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GULF TIMES
published in QATAR since 1978
THURSDAY Vol. XXXXVI No. 13621
January 15, 2026
Rajab 26, 1447 AH
www.gulf-times.com 2 Riyals

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Qatar hopeful after the US announces Phase Two of Gaza ceasefire

QNA, AFP
Doha/Washington

Qatar expressed the hope that the start of the Phase Two of the ceasefire agreement in Gaza will help stabilise the situation and address the deteriorating humanitarian conditions in the territory.

Talking to QNA, HE Adviser to the Prime Minister and Official Spokesperson for Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Majed bin Mohammed al-Ansari welcomed an announcement by US Middle East envoy Steve Witkoff on the launch of the next phase of the agreement.

Dr al-Ansari said Qatar, acting in its role as a mediator and in coordination with its partners, would continue its diplomatic efforts aimed at de-escalation and protecting civilians from the consequences of conflict.

President Donald Trump's envoy announced yesterday that a plan to end the Gaza war is moving to Phase Two with a goal of establishing technocratic governance, despite a number of Israeli strikes during the ceasefire.

"Today, on behalf of President Trump, we are announcing the launch of Phase Two of the President's 20-Point Plan to End the Gaza Conflict, moving from ceasefire to demilitarisation, technocratic governance, and reconstruction," envoy Steve Witkoff wrote on X.

The second phase includes the setup of a 15-person Palestinian technocratic committee to administer post-war Gaza. Its formation was announced earlier yesterday by Egypt, a close US ally and mediator in the conflict.

Witkoff's statement expressed gratitude to regional mediators, writing: "We are deeply grateful to Egypt, Turkiye, and Qatar for their indispensable mediation efforts that made all progress to date possible."

Meanwhile, Qatar, Egypt and Turkiye issued a joint statement, embracing the completion of a Palestinian technocratic committee to administer the Gaza Strip.

Citing the three mediators, the statement welcomed the formation of the Palestinian Technocratic Committee, headed by Dr Ali Abdel Hamid Shaath, hoping that it will contribute to strengthening efforts aimed at consolidating stability and improving the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip.

Qatar-UNOPS partnership shifts aid focus to measurable impact

By Faisal Abdulhameed al-Mudahka
Editor-in-Chief

GT Exclusive

Qatar's partnership with the UN Office for Project Services (UNOPS) is shifting aid from inputs to impact, with projects measured by outcomes, such as Gaza fuel supplies, Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) aligned finance, and education access.

UN under-secretary-general and UNOPS executive director Jorge Moreira da Silva said the agency measures success by outcomes, not outputs, aligning with Qatar's emphasis on results-based development assistance.

"We are an organisation that focuses on outcomes rather than outputs. This means that we evaluate all our projects based on their impact on the people we serve. Instead of counting billions or millions of dollars, we are interested in counting the number of individuals who benefit from each project," Da Silva told *Gulf Times* in an exclusive interview.

Asked how UNOPS measures its success and how tools like SDG-aligned finance and impact standards change how projects are designed and assessed, Da Silva emphasised that mobilising finance alone is insufficient, and stressed the need to prioritise fragile contexts where Qatar is active.

UN under-secretary-general and UNOPS executive director Jorge Moreira da Silva.
PICTURE: Shaji Kayamkulam

"I hear lots of conversation about finance, going from billions to trillions of dollars. But we shall not confuse the need for mobilisation with the need for alignment. We need to mobilise more. Today, we are facing a $4tn gap annually to reach the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Developing countries need additionally every year $4tn, so this is the gap," Da Silva explained.

He continued: "But the issue is not just the gap, it's the misalignment. If you go through all sources of finance, blended finance, impact investment, and foreign direct investment, the support to the most fragile context has not been prioritised. Only 7% of the blended finance goes to low-income countries.

"Only 10% of foreign direct investment goes to fragile contexts. So, the point is not just about mobilisation of finance, it's ensuring that we prioritise those contexts where the needs are greatest, namely conflict-affected countries, countries affected by the climate crisis, and that's why measuring impact matters."

On how UNOPS translates Qatar's financial and diplomatic commitments into projects that deliver measurable impact, Da Silva cited fuel as an example, noting that fuel supplies in Gaza illustrate how Qatar's financial support translates into tangible outcomes, powering hospitals, schools, and bakeries, among others.

Da Silva said: "Fuel is not just about fuel. In Gaza, fuel is the only way for people to have access to basic needs. In other parts of the world, people have access to energy through electricity, gas, renewable energy, and many other sources via several transmission pathways." To Page 3

'I Chose Sports': Over 800 events planned for National Sport Day

Committee unveils ambitious calendar for healthy lifestyle

By A Staff Reporter
Doha

Qatar is transforming its National Sport Day from a single annual celebration into a year-round movement, with organisers announcing over 800 events planned for 2026 under the new motto "I Chose Sports".

At a press conference yesterday at Lusail Sports Hall, the National Sport Day Committee revealed an ambitious calendar aimed at making physical activity a fundamental part of daily life for all residents, rather than just a once-a-year observance.

The announcement builds on impressive momentum from 2025, when the Qatar Sports for All Federation (QSFA) organised 834 events — exceeding its original target of 750 — and attracted 216,000 participants across the country. That represents a 10,000-person increase over 2024's total of 206,000 participants.

Committee Chairman Abdulrahman bin Muslim al-Dosari, who also serves as QSFA president, said the new motto reflects a fundamental shift in how Qatar approaches sports and wellness.

"The choice of this motto underscores the transformation of practising sports into a decision and responsible societal awareness," al-Dosari said. "We're contributing to the enhancement of quality of life and public health, making sports an effective tool in building a productive, active, and creative society."

Al-Dosari emphasised that National Sport Day has morphed from merely an annual event into a national platform for embracing a culture of physical activity and balance, reinforcing health values within Qatari society. To Page 3

Qatar: Security of citizens and residents is top priority

MoI assures public as precautionary measures continue

By A Staff Reporter
Doha

The International Media Office (IMO) of the State of Qatar yesterday said the departure of certain personnel from Al Udeid Air Base is being undertaken in response to current regional tensions.

In a statement addressing media reports circulating on the issue, the IMO said:

"With reference to circulating media reports regarding the departure of certain personnel from Al Udeid Air Base, the International Media Office (IMO) of the State of Qatar states that such measures are being undertaken in response to the current regional tensions."

The IMO reaffirmed that safeguarding the security and safety of citizens and residents remains a top priority for the State of Qatar.

"The IMO reaffirms that the State of Qatar continues to implement all necessary measures to safeguard the security and safety of its citizens and residents as a top priority, including actions related to the protection of critical infrastructure and military facilities," the statement said.

The office added that any further developments would be communicated through official channels.

"The IMO further notes that should any developments arise, it will be communicated through the official designated channels," the statement said. To Page 3

Amir, Pakistan PM mull developments

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani discussed yesterday with Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif the latest regional and international developments of joint interest, particularly de-escalation, enhancing dialogue, empowering peaceful solutions, and supporting diplomatic efforts aiming to support security and stability in the region. This followed a telephone call His Highness the Amir held with Prime Minister Sharif. They also dealt with discussed bilateral relations and the means to enhance them.

The Pakistan Prime Minister's Office (PMO) reported that Sharif appreciated Qatar's constructive and proactive role in promoting peace, dialogue, and mediation across the region, and acknowledged its meaningful efforts to defuse tensions through diplomatic solutions. He assured the Qatari leadership that Pakistan would also continue to play a positive role in maintaining regional peace and stability. (**QNA**)

Cabinet updates National Qualifications Framework

HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani chaired the Cabinet's regular meeting yesterday morning at the Amiri Diwan.

Following the meeting, HE the Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Ibrahim bin Ali al-Mohannadi announced the Cabinet's decisions.

The Cabinet welcomed the outcomes of the third Qatari-Japanese Strategic Dialogue held in Doha on Tuesday, co-chaired by HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Japanese Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi.

On education, the Cabinet approved adoption of the updated National Qualifications Framework (NQF), aligning it with Qatar National Vision 2030, the Third National Development Strategy, and requirements of contemporary educational and technological development in line with latest standards.

On legislative matters, the Cabinet was briefed on the Shura Council's approval of a draft law amending provisions of Decree Law No 24 of 2019 on regulation and management of the strategic stockpile of food and consumer goods. To Page 3

UN declares Qatar's digital vision a global model

By A Staff Reporter
Doha

The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) has recognised Qatar's Digital Agenda 2030 as a global best practice in digital government and transformation, marking a pivotal moment in the nation's emergence as a leader in strategic technological development.

According to the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, the international validation reflects Qatar's success in building a comprehensive digital ecosystem — one that seamlessly integrates long-term strategic vision with systematic execution while anchoring digital transformation directly to sustainable development objectives. Qatar's approach now serves as a blueprint for nations worldwide seeking to align technological advancement with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

Following rigorous evaluation by the UN's Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government (DPIDG), the Digital Agenda 2030 was distinguished for its strategic sophistication: its clear integration with Qatar National Vision 2030, its commitment to ensuring technology serves all segments of society, and its robust support for knowledge-driven innovation.

The UN particularly praised Qatar's achievement in balancing cutting-edge technological adoption with principles of inclusivity and sustainability — an equilibrium that positions the nation as both a regional and global hub for excellence in digital governance.

As the national blueprint for digital transformation and a core pillar of both Qatar National Vision 2030 and the Third National Development Strategy 2024-2030, the Digital Agenda is built on three foundational technological pathways: universal connectivity that unites all elements of the digital society, high-performance computing to maximise data-processing capabilities, and AI-driven integrated automation that supports resilient, scalable infrastructure.

The agenda's strength lies in its comprehensive architecture of six interconnected pillars: advanced and secure digital infrastructure, enhanced digital government efficiency, national capacity-building in digital technologies and data science, stimulation of digital innovation and economic growth, and the cultivation of a digitally capable society prepared for rapid change. Together, these elements have transformed digital advancement from a technological initiative into a holistic development strategy — one that strengthens governance, drives economic prosperity, and positions Qatar for the demands of tomorrow.

QATAR

IPU session concludes in Doha

The 298th session of the Executive Committee of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), hosted by the Shura Council, concluded in Doha yesterday. The two-day session deliberated on an array of subjects on the agenda, foremost of which was the evaluation of the implementation of the IPU's current strategy, the general directions of the upcoming five-year strategy, along with a wide range of organisational and parliamentary issues related to reinforcing the IPU's role and the effectiveness of its mechanisms.

HE Deputy Speaker of the Shura Council, Dr Hamda bint Hassan al-Sulaiti, who is also a Member of the Executive Committee of the IPU and Vice-President of the Committee representing the Arab Group within the Union, affirmed that the session constituted a consequential milestone for evaluating the Union's operational path. She emphasised that the event produced outcomes that would help advance the IPU's mechanisms and effectiveness in addressing the current challenges facing international parliamentary action.

The convened discussions demonstrated the commitment of the Executive Committee's members to boosting joint parliamentary action, deepening the multilateral parliamentary co-operation approach as an effective tool in supporting dialogue, coordinating positions, and sharing expertise among national parliaments, thereby contributing to achieving the IPU's objectives and responding to peoples' aspirations, Dr Hamda pointed out.

In addition, Dr Hamda underscored the Shura Council's commitment to forging ahead in positively contributing to international parliamentary co-operation pathways and fostering partnerships with regional and global parliamentary institutions and parliaments, stemming from its belief in the importance of collective work to deepen peace and development and confront common challenges on multiple levels. **(QNA)**

Amir receives message from Guinea president

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani received a written message from Guinea President Mamady Doumbouya, pertaining to enhancing bilateral relations and ways to support and develop them. HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Mohammed bin Abdulaziz al-Khulaifi received the message during his meeting with Guinea ambassador to Qatar Thierno Abdoulaye Sow. **(QNA)**

Official

Amir sends cables of condolences to Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, His Highness the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani and HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani sent cables of condolences to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz al-Saud of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, on the passing of Princess Hind bint Saud bin Abdulaziz al-Saud. **(QNA)**

NHRC set to hold 4th national forum on Jan 20-21

By Tawfik Lamari
Staff Reporter

The National Human Rights Committee (NHRC) announced yesterday that it will hold its 4th national forum between January 20-21, bringing together government bodies, international organisations, and civil society to examine drug control through a human rights lens amid growing global trafficking and rising drug use.

The event, themed 'Human Rights at the Heart of Combating Drugs: Challenges and Prospects for Sustainable Solutions' will take place in partnership with the Ministry of Social Development and Family (MSDF), the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE), and the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH), with the participation of the Public Prosecution, the National Planning Council (NPC), the National Cyber Security Agency (NCSA), alongside relevant UN offices, and civil society institutions.

Dr Mohammed bin Saif al-Kuwari, vice-chairman of the NHRC, said: "Our choice of this topic reflects the challenges facing the entire world due to the growing phenomenon of drug and psychotropic substance trafficking globally, and the rising rates of drug use according to international reports. "It also reflects our deep understanding of its negative impact on human rights, in addition to the fact that it constitutes an obstacle to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals."

Dr al-Kuwari noted that Qatar is free from the grave risks associated with this deadly scourge, thanks to the legislation, public policies, and measures implemented to combat trafficking and smuggling networks and mitigate their serious health, social, economic, and security consequences.

