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## Rainy interlude in Doha



Light, scattered rain briefly dampened Doha's Corniche yesterday, with drizzle dotting windscreens and palm-lined roads as low clouds hung over the waterfront, offering a rare mid-day wintry interlude in the capital. **PICTURE:** Shaji Kayamkulam

## PM, Saudi FM discuss ties

HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani, held a telephone call yesterday with Saudi Minister of Foreign Affairs Prince Faisal bin Farhan bin Abdullah al-Saud. They discussed bilateral relations and ways to support and strengthen them, and addressed efforts aimed at consolidating security and stability in the region. (QNA)

## PM receives calls from Iran FM, EU top official, Cyprus FM

HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani received yesterday a telephone call from Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs Abbas Araghchi. The call dealt with bilateral co-operation and means to enhance it, in addition to the latest developments in the regional and several issues of joint interest. The PM renewed Qatar's support for all efforts aiming to de-escalate and find peaceful solutions that enhance the security and stability in the region. The PM also received telephone calls from EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission Kaja Kallas, and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cyprus Dr Constantinos Kombos, which currently holds the Presidency of the Council of the European Union. The calls dealt with discussing co-operation between Qatar and the EU. (QNA)

## Elite runners ready to roll marathon magic in Doha

By Shaima Sheriff  
Staff Reporter

Elite runners from three continents stepped into the spotlight in Doha yesterday, turning the Ooredoo Doha Marathon's elite press conference into a stage for stories of grit, ambition and shared passion rather than times and titles. As they spoke of first impressions of the city, what keeps them chasing the next finish line and why Doha has become a must-run race on the global calendar, the event underscored Qatar's growing reputation as a world-class home for endurance sport.

The 'Elite Press Conference' of the Ooredoo Doha Marathon yesterday offered more than

statistics and race predictions, as international athletes spoke openly about passion, challenge and what drew them to compete on the streets of Doha.

With runners arriving from across Africa and Europe, the discussion reflected how the marathon has grown into a global event, supported by Visit Qatar, that attracts world-class athletes while showcasing the city as a welcoming stage for endurance sport.

Kenyan runner Sammy Kituara, competing in his first Doha Marathon, said the familiarity of the climate instantly put him at ease. "It's my first time in Doha, and I like the weather. It's the same as back home in Kenya, where I was born," he said, ahead of running the full marathon.

For Kituara, running is both a

lifelong passion and a profession. "I've loved sports since I was young. That's what motivates me. It keeps me fit, and sometimes it's also how you make a living," he said.

Having previously completed 16 marathons, he said watching last year's Ooredoo Marathon inspired him to take part. "I saw it last year, liked it, and asked my manager to arrange it. Now I'm happy to be here."

British marathon world record holder Richard Whitehead described the Doha race as a special milestone, as it marks his 101st marathon. "Every marathon is a real challenge. That's what makes it exciting. It pushes you to the limit, but everyone shines when they cross that finish line," he said.

While this edition is his first marathon in Doha, Whitehead is no stranger to the city, having previously won world title on the track here. "I'm really excited to run the streets of Doha and experience the highs and lows of marathon running with 20,000 other people," he said, highlighting the shared emotion that defines the event.

Whitehead added that motivation comes from showing up fully on race day. "When you stand on that start line, you have to give your all. That's what matters most to me – showing up and giving your best." **To page 3**



Elite runners from three continents, including paraplegic athlete Richard Whitehead (2nd from right), at the press conference yesterday. **PICTURE:** Thajudheen

## Who rules the digital world? Tech giants take on the state

### Dr Mahmoud's book decodes shifting power in cyberspace

By Tawfiq Lamari  
Staff Reporter

As governments and tech giants battle for influence in the digital world, a new book by Qatari scholar Dr Khalid Walid Mahmoud shines fresh light on a question at the heart of modern geopolitics: who really holds power in cyberspace?

Titled *Cyberspace and Power Shifts in International Relations*, the book dives into how technology corporations now rival nation-

states in shaping public behaviour, controlling data, and defining the global flow of information.

Published by the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies (ACRPS), it is a timely addition to Qatar's growing body of research focused on innovation, governance, and digital transformation.

Dr Mahmoud, who holds a PhD in Political Science, is Senior Manager of the Media and Communication Section at the Doha Institute. A specialist in cyber politics, he has also written extensively for regional newspapers on

issues where technology, power, and policy intersect.

In an exclusive interview with *Gulf Times*, Dr Mahmoud explained that major technology companies are "no longer neutral economic actors; they have become influential political players capable of shaping information flows, public behaviour, and the digital public sphere."

He added that the state's traditional monopoly over regulation and control "has been weakened," creating a new configuration where power is increasingly shared

between governments and digital platforms.

Dr Mahmoud warned that the bursting of a "technology bubble" could trigger disruptions far beyond financial markets – potentially undermining the digital backbone of economies, governance, and security. He argued that dependence on a few dominant platforms increases systemic vulnerability, reopening urgent global debates on digital sovereignty, data protection, and states' resilience in the face of corporate dominance.



Dr Khalid Walid Mahmoud

A key contribution of the book, he said, is its close examination of

whether the international system can develop effective global cyber governance. "While awareness of the need to govern cyberspace is growing, most frameworks remain inadequate. They are still bound by the logic of state sovereignty, while cyberspace itself transcends borders," Dr Mahmoud noted.

He pointed out that current efforts "remain fragmented and largely non-binding", often shaped by "power imbalances between major states and large technology firms", leaving digital rights and democracy dependent on political will rather than enforceable global norms. **To page 3**



## Amir, Syrian president mull developments

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani discussed with Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa bilateral relations and the means to enhance them in all fields. This followed a telephone call His Highness the Amir held with the Syrian president. The call also dealt with the exchange of views on issues of joint interest, including regional and international developments. Both sides stressed the importance of continued coordination and consultation to benefit joint interests and advance security and stability in the region.

## Amir sends cables of condolences to president of Cyprus

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 Cyprus President Nikos Christodoulides, on the death of former president George Vassiliou.

## Amir condoles with king of Thailand

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani and His Highness the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani have sent cables of condolences to King Maha Vajiralongkorn of the Kingdom of Thailand, on the victims of the crane collapse onto a passenger train, wishing a speedy recovery to the injured. HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani also sent a similar cable to Thai Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul on the victims of the crane collapse, wishing a speedy recovery to the injured. (QNA)

## Qatar steps up market inspections ahead of Ramadan

Qatar's Ministry of Commerce and Industry has intensified inspection campaigns across retail outlets and consumer complexes nationwide as part of its preparations for the holy month of Ramadan. In a statement, the ministry said the inspections are part of an integrated monitoring plan aimed at ensuring market stability, maintaining the availability of essential goods and enforcing compliance with commercial laws and regulations. The campaigns focus on checking the availability of basic commodities, monitoring supply chains from suppliers to retailers, verifying that prices match those advertised to consumers, and preventing price manipulation and monopolistic practices. The ministry said inspection teams are working continuously, in coordination with relevant authorities, to closely track market developments and take action against violators to support price stability and adequate consumer choice. It added that regular and seasonal inspection campaigns will continue, with legal measures taken against offenders under the Consumer Protection Law and its executive regulations. The ministry also urged citizens and residents to report any violations or irregularities. (QNA)

# NCSA Digital Safety Booklet caters to persons with visual disabilities

QNA  
Doha

The National Cyber Security Agency (NCSA), in partnership with Al Noor Center for the Blind, launched yesterday the Digital Safety Booklet for Persons with Visual Disabilities, written in Braille. This initiative comes as part of the agency's ongoing efforts to enhance cybersecurity indicators and promote digital safety across society. The booklet was launched during a special ceremony held at Al Noor Center for the Blind, attended by President of NCSA, Engineer Abdulrahman bin Ali al-Farahid al-Malki, and Executive Director of Al Noor Center for the Blind, Mishael bin Abdullah Saqr al-Nuaimi.

On this occasion, Director-General of NCSA, Ahmed Mohammed Ali al-Mutawa al-Hamad, affirmed that the agency places persons with special needs in general, and persons with visual disabilities in particular, among its top priorities. He noted that they receive special attention across the agency's various projects and initiatives, foremost among them the National Digital Safety Initiative.

Al-Hamad explained that NCSA operates within a clear methodology and an awareness-raising strategy that emphasises that cybersecurity awareness is a right for everyone and a social and



humanitarian priority, a principle reflected in all of the agency's projects and initiatives.

For his part, Executive Director of Al Noor Center for the Blind, Mishael bin Abdullah Saqr al-Nuaimi noted that the centre is keen to provide various forms of support to persons with visual disabilities and contributed to the production of the Digital Safety Booklet as part of its social responsibility toward this group.

In turn, Assistant Director of the Policies Department at NCSA, Dalal Abdulaziz al-Aqidi, emphasised that the launch of the Digital Safety Booklet for persons with visual disabilities represents the culmination of the agency's efforts to raise awareness among this group. She noted that Braille copies of the booklet will be distributed to persons with visual disabilities across the country, contributing to the enhancement of digital safety indicators and protecting them from cyber risks.

She also stressed that the booklet relies on integrated awareness tools tailored to their actual needs, based on the principle that cybersecurity awareness is an ongoing effort and a continuous project that evolves alongside the development of cyberspace and the diversity of digital threats.

Meanwhile, Acting Director of the Community Awareness Department at Al Noor Center for the Blind, Munira Ayed al-Adba, explained that cybersecurity awareness for persons with visual disabilities is a top priority for the centre, especially in light of the escalating digital threats facing this group. It is worth noting that the National Digital Safety Initiative, launched by NCSA, aims to enhance cybersecurity and digital safety indicators at the state and community levels. The initiative targets all segments of society, with a particular focus on persons with special needs, women, families, and senior citizens.

## MoECC initiative to plant 1,000 native seedlings at Rawdat Bu Nbeirah

QNA  
Doha

The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change (MoECC), in co-operation with the embassy of Pakistan, yesterday launched an initiative to plant 1,000 native seedlings at Rawdat Bu Nbeirah. The initiative comes as part of national efforts to protect the environment, expand vegetation cover, and strengthen international partnerships in the environmental field.

The event was attended by several officials from the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change, along with approximately 200 male and female students from the Pakistan International School. The participation aimed to instil a culture of sustainability and enhance environmental awareness among students.

During the event, 300 na-

tive seedlings of local plant species were planted at Rawdat Bu Nbeirah. The activities also included site clean-up efforts and awareness session for students highlighting the Qatar Desert Rehabilitation Program and the ministry's ongoing efforts to restore natural habitats.

In this context, Director of the Wildlife Development Department at the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change, Khalid Juma al-Muhammadi emphasised that the initiative forms part of the ministry's plans to restore natural ecosystems, expand green areas, and support biodiversity. He stressed the importance of community and diplomatic partnerships in ensuring the success of afforestation projects.

He noted that engaging students in such initiatives significantly contributes to raising environmental awareness, fostering a sense of responsibility toward protecting natural resources, and

reflecting the ministry's commitment to practically implementing sustainable development concepts beyond theoretical awareness programs.

For his part, ambassador of Pakistan to Qatar Mohamed Aamer praised the ongoing co-operation with the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change, underscoring the importance of joint environmental initiatives in addressing climate change challenges and highlighting the vital role of youth in supporting environmental protection efforts.

The initiative represents a successful model of integration between government entities, diplomatic missions, and educational institutions, supporting national sustainability efforts and strengthening community awareness of the importance of environmental conservation for present and future generations.

## Environment minister meets member of Greek parliament

HE the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Dr Abdullah bin Abdulaziz bin Turki al-Subaie, met with Member of the Hellenic Parliament, Dr Dionysia-Theodora Avgierinopoulou. The meeting discussed several topics of mutual interest and areas of co-operation in environment and climate change, in addition to exchanging points of view regarding global environmental challenges and the mechanisms of facing them. (QNA)



## Minister issues decision regulating realty off-plan sales procedures

QNA

Doha

HE the Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Ibrahim bin Ali al-Mohammadi issued a decision regulating the Preliminary Real Estate Register, defining its data and procedures, as part of the executive measures of Law No 6 of 2014 regulating the real estate sector and its amendments.

The move is intended to consistently keep pace with the national vision aimed at driving the real estate sector forward and strengthening its role within the ecosystem of sectors supporting national development.

The decision specified the components of the Preliminary Real Estate Register, which shall consist of a set of real estate title records designated for off-plan real estate units, along with the supplementary registers thereto, containing applications, contracts and their legal instruments, architectural designs, and engineering plans for the project duly approved by the competent authorities.

The decision further stipulates that the Preliminary Real Estate Register shall record, for each off-plan real estate unit, the area details, the original property number, the approved project data, the off-plan unit number, its area, boundaries, specifications, any common parts where applicable, and the designated purpose thereof.

It shall also record the data indicating the identity of the owner, or the owners in cases of co-own-



ership of the off-plan real estate unit, the share of each, the cause of acquisition and the cause of termination of ownership, daily register entries, ancillary real rights, related restrictions, and the manner and grounds for their cancellation.

These ownership interests will be registered in the Real Estate Register and granted the necessary legal protection, al-Ghafri outlined, noting that among the most significant provisions of the decision is granting holders of preliminary title deeds the right to mortgage and transfer them, whether by sale or gift, and to conclude all ownership-transferring dispositions, in accordance with the laws in force in the State of Qatar.

He also stated that, as part of facilitating procedures, the decision allows for the electronic submission of applications for the registration or recording of off-plan real estate units in the Preliminary Real Estate Register, following approval by the Real Estate Regulatory Authority "Aqarat" and in accordance with the procedures prescribed under Law No 5 of 2024 regulating real estate registration.

Al-Ghafri applauded the level of co-operation and partnership between the Ministry of Justice and Aqarat in providing a supportive legislative environment that stimulates the growth of the real estate sector and promotes its investment attractiveness.

Pursuant to the decision, the Real Estate Registration Department at the Ministry of Justice shall issue a Preliminary Title Deed for each off-plan real estate unit, based on the data recorded in the Preliminary Real Estate Register, with an annotation made on the original title record of the project land to that effect.



## Romanian Football Federation joins Aspire in World Fellows

Aspire Academy has signed a collaboration agreement with the Romanian Football Federation (FRF), making it the 51st member of the Aspire in the World Fellows programme. The partnership highlights the growing ambition of Romanian football and marks a significant step toward strengthening technical capabilities and football infrastructure.

Prof Valter Di Salvo, executive director of Aspire in the World Fellows and director of Football Performance and Science at Aspire Academy, was in Romania to sign the agreement.

"We are excited to welcome the FRF to the Fellows as just the fourth European federation to join this global network of elite clubs, football associations, and leagues. Our members have been fostering innovation, development, and knowledge exchange in football, with an emphasis on youth play-

ers, since 2014. "Joining us will see Romanian football gaining access to cutting-edge best practices in training methodology, performance management, sports science, data analysis, and nutrition. We are also looking forward to hearing how Romania approaches football development and what we can learn from them," Di Salvo said.

The first major joint project will see Romania hosting The Workshop Tour 2026 Europe in Bucharest from 20-22 April. This will mark the Workshop Tour's first stop in Europe after previous editions in South America (Buenos Aires) in 2024 and in Asia (Singapore) in 2025.

The tour is part of Aspire Academy's ongoing commitment to supporting the development of global youth football through its worldwide programme, Aspire in the World Fellows.

The event is dedicated to work-

ing with coaches to explore new ideas and innovations in youth football development nationwide.

During the three days of the event, the sessions will cover a wide range of essential topics, including nutrition, psychology, sports science, as well as the technical and tactical aspects of the game.

