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Tamirat Tola bags the event's top award, followed by compatriots Asefa Boki and Boki Diriba.

Ethiopian runners dominate at '26 Doha Marathon by Ooredoo

By Joey Aguilar

Doha

Ethiopian runners dominated the 2026 Doha Marathon by Ooredoo yesterday, clinching top honours in both the men's and women's elite races as thousands of participants took part in the prestigious sports event.

The men's race was led by reigning Olympic champion Tamirat Tola, who confirmed his status as one of the world's premiere marathoners by winning in 2:05:40. He controlled the pace from the front and spearheaded an emphatic

Ethiopian clean sweep of the top five positions.

Tola was followed closely by compatriot Asefa Boki, who finished second in 2:05:55, while Boki Diriba claimed third in 2:06:26.

Fellow Ethiopians Dinkalem Ayele (2:06:43) and Balew Yihunle (2:07:07) rounded out the top five, highlighting Ethiopia's depth in elite distance running.

The dominance extended beyond the podium. Eritrea's Ogbe Kibrom Ruesom finished sixth in 2:07:55, while Ethiopia returned to the fore with Mulugeta Debasu (2:09:49) and Desalegn Girma (2:10:43) placing seventh and eighth, respectively. Kenya's Ni-

cholas Kirwa secured ninth place with a time of 2:10:56, ensuring representation from East Africa's traditional marathon powerhouses.

In the women's elite race, Ethiopian runners were equally formidable. Tigist Gezahagn clinched victory in 2:21:14, leading an Ethiopian sweep of the top three. She was followed by Tigist Girma, who finished second in 2:22:33, and Muluhabit Tsega in third with 2:23:21. Both Girma and Tsega arrived in Doha with strong personal bests and proven international credentials, and their performances secured their standing among the world's leading marathon athletes. **To Page 12**

MENC to spotlight defence diplomacy and maritime security at Dimdex 2026

By Joey Aguilar

Doha

The Middle East Naval Commanders Conference (MENC), a flagship feature of the Doha International Maritime Defence Exhibition and Conference (Dimdex 2026), will once again bring together senior naval leaders, defence officials, academics and strategic experts from around the world to address evolving maritime security challenges.

Held under the theme "Defence Diplomacy and Maritime Security Challenges," MENC will convene as part of Dimdex 2026, which takes place from January 19-22

at the Qatar National Convention Centre.

The ninth edition of Dimdex is organised and hosted by the Qatar Armed Forces under the patronage of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, and runs under the broader exhibition theme, "A Global Hub for Defence Innovations: Invest in Possibilities to Shape a Secure Tomorrow".

According to the organisers, MENC continues to serve as a high-level platform for in-depth dialogue on regional and international maritime defence developments, while facilitating the exchange of expertise and forward-looking insights that



help shape the future of global maritime security.
Staff Brigadier (Sea) Abdulbaqi Saleh al-Ansari, chairman of the Organising Committee of Dimdex, said the conference remains one of the exhibition's most significant accompanying events. **To Page 12**

Arab League lauds Qatar, Egypt efforts for Gaza Technocrat Committee formation

• Trump announces formation of Gaza Peace CouncilQNA
Cairo

The Arab League has welcomed the announcement of the formation of the Palestinian technocratic committee to manage the Gaza Strip, headed by Dr Ali Shaath, and commended the efforts of Qatar, Egypt, and other mediators in this regard.

In a statement issued yesterday, Arab League secretary-general Ahmed Aboul Gheit said that the formation of the committee represents an important step towards implementing the requirements of the second phase of US President Donald Trump's peace plan. He expressed his wishes for the committee members' success in their crucial mission of serving the Palestinian people in these difficult circumstances.

He also condemned the Israeli occupation's prevention of the committee's head from leaving the West Bank.

Aboul Gheit appealed to the international community, particularly the US, which played a leading role in charting the course for a ceasefire and stability in Gaza, to work diligently to remove obstacles and impediments to peace and reconstruction in Gaza, including addressing Israel's continued procrastination to evade the requirements of the second phase, foremost among



Palestinians move past the rubble of residential buildings destroyed during the war, in Gaza City, yesterday.

them withdrawal from the Strip, and ensuring the unimpeded and continuous entry of humanitarian aid into Gaza. Meanwhile, US President Donald Trump has announced the formation of a Gaza Peace Council.

In a post on his Truth Social platform, Trump said it was a great honour to announce that the council had been formed, adding that the list of its members would be revealed soon.

He described it as the greatest and most distinguished council ever formed at any time or place.

Trump said that, in his capacity as head of the Peace Council, he supports the newly appointed Palestinian technocratic committee and the national committee tasked with administering

Gaza during a transitional period. He added that the Palestinian leaders were firmly committed to a peaceful future.

The announcement comes shortly after the formation of a 15-member Palestinian technocratic committee to manage Gaza in the post-war period.

The US-backed Gaza peace plan came into effect on October 10 and includes provisions for the deployment of an international stabilisation force in the territory, as well as the training of Palestinian police units.

According to the US Middle East envoy, Steve Witkoff, the second phase of the plan, which entered into force on Wednesday, focuses on the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip.

Sixth Katara Amber Exhibition concludes

The sixth edition of the Katara International Amber Exhibition concluded yesterday with wide international participation and a remarkable turnout from enthusiasts and experts. The exhibition successfully reinforced its position as a specialised annual platform that brings together the commercial, cultural, and artistic aspects of this global heritage. This edition featured distinguished participation from 13 countries around the world, represented by 82 pavilions that offered rich experiences combining the tradition of craftsmanship, the authenticity of heritage, and the spirit of contemporary art, confirming Katara's leading role in this field. **(QNA) Page 12**



First Harvard Model Congress in Qatar gets underway at Education City

By Joseph Varghese

Staff Reporter

The inaugural edition of the Harvard Model Congress Middle East (HMCME) 2026 in Qatar began yesterday at Multaqa, the Student Centre at Qatar Foundation (QF)'s Education City with the participation of over 130 students from around the world.

HMCME 2026, a three-day event hosted by the Academic Bridge Program (ABP), part of QF's Pre-University Education is held under the theme "Diplomacy in the Age of Innovation."

HMCME is a government simulation run entirely by Harvard students dedicated to international relations, teaching and politics.



Officials at the opening ceremony of HMCME 2026. **PICTURE:** Shaji Kayamkulam

It is the premier international government simulation for high school students in the Middle East. Ever since the first Harvard Model Congress conference was held

in Boston in 1986, Harvard Model Congress has been dedicated to providing immersive learning opportunities to students from all backgrounds all around the world.

The opening session of the congress was attended by Dr Hareb bin Mohammed al-Jabri, assistant undersecretary for Higher Education at the Ministry of Education and Higher Education; Dr Saheim Khalaf al-Temimi, director ABP; officials of Qatar Foundation and Harvard Model Congress among others.

Speaking at the opening session of the congress, Dr al-Temimi said that hosting the conference holds a special significance for ABP.

He explained: "The mission of ABP has always been to prepare students academically, intellectually and personally for higher education and to equip them to become responsible global citizens. Harvard Model Congress embodies these same values: critical thinking, constructive and respectful dialogue, informed decision

making and ethical leadership, making this collaboration a strong and meaningful partnership."

"Programmes like this play a vital role in developing students' critical thinking, problem-solving, and teamwork skills, competencies that are essential for their academic and professional success. The experience extends beyond academics, offering opportunities for meaningful interaction, dialogue, and the strengthening of strategic thinking skills, especially in a world that is rapidly evolving through technology and innovation," added al-Temimi.

President of HMCME, Salma Boukouj said that one of the first decisions she made as president was to move the conference from its home over the past 12 years. **To Page 2**



Interior minister meets Qatar forces securing Olympic Winter Games



HE the Minister of Interior and Commander of the Internal Security Force (Lekhiya) Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani met with the Qatari security forces participating in securing the Olympic Winter Games Milano Cortina 2026 in Italy, set to take place from Feb 6-22. HE the minister urged the task force to make the most of its experience in securing major sporting events to carry out its duties with the highest levels of efficiency and readiness, contributing to the success of the games and reflecting the international confidence in the Qatari security system. HE Sheikh Khalifa also wished them success in performing their duties. (QNA)

Official

Amir, British PM discuss ties in phone call

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani discussed with British Prime Minister Keir Starmer several regional and international developments of joint interests, particularly related to enhancing the exchange of views and consultation to support stability and avoid escalation in the region in a way that contributes to easing tensions and advancing international peace and security through diplomatic dialogue. This came in a telephone call His Highness the Amir received from the British PM. The call also dealt with discussing bilateral relations between the two countries and ways to enhance co-operation in different fields of strategic partnership between the two countries. (QNA)

Education minister holds talks with Saudi, Yemeni counterparts in Riyadh

HE the Minister of Education and Higher Education Lolwah bint Rashid AlKhater has held meetings in Riyadh with her Saudi and Yemeni counterparts to discuss ways of strengthening co-operation in the education sector. HE AlKhater met Minister of Education of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Yousef bin Abdullah al-Benyan and Minister of Education of the Republic of Yemen Tareq bin Salem al-Akbari. Discussions focused on enhancing joint co-operation in areas including teacher development, technical education and the exchange of expertise. The meetings took place on Thursday on the sidelines of celebrations marking the golden jubilee of the Arab Bureau of Education for the Gulf States. The talks aimed at supporting the advancement of education systems and strengthening shared educational efforts among the brotherly countries. (QNA)

Bengali translation of *Bridges, Not Walls* launched at Katara

Katara Cultural Village hosted the launch ceremony of the Bengali-language translation of the book *Bridges, Not Walls* by HE Dr Hamad bin Abdulaziz al-Kawari, Minister of State and President of Qatar National Library. The event, held at Katara's Building 15, underscored the book's status as a humanistic intellectual project that calls for communication, openness, and the rejection of isolation.

Prof Dr Khalid bin Ibrahim al-Sulaiti, General Manager of Katara, attended the launch ceremony as well as Mohamad Hazrat Ali Khan, ambassador of Bangladesh to Qatar; several representatives of diplomatic missions; a group of intellectuals; and members of the Bangladeshi community living in Qatar.

The ceremony included a speech by HE Dr al-Kawari, in which he expressed his happiness at the publication of the Bengali translation of his book, which has previously been translated into several languages. He emphasised that translation is not merely a linguistic transfer, but a profound cultural act that opens new horizons for dialogue among peoples.

He praised the translator, Tamim Rehan, for conveying the spirit and ideas of the text into a different language and culture while preserving the book's humanistic message. He also touched on his diplomatic career, noting the diplomatic support he received from Bangladesh during his candidacy for the presidency of Unesco.

Dr al-Kawari commended Katara, represented by Prof Dr al-Sulaiti, affirming that his presence reflects Katara's continued support for cultural and intellectual initiatives that promote the values

The book by HE Dr Hamad bin Abdulaziz al-Kawari, Minister of State and President of Qatar National Library, is a humanistic intellectual project that calls for communication, openness, and the rejection of isolation



of coexistence and intercultural dialogue, and reinforce the role of translation as a bridge of knowledge between nations. He also highlighted Katara's efforts to support culture and enrich the cultural scene locally, regionally, and globally, which have made it an actual meeting point for cultures and peoples.

Accordingly, the ambassador expressed his deep appreciation for this cultural initiative, lauding the importance of translating the book into Bengali to convey the universal human messages it carries, which resonate with people's

aspirations for peace, understanding, and co-operation. He said this translation, completed by Bangladeshi translator Tamim Rehan, represents a valuable addition to the Bengali library and contributes to broadening readers' horizons toward a philosophy based on building bridges rather than erecting walls.

In turn, translator Tamim Rehan stated that translating *Bridges, Not Walls* represented a profound cultural and human experience for him.