He stressed the importance of developing these measures and strengthening the mechanisms to keep pace with global challenges and the rapidly evolving methods and means of drug smuggling and distribution. Dr al-Kuwari said the forum aims to adopt a comprehensive, human rights-based approach to legislation, public policy, and counter-narcotics strategies. This approach also emphasises the rehabilitation and reintegration of individuals affected by substance abuse and addiction, in alignment with the principles of Qatar's Permanent Constitution, Qatar National Vision 2030, and international human rights obligations.

Officials at the media event announcing the 4th national forum of NHRC.

He highlighted the key role of the Ministry of Interior (MoI) in law enforcement and in implementing preventive measures to safeguard society from the harms of drugs. He stressed the need for coordinated efforts among relevant authorities and the engagement of diverse stakeholders to address evolving challenges, especially those arising from the misuse of artificial intelligence and new technologies to facilitate drug trafficking.

This collaborative approach, he noted, is intended to strengthen Qatar's internationally recognised leadership in prevention and control. Dr al-Kuwari said the forum will review legislation, public policies, and prevention and control plans, as well as examine the challenges facing efforts to rehabilitate and reintegrate drug users into society. It will also explore the most effective means of raising public awareness about the dangers of drugs and the illicit use of psychoactive substances. Brigadier Saad Salem al-Dosari, assistant director of the Human Rights Department at the Ministry of Interior (MoI), underlined the depth of the constructive partnership between the MoI and NHRC. This partnership is based on the Memorandum of Understanding signed by the two parties in 2018, which has led to the organisation of numerous joint events, training courses, and specialised awareness workshops on human rights.

Brig al-Dosari said this forum will serve as an effective national platform and a distinguished opportunity to exchange expertise and experiences in combating drugs. It also supports and strengthens the Ministry of Interior's 2024-2030 strategy, particularly its second strategic objective to protect society from drugs, which is considered one of the most prominent challenges to the security and safety of individuals and communities.

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Cabinet updates National Qualifications Framework

From Page 1

The draft law aims to ensure timely availability of strategic commodities and enhance stockpile management efficiency.
The Cabinet approved a draft decision by HE the Minister of State for Energy Affairs regulating district cooling service fees and licensing. The draft completes the regulatory framework of Law No 19 of 2024 on district cooling services regulation. The Cabinet decided the draft be posted on the Civil Service and Government Development Bureau's "Sharek" platform for seven days to solicit public feedback before legislative review.
On international agreements, the Cabinet decided to take necessary measures to ratify a memorandum of understanding for co-operation in radio and television broadcasting between Qatar Media Corporation and the Saudi Broadcasting Authority, as well as an agreement between Qatar and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), International Development Association (IDA), International Finance Corporation (IFC), Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA), and International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID) regarding establishing and operating offices in Qatar.
The Cabinet approved the draft executive programme for 2026-2027 within the framework of the memorandum of understanding for youth cooperation between Qatar and Turkmenistan, signed on March 20, 2023. (**QNA**)

Amir sends cables of congratulations to Guinea president

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani and His Highness the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani sent cables of congratulations to Mamady Doumbouya following his election as president of the Republic of Guinea. His Highness the Amir wished President Doumbouya success in his duties and expressed hope for continued growth and development in relations between Qatar and Guinea. **(QNA)**

Qatar condemns attack targeting Pakistani police

The State of Qatar expressed its condemnation and denunciation of the attack that targeted a police vehicle in northwestern Pakistan, resulting in deaths and injuries. In a statement, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs reiterated Qatar's firm stance against violence and terrorism, regardless of the motives or reasons. The ministry expressed the State of Qatar's condolences to the families of the victims and to the government and people of Pakistan, and its wishes for a speedy recovery for the injured. **(QNA)**

Minister of state meets Speaker of Australia's House of Representatives

HE the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sultan bin Saad al-Muraikhi met yesterday with Speaker of the House of Representatives of Australia Milton Dick, who is currently visiting the country. During the meeting, the two sides reviewed co-operation relations, as well as ways to support and strengthen them. **(QNA)**

Qatar plays influential role on regional, global stages: Aussie Speaker

QNA
Doha

The Speaker of the House of Representatives of Australia, Milton Dick, underlined that the State of Qatar has played an influential role on the global stage, stressing that it has become one of the nations that possess vibrant and energetic characteristics both in the regional and global spheres.

Speaking to Qatar News Agency (QNA) on the sidelines of his participation in the meeting of the Executive Committee of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) in Doha, Dick underscored the importance of hosting the 298th session of the Executive Committee of the IPU, which promotes Qatar's standing as one of the active members of the Union.

He highlighted the role Qatar plays in organisation and active participation, emphasising that he is honoured to work side by side with the Qatari side in the Executive Committee in his capacity as representative of the Asian group, reflecting Qatar's strong engagement in international parliamentary forums.

Addressing the parliamentary relationship between Australia and countries in the Middle East, the speaker emphasised that it is warm and strong. He noted that the Australian and Qatari parliaments have established parliamentary friendship groups that contribute to strengthening parliamentary diplomacy, supported by the ambassadors of the two nations.

Dick affirmed that the establishment of these friendship groups was among the reasons they wanted to visit Qatar. He added that his visit to the Shura Council's headquarters and meeting with the Australian-Qatari Parliamentary Friendship Group reflected the strength of the bilateral relationship, expressing that he looks forward to further great parliamentary co-operation and partnership between the two sides based on strong foundations.

The Australian Speaker said that the IPU meetings deal with multiple issues across the globe amid the participation of 138 member countries and nearly 44,000 parliamentarians, including global conflicts, strengthening communications between parliaments and citizens, climate change and gender equality, youth empowerment, and economic equality. He noted that these issues concern all countries without exception.

Finally, he stressed that parliamentary diplomacy was required more than ever amid the conflicts spreading across the continents, suggesting that parliamentarians are in need more than ever to sit down together, find common solutions, strengthen peace, and make sure that citizens are represented.

He added that there is a need to build and secure safe environments, and this was exactly the IPU mandate when it was established.

Qatar-UNOPS partnership shifts aid focus to measurable impact

From Page 1

He further pointed out: "In Gaza, that is not possible; Gaza is totally dependent on fuel. So, without the power station functioning, without the transmission lines being activated, the only way to bring the energy to the bakeries, hospitals, schools, sewage, and desalination facilities is through fuel.

"That's why we have had the chance to benefit from the financial support from Qatar. And with the Qatar financial support, we can go to the market, procure fuel, and bring the fuel to Gaza. As we distribute the fuel, we also distribute it to other UN agencies."

On transparency mechanisms, Da Silva noted that UNOPS has introduced systems to ensure aid reaches beneficiaries without leakage or politicisation, including the UN 2720 Mechanism in Gaza.

Da Silva also underscored the importance of infrastructure and climate change, stating that resilient infrastructure is central to achieving the SDGs, offering Qatar opportunities for deeper cooperation.

According to a research piece that UNOPS has conducted with Oxford University, da Silva said "92%" of the SDGs depend on infrastructure. More than "80%" of the greenhouse gas emissions are related to infrastructure, he noted.

"This means that unless we get it right – the infrastructure work – we won't deliver on the sustainable development goals and on climate action. That's why it's so important to invest in infrastructure," he stressed.

Da Silva lamented that today, there are "700mn" people without access to electricity, while another "2bn" people don't have access to clean water. He said "2.4bn" don't have access to sanitation, and "3bn" people worldwide are offline, lacking access to digital platforms.

"It's impossible to fix issues on education, health, energy, or water, unless we invest in infrastructure. However, investing in infrastructure can't be just about going green; it's also about resilient infrastructure. Unfortunately, the reality is that the conflict-stricken countries are, at the same time, countries facing the disproportionate impact on climate," Da Silva explained.

'I Chose Sports': Over 800 events planned for National Sport Day

From Page 1

"Sports are not a temporary activity, but a lifestyle reflecting awareness and a spirit of responsibility toward oneself and society," he said. "This day represents an annual opportunity to strengthen and embed this awareness, consistent with the nation's vision to build a healthy, active, and sustainable society."

QSFA Executive Director Abdullah al-Dosari presented detailed statistics demonstrating the program's reach across all regions—from the north and south to central Doha, extending westward to Dukhan and Al Jumailiya, in addition to public parks, youth centres, and sports clubs.

The 365 Days of Activity programme alone drew 35,000 participants across four different parks, with residents taking part in 1,460 sports sessions under the supervision of 36 community coaches — representing a clear improvement in participation rates compared to the previous year.

Farjan football fields proved particularly popular, with 58,751 registered participants across 16 fields. Walking and running activities at these facilities recorded an additional 13,800 participants.

School programmes engaged 22,259 students across 91 events at 60 schools — a number higher than previously achieved. Community events at more than 52 locations drew 40,593 participants, while sports championships attracted 6,984 competitors across 74 competitions.

Community running events saw participation climb to 38,696 people, while women's involvement reached 8,000 across 59 races — achieving what organisers described as great success and growing engagement.

The "Sports for All" mobile application has become a comprehensive platform for tracking participation, recording individual walking activities and steps, managing event tickets, and registering for races. More than 73,000 people downloaded the application in 2025.

Looking ahead to 2026, the executive director expressed confidence that the federation will maintain the same high quality across all planned activities while collaborating with public and private partners to ensure nationwide distribution and encourage participation from all segments of society.

Qatar: Security of citizens and residents is top priority

From Page 1

The Ministry of Interior has reiterated its reassurance to the public amid evolving regional developments, underscoring that security and safety remain paramount.

"In light of regional developments, and as part of the Ministry of Interior's commitment to ensuring the security and safety of citizens, residents, and visitors in the State of Qatar, the Ministry affirms, in coordination with the relevant authorities, that it continues to implement the necessary precautionary measures to ensure the safety of everyone, which remains its highest priority at all times. Accordingly, the public will be kept informed of any developments and the measures required to be taken in due course," it said in a statement last night.

The ministry also emphasised the importance of obtaining information from official, authorised sources, while assuring that the competent authorities "will not hesitate to take all legal measures against anyone proven to be involved in spreading false information that undermines public security".

The statements follow Qatar diplomatic engagement aimed at easing tensions in the region. HE the Spokesman for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dr Majed bin Mohammed al-Ansari, said on Tuesday that Qatar is a party to communications focused on de-escalating regional tensions and resolving the dispute between Washington and Tehran.

He emphasised that "diplomacy is the effective way to resolve the region's crises, and we are working on this with our neighbours and partners."

Speaking at the weekly press briefing, Dr al-Ansari added: "We are not talking about war at the moment, but rather expectations of a possible military escalation in the region, and we are striving for de-escalation."

QATAR

Top experts to attend Sidra Medicine's paediatric conference from tomorrow

By Joseph Varghese
Staff Reporter

Sidra Medicine will host the 10th edition of its Qatar Paediatric Emergency Medicine (QPEM 2026), international conference from tomorrow focusing on the realities of paediatric emergency care.

"From its early years, QPEM has evolved from a teaching forum into a platform that actively supports research, quality improvement, and knowledge translation. The conference encourages participants to present original work, audits, and system-level innovations grounded in real clinical environments," Dr Syed Huda, attending physician and education lead at Emergency Department, Sidra Medicine and the scientific committee chairman of the conference told *Gulf Times*.

Dr Huda noted that discussions at the virtual conference taking place from January 16-18 will centre on high-risk, low-frequency emergencies such as complex paediatric airway management, trauma, sepsis and sudden cardiac or metabolic collapse.

"Beyond clinical knowledge, there is strong emphasis on team leadership, human factors, patient safety and decision-making under pressure, recognising that outcomes in paediatric emergencies are shaped as much by systems and teamwork as by individual expertise. QPEM 2026 also addresses the challenges faced by rapidly growing health systems, including overcrowding, resource variability and the need for reliable resuscitation performance across multidisciplinary teams," explained Dr Huda. According to Dr Huda, by bringing together clinicians, educators, and researchers, QPEM facilitates collaboration across institutions and disciplines, allowing ideas tested locally to be refined, evaluated, and shared regionally.

"Importantly, QPEM places value on applied research work that informs practice, improves patient flow, strengthens resuscitation systems, and enhances team performance, ensuring that knowledge generated at the conference has practical impact beyond the lecture hall," he said.

Dr Syed Huda

The physician stated that the most significant impact of QPEM has been the development of a shared paediatric emergency care culture across the region.

"Over time, the conference has helped standardise approaches to paediatric resuscitation, strengthen interprofessional collaboration, and elevate expectations around safety, leadership, and preparedness. It has contributed to workforce development by supporting trainees, fellows, nurses, and allied health professionals, while also creating a professional network that continues well beyond the conference itself."

He remarked that Sidra Medicine advances paediatric care by combining tertiary clinical services with education, research, and system leadership.

"As a dedicated women's and children's hospital, it provides highly specialised care for complex paediatric conditions while also serving as a national referral centre. Beyond direct patient care, Sidra Medicine plays a critical role in training the paediatric and emergency workforce, developing clinical pathways, and contributing to international research collaborations.

"Its model is intentionally outward-looking, sharing expertise, supporting regional capability building, and aligning care delivery with global best practices adapted to local needs," added Dr Huda.