The workshop will bring together global experts and local practitioners through a series of theoretical presentations, practical on-field sessions and community initiatives.

As part of the Aspire in the World Fellows, the FRF will also participate in the annual Aspire Academy Global Summit in the latter part of 2026.

The event brings together all the members of the Fellows to explore the latest innovations in advancing player development, performance, and knowledge exchange.

## Imalco, Giti Tires officially launch brand in Qatar

Imalco, in collaboration with Giti Tires, officially launched the Giti Tires for its customers on January 13 at the Radisson Blu Hotel Doha.

The event was attended by senior management and top executives from Giti Tires and Imalco's leadership team, as well as a distinguished gathering of trade customers.

The launch seminar highlighted Giti Tires' manufacturing capabilities, advanced technologies, and its expanding supply to Qatar's popular vehicle segments, underscoring its positioning as a preferred OEM (original equipment manufacturer) partner.

Addressing the audience, Imalco chief executive Aboobacker Bawu highlighted the strategic importance of the partnership, describing it as a collaboration rooted in shared values, innovation, and a long-term vision.

He outlined Imalco's goal of placing Giti among the top three tyre brands in Qatar, supported by a comprehensive portfolio spanning passenger cars, 4x4s, SUVs, and electric vehicles.

He also noted Giti's strong global presence as one of the world's top 10 tyre manufacturers, with annual production exceeding 100mn tyres, and reaffirmed Imalco's commitment to delivering safe, reliable, and performance-driven mobility solutions to the Qatar market.



The Giti Tires launch was attended by management and executives from Giti Tires and Imalco's leadership team, as well as trade customers.

## Qatar Custom Show turns racing club into car lovers' playground

By Shaima Sheriff  
Staff Reporter

The Qatar Custom Show returned to the Qatar Racing Club yesterday, bringing together modified cars, motorcycles and passionate enthusiasts in a free-entry celebration of creativity, innovation and automotive culture.

The roar of engines and the hum of excitement filled the Qatar Racing Club as the Qatar Custom Show opened its doors, transforming the venue into a vibrant meeting point for car lovers, builders and curious families.

More than a traditional car exhibition, the show has positioned itself as an experience – one that blends customised vehicles, live drag racing energy and a strong sense of community.

With free entry and running until January 17, the event offers visitors a chance to get up close with some of the most striking modified cars and bikes in the country.

Founder Khaled al-Hamadi said that what sets the Qatar Custom Show apart is its diversity.

"This is a different event from anywhere else in the GCC," he said. "Here, you will see electric cars, Chinese cars, European cars – every kind of auto and moto in one place."

Alongside cars, the exhibition features customised motorcycles and live participation with the Arab Champion Drag Race, adding an adrenaline-fuelled backdrop



that al-Hamadi described as "the music of this place".

Strict customisation standards define the show.

According to al-Hamadi, participating vehicles must reflect the owner's creativity from top to bottom.

"The car has to be fully customised – from the wheels to the body, engine and materials," he explained. "I want to see what's in your mind and how you bring

that idea into the car or bike."

One of this year's highlights is the introduction of modified electric vehicles, a first for the event.

"This is something new happening in 2026," al-Hamadi said. "To see an electric car customised is exciting, and it shows how the show is upgrading every year."

The Qatar Custom Show also celebrates inclusivity through its "Women on Wheels" segment, where female drivers

Visitors can get up close with some of the most striking modified cars and bikes in the country. (Screenshots from Qatar Custom Show IG page)



Khaled al-Hamadi (centre) with the management of the Qatar Custom Show and special guests.

and builders showcase their customised vehicles.

The initiative reflects the growing presence of women in Qatar's automotive scene and adds another layer of personality to the exhibition.

Beyond the cars themselves, organisers noted that the show has become a networking hub for enthusiasts, professionals and newcomers to the scene.

Visitors are encouraged not just to ad-

mire the builds, but to meet the people behind them, exchange ideas and build connections within Qatar's fast-evolving car culture.

Inviting the public to attend, al-Hamadi said the show is designed for everyone.

"Don't miss this weekend," he said. "You are welcome with your family, kids, and everyone. You will see new things, customised things, and you will enjoy the atmosphere here at Qatar Racing Club!"

## Al Jasra Club symposium discusses modern role, need for intellectuals

By Tawfiq Lamari  
Staff Reporter

Al Jasra Cultural and Social Club, affiliated to the Ministry of Culture, hosted on Wednesday academic and researcher Dr Nader Kazem for a lecture on "Has the Need for Intellectuals Ended Today?" as part of its current cultural season.

This event, held in partnership with Al Qafila Club, affiliated with the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula Studies Unit in Bahrain, explored the challenges and transformations of the intellectual's role in light of contemporary changes.



Part of the audience at the symposium.

In the symposium moderated by researcher Abdulrahman al-Baker, Dr Kazem addressed the central issue posed by the lecture's title, explaining that the question of the need for intellectuals is not new, adding that its relevance stems from

the intellectual and social transformations the world has witnessed.

He pointed out that intellectuals have historically played pivotal roles in their societies, both in generating ideas and defending core values, before these roles un-

derwent profound challenges.

Dr Kazem referred to the arguments of several thinkers who discussed the end of grand narratives, such as the concept of justice, citing the Tunisian thinker Taher Khmiri, who heralded the post-

modern era in his writings, arguing that it contributed to the decline of the traditional intellectual's image and main role in the public sphere.

He addressed the problematic definition of the intellectual, questioning the reasons for the differing opinions surrounding this concept.

Dr Kazem noted that the term encompasses the playwright, the academic, the poet, and the writer, which has given it considerable flexibility.

He offered a historical perspective on the concept of the intellectual, linking it to earlier uses of the word *thaqafa* (to educate).

Dr Kazem pointed out that the

use of the passive participle form instead of the active participle has contributed to conceptual ambiguity, making it difficult to agree on a comprehensive and precise definition of the intellectual.

The lecture saw significant engagement from the attendees, who raised several questions.

Dr Kazem responded patiently, expressing his appreciation for this engagement and emphasising the importance of such discussions in enriching awareness and deepening understanding.

He said that he hopes the event had contributed to a fruitful intellectual development for those present.

## Top runners ready to roll marathon magic to streets of Doha



British marathon world record holder Richard Whitehead at the press conference.

### From Page 1

Ethiopian Olympic and world champion Tamrat Tola also spoke of his excitement at participating in the Ooredoo Doha Marathon for the first time.

"I knew about this marathon before I came, and now I'm proud and happy to be here in Doha," he said.

For Tola, the appeal of marathon running lies in the challenge itself.

"Marathon is never easy," he explained. "Every race is different – major marathons, gold, platinum – all of them are a challenge. But when I challenge my body, I feel motivated for the next one."

Tola lauded the event's growth, noting an increase from 15,000 to 20,000 runners.

"It's not easy to grow like that. I'm proud of the Ooredoo Marathon for what they've achieved, and I'm happy they invited me," he said. "I want all participants to run tomorrow for their personal best."

## Who rules the digital world? Tech giants take on the state

### From Page 1

Dr Mahmoud argued that while the state is not disappearing, sovereignty is being reshaped.

Technology corporations now wield regulatory authority over data, algorithms, and digital infrastructure, creating a hybrid order with weak accountability and shifting power from territory to opaque digital systems.

The outcome, he warned, is a challenge to transparency, equality, and democratic trust – making algorithmic accountability and ethical safeguards vital.

Addressing the Global South, Dr Mahmoud said these nations risk a new wave of dependency if they remain primarily consumers of technology.

"When digital systems and data are controlled externally, it reproduces old inequalities through new means," he said. "The challenge is not the technology itself, but the lack of national cyber policies, and insufficient investment in research, education, and capacity-building."

He emphasised that digital technologies and artificial intelligence (AI) bring immense opportunities to expand learning access – but also hand vast influence to big tech firms over educational content and standards.

"Without deliberate cyber-policy and educational governance," Dr Mahmoud warned, "societies risk deepening cognitive and technological divides."

"The goal should be to transform AI from a product of commerce into a tool for knowledge empowerment and educational sovereignty," he said.



The new book by Dr Mahmoud, *Cyberspace and Power Shifts in International Relations*.

## Justice ministry cuts fees, expands exemptions

### From Page 1

Among newly standardised charges, registration fees for off-plan units have been fixed at QR100 per unit, and the cost of issuing replacement title deeds has dropped from QR500 to QR100.

The fee for a title deed and registration map has likewise been reduced from QR300 to QR100.

Mortgage and lien registration now carry a rate of 0.025% of the secured debt value, while property transfers linked to company mergers, divisions, or dissolutions attract a flat charge of QR500.

The same rate applies to transfers between individuals and companies they own, in full or in part.

For inheritance-related property transfers, fees have been capped at QR500 per property, while issuing ownership statements and certificates now costs QR50 – half the previous fee.

The ministry also announced a sharp reduction in charges for mobile services requiring staff visits to applicants' premises.

The fee has fallen from QR1,000 to QR200 for people aged 60 and above, while persons with disabilities and social security beneficiaries are fully exempt.

The ministry said that the new measures underscore its ongoing commitment to modernising judicial services, simplifying processes, and enhancing digital accessibility.

The changes form part of broader national efforts to support economic growth and build investor confidence through transparent, efficient governance.



## Qatar participates in session of Arab sports ministers' council



Qatar participated in the 49th session of the Council of Arab Youth and Sports Ministers, which was held at the headquarters of the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States in Cairo.

Qatar's delegation was headed by HE the Minister of Sports and Youth Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa bin Ahmed al-Thani.

The meeting addressed topics related to strengthening joint Arab action in the youth and sports sectors, which included a set of proposals for youth and sports projects and programmes planned for implementation in 2026.

The proposals included on the council's agenda included programmes, activities and dialogue sessions, such as the Fourth Arab-Chinese Co-operation Forum, the Ninth Arab-European Co-operation Forum, the Fourth Arab Youth Parliament Simulation Model, and the Third Arab Youth Salon.

The agenda features training courses on

artificial intelligence (AI), content creation, and youth awareness-building, as well as courses on cybersecurity and youth mental health.

In addition, it includes the Arab Youth Excellence Award, the First Arab Esports Championship, and the League of Arab States Cup for Embassies.

The Council's agenda covered proposals from the ministries of youth and sports of the Arab member states regarding several diverse youth and sports activities, including the 10th edition of the Holy Sites Journey Programme for Arab and Islamic Youth in Saudi Arabia, the Nile Ship for Arab Youth in Egypt, the Arab Youth Capital for 2026, and the Peace Marathon in Somalia.

Other initiatives are the Arab School Sports Festival in Algeria, the Arab Women's Clubs Championship in Sharjah, Manama as the Arab Capital of Sports Culture, and the 2026 Sports Games for Specialised Federations. - QNA

## WCM-Q-co-ordinated e-book on FMT research surpasses 100,000 views

A e-book co-ordinated by a WCM-Q researcher, which compiles the latest research into the use of faecal transplants to restore healthy gut microbiota, has proven so successful that it is to be re-launched in an expanded form next year.

The e-book, *Faecal Microbiota Transplants: challenges in translating microbiome research to clinical applications*, has garnered more than 100,000 views in only one month since its publication in *Frontiers in Microbiology*, one of the most cited open access microbiology research journals.

Following that success, the journal has invited the editorial team to launch a second volume of the e-book to capitalise on the upswell of interest in the topic.

The first volume of the e-book, of which WCM-Q assistant professor of biology Dr Ghizlane Bendriss is the research topic co-ordinator, featured 26 research articles examining the challenges preventing faecal microbiota transplants (FMT) from becoming adopted into mainstream clinical practice.

The procedure, which involves transplanting a healthy stool sample from a donor into the gastrointestinal tube of a patient with an unbalanced gut microbiome showing a loss of diversity, has been found to be effective at re-establishing a diverse gut flora in the recipient, but widespread adoption remains elusive.

Dr Bendriss, who holds a PhD in neuroscience, said: "Faecal microbiota transplants show promise as treatments for a wide variety of conditions, yet progress in translation into clinical applications has been slow."

"This e-book is a collection of accepted manuscripts highlighting the challenges that are preventing the widespread clinical adoption of FMT, which include difficulty in finding and screening healthy donors, regulatory challenges, technical difficulties relating to collection, storage and transport of stool samples, difficulty predicting outcomes, and the lack of known biomarkers to assess the success of transplants, among many others."

Dr Bendriss said that new developments in the field of multi-omics, now increasingly coupled with artificial intelligence (AI) to enable large-scale pattern detection and in-depth study of metabolic processes, provide new tools for testing the effectiveness of faecal transplants.

The WCM-Q is a regional pioneer in the study of multi-omics, including metabolomics, metagenomics and proteomics, and has also developed advanced capabilities in AI and machine learning research in recent years.



WCM-Q students during the trip.

## WCM-Q medical students visit Oman on service learning programme

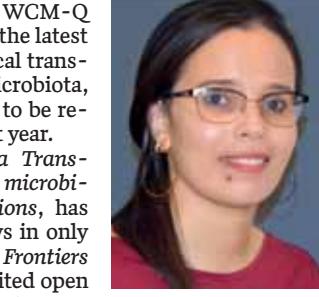
The Division of Student Affairs at Weill Cornell Medicine - Qatar (WCM-Q) recently organised a visit to Oman for first-year medical students as part of the college's Medical Service Learning Programme (MSLP).

The week-long MSLP trip of first-year medical students is a unique opportunity to develop a global perspective on healthcare issues affecting different populations, explore the curricula and clinical programmes of medical schools in the region, participate in community service projects, and experience the history and cultural heritage of another nation.

Following the trip, students give a public presentation to highlight their experiences and discuss how the programme has affected their studies.

During the trip, students visited the College of Medicine and Health Sciences at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), where they met SQU students, faculty, and staff.

They also toured the Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care and Research Centre, Sul-



Dr Ghizlane Bendriss

## Adviser to PM meets Norwegian official



The Adviser to the Prime Minister and Official Spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, HE Dr Majed bin Mohammed al-Ansari, has met Norwegian Special Envoy to Yemen Heidi Johansen. Their meeting discussed co-operation relations between the two countries and ways of supporting and strengthening them, as well as the latest regional and international updates, in addition to several topics of mutual interest. - QNA

## Uganda votes in poll seen as test of Museveni's strength

AFP/Reuters  
Kampala

Polls closed in Uganda yesterday after a chaotic day of voting that took place under an Internet blackout and with long delays caused by technical breakdowns as President Yoweri Museveni seeks to extend his 40 years in power.

Museveni, an 81-year-old who came to power at the head of a rebel army in 1986, is widely expected to win a seventh term in office thanks to his total control of the state and security apparatus.

However, inside a Kampala stadium in an opposition stronghold, there were loud cheers as a crowd watched the counting of votes and returning officers read out ballots for the main challenger, singer-turned-politician Bobi Wine.

The 43-year-old styles himself the "ghetto president" after the slum areas of the city where he grew up, but has faced "brutal repression" of his campaign, according to rights groups.

Official results were due within 48 hours.

Wine accused the government of "massive ballot-stuffing" and arresting some of his party officials under cover of the internet blackout imposed by the government this week.

In many polling stations around the country, voting was delayed by several hours as ballot boxes were slow to arrive and biometric machines - used to verify voters' identity - were malfunctioning,

which some blamed on the Internet blockage.

"We are holding elections in the dark," Wine said after casting his vote.

"This is done in order to facilitate the intended rigging of the regime," he said. "We would encourage the people of Uganda to resist."

However, voting passed off peacefully.

A spokesperson for the Ugandan Red Cross, which deployed across the country ahead of polls, told AFP that they had heard "no substantive" reports of violence.