He explained that the work does not merely present theoretical ideas, but carries a universal message calling

for dialogue, understanding, and the building of bridges of communication among peoples.

He added that throughout the translation process, he was keen to faithfully and accurately convey the spirit of the text and its intellectual and human dimensions into Bengali, while taking into account the cultural specificity of the Bengali reader to ensure the message reaches them clearly and effectively.

He expressed his confidence that this translation would contribute to cultural rapprochement and open new avenues for dialogue



HE Dr Hamad bin Abdulaziz al-Kawari at the launch event.



disregard of the contributions of other human civilisations, foremost among them Arab-Islamic civilisation, in shaping the Western civilisational achievements. The book is grounded in a personal journey and a deep historical observation by the president of Qatar National Library, who has accumulated extensive experience in diplomatic and cultural work. Through this, he seeks to alert new Arab generations to the value of their civilisation, which has been marginalised by internal conflicts, leading to a decline in their role in building human civilisation.

He calls for adopting a new vision for relations between the North and the South, one that extends bridges rather than erects walls.

The book *Bridges, Not Walls* reveals aspects of the author's experience at the Unesco, shedding light on the complexities of civilisational relations between the Global North and the Global South, and the resulting tendencies toward centralism and superiority in the North, which have contributed to undermining global stability and peace through the apparent

The ceremony concluded by stressing the importance of continuing to support translation and joint publishing projects, given their pivotal role in consolidating cultural dialogue and enhancing rapprochement among peoples, in complete harmony with Katara's artistic mission and Dr al-Kawari's intellectual vision.

QU hosts workshop on skills and employability

Qatar University (QU)'s College of Business and Economics recently organised a high-level workshop, bringing together academic leaders, policymakers, industry representatives, and experts to explore how higher education can better prepare graduates for a rapidly evolving labour market. Titled 'Employability in Transition: Building Qatar's Competitive Advantage through Talent', the workshop was held in collaboration with QU's Office of International Affairs and addressed key transformations reshaping employability, including artificial intelligence, digital disruption, and the growing demand for interdisciplinary and future-ready skills. Discussions emphasised that

employability today is no longer about short-term job placement, but about long-term relevance, adaptability, and the ability to continuously reinvent oneself. The session was led by Emerging Group, the producer of the Global Employability University Ranking and Survey (GEURS), which is based on independently validated, large-scale employer data. Participants engaged with employer-backed insights from Qatar and across the globe, offering a rare, evidence-based perspective on graduate readiness and work expectations. Dr Rana Sobh, dean of QU's College of Business and Economics, said: "This workshop is not simply about employability, it is about relevance. As AI and emerging



technologies reshape work and skills, universities must rethink how they educate students for a future defined by continuous change. By grounding this conversation in employer data and national priorities, we are contributing to building a talent ecosystem that supports Qatar's long-term ambitions." Cesar Wazen, director of QU's International Affairs Office, added:

"This collaboration reflects QU's commitment to evidence based international engagement. Employer driven indicators such as GEURS provide insights that go beyond our institution, helping us understand how Qatar's talent landscape is perceived globally. By translating these data into action, we strengthen not only the University's role but also Qatar's national competitiveness."

First Harvard Model Congress in Qatar gets underway at Education City

From Page 1

"Looking back today, I can say it was one of the best decisions I could have made for the future of the conference. Doha is a global hub for education, dialogue, and youth leadership. And Education City, in particular, embodies the power of learning as a space to exchange for institutions, cultures, and perspectives, intersecting in a

meaningful way," highlighted Boukouj. "As students engaging in conversations about governance and diplomacy, there is no more fitting a location for us to have these discussions. Relocating the conference to Doha would not have been possible without the support of the Academic Bridge Program, which welcomed us with open arms and worked tirelessly alongside us here at Education City, while our

team worked across the globe on Harvard's campus to bring this new chapter to life," she added. Dr Abdulnassir S al-Tamimi, executive director of student services, QF Higher Education Division, delivered the keynote speech at the opening session. He stated: "Diplomacy today is very different from what it was even a generation ago. Technology, AI, data, and instant communication have reshaped how countries

interact and how global challenges unfold. Innovation has created new opportunities but also new challenges and responsibilities. "Today's diplomats and leaders must think creatively, act ethically, and understand the global impact of their decisions. They must be flexible as the world changes. They must be able to work with others who are different from them and who think differently," he added.

MENC to spotlight defence diplomacy and maritime security at Dimdex 2026

From Page 1

"Dimdex will continue to host its key accompanying events, most notably the Middle East Naval Commanders Conference, which brings together an elite group of military leaders, decision-makers, experts and academics from around the world to discuss the latest developments in defence and security, share knowledge, and exchange experiences," he said.

As global dependence on maritime routes for trade, energy transport and strategic mobility continues to grow, organisers noted that challenges such as piracy, regional conflicts, illegal fishing and intensified naval competition demand collaborative, multinational solutions.

In this context, defence diplomacy – including military partnerships, joint exercises and maritime agreements – has emerged as a critical tool in promoting stability and trust in contested waters. MENC 2026 will also explore the dynamic interplay between defence diplomacy and maritime security, emphasising the importance of multilateral frameworks in securing vital sea lanes and safeguarding both

economic and strategic interests. The conference will further address strategies to promote maritime stability through enhanced co-operation, greater transparency, and a steadfast commitment to the rules-based international order.

First introduced at the inaugural Dimdex in 2008, MENC has evolved into one of the exhibition's defining features. Over the years, it has addressed a wide range of themes, from maritime cooperation and technological advancement to resilience against asymmetric threats and the economic implications of maritime security.

Previous editions have reflected shifting global priorities, including protecting trade routes, strengthening naval co-operation in the Gulf region, and addressing emerging non-traditional security threats. Dimdex 2026 will also continue its tradition of hosting the Visiting Warships Display at Hamad Port, one of the largest and most advanced ports in the Middle East. Naval vessels from several regional and international navies, including those of France, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Russia, Pakistan and Kuwait, are expected to participate.



PISQ organises vibrant food festival



Pakistan International School Qatar (PISQ) hosted its 'A Day of Taste & Aroma Food Festival' recently, with students from all wings taking part in an event that turned the campus into a vibrant showcase of food, culture, and community spirit.

The festival witnessed an overwhelming response from students and parents. Beautifully decorated stalls, innovative food presentations, and a joyful atmosphere marked a celebration unlike any seen before at PISQ.

Nearly 80% of the food items were healthy, thoughtfully prepared at home, attractively presented, and well-organised, reflecting strong parental support and a shared commitment to promoting healthy eating habits. Every student participated with excitement, making the event inclusive and engaging for all.

The festival also featured a wide range of games, interactive activities, face painting, musical performances, and creative student messages celebrating Qatar. The event beautifully blended

Qatari culture, Pakistani traditions, and an international culinary touch, promoting values of harmony, unity, and global citizenship.

The school administration extended sincere appreciation to the vice principals of the KG Wing, Primary Wing, Cambridge Wing, Boys Wing, and Girls Wing for their effective leadership and co-ordination. Special thanks were also conveyed to the support staff and helpers whose behind-the-scenes efforts ensured the smooth execution of the event.

A heartfelt tribute was paid to the dedicated teachers of PISQ, whose guidance, encouragement, and motivation empowered students to showcase confidence, creativity, and teamwork, adding colour and vibrancy to every stall.

The success of the festival was made possible under the leadership of Muhammad Afzal, principal of PISQ, whose continuous support and encouragement played a pivotal role in turning this event into a spectacular celebration.

The PISQ Food Festival truly

became a day to remember, a festival to cherish, and a collection of memories that will last forever, reinforcing the school's commitment to holistic education and cultural appreciation.

Indian embassy fêtes MES principal

MES Indian School principal Dr Hameeda Kadar was honoured by the embassy of India in Doha for her exemplary service to the Indian community and outstanding contributions in the field of education.

Dr Kadar, the embassy noted, also made impactful contributions to fostering India's image abroad and empowering the Indian diaspora. The prestigious felicitation took place during a ceremony on January 9 at the ICC Ashoka Hall, when Indian ambassador Vipul presented a memento to Dr Kadar, acknowledging her distinguished leadership in education and unwavering



commitment to academic excellence, contributing to the growth and integration of the Indian expatriate community in Qatar. Themed 'Bridging Nations, Building Futures', the event was held as part of the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas celebrations, organised by the embassy, in association with

the Indian Cultural Centre. The occasion also marked Nari Shakti – the power of women, during which the Nari Shakti Samman was presented to distinguished women achievers of the Indian community in Qatar. The MES management, officials, teaching and non-teaching staff have congratulated Dr Kadar.

MES holds moral guidance session for students

MES Indian School's Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies recently held a motivational session, titled "Moral and Spiritual Guidance and Its Implications", for students from Classes VII-XII at the KG Hall. Attended by around 260 students, the session aims to promote ethical values, personal responsibility, and inner growth, and featured two distinguished speakers. Dr Sulaiman Melpathur, a renowned motivational



speaker from India, delivered an engaging address. The session also featured Wafi Shihad, an alumnus of MES Indian School

and a youth mentor. The programme was co-ordinated by Usman Mayyeri, head of the Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies.

RPS charity carnival attracts crowds

Rajagiri Public School (RPS) hosted its student-led charity carnival, LUMINA 2026 on January 8, drawing crowds to the campus. The event was inaugurated by Dr Aju Abraham, member of the board of directors, along with admin director Jinsu Aju and principal Joshy Abraham, who commended the student council for their exemplary organisational efforts. Deputy head boy Gurshaan Singh and deputy head girl Ayisha Vengasseri led the planning and execution of the carnival, with contributions from students of Grade IX and XI. The carnival featured a wide range of cultural performances, games, activity stalls, and entertainment programmes. Select materials and services were outsourced to enhance the quality of offerings. In alignment



with the school's mission to nurture student leadership and social responsibility, all surplus

funds after covering basic expenses will be donated to charitable organisations.

BPS celebrates 22nd Annual Sports Day

Birla Public School (BPS) successfully hosted its 22nd Annual Sports Day for Kindergarten and Primary students at the Aspire Dome on January 10.

The event brought together the stakeholders of Birla Public School for a day filled with enthusiasm, discipline and memorable performances.

Femi Seun Ogunode, an Arab and Asian champion and World bronze medallist, was the chief guest. The event was formally declared open by Indian ambassador to Qatar Vipul.

Also present at the opening ceremony were members of the school management and leadership, including Gope Shahani, management representative Chindhu Antony, principal Dr Anand Nair, vice-principal Edna Fernandez, the headmistresses of the Kindergarten and Primary sections, and the headmaster of discipline and activities.

The programme commenced with a welcome by the sports captains of Primary 1 and Primary 2,



followed by the opening ceremony. The march past featured the four student houses – Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, and Neptune – along with the Student Council members, Cubs and Bulbuls, Beavers and Brownies. This was followed by the oath-taking ceremony, led by the Sports and House Captains of the Primary section.

In a symbolic tribute to the Olympic spirit, director Gope Shahani passed the ceremonial torch to the school's young sports achievers. The torch was carried forward by 10 student achievers. The event culminated in the presentation of prizes and medals to outstanding performers and winning teams.

The event ended with the announcement of the individual champions and the march past winners, followed by a vote of thanks proposed by the Sports Vice-Captain of the Primary section. The Annual Sports Day 2025-26 was formally closed by the principal, who handed over the school flag to Albert Anthony, HOD of the Physical Education Department.

BPS student shines in maths contest

Birla Public School (BPS), Doha, celebrated the achievement of Class X student Shamita Adiga, who ranked 37th in CBSE's Aryabhata Ganit Challenge. The prestigious Level 2 competition spotlights top mathematical talent across CBSE schools, and Shamita secured a place among the nation's Top 100 performers.