Global Carbon Council, AFoCO in pact to bridge $216bn forest finance gap

The Global Carbon Council (GCC) and the Asian Forest Co-operation Organisation (AFoCO) have signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to strengthen co-operation in addressing global climate change by promoting Nature-based solutions and fostering an enabling, high-integrity carbon market ecosystem across Asia.

The MoU was signed during a formal ceremony by Dr Yousef Alhorr, founding chairman of GCC and Dr Chongho Park, executive director of AFoCO.

The partnership was initiated not only in response to UNEP's inaugural State of Finance for Forests report, which highlights the significant global shortfall in forest and environmental finance, but also to align with broader international efforts aimed at forest restoration, resilience, and long-term sustainability. The partnership seeks to leverage carbon-based incentives in line with the Paris Agreement, particularly Article 6, as a means to mobilise private sector engagement through internationally aligned carbon market mechanisms.

According to the report, annual forest investments must more than triple from $84bn in 2023 to $300bn by 2030 to meet global climate and biodiversity targets.

Currently, the world faces a forest finance gap of $216bn per year, underscoring the need for scalable and credible market-based solutions. To this end, the agreement between GCC and AFoCO establishes a co-operative framework to support sustainable, verifiable, and impactful forestry and climate initiatives across the region.

Through this MoU, the two organisations will promote collaboration on Public–Private Partnership based Nature-based Solutions carbon incentive programmes, aligned with the Land Use, Land-Use Change and Forestry initiatives implemented by AFoCO to strengthen climate change mitigation, adaptation, and resilience.

The partnership aims to ensure that outcomes from nature-based solutions projects are transparent, credible, and aligned with international standards, while contributing to community resilience and long-term sustainability through AFoCO's member country co-operation platform, where relevant and appropriate.

Dr Alhorr stated: "Forests are our most effective natural defence against global warming. Recent data shows that Asian forest sinks are already removing nearly one billion tonnes of CO_2 every year, making the region one of the most productive carbon absorbers on the planet. By scaling Nature-based solutions through our partnership with the Asian Forest Co-operation Organisation, we are bringing together technical expertise, strong governance, and innovative carbon market frameworks to deliver measurable, high-integrity outcomes that benefit both people and the planet."

Dr Chongho Park, executive director of AFoCO, added: "Our collaboration with the Global Carbon Council strengthens our ability to provide member countries with the tools, knowledge, and capacity needed to systematically scale sustainable forestry and nature-based projects. Together, we aim to create long-term positive impacts for communities, ecosystems, and the climate."

Following the signing of the MoU, the two organisations will establish a joint working group to identify priority initiatives, co-ordinate technical support, and progressively implement the co-operation framework through targeted events, workshops, and joint activities.

أمـــواج
AMWAJ

AMWAJ Catering Services Company announces the following:

Auction Ref. No.	Description	Bid Bond / Cheque	Bid Closing Date
021	Vehicle Auction	QR. 10,000/-	25 January 2026 @ 12:00 NN

- Auction documents will be available for collection until 21 January 2026.
  Location : AMWAJ Corporate Office at 4th Floor, Alaqaria Building, Museum St. Old Salata (next to Doha City)
  Date of releasing Bid Documents : 15 – 21 January 2026
  Time : From 9:00 AM – 1:00 PM
  Contact Number : 44912175
- **Bid Bond (Bank Guarantee) / Cheque** must be enclosed along with the offer. Bids without **Bid Bond** will be rejected.
- Auction documents will be released only to authorized company representatives with the following documentations:
  i. Copy of company's valid Commercial Registration Document
  ii. Letter of Authorization on Company Letter Head
  iii. Valid Qatari I.D.

Katara event showcases culinary heritage of Iraq

In celebration of the Iraqi heritage, the Katara Cultural Village Foundation organised a Gastronomy Event in co-operation with the Iraq embassy in Qatar, at Hall 32 in Katara.

This event aligns with Katara's cultural mission aimed at broadening horizons of intercultural exchange, fostering closer ties among the diverse customs and traditions shared by the people of the region, and reinforcing common human values.

The event featured the presentation of the traditional Iraqi dish Dolma, one of the most prominent symbols of Iraqi cuisine, alongside traditional Iraqi tea and sweets, in an atmosphere that reflected the depth of Iraqi cultural heritage and the richness of its diversity.

In his remarks during the event, Iraq ambassador to Qatar, Mohammed Jaafar al-Sadr, expressed his deep gratitude to the Katara Cultural Village Foundation for the cultural initiative. He also expressed his hope for continued co-operation through the organisation of future events that showcase Iraqi heritage in various cultural and artistic fields.

The event featured the presentation of the traditional Iraqi dish Dolma, one of the most prominent symbols of Iraqi cuisine, alongside traditional Iraqi tea and sweets

The Katara Cultural Village Foundation continues to organise a series of cultural events in co-operation with accredited diplomatic missions to the State, contributing to the strengthening of mutual understanding among people and enhancing Doha's position as a global destination for civilisational dialogue and cultural diversity. **(QNA)**

Judicial auctions net over QR65.6mn

The Evictions and Judicial Auctions Department at the Supreme Judiciary Council conducted a number of auctions on January 11, generating proceeds of QR65,648,361, which were allocated to 513 cases, with a total of 2,265 bids.

الهلال الأحمر القطري
Qatar Red Crescent

Qatar Red Crescent – Medical Affairs Division

Tenders Announcement: -

Sr. #	Tender No.	Description	Documents Fees (Non-Refundable)	Temporary Tender Bond	Closing Date
1	QRC/EMS/01-2026	Purchase and supply of 10 ambulances (Type II) according to the conditions and specifications	2000 Q.R	200,000 Q.R	08-02-2026
2	QRC/EMS/02-2026	Purchase and supply of Mobile Clinic Vehicle according to the conditions and specifications	500 Q.R	50,000 Q.R	08-02-2026

The documents can be collected from Medical Affairs Division, Ain Khalid Area, Sunday to Thursday from 09:00 am to 02:00 pm till the closing date or by sending email along with the requested documents below.

Required Documents:
1.Authorization letter to receive tender documents + ID copy of the person will be receiving the documents.
2.Company's Commercial registration copy.
3.Bank deposit voucher with the value of documents not refunded & account details:
- Account Name: Qatar Red Crescent.
- Bank: Al Rayan.
- Account Number: 0003-100689-200
- IBAN Number: QA09MAFR00000000003100689200

For more information: please call: (50044554), or Email: whc.tenders@qrcs.org.qa

قطر للطاقة
QatarEnergy
LNG

QatarEnergy LNG
Tender Invitation

No.	TENDER NUMBER / DESCRIPTION	TENDER ISSUE PERIOD	TENDER FEE (QAR)	TENDER BOND (USD)	TENDER CLOSING DATE
1	SUP/C/OOS/7434/25 PROVISION OF MDEA RECLAMATION SERVICES ON CALL-OFF BASIS	14/01/2026 to 21/01/2026	0	0	29/01/2026

Scope of Work:
QatarEnergy LNG requires Methyl Diethanolamine (MDEA) solvent reclamation services to remove the Heat Stable Salts (HSS) and Amino Acids/Bicines from the MDEA solution of Sulfur Recovery Unit using a Mobile Ion Exchange Unit for South Site Trains 7 & 3 located at Ras Laffan Industrial City, State of Qatar. The MDEA solvent reclamation services are expected to reduce the HSS and Amino Acids/Bicines from MDEA solvent of its facilities to meet the stated target values and should be provided by an organization that meets a specific criteria stated in the requirements.

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

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

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

Doha Marathon spotlights women's journeys beyond the finish line

As the Doha Marathon by Ooredoo returns on January 16, this year's race is placing renewed focus on the personal journeys that bring runners to the starting line, as well as the support networks that help sustain them.

Through its partnership with Athletics Edge, one of Qatar's leading women-led running communities, New Balance has been supporting female runners at different stages of their athletic development, from beginners taking their first steps to experienced marathon participants.

The initiative aims to broaden perceptions of who can be a runner and to encourage greater participation by women in sport across the region.

Among the runners lining up this week is Duaa Gubara, a 30-year-old nurse competing in her first-ever race. Gubara began running just two months ago, initially out of curiosity and a desire to challenge herself. She will make her marathon debut after overcoming fear, self-doubt, and social barriers often faced by women in sport. Also taking part is Tasnim, a senior data analyst and four-time Doha Marathon runner. Her running journey began with her first post-lockdown run following the easing of Covid-19 restrictions. She has since become a marathoner and triathlete, crediting running with helping her maintain mental resilience during a difficult period in her life. Tasnim continues to train in challenging conditions, including extreme heat, while navigating questions of modesty in sport.

Safeya Mohamed al-Mushiri, 39, a mother of two, will also be among the participants. After stopping all sporting activity at the age of 13 due to personal trauma, Safeya returned to running years later during her divorce. With 28 long-distance runs completed, she now describes running as a form of emotional healing rather than physical exercise. For her, the Doha Marathon represents a deeply personal journey tied to identity and home.

Completing the group is Dr Eman Wehedy Abdelsalam, a 38-year-old doctor and mother competing in the 10km race. Dr Eman began running with a 5km event in December 2023 and has since progressed to half marathons. Balancing professional responsibilities and family life, she credits discipline, planning, and consistency, as well as the support of women-led communities, for her continued progress.

With the marathon just days away, the participation of these women highlights broader themes emerging around the event, including the growing role of women in reshaping sport in the Middle East, the use of running as a tool for mental resilience and healing, and the impact of community support in enabling first-time runners to compete alongside seasoned athletes.

Illegal fishing gear seized in night raid

The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change's Marine Protection Department has spotted fishing vessels using prohibited equipment on board in violation of the applicable laws and regulation.
The violations, discovered during a surprise nighttime inspection tour, included the use of powerful spotlights directed at the sea surface, in addition to the seizure of quantities of prohibited fishing gear of longline and hook types, found on the vessels.

Winter Mirage Fest Continues to Transform Meryal Waterpark into a Winter Beachfront Destination

On Friday, 9 January from 4:00 PM, Meryal Waterpark once again welcomed guests, media representatives, and influencers to experience the enchanting transformation of the park during the Winter Mirage Fest, where water rides and slides close and the destination evolves into a vibrant winter celebration by the sea.

Each evening from 4:00 PM until 9:00 PM, Meryal Waterpark shifts from its daytime water adventure offering into a festive winter landscape filled with immersive entertainment, ambient lighting, seasonal music, family friendly attractions, and curated activities designed to celebrate Qatar's winter season in a relaxed beachfront setting. Entry to the Winter Mirage Fest is complimentary, inviting guests to enjoy the experience as part of their visit.

The evening activation highlights a new dimension of Meryal Waterpark, offering a welcoming space for families, friends, and visitors of all ages to connect, unwind, and enjoy a winter inspired atmosphere that blends entertainment, culture, and coastal charm.

To mark the occasion, Meryal Waterpark hosted members of the local media, journalists, and influencers, providing them with an opportunity to experience the festival first hand and discover how the park continues to innovate beyond its record breaking attractions.

Running daily until 15 February, the Winter Mirage Fest reinforces Meryal Waterpark's position as a dynamic entertainment destination that continues to evolve with the seasons, offering fresh and memorable experiences for residents and visitors alike.

Meryal Waterpark, Qatar's largest waterpark located on Qetaifan Island North in Lusail, is inspired by the nation's oil and gas heritage and features the iconic RIG 1938 tower, a Guinness World Record holder for both height and number of slides. Alongside its world-class rides, the destination offers a beachfront, dining and retail outlets, private cabanas, and interactive educational exhibits for a complete entertainment experience.

Alfardan Sports Motors launches the new Ferrari Amalfi in Qatar

Alfardan Sports Motors, the official Ferrari importer in Qatar, has expanded its portfolio of cars with the arrival of the new Ferrari Amalfi in the country.

To mark the milestone, the luxury destination of Pearl Island provided a picturesque setting for the stunning ceremony at St Regis Marsa Arabia Hotel – reminiscent of the global premiere in Amalfi in Southern Italy – as the car was unveiled for the first time in Qatar. It brought together Ferraristi and guests, giving them an exclusive opportunity to admire the Prancing Horse's new 2+ coupe that replaces the Ferrari Roma. The Ferrari Amalfi redefines the concept of the contemporary grand tourer, combining high performance, versatility and refined aesthetics.

Designed for those who want to enjoy thrilling power without sacrificing comfort or style, the Ferrari Amalfi stands out for its unprecedented balance between adrenaline and everyday usability. The car's design stems from a fluid and minimalist approach, with sculpted volumes and clean surfaces that express modernity and dynamism.

The front is dominated by a large air intake and a long, sculpted bonnet housing the 640 cv twin-turbo V8 engine. At the rear, the integrated active spoiler contributes to high-speed stability, while forged wheels and carbon fibre details complete a sporty and sophisticated aesthetic.

Inside, the cabin adopts a dual-cockpit layout, with a new steering wheel featuring physical buttons and the return of the iconic start button. The integrated central display and ergonomic controls ensure intuitive interaction with the car, even during dynamic driving.