There was a heavy police and army presence throughout the day, with authorities determined to prevent the anti-government protests seen in neighbouring Kenya and Tanzania in recent months.

Yesterday many polling stations did not open on time because biometric voter verification machines were not working, leading the electoral commission to extend the close of voting by an hour.

Casting his ballot in the Kasangati township, Ronald Tenywa, a 45-year-old university researcher, complained that political leaders "cling on for a long time".

"If we vote for someone who cares, things will be better for Uganda," he said.

Museveni acknowledged even he had trouble with the voting machines and promised to investigate.

"I put my right... thumbprint. The machine did not accept it. I put my left, it did not accept it," he told journalists, adding that the machine finally accepted a scan of



A woman casts her vote at a polling centre in Kampala. - Reuters

his face, allowing him to vote.

As with Wine's 2021 campaign, hundreds of his supporters were arrested in the run-up to the vote.

He wore a flak jacket at rallies, describing the election as a "war" and Museveni as a "military dictator".

Human Rights Watch has denounced this week's suspension of 10 non-governmental organisations (NGOs), including election monitors.

The government said the Internet shutdown was needed to prevent the spread of "misinformation" and "incitement to violence", but the United Nations called it "deeply worrying".

The other major opposition figure, Kizza Besigye, who ran four times against Museveni, was abducted in Kenya in 2024 and brought back to a military court in Uganda for a treason trial that is ongoing.

## US 'monitoring Iran closely', slaps sanctions

US President Donald Trump is closely monitoring the situation on the ground in Iran, White House spokeswoman Karoline Leavitt said yesterday, adding Trump and his team have warned Tehran there would be "grave consequences" if - according to Washington - killings linked to its crackdown continue. It also imposed sanctions yesterday on Iranian security officials and financial networks, accusing them of orchestrating a violent crackdown on peaceful protests and laundering billions in oil revenues. Among those sanctioned is Ali Larijani, secretary of Iran's Supreme Council for National Security, whom Washington accused of coordinating the crackdown and calling for force against protesters. Four regional commanders of Iran's Law Enforcement Forces and Revolutionary Guard were also sanctioned for their roles in the crackdown in Lorestan and Fars provinces. - Reuters, AFP

## Israel strikes in Lebanon

The Israeli military said yesterday that it conducted air strikes against Hezbollah targets shortly after issuing evacuation orders for the village of Sohmor in southern Lebanon. Earlier in the day the army had warned residents of Sohmor to evacuate certain areas ahead of strikes against Hezbollah targets.

## UK, Portugal shut their embassies in Tehran

Portugal announced yesterday a "temporary" closure of its embassy in Tehran, citing a "context of tension" and advised its nationals not to travel to Iran.

Portugal's foreign ministry said in a statement that eight Portuguese citizens had already left Iran, and others were preparing to do the same.

Another 10 Portuguese passport holders, including seven dual nationals, had decided to remain in the country, the ministry said.

On Wednesday the British embassy in Tehran was temporarily closed.

"We have temporarily closed the British embassy in Tehran, this will now operate remotely. Foreign Office travel advice has now been updated to reflect this consular change," a UK government spokesperson said.

Britain's ambassador and all consular staff were evacuated based on a security assessment and a decision to prioritise staff safety, a British official said. - AFP/Reuters

## Mass grave found in eastern Libya containing bodies of 21 migrants

Reuters  
Tripoli

At least 21 bodies of migrants have been found in a mass grave in eastern Libya, with up to 10 survivors in the group bearing signs of having been tortured before they were freed from captivity, two security sources said yesterday.

The sources, speaking on condition of anonymity, said security authorities raided a farm near the town of Ajdabiya after receiving a report of migrants from sub-Saharan Africa being held there.

"We found migrants - men, women and children - bearing signs of torture. They were taken to a hospital where they reported that other migrants had been with them and then disappeared," one of the security sources told Reuters.

The mass grave was discovered some 10km (six miles) southeast of Ajdabiya, which is around 160km from Benghazi, the sec-

ond largest city in the North African country.

The farm owner was arrested and had admitted the presence of a mass grave on his property, the sources said.

Unverified pictures posted on the Internet showed a number of security personnel and Red Crescent volunteers placing bodies allegedly found on the farm property into black plastic bags.

How the migrants died remained unclear and investigations were underway, said one of the security sources.

Libya has become a transit route for migrants fleeing conflict and poverty to Europe via dangerous routes across the desert and over the Mediterranean since the toppling of Muammar Gaddafi in a North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato)-backed uprising in 2011.

The oil-based Libyan economy is also a draw for impoverished migrants seeking employment, but security throughout the sprawling country is poor, leaving migrants vulnerable to abuses. In July, more than 100 migrants, including five women, were freed from captivity in Ajdabiya after being held for ransom by a gang, according to Libya's attorney-general.

In September, the UN International Organisation for Migration (IOM) said at least 50 people had died after a vessel carrying 75 Sudanese refugees caught fire off Libya's coast.

In mid-October, 61 bodies of migrants were recovered on the Mediterranean coast west of the capital Tripoli.

UN data collected in 100 Libyan municipalities between August and October 2025 showed they were hosting a total of 928,839 migrants from 44 countries. However, several states including Britain, Spain, Norway and Sierra Leone urged Libya at a UN meeting in Geneva in November to close detention centres where rights groups say migrants and refugees have been tortured, abused and sometimes killed.



## World Hindi Day 2026 celebrated with grandeur

• Indian embassy, Amrit Uttar Pradesh Navrang Sanskritik Mandal unite to showcase global spirit of Hindi language

Amrit Uttar Pradesh Navrang Sanskritik Mandal (AUPNSM), Qatar, in collaboration with the embassy of India in Doha, marked World Hindi Day 2026 recently, bringing together a large and enthusiastic audience.

Diplomats, community leaders, cultural organisations, teachers, students and Hindi enthusiasts from several countries attended the event – organised to honour Hindi as a global language that strengthens the cultural and emotional bonds among people across the world.

The programme commenced with the traditional lighting of the ceremonial lamp, followed by the rendition of the Qatar and Indian national anthem.

The auditorium was filled with an atmosphere of pride and harmony as participants from Qatar, US, Nepal, Sri Lanka and African nations took the stage to express their love for the world's 3rd most spoken language – Hindi – through songs, poems, dramatised street plays, traditional and fusion dances.

The performances beautifully demonstrated that Hindi is not just a language but a living cultural expression that transcends geographical boundaries.

Hindi book (*FIFA Ki Dhoon*) written by Shalini Verma was also inaugurated by Indian ambassador Vipul. In his keynote address, he spoke about the historical evolution of Hindi and its growing significance in today's multicultural world.

He highlighted the global outreach of Hindi literature, cinema and digital communication, noting how the language unites Indian diaspora communities and fosters intercultural dialogue in regions like the Middle East.

"Hindi carries the essence of India's rich heritage and continues to serve as a bridge of friendship, connecting diverse cultures and communities across the world," Vipul remarked.

He also commended the efforts of community organisations such as AUPNSM in Qatar for their continuous dedication to promoting India's linguistic and cultural identity in Qatar.

The evening featured captivating performances by foreign participants, including children and adults who delivered powerful poetry recitations, emotional monologues and lyrical dance presentations centred on the themes of language, culture, and unity. Each performance displayed exceptional talent, confidence, and heartfelt af-



tion for Hindi. The full house audience applauded enthusiastically, turning the event into a celebration of both art and emotion.

Nita Mishra, president of AUPNSM

Qatar, thanked the embassy of India for its support in making the event possible. She also thanked the participants, volunteers, guests and AUPNSM management committee members - Nikhil Srivastava, Ajay Rai, Ashutosh Mishra, Mayank Sharma, volunteers - Afzal Ayub, Kanika Mehrotra, Shilpi Sangal, Anupam Sharma and Shubham Shankhdhar whose contributions turned the

event into a spectacular success. The event concluded with the distribution of mementos, certificates of appreciation to participants and collaborators.

## Cultural fervour and linguistic pride mark MES celebration

MES Indian School organised an engaging and culturally rich programme on January 8 at the school's Conference Hall to mark World Hindi Day, igniting students' interest in learning and appreciating the Hindi language.

The programme was presented by students representing diverse linguistic communities from around the world, showcasing the Hindi language's positive influence.

The event commenced with an introduction by Sameer Pandey, a member of the faculty in the department of Hindi, and a welcome address delivered by Aariz Mazood Khan (class VII-G).

In her inaugural address, Dr Hameeda Kadar, principal of MES Indian School, emphasised the importance of Hindi as a powerful medium of expression and a symbol of cultural identity and national pride.

She encouraged students to embrace the language and its literary heritage with enthusiasm and commitment.

The celebration was enlivened by a cultural programme presented by students from the 'boys', 'girls', and junior sections. The performances included inspiring speeches, melodious group songs, and graceful dance presentations, all reflecting the beauty and richness of the Hindi language and culture.

Teacher Mohamed Elsayed Ibrahim highlighted the Hindi language's growing



global presence while Rajendran S, coordinator of the Hindi department, captivated the audience with a heartfelt poem and delivered an inspiring message. He

encouraged students to develop a deep-rooted passion for the Hindi language. The event concluded with a vote of thanks by Khan Omer Ahmed, followed

by the national anthem sung by the school choir. The celebration was attended by school officials, teachers, and students from all sections, whose par-

icipation contributed to the event's resounding success. It served as a vibrant reminder of the importance of linguistic pride and cultural unity through Hindi.

## MES dazzles at World Hindi Day event

Students of MES Indian School delivered an exceptional performance at the World Hindi Day celebrations, organised by the embassy of India in Qatar on January 10 at the DPS-Modern Indian School.

The event witnessed the active participation of MES students representing various linguistic communities, who came together to showcase the richness and global significance of the Hindi language.

Their confidence, cultural insight, and linguistic prowess were prominently displayed through a series of engaging activities conducted by the embassy to promote Hindi as a global language.

During the felicitation ceremony, department of Hindi co-ordinator Rajendran S and faculty member Bijimol were honoured with a shawl in recognition of their significant contributions to promoting the Hindi language among students.

Indian ambassador Vipul lauded their commitment to fostering linguistic apprecia-

tion and cultural enrichment through Hindi language. The programme also featured a well-crafted Hindi song, written by Rajendran S, which captured the cultural essence and literary value of the language. A video presentation, edited by Bijimol, added visual charm to the performance, earning admiration from the audience. The event highlighted the school's commitment to nurturing linguistic talents and promoting language and culture on international platforms, as well as its significant role in fostering cultural unity beyond borders.

A team of 15 teachers, eight students, and their parents represented MES Indian School at the programme. The co-ordination of MES activities was effectively carried out by Sameer Pandey and Namitha, under the leadership and guidance of Rajendran S. The celebration was a grand success, serving as a vibrant platform for artistic expression, cultural integration, and linguistic harmony.





# More US arms sales in the pipeline: Taiwan

Reuters  
Taipei

**M**ore US arms sales to Taiwan are in the pipeline with four deals yet to be notified to Congress, a senior Taiwanese defence official said yesterday, following the an-

nouncement of an \$11bn package last month, the largest ever for the island. The US is Taiwan's most important international backer and arms supplier, despite the lack of formal diplomatic ties.

China, which claims Taiwan as its territory, held war games around the island in late December after the latest deal was announced. Speak-

ing to reporters in Taipei following a weekly Cabinet meeting, vice defence minister Hsu Szu-chien said that four additional packages for Taiwan had yet to be formally notified to the US Congress, the usual process for approval of such sales.

"Don't ask me what four these are, I cannot say, but there are still four cases yet to be notified to Con-

gress," Hsu said, adding he could not say more for legal reasons.

"As a matter of policy, the department does not confirm or comment on proposed defence sales until they have been formally notified to Congress," a state department spokesperson said.

The announced December arms sales cover eight items, including

Lockheed Martin HIMARS rocket systems and Altius loitering munition drones. In November, President Lai Ching-te unveiled an extra \$40bn in defence spending to 2033 to underscore Taiwan's determination to defend itself in the face of the rising threat from China.

But Taiwan's opposition, which has the most seats in parliament,

has not let the measure progress to the committee stage for review, arguing that the spending details are vague and that they want more details.

Defence Minister Wellington Koo will give lawmakers a confidential briefing on Monday, and the ministry is happy to give more details, Hsu said.

# Beijing tells Chinese companies to stop using US and Israeli cybersecurity software

Reuters  
Beijing

**C**hinese authorities have told domestic companies to stop using cybersecurity software made by more than a dozen firms from the US and Israel due to national security concerns, three people briefed on the matter said.

As trade and diplomatic tensions flare between China and the US and both sides vie for tech supremacy, Beijing has been keen to replace Western-made technology with domestic alternatives.

The US companies whose cybersecurity software has been banned include Broadcom-owned VMware, Palo Alto Networks and Fortinet, while the Israeli companies include Check Point Software Technologies, two of the sources said.

The third source said other companies whose software was banned included Alphabet-owned Mandiant and Wiz, whose purchase Alphabet announced last year, as well as US firms CrowdStrike, SentinelOne, Recorded Future, McAfee, Claroty, and Rapid7.

Israeli firm CyberArk, whose purchase was announced by Palo Alto last year, was also on the list, as were Orca Security and Cato Networks, two Israeli firms, and Imperva, which was purchased by French defense firm Thales in 2023.

Recorded Future said in an e-mail that it did no business in China and

had no intention of doing so. McAfee said it is a consumer-focused company whose technology "is not built for government or enterprise use."

CrowdStrike said it did not sell into China and did not have offices, hire people or host infrastructure there, and thus could "only be negligibly affected." SentinelOne said it had "no direct revenue exposure to China," citing similar reasons.

Claroty said it did not sell to China. In a statement, Orca Security CEO Gil Geron said his company had not been notified of the move. Geron added that his company was focused on defence and that a ban "would be a step in the wrong direction."

The other blacklisted companies did not respond to requests for comment.

Reuters was unable to establish how many Chinese companies received the notice that the sources said was issued in recent days.

Chinese authorities expressed concern the software could collect and transmit confidential information abroad, the sources said. They declined to be named due to the sensitivity of the situation.

China's internet regulator, the Cyberspace Administration of China, and the ministry of industry and information technology had not responded to requests for comment at the time of publication.

The US and China, which have been locked in an uneasy trade truce, are preparing for a visit by US

President Donald Trump to Beijing in April.

While the West and China have clashed over China's efforts to build up its semiconductor and artificial intelligence sectors, Chinese analysts have said Beijing has become increasingly concerned that any Western equipment could be hacked by foreign powers.

It has therefore sought to replace Western computer equipment and word processing software.

The country's largest cybersecurity providers include 360 Security Technology and Neusoft.

Some of the US and Israeli companies facing a ban for their part have repeatedly alleged Chinese hacking operations, which China has denied.

Last month, Check Point published a report on an allegedly Chinese-linked hacking operation against an unidentified "European government office." In September, Palo Alto published a report alleging a Chinese hacking effort targeted diplomats worldwide.

Several of the firms do not conduct business with Chinese clients, but others have built a significant footprint in China.

Fortinet has three offices in mainland China and one in Hong Kong, according to its website. Check Point's website lists support addresses in Shanghai and Hong Kong. Broadcom lists six China locations, while Palo Alto lists five local offices in China, including one in Macau.



Canada's Prime Minister Mark Carney and China's Premier Li Qiang review the honour guard at an official welcoming ceremony, during the first visit by a Canadian prime minister to China since 2017, at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, China, yesterday.