Prior to this remarkable achievement, Shamita emerged as the top scorer in Level 1 of the challenge, demonstrating an outstanding command over mathematical concepts.



The school management, along with the principal, vice principals, and headmistress, have congratulated the student and

also appreciated the guidance provided by the Mathematics department, under the leadership of Shibumon P. S.

CVQ organises beach cleanup drive



More than 120 volunteers, along with Bangladeshi embassy officials and staff led by ambassador Mohammad Hazrat Ali Khan, took part recently in a cleanup drive at Al Wakrah Beach, organised by Community Volunteers Qatar (CVQ).

According to CVQ, the event marks the start of a broader environmental initiative with plans to collaborate further with the Ministry of Municipality and Environment. CVQ will also invite residents across Qatar to join the campaign, assisting in identifying waste, removing debris, and working hand-in-hand to protect the country's natural spaces.

Volunteers meticulously collected plastic waste, charcoal remnants, stones, sharp objects, and other hazardous debris. The drive aligns with Qatar's ongoing coastal and beach conservation campaigns.

A representative of CVQ said: "This beach cleanup is just the beginning of a nationwide effort. By working hand-in-hand with the Ministry of Municipality and Environment, we aim to create a lasting culture of environmental care and responsibility. Together, we can make a measurable difference."

An official from the embassy said: "The participation of the ambassador and embassy staff



underscores our commitment to service and sustainability."

Volunteers were equipped with protective gloves, trash pickers, and eco-friendly waste bags, and practised responsible waste seg-

regation and disposal to maximise safety and environmental impact.

The Ministry of Municipality provided support with guidance on waste disposal, safety protocols, and operational efficiency.



Safari 'Visit & Win' promotion: First winner receives Tesla car

As part of the inauguration of Safari's new outlet at Ezdan Mall, Gharafa, Safari Hypermarket – one of Doha's leading hypermarket chains – launched the "Visit & Win" promotion, offering visitors a chance to win two Tesla cars through a coupon lucky draw without any purchase.

The first Tesla car under this promotion was handed over to

the lucky draw winner at a ceremony held on January 15 at Safari Ezdan Mall, Gharafa.

The prize was presented by Safari management representatives to M D Firoz Sahabudheen Ansari (Coupon No 114711).

Safari, which has earned a strong place in the hearts of the public by introducing numerous attractive promotional campaigns, has already created

many winners through such initiatives. The "Visit & Win" promotion will conclude on February 18, and the second draw will be held on February 19 at Safari Ezdan Mall.

Anyone visiting the Safari outlet at Gharafa can participate in this promotion, as free coupons are provided to visitors without requiring any purchase, giving everyone an equal chance to win.



Indian expat forum hosts New Year get-together

Amrit Uttar Pradesh Navrang Sanskritik Mandal (AUPNSM), Qatar, marked the beginning of the New Year 2026 with a community picnic and get-together at a farmhouse.

The event brought together members of the Indian diaspora in Qatar for a memorable afternoon and evening of friendship, leisure and entertainment.

The atmosphere buzzed with excitement and warmth as professionals, families and children mingled, shared experiences and celebrated the vibrant spirit of unity that defines AUPNSM. The networking session truly reflected the AUPNSM's commitment to fostering cultural harmony and community solidarity among its members in Qatar.

Adding a unique and flavourful twist to the event, live cooking by caterers captivated all. The highlight was the elaborate buffet dinner featuring both vegetarian and non-vegetarian delicacies.

The organisers ensured that joy and excitement were shared equally by children and adults alike. Laughter echoed across the grounds during a series of exciting games that encouraged



aged teamwork, creativity, and friendly competition. Traditional outdoor activities and interactive challenges were held.

As the sun set, the atmosphere transformed into one of pure energy and rhythm. A lively session of DJ music and dance kept everyone on their feet.

The evening concluded on a high note with a talent show that showcased the diverse abilities of AUPNSM members. Participants enthralled the audience with soulful singing, graceful dance performances and creative acts. Founder and president of AUPNSM, Nita Mishra, expressed heartfelt gratitude to all families, volunteers, co-ordinators, supporters, and management committee members Ajay Rai, Abhishek Srivastava, Mayank Sharma, and Ashutosh Mishra, who contributed to the event's success.

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Saudi king 'leaves hospital after tests'

The Saudi Royal Court yesterday announced that the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz al-Saud had left King Faisal Specialist Hospital in Riyadh, after reassuring medical tests, QNA reported from Riyadh.

The Royal Court issued the following statement yesterday: "Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz al-Saud left King Faisal Specialist Hospital in Riyadh, on January 16, 2026, after completing medical examinations. The results were reassuring."

Yemen PM quits, replaced by FM

AFP
Riyadh

The prime minister of Yemen has been replaced by his foreign minister after the premier submitted the government's resignation, the country's Saudi-backed presidential body

said. Prime Minister Salim Saleh BinBuriak met Presidential Leadership Council chairman Rashad al-Alimi and "submitted the government's resignation to pave the way for the formation of a new government," a statement published by news agency Saba, said. The presidential council posted on state media that foreign min-

ister "Dr Shaya Mohsen Zindani is appointed prime minister and tasked with forming the government."

The statement published on Saba cited "efforts to restore state institutions, strengthen the unity of sovereign decision-making" and "defeating the coup" as reasons for the premier's resignation.

Protests abate in Iran amid arrests

Reuters
Dubai

Iran's deadly crackdown appears to have broadly quelled protests for now, according to a rights group and residents, as state media reported more arrests yesterday in the shadow of repeated US threats to intervene if the killing continues.

The prospect of a US attack has retreated since Wednesday, when President Donald Trump said he'd been told killings in Iran were easing, but more US military assets were expected to arrive in the region, showing the continued tensions.

US allies, including some Gulf states, conducted intense diplo-

macy with Washington this week to prevent a US strike, warning of repercussions for the wider region that would ultimately impact the United States.

Israel's intelligence chief David Barnea was also in the US yesterday for talks on Iran, according to a source familiar with the matter, and an Israeli military official said the country's forces were on "peak readiness."

The White House said on Thursday that Trump and his team have warned Tehran there would be "grave consequences" if there was further bloodshed and added that the president was keeping "all of his options on the table".

The protests erupted on December 28 over economic hard-

ship and swelled into widespread demonstrations calling for the end of the current rule, which culminated in three days of mass violence at the end of last week. According to opposition groups and an Iranian official, more than 2,000 people were killed in the worst domestic unrest since Iran's 1979 Revolution. But several residents of Tehran reached by Reuters said the capital had now been comparatively quiet for four days. Drones were flying over the city, but there had been no sign of major protests on Thursday or yesterday.

Another resident in a northern city on the Caspian Sea said the streets there also appeared calm. The residents declined to be identified for their safety.

A Palestinian man reacts as he inspects a destroyed house after an Israeli military attack on the home of the Al-Houli family, in which four people were reportedly killed, west of Deir Al-Balah, in the central Gaza Strip, yesterday.



Israeli strike in Lebanon kills one

AFP
Beirut

An Israeli strike on south Lebanon killed one person yesterday, the health ministry in Beirut said, a day after raids that Israel said had targeted the Hezbollah.

Israel has kept up regular

strikes in Lebanon despite a November 2024 ceasefire that sought to end more than a year of hostilities with Hezbollah, usually saying it is targeting members of the group or its infrastructure.

In a statement, the health ministry said an "Israeli enemy strike" on a vehicle in Mansuri in south Lebanon killed one person.

It also said that a strike on Mayfadun in south Lebanon the previous night killed one person.

Israel said Thursday's attack killed a Hezbollah member it alleged "took part in attempts to re-establish Hezbollah's infrastructure in the Zawtar Al-Sharqiyah area", also in south Lebanon.

Experts cast doubt on Burkina Faso's 'foiled coup'

AFP
Abidjan

Burkina Faso said this month it had foiled an assassination attempt on military leader Captain Ibrahim Traore, but analysts – sceptical after a long series of increasingly unbelievable plots – wondered if the junta has cried wolf too many times.

If the supposed plot, which the military said was to take place on January 3, had succeeded, it would have been the chronically unstable west African country's third coup in four years.

State TV spent the next four days airing nightly "confessions" by the alleged conspirators, as the junta called it the "umpteenth time" its enemies have attempted to destabilise the country.

But some analysts remain unconvinced.

"It's the same every time: they announce they've foiled a coup d'état, and each scenario is more unbelievable than the last," said a Burkina Faso journalist and political analyst.

But "there have been zero trials, zero convictions," he added, speaking on condition of anonymity for security reasons, in a country where those critical of the junta risk its repressive wrath.

"This time, they're saying it was a discount coup, financed for just 70mn CFA francs (\$120,000)... Previously, they've talked about financing of more

than five billion." It would not be the first time the junta has resorted to peculiar means of self-promotion.

Last year, their supporters spread videos that had gone viral on social media of world-famous figures – the Pope, Beyoncé, Justin Bieber, disgraced R&B star R Kelly – praising Traore as a fantastic leader.

It turned out the videos had been generated by artificial intelligence.

According to the junta, the mastermind behind the alleged assassination plot was former lieutenant-colonel Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba, who is in exile in Togo.

Damiba ousted president Roch Marc Christian Kabore in a January 2022 coup, but was himself deposed eight months later in the coup that brought Traore to power.

Burkina Faso's security minister said Damiba and his co-conspirators had planned a series of "targeted assassinations" of civilian and military authorities on January 3, "starting with the neutralisation of comrade Ibrahim Traore".

He accused neighbouring Ivory Coast, which has strained relations with Burkina Faso's military government, of financing the plot.

A series of alleged conspirators were paraded before state television's cameras to make "confessions". Alleged "key player" Mady Sakande, presented as a businessman, said he had travelled to Ivory Coast to collect the

money for the plan. Army Captain Prosper Coudiati said he had been assigned to decapitate the commander of the Sapone drone base outside the capital, Ouagadougou, to prevent an aerial response.

And Sergeant First Class Salfo Yalweogo of the Republican Guard said Damiba had contacted him to "mobilise men" for a coup.

The junta has repeatedly pointed the finger at Ivory Coast, which has denied the accusations.

"We have a foiled plot around every four to six months," said another Burkina Faso analyst.

"Each time, it's an occasion for mobilising and revitalising support for the head of state. But be careful: cry wolf too many times, and people end up not believing you."

The effect may be wearing thin in Burkina Faso, which has other problems, including a long-running militants' insurgency.

"When this destabilisation attempt was announced, support for the junta rallied. But not with the same fervour as before," said one Ouagadougou resident.

Nina Wilen, head of the Africa programme at the Brussels-based Egmont research institute, called the junta's latest coup allegation "very improbable".

"Disinformation is omnipresent in Burkina Faso, and Captain Traore's team is particularly good at spreading rumours and fake news," she said.

Ivory Coast displays art returned from German researcher's collection

AFP
Abidjan

Between the 1930s and the 1970s, German ethnologist Hans Himmelheber journeyed across Ivory Coast amassing a collection of ritual objects.

Today, around a hundred pieces he bought from local artists – along with 15,000 photographs and a dozen films – have been handed back to their country of origin. Masterpieces from the Senufo, Dan, Baoule and Guro peoples, as well as everyday objects, are now on show in the cities of Abidjan and Man.

Ivorian schoolchildren crowd around masks, finely carved turtles, and ceremonial spoons once admired by visitors of Zurich's Rietberg Museum.

They have flocked to the Himmelheber archive at the Adama Toungara museum in economic capital Abidjan. Running until March 8, the exhibit retraces the journeys made by the researcher, who died in

2003. It also features 24 of the 107 returned objects, alongside thousands of digitised photos and films shot by Himmelheber.