At the heart of the Ferrari Amalfi is an evolved twin-turbo V8 derived from the award-winning F154 family, capable of delivering 640 cv thanks to new turbocharging calibrations. The highly acclaimed eight-speed dual-clutch transmission ensures fast and smooth gear changes. Performance is outstanding: 0–100 km/h in 3.3 seconds, 0–200 km/h in 9.0 seconds, with a power-to-weight ratio of 2.29 kg/hp, the best in its class.

The Ferrari Amalfi stands out for its unprecedented balance between adrenaline and everyday usability.

Rolling out the Almalfi and expanding its portfolio strengthens Alfardan Sports Motors' long-standing partnership with Ferrari as Qatar consolidates its position as a key market in the Middle East and abroad.

Tarek al-Hammoud, general manager of Alfardan Sports Motors, said: "The launch of the Ferrari Amalfi in Qatar represents another milestone for Alfardan Sports Motors as we expand our line-up. It is a model of great significance and has been crafted to offer a blend of modern elegance and high performance, making it a unique car that customers can now look forward to driving in Qatar."

Giorgio Turri, general manager of Ferrari Middle East, said: "Ferrari Qatar is not only a market that continues to go from strength to strength but is established as one of the Middle East's leading luxury automotive destinations. This makes it the perfect destination for the Ferrari Almafi and will deliver extraordinary experiences for every Ferrari customer in Qatar."

LIQUIDATION / LICENSE CANCELLATION NOTICE

M/s. DOGUS TECH QFZ LLC, (FZA No: 493) located at Coworking space 291,292 Office 62 Ras Bufontas Admin Building, Building 43 , Street 517, Zone 49 Ras Bufontas Free Zone - Doha, Qatar, registered and licensed with the Qatar Free Zones Authority (the "Company"), wishes to announce the decision taken regarding closing down/ winding-up and cancellation of license via board resolution passed at the Shareholders meeting of M/s. DOGUS TECH QFZ LLC held on 17.06.2025.

Accordingly, any interested party who has a claim against the Company is hereby requested to submit its outstanding claims within 14 days of notice by registered post or contact:

Mrs. Salma Ketata

Company Name: DOGUS TECH QFZ LLC
Address: Coworking space 291,292 Office 62 Ras Bufontas Admin Building, Building 43, Street 517, Zone 49 Ras Bufontas Free Zone,
Doha, Qatar.
Tel No. +974 66778020
Email: salmaktata@dogusgrubu.com.tr

Claims received after expiry of the notice period of 14 days shall not be considered

QATAR/REGION/ARAB WORLD/AFRICA

Marmi 2026 sees intense contests, record speeds

The qualifying rounds of Al Da'wa competitions were held yesterday in two categories of falcons, as part of the activities of the 17th edition of the Qatar International Falcons and Hunting Festival (Marmi 2026).

Al Da'wa competitions took place in the morning with 10 falconers qualifying: Al Sheehaniya Team (two falcons), Hamad Abdullah al-Arjani (two falcons), Al Zam Team (three falcons), Abdullah Amer al-Kaabi, Mohammed Khabbab al-Nuaimi, and Lefan Team.

A falcon from Al Sheehaniya Team recorded the best time in the group at 15.752 seconds.

In the other category, the qualifiers were Sultan Hamad al-Humaidi (two falcons), Mihna Mohamed al-Dosari, Mohamed Khabbab al-Nuaimi, Lefan Team, Al Sheehaniya Team, Al Bairaq Team, Ahmed Abdullah al-Khater, Al Zam Team and Hamad Abdulhadi bin Naifa.

The falcon "Ghasham," owned by Sultan Hamad al-Humaidi, achieved the best time in the group at 17.181 seconds.

Hamad Saleh al-Masoud, head of Al Da'wa Championship at the Marmi Festival, said the competition was extremely intense in both categories, noting that rankings shifted with the completion of each falcon run, and that hundredths of a second were decisive in determining the qualifying positions.

He explained that such technical speed-based championships are governed by tiny details that make the difference, and related to the falcon's launch, flight performance, handling at the finish line, or the caller's guidance.

Accordingly, participating falconers lauded the competitive atmosphere provided by Marmi 2026, as well as the high level of organisation and co-ordination, which was positively reflected in the recorded results.

In the evening session, competitions for Group Thirteen of the Haddad Al Tahadi Championship were held, resulting in the victory and qualification of three falconers for the final, Al Majd Team, Mohamed Hamad al-Adhbi, and Al Gharbiya Team, which raised the total number of finalists to 22.

Muteb Mubarak al-Qahtani, president of the Marmi Festival, crowned the winners and qualifiers at the festival site. Each qualified winner receives a cash prize of QR100,000, in addition to competing for the grand prize in the final, a Lexus vehicle.

Shawi al-Kaabi, head of Haddad Al Tahadi Committee at the Marmi Festival, pointed out that the falcons demonstrated their readiness and strength in this round, raising the total number of qualified winners to 22. He explained that most of the falcons delivered heroic performances despite the strength of the racing pigeon used by Abdullah Fakhro, and reflecting the intense and rigorous training they underwent.

Participants in the Haddad Al Tahadi Championship highly appreciated the Marmi Festival, which has become an international platform for falconers, bringing them together from all regions to exchange expertise and renew connections.

Today morning, the local Al Da'wa Championship continues, while the evening session will host competitions for Group Fourteen of the Haddad Al Tahadi Championship.

Saudi Arabia 'tells Iran its land, airspace won't be used in strike'

AFP
Riyadh

Saudi Arabia informed Iran it will not allow its airspace or territory to be used to attack it, two sources close to the kingdom's government said yesterday, as Washington threatens Tehran with possible military strikes.

The message was conveyed as the United States warned it could respond to an Iranian government crackdown on protests, while Tehran has said it would strike US military and shipping assets in the event of a new attack.

"Saudi Arabia has informed Tehran directly that it will not be part of any military action taken against it, and that its territory and airspace will not be used for that purpose," a source close to the Saudi military said.

A second source close to the government confirmed that message had been communicated to Tehran. The US has military assets in the Gulf, including in Saudi Arabia.

Dozens of ships anchor outside Iran's ports amid tensions

Dozens of commercial ships have dropped anchor at a distance outside Iran's port limits in recent days, according to data and shipping sources, as tensions with the US grow, Reuters reported from London. Such movements were precautionary given the tensions amid ongoing protests in Iran, the shipping sources said. Port limits are significant because they run a higher risk of collateral damage in the event of air strikes on nearby infrastructure. The US is withdrawing some personnel from bases in the Middle East, a US official said yesterday, after a senior Iranian official said Tehran had warned its neighbours that it would hit American bases if Washington strikes Iran.At least 25 bulk carriers were stationary in Iran's EEZ off the major port of Bandar Imam Khomeini, data from ship tracking and maritime analytics provider MarineTraffic showed. A further 25 ships including container and cargo vessels had dropped anchor further south off the port of Bandar Abbas, MarineTraffic data showed.

Egypt says all parties agree on Gaza technocratic committee members

AFP
Cairo

Egypt said yesterday that all the members of a 15-person Palestinian technocratic committee meant to administer post-war Gaza had been agreed upon by all Palestinian factions, who swiftly offered their support.

Under a 20-point Gaza truce plan brokered by US President Donald Trump in October, the Palestinian territory would be governed by the committee operating under the supervision of a so-called "Board of Peace", to be chaired by Trump himself.

Hamas officials said earlier in the day that the group had opened talks with Egyptian mediators in Cairo on the committee, which forms part of Trump's truce plan for Gaza.

"We hope that following this agreement, the committee will be announced soon… and will then be deployed to the Gaza Strip to manage daily life and essential services," Abdelatty said.

The majority of the Palestinian factions offered their support to the committee after Abdelatty's announcement.

In a statement, the factions including Hamas and Islamic Jihad said they had agreed "to support the mediators' efforts in forming the Palestinian National Transitional Committee to administer the Gaza Strip, while providing the appropriate environment" for it to begin its work.

Displaced Palestinians shelter at a tent camp in Khan Younis, southern Gaza Strip, yesterday.

The Ramallah-based Palestinian presidency also announced its support in official media, with a source from the office telling AFP the statement "reflects the position of the Fatah movement because President (Mahmoud) Abbas is also the head of Fatah".

The Cairo meeting aimed to address the formation of the committee and its operational mechanisms, a senior Hamas official had previously said on condition of anonymity.

Separately, the Hamas delegation was also to hold talks in Cairo with leaders of other Palestinian factions on "political, national and field developments" and the state of the Gaza ceasefire, the official added.

Hamas has repeatedly said it does not seek a role in any future governing authority in the Palestinian territory, and would limit its role to monitoring governance to ensure stability and facilitate reconstruction.

Talks with Egyptian mediators were also focused on the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza, the reopening of the Rafah crossing, the entry of aid currently stockpiled on the Egyptian side of the border, and preparations for launching the second phase of the ceasefire plan, the official said.

Abdelatty did not name any of the agreed-upon committee members.But two names circulating as potential heads were Ali Shaath, a former deputy minister of planning in the Palestinian Authority, and Majed Abu Ramadan, the current minister of health, the second official said.

The Trump proposed Board of Peace is expected to be led on the ground by Bulgarian diplomat and politician Nickolay Mladenov, who has recently held talks with Israeli and Palestinian officials.

Mladenov previously served as the United Nations envoy for the Middle East peace process from early 2015 until the end of 2020.

Media reports say Trump is expected to announce the members of the Board of Peace in the coming days, with the body set to include around 15 world leaders.

Uganda defends Internet ban ahead of vote

AFP
Kampala

A senior Ugandan official yesterday defended the Internet blackout imposed ahead of elections, saying it was necessary to prevent riots and misinformation.

The east African country goes to the polls today in a vote widely expected to secure President Yoweri Museveni his seventh term, due to his total control over state and security bodies.

The authorities shut off access to the Internet on Tuesday, despite repeated promises not to do so, adding to fears of renewed repression and manipulation on election day. Presidential advisor Hajat Hadijah Namyalo Uzeiye defended the move, saying: "Internet creates wars, riots, misinformation.

"They had to shut down the Internet because of the misinformation from different stakeholders," she said. The UN human rights office said the shutdown — as well as a ruling this week to suspend 10 rights NGOs — was "deeply worrying". Uzeiye told AFP they expected a landmark win of "at least 70 percent" in the election. "We are not ready for him to leave," she said.

She rejected allegations from opposition leader Bobi Wine, analysts and rights groups that he is a military dictator who has violently repressed the opposition during his four-decade rule.

"I won't call it dictatorship," she said.

"What they are trying to portray to the world is the element of dictatorship without giving any version of the why, the who, the where, and the what."

Six Gaza fighters killed despite ceasefire

AFP
Jerusalem

The Israeli military said yesterday it had killed six fighters in an updated toll from an exchange of fire in Gaza the day before, accusing them of violating the ceasefire in the territory.

The military said in a statement late on Tuesday that it had killed two of six fighters it had identified adjacent to its troops in western Rafah and that tanks had fired on them. It said they were killed in an ensuing exchange of fire, including aerial strikes, while troops continued to search for the rest.

It said the presence of the fighters adjacent to troops and the subsequent incident were a "blatant violation of the ceasefire agreement". A security source in Gaza reported late on Tuesday that Israeli forces had "opened fire west of Rafah city".

Under a truce that entered into force in October following two years of war between Israel and Hamas, Israeli forces in Gaza withdrew to positions behind a demarcation known as the "yellow line".

The city of Rafah is located behind the yellow line, under Israeli army control. The area beyond the yellow line remains under Hamas authority.

Both sides have repeatedly accused the other of violating the ceasefire.

According to the health ministry in Gaza, which operates under Hamas authority, at least 165 children have been killed in Israeli attacks since the ceasefire began on October 10.

Denmark, Greenland wrap up crunch White House talks

AFP
Washington, US

Denmark and Greenland's top diplomats held high-stakes talks yesterday at the White House, with no immediate signs of a breakthrough on President Donald Trump's threats to take control of the Arctic island.

An AFP photographer saw Danish Foreign Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen and his Greenlandic counterpart Vivian Motzfeldt leaving less than 90 minutes after the start of their meeting with US Vice-President J D Vance and Secretary of State Marco Rubio.

Neither side commented after the meeting.

Hours before the talks, Denmark said it was boosting its military presence in Greenland in a bid to head off Trump's escalating threats over the vast, sparsely populated territory controlled by Copenhagen.

But Trump insisted earlier yesterday that Nato should support the US effort to take control of Greenland, saying it was "vital" for his planned Golden Dome air and missile defence system.

"Anything less than that is unacceptable," he wrote on his Truth Social network. "if we don't, Russia or China will, and that is not going to happen!"

While the talks were underway, the White House posted on X: "Which way, Greenland man?"

The post included a drawing of two dogsleds - one heading towards the White House and a huge US flag, and the other towards Chinese and Russian flags over a lightning-bathed Kremlin and Great Wall of China.

Trump has derided recent Danish efforts to increase security for Greenland as amounting to "two dogsleds." Denmark says it has invested almost $14bn in Arctic security.

The row over Greenland has deeply shaken transatlantic relations. Both Denmark and Greenland insist only Greenlanders should decide the autonomous island's fate.