# Canada's Carney hails warmer ties with China, Xi's leadership

Reuters  
Beijing

**P**rime Minister Mark Carney yesterday hailed Canada's improving ties with China as well as the leadership of President Xi Jinping, declaring that their nations were charting a new course in co-operation at a time of global division and disorder.

The four-day visit to China was the first by a Canadian prime minister since 2017, following up on Carney's positive meeting with Xi in South Korea in October. The two are set to meet again today.

"We're heartened by the leadership of President Xi Jinping and the speed with which our relationship has progressed," Carney

told China's top legislator, Zhao Leji, in a meeting in Beijing.

"It sets the stage for these important discussions on a wide range of issues where we can be strategic partners from energy to agriculture, to people-to-people policies, multilateralism, to issues on security."

Carney's optimism follows months of intense re-engagement by both countries aimed at recalibrating ties that had soured under the previous prime minister, Justin Trudeau.

The efforts have also been fuelled by a push to diversify export markets after US President Donald Trump imposed tariffs on Canada last year and suggested the longtime US ally could become his country's 51st state.

"Our teams have worked hard,

addressing trade irritants and creating platforms for new opportunities," Carney told Premier Li Qiang in a separate meeting. "I believe that together, we are bringing this relationship back toward where it should be."

Periods of tension in the past decade have strained ties, most recently after Trudeau's government imposed tariffs on Chinese electric vehicles in 2024, following similar US curbs.

Canadian Industry Minister Melanie Joly, who was part of Carney's delegation to China, said talks about auto tariffs were still ongoing, when asked by reporters if Canada might reduce the EV tariffs by 50%. Negotiations will continue today, Joly said, when Carney will meet with Xi.



Philippine Foreign Minister Ma. Theresa P Lazaro and Japanese Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi shake hands while holding signed bilateral agreements ahead of their joint press conference in Pasay City, Metro Manila, Philippines, yesterday.

# Japan and Philippines sign new security pacts

Reuters  
Manila

**T**he Philippines and Japan yesterday signed two defence pacts, including a deal allowing their forces to exchange supplies and services, with both countries seeking to strengthen security co-operation in response to rising regional tensions.

The Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement, designed to enable the swift provision of supplies and services between their militaries, comes months after a landmark Reciprocal Access Agreement between two of Washington's closest Asian allies took effect.

Japanese Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi signed the deals in Manila during a nine-day Middle East and Asia tour.

Motegi and his Philippine counterpart Theresa Lazaro, also an-

nounced a \$6mn Official Security Assistance from Tokyo to fund the building of facilities to house rigid-hulled inflatable boats donated by Japan to boost Manila's naval capabilities.

Japan has voiced concerns about rising maritime tensions in East Asia, opposing any unilateral attempt to change the status quo and backing Philippine maritime security as part of a broader trilateral framework with the US.

"The secretary and I also confirmed the importance of the Japan, Philippines, US trilateral co-operation in the face of an increasingly severe strategic environment," Motegi said in a joint press conference with Lazaro.

Japan has supported the 2016 ruling by the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague rejecting China's expansive South China Sea claims, a decision Beijing has rejected.

# Two dead in Thailand after another crane collapses

Reuters  
Bangkok

**A** crane collapsed onto a road near Thailand's capital yesterday, crushing two vehicles and killing two people a day after a similar accident in the northeast caused the derailing of a train and the deaths of 32 passengers.

Thailand's transport minister said construction firm Italian-Thai Development PCL, whose crane fell onto the train in northeastern Nakhon Ratchasima province a day earlier, was also

involved in the crane accident near Bangkok.

Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul, who faces a general election next month, said yesterday his government is moving to cancel two contracts with ITD involving the two accident-hit projects, and vowed legal action against the firm.

"The ministry of transport has been instructed to terminate the contracts with the contractors, pursue all legal action available, and place them on a blacklist," the ITD statement to the Thai stock exchange said.

The government has also ordered a pause to around a dozen

active ITD construction projects involving the state and put them under review, Transport Minister Phiphat Ratchakitprakarn said.

Italian-Thai, founded in 1958 by Italian and Thai partners, said in a statement shortly after the prime minister's remarks that it accepts responsibility for providing care, compensation, and remedies for the losses incurred in both incidents.

"The company will review and strengthen its safety measures to ensure stricter and more comprehensive standards going forward," the ITD statement to the Thai stock exchange said.

Yesterday's incident took place in Samut Sakhon province, where the crane, which was being used in building an elevated highway, fell onto the road beneath and crushed two cars, according to police, who said two people were also injured.

It was the latest in a series of fatal accidents at construction projects in Thailand, several involving Italian-Thai, including the collapse of a partially-built Bangkok tower last year that killed at least 89 people during a 7.7-magnitude earthquake and led to charges of negligence against 23 people.

Images from the scene yesterday showed a mangled green crane and huge pieces of concrete that had crushed the vehicles below. Video from news outlet Thai Rath showed cars reversing to avoid the wreckage amid a cloud of dust from the collapsed concrete.

Thailand, southeast Asia's second-biggest economy, has been undergoing significant infrastructure development, from elevated highways and high-speed rail lines to major expansion of its elevated rail network in Bangkok.

Authorities said an investigation into Wednesday's accident

in the northeast was ongoing. As well as the 32 fatalities, 66 of the 195 passengers on the train were injured after a crane involved in building structures for an elevated high-speed rail project collapsed onto an existing train line below.

The cross-country high-speed rail project will connect to China through Laos. The government said last year that more than a third of construction had been completed in the segment connecting Bangkok to Nakhon Ratchasima, with the whole line to Nong Khai at the border with Laos ready by 2030.

**A** UN rights expert has voiced alarm at US signalling of a "shoot-to-kill" posture both extraterritorially, including on the high seas and in Venezuela, and in law enforcement operations at home.

Morris Tidball-Binz, the UN special rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary and arbitrary executions, voiced concern that "shoot-to-kill" posturing in Washington risked "lowering the threshold for the use of lethal force".

"There are no exceptions to the absolute and universal prohibition of the arbitrary deprivation of life," said the inde-

pendent expert, who is mandated by the UN Human Rights Council but does not speak on behalf of the United Nations.

"International law does not allow states to kill on the basis of labels, perceptions of how someone appears, or allegations of wrongdoing," he said in a statement.

"Whether at sea, abroad, or at home, the use of lethal force must be strictly limited by the principles of legality, necessity, proportionality and precaution, and may be used only as a last resort to protect life."

His comments came after Washington's deployment of a huge naval force in the Caribbean, carrying out deadly strikes on boats it says were used for drug trafficking, seizing tankers and executing a stunning operation to seize Venezuela's leftist leader.

Tidball-Binz emphasised that unprovoked use of armed force on the sovereign territory of another state violates the UN Charter.

It could also constitute "the international crime of aggression attributable to

individual political and military leaders involved", his statement said.

"Deaths resulting from such an act of aggression are arbitrary by definition," he said. "Respect for the right to life is inseparable from respect for international law, including the prohibition on the use of force."

Tidball-Binz also expressed grave concern over the fatal shooting of a woman in Minneapolis last week by a US immigration officer, demanding an "independent, impartial and transparent investigation".

"Where potentially unlawful deaths

occur, investigations should comply with the Minnesota Protocol and victims' families must have access to truth, justice and reparation," he said.

The expert urged the United States to urgently review relevant laws, policies and rules of engagement around the use of lethal force domestically and extraterritorially.

"The right to life is non-derogable and non-negotiable," he said, insisting that "states must never normalise a 'shoot-to-kill' approach which erodes the strict and absolute limits international law places on the use of lethal force." - AFP

## US seizes sixth tanker ahead of Trump meeting with Machado

**T**he United States has seized another Venezuela-linked tanker, US officials told Reuters yesterday, ahead of a meeting between US President Donald Trump and Venezuelan opposition leader Maria Corina Machado.

The seizure marks the sixth vessel targeted since mid-December that was either carrying Venezuelan oil or had done so in the past.

The officials, speaking on the condition of anonymity, said the seizure took place in the Caribbean.

The US military's Southern Command confirmed the pre-dawn operation, saying that US forces apprehended tanker *Veronica* "without incident".

It said the *Veronica* was "operating in defiance of President Trump's established quarantine of sanctioned vessels in the Caribbean".

"The only oil leaving Venezuela will be oil that is co-ordinated properly and lawfully," Southern Command said in a statement.

Guyana-flagged Aframax tanker *Veronica* departed empty from Venezuelan waters in early January, according to shipping documents from state company PDVSA and monitoring service Tanker-Trackers.com.

The vessel had not returned to Venezuela as other ships have done in recent days.

The seizures began as part of Trump's campaign to force Venezuelan president Nicolas Maduro out of power, which culminated in US forces swooping into the country to grab him and his wife on January 3.

Since then, Trump has said the US plans to control Venezuela's oil resources indefinitely as it seeks to rebuild the country's dilapidated oil industry in a \$100bn plan.

The US government has filed for court warrants to seize dozens more tankers linked to the Venezuelan oil trade, four sources told Reuters on Wednesday, as Washington consolidates control of oil shipments in and out of the South American country.

The vessels intercepted so far have been either under US sanctions or part of a "shadow fleet" of ships that disguise their origins to move oil from major sanctioned producers - Iran, Russia or Venezuela.

Most of the Venezuela-linked vessels seized so far were flying fake flags or their flag registrations had been cancelled before the interceptions, the maritime authorities of Panama, Cook Islands and Guyana have told Reuters.

The latest seizure came ahead of a meeting between Trump and Machado, in their first face-to-face meeting since the US ousted her long-time foe, Maduro.

Trump has previously called her a "freedom fighter" but dismissed the idea of installing her to lead Venezuela after ousting Maduro, saying that she did not have enough domestic support.

A classified Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) assessment presented to Trump concluded that Maduro loyalists, including Rodriguez, were best positioned to maintain stability. - Reuters

## Trump threatens to send soldiers over Minnesota anti-ICE protests

**R**euters/AFP  
Washington/Minneapolis

**U**S President Donald Trump threatened yesterday to invoke the Insurrection Act to deploy military forces in Minnesota after days of angry protests over a surge in immigration agents on the streets of Minneapolis.

Confrontations between residents and federal officers have become increasingly tense after an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agent fatally shot a US citizen, Renee Good, in a car eight days ago in Minneapolis, and the protests have spread to other cities.

Trump's latest threat came a few hours after an immigration officer shot a Venezuelan man that the government said was fleeing after agents tried to stop his vehicle in Minneapolis.

"If the corrupt politicians of Minnesota don't obey the law and stop the professional agitators and insurrectionists from attacking the Patriots of I.C.E., who are only trying to do their job, I will institute the INSURRECTION ACT," Trump wrote on social media.

Trump, a Republican, has for weeks derided the state's Democratic leaders and called the Somali community in the area "garbage" who should be "thrown out" of the country.

He has already sent nearly 3,000 federal officers into the Minneapolis area, who have carried guns through the city's icy streets, wearing military-style camouflage gear and masks that hide their faces.

They have been met frequently by loud, often angry protests by residents, some blowing whistles or banging tambourines.

The agents have arrested both immigrants and protesters, at times smashing



A person carries a child exposed to tear gas after law enforcement deployed tear gas and munitions against protesters in north Minneapolis. - Reuters

Members of federal law enforcement are seen after using tear gas on angered community members in Minneapolis. - Reuters



tarian parole programme.

The Trump administration, which has sought to revoke Biden-era immigration and asylum programmes, accused him of being in the country illegally.

Reuters was not able to verify the account given by the DHS.

Minneapolis Police Chief Brian O'Hara told reporters at a late-night press conference that the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and Minnesota's Bureau of Criminal Apprehension were gathering evidence from the scene.

The man's injuries were not life-threatening and he was recovering in hospital, O'Hara said.

Speaking alongside O'Hara, Mayor Jacob Frey called the ICE surge an invasion and said he had seen "conduct from ICE that is disgusting and is intolerable".

"We cannot be at a place right now in America where we have two governmental entities that are literally fighting one another," Frey said.

The Insurrection Act of 1807 is a law allowing the president to deploy the military or federalise soldiers in a state's National Guard to quell rebellion, an exception to laws that prohibit soldiers being used in civil or criminal law enforcement.

It has been used 30 times in US history, according to New York University's Brennan Centre for Justice.

The Supreme Court has ruled that the president alone can determine if the act's conditions have been met.

However, so far Trump has stopped short of resorting to the law as he presses an agenda that has drawn accusations of authoritarian overreach and periodic mass rallies with the mantra "No Kings".

The president has already taken the unusual step of federalising National Guard soldiers to help with immigration law enforcement in Democrat-run cities over the objections of state governors, including in Los Angeles last year, which a judge ruled in

December was unconstitutional.

Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem, addressing reporters outside the White House, declined to say if she thinks Trump should invoke the law.

"I think that the President has that opportunity in the future. It's his constitutional right, and it's up to him if he wants to utilise it to do it," Noem said.

Asked if Trump is likely to take this major step, she said: "I don't know."

The Insurrection Act was last invoked in 1992 by [resident George H W Bush at the request of the Republican governor of California, who was facing unprecedented riots in Los Angeles following the acquittal of police officers who had beaten Rodney King, a black motorist, the previous year.

If Trump sends soldiers to Minnesota, he would almost certainly face legal challenges by the state.

The Minnesota attorney-general's office has already sued the Trump administration this week, saying that the ICE surge was violating Minnesotans' rights, and on Wednesday asked US District Judge Kate Menendez to issue a temporary order restraining it.

Brian Carter, a lawyer for Minnesota, told the judge that Trump's agents were engaged in a "pattern of unlawful, violent conduct", including racial profiling and forced entry into residents' homes without warrants.

"They are foisting this crisis onto us," Carter said.

In a social media post yesterday morning, Trump said incorrectly that the judge had "declined to block" the ICE surge.

In the hearing, Judge Menendez ordered the Trump administration to respond by Monday to Minnesota's complaints, saying that she would rule after that, calling the issues raised by Minnesota's lawsuit "eminently important".

"They deal with the very fundamental relationships between the government and the state and municipalities," she said.



Demonstrators protest on Wednesday outside of the Whipple federal building in Minneapolis. - AFP

## US pressing Mexico to allow US forces to fight cartels: NYT

**R**euters  
Washington

**T**he United States is intensifying pressure on Mexico to allow US military forces to conduct joint operations to dismantle fentanyl labs inside the country, the *New York Times* (NYT) reported yesterday, citing US officials.

US officials want American forces, either

Special Operations troops or Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) officers, to accompany Mexican soldiers on raids on suspected fentanyl labs, the report said, citing multiple unnamed officials.

"On the campaign trail, President Trump pledged to take on the cartels," a White House official told Reuters, adding that Donald Trump has "left all options on the table" to stop drugs from entering the country.

The crew Dragon spacecraft dubbed Endeavour parachuted into calm seas off San Diego about 12.45am PST (0845 GMT).

The finale of the abbreviated mission was carried live by a Nasa-SpaceX webcast.

"On behalf of SpaceX and Nasa, welcome home," mission control told the crew moments after landing.

"It's so good to be home, with deep gratitude

Trump told Fox News last week that cartels were running Mexico and suggested the US could strike land targets to combat them, in one of a series of threats to deploy US military force against drug cartels.

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

The US request to Mexico to use US forces

was renewed after Washington's forces captured Venezuelan president Nicolas Maduro in a raid on January 3, the *New York Times* reported.

Sheinbaum has previously declined offers of military action from Trump.

Reuters could not immediately verify the *New York Times* report.

Mexico's foreign ministry did not immediately respond to a Reuters request for comment outside regular business hours.

to the teams that got us there and back," Nasa astronaut Zena Cardman, 38, replied.