Among the highlights: a striking "wabele" hood mask and a Dan runner's mask with delicate feminine features.

The return of cultural artefacts taken from ex-colonies in Africa and elsewhere has become a sensitive issue, with museums, institutions and collectors in Europe and the US facing pressure to give them back.

Although Himmelheber "always bought his pieces... we cannot ignore the colonial context that sometimes forced people to sell", said Michaela Oberhofer, head of the Africa and Oceania collections at the Rietberg Museum.

Although returns of African cultural heritage are increasing, experts say such gestures remain rare.

"This donation is key to diversifying our collections," said Francis Tagro, director of Abidjan's Museum of Civilisations, set to reopen this year after renovations.

Somali president visits 'disputed' region

AFP
Mogadishu

Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud yesterday visited a provincial capital claimed by the breakaway region of so-called Somaliland in the first visit by a sitting president there in nearly 50 years.

The visit to Las Anod, the administrative capital of the Sool region, comes amid heightened diplomatic tensions in the Horn of Africa after Israel officially recognised so-called Somaliland, drawing strong opposition from Mogadishu.

Mohamud was attending the inauguration of the new and first president of Northeast State, a region that declared itself Somaliland's sixth federal state in August.

Somalia is a federation of semi-autonomous states, some of which have fraught relations with the central government in Mogadishu.

The Northeast State comprises the regions of Sool, Sanaag and Cayn, all territories so-called Somaliland claims as integral to its borders.

'Somaliland' had controlled Las Anod since 2007 but was forced to withdraw in 2023 after violent clashes with Somali forces and pro-Mogadishu militias left scores dead.

Mohamud's visit "is a symbol of strengthening the unity and efforts of the federal government to enforce the territorial unity of the Somali country and its people," the Somali presidency said.

in the coming days. The recovery of two bodies in Limpopo province, around 300 kilometres north of Johannesburg, took the provincial death toll to 11 since December, Premier Phophi Ramathuba told reporters. Neighbouring Mpumalanga has recorded 19 deaths since the punishing rains began in November, provincial officials said this week.

Heavy rains have drenched the northeast of the country since late last year, claiming at least 30 lives, with the region on maximum alert for more rain

"The devastation inflicted upon our communities, our infrastructure and, tragically, the loss of lives cannot be overstated," Ramathuba said.

Dramatic SANParks footage showed wide stretches of the reserve swallowed by swirling brown water, with only trees jutting out.

Hundreds of schools could not open for the new term.

The flooding forced Kruger National Park, a world-famous safari destination, to halt day visits since Thursday and airlift some guests and staff to safety. "Only essential staff are allowed access into the parks," South African National Parks (SANParks) spokesman JP Louw said. At least two camps had been closed and evacuated, he said.

People assist motorists through a waterlogged road after heavy rains caused severe flooding and property damage in Phalaborwa, Limpopo, South Africa, yesterday.

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Two bodies recovered as SA flood toll rises

AFP
Giyani

Authorities in South Africa recovered yesterday two more bodies from widespread flooding that washed out homes, roads and bridges, also cutting access to the famed Kruger National Park for a second day.

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UN sounds alarm on hunger in west, central Africa

AFP
Geneva

Around 55mn people in violence-wracked west and central Africa face acute food insecurity this year and some are on the verge of famine in northern Nigeria, the UN said yesterday.

Violence across the region has triggered a hunger crisis that is being exacerbated by aid cuts, the UN's World Food Programme (WFP) said. WFP said it had had to slash its food assistance in the area as funding dries up.

In west and central Africa, "a staggering 55mn people will be facing acute food insecurity in the upcoming lean season between June and August 2026", Jean-Martin Bauer, WFP's food security and nutrition analysis director, told reporters in Geneva.

Those people are in the crisis, emergency and catastrophe

phases of hunger – the three worst of five levels used to assess food insecurity.

The number of people in emergency conditions has doubled since 2020, to 3mn, he said.

And 15,000 people in certain

areas of Borno state in northeast Nigeria are in the catastrophe phase – the first time this level has been reached in a decade.

"This is a group that's one step away from famine," Bauer said, speaking from WFP's headquar-

ters in Rome. "That does mean that people are dying... people are starving."

Borno state is the epicentre of a militant insurgency that began in 2009. The conflict has killed more than 40,000 people and displaced around 2mn others in the northeast and spilled into neighbouring countries.

Bauer said the last rainy season in west Africa, which ended in October, was relatively favourable and crops in the region were doing well.

"This is not due to the climate. The vulnerabilities we're seeing in west and central Africa right now are really due to violence," he stressed.

"They're also due to the fact there have been large funding cuts to the central systems that support the population."

Under President Donald Trump, the US has heavily slashed foreign aid, while other key donor countries have also

been tightening their belts.

Bauer said last year, WFP stopped providing assistance to around 300,000 children in Nigeria due to funding cuts, and in Cameroon, it might need to cut services to 500,000 due to lack of resources. In Nigeria, WFP is planning on providing aid to 72,000 people next month – compared to a monthly reach of about 1.3mn in 2025. "The funding cuts are exacerbating the problem," said Bauer.

He said the situation had "gotten so bad that in some places we can talk about a humanitarian vacuum, as humanitarian agencies have withdrawn from the front line".

Over the next six months, WFP needs \$453mn to implement its programme of work in the region.

"If these programmes are not funded, what we see is a very quick decline in food consumption indicators at the household level," said Bauer.



File photo shows two men empty a bag of rice into a bowl at a WFP distribution centre in Mafa, Borno State, Nigeria.



Ugandan Electoral Commission Chairperson Justice Simon Byabakama sits with other commissioners to announce initial results at the Tally Centre in Lubowa, Wakiso district near Kampala, yesterday.

10 killed in Ugandan elections, Museveni set to extend 40-year rule

AFP
Kampala

At least 10 people died in violence-marred elections in Uganda, the opposition said yesterday, as veteran leader Yoweri Museveni looked set to prolong his four-decade rule in a ballot that saw widespread repression and an Internet blackout.

Ugandan opposition leader Bobi Wine said he was under house arrest after Thursday's vote while Uganda's Electoral Commission said Museveni was on 75.4% to Wine's 20.7 with close to 60% of votes counted.

Final results are due around 1300 GMT today.

Authorities imposed an Internet blackout during the election that was still in place yesterday.

Wine, 43, whose real name is Robert Kyagulanyi, has emerged as the main challenger to Museveni in recent years. The former

singer styles himself the "ghetto president" after the slum areas of Kampala where he grew up.

"After casting my ballot, the military deployed all around my home in order to place me under house arrest," Wine wrote on X.

"They do this because they are afraid of the people's reaction after stealing their vote."

AFP journalists visited the compound early yesterday and said it was outwardly calm, though a military vehicle and several police officers were stationed outside.

Local station NBS quoted a police spokesman saying Wine was "not under house arrest, we're just providing him with security". Muwanga Kivumbi, member of parliament for Wine's party in the Butambala area of central Uganda, told AFP's Nairobi office by phone that security forces had killed 10 of his campaign agents after storming his home.

His wife Zahara Nampewo, a law professor, said the 10 were

hiding in their garage when security forces fired through the door.

"After killing them, the military continued firing," Kivumbi said. "And they ensured that they removed all the evidence of the dead. You only have a pool of blood that is left here."

Local police spokeswoman Lydia Tumushabe gave a different account, saying "a group of NUP goons" had planned to overrun and burn down a local tally centre and police station.

"An unspecified number were put out of action," she told AFP, adding that 25 others had been arrested and charged with malicious damage of property.

Analysts have long viewed the election as a formality.

Museveni, a former guerrilla fighter who seized power in 1986, has total control over the state and security apparatus, and has ruthlessly crushed any challenger during his rule.

Election day was marred by significant technical problems after biometric machines – used to confirm voters' identities – malfunctioned and ballot papers were undelivered for several hours in many areas.

There was a heavy security presence across the country.

The UN rights office said last week that the elections were taking place in an environment marked by "widespread repression and intimidation" against the opposition.



Trump accepts Nobel medal from Venezuela's Machado

Reuters/AFP

Washington

Venezuelan opposition leader Maria Corina Machado gave her Nobel Peace Prize medal to US President Donald Trump on Thursday during a White House meeting, in a bid to influence his efforts to shape her country's political future.

A White House official confirmed that Trump intends to keep the medal.

In a social media post on Thursday evening, Trump wrote: "Maria presented me with her Nobel Peace Prize for the work I have done. Such a wonderful gesture of mutual respect. Thank you Maria!"

Machado, who described the meeting as "excellent", said the gift was in recognition of what she

called his commitment to the freedom of the Venezuelan people.

"He deserves it, and it was a very emotional moment," she later told broadcaster Fox News in an interview.

The White House later posted a photo of Trump and Machado with the president holding up a large, gold-coloured frame displaying the medal.

Accompanying text read: "To President Donald J Trump In Gratitude for Your Extraordinary Leadership in Promoting Peace through Strength" and labelled the gesture as a "Personal Symbol of Gratitude on behalf of the Venezuelan People".

Machado's attempt to sway Trump came after he dismissed the idea of installing her as Venezuela's leader to replace the deposed Nicolas Maduro.

Trump openly campaigned for the prize before Machado was awarded it last month and complained bitterly when he was snubbed.

Though Machado gave Trump the gold medal that honorees receive with the prize, the honour remains hers; the Norwegian Nobel Institute has said that the prize cannot be transferred, shared or revoked (see accompanying report).

Asked on Wednesday if he wanted Machado to give him the prize, Trump told Reuters: "No, I didn't say that. She won the Nobel Peace Prize."

The Republican president has long expressed interest in winning the prize and has at times linked it to diplomatic achievements.

The lunch meeting, which appeared to last slightly over an hour,

marked the first time the two have met in person.

Machado then met with more than a dozen senators, both Republican and Democratic, on Capitol Hill, where she has generally found more enthusiastic allies.

During the visit, White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said Trump had looked forward to meeting Machado, but stood by his "realistic" assessment that she did not currently have the support needed to lead the country in the short term.

Machado, who fled the South American nation in a daring sea-borne escape in December, is competing for Trump's ear with members of Venezuela's government and seeking to ensure she has a role in governing the nation going forward.

After the United States captured Nicolas Maduro in a snatch-and-grab operation this month, opposition figures, members of Venezuela's diaspora and politicians throughout the US and Latin America expressed hope for Venezuela to begin a process of democratisation.

Democratic Senator Chris Murphy, one of the senators who met with Machado, said the opposition leader had told senators that repression in Venezuela was no different now than under Maduro.

Venezuela's interim President Delcy Rodriguez is a "smooth operator" who was growing more entrenched by the day thanks to Trump's support, he said.

"I hope elections happen, but I'm sceptical," said Murphy, of Connecticut.

Trump has said he is focused on securing US access to the country's



US President Trump with Machado at the Oval Office, where she presented him with her Nobel Peace Prize medal. - Reuters

oil and economically rebuilding Venezuela.

Trump has on several occasions praised Rodriguez, Maduro's second-in-command, who became Venezuela's leader upon his capture.

In an interview with Reuters on Wednesday, Trump said: "She's been very good to deal with."

Machado was banned from running in Venezuela's 2024 presidential election by a top court stacked with Maduro allies.

Outside observers widely believe Edmundo Gonzalez, an opposition figure backed by Machado, won by a substantial margin, but Maduro claimed victory and retained power.

She added that her government was "not afraid" of a diplomatic clash with Washington.

"We know they are very powerful. We know they are a lethal nuclear power... we are not afraid to confront them diplomatically, through political dialogue," said Rodriguez.

She also said she would propose reforms to her country's oil industry aimed at increasing access for foreign investors.