Washington Post reporter's home searched by FBI agents

Reuters
Washington

FBI agents searched a *Washington Post* reporter's home yesterday as part of an investigation into sharing secret government information, officials said, in a move that press advocates said threatened journalistic freedom.

The reporter, Hannah Natanson, has covered US President Donald Trump's campaign to fire hundreds of thousands of federal workers and shift remaining workers to implementing his agenda.

Attorney-General Pam Bondi said federal agents had executed the search at the request of the defence department. Trump's justice department last year reversed a policy that had barred prosecutors from seizing records from reporters in most circumstances.

Press-freedom advocates called the search a dramatic escalation in the Trump administration's ongoing attacks on news media.

The Post reported that Natanson was present for the search of her Virginia home yesterday. It reported that the search was linked to a criminal case against Aurelio Perez-Lugones, a technology specialist for a US government contractor who was charged last week with unlawful retention of national defence information.

Natanson wrote a story in December about her personal experience covering the administration's efforts concerning federal workers, titled "I am *The Post*'s 'federal government whisperer.' It's been brutal." In it, Natanson related the relentless pace of calls and messages she received from former and current federal employees frustrated by the changes.

The Post said on X that investigators told Natanson she was not a focus of the probe. Natanson could not immediately be reached for comment.

Prosecutors alleged that Perez-Lugones took screenshots of classified intelligence reports and printed those documents, according to a criminal complaint. Investigators also found documents marked "secret" in a lunchbox in Perez-Lugones' car and in his basement, according to an FBI affidavit.

"The Trump administration will not tolerate illegal leaks of classified information that, when reported, pose a grave risk to our nation's national security," Bondi said on X.

"Searches of newsrooms and journalists are hallmarks of illiberal regimes, and we must ensure that these practices are not normalised here," said Jameel Jaffer, executive director of the Knight First Amendment Institute.

Trump has often taken an antagonistic approach towards the news media and has filed lawsuits against the BBC, the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal* and a newspaper in Iowa.

Mexican president offers to mediate between US, Cuba

Mexico's President Claudia Sheinbaum yesterday said her government stood ready to mediate between the US and Cuba, under growing pressure from Washington after the ouster of key ally Nicolas Maduro. Sheinbaum told reporters Mexico was "fully prepared to be a vehicle for fostering dialogue" between the US and Cuba. Sheinbaum told reporters both Washington and Havana would have to agree to mediation and the conditions under which talks would occur. Cubans, she added, had the right to "decide their own destiny".

US suspends immigrant visa processing for 75 countries

AFP
Washington, US

The US yesterday said it was suspending the processing of immigrant visas from 75 countries, President Donald Trump's latest move against foreigners seeking to come to America.

The US has long rejected visas from people who appear likely to end up needing government welfare, but the state department said it would now use the same authority for a blanket suspension of immigrant visas based on nationality.

"The Trump administration is bringing an end to the abuse of America's immigration system by those who would extract wealth from the American people," state department spokesman Tommy Pigott said.

"Immigrant visa processing from these 75 countries will be paused while the state department reassesses immigration processing procedures to prevent the entry of foreign nationals who would take welfare and public benefits," he said. White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt posted on X that the countries affected would include Somalia - whose people Trump has attacked in heated terms after immigrants were involved in a funding scandal in Minnesota - as well as Russia and Iran.

A US official said that the other countries affected would include a number of countries with friendly relations with the US, including Brazil, Egypt and Thailand. Other countries to face the pause include Nigeria - Africa's most populous country - as well as Iraq and Yemen, the official said. The state department did not immediately release a full list of countries.

Trump has made no secret of his desire to reduce immigration by people who are not of European descent. He has said Somalis should "go back to where they came from" and instead said he was open to Scandinavians moving to the US.

The state department said on Monday that it has revoked more than 100,000 visas since Trump's return, a one-year record.

The department of homeland security last month said that the Trump administration has deported more than 605,000 people, and that 2.5mn others left on their own.

Venezuelans regain access to X after year-long block

The social network X was once again accessible in Venezuela, more than a year after users were blocked by deposed president Nicolas Maduro, who was captured by US forces last week. Interim president Delcy Rodriguez updated her bio - she served as vice-president under Maduro - and wrote: "Let us stay united, moving toward economic stability, social justice, and the welfare state we deserve to aspire to." Access remained spotty to the X network owned by billionaire Elon Musk, who engaged in heated online exchanges with the ousted Venezuelan leader, until Maduro lashed out in retaliation for criticism of his contested 2024 election and shut X down. After the July 2024 election, Maduro was declared the winner amid allegations of fraud and suspended the platform in August. Prior to that, X had been a prominent social media network for Venezuelans, but the blockade meant ministers, lawmakers and government institutions stopped updating their pages. Rodriguez assumed power after Maduro was captured by US military forces on January 3 along with his wife, during attacks that left more than 100 dead, according to official figures.

ICE agents conduct raid at bus stop

Federal agents detain a person at a bus stop as they conduct an immigration raid days after a US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agent fatally shot Renee Nicole Good, in Minneapolis, Minnesota, US, yesterday.

US govt reverses job cuts at safety research agency

Reuters
Washington

The administration of US President Donald Trump is reversing staffing cuts to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, reinstating employees at the agency that provides research and services for coal miners, firefighters and others, according to an agency spokesperson.

The status of NIOSH workers had been in flux since mass job cuts last year, with some workers brought out of administrative leave earlier this month only to be notified days later that they were permanently terminated.

Department of health and human services spokesperson Andrew Nixon confirmed that the staffing cuts were reversed.

"The Trump administration is committed to protecting essential services - whether it's supporting coal miners and firefighters through NIOSH, safeguarding public health through lead prevention, or researching and tracking the most prevalent communicable diseases," Nixon said in a statement.

The reversal was first reported by Bloomberg.

In April, around 875 of NIOSH's roughly 1,000-strong workforce were terminated across the country, as part of sweeping job cuts by the HHS that affected several high-profile agencies including the FDA, CDC and the National Institutes of Health.

Reuters had earlier reported that those potential job cuts, as well as the redundancies at the Mine Safety and Health Administration, were putting miners at risk even as Trump called for a revival of the coal industry.

The cuts also threatened worker safety training for those in the fishing industry, farmers and others in some of the country's most dangerous jobs.

NIOSH is the US federal agency responsible for conducting research and making recommendations to prevent work-related injuries, illnesses and deaths.

LEGAL

US Supreme Court does not issue ruling on Trump's tariffs

The US Supreme Court issued three decisions yesterday but did not decide the closely watched dispute over the legality of President Donald Trump's global tariffs. The court did not announce the next date when it will issue rulings. It does not announce in advance which rulings will be released on a given date. The challenge to Trump's tariffs marks a major test of presidential powers as well as of the court's willingness to check some of the Republican president's far-reaching assertions of authority since he returned to office in January 2025. The outcome will impact the global economy.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Trump son-in-law, envoy 'plan to meet Putin in Moscow'

White House envoy Steve Witkoff and US President Donald Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner are seeking to travel to Moscow to meet Russian President Vladimir Putin, Bloomberg News reported yesterday. The meeting could happen this month, though plans are not final and timing may slip due to unrest in Iran, the report said. A White House official said no such meeting is scheduled at this time. The US officials will present the latest draft peace proposals to Putin and his team, the report said, adding that the talks were expected to cover security guarantees from the US and Europe to uphold any agreement, and Ukraine's post-war reconstruction.

CRIME

Actor Kiefer Sutherland arrested for assaulting driver

Actor Kiefer Sutherland was arrested on Monday on suspicion of assaulting a ride-share driver, according to Los Angeles police. The Canadian-British actor was taken into custody after officers responded a call in Hollywood shortly after midnight."The investigation determined that the suspect, later identified as Kiefer Sutherland, entered a ride-share vehicle, physically assaulted the driver (the victim), and made criminal threats toward the victim," police said in a statement. The 59-year-old actor was released a few hours later after posting $50,000 bail, law enforcement said. Police said the driver did not sustain injuries requiring medical attention.

DECISION

Quebec premier quitting ahead of election

Quebec Premier Francois Legault yesterday said he was resigning after more than seven years in office, months ahead of an election which a party seeking independence for the Canadian province looks set to win. Legault's centre-right Coalition Avenir Quebec party won elections in 2018 and 2022 but has struggled over the last year. "A lot of people in Quebec want change, and among other things, a change of prime minister," Legault told reporters in Quebec City. "For the good of my party, and above all for the good of Quebec, I am announcing that I will leave my position as prime minister of Quebec."

WORLD

Radioactive zinc shipment in Philippines onshore in 'safe' location

AFP
Manila

More than 20 containers of radioactive zinc stranded in Manila Bay for months have been brought ashore to a "safe place", the country's nuclear research director said yesterday.

The 23 containers arrived in Manila aboard the MV Hansa Augsburg in late September after Indonesian authorities "rejected and reexported" them after discovering traces of radioactive Caesium-137.

Jakarta sent the shipment back as it clamped down on scrap iron and steel imports amid a scandal over alleged radioactive contamination of food products.

A source with knowledge of the situation said the containers were offloaded at Manila's port on Sunday at 10.27am.

Philippine Nuclear Research Institute (PNRI) director Carlo Arcilla, who called the issue a "solvable problem" in October, said the zinc was now awaiting a medium-term solution, with storage at the Subic Bay military facility a likely option.

He declined to say where the containers were currently located, but another official who spoke on condition of anonymity said they were in a temporary holding area just outside Metro Manila.

"(The Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority) is open to the idea because they have ammunition bunkers there during World War II. I've seen the bunkers; they are in good shape," Arcilla said, stressing that the contamination levels were low.

"It's weakly contaminated, because three feet away from the container, the radiation becomes background," he said, adding that the ship's crew had tested negative for radiation.

The final solution will see the shipment sealed in a purpose-built underground containment facility, he said.

Arcilla went on to say that China's Cosco Shipping Lines, the ship's operator, had been victimised by what he called an "irrational fear of radiation" as well as Manila's failure to find a solution.

"The shipping company took it into their own hands to negotiate because they are losing millions," he said.

Cosco did not immediately respond to questions about the shipment.

Neither the Philippines nor Indonesia have disclosed the radiation levels in the containers.

The zinc dust, a byproduct of steel production, was exported to Indonesia by Zannwann International Trading Corporation after being sourced from local recycler Steel Asia, Arcilla said in October.

Japan's Takaichi to dissolve parliament for snap election

AFP
Tokyo

Japan's Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi intends to dissolve the lower house for a snap election soon after a parliamentary session begins next week, her ruling party and a coalition partner said yesterday.

Takaichi was appointed Japan's first woman prime minister in October and her cabinet is enjoying an approval rating of around 70%.

But her ruling bloc only has a slim majority in the powerful lower house of parliament, hindering its ability to push through her ambitious policy agenda.

"I was notified by Prime Minister Takaichi that she will dissolve" the lower house "at an early stage of the ordinary parliamentary session", Hirofumi Yoshimura, one of the leaders of the Japan Innovation Party (JIP), told reporters.

Yoshimura added that Takaichi told him she planned to hold a news conference on Monday to explain more about her decision.

The Tokyo stock market closed 1.5% higher and the yen slumped to its lowest value since mid-2024 on media reports that the election could take place as soon as February 8.

The prime minister also conveyed her intention to dissolve the chamber to Shunichi Suzuki, secretary-general of her ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), he said.

Suzuki told reporters in Tokyo that the election would in part be about seeking a public mandate on the current LDP-JIP partnership, which materialised only recently after the ruling party's former partner exited the coalition.

The junior Komeito party ended its 26-year relationship with the LDP last year, citing the LDP's failure to tighten party funding rules following a damaging slush fund scandal.

It was also unnerved by Takaichi's previous harsh rhetoric on China and her regular visits to a Tokyo shrine that honours Japan's war dead, including war criminals.

If Takaichi dissolves the lower house on January 23, which is the start of a regular parliament session, the most likely election date would be February 8, various media reported.

By keeping short the period between parliament dissolution and a general election, Takaichi hopes to curb the election's impact on parliamentary debate over the budget bill for the upcoming fiscal year, the Yomiuri newspaper said.

Takaichi's cabinet approved a record 122.3tn-yen ($768bn) budget for the fiscal year from April 2026, and she has vowed to get parliamentary approval as soon as possible to address inflation and shore up the world's fourth-largest economy.

An aerial view of the wreckage of a train that crashed when a construction crane collapsed in Thailand's Nakhon Ratchasima province yesterday.

Thailand crane collapses onto train, killing 32 people

AFP
Nakhon Ratchasima, Thailand

A crane at a China-backed high-speed rail project in Thailand collapsed onto a passenger train yesterday and caused it to derail, killing at least 32 people, authorities said.

The massive crane was left resting on giant concrete pillars while dozens of rescuers worked searched for missing people in mangled train carriages in Nakhon Ratchasima province, northeast of the capital Bangkok.

The company contracted to build the section of the high-speed rail where the crane fell, Italian-Thai Development - one of the Thailand's biggest construction firms - has seen several deadly accidents at its sites in recent years.

The firm expressed condolences for those killed and the dozens injured, saying in a statement it would "take responsibility for compensating the victims' families and covering medical expenses".