Joining her on the return voyage were fellow US astronaut Mike Fincke, 58, Japanese astronaut Kimiya Yui, 55, and Russian cosmonaut Oleg Platonov, 39.

In less than an hour, SpaceX recovery teams had secured their heat-scorched capsule and hoisted it onto the deck of a retrieval vessel, then helped the astronauts out of the spacecraft for their first breath of fresh air in nearly 24 weeks.

Each of the crew members, still garbed in helmeted white-and-black space suits, smiled and gave a thumbs-up as they emerged and were helped to their feet.

It was not clear from their appearance which one was ailing.

Unable to bear their own weight on Earth after spending months in microgravity, the four were each assisted onto special gurneys and escorted to an onboard medical station for routine check-ups at sea.

Afterward they were to be flown to a local hospital for further medical exams, SpaceX said.

The decision to bring all four home early was announced January 8, with Nasa Administrator Jared Isaacman saying one of the astronauts faced a "serious medical condition" that required immediate attention of doctors on the ground.

Isaacman was also present at mission control for the splashdown yesterday.

Nasa officials have not identified the crew member of concern or described the nature of the medical issue, citing privacy requirements.

Fincke, a retired Air Force colonel who has now logged five missions to space, and Cardman, a rookie astronaut and geobiologist, had been scheduled to conduct a six-hour-plus spacewalk last week to install hardware outside the station.

The spacewalk was cancelled on January 7 over what Nasa then characterised as a "medical concern" with an astronaut. - Reuters/AFP



Support teams onboard the SpaceX recovery ship SHANNON work around the SpaceX Dragon Endeavour spacecraft shortly after it landed in the Pacific Ocean off the coast of California. - AFP

## ISS crew splashes down on Earth after medical evacuation

**F**our astronauts returned safely to Earth early yesterday after an undisclosed serious medical condition affecting one of them forced an end to their International Space Station (ISS) mission a few weeks early.

Their SpaceX capsule splashed down in the Pacific off California, capping a 10-hour-plus descent from the space station and fiery re-entry through Earth's atmosphere.

It was the first time that the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (Nasa) has cut short the rotation of an ISS crew due to a health emergency.

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to the teams that got us there and back," Nasa astronaut Zena Cardman, 38, replied.

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# India close to EU trade pact as US talks drag on

**Reuters**  
New Delhi

**I**ndia expects talks on a long-sought trade deal with the European Union (EU) to conclude this month, Trade Secretary Rajesh Agrawal said yesterday, in what would be New Delhi's largest agreement as it seeks new markets amid US tariff pressures.

The deal, under discussion for years, is seen as a chance for both sides to deepen economic ties and cut reliance on China and Rus-

sia. Bilateral trade between India and the EU totalled 120bn euros (\$140bn) in 2024, making the bloc India's biggest trading partner.

Agrawal said the two sides were "very close" to finalising the pact and were exploring whether it could be wrapped up before leaders meet in New Delhi this month.

He said talks on a US trade pact were continuing and a deal would be reached when both sides were ready. Negotiations collapsed last year after a breakdown in communication between the two governments.

The president of the European Council, Antonio Costa, and European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen will visit India on January 25-27 and co-chair an India-EU summit on January 27, India's foreign ministry said.

If concluded, the deal would open India's vast and heavily protected consumer market of more than 1.4bn people to European goods and could reshape global trade flows as protectionism rises and a US-India pact remains stalled.

Both sides have been pushing to close a broad agreement after

von der Leyen and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi agreed to fast-track negotiations in an effort to close a deal in 2025. Talks, relaunched in 2022, gained momentum after US President Donald Trump imposed tariff hikes on trading partners including India.

Brussels has recently signed deals with Mexico and Indonesia and stepped up talks with India, while New Delhi has reached agreements with Britain, Oman and New Zealand.

Some sensitive agricultural items have been excluded from ne-

gotiations, an Indian trade ministry official said.

India will not open its agriculture or dairy sectors in any trade pact, officials have said, citing the need to protect millions of subsistence farmers.

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

Beyond goods, the agreement is expected to expand services trade,

investment and cooperation in digital trade, intellectual property and green technologies, as well as spur European investment in Indian manufacturing, renewable energy and infrastructure.

Challenges remain over regulatory alignment and the protection of sensitive sectors. The EU's carbon border levy, which requires importers to account for emissions in steel, cement and other carbon-intensive products, has started to hit some Indian exports and is a key concern for New Delhi, exporters said.

# Badenoch sacks Tory leadership rival Jenrick over defection plan

**Reuters**  
London

**B**ritain's Conservative Party leader Kemi Badenoch sacked one-time leadership rival Robert Jenrick from her senior policy team and suspended him from the party yesterday, saying he was plotting to defect.

Nigel Farage, the leader of the populist Reform UK party, said the two men had held discussions about him joining the party.

Jenrick lost to Badenoch in the 2024 contest to lead the main opposition party after their crushing national election defeat and was then, in an effort to reunite the party, given the role of justice spokesman.

Jenrick has used that position to build a personal profile on key issues like immigration and crime that many saw as a platform for a future challenge to Badenoch's leadership, as the Conservatives sought to counter a dramatic loss of support to Reform UK.

"I was presented with clear, irrefutable evidence that he was plotting in secret to defect in a way designed to be as damaging as possible to his shadow Cabinet colleagues and the wider Conservative Party," Badenoch said on X.

She did not say which party he was planning to defect to, and Jenrick did not

respond to a request for comment.

Farage said he had previously spoken with Jenrick and had "little doubt" that he was considering defecting to Reform, although an agreement was not imminent. Were that to occur, Jenrick would join a string of senior Conservative Party figures to switch allegiance to join the right-wing Reform, which holds a solid lead in the polls.

"I'm very surprised that this news has broken," Farage told reporters in Scotland. "Was I on the verge of signing a document with him? No. But have we had conversations? Yes."

Jenrick, who held various ministerial roles in the previous Conservative government, has undergone a transformation from being a staunch party centrist to moving towards the right with his strong criticism of immigration policies.

At least dozen prominent Conservatives have joined Reform, although Jenrick would be only the second sitting lawmaker to have switched to Farage's party.

Current opinion polling puts Reform ahead of both Prime Minister Keir Starmer's Labour Party and Badenoch's Conservatives.

That points to a possible 2029 Reform election win which would make Farage prime minister - a potentially seismic shift in a political system dominated by Labour and the Conservatives for more than a century.



Visitors look at an artwork titled "Water Lilies" by Chinese artist Ai Weiwei displayed during his first solo exhibition in India, at the Nature Morte gallery in New Delhi yesterday.

# Chinese dissident artist Ai Weiwei debuts in India

**AFP**  
New Delhi

**T**he first solo exhibition in India by Chinese dissident artist Ai Weiwei opened yesterday, featuring sculpture, installation and mixed media spanning his career, as well as his "homage" to the country.

The son of a revered poet, 68-year-old Ai is perhaps China's best-known modern artist. He helped design the famous "Bird's Nest" stadium for the 2008 Beijing Olympics but fell out of favour after criticising the Chinese government and was imprisoned for 81 days in 2011. He eventually left

for Germany four years later.

His show at New Delhi's Nature Morte gallery comes as India's relations ease with neighbouring China, although the world's two most populous nations remain strategic rivals in the region.

"This is my first exhibition in India... although there are only a dozen of my artworks, it covers several key points that trace more than 20 years," the artist, who did not attend the opening, said in a statement. Gallery co-director Aparajita Jain said the show aimed to broaden understanding and artistic exchange.

"We're simply a space for expression - a place for conversation where we can learn about art practices from around the world

and share histories," she said.

The exhibition includes Ai's large-scale Lego compositions "Surfing" and "Water Lilies", alongside works made from porcelain, stone and even buttons.

The exhibition includes three pieces made "as a homage to India", Jain added - toy-brick works based on historic Indian paintings.

Visual arts student Disha Sharma, 20, travelled 90kms from the city of Rohtak to see the opening. "It's not art that you immediately understand," said Sharma. "It makes you think."

Srishti Rana Menon, an artist based at Nature Morte, said that seeing the work in India was exciting.

## Vote cast in BMC elections



A woman poses next to a poster with her ink-marked finger after voting at a polling centre during the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) elections in Mumbai, India, yesterday.

## Harry to give evidence in suit against Daily Mail next week

**Reuters**  
London

**B**ritain's Prince Harry is due to give evidence at London's high court next Thursday in his and other high-profile British figures' privacy lawsuits against the publisher of the *Daily Mail*, his lawyers said yesterday.

It will be the prince's second such court date in three years, having become the first British royal to give evidence in 130 years in 2023 in another lawsuit against Mirror Group Newspapers.

In next week's case, Harry, the younger son of King Charles, and six others including singer Elton John, are suing Associated Newspapers over alleged unlawful information gathering dating back 30 years.

Associated rejects any wrongdoing by its titles, saying there is no basis to any of what it describes as the claimants' "preposterous smears" against its journalists.

The nine-week trial starts on

Monday and will see Harry, John and the other claimants - including John's husband David Furnish and actors Liz Hurley and Sadie Frost - give evidence as they seek to prove their case against Associated.

Harry will be in the witness box on January 22, according to a draft trial timetable made public on Thursday. John and Furnish are due to give evidence in February but will seek to do so remotely, their lawyers said.

The case against Associated is the last outstanding case brought by Harry and his US wife Meghan against media organisations since 2019, in what he has described as his mission to rid the British press of senior executives and editors he accuses of abusing their power.

Associated unsuccessfully applied to throw out Harry and the cases because they had been brought too late, with the high court ruling in 2023 that the lawsuit should proceed to trial. However, that issue is still likely to form part of the arguments at the trial.

# UK presses on with Grok probe despite Musk's climbdown

**Reuters**  
London

**B**ritain welcomed a U-turn by xAI to stop its Grok AI chatbot making non-consensual sexually explicit deep-fakes, but said its investigation into how Elon Musk's company ever allowed it to happen would continue.

Musk's artificial intelligence company xAI late on Wednesday imposed restrictions on all Grok users, limiting image editing

following global concerns from regulators. "This is a welcome development," Britain's media regulator Ofcom said yesterday.

"However, our formal investigation remains ongoing. We are working round-the-clock to progress this and get answers into what went wrong and what's being done to fix it."

Britain is one of a growing list of countries cracking down on explicit content generated by Grok, imposing bans and demanding safeguards in a global push to curb illegal material.

xAI, owned by billionaire Musk, said it had implemented tech fixes to stop the Grok account on its X platform editing images of real people in revealing clothing.

It had previously limited the feature to paying users, but the change did nothing to quell criticism.

Britain's Technology Secretary Liz Kendall claimed the U-turn as a victory in the government's fight to rein in the powers of big tech.

"Our Online Safety Act is and

always has been about keeping people safe on social media - especially children - and it has given us the tools to hold X to account in recent days," she said.

Kendall, who said earlier this week that the Ofcom probe into X must not take months and months, added yesterday that she would not rest until all social media platforms provided a service that is safe and age appropriate to users.

Separately Ofcom said yesterday that Snapchat had "materially improved" its illegal content

risk assessment, helping to protect the UK public.

xAI said it had blocked users, based on their location, from generating images of people in "jurisdictions where it's illegal". It did not identify those jurisdictions.

California joined the critics on Wednesday, when its governor and attorney general demanded answers from xAI after Musk said he was not aware of any "underage images" generated by Grok.

At first, Musk publicly laughed off the controversy, posting hu-

morous emojis in response to users' comments about the influx of objectionable photos.

More recently, X has said it treats reports of child sexual abuse material seriously and policies it vigorously.

The company is facing regulatory scrutiny around the world, from France to India.

The Philippines yesterday said it was moving to block Grok amid concerns about its ability to generate sexualised images, including content that could pose child safety risks.

# The Sunnah: the second form of revelation

Allah, Almighty, Says (what means): "This day have I perfected your religion for you and completed my favor upon you and have chosen for you Islam as your religion." [Qur'an; 5: 3]

Amongst the believers there is no doubt about this way of life called Islam. It is a complete way of life. The Creator of the heavens and the earth has not left anything out of this glorious religion (way of life) of His. As the above verse states that this religion is perfect and complete. However, something new has come in fairly recent years from Satan, concerning the Sunnah of the Messenger of Allah, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam. It has been suggested by him to the hearts of some of the Muslims that the Qur'an, as Glorious as it is, is sufficient as guidance for mankind. Meaning that the Sunnah is something that can be left off, or abandoned. Surely this is a disease that has no place in this wonderful religion (Islam).

In order to address this issue we must ask ourselves an important question. How do we worship Allah? Do we worship Him any way we want? Is there a correct methodology to worshipping Allah? Is it sufficient for us to say and do whatever it is that we feel is worship and then call it worship and it will be accepted as such? Let us consider the saying of Allah (which means): "O you who believe! Obey Allah and obey the Messenger, and make not vain your deeds!" [Qur'an; 47: 33]

You must know that the Qur'an and the Sunnah do not contradict one another, rather they complement one another. When Allah Says in this verse that the Messenger is to be obeyed, He is not only talking to that honourable group of Muslims that accompanied the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, during his lifetime. He is speaking to all of the Muslims that will come up until the Last Day.

Similarly, no one is ready to conceive the notion that when Allah, Says (what means): "O you who believe!" that the only ones who believe are the Muslims who were with the Prophet at that time and no one after them

believed and no one else will ever believe! This would be grossly limiting the Qur'an.

Satan is crafty! He may then try to sway your thinking from another angle. He may say that the Qur'an is simple to understand and that it needs no explanation. For it is true that Allah Says (what means): "We have indeed made the Qur'an easy to understand and remember" [Qur'an; 54: 32]

However, although the Qur'an is easy to understand, it does need to be explained so that it is properly understood. Allah Says (what means): "And when We have recited it to you [O Muhammad through Jibreel (Gabriel)] then follow you its (The Qur'an's) recital. Then it is for Us (Allah) to make it clear (to you)." [Qur'an; 18: 19]

Surely if the Qur'an had to be made clear to the Messenger, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, then how much more so to you and I?

Allah Says (what means): "...And We have sent down unto you (O Muhammad) the Reminder, that you may explain clearly to men what is sent down to them, and that they may give thought." [Qur'an; 16: 44]

In this verse, Allah is exhorting the Messenger, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, not merely to recite the Qur'an but to explain it as well. Obviously, some explanation is required even to the most pious of men.

Furthermore, giving the needed details to carry out certain commands given in the Qur'an was another very vital role played by the Sunnah. For example, Allah commands us to establish the prayers and to pay the obligatory charity (Zakat), saying (what means): "And establish the prayers and give Zakat (the obligatory charity) and bow with those who bow [in worship and obedience]." [Qur'an; 2:43] Yet, nowhere in the Qur'an does Allah give the required details to implement His command, and it was the Sunnah that gave us all the details of the how, when, who of this command.

Additionally, Allah Says (what means): "... (And) if you differ in anything amongst yourselves, refer it to Allah and His Messenger, if you believe in Allah and the Last Day. That is

better and more suitable for final determination." [Qur'an; 4: 59]

Once again, if we try to leave off the importance of the Sunnah, then how do we implement this verse of the Qur'an? Allah orders us to refer our differences to Him. This means for us to seek our answers from the Qur'an. He also attaches the Messenger, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, to that particular order when He stated for us to refer to Him. If we leave off the Sunnah then this part of the verse has no meaning.

Allah Says (what means): "Whoever obeys the Messenger, has obeyed Allah." [Qur'an; 4: 80]

And (what means): "Say (O Muhammad): If you (really) love Allah, then follow me, Allah will love you and forgive you your sins." [Qur'an; 3: 31]

How can the Muslims of today follow the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, and not refer to his Sunnah? How can we say that we love Allah and not try to follow the methodology of His Prophet?

