality, and the rule of law.

He noted that the association continues to launch initiatives in co-operation with the National Human Rights Committee and other official and civil society organisations to promote legal awareness and the culture of rights and duties.

These initiatives, al-Sulaiti added, primarily provide legal support to vulnerable groups, especially those unable to afford litigation, through free legal consultations or representation by member lawyers registered as volunteers with the Human Rights Committee.

Engineer Khalid Ahmed al-Nasr, board member and secretary of the Qatar Experts and Arbitrators for Awareness and Culture Association, said that the association has established a strong presence in the professional and cultural sectors and achieved tangible results in supporting civil society and the experts and arbitrators industry in Qatar.

He noted that the association has become an effective platform for developing national competencies, enhancing the role of experts and arbitrators, and supporting the Supreme Judicial Council's goal of delivering timely justice.

In 2025, it launched several initiatives, including the Experts Forum and Arbitrators Forum, which regularly address challenges and develop solutions in line with international standards, as well as daily advisory programmes "Expert Advice" and "Arbitrator Advice", alongside training programmes, seminars, and conferences.



Single falconer clinches first place in Al Tala'a Championship

The final of Al Tala'a Championship was held yesterday with a single falconer claiming first place after other competitors' falcons failed to fly and hunt, leaving no additional positions awarded.

Al Tala'a Championship final featured five falconers: Abdulla-hadi Jaber Hussein, Ali Hassan al-Saei (with two falcons), Abdulla-hadi Ubaid al-Merri, and Shaheen Salem al-Dosari.



The competition concluded with Ali Hassan al-Saei winning first place.

In contrast, the second and third placers were withheld because the other competing falcons were unable to fly and hunt successfully.

Ali Ayash al-Mansouri, chairman of the Tala'a Championship Committee at the 17th Qatar International Falcons and Hunting Festival (Marmi 2026), said that the final round witnessed only one falconer winning among the five competitors, despite all the falcons reaching the final being champion-level birds and among the best of Tala'a falcons.

The official congratulated winner al-Saei, and wished all participants success in the next edi-

tion of the championship.

However, some groups were postponed to ensure fairness and equal opportunity for all participants.

Al-Mansouri lauded the efforts of the Tala'a Championship team, especially the judges who accompany competitors, confirming their right to qualify and win.

Meanwhile, first-place winner al-Saei expressed his happiness with the result, which crowned his efforts throughout the championship, culminating in the final.

He said that he trained hard and carefully selected the participating falcons, reaching the final with two top-tier birds, ultimately winning with one of them.

During the evening session, the 11th group of the Haddad Al Tahadi Championship was held, resulting in only one falconer qualifying for the final: Mohammad Jarallah al-Nabat, who was crowned by Muteb Mubarak al-Qahtani, chairman of the Marmi Festival, at the festival site.

Al-Nabat expressed his happiness at winning and qualifying for the Haddad Al Tahadi final, considering it a success for all goshawk owners, especially since

hunting pigeons is not easy.

The competition with Abdullah Fakhro is ongoing, and the championship is a constant contest between the peregrine falcons and pigeons, which makes Haddad Al Tahadi exciting.

Several participating falconers in the Haddad Al Tahadi lauded the festival's excellent organisation and the variety of competitions it provides, which meet their ambitions and enhance the presence of falconry as a sport.

They also stressed the importance of considering their developmental feedback.

Some falconers suggested relocating Haddad Al Tahadi field deeper into the desert, away from camps and nearby facilities, to ensure the safety of falcons, improve competition tracks, and achieve greater fairness among participants, as part of their shared commitment to enhancing the festival in future editions.

Meanwhile, the Marmi Festival organising committee announced



the start of registration for the "International Shooting" Championship, to be held on January 17, in co-operation with the Sports Shooting Club.

Registration continues until January 15 via WhatsApp at +97455215399.

Al Da'aw Championship will take place this morning, featuring competitions for peregrine falcons, locally bred free birds, and all local falcon productions.

The tournament for other categories continue until next Friday.

HMC, partners launch pilot study for early cancer detection

The Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC), in partnership with Qatar Foundation (QF), the Qatar Precision Health Institute (QPHI), Weill Cornell Medicine - Qatar, and Hamad Bin Khalifa University, has launched a pioneering pilot study highlighting how genetic research can be safely and effectively translated into practical clinical care, opening new horizons for early cancer detection and prevention.

The announcement of the study represents a strategic step placing Qatar among the world's leading nations in precision medicine.

Published in the international journal *Biomedicines*, the study is the result of a national institutional collaboration aimed at bridging the gap between scientific research and medical practice, translating genomic research findings into actionable clinical applications within Qatar's healthcare system.

The HMC reported that the study focused on harmful variants in the BRCA1 and BRCA2 genes, which are known to significantly increase the risk of breast, ovarian, and prostate cancer.

The research team successfully tested structured pathway to bridge the gap between genetic research and clinical application by returning research findings to individuals and providing them with appropriate care.

The study analysed genomic data from approximately 6,142 participants in the Qatar Biobank, identifying ten individuals carrying pathogenic or likely pathogenic variants.

After obtaining their consent, these participants underwent confirmatory testing in accredited clinics.

The benefits of the study extended beyond the initial participants to their families, with cascade testing identifying 20 additional relatives carrying the same genetic variants, enabling them to access necessary screening and preventative care.

The findings also highlighted high acceptance of genetic result disclosure among participants, with adherence to recommended follow-up care remaining at 100% over two years, reflecting the community's confidence in the country's healthcare system.

This initiative represents the first programme of its kind in an Arab population to integrate the return of medically actionable genetic results into routine clinical care, marking a significant step toward advancing precision medicine and preventative healthcare in Qatar.

The pilot study demonstrates that the Qatar Biobank's infrastructure and precision medicine capabilities can successfully transform genomic research into tangible health benefits.

By identifying cancer risk before symptoms appear, healthcare providers can offer early interventions, personalised surveillance, and proactive, informed decision-making. - QNA