From a hospital bed in Nakhon Ratchasima, survivor Taew Eimertenbrink, 63, said her German husband "was killed instantly" in the derailment. "I was sleeping. He was sleeping. A metal bar was on him," she told reporters. The couple was visiting from Germany and travelling to Taew's hometown in Surin province, she said. "I thought travel by train was the best way, but… this happened."

The Thai health ministry said 32 people were confirmed dead, three were missing and 64 were hospitalised including seven in serious condition. Resident Mitr Intrpanya said he went to the scene after hearing two loud explosions and found the fallen crane sitting on a train with three carriages. "The metal from the crane appeared to strike the middle of the second carriage, slicing it in half," the 54-year-old said.

The accident happened at a construction site that is part of a more than $5bn project backed by China to build a high-speed rail network in Thailand.

It aims to connect Bangkok to Kunming in China via Laos by 2028 as part of Beijing's vast Belt and Road infrastructure initiative.

Engineering consultant Theerachote Rujiviphat, an adviser on the project, said Italian-Thai Development was solely responsible for the crane collapse.

Theerachote, from the China Railway Design Corporation, said the launching crane that fell onto the existing rail tracks also belonged to Italian-Thai.

Singapore parliament votes to remove opposition leader

Singapore's parliament yesterday voted to remove opposition chief Pritam Singh from his post as leader of the opposition after he was convicted of lying to lawmakers. Indranee Rajah, the house leader and member of the ruling People's Action Party, submitted a motion to declare Singh, head of the Workers' Party, unsuitable to continue as opposition chief given his "dishonourable and unbecoming" conduct. Parliament's decision will need to be confirmed by Prime Minister Lawrence Wong to take effect as the opposition leader is designated by the head of government. A Singapore court found Singh guilty of giving false testimony to a parliamentary committee in 2021 about a fellow party member, Raeesah Khan, who admitted to lying in a parliamentary speech about an account of her accompanying a sexual assault victim to make a police report. Singh's appeal was rejected in court in December. - Reuters

Canadian PM arrives in China

Canada's Prime Minister Mark Carney receives flowers from Lu You Ci, 11, upon his arrival at Beijing Capital International Airport, during the first visit by a Canadian Prime Minister to China since 2017, in Beijing, China, yesterday.

S Korea vows action over drone incursion into North

AFP
Seoul

The South Korean president's top adviser yesterday vowed to punish whoever is found responsible for a recent drone incursion into North Korea, after a furious Pyongyang demanded an apology.

North Korea accused the South over the weekend of sending a drone across their shared border into the city of Kaesong this month, releasing photos of debris from what it said was the downed aircraft.

And on Tuesday the North Korean leader's powerful sister, Kim Yo-jong, demanded an apology over the incident from the "hooligans of the enemy state" responsible.

Seoul has denied any involvement but has left open the possibility that civilians may have flown the drone, a position reiterated by national security adviser Wi Sung-lac yesterday.

"Our understanding so far is that neither the military nor the government carried out such an operation," Wi told reporters on the sidelines of a summit between the leaders of South Korea and Japan in the Japanese city of Nara.

"That leaves us the task to investigate if someone from the civilian sector may have done it," he said.

"If there is anything that warrants punishment, then there should be punishment."

South and North Korea remain technically at war, as the 1950-53 Korean War ended with an armistice rather than a peace treaty.

Wi noted that despite Pyongyang's criticism and its demand for an apology, the North has also sent its own drones into South Korea.

"There have been incidents in which their drones fell near the Blue House, and others that reached Yongsan," he said, referring to the current and former locations of the presidential offices.

'Are You Dead?': Chinese app for solo dwellers goes viral

AFP
Beijing

'Are You Dead?', an app that sounds the alarm if a user doesn't check in every 48 hours, has become one of China's top-selling paid apps as the country's growing class of solo dwellers flocked to download it.

More and more people in the world's second largest economy are living alone as marriage rates decline and the number of elderly empty-nesters grows. Created by Moonscape Technologies, the app pitches itself as a "safety tool crafted for solo dwellers… to make solitary life more reassuring".

Although its blunt name has divided opinion, it had still shot to the top of the Chinese iOS store's list of paid apps by Sunday, and remained there yesterday.

The Chinese name "sileme", a play on the name of a popular food delivery app, is a curt phrasing that translates to "are you dead" or simply "dead?". With a ghost as its icon, the app takes users to a landing page where they are asked to enter their name and an emergency contact's e-mail.

"If you haven't checked in for two days, the system will send an e-mail to your emergency contact," a version available internationally tells users.

On the streets of Beijing, some of the app's target market were dubious.

Yaya Song, a 27-year-old IT worker who lives alone, said she was intrigued but that it cost too much. "If it were free, I'd download it to try out - even charging one yuan ($0.14) would be reasonable for a trial - but eight yuan ($1.15) feels a bit expensive."

If the worst happened, employed people's workplaces would generally realise something was wrong before family and friends, she said, adding that the app's name "feels a bit too violent".

Student Huang Zixuan agreed.

"If I wanted my grandparents to download this app, I probably wouldn't be able to bring myself to say the name," the 20-year-old said.

Others saw the appeal.

In 2024, people who lived alone accounted for around one fifth of all Chinese households, compared to 15% a decade earlier, official data shows.

"I guess as we reach middle age, everyone starts to worry about their own affairs after death," said 36-year-old office worker Sasa Wang.

On Saturday, the former editor of state-backed tabloid Global Times, Hu Xijin, praised the app's potential, especially for the elderly.

He suggested changing its name to "Are you alive?"

"This way it will give elderly people who use it more psychological comfort," he wrote on social media.

The app's account responded on social media that it would "seriously look into and consider" changing the name.

But others begged them to keep it. "It's good to face the issue of death," the top-liked comment read.

India hunts rampaging elephant that killed 20 people

AFP
Patna, India

Indian wildlife officers are hunting a rampaging wild elephant blamed for killing at least 20 people and injuring 15 others in the forests of Jharkhand, villagers and officials said.

The elephant, a lone bull, is reported to have gone on the rampage for nine days beginning in early January, creating panic in the rural West Singhbhum district.

"We are trying to trace and rescue this violent wild elephant that killed so many people," government forest officer Aditya Narayan said, confirming the toll of 20 dead. Children and the elderly are among the dead, as well as a professional elephant handler, known as a mahout.

But after wreaking a trail of destruction, it had not been spotted since Friday, despite multiple patrols in the area.

Officials said search teams, aided by drones, are combing dense forest tracts, including a national reserve in neighbouring Odisha state.

Fear has driven residents of more than 20 villages to abandon their farms or barricade themselves indoors at night, elected village head Pratap Chachar said.

"A police team, or forest official vehicle, visits in the night to provide essential help to villagers," Chachar said.

Hundreds of thousands of Indians are affected each year by crop-raiding elephants.

Asian elephants are now restricted to just 15% of their original habitat.

The usually shy animals are coming into increasing contact with humans because of rapidly expanding settlements and growing forest disturbance, including mining operations.

As elephant habitats shrink, conflict between humans and wild elephants has grown - 629 people were killed by elephants across India in 2023-2024, according to parliamentary figures.

India and US discuss trade, critical minerals, nuclear power

Reuters
Washington

India's Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar said he held talks on trade, critical minerals and energy with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio.

India and the US have set a target of more than doubling bilateral trade to $500bn by 2030, while New Delhi has pledged to buy more US energy and defence equipment to help narrow the trade gap, even as trade talks last year failed to result in a deal.

The failure to reach an agreement had pushed the Indian rupee to a record low and spooked investors waiting for progress in two-way negotiations.

Both sides have held multiple rounds of negotiations last year to firm up a bilateral trade deal. However, it could not be sealed yet largely in view of Washington's demands to open up India's farm and dairy sectors.

"Just concluded a good conversation with Secretary Rubio. Discussed trade, critical minerals, nuclear cooperation, defence and energy," Jaishankar said in a post on X.

The US state department said that in the call, Rubio congratulated India on its move to end decades of state control over nuclear power, and expressed interest in enhancing US-India civil nuclear cooperation and expanding opportunities for American companies.

"Secretary Rubio and minister Jaishankar discussed ongoing bilateral trade agreement negotiations and their shared interest in strengthening economic cooperation," it said in a statement, adding that they also discussed regional development and a shared commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific.

In an address at the US embassy on Monday, US ambassador Sergio Gor said India and the US are actively engaged on the proposed trade deal.

In his remarks, Gor also said that no country is as essential as India to the US. "No partner is more essential than India. In the months and years ahead, it is my goal as ambassador to pursue a very ambitious agenda. We will do this as true strategic partners, each bringing strength, respect and leadership to the table," he said.

The phone conversation between Jaishankar and Rubio also came after Trump announced that a 25% tariff will be levied on countries doing business with Iran.

Sources in the Indian government said the new tariff is expected to have "minimal impact" on India as volume of trade between India and Iran is currently less than $2bn.

For India, Iran does not even figure in the top 50 global trading partners, the sources said.

Last year, India's trade with Iran was $1.6bn, which is approximately 0.15% of India's total trade, they said.

On alert

Indian paramilitary troopers stand guard along a road in Srinagar, India, yesterday.

UK government retreats on mandatory digital ID to work

AFP
London

UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer yesterday defended his decision to shelve plans to make a digital ID mandatory to work in Britain.

The latest U-turn in his Labour government's policies follows an intense backlash against plans to introduce a free digital ID for UK nationals and those residing in the country in a bid to curb illegal migration.

Officials briefed British media late Tuesday that the new ID which had been proposed by the government in September would no longer be mandatory for employment.

"I'm determined to make it harder for people to work illegally in this country, and that is why there will be checks," Starmer told parliament. "They will be digital, and they will be mandatory."

Earlier, Finance Minister Rachel Reeves insisted the right to work would still be contingent on providing a form of digital verification. "We are saying that you will need mandatory digital ID to be able to work in the UK," she told the BBC.

"Now the difference is whether that has to be one piece of ID - a digital ID card - or whether it could be an e-visa or an e-passport," Reeves added. "We're pretty relaxed about what form that takes."

There has been long-standing resistance in the UK to any plans to impose a mandatory ID, and the latest proposals from Starmer's government had sparked fierce opposition from rival political parties as well as public concern. Some criticism, including from far-right figures, promoted unproven claims that it would be used to boost government control over people's lives.

X moving to comply with UK law over AI deepfakes: Starmer

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer yesterday said Elon Musk's X is acting to ensure full compliance with UK law after the country's media regulator launched a probe into the platform over sexualised imagery produced by the Grok AI chatbot. "I have been informed that X is acting to ensure full compliance with UK law," Starmer told parliament, adding that the government would take further measures if needed. Shortly after Starmer spoke, Musk posted on X that Grok will always comply with the law of the countries in which it operates. "When asked to generate images, it (Grok) will refuse to produce anything illegal, as the operating principle for Grok is to obey the laws of any given country or state," he said. Earlier in January, X said that it had restricted requests to undress people in images to paying users. Ofcom launched an investigation into the social media platform on Monday over concerns Grok was creating intimate deepfake images in violation of its duty to protect people in the UK from illegal content. - AFP

Cold morning in Delhi

People walk along a street across the Jama Masjid on a cold winter morning in the old quarters of Delhi, India, yesterday.

UK nets record offshore wind supply in renewables push

AFP
London

Britain yesterday announced it had secured a record amount of offshore wind power capacity in its latest auction, as the government pushes to meet its ambitious 2030 decarbonisation goals.

The Labour government increased the budget for new contracts to attract more developers, after industry groups blamed a lack of bidders in the past on low prices. The government said the contracts would deliver 8.4 gigawatts of electricity, enough to power more than 12mn homes.

Prime Minister Keir Starmer's centre-left administration described the auction as "the biggest single procurement of offshore wind energy in British and European history". "With these results, Britain is taking back control of our energy sovereignty," Energy Secretary Ed Miliband added.

Britain is one of the leading players in renewable energy in Europe owing to onshore and offshore wind power.

The country has set a target to consume zero carbon electricity by 2030 and is aiming to reach net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 to combat climate change.

A centre-right think tank, however, argued that higher costs would ultimately fall on consumers, highlighting the challenge Starmer faces in expanding renewable energy while easing household bills.

"The government's sprint to buy as much wind as possible while it's expensive will actually lock us into higher electricity prices, making it harder to decarbonise," said Sam Richards, chief executive of Britain Remade, who previously served as an adviser to ex-prime minister Boris Johnson from the opposition Conservative party. But Greenpeace noted that new wind farms are cheaper than new gas, nuclear and biomass plants. "These new wind farms will lower our bills when they come online, and shield us against the volatile fossil fuel prices driven by the actions of unreliable petrostates," said Douglas Parr, policy director for Greenpeace UK.

MPs concerned ahead of UK decision on mega Chinese embassy

AFP
London

British MPs voiced major security concerns over China's proposed new London embassy after a leading daily reported the site would house 208 secret rooms, including a "hidden chamber".

Urgent questions were raised in parliament ahead of a January 20 government deadline for a decision on the planning proposals for a new embassy.

The Daily Telegraph said it had obtained unredacted plans for the vast new building set to be erected close to the Tower of London on the historical site of the former Royal Mint.

It showed that Beijing reportedly plans to construct a single "concealed chamber" among "secret rooms" underneath the embassy which would be placed alongside sensitive underground communications cables.