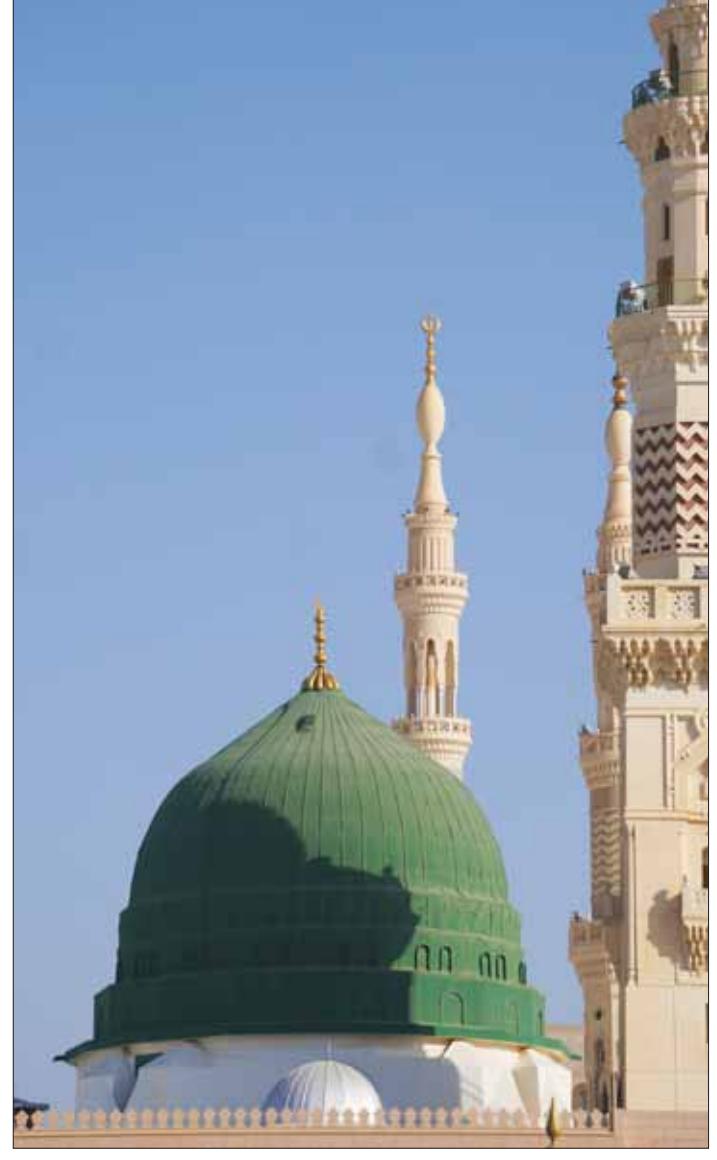
Finally, we would like to conclude with a Hadith (narration) from the Messenger of Allah that was collected by Imaam Maalik in his book called Muwatta. The Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "I have left behind two matters. Those who hold fast to them will never go astray: The Book of Allah and the Sunnah of His Messenger."

The reason that many of the Muslims are going astray today is because they are not only leaving off the Sunnah but they are leaving the Qur'an as well! If you are not giving the Sunnah its rights, then you are not giving the Qur'an its rights.

Without the Sunnah then the second statement of your Shahada (testimony of faith) also has no meaning.

Article source: <http://www.islamweb.net/emainpage/>

 **islamweb.net**  
English



## The two most authentic books of Hadith

### Saheeh Al-Bukhari:

Of all the works of Hadith, Saheeh Al-Bukhari and Saheeh Muslim are regarded as the most authentic and authoritative books, after Al-Qur'an. Indeed the very word "Saheeh" means "authentic".

Saheeh Al-Bukhari was compiled by Imam of Hadith, Mohammad Ibn Isma'eel al-Bukhari, born 194H in Bukhara, central Asia. He travelled at an early age seeking knowledge to Hijaaz (Makkah and Madinah), Ancient Syria, Iraq, Egypt, etc. He devoted more than 16 years of his life to the actual compilation of this work. He learnt from more than 1,000 scholars.

It is said that Imaam al-Bukhari collected over 300,000 Hadiths and he himself memorised 200,000 of which some were unreliable. He wrote many books especially on the bibliography of Hadith narrators and other books on various issues of Fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence). However, his book 'Saheeh Al-Bukhari' stands out for being the most authentic book of Hadith. It was also the first book to contain only authentic Hadiths, while previous books contained authentic and non-authentic Hadiths, as well as sayings of the Companions and others. Imaam al-Bukhari died in his hometown, Bukhara in the territory of Khurasaan (West Turkistan), in the year 256H.

He grouped the traditions of the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, under various headings dealing with specific points of Islamic jurisprudence. In his time, the schools of law had been generally established and his objective was to catalogue the traditions he regarded as authentic in relation to their respective topics of jurisprudence.

Before he recorded each Hadith, he would perform ablution and offer a two-Rak'ah prayer and supplicate to Allah. Many religious scholars of Islam tried to find fault in the great remarkable collection, but without success. It is for this reason, they unanimously agreed that the most authentic book after the Book of Allah is Saheeh Al-Bukhari.

### Some facts about Saheeh Al-Bukhari:

1. It contains 7,275 Hadiths, which he chose from the large number of Hadiths that he had collected.

2. The number of complete un-repeated Hadiths is 2,230.

3. All the Hadiths mentioned are authentic.

4. The conditions for accepting a Hadith were very stringent. Such as: a) The chain of narrators must be linked, i.e. every narrator must have met his predecessor, (the man of whom he heard the Hadith from, up to the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam.)

b) For it to be enclosed in the Saheeh, the narrators must be of the highest caliber regarding their piety, manners, memory, integrity, etc.

5. The book is not a mere book of narrations; it is essentially a course of study on Hadith, its derivatives, inductions and research.

6. Each one of its 97 chapters is headed by a relevant verse from the Qur'an that complements the meaning

of the Hadiths quoted.

7. Finally, much more could be said about this monumental work, however, it is enough to say that many people have reached fame and achieved the highest qualifications by studying the book, researching it and commenting on it.

### Saheeh Muslim:

Saheeh Muslim is the second most authentic book of Hadith after Saheeh Al-Bukhari, compiled by Imam Muslim ibn al-Hajjaaj al-Nisapuri. Born in 202H and died in 261 H. He travelled widely to gather his collection of Hadith to Iraq Hijaaz, Ancient Syria, and Egypt. He learnt from many scholars, most of which were al-Bukhari's teachers. He also learnt from the Imaam al-Bukhari himself and became his most loyal student. Like Imaam al-Bukhari, he wrote many books on the sciences of Hadith.

He sought not so much to complement the issues at stake in the fiqh, the Islamic jurisprudence, but rather to produce a collection of sound traditions, an authentic record, on which future studies of Hadith could be based.

### Some facts about Saheeh Muslim:

1. The book contains 4,000 non-repeated Hadiths and 12,000 repeated ones.

2. Many narrations are mentioned in Saheeh Al-Bukhari, but with different chain of narrators.

3. In every chapter more than one Hadith with the same meaning but with different chains and text are listed. The first Hadith in each chapter is the strongest, followed by weaker narrations in order to strengthen weaker narrations.

4. Excellent classification.

5. The book is forwarded by a detailed introduction about the basis of the sciences of Hadith.

Saheeh Al-Bukhari is preferred over Saheeh Muslim based on the authenticity of the Hadiths. Imaam al-Bukhari was stricter in selecting Hadiths (chains) than Imam Muslim. Besides considering all the conditions of a Saheeh Hadith, Imaam al-Bukhari stipulated a further condition that a narrator should meet the person from whom he is narrating the Hadith.

Imam Muslim however, did not stipulate the evidence of meeting the narrator from whom he is narrating, but according to him, it is sufficient to accept the Hadith of a narrator if he lives in the same period and there was the possibility of meeting the narrator from whom he is reporting the Hadith. So, the condition of Imam Muslim was less strict than the condition of Imaam al-Bukhari.

While Bukhari's compilation is considered the more reliable of the two, Muslim's arrangement of his material has been recognised as superior, and rightly so. While al-Bukhari made the traditions in his collection testify to his own schedule of various points of law, Muslim left them to speak for themselves.

Article source: <http://www.islamweb.net/emainpage/>

## The second source of legislation

**T**he Sunnah (the actions, sayings and confirmations of Prophet Muhammad, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, is the second source of Islamic legislation and must be in complete agreement with the first source (i.e. the Qur'an).

The term Sunnah comes from the root word 'sanna', which means to pave the way.

Sunnah can be used to describe a path that people follow. In Islamic terminology, Sunnah applies to a prophetic way which includes references to the Prophet's sayings, actions, approvals, physical features and character traits.

His actions pertain to anything he did, as authentically reported by the Companions. His silent approvals on different issues meant he didn't oppose or mind what he saw, heard or knew of the actions or sayings of his Companions. Sunnah also includes everything authentically narrated concerning the Prophet's physical features and his traits.

The Qur'an and the Sunnah complement each other. Without the Sunnah, Islam is not complete, likewise without the Qur'an, Islam is not complete.

Actually, Sunnah is so important that without it one cannot fully understand the Qur'an and Islam, or be able to apply it to his life. Both of these sources guide us to the right path.

The Qur'an is the Word of Allah, whereas the Sunnah is its practical interpretation. Sunnah also gives a full account of the life of the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam.

The Qur'an principally deals with basics. It is the Sunnah which gives the details and necessary explanations of Qur'anic injunctions. For instance, Allah Says in the Qur'an what means: "... Establish the prayer..." [2: 43] But it does not specify how the prayer has to be performed.

Even after knowing the details, it

may not be possible to follow the divine injunctions contained in the Qur'an.

For not everything can be properly understood by words alone. Therefore, the Messenger of Allah, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, demonstrated before the believers how the prayer was to be performed.

Thus, not only did the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, inform the believers of the divine injunctions, but he also put these teachings into practice in all matters pertaining to religion and daily life. He, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, himself practiced these injunctions scrupulously. His practice was not a private matter; it had the status of a detailed interpretation and application of the Qur'an.

### Importance of the Sunnah

The Qur'an repeatedly reminds us of the importance of the Sunnah, enjoining us to strictly follow the Prophet sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam.

Allah, Almighty, Says what means: "... And whatever the Messenger has given you - take; and what he has forbidden you - refrain from..." [Qur'an 59:7]

Allah also Says what means: "But no, by your Lord, they will not [truly] believe until they make you [O Muhammad] judge concerning that over which they dispute among themselves and then find within themselves no discomfort from what you have judged and submit in [full, willing] submission.." [Qur'an 4:65]

Again, Allah Says what means: "It is not for a believing man or a believing woman, when Allah and His Messenger have decided a matter, that they should [thereafter] have any choice about their affair. And whoever disobeys Allah and His Messenger has certainly strayed into clear error." [Qur'an 33:36]

According to many verses in the

Qur'an, the Muslim is bound to follow the Sunnah of the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam. No one remains Muslim if he does not accept the Prophet's Sunnah.

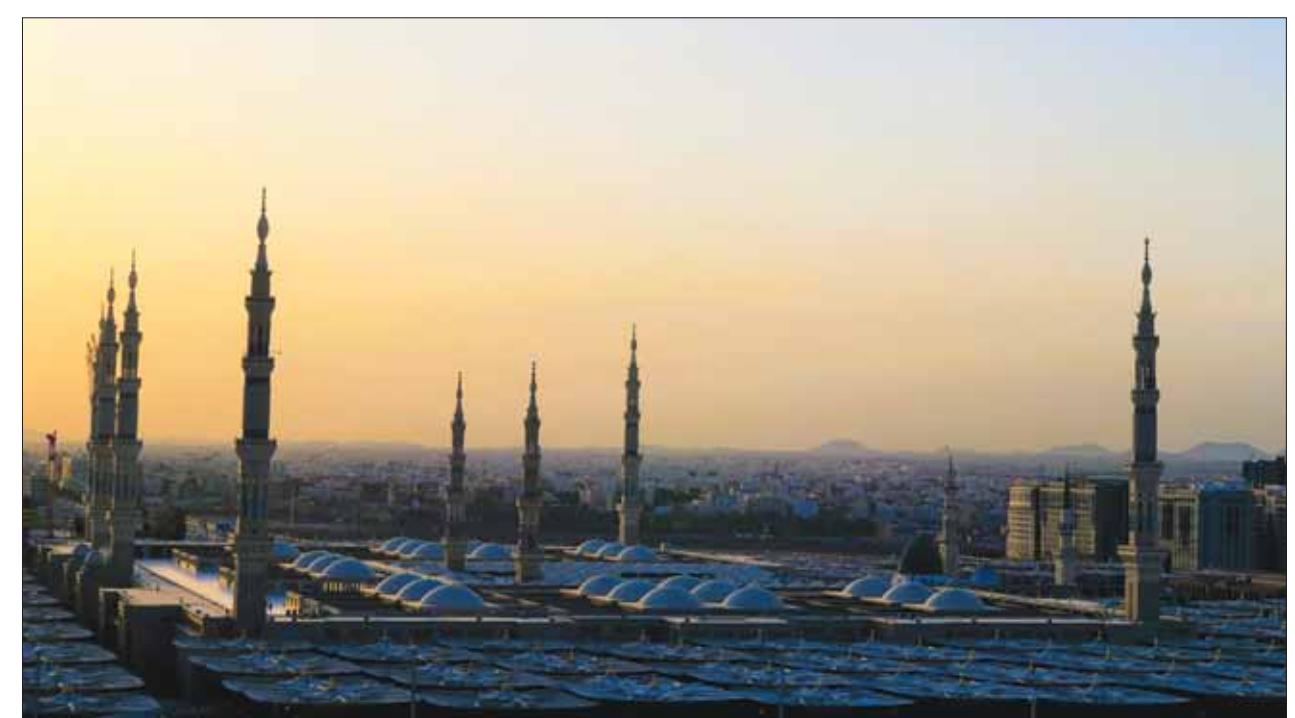
The Sunnah is nothing but a reflection of the personality of the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, who is to be obeyed at every cost.

The Sunnah was not, as is generally supposed, a thing of which the need may have been felt only after the Prophet's death, for it was very much needed in his lifetime. The two most important religious institutions of Islam are Prayer and Zakat (obligatory alms giving); yet when the injunction relating to Prayer and Zakat were delivered, and they were repeatedly revealed in both Makkah and Madinah, no details were supplied. 'Keep up prayers' is the Qur'anic injunction, and it was the Prophet himself, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, who by his own actions gave details of the prayer by saying: "Pray as you see me praying."

Zakat is again an obligation frequently repeated in the Qur'an, yet it was the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, who gave the rules and regulations for its payment and collection. These are two examples, but since Islam covers the entire sphere of human activities, hundreds of points had to be explained by the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, in word and deed.

The importance of the Sunnah, even as a second source of Islam, was an openly accepted issue by the Companions of the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam. Whenever they couldn't find a solution to a problem in the Qur'an, they would refer to the Sunnah. And they were the most diligent in preserving it for those who came after them.

Article source: <http://www.islamweb.net/emainpage/>



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Kamran Rehmat

- P.O.Box 2888, Doha, Qatar
- editor@gulf-times.com
- 44350478 (News),
- 44466404 (Sport),
- 44466636 (Home delivery)
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**GULF TIMES**

## BoJ puts self-defence ahead of solidarity with Fed's Powell

The Bank of Japan (BoJ)'s absence from a list of central banks lining up to support Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell reflects its aversion to politics and the government's reluctance to cross the US, with an early election on the horizon.