Pentagon to overhaul independent US military newspaper

The US Defence Department said on Thursday that it would overhaul the editorially independent, Pentagon-funded *Stars and Stripes* military newspaper to refocus the publication away from "woke distractions".

Stars and Stripes was first published over 150 years ago and is authorised by Congress to remain free from political interference despite being funded by the Department of Defense.

The paper will adapt "to serve a new generation of service members", including by stopping the publication of reports by the independent Associated Press wire service, Pentagon spokesperson Sean Parnell wrote on X.

"*Stars & Stripes* will be custom tailored to our warfighters. It will focus on warfighting, weapons systems, fitness, lethality, survivability, and ALL THINGS MILITARY," he wrote.

The announcement came days after the *Washington Post* reported that applicants to the military newspaper have been asked how they would support President Donald Trump's priorities, raising concerns about its independence.

Stars & Stripes was first published by Union soldiers during the Civil War in 1861 and has been continually published since World War II, according to its website.

Its reports focus on the military community and range from news to entertainment.

The paper's leadership had not been aware the Trump administration was asking applicants about how they would support the president's policies, Jacqueline Smith, the ombudsman who guards the paper's independence, told the *Post*.

Smith said asking such a question "is antithetical to *Stripes'* journalistic and federally mandated mission".

Stars and Stripes editor-in-chief Erik Slavin told NBC News that the paper "does not ask questions about policy support during job interviews".

PEN America, an organisation that advocates for free expression, accused the Pentagon of "trying to turn this independent newsroom into a mouthpiece for the administration's political messaging".

Parnell indicated the Pentagon planned to take a larger role in the newspaper's operations.

"*Stars & Stripes* has a proud legacy of reporting news that's important to our service members," Parnell said. "The Department of War is committed to ensuring the outlet continues to reflect that proud legacy." - AFP

Afghan mothers seek hospital help for malnourished children

By Isabelle Wesselingh and Qubad Wali
AFP

Najiba, 24, keeps a constant watch over her baby, Artiya, one of around 4mn children at risk of dying from malnutrition this year in Afghanistan.

After suffering a bout of pneumonia at three months old, Artiya's condition deteriorated and his parents went from hospital to hospital trying to find help.

"I did not get proper rest or good food," affecting her ability to produce breast milk, Najiba said at Herat Regional Hospital in western Afghanistan. "These days, I do not have enough milk for my baby."

The distressed mother, who chose not to give her surname for privacy reasons, said the family earns a living from an electric supplies store run by her husband.

Najiba and her husband spent their meagre savings trying to get care for Artiya, before learning that he has a congenital heart defect.

To her, "no one can understand what I'm going through. No one knows how I feel every day, here with my child in this condition".

"The only thing I have left is to pray that my child gets better," she said.

John Aylieff, Afghanistan director at the World Food Programme (WFP), said that women are "sacrificing their own health and their own nutrition to feed their children".

Artiya has gained weight after several weeks at the therapeutic nutrition centre in the Herat hospital, where colourful drawings of balloons and flowers adorn the walls.

Mothers such as Najiba, who are grappling with the reality of not being able to feed their



This photograph taken on January 8 shows a woman sitting next to her malnourished child inside the Medecins Sans Frontieres therapeutic nutrition centre at a hospital in Herat. - AFP

children, receive psychological support.

Meanwhile, Artiya's father is "knocking on every door just to borrow money" which could fund an expensive heart operation on another ward, Najiba said.

On average, 315-320 malnourished children are admitted each month to the centre, which is supported by medical charity Doctors Without Borders (Medecins Sans Frontieres or MSF).

The number of cases has steadily increased over the past five years, according to Hamayoun Hemat, MSF's deputy coordinator in Herat.

Since the Taliban regained power in 2021,

low-income families have been hit hard by cuts to international aid, as well as drought and the economic fallout of 5mn Afghans forced across the border from Iran and Pakistan.

"In 2025, we'd already seen the highest surge in child malnutrition recorded in Afghanistan since the beginning of the 21st century," Aylieff said in Kabul.

The crisis is only set to worsen this year, he told AFP: "A staggering 4mn children in this country will be malnourished and will require treatment."

"These children will die if they're not treated."

Thieves steal \$100,000 in Pokemon cards in armed robbery at US store

AFP
New York

Several valuable Pokemon cards were stolen in a gunpoint robbery at a New York store, US police said on Thursday, with about \$100,000 worth of merchandise reportedly taken.

Images shared by the shop show a hooded man dressed in all black pointing what appears to be a pistol at someone who was sitting with their hands up.

US media said some of the individual cards taken were worth as much as \$5,500.

Pokemon cards bearing "little monsters" attract children as well as adult superfans and collectors, with billions printed and some selling for millions of dollars.

Earlier this month, around \$300,000 worth of Pokemon cards were stolen in another armed robbery in California.

New York police said that they received reports late on Wednesday that three men had entered The Poke Court shop in Manhattan and "displayed a firearm and made threats to individuals".

"They then removed multiple merchandise and cash and a phone," a spokesman said.

No arrests have been made.

Courtney Chin, owner of The Poke Court, said in a video posted on Instagram that all customers and staff were safe.

She spoke in front of display cases that had been smashed.

The store listed several cards as stolen, each stored in protective plastic cases called "slabs" that verify their authenticity.

The stolen cards include those of famous Pokemon characters like Pikachu, the large yellow mouse with a lightning bolt-shaped tail.

Several people were in the Manhattan store to attend a community event when the robbery unfolded.

"This hobby should be a safe and welcoming place and while cardboard can be replaced, no one should ever have to go through this," the shop wrote on Instagram.

Characters from Pokemon games have been spun off into films, animated series and a plethora of merchandise.

The franchise racked up \$12bn in licensing revenue in 2024, according to specialist publication *Licence Global* - more than toy giant Mattel.

US judge dismisses Justice Department lawsuit seeking California voter details

Afederal judge has dismissed a US Justice Department (DOJ) lawsuit that sought an unredacted statewide voter registration list from California.

US District Judge David Carter in Santa Ana said the Justice Department's claims were insufficient under federal civil rights law and voting laws, adding that its demands, which included voter names, dates of birth, driver's licence information and partial social security numbers violated privacy laws.

"The centralisation of this information by the federal government would have a chilling effect on voter registration, which would inevitably lead to decreasing voter turnout as voters fear that their information is being used for some inappropriate or unlawful purpose," said Carter, who was appointed by Democratic president Bill Clinton.

The Justice Department did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

against California and several other mostly Democratic-led states in September for not providing voter registration lists.

It cited laws it said allowed the attorney-general to demand statewide voter lists and to ensure states effectively maintained voter data.

California resisted the request, arguing that it was not legally entitled to hand over the voter information.

The Justice Department did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Reuters reported in September that the DOJ was in talks with a division of the Department of Homeland Security about transferring voter roll data for use in criminal and immigration investigations.

Trump and his allies have long spread claims of widespread voter fraud, including that immigrants living illegally in the country are voting in large numbers. - Reuters

Bolsonaro sent to prison with bigger cell, more perks

Brazil's former president Jair Bolsonaro was on Thursday transferred to prison, where he will serve his sentence for orchestrating a failed coup, in "more favourable" conditions, according to a court order.

The 70-year-old former leader was sentenced to 27 years in prison last year for his attempts to cling to power following his narrow 2022 re-election loss to Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva.

Bolsonaro's family has repeatedly complained on podcasts and social media about the conditions in which he was previously being held in a room at police headquarters, including excessive noise from an air conditioner, inadequate space and the food.

Supreme Court judge Alexandre de Moraes criticised a bid to "delegitimise the regular and legal fulfilment of the prison sentence".

He elaborated for several pages in his ruling on the dire conditions facing inmates in Brazil's overcrowded prisons, highlighting the already "exclusive conditions" under which Bolsonaro is serving his sentence.

He criticised the complaints as apparent demands for Bolsonaro's jail time to be converted to "a hotel stay or a holiday resort".

Bolsonaro had been detained in a 12sq metre (129.1sq foot) room with a television, fridge and air-conditioning at police headquarters in Brasília.

He was on Thursday transferred to the Papuda Penitentiary Complex, also in the capital, where he will be held in a special detention unit five times the size of his current room, with a kitchen, private outdoor area and a double bed, according to the court.

Moraes said that Bolsonaro was being held "with complete isolation from the other prisoners in the complex".

One of the former president's sons, Carlos Bolsonaro, accused Moraes of "cruelty" and slammed "the transfer to a harsh prison environment", on the X social network.

Bolsonaro's lawyers have appealed, in vain, for him to be permitted house arrest, on health grounds.

His latest request, filed this week, is pending a medical evaluation.

Bolsonaro had been under house arrest before the official start of his sentence, however was moved to prison after he took a soldering iron to his ankle monitoring bracelet in what the court saw as an escape attempt. - AFP

US lawmakers in Denmark to offer support against Greenland threats

AFP/Reuters

Copenhagen/Nuuk

A bipartisan delegation of US lawmakers met the leaders of Denmark and Greenland in Copenhagen yesterday, seeking to "lower the temperature" with assurances of congressional support after President Donald Trump's threats to seize the Arctic island.

The two-day visit comes alongside a European show of support in the form of a military reconnaissance mission to Greenland, a Danish autonomous territory.

However, Trump, insisting the United States needed Greenland for its "national security", warned in Washington yesterday that he "may put a tariff" on countries that oppose that stance.

The 11 visiting US lawmakers held talks with Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen and her Greenlandic counterpart Jens-Frederik Nielsen, as well as Denmark's foreign and defence ministers, members of parliament and business leaders.

Republican Senator Lisa Murkowski said that there was "good dialogue" in the meetings, and stressed it was important to "nurture" ties between the United States, Denmark and Greenland.

"When you ask the American people whether or not they think it is a good idea for the United States to acquire Greenland, the vast majority - some 75% - will say, 'we do not think that that is a good idea,'" Murkowski told reporters.

"Greenland needs to be viewed as our ally, not as an asset," she said.

The delegation's visit follows a meet-



Danish Foreign Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen, Defence Minister Troels Lund Poulsen and other officials with an American delegation consisting of senators and members of the House of Representatives: Thom Tillis, Gregory Meeks, Steny Hoyer, Lisa Murkowski, Chris Coons, Sara Jacobs, Sarah McBride, Jeanne Shaheen, Peter Welch, and Madeleine Dean. - Reuters

ing in Washington on Wednesday at which Danish representatives said Copenhagen and Washington were in "fundamental disagreement" over the future of Greenland.

Democratic Senator Chris Coons said the purpose of the Congress members' two-day visit to Copenhagen was to "listen respectfully to our friends, our trusted allies and partners here in Denmark and from Greenland".

"There's a lot of rhetoric, but there's not a lot of reality in the current discussion in Washington," he told reporters following the meetings, saying that the lawmakers would seek to "lower the temperature" on returning home.

"Greenland needs to be viewed as our ally, not as an asset," she said.

The delegation's visit follows a meet-

In Greenland's capital Nuuk, residents welcomed the show of support.

"Congress would never approve of a military action in Greenland. It's just one idiot speaking," a 39-year-old union representative told AFP.

"If he (Trump) does it, he'll get impeached or kicked out. If people in Congress want to save their own democracy, they have to step up," said the union rep, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Trump has repeatedly criticised Denmark - a North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato) ally - for, in his view, not doing enough to ensure Greenland's security.

The US president has pursued that argument, despite strategically located Greenland - as part of Denmark - being covered by Nato's security umbrella.

Military personnel were more visible in Nuuk yesterday, according to an AFP journalist, days after Denmark said it was beefing up its defence on the island.

"I don't think troops in Europe impact the president's decision-making process, nor does it impact his goal of the acquisition of Greenland at all," White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt told a briefing.

Danish Foreign Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen retorted that a US acquisition of Greenland was "out of the question".