Beijing also plans to demolish and rebuild a wall between the cables and the embassy, according to the unredacted plans.

The embassy, which if approved would be the largest in the UK by area, has been beset by delays, protests and concerns for years, prompting frustration in Beijing.

Alicia Kearns, the opposition Conservative Party's interior spokeswoman, told parliament the new embassy would give China a "launch-pad for economic warfare" against Britain.

"The government can claim today that they had no idea about these secret rooms, and we will take them at that word," she said.

"But they cannot now say they have no power to protect us. Protect our economy, protect the British people, deny the Chinese Communist Party their embassy."

In response, Planning Minister Matthew Pennycook said the government would not be commenting on speculation in the press about the secret rooms and said the government had "transparently sought" further information on the redacted drawings.

"If new, potentially relevant information is drawn to the department's attention, it will be assessed," he said.

Kearns and other MPs also raised other security concerns, such as whether exiled Hong Kong activists living in the UK could face increased surveillance.

"We recognise that China poses a series of threats to UK national security and we challenge these robustly," Pennycook added.

"China also presents opportunities to the UK as the world's second largest economy and the UK's third largest trading partner. We will therefore continue to develop a consistent and pragmatic approach to economic engagement without compromising our national security."

Activists plan to protest against the proposed embassy on Saturday.

"I want my government to stand up to bullies, not reward them," said Labour MP Sarah Champion. "We need to be seeing rules, limits, put in place around China to stop this behaviour, not rewarding them with the embassy that they so dearly want."

COMMENT

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GULF TIMES

Political scramble in Iraq to name new president

The Iraqi political arena is witnessing intense political activity and ongoing consultations among parliamentary blocs in a scramble to reach a consensus on naming the new president of the republic, amid sharp political competition and constitutional and political complexities surrounding this electoral entitlement.

This comes despite the closure of the nomination period for the post, after 81 candidates from various political and social components, including four women, advanced their nominations, amid the persistence of the political norm that traditionally assigns the presidency to the Kurdish forces.

The Kurdish political sphere is witnessing a scramble between the Kurdistan Democratic Party and its historical rival, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, to clinch the presidency.

The Kurdistan Democratic Party announced the nomination of Fuad Hussein, Minister of Foreign Affairs in the current caretaker government, and Nawzad Hadi, former governor of Erbil, for the post, while the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan announced the nomination of Nizar Amedi, former minister of environment.

Ghalib al-Duaimi, an Iraqi academic and political analyst, told Qatar News Agency (QNA) that offering the chance for a record number of aspirants is a positive step, but the reality is that the winning candidate will only be among those subject to the will of the major parties within parliament.

He added that the constitutional process is ongoing, yet the real decision remains in the hands of the political elite, not civil society or voters directly.

The Kurdish forces are still conducting intensive consultations to select a unified candidate for the presidency, because this post is viewed as a traditional entitlement for the Kurdish forces under the political quota norm, he noted.

The Kurdish political sphere is witnessing a scramble between the Kurdistan Democratic Party and its historical rival, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, to clinch the presidency

According to the Iraqi Constitution, parliament elects the president of the republic by a two-thirds majority of its members within 30 days after the first parliamentary session, and the president must then assign a prime minister within 15 days from the date of his election.

Legal expert Ali Hussein al-Burki affirmed to QNA that the constitutional term for electing the president is a regulatory description and does not constitute a forfeiture of the constitutional right if exceeded. He added that exceeding the stipulated period does not necessarily amount to a constitutional violation, as the speaker of the Council of Representatives can set a new election date without breaching the Constitution.

For his part, Saad al-Tubi, a former member of the Iraqi parliament, said that the dilemma of the presidency in Iraq is not confined to the Kurdish political milieu, but is part of a broader crisis affecting other political blocs, noting that the co-ordination framework alliance wants to hasten the selection of the president in order to move ahead with resolving the files of the new prime minister and the Council of Ministers that will serve with him.

The political norm designates the presidency for Kurds generally, not for a specific party, which necessitates reaching a new Kurdish agreement that opens the door for competition among various Kurdish political forces, al-Tubi said, affirming that what is happening is not just a political impasse, but represents a healthy phenomenon within the Iraqi democratic experience.

Iraq typically witnesses political mobilisation and complexities that prolong consensus on nominees for senior positions, while entrenched political disagreements hinder compliance with constitutional deadlines.

The Iraqi Constitution stipulates electing the president of the republic by a two-thirds majority of parliament members - i.e., 220 votes - within 30 days of the first session, which was held on Dec 29. However, if parliament cannot decide in the first round, the vote is repeated between the two candidates who received the highest votes in the first round, and the candidate who obtains the highest number of votes in the second round is considered the winner, regardless of the number of votes obtained.

Upon electing the president of the republic, the new president assigns the candidate of the largest parliamentary bloc to form the government, who then presents his cabinet program within a maximum of 30 days, paving the way for a confidence vote, so the government may begin its work with full constitutional powers, while parliament begins its oversight and legislative role. **(QNA)**

Qatar forum weighs in on informed leadership, forging national narratives

QNA
Doha

The Government Communications Forum 2026, in its second deliberations, weighed in on the role of informed leadership in steering the communication system toward achieving national priorities, the importance of co-ordination among government agencies, as well as the role of transparency in building public trust.

The panel discussion on purposeful communication: leadership perspectives from the government sector explored avenues for building an enduring and adaptable corporate readiness with a sharp focus on the significance of communications based on clear-eyed goals and deepened values to promote interaction with the public and clarity in the long run.

HE Undersecretary of the Ministry of Sports and Youth, Yasir bin Abdullah bin Ahmed al-Jamal, emphasised that strategic communications represent a core pillar in crafting national policies, highlighting that the ministry has pursued a participatory approach in fashioning policies, starting from the pre-decision-making phase through direct communications with targeted segments, and ultimately ending with measuring the impact to ensure long-term sustainability and social understanding.

Al-Jamal further pointed out that in 2024 the ministry launched an executive program aimed at achieving the outcomes of the National Youth Policy, including the Qatar Youth Delegates to the United Nations Program, which has served as a platform for young Qataris to amplify their voices in international fora, with over 50 young men and women representing the State of Qatar being graduated.

Al-Jamal noted that the national sports policy comprises an angle dedicated to sports communications and media, stemming from the belief that sports have no longer become a physical activity only, but a lifestyle and social behaviour that requires agile media discourse demonstrating the athletes' accomplishments and sophisticated infrastructure, which reinforces awareness of the significance of sports as a national value.

For his part, HE Adviser to the Prime Minister and Official Spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dr Majed bin Mohammed al-Ansari, clarified that strategic communications in diplomatic work has no longer become an option, but an imperative imposed by the rapid flow of information and the multitude of platforms.

Every single word uttered in the media space today is instantly transformed into a title that could directly affect the nation's image and global narrative, Dr al-Ansari suggested. He elaborated that the ministry's experience of press briefs has come as a response to a pressing need to proactively manage the national narrative, as well as to transition from reacting to creating the narrative, ensuring that the nation's positions are conveyed with clarity and precision, while preventing the creation of alternative narratives outside the official framework.

Media is literally a fundamental partner, not an adversary, since forging a relationship based on trust and respect with journalists and media enterprises is a prerequisite for the success of any communications policy, Dr al-Ansari stressed, before noting the importance of never remaining oblivious to the national optics when addressing the world, because those optics are the prime pillar of national trust.

HE Undersecretary of the Ministry of Labour, Sheikha Najwa bint Abdulrahman al-Thani, suggested that the staggering challenge in communications facing the ministry lies in the diverse optics given the diversity of interests, prompting multilingual messaging and flexible communication approaches, without compromising the core of the message or altering its substance between domestic and international audiences.

She further emphasised that government communication is no longer unidirectional, but has become interactive and participatory, with feedback from the public and relevant stakeholders contributing to the development of policies, suggesting that trust is built when the optics feel their voice is heard and when solutions are crafted in partnership with them.

Sheikha Najwa also stressed the importance of unifying messages across government agencies, noting that issues related to the labour market intersect with multiple agencies and cannot be addressed through isolated communication. This underscores the role of institutional co-ordination and the Government Communications Office as the central reference for official messaging.

For his part, HE Undersecretary of the Ministry of Social Development and Family, Khalifa bin Issa bin Abdullah al-Kubaisi, affirmed that communication is a time-honoured part of the decision-making process, not a subsequent phase.

Al-Kubaisi pointed out that the ministry's strategy motto, "From Care to Empowerment", is not merely a media message, but a framework guiding decision-making and the design of initiatives.

Dealing with sensitive social issues requires a balanced humanitarian discourse that respects the dignity of beneficiary groups and enhances their integration into society, since true empowerment is achieved through social inclusion, not institutional isolation, he underlined.

Al-Kubaisi averred that transparency in broaching societal challenges has contributed to raising public awareness and preparing society to accept new policies and initiatives, emphasising that changing societal behaviours requires joint effort in the field of communication and broad partnerships with various media entities.

The forum proceeded with rich discussions focused on communication as a tool for influence, trust-building, and fashioning narratives capable of keeping up with rapid transformations both at home and abroad, affirming its role as a national platform for sharing leadership perspectives and weighing in on the role of strategic communication in supporting national priorities and enhancing societal impact.

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Ukraine's new defence minister vows innovation on battlefield

Reuters
Kyiv

Ukraine's parliament appointed young technocrat Mykhailo Fedorov as defence minister yesterday as the government seeks to drive innovation to strengthen the military during a difficult phase of the nearly four-year war.

President Volodymyr Zelensky said he had ordered Fedorov, 34, to implement fast decisions to protect Ukraine's skies, strengthen supplies to the front line and introduce other technological solutions to stop Russian advances.

"We immediately identified the first priorities for the ministry of defence. The main one is air defence," Zelensky said in a post on X after meeting Fedorov. The exhausted Ukrainian army is outmanned and outgunned on the battlefield after Russia's invasion in February 2022. Russian forces are steadily grinding forward in the eastern Donetsk region and trying to punch through defence lines in the south and northeast. With diplomatic efforts to end the war failing to produce tangible results, Kyiv needs to strengthen its armed forces, which total around 1 million personnel.

Newly-appointed Defence Minister Mykhailo Fedorov addresses lawmakers during a session of Ukrainian parliament, amid Russia's attack on Ukraine, in Kyiv, yesterday.

Zelensky said "much broader changes" were needed in the system for mobilising troops for the war.

"Decisions have already been made to ensure a more equitable distribution of personnel among combat brigades," he said.

Parliament voted to extend martial law and mobilisation until May, the 18th time since Russia's full-scale invasion.

Fedorov has already played an important role in shaping Ukraine's high-tech response to Russia's invasion in previous roles as the first deputy prime minister and digital transformation minister.

"Today, it is impossible to fight with new technologies using an old organisational structure," Fedorov told lawmakers before the vote, promising sweeping changes.

"Our goal is to change the system: to reform the army, improve infrastructure on the front lines, eradicate lies and corruption, and make leadership and trust a new culture."

Russian strikes on Ukraine kill four, knock out heat and power

Reuters
Kyiv

Russia struck cities across Ukraine with missiles and drones overnight in one of its biggest attacks of the New Year so far, killing at least four people and knocking out heat and power, exposing millions to dangerous winter cold.

President Volodymyr Zelensky said Russia had launched nearly 300 drones, 18 ballistic missiles, and seven cruise missiles during overnight attacks on eight Ukrainian regions.

The main targets were energy-generation facilities and substations, Zelensky said in a post on the Telegram app. "Every such strike against life is a reminder that support for Ukraine cannot be stopped. Missiles for air defence systems are needed every day, and especially during winter."

Ukrainian air defence units shot down 247 drones and seven missiles, the air force said. It also said on the Telegram app that missiles and drones caused damage at 24 sites. Emergency power cuts were introduced in the capital Kyiv and also in the Chernihiv, Odesa, Kharkiv, Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhzhia and Donetsk regions, the Energy Ministry said. DTEK, Ukraine's largest private energy company, said the attack heavily damaged equipment at one of its thermal plants.

Zelensky, in his nightly video address, said emergency crews, hampered by "extraordinary challenges" and temperatures plunging to -16C (3F) in Kyiv, remained engaged round-the-clock to restore heating and power. "It is important that so many of our people are working professionally, restoring supplies and striving to sustain normal life," he said.

Kyiv Mayor Vitali Klitschko posted a video on Telegram of crews repairing pipes. He said that while heating was now on in most apartment buildings, it still had to be restored in nearly 500 dwellings.

Russia has relentlessly targeted Ukraine's energy system throughout the conflict, claiming attacks on civil infrastructure are justified to impair Ukraine's war effort. Kyiv says Moscow's aim is to inflict suffering to break the national will.

Ukrainian officials say the war's fourth winter is shaping up to be the coldest and darkest yet, with Russian strikes intensified, years of cumulative damage taking a toll and the weather dangerously cold even for Ukraine's climate.

Pakistan to partner with affiliate of Trump family's World Liberty Financial on USD1 stablecoin

Reuters
Islamabad

Pakistan said yesterday it had signed an agreement with a firm connected to World Liberty Financial, the main crypto business of US President Donald Trump's family, to explore using World Liberty's USD1 stablecoin for cross-border payments.