In a sign of the sensitivity of the matter, the BoJ informally consulted the government about whether to sign the joint statement, but officials were not able to say yes in time for its release, according to two government sources.

"The reason we couldn't immediately say yes is partly because of our relationship with the US," one of the sources said on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the matter.

A spokesperson for the BoJ declined to comment. The government's top spokesperson, Minoru Kihara, also declined to comment, saying on Wednesday the matter fell under the central bank's umbrella.

In a rare joint statement on Tuesday, central bank chiefs from around the world stood shoulder to shoulder with Powell after the Trump administration threatened him with a criminal indictment - a sign of their fear that the move could imperil global central bank independence. While BoJ Governor Kazuo Ueda has stressed the importance of independence, he has refrained from commenting on US President Donald Trump's attacks on the Fed.

The BoJ's decision not to sign the statement was in line with its long-held practice of withholding comment on controversial and political topics, analysts say, which likely derives from Japan's history of political meddling in monetary policy.

But it might also reflect the BoJ's desire to avoid stepping into Trump-related controversy as Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi - who touts her close relationship with her American counterpart - stands at the precipice of an early election in February, some analysts said.

"The BoJ's decision is in line with its protocol," said former BoJ board member Takahide Kiuchi. "But it also shows how it's not completely independent from government interference."

"Criticising US policy could put Japan's government under heat from Trump," said Kiuchi, who today serves as an economist at Japan's Nomura Research Institute. "It's safest to avoid making any comment on what's happening overseas."

Elsewhere in the Asia-Pacific region, New Zealand's foreign minister rebuked the country's central bank chief for signing the statement in support of Powell.

Under a law that took effect in 1998, the BoJ

**Central bank chiefs from around the world stood shoulder to shoulder with Powell after the Trump administration threatened him with a criminal indictment**

nominally enjoys independence, although that has not shielded it from political pressure to expand monetary support for an economy in the doldrums.

While the government cannot fire a BoJ chief, it has the authority to pick the governor and members of the board, who all need Parliamentary approval.

Known as a fiscal and monetary dove, Takaichi rattled markets immediately after taking office in October. She said she had control over the direction of monetary policy and stressed her preference for low interest rates.

Later, when the yen slumped and risked pushing up import costs, her administration backed down and assented to the BoJ's plan to raise interest rates to 0.75% from 0.5% in December. But Takaichi's reflexionist advisers have repeatedly warned against the danger of additional interest rate increases.

Takaichi is widely expected to call a snap election in February, a move that would give her a chance to capitalise on her strong public approval ratings. If Takaichi delivers a solid victory for her ruling party, her administration would have the authority to fill two seats that are opening up on the BoJ's nine-member board. It might also have a say in who becomes the next governor when Ueda's term ends in early 2028, analysts say.

"The BoJ is not immune to the kind of things happening with the Fed," Kiuchi, the ex-BoJ board member, said. "Although not as explicit as the way Trump intervenes, Takaichi has and could make a lot of requests (about) what the BoJ ought to do." — Reuters

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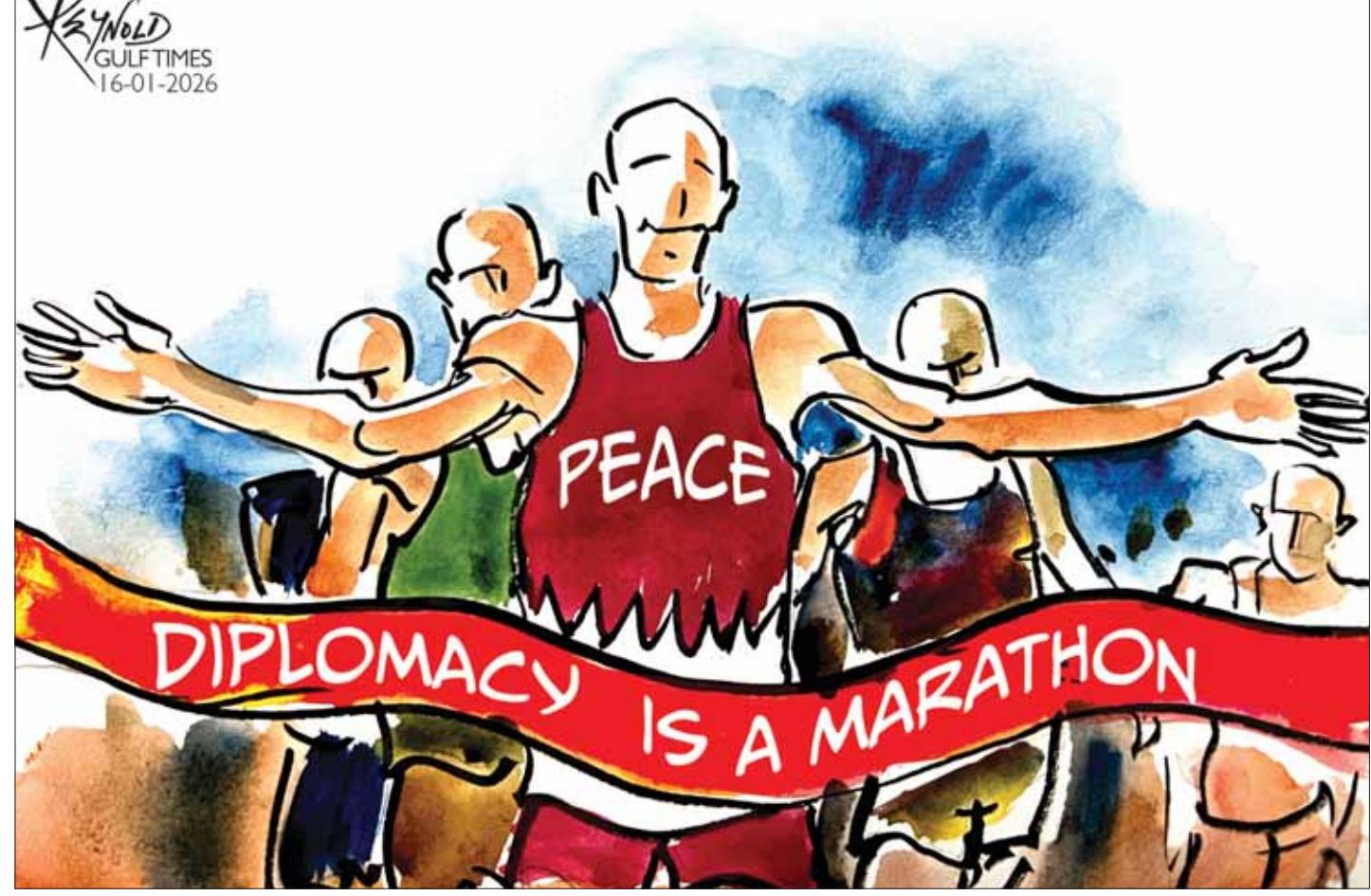
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# Doha's mediation distinguished by trust of parties involved: Chungong

**Secretary-General of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, Martin Chungong, lauded the State of Qatar for hosting the 298th session of the Executive Committee of the IPU and for the outcomes it produced in advancing sustainable social development worldwide**

**QNA**

Doha

**S**ecretary-General of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), Martin Chungong, applauded the close co-operation and ongoing partnership between the State of Qatar, the Shura Council, and the IPU across all areas related to activities and events organised at all levels and fields.

Speaking to Qatar News Agency (QNA) on the margins of the 298th session of the Executive Committee of the IPU, which concluded in Doha on Wednesday, Chungong said that the co-operation and partnership with the State of Qatar have been ongoing for many years.

Numerous joint events have been organised, the latest being a parliamentary forum with the Shura Council titled 'Investing in People and Institutions: The Role of Parliamentarians in Social Development', convened on the sidelines of the Second World Summit for Social Development hosted by the State of Qatar from November 4-6, 2025, Chungong highlighted, confirming that it was an utterly successful forum.

Chungong praised the State of Qatar for hosting this session and for the outcomes it produced in advancing sustainable social development worldwide, adding that it is essential to collaborate with the State of Qatar and the Shura Council to ensure the existence of a framework and action plan to foster social development globally.

Qatar regularly hosts IPU activities to discuss a variety of issues and topics of global significance, including, for instance, strengthening parliamentary efforts to support the peace process in the Middle East, he underlined. Chungong further stated that the IPU consistently seeks to deepen its collaboration with Qatar and continuously works to advance its shared agenda with Doha, benefiting from the expertise Qatar possesses in global peacebuilding efforts.

In addition, Chungong said that first and foremost, he believes it is entirely natural for a nation so highly active on the international stage, such as Qatar, to host the activities and events of a global organisation like the IPU, emphasising that he has visited Doha on several occasions and has observed the nation's strong commitment to the IPU.

Accordingly, Chungong underscored that he feels a great sense of ease here when considering the issues on the Union's agenda, such as peace



Martin Chungong

and security and sustainable development, issues in which Qatar is deeply engaged. For all these reasons, he finds it entirely fitting to be in Qatar and to enjoy the warm and generous hospitality.

Chungong further affirmed that the Doha session was extremely productive, expressing his sincere gratitude to the State of Qatar, and in particular to the Shura Council, for hosting the session and providing the conditions that enabled participants to conduct highly substantive deliberations and take decisions that will enhance the way the IPU executes its work in the coming months.

He highlighted the appreciated efforts of the State of Qatar in mediation, which are welcomed by all, adding that Qatar has become a hub for anyone facing a problem or crisis in need of mediation and peaceful solutions. What distinguishes Qatar in this regard is the trust placed in it and its policies, and if one looks at nations that succeed in mediation in conflict situations, they succeed because they enjoy the trust of all parties involved, Chungong underlined.

Therefore, he said, many are keen to come to Qatar, as they regard it as a neutral, non-aligned nation that commands trust, which is extremely important. He pointed out that it is no coincidence that Qatar is regarded as a hub for conflict resolution, as it has first demonstrated this commitment, and has also shown flexibility in addressing crises worldwide,

making it a trusted crossroads for all parties.

In an interview with QNA, IPU Secretary-General Martin Chungong commended the support as well as development and humanitarian aid provided by the State of Qatar to numerous countries and communities in need around the world. He noted Qatar's commitment to its international obligations in these vital sectors, as evidenced by its hosting of the Fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries in March 2023.

Chungong asserted that the role of parliaments goes beyond monitoring government performance to include contributing to peacemaking, crisis resolution, and the guarantee of human rights.

He emphasised the crucial importance of parliamentary diplomacy in enriching traditional forms of diplomacy undertaken by executive government bodies since parliaments represent the people, speak on their behalf, and advocate for their interests, adding that any efforts they undertake in the areas of peace and conflict resolution aim to create conditions that allow people to live normal lives.

When peace processes are completed anywhere in the world with the contribution of parliaments, they must be prepared to incorporate the outcomes of these processes into their legislative functions in terms of enacting sound laws to support the peace process

outcomes, holding governments accountable for failing to implement internationally reached agreements, and, more generally, representing the people and providing the resources necessary for implementing the outcomes of peace processes, he pointed out. He emphasised that it is crucial for parliaments to utilise their roles and responsibilities to promote peace globally in these areas.

In his interview with QNA, he discussed the IPU's strategy for the coming years and its priorities, focusing on enhancing people's well-being and ensuring that other actors work in tandem with parliament. This ensures that parliaments are not viewed as isolated institutions, but rather as part of a system with numerous institutions and stakeholders contributing to a shared objective.

He revealed that the IPU is developing a new strategy for the period 2027-2031, stating that one of its key priorities is how to integrate new technologies, such as artificial intelligence, into society and ensure their use for the benefit of humanity, while also minimising the risks associated with their development.

He emphasised that the IPU's strategy works with parliaments to ensure they are not merely consumers of these new technologies, but also the entities that establish a legislative framework for the responsible use of scientific and technological innovation - a crucial aspect of the new strategy.

In a related context, he highlighted the IPU's commitment to ensuring that parliaments are strong institutions in all the countries where they are present, and that they are better equipped to address citizens' concerns and guarantee their well-being.

At the end of his interview with QNA, Chungong pointed out that the current year, 2026, is the Year of Human Rights, and that it will celebrate the 50th anniversary of the IPU Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians, the 20th anniversary of the UN Human Rights Council, as well as the 60th anniversary of two fundamental covenants: the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Therefore, more attention will be given to how parliaments can contribute to global efforts to promote and defend human rights.

## Turkiye 'in talks' with Pakistan and Saudi over defence pact

AFP  
Istanbul

Nato member Turkiye is holding talks with Pakistan and Saudi Arabia to join a defence alliance established in September between the two countries, Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan said yesterday.

"At present, there are discussions and talks underway, but no agreement has yet been signed," Fidan told reporters.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's "vision is broader, more comprehensive, and aimed at establishing a larger platform," he added.

The defence agreement be-



Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Hakan Fidan looks on as he addresses the audience during a press briefing meeting in Istanbul yesterday. (AFP)

tween Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, announced amid tensions

in the Gulf region, raises many questions, particularly about its possible nuclear component, given Islamabad possesses nuclear weapons.

The Pakistan-Saudi pact was signed just months after Pakistan and India fought an intense four-day conflict in May that killed more than 70 people on both sides in missile, drone and artillery fire, the worst clashes between the nuclear-armed neighbours since 1999.

Pakistan and India, also a nuclear power, have long accused each other of backing militant forces to destabilise one another.

Saudi Arabia is believed to have played a key role in defusing the conflict.

## Deprived of heating, Kyiv enters survival mode to beat big freeze

AFP  
Kyiv, Ukraine

After running her stiff fingers along the keys, Ukrainian piano teacher Yevgenia retreated to her fort of mattresses and sheets to shelter from the cold reigning in her Kyiv flat.

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky said the country would declare a "state of emergency" in its energy sector, battered by massive Russian strikes and buckling as temperatures dip as low as -20C.

A Russian barrage of drones and missiles last week left half of the Ukrainian capital without heating, prompting mayor Vitali Klitschko to call on residents to temporarily leave the city if able to do so.

Six days later, some 300 apartment buildings still lack heating and the capital is facing prolonged emergency rolling blackouts, imposed by the authorities to ration precious supplies.

In Yevgenia's flat, the temperature was hovering at a chilly 12C.

The heating in her building connected to city's electric grid gets cut off with every blackout, as backup batteries do not have the capacity to take over.

"We've been without power for 12 hours," she told AFP. "And that's not even the worst scenario."

Every hour without power, the temperature in her living room dropped further.

"With each passing day, we're getting closer to zero."

**To break people'**  
Equipped with her flashlight



A lady cooks bursak, a traditional Central Asian bread, on a potbelly stove at a heating point in a park in Kyiv yesterday. (AFP)

and with her cat by her side, Yevgenia slipped into a pocket of warmth inside the apartment: a makeshift mattress castle.

The temperature inside reached 24C.

"This idea came to me yesterday at midnight," said the 32-year-old, surprised at its effectiveness.

"I just wanted some kind of feeling, I don't know, of safety, of childhood."

Russia has pummelled Ukraine's energy grid each winter since invading in February 2022, attacks Kyiv says are designed to hurt civilians.

"This is an attempt to break people," Oleksandr Kharchenko, director of Kyiv-based Energy Industry Research Study Center told AFP.

He accused Russia of trying to drive major cities "into a man-made disaster, into an absolute crisis."

"Right now the situation is the most difficult of the entire war in terms of energy supply and heating in several major regions," he added.

In Kyiv, the glow of car headlights and runners' headlamps dotted the otherwise frozen, blacked-out city streets after sunset.

The sound of Russian attack drones mixed with the low hum of power generators.