The European troop deployment in Greenland for a military exercise is aimed at "sending a signal" to "everyone", including the United States, that European countries are determined to "defend (their) sovereignty", the French armed forces minister, Alice Rufo, said.

Britain, Finland, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden have announced the deployment of small numbers of military personnel to prepare for future exercises in the Arctic.

"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 on Thursday.

Trump's special envoy to Greenland meanwhile said that he planned to visit the Danish territory in March, and that he believed a deal could be done.

"I do believe that there's a deal that should and will be made once this plays out," Jeff Landry told Fox News in an interview yesterday. "The president is serious. I think he's laid the markers down. He's told Denmark what he's looking for."

Large demonstrations were planned across Denmark and Greenland today to protest against Trump's territorial ambitions.

Thousands of people have taken to social networks to say they intend to take part in the protests organised by Greenlandic associations in Nuuk and Copenhagen, Aarhus, Aalborg and Odense.

Lawmakers from both Trump's Republican Party and opposition Democrats have said they would back legislation to rein in Trump's ability to seize Greenland, amid an ongoing fight over war powers, which the Constitution grants to Congress.

A House bill in support of annexing Greenland has also been introduced.

Just 17% of Americans approve of President Donald Trump's efforts to acquire Greenland, and large majorities of Democrats and Republicans oppose using military force to annex the island, a Reuters/Ipsos poll found.

Trump has called the poll "fake".

He first floated the idea of acquiring Greenland in 2019 during his first term, but faces opposition in Washington, including from within his own party.



Military personnel believed to be from the German armed forces Bundeswehr disembark a charter plane upon arrival yesterday at Nuuk international airport. - AFP



Cuban military personnel hold up red flags during a march outside the US embassy in Havana to protest against what they denounced as US aggression in the region. - Reuters

Cubans rally in Havana against US

Reuters

Havana

Thousands of Cubans gathered before the US embassy in Havana at day-break yesterday to protest against what they denounced as US aggression in the region following the capture of Venezuelan leader Nicolas Maduro, a Cuban ally.

Tension between the two longtime rivals has spiked since the US attack on Venezuela, which resulted in the deaths of 32 Cuban military and intelligence officers believed to be defending Maduro were killed, marking the first clashes between US and Cuban forces in decades.

Cubans bundled in hats and jackets gathered on the capital's Malecon waterfront boulevard waving Cuban and Venezuelan flags under gray skies as blustery winds and waves buffeted the coast.

Diaz-Canel said after Trump's comments that Cuba would defend its homeland "to the last drop of blood".

Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel, dressed in olive-green military garb and with his back to the US embassy, called on Cubans to remain united in the face of US pressure.

"No, imperialists, we have absolutely no fear of you... and we don't like to be threatened," he said, turning to wave his finger at the embassy building. "You will not intimidate us."

Both sides have ratcheted up political rhetoric in recent days, marking a new low in long frosty relations between the US and communist-run Cuba, which lies 90 miles (145km) from the shores of Florida.

US President Donald Trump said on Sunday that no more Venezuelan oil or money would go to Cuba, warning Havana to make a deal before it's "too late".

Diaz-Canel said after Trump's comments that Cuba would defend its homeland "to the last drop of blood".

Trump to pardon former Puerto Rico governor Vazquez

Reuters

Washington

US President Donald Trump is issuing a pardon to Puerto Rico's former governor Wanda Vazquez Garced, who was previously indicted in a federal corruption case, a White House official confirmed yesterday.

"This entire case is an example of political prosecution," White House official said of Vazquez, who was arrested in August 2022 on bribery charges related to the financing of her gubernatorial campaign in 2020.

Trump is also pardoning Vazquez's co-defendants Julio Martin Herrera Velutini and Mark Rossini, CBS News said.

Trump has granted a flurry of pardons since assuming office last year, many of them to white-collar criminals and political allies.

New map reveals hidden landscape under Antarctica's ice sheet

By Will Dunham

Reuters

Scientists have devised the most detailed map to date of the terrain hidden below the vast ice sheet blanketing Antarctica, uncovering an exuberant landscape of mountains, canyons, valleys and plains while discerning for the first time tens of thousands of hills and other smaller features.

The researchers used the latest high-resolution satellite observations and a method called ice-flow perturbation analysis, which estimates subglacial topography and conditions based on surface features, to map the full continent including previously uncharted parts.

Improved knowledge of the subglacial bedrock landscape may aid in forecasts concerning the climate-related retreat of Antarctica's ice sheet.

Previous research indicated that rough terrain like jagged hillsides and mountaintops can slow this retreat.

"Having the most accurate map

of Antarctica's bed shape is crucial, because the shape of the bed is an important control on friction acting against ice flow, which in turn we need to include in numerical models that are used to project how rapidly Antarctica's ice will flow towards the ocean, melt and contribute to global sea-level rise," said glaciologist Robert Bingham of the University of Edinburgh in Scotland, who helped lead the study published this week in the journal *Science*.

The researchers were able to map the subglacial terrain with unprecedented precision.

For instance, they identified more than 30,000 previously uncharted hills, defined as terrain protuberances of at least 165' (50m).

Antarctica is about 40% larger than Europe, 50% larger than the United States and roughly half the area of Africa.

The map revealed a landscape bearing various topographical features.

"Possibly the type of landscape that many people might know less is 'plateaus dissected by deep-carved glacier valleys,'" Bingham said. "I can tell you this is very familiar for Scots, but also

ham said. "Boring it is not."

The Antarctic Ice Sheet is the largest mass of ice on Earth and holds about 70% of the planet's freshwater.

Its average thickness is estimated at about 1.3 miles (2.1km), with a maximum thickness of about three miles (4.8km).

Antarctica has not always been covered in ice.

Its subglacial features initially

were sculpted before the continent

acquired its icy covering more than 34mn years ago before being further modified by the dynamic ice sheet.

Antarctica once was connected to South America but separated due to a process called plate tectonics involving the gradual movement of continent-sized plates on the Earth's surface.

The map revealed a landscape

bearing various topographical features.

"In every case, all of these continents contain an array of very different landscapes in themselves,

from towering mountain ranges to

immense flat plains."

Bingham said. "I can tell you this

is very familiar for Scots, but also



A handout image of a map illustrating the subglacial landscape of mountain ranges, deep canyons and wide valleys, as well as tens of thousands of smaller hills and valleys, with comparative examples inset, in Antarctica, obtained by Reuters on Thursday. - Reuters

a landscape that is common across Scandinavia, northern Canada and Greenland."

"In fact, the very fact that the landscape our technique has uncovered across Antarctica matches these landscapes so well gives us great confidence in our new map," he added.

The researchers noted that until

now the surface of Mars was better

mapped than the subglacial terrain of Antarctica.

Traditionally, scientists have mapped the subglacial landscape using radar equipment suspended on planes or towed by snowmobiles, according to glaciologist Helen Ockenden of the Institut des Géosciences de l'Environnement in France, lead author of the study.

The researchers hope the map will help inform models used to project future sea-level rise as well as the forecasts issued by the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) that provides governments with data to shape climate-related policies.

"We can now also identify better where Antarctica needs more detailed field survey, and where it does not," Bingham added.



China says 'resolutely opposes' US-Taiwan trade deal

AFP
Beijing

China yesterday said it "resolutely opposes" a deal signed by Washington and Taipei to reduce tariffs on Taiwanese products and increase the island's investment in the US.

"China consistently and resolutely opposes any agreement... signed between countries with which it has diplomatic relations and the Taiwan region of China," ministry spokesman Guo Jiakun said, urging Washington to abide by the one-China principle.

China claims Taiwan as part of its territory, and has not ruled out

using force to bring it under its control.

Meanwhile, Taiwan Vice Premier Cheng Li-chiun yesterday said Taipei aims to become a close strategic partner with the US in the area of artificial intelligence (AI),

The administration of President Donald Trump has pushed the major producer of semiconductors for

greater investment in the US, specifically in turning out chips that power AI.

"In this negotiation, we promoted two-way Taiwan-US high-tech investment, hoping that in the future we can become close AI strategic partners," Cheng said in comments livestreamed from a press conference in Washington. Cheng

led the talks that clinched Thursday's trade deal, which cuts tariffs on many of Taiwan's exports, and directs new investments in the US technology industry, but it could also irritate China.

US Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick said Taiwan companies would invest \$250bn to boost production of semiconduc-

tors, energy and artificial intelligence in the US.

The figure includes \$100bn already committed by chipmaker TSMC in 2025, with more to come, he added.

Taiwan will also guarantee an additional \$250bn in credit to facilitate further investment, the Trump administration said.

South Korea's former president Yoon gets five-year jail term in martial law case

Reuters
Seoul

A South Korean court yesterday sentenced former president Yoon Suk-yeol to five years in prison on charges that included obstructing attempts by authorities to arrest him following his failed bid to impose martial law in December 2024.

The Seoul Central District Court found Yoon guilty of mobilising the presidential security service to block authorities from executing an arrest warrant to investigate him for his martial law declaration.

In televised proceedings, the 65-year-old former prosecutor was also found guilty of charges that included fabricating official documents and failing to follow the legal process required for martial law, which has to be discussed at a formal cabinet meeting.

The ruling is the first related to the criminal charges Yoon faces over his botched martial law declaration.

"The defendant abused his enormous influence as president to prevent the execution of legitimate warrants through officials from the Security Service, which effectively privatised officials ... loyal to the Republic of Korea for personal safety and personal gain," the lead judge on the three-judge panel said.

Yoon, his hair streaked with grey, listened intently as the judge

delivered the ruling, looking noticeably slimmer than when he first came under investigation a year ago. He showed no reaction as the sentence was announced in a courtroom packed with many of his supporters.

Speaking outside the court immediately afterwards, one of Yoon's lawyers, Yoo Jung-hwa, said the former president would appeal.

"We express regret that the decision was made in a politicised manner," she said. Prosecutors did not

answer questions from reporters about whether they would lodge an appeal, which they are entitled to do under South Korean law.

Prosecutors have asked the court in a separate trial to sentence Yoon to death for masterminding a revolt by trying to impose military rule without justification and to suspend parliament.

Yoon, who is currently being held in the Seoul Detention Centre on the outskirts of the capital, has argued it was within his powers as president to declare martial law and that the action was aimed at sounding the alarm over the obstruction of government by opposition parties.

A few dozen supporters gathered outside the court complex ahead of the hearing, holding signs that said Yoon was the victim of a political witch hunt. "History will be the judge," the placards said, and that Yoon remained the president.

There was a heavy police pres-

ence in and around the court that is only a few blocks from Yoon's upscale apartment in Seoul. Yoon could have faced up to 10 years in jail over the obstruction charges related to when he barricaded himself inside his residential compound in January last year and ordered the security service to block investigators.