The Pakistan Virtual Asset Regulatory Authority said in a statement that a memorandum of understanding with SC Financial Technologies, a little-known company it described as an "affiliated entity" of World Liberty, would enable "dialogue and technical understanding around emerging digital payment architectures."

The announcement represents one of the first publicly announced tie-ups between World Liberty, a crypto-based finance platform launched in September 2024, and a sovereign state. It also comes amid a warming of ties between Pakistan and the United States.

Reuters was the first to report that the deal had been signed ahead of the regulator's announcement.

Under the agreement, SC Financial Technologies will work with Pakistan's central bank to integrate its USD1 stablecoin into a regulated digital payments structure, allowing the token to operate alongside Pakistan's own digital currency infrastructure, a source involved in the deal said.

The memorandum was announced during a visit to Pakistan by World Liberty's co-founder and chief executive Zach Witkoff, who is the son of US special envoy Steve Witkoff.

A government photograph showed Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb and Witkoff signing the agreement, with Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and army chief General Asim Munir standing behind them. Witkoff is also the CEO of SC Financial Technologies. The company, registered in Delaware, co-owns with World Liberty the USD1 stablecoin brand, according to documentation on the stablecoin's reserves from July 2025. World Liberty did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the visit and tie-up.

"Our focus is to stay ahead of the curve by engaging with credible global players, understanding new financial models, and ensuring that innovation, where explored, is aligned with regulation, stability, and national interest," said Aurangzeb, the finance minister.

Stablecoins - digital tokens typically pegged to the dollar - have ballooned in value in recent years.

Under Trump, the United States has introduced federal rules widely seen as beneficial to the sector, and countries across the world are beginning to examine the potential role of stablecoins in payments and financial systems.

World Liberty has fuelled a sharp increase in income for the Trump family business, known as the Trump Organisation, including from foreign entities, in the first half of last year, Reuters reported in October. Last May, MGX, a state-controlled Abu Dhabi investment company, used the World Liberty stablecoin to buy a $2bn equity stake in Binance, the world's largest crypto exchange.

The growth of the Trump family's crypto initiatives as Trump oversees US crypto policy constitutes a conflict of interest, government ethics experts have said. The White House has denied that any such conflicts exist.

Pakistan has been exploring digital currency projects as it seeks to reduce cash usage and improve cross-border payments such as remittances, a key source of foreign exchange.

It sees over $36bn in annual remittance inflows, with an estimated 40mn crypto users and up to $300bn in annual crypto trading volumes, the regulator's statement said.

Pakistan's central bank governor said in July it was preparing to launch a pilot for a digital currency and is finalising legislation to regulate virtual assets.

French government survives no-confidence votes, now faces another budget battle

Reuters
Paris

French Prime Minister Sebastien Lecornu survived two no-confidence votes in parliament yesterday, clearing the way for the government to focus on yet another budget showdown in the coming days.

The no-confidence motions, filed by the far-right National Rally (RN) and hard-left France Unbowed (LFI), aimed to protest the European Union's trade agreement with the Mercosur bloc. Despite French opposition, EU member states last week approved the signing of the long-debated deal with Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay. The RN and LFI accused the government of not doing enough to block it.

"Inside the country, you are a government of vassals serving the rich. Outside, you are humiliating our nation before the European Commission and the US empire," chief LFI lawmaker Mathilde Panot told the government, speaking in parliament ahead of Wednesday's no-confidence motion votes.

The Socialist Party had ruled out backing the no-confidence motions and the conservative The Republicans also said they would not vote to censure the government over Mercosur. As a result, both motions failed. The one tabled by LFI received only 256 votes in favour, 32 votes short of what was needed for the motion to pass. The second motion, put forward by the far right, received 142 votes in favour and also failed.

French Prime Minister Sebastien Lecornu speaks during a debate before votes on two no-confidence motions at the National Assembly in Paris, yesterday.

Lecornu said time spent on the no-confidence votes was further delaying fraught debates on the country's 2026 budget, which he said political leaders should instead focus on. "You are acting like snipers lying in wait, firing into the executive's back at the very moment when we must confront international disruptions," he said.

Now, one of several options regarding the 2026 budget would be for Lecornu to invoke Article 49.3 of the Constitution to push through the finance bill without a vote, after negotiating a text with all groups except the RN and LFI, one government source said. That would almost certainly lead to more motions of no-confidence.

Lawmakers are eager to end weeks of wrangling over the budget, even if it means the country's deficit remains near 5%, sources said. President Emmanuel Macron, according to his entourage, wants a budget adopted in January and is "neutral" on how to achieve that. Government spokeswoman Maud Bregeon said on Tuesday that "nothing is excluded" to pass the budget.

France's political situation has been fragile since 2022, when Macron lost his majority in parliament.

German finance minister calls for 'European patriotism' to protect economy

Germany's finance minister called yesterday for a new era of "European patriotism" to protect regional economic interests, proposing that companies receiving state aid be required to keep jobs in Europe and that public procurement prioritises Europe-made goods, reports Reuters.

Speaking at a lecture at the German Institute for Economic Research DIW Berlin, Lars Klingbeil said Europe must fundamentally rethink its approach as traditional alliances dissolve and trade becomes increasingly weaponised.

"We need more European patriotism," Klingbeil said. "That means when we make public investments, we use goods produced in Europe."

"The transatlantic alliance as we knew it is dissolving," Klingbeil said, noting the Trump administration's National Security Strategy shows the United States is "turning away from Europe politically and culturally".

His comments come days after German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier strongly criticised US foreign policy under President Donald Trump, and spoke of a "breakdown of values" that had built the world order.

Klingbeil said trade was increasingly "weaponised" through subsidies, overcapacity, tariffs and export controls, putting pressure on Germany's export-oriented economy.

Europe's biggest economy contracted in 2023 and 2024 and only modest growth of 0.2% is expected for 2025. Preliminary results will be published on Thursday.

"We must become stronger and more sovereign so we don't become pawns of the great powers," Klingbeil said. "Those who believe we can simply export our way out of the current situation underestimate the upheavals taking place."

Louvre and other French museums hike fares for non-European visitors

AFP
Paris

France began charging non-EU visitors to the Louvre Museum 45% more than Europeans yesterday, in a controversial bid to raise money for renovations at the beleaguered Paris landmark.

The move is one of the boldest adoptions in Europe of so-called "dual pricing" at museums - charging visitors different prices depending on their origins.

The practice is common in many developing countries, but until now was largely absent in Europe and has been criticised for being discriminatory and reducing access for some low-income foreign visitors to the home of the Mona Lisa.

Tourists who spoke to AFP on Wednesday had mixed reactions.

Kevin Flynn, an Australian in his 60s in Paris for a week with his wife, said the new 32-euro (37-dollar) tariff for non-Europeans was "acceptable".

"It's the same price for many things in Italy, many things in Malta ... of such magnitude," he said.

But others, such as Joohwan Tak from South Korea, thought it was "unfair."

"We're all human beings. It's a big difference," he added.

"If I go to India, people from India pay less than people from abroad - it's fair because they have less money," added Marcia Branco from Brazil. "But because I'm in Paris and it's supposed to be a rich country I think it's not fair."

Other state-owned French cultural tourist hotspots are also hiking their fees for non-EU visitors, including the Versailles Palace, Chambord Palace in the Loire region and the national opera house in Paris.

The government has justified the increases on financial grounds, saying the change at the Louvre would raise 20-30mn euros annually for the museum which needs repairs and suffered a major robbery last October.

Trade unions at the Louvre have denounced the policy as "shocking philosophically, socially and on a human level" and have cited the change among complaints that have sparked recent strike action.

They argue that the museum's vast collection of around 500,000 items, including many from Egypt, the Middle East or Africa, hold universal human value.

While rejecting discriminatory pricing on principle, they are also worried for practical reasons, as staff will now need to check visitors' identity papers.

French academic Patrick Poncet has drawn a parallel between France's move and the "America First" policies of US President Donald Trump, whose administration hiked the cost for foreign tourists of visiting US National Parks by $100 on January 1.

The French policy was "symptomatic of the return, as elsewhere in the world, of unabashed nationalism", Poncet wrote in *Le Monde* newspaper last month.

It remains to be seen whether the break with European convention by the continent's most-visited country will spur other cultural destinations to follow suit.

Low-cost airline Ryanair hits out at Belgium over aviation taxes

AFP
Brussels

Low-cost airline Ryanair yesterday announced it is mulling a cut to flights in Belgium, especially at its major European hub of Charleroi Airport, because of Belgian authorities' "stupid" taxes.

"What's extraordinary about the stupidity of the Belgian government is that they've come up with this visionary idea to raise taxes on passengers, at a time when almost every other European country is abolishing travel and environmental taxes," chief executive Michael O'Leary told reporters in Brussels.

O'Leary pointed to European countries cutting taxes to fuel growth, such as Hungary, Slovakia and Sweden. Charleroi authorities is demanding three euros ($3.50) per passenger departing from the airport in the city.

"The aircrafts can move, the jobs can move, the passengers can move, and they will move to those countries who are abolishing taxes and lowering airport fees," O'Leary said.

The Irish no-frills airline said it would reduce its capacity at Charleroi airport by 1.1mn seats by the end of 2026. The hub serves several destinations especially in the warmer Mediterranean region. Ryanair says it was the leading airline in the Belgian market with 11.6mn passengers travelling with the airline in 2025. The company warned this figure would fall by around 10 percent if the city of Charleroi maintains its plan to impose the tax on airports.

Michael O'Leary, chief executive of Ryanair.

At the national level, the Belgian government led by Prime Minister Bart De Wever raised taxes on air transport in 2025, including on passengers departing via Brussels-Zaventem, the country's main airport.

Belgium is also engaged in a massive effort to consolidate its public finances.

Contacted by AFP, the prime minister's office did not wish to comment.

Ryanair called on De Wever in a statement "to reverse these silly tax rises, which will damage Belgium's competitiveness, and cost Belgium millions of passengers, thousands of flights, and thousands of jobs in tourism".

QATAR

HE Saad bin Ali al-Kharji, Abdulaziz Ali al-Mawlawi, and other dignitaries attended the QIFF opening yesterday at Stadium 974.

QIFF 2026 opens, putting Qatar on global food map

Calvin

Armin Vahabian

Swati Varanasi

By Shaima Sheriff
Staff Reporter

The Qatar International Food Festival (QIFF) 2026 opened on a lively note yesterday at Stadium 974 Precinct, as international brands at the Global Bites section shared food, stories, and business ambitions and highlighted the nation's growing influence on the global culinary scene.

HE Saad bin Ali al-Kharji, chairman of Qatar Tourism and chair of the Board of Directors of Visit Qatar; Abdulaziz Ali al-Mawlawi, CEO of Visit Qatar; other dignitaries, and a large number of food lovers from different walks of life, attended the event, which featured an array of live performances and cultural shows.

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

Day one of QIFF felt less like a formal opening and more like a global gathering, as chefs, founders, and food lovers came together to celebrate flavour, culture, and opportunity in the heart of Doha. The Global Bites section quickly became one of the festival's most vibrant areas, with international restaurants and cafés introducing their concepts to enthusiastic crowds.

The festivity underlines how QIFF has evolved into a space where food meets business, and where international brands explore Qatar's expanding hospitality market. For Australia's Coffee Club, the festival offered a unique opportunity to connect directly with people. Calvin, multi-unit manager for the Middle East, said the atmosphere spoke for itself: "It's a beautiful thing to be in Qatar where everybody comes together. The crowd is amazing, and people genuinely want to know about the brands and what they offer."

Walking through Global Bites, Calvin highlighted the diversity on display, saying: "There's something for everyone here, especially when it comes to coffee. People are starting to appreciate well-crafted coffee, and festivals like this help build that connection."

Participating in QIFF for the first time during its 15th edition, he emphasised the long-term significance of the experience. "This is exactly why we're here, to properly introduce the brand to Qatar. We're already in the UAE and expanding elsewhere, and Qatar is definitely a market we're excited about," he said.

That excitement was echoed at the stand of Fat Phill's, the Dutch-born burger brand that drew steady queues throughout the opening day. Founder and CEO Armin Vahabian said the response exceeded expectations: "Qatar has been incredibly welcoming. Everything has been organised so well, and people are really enjoying the food."

With more than 25 locations across Europe, Fat Phill's saw its stock disappear quickly on day one. "We sold out on the first day, which says a lot about the appetite here. We're definitely looking forward to doing more business in Qatar and hopefully expanding in the future," Vahabian added.

For London-based Curry on Naanstop, QIFF marked a special milestone. Founder Swati Varanasi described the experience as both exciting and meaningful: "This is our first international festival, and we're honestly very grateful that Qatar invited us."

Founded in 2018 as a food truck, the brand has grown across the UK's festival circuit and hotel partnerships, building a reputation for energy and flavour. "We're all about festival vibes and excitement — that's the heart of our brand," Varanasi explained.

The QIFF 2026 opening featured an array of live performances and cultural shows.

She also spoke warmly about her first impressions of Qatar: "The vibe is great, the weather is perfect, and the people are so lovely. I really see a lot of opportunity here," she said, adding that Curry on Naanstop is presenting Mumbai street food flavours with a modern London twist.