But residents dared not look up to check the threat from above, their gazes fixed on the path ahead to avoid slipping.

People exercised by candlelight in gyms, got their hair cut by the light of headlamps, and scanned supermarket shelves using the light from their mobile phones.

Without electricity in homes, fridges served as shelves and balconies as freezers.

### No 'disaster'

The city has also set up large, heated tents where hot meals are distributed. But amid the crisis, politics has also been at play. Zelensky has blasted city officials for the response.

"Far too little has been done in the capital," he said in a video address on Wednesday.



A Royal Danish Air Force Lockheed C-130J Super Hercules is parked on the tarmac at Nuuk international airport yesterday. (AFP)

## European military troops in Greenland as Washington aim 'remains intact'

AFP  
Nuuk

A European military mission was taking shape in Greenland yesterday, drawing a sharp rebuke from Russia, as Denmark said Washington still aimed to take control of the mineral-rich Arctic island.

Greenland's Prime Minister Jens-Frederik Nielsen insisted meanwhile that "dialogue and diplomacy are the right way forward," hailing in a Facebook post the fact that a dialogue was now "underway".

The developments came a day after a White House meeting failed to resolve "fundamental disagreement" over Greenland, an autonomous Danish territory that President Donald Trump insists the United States needs to ensure its security.

Two Danish troop transport planes landed in Greenland on Wednesday.

Britain, Finland, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden have also announced the deployment of military personnel as part of a reconnaissance mission to Greenland's capital Nuuk, under Denmark's "Arctic Endurance" exercise organised with Nato allies.

The modest military reinforcements - 13 soldiers from Germany, for example - are meant to prepare armed forces for future exercises in the Arctic, according to European defence sources.

"A first team of French service members is already on site and will be reinforced in the coming

days with land, air, and maritime assets," French President Emmanuel Macron said yesterday.

Germany's defence ministry said the aim was to "explore the framework conditions for possible military contributions to support Denmark in ensuring security in the region".

### Nato consensus'

The foreign ministers of Denmark and Greenland met with US Vice-President J D Vance and Secretary of State Marco Rubio in Washington on Wednesday.

Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen said in a statement yesterday that "a working group" was being set up to discuss how Arctic security could be improved.

"However, this does not change the fact that there is a fundamental disagreement, because the American ambition to take over Greenland remains intact," Frederiksen said, hailing the arrival of European military personnel in Greenland.

"There is consensus within the Nato alliance that a strengthened presence in the Arctic is crucial for European and North American security," she said.

Trump has argued that if the United States does not take Greenland, "China or Russia will", deriding Danish efforts to increase security for Greenland as amounting to "two dogsleds".

Denmark says it has invested almost \$14 billion in Arctic security.

The Russian embassy in Belgium, where Nato is headquartered, said the arrival of Nato forces to Greenland was concerning.

"The situation unfolding in the

high latitudes is of serious concern to us," the embassy said in a statement late Wednesday.

Nato is "building up its military presence there under the false pretext of a growing threat from Moscow and Beijing", it added.

### Frightening'

On the streets of Nuuk, where red and white Greenlandic flags fly in shop windows, on apartment balconies and on cars and buses in a show of national unity, some residents have described anxiety over the geopolitical tensions.

"It's very frightening because it's such a big thing," said Vera Stidsen, a 51-year-old teacher.

"I hope that in the future we can continue to live as we have until now: in peace and without being disturbed," she told AFP.

After attending the White House talks, Denmark's Foreign Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen posted yesterday on Facebook that "We agree on the objective: enhancing long term security in the Arctic. But we disagree on the method."

"This is 2026 - you can trade with people, but you don't trade people."

After the meeting, Trump for the first time sounded conciliatory on Greenland, acknowledging Denmark's interests even if he again said he was not ruling out any options.

"I think something will work out," Trump said.

Trump has insisted Greenland is "vital" for his planned "Golden Dome" air and missile defence system, as it lies on the shortest route for missiles between Russia and the United States.

## Spain hosted record 97mn foreign tourists in 2025

AFP  
Madrid

A record 97mn foreign tourists visited Spain in 2025 as the economically vital sector set a new benchmark for the second year running, the tourism minister said yesterday.

The first estimation represents a 3.5% increase on the 2024 figure of 94mn, while spending climbed 6.8% to 135bn euros (\$157bn), Jordi Hereu told a press conference in Madrid.

"This is a collective success by the whole country that perfectly demonstrates Spain's enormous attractiveness, because Spain is a country that seduces the world," he said.

Most visitors are European, with British, German and French holidaymakers accounting for around half of the arrivals, said Pedro Aznar, a professor at Esade business school.

Like southern European neighbour Portugal, and Greece, Spain has rebounded from harsh austerity measures and heavy debt in the early 2010s, with a tourism rebound following the Covid-19 pandemic playing an important role.

Tourism represents around 13% of the economy in the world's second most-visited country after France, whose dynamic growth has outstripped EU peers.

The Bank of Spain has predicted growth of 2.9% in 2025 for the European Union's fourth-largest economy, more than double the



Tourists take photos with their phones as they visit the Cathedral in Palma de Mallorca on August 1, 2025. Spain received a record 97mn foreign tourists last year, up from 94mn in 2024, when the previous record was set, according to a preliminary report unveiled by Spain's Minister of Industry and Tourism Jordi Hereu at a press conference in Madrid yesterday. (AFP)

average expected in the eurozone.

### Overtourism backlash

But as elsewhere, a backlash against the social and economic consequences of mass tourism is growing as Spain grapples with a persistent housing crisis.

Locals have protested in their thousands, complaining that surging visitor numbers are changing the fabric of their neighbourhoods, particularly in hotspots including Barcelona, the southern region of Andalusia and

the Canary and Balearic Islands.

Although the sector's growth generates wealth and jobs, the high numbers have "a clear impact on residents" in specific destinations as tourist accommodation "offers higher profitability," Aznar told AFP.

Barcelona and the popular southern coastal city of Malaga have announced measures to clamp down on short-term tourist rentals in a bid to tame popular discontent at rampant housing prices.

The leftist government, under pressure to find a solution to one of the population's main concerns, has ordered online holiday accommodation giants Airbnb and Booking.com to take down tens of thousands of ads deemed to have breached the regulations for short-term rentals. "The impact on environmental sustainability is also relevant," Aznar said, in a country that suffers persistent water supply stress and emerged from a years-long drought in 2025.

## Macron says France now providing two thirds of intelligence to Ukraine

Reuters  
Paris

President Emmanuel Macron said yesterday that France was now providing two-thirds of intelligence information to Ukraine, largely replacing the United States, which until last year had delivered the bulk of those services.

In March 2025, Washington made the decision to suspend intelligence sharing with Ukraine as part of efforts to crank up pressure on Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to co-operate with President Donald Trump's bid to convene peace talks with Russia, which invaded Ukraine in February 2022.

The relationship has had its ups and downs since, but there has been no indication that Washington has drastically cut its intelligence provision to Ukraine.

In a New Year's speech to the French military, Macron praised Europe's efforts over the last two years in taking over major strands of weapons support to Ukraine.

He said a coalition of some 35 countries was now providing all of the support, including financial, to Kyiv after Washington had decided to no longer fund or directly give weapons to Ukraine.

"Where Ukraine was extremely dependent on American intelligence capacity, huge majority (of it) a year ago, in the (space of) a year, two-thirds is today provided by France," Macron said.

The comments are in contrast to Kyrylo Budanov, who was appointed head of Zelensky's office and is the former chief of Ukraine's military intelligence, who said in December that Kyiv was critically dependent on Washington for intelligence ranging from satellite imagery to early warning systems after ballistic missile launches.

Ukraine's GUR military intelligence agency declined to comment.

A French defence ministry official declined to comment specifically on the president's assertions, but said much of the intelligence was of technical origin.



French President Emmanuel Macron shakes hands with soldiers after delivering his New Year's address to the armed forces at the Istres military air force base, southern France, yesterday. (AFP)



# Qatar attends Gulf education body's golden jubilee in Riyadh

**QNA**  
Riyadh

Qatar has taken part in celebrations marking the 50th anniversary of the Arab Bureau of Education for the Gulf States, held in the Saudi capital, Riyadh, with senior officials highlighting education as a moral and strategic priority for the region.

Qatar's delegation was led by HE the Minister of Education and Higher Education Lolwah bint Rashid AlKhater, accompanied by HE Ibrahim bin Saleh al-Nuaimi, the ministry's undersecretary and other senior officials. The event was attended by education ministers from across the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC), as well as representatives of leading regional



and international organisations.

On the sidelines of the celebrations, HE AlKhater toured an accompanying exhibi-

tion and witnessed the signing of several strategic agreements and partnerships between the Arab Bureau of Education

and prominent international and research institutions. These included Unesco, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA).

A high-level dialogue session on the future of education in the Gulf States was also held. Speaking during the session, HE AlKhater described the Arab Bureau of Education as a centre of expertise that has successfully combined long-standing experience with forward-looking vision.

She praised its role in supporting educational reform and strengthening a shared Gulf vision for the future.

She said Qatar views education as an ethical commitment focused on developing responsible individuals who are confident in their identity and equipped

with initiative and leadership skills.

Highlighting national efforts in education and higher education, the minister pointed to the launch of an updated national curriculum in 2025, designed to align with global developments while preserving national values. She also stressed Qatar's commitment to ensuring equal educational opportunities for people with disabilities.

On digital transformation, HE AlKhater said Qatar has embraced artificial intelligence technologies and is working to produce Gulf-based educational knowledge capable of inspiring innovation beyond the region. The golden jubilee celebrations underscored the growing emphasis among Gulf states on regional cooperation, global partnerships and digital innovation as key drivers of future education systems.

## 'Madam Due Process': How one minister's reforms reshaped a continent



Dr Oby Ezekwesili (centre) holding the 2025 International Anti-Corruption Excellence Award in Doha.

**By Tawfiq Lamari**  
Doha

The governance efficiency and anti-corruption reforms pioneered in one country can serve as a powerful benchmark for others – a principle exemplified by the distinguished career of Nigeria's Dr Oby Ezekwesili. Her transformative work as a minister and World Bank official has left an indelible mark on Nigeria and across Sub-Saharan Africa.

Now a frequent visitor to Qatar and an acclaimed African leader, Dr Ezekwesili has been honoured on the global stage with the 2025 International Anti-Corruption Excellence Award in Doha, Qatar, receiving the Lifetime Achievement and Outstanding Achievement Award.

"HH The Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani International ACE Awards highlights Qatar's steadfast commitment to promoting integrity, transparency, and accountable governance worldwide. These ethics resound well with our governance credo," Dr Oby Ezekwesili told *Gulf Times* in an interview.

She describes her impact on governance since "I started as the pioneer head of the Budget Monitoring and Price Intelligence Unit (aka Due Process Unit) it was a success story for my country. It was in this position that I received the nickname as 'Madam Due Process' for my work of leading a team of professionals to sanitise the public procurement and contracting processes at the federal level in Nigeria".

She was the architect of the Bureau for Public Procurement legislation, the Nigeria Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (NEITI) legislation, and the new Minerals and Mining legislation during her six-and-a-half year time in government, where all oil sales had to go through a public tender, thus stripping the minister from his or her discretion. "When I was minister of minerals, of education, I did a public procurement reforms for my country, Nigeria, that's a tough one because procurement is the hot bed for corruption, but I had to do it. Then I executed the transparency principles in the minerals sector, under the extractive industries initiative".

The resulting impact of Ezekwesili's mandate as Minister of Solid

Minerals (Mines and Steel), led to Nigeria's global recognition as a credible mining investment destination. She also led the first national implementation of the global standards and principles of transparency in the oil, gas and mining sector.

In her relentless struggle for transparency and good governance, Dr Ezekwesili believes that the fight against corruption reminds us of our shared responsibility to work together towards a more just and accountable society. "I promised my dad from the age of 10, I will do something about the unfair world, or that does not give governance so that poor people can have the opportunity to thrive. So, this work has made me very focused on the kinds of policies that reduce opportunities for corruption".

While in government, Ezekwesili led the restructuring and refocusing of the Education Ministry for the attainment of Education for All (Efa) targets and Millennium Development Goals. "I introduced public-private partnerships for education service delivery, revamped the Federal Inspectorate Service as an improved quality assurance mechanism, and I introduced transparency and accountability mechanisms for better governance of the budget".

She noted the "Nigeria through my work has a public procurement law, and has an institution that insures that the principles that I codified are continuing to be followed. Also, the fact that the oil sector, one of the aspects of transparency that I put in there was auction for oil licensing. The first time we did it we got an extra billion dollars, that is an impact, that is an investment in poor peoples' issues," she said.

From 2007-2012, as vice-president for the World Bank's Africa region, she managed to transfer the transparency and good governance culture successfully to the region during her mandate. "I was in charge of the bank's operations of 48 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa and supervised a lending portfolio of over \$40bn. I built on my experience in Nigeria and set a benchmark for the Africa region. I made the governance and anti-corruption programme for the countries that I was responsible for, in order to achieve inclusive growth, as vice-president for the Africa region," Dr Ezekwesili said.

## QIFF: 15 years of culinary, cultural exchange

**By A Staff Reporter**  
Doha

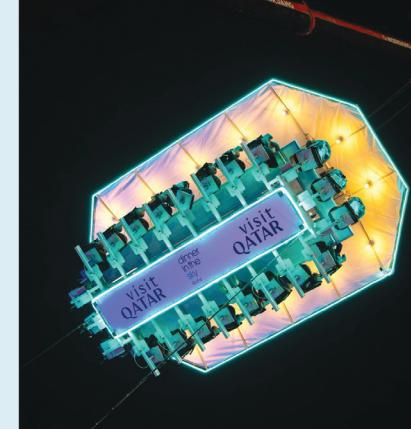
Marking 15 years since its launch, the Qatar International Food Festival (QIFF) evolved from a niche food event into one of the country's longest-running cultural festivals, reflecting the country's changing culinary and tourism landscape.

Visit Qatar inaugurated QIFF's 15th edition at the Stadium 974 Precinct on Wednesday, marking a milestone year for the annual event, which has become a fixture on Qatar's cultural calendar.

The first day of the festival featured a carefully curated cultural programme that underlined QIFF's growing role beyond food. Highlights included a traditional Qatari Fajri performance inspired by the nation's pearl-diving heritage, as well as Mexican and Canadian cultural showcases presented as part of the Qatar-Canada and Mexico 2026 Year of Culture initiative. The programme also included an opening address by Engineer Abdulaziz Ali al-Mawlawi, CEO of Visit Qatar, followed by performances, with fireworks and a drone display concluding the evening and officially signalling the launch of QIFF 2026.

In a press statement, al-Mawlawi said the festival has evolved into a flagship annual platform that reflects the depth of Qatari hospitality and the country's openness to the world. He noted that the 15th edition builds on a strong legacy of success by bringing together international flavours and local heritage, with a particular focus on Canadian and Mexican cultures through a strategic partnership with QM and the Years of Culture initiative. Al-Mawlawi stressed Visit Qatar's commitment to diversifying the tourism offering, supporting Qatari talent, and delivering experiences that reflect the cultural richness and high standards of the State of Qatar.

This year's edition features an expanded programme with a wide range of local and international food vendors, live culinary showcases, and family-friendly attractions. New additions include the QIFF Museum and Concept Store, while popular



One of the highlights at QIFF includes the Dinner in the Sky.

signature experiences return alongside new activations such as the Open Fire Food Festival, curated and presented by Steve Harvey.

Other highlights include QIFF Ring, QIFF Juniors, and Dinner in the Sky, further reinforcing the festival's position as a platform for culinary creativity and cultural