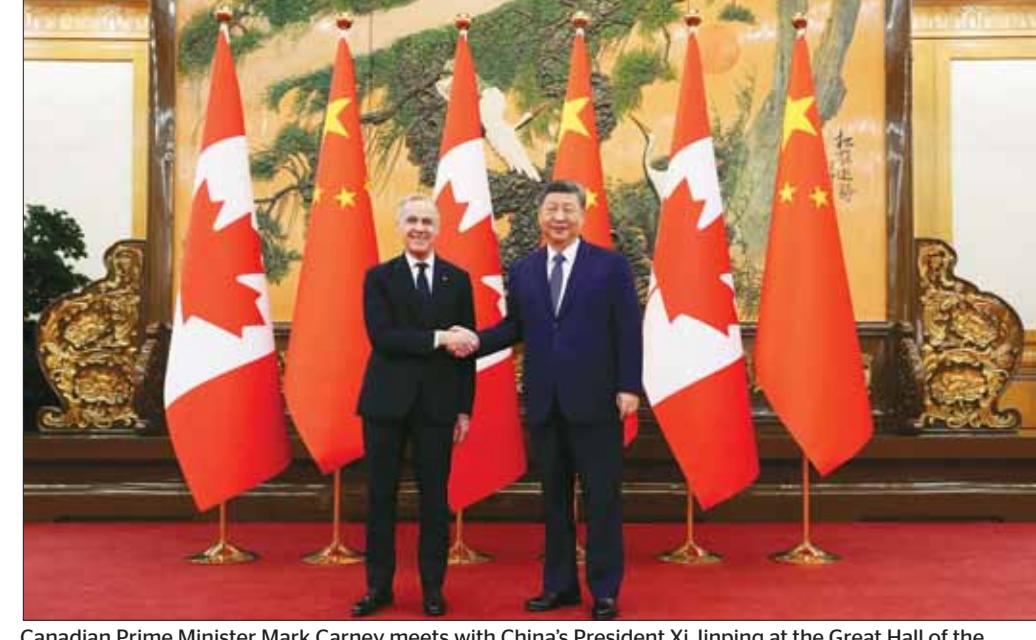
He was finally arrested in a second attempt involving more than 3,000 police officers. Yoon's arrest was the first ever for a sitting president in South Korea.

Parliament, joined by some members of Yoon's conservative party, voted within hours to overturn his surprise martial law decree and later impeached him, suspending his powers.

He was removed from office in April last year by the Constitutional Court, which ruled he violated the duties of his office.

While Yoon's bid to impose martial law lasted only about six hours, it sent shockwaves through South Korea, which is Asia's fourth-largest economy, a key US security ally and long considered one of the world's most resilient democracies.

Yoon is the latest in a series of South Korean presidents who have been convicted and imprisoned, including former general Chun Doo-hwan who was sentenced to death in 1996 for a brutal crackdown on mass protests in Gwangju in 1980.



Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney meets with China's President Xi Jinping at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, China, yesterday.

China, Canada reach deal on tariffs, visas

AFP
Beijing

Canada's Prime Minister Mark Carney and Chinese President Xi Jinping yesterday agreed on a raft of measures from trade to tourism at the first meeting between the countries' leaders in Beijing in eight years.

The Canadian premier hailed a "landmark deal" under a "new strategic partnership" with China, turning the page on years of diplomatic spats, retaliatory arrests of each other's citizens and tariff disputes.

Carney has sought to reduce his country's reliance on the US, its key economic partner

and traditional ally, as President Donald Trump has aggressively raised tariffs on Canadian products.

"Canada and China have reached a preliminary but landmark trade agreement to remove trade barriers and reduce tariffs," Carney told a news conference after meeting with Xi.

Under the deal, China - which used to be Canada's largest market for canola seed - is expected to reduce tariffs on canola products by March 1 to around 15%, down from the current 84%.

China will also allow Canadian visitors to enter the country visa-free.

In turn, Canada will import 49,000 Chinese electric vehicles (EVs) under new, preferential

tariffs of 6.1%. "This is a return to the levels that existed prior to recent trade frictions," Carney said of the EV deal.

Welcoming Carney in the Great Hall of the People, Xi said China-Canada relations reached a turning point at their last meeting on the sidelines of the Apec summit in October.

"It can be said that our meeting last year opened a new chapter in turning China-Canada relations toward improvement," Xi told the Canadian leader.

"The healthy and stable development of China-Canada relations serves the common interests of our two countries," he said, adding he was "glad" to see discussions over the last few months to restore cooperation.

China protests over Philippine coast guard's Xi images

The Chinese embassy in Manila yesterday said it has filed a diplomatic protest against a Philippine Coast Guard spokesman over a social media post that included cartoonish images of President Xi Jinping. Coast Guard spokesman Jay Tarriela and an embassy official had been trading barbs since last week over issues concerning the disputed South China Sea. Beijing claims historic rights to the crucial waterway. Tarriela's Facebook post on Wednesday included a photo of him giving a speech, with a background featuring a compilation of comical images of Xi under the banner "Why China remains to be bully?" The embassy yesterday slammed the post for "attacking and smearing Chinese leaders" in a statement it released. The move "constitutes a serious violation of China's political dignity", the embassy said adding that it is a "blatant political provocation, which has crossed the red line".

Major blaze in South Korea



A major fire that broke out early yesterday in a deprived area of the upmarket Gangnam district of Seoul was brought under control and fully extinguished about eight hours later, a fire official said. "We are relieved that we were able to extinguish the fire without any casualties," the official said in a statement from the National Fire Agency. The fire that broke out just after 5am was fully extinguished at 1.28pm, the statement added. While no casualties were reported, 258 residents living in the affected areas of Guryong Village were evacuated, and a total of 324 firefighters and 106 vehicles

Thailand halts construction projects after fatal accidents

Reuters
Bangkok

Thailand's transport ministry yesterday ordered a 15-day construction halt on 14 contracts involving Italian-Thai Development PCL as well as other large-scale projects overseen by the ministry, as it conducts safety inspections after two fatal crane accidents in two days.

The decision follows a train derailment that killed 32 passengers in northeastern Nakhon Ratchasima on Wednesday and the death of two drivers when their vehicles were crushed near Bangkok 24 hours later, with both incidents caused by the collapse of cranes used on Italian-Thai Development projects.

ITD, founded in 1958 by Italian and Thai partners, has said it accepts responsibility for providing care, compensation, and

remedies for the losses incurred in both incidents.

The halt to the 14 projects would allow expert teams to conduct detailed inspections to ensure safety standards were being met, said Chirapong Theppitthuck, deputy permanent secretary of the transport ministry.

He also ordered other major projects commissioned by the ministry to stop construction for up to 15 days for similar inspections, after which legal or regulatory action would be taken if required, the ministry said.

This week's crane collapses were the latest in a series of fatal accidents at construction projects in Thailand, several involving Italian-Thai, including the fall of a partially-built Bangkok tower last year following a 7.7-magnitude earthquake in neighbouring Myanmar, which killed at least 89 and led to charges of negligence against 23 people.

Gambia has not proven Rohingya genocide case, claims Myanmar

Reuters
The Hague

Myanmar told the United Nations' top court yesterday Gambia had not proven its accusation that the Myanmar government had committed genocide against the minority Muslim Rohingya, part of a hearing on the landmark case.

Gambia brought the case before the International Court of Justice in 2019. The West African country told the court on Monday that Myanmar's authorities had targeted the Rohingya for destruction, al-

legations Myanmar rejected.

"Gambia has failed to meet its burden of proof. This case will be decided on proven fact not unsubstantiated allegations," Ko Ko Hlaing, a representative of the Myanmar government, told the ICJ, which is also known as the World Court.

Myanmar's armed forces launched an offensive in 2017 that forced at least 730,000 Rohingya from their homes and into neighbouring Bangladesh, where they recounted killings, mass rape and arson. A UN fact-finding mission concluded the 2017 military offensive had included "genocidal acts".

Myanmar has denied genocide and Ko Ko Hlaing told judges the offensive was a legitimate counter-terrorism campaign in response to attacks by militants. He added the UN fact-finding mission was not objective or reliable.

Lawyers for Gambia had argued that it would be unreasonable for judges to conclude that Myanmar's attack on thousands of Rohingya civilians, including women, children and the elderly, as well as burning their villages was done only to combat terrorism.

They said the pattern of conduct during the crackdown indicated the genocidal intent legally needed

to determine genocide was committed.

Ko Ko Hlaing stressed that his government was committed to returning and resettling Rohingya refugees from the camps in Bangladesh but said those efforts were thwarted by elements beyond its control like the Covid-19 pandemic, a cyclone and political instability.

"Myanmar's commitment and constant efforts since 2017 contradict Gambia's narrative that Myanmar's intention is to destroy or forcibly deport this population," he said.

The ICJ is the UN's highest court

and deals with disputes between states.

Gambia's case, backed by the 57-nation Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, is the first genocide case the ICJ is hearing in full in more than a decade. A final ruling is expected towards the end of 2026.

The outcome will have repercussions beyond Myanmar, likely affecting South Africa's 2023 genocide case at the ICJ against Israel over the war in Gaza.

Myanmar has been in further turmoil since 2021, when the military toppled the elected civilian government and violently sup-

pressed pro-democracy protests, sparking a nationwide armed rebellion.

The country is currently holding phased elections that have been criticised by the United Nations, some Western countries and human rights groups as not free or fair. The military says the vote has public backing and is being conducted without coercion.

The hearings span three weeks and from next Wednesday the court will hear Rohingya victims of the alleged atrocities in closed sessions. That will mark the first time Rohingya victims will be directly heard by an international court.

UK grocers begin to feel impact of appetite-suppressing drugs

Reuters
London

Britain's major food retailers are beginning to feel the impact of a new trend as the surging popularity of appetite-suppressing drugs starts to reshape shopping habits and sales.

About 5% of the UK's adult population is reportedly embracing glucagon-like peptide (GLP-1)

drugs and their effect is now starting to show in sales of food, retail bosses and analysts said this week.

Market researcher NielsenIQ said yesterday that although total UK grocery sales rose 2.5% in value terms over the four weeks to December 27, they fell 0.2% on a volume basis.

Clive Black, head of consumer research at Shore Capital, said this was "perhaps the clearest indication of the impact" of the drugs on

the nation's eating habits. Simon Roberts, CEO of Sainsbury's, Britain's second largest food retailer, said the group was noticing an impact.

"For customers that are using these products, we're seeing more of that switch into healthier choices, into fresh food, into fibre and we're really well placed to serve that mission," he told reporters.

Ken Murphy, CEO of Tesco, said

Britain's biggest food retailer was watching "very closely" how the GLP-1 trend is developing.

"We already have a wide range of products that I would describe as GLP-1 friendly," he said, highlighting that fresh food was the standout performance at Christmas, with like-for-like sales up 6.6% year-on-year - "that is, by far and away, the best thing people can eat!"

He said Tesco also had high-protein products across several

categories that work well in the GLP-1 context.

"We're well set to respond to any trends in healthier eating and we'll continue to watch very closely any specific product ranges that could be suitable for those kinds of consumers."

Higher sales of no alcohol drinks was also evident, Murphy added.

Roisin Currie, CEO of Greggs, the British fast-food chain fa-

mous for its high calorie sausage rolls, steak bakes and sweet treats, said its customers are looking for smaller portions and for more information on protein and fibre content. She said Greggs is responding by refining its product offer.

Last month, upmarket food retailer Marks & Spencer launched a range of nutrient-dense meals, tailored to people taking weight-loss injections.

India warns Apple it will proceed with antitrust case after firm plays for time

Apple has said it fears it could be fined up to \$38bn if India's competition watchdog uses its global turnover calculation for penalties

Reuters
New Delhi

India has issued a final warning to Apple that it will proceed in an antitrust case against the US tech giant as the company has delayed responses to officials for over a year and undermined the investigation, a confidential order shows.

Apple has said it fears it could be fined up to \$38bn if India's competition watchdog uses its global turnover calculation for penalties, after an investigation found it had abused its position on its app store. Apple, which denies the allegations, has challenged the penalty rules in an Indian court, and the matter is pending.

While the Delhi High Court is still hearing that challenge, a confidential December 31 order from the Competition Commission of India (CCI) shows Apple privately sought to pause the entire case while the penalty-rules dispute is before the court. The CCI rejected the request.

The watchdog said it asked Apple in October 2024 to file objections to the investigation's findings and pro-

vide financial details typically used to assess penalties, but the company has received "repeated extensions" since then.

"The commission is of the considered view that repeated extensions, despite unambiguous directions, undermine procedural discipline and impede the timely conclusion of proceedings," CCI noted in its order.

"The commission is of the view that repeated extensions undermine procedural discipline and impede the timely conclusion of proceedings"

"Such indulgence cannot be continued indefinitely," it added, giving Apple a final warning that it will proceed in the case unilaterally if no response is received by next week.

Apple did not respond to Reuters queries.

A source familiar with the matter said Apple views CCI's December order as a move to preempt the ongoing court proceedings and the company was not likely to respond to it before the judges hear it next on January 27.

Since 2022, Tinder-owner Match and Indian startups have been locked in an antitrust battle with Apple. Investigators in 2024 issued a report saying the US smartphone company engaged in "abusive conduct" on the iOS apps market.

Catherine meets England Women's rugby team members



Britain's Catherine, Princess of Wales, poses for a group photo with members of the England Women's rugby team at Windsor Castle in Windsor, Britain. England won the 2025 Women's Rugby World Cup.

India 'to ease rules to boost foreign investment in local defence firms'

Reuters
New Delhi

India plans to make it much easier for foreign firms to invest in defence companies, two government sources with knowledge of the matter said - a move that would align with efforts to boost domestic manufacturing after last year's conflict with Pakistan.

The cap on foreign direct investment in defence firms with existing licences under the so-called automatic route, where government approval is not required, is set to be raised to 74%

from 49%, the sources said. Presently, foreign investors can only own 74% of an Indian defence business under the automatic route when the companies are seeking new licences.

The government is also in discussions about dropping a condition that stipulates foreign investment beyond 74% is only allowed if it "results in access to modern technology" - wording that has been criticised by experts as vague and ambiguous.

The planned easing of these rules, which has not been previously reported, is aimed at encouraging companies from defence partner nations to take majority stakes in Indian ven-

tures, said the sources who were not authorised to speak to media and declined to be identified. The reforms could be enacted in the next couple of months, they added.

Another condition set to be dropped is a requirement for fully export-oriented defence manufacturers to set up domestic maintenance and support facilities, the sources said.

"This condition compelled companies to first set up a base for maintenance activities, which can now be outsourced by the export-oriented units, making it easier for them to attract foreign investment," said Amit Cowshish, a former defence ministry official.

UK navy launches new crewless helicopter



The Proteus, UK's first truly autonomous full-size helicopter, flies as on the day it completed its maiden flight operating from Predannack airfield in Cornwall, Britain. The Royal Navy yesterday said it had completed its maiden flight. The British navy said the helicopter, named Proteus, had successfully completed a short test routine. Developed under a £60mn (\$80.46mn) programme, it was key to defending Britain and Nato allies against what it called "evolving threats" in the North Atlantic.

UK house prices 'rise by least since March 2024'

Reuters
London

British house prices rose by 0.3% in the 12 months to December, the weakest annual increase since March 2024, as economic and tax uncertainty overshadowed the market at the end of the year, mortgage lender Halifax said.

Prices unexpectedly fell in month-on-month terms, dropping by 0.6% in December after falling 0.1% in November. Economists polled by Reuters had forecast prices would be 1.1% higher than a year earlier and rise 0.2% on the month.

"While December's monthly fall in prices was likely related to uncertainty in the latter part of the year, this should now be starting to unwind," Amanda Bryden,

head of mortgages at Halifax, said.

Bryden said a combination of lower mortgage rates and modest growth in property prices improved affordability for first-time buyers, with the house price to income ratio at its lowest in over a decade in December.

But Matt Swannell, chief economic advisor to the EY Item Club, a forecasting group, said he did not expect much improvement in affordability as the loosening in the labour market would likely slow wage growth, saying there was also limited scope for big falls in mortgage rates in 2026.

"It looks very likely interest rates will be cut less this year than they were last year," Swannell said.

The Bank of England cut interest rates to 3.75% from 4% in December, and investors are pricing in one or two more quarter-point cuts this year.

India's December quarter cotton imports soar

India's cotton imports rose 158% year-on-year to a record 3.1mn bales in the December quarter after New Delhi allowed duty-free imports, boosting overseas purchases, a leading industry body said. Higher imports by the world's second-largest cotton producer are expected to support global prices, but they could weigh on local prices, which had been rising due to crop damage. New Delhi exempted cotton imports from the 11% duty during the December quarter. India's cotton imports in the 2025-26 marketing year, which began on October 1, are likely to jump 22% from a year earlier to a record 5mn bales, the Cotton Association of India estimated. India's imports reached a record 4.1mn bales last year from the US, Brazil, Australia and Africa. The industry body raised its estimate for the current season's cotton crop to 31.7mn bales, up from the previous forecast of 30.95mn bales. - AFP

Harry's war against press reaches showdown with Daily Mail case

Reuters
London

Prince Harry's war against the British press heads into a final showdown next week with the start of his privacy lawsuit against the publisher of the powerful *Daily Mail* newspaper over alleged unlawful action he says contributed to his departure for the US.

The 41-year-old Harry, a boy when his mother Princess Diana died in a 1997 car crash with paparazzi in pursuit, has long represented the often aggressive tactics of British media and pledged to bring them to account.

Harry, who is King Charles' younger son, and six other claimants including singer Elton John are suing

Associated Newspapers over years of alleged unlawful behaviour, ranging from bugging phone lines to obtaining personal health records.

Associated has rejected any wrongdoing, calling the accusations "preposterous smears" and part of a conspiracy.

Over the course of nine weeks, Harry, John and the other claimants - John's husband David Furnish, actors Liz Hurley and Sadie Frost, campaigner Doreen Lawrence, and former British lawmaker Simon Hughes - will give evidence to the high court in London and be grilled by Associated's lawyers.

The prince is due to appear next Thursday. It will be his second such court appearance in the witness box in three years, having become the first British royal to give evidence in

130 years in 2023 in another lawsuit.

Current and former senior Associated staff, including a number of editors of national newspapers, will likewise be quizzed by the claimants' legal team. The stakes for both sides are high, with not just the reputation of media and claimants on the line, but because legal costs are set to run into tens of millions of pounds.

Critics say Harry, the Duke of Sussex, is bitter over unfavourable coverage, from partying in his youth to quarrelling with his family and leaving the UK in later years.

But supporters say it is a noble cause against sometimes immoral media.

"He seems to be motivated by a lot more than money," said Damian Tambini, an expert in media and

communications regulation and policy at the London School of Economics.

"He's actually trying to, along with many of the other complainants, affect change in the newspapers."

Harry and his American wife Meghan have cited media harassment as one of the main factors that led them to stepping down from royal duties and moving to California in 2020. Elton John, 77, also has history in the courts with the British press, successfully suing newspapers including the *Daily Mail* for libel. He received £1mn (\$1.34mn) from the *Sun* in a 1988 settlement.

Having successfully sued Mirror Group Newspapers, and also won damages, an apology and some admission of wrongdoing from Rupert Murdoch's News Group Newspapers (NGN), the case against Associated could be Harry's most significant.

The 130-year-old *Daily Mail*, renowned for championing traditional, conservative values, for decades has been one of, if not the most powerful media force within Britain and unlike the Mirror and NGN has not been embroiled in the phone-hacking scandal.

It says it gives voice to millions in "Middle England", holding the rich, powerful and famous to account.

In 1997, it famously ran a front page denouncing five men accused of the racist killing of Black teenager Stephen Lawrence as murderers and challenging anyone to sue if that was wrong. The case was a defining moment in race relations in Britain.

Despite that, one of those now suing the Mail is Doreen Lawrence, the mother of murdered Stephen, who says journalists tapped her phones, monitored her bank accounts and phone bills, and paid police for confidential information.

The Associated case will mark one of the final airings in court of accusations of phone-hacking which have dogged the British press for more than 20 years.

The practice of unlawfully accessing voicemails fully burst onto the public agenda in 2011, leading to the closure of Murdoch's News of the World tabloid, the jailing of its former editor who had later worked as a communications chief for ex-Prime Minister David Cameron, and a public inquiry.

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GULF TIMES**Greenland's history as a Danish territory and why Trump wants it**

US President Donald Trump has renewed his ambition to take control of Greenland for national security reasons and questioned whether Denmark has any legal right to the Arctic island. The debate has revived scrutiny of how Greenland became part of Denmark, its current self-rule and path to independence, and Washington's military footprint.

Greenland was inhabited by Inuit peoples from Asia and North America intermittently from around 2,500 BC. Around 985 AD, Vikings led by Erik the Red settled in southern Greenland, farming and building churches. Around the same time, ancestors of today's Inuit arrived, living as hunters and gatherers. They became the dominant culture, pushing out Viking settlers around 1400.

Denmark colonised Greenland in the 18th century when missionary Hans Egede arrived in 1721, marking the start of the colonial era. A statue of Egede still stands on a hilltop in the capital Nuuk's colonial harbour, seen by many Greenlanders as a symbol of lost Inuit traditions.

In 1916, the United States bought the Danish West Indies - now the US Virgin Islands - for \$25mn in gold. As part of that treaty, Washington declared it would not object to the Danish government extending its "political and economic interests to the whole of Greenland", formally recognising Danish sovereignty.

Greenland shifted from colony to formal territory in 1953 under Denmark's constitution, though Greenlanders were not consulted. Any sale would require a constitutional amendment.

Greenland has about 57,000 people, limited infrastructure, and no roads between its around 17 towns. Relations have been strained by revelations of historical misconduct. In the 1950s, Danish authorities forcibly relocated Inuit to larger towns, marginalising the practices and languages of indigenous people who make up almost 90% of the population. Denmark apologised in 2022 for a 1950s experiment that sent Greenlandic children to Denmark.

Trump has said acquiring Greenland is a national security priority, and that the US must own the island to prevent Russia or China from taking it

maintains a permanent presence at Pituffik air base in northwest Greenland under a 1951 agreement granting freedom to build bases with Danish and Greenlandic notification.

Denmark has historically accommodated the US presence because Copenhagen does not have the capability to defend Greenland and benefits from US security guarantees through Nato.

Trump has said acquiring Greenland is a national security priority, and that the US must own the island to prevent Russia or China from taking it. The shortest route from Europe to North America runs via Greenland, making it important for the US ballistic missile early-warning system.

Greenland sits at a geopolitical crossroads amid Arctic militarisation by Nato, Russia and China. The US wants to expand its military footprint, including radars to monitor waters used by Russian vessels and submarines.

More broadly the Arctic is becoming increasingly militarised with Nato states, China and Russia all expanding activity there. The island, whose capital Nuuk is closer to New York than the Danish capital Copenhagen, boasts mineral, oil and natural gas wealth, but development has been slow and mining has seen very limited US investment.

Polls indicate a majority of Greenlanders support independence in principle. But many warn against rushing due to economic reliance on Denmark and becoming overly exposed to the United States if independence is pursued too quickly.

Independence could allow association with the US under a Compact of Free Association, similar to agreements with Micronesia, Palau and the Marshall Islands.

COFA typically provides US services and military protection in exchange for defence access, but whether Greenland would benefit depends on the scale of support and the pace of economic diversification beyond fishing.

When Trump offered to buy the island during his first presidential term, Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen called it "absurd". Frederiksen and Greenland's Prime Minister Jens-Frederik Nielsen reiterated in December 2025 that Greenland could not be annexed and international security did not justify such a move. — Reuters

The PMs club

Italy's Prime Minister Georgia Meloni and Japan's Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi take part in the Japan-Italy summit meeting yesterday in Tokyo, Japan. — Reuters

Global economy appears more resilient, better able to withstand crises: report

A recent World Bank report on global economic prospects paints a mixed picture of the world economy, showing weaker growth but greater resilience in the face of ongoing shocks, according to a Jordanian academic

QNA
Doha

Two economists said that although the World Bank's recently released semi-annual report on global economic prospects pointed to weak global output growth in 2026, it nevertheless confirmed that the global economy appears more resilient and better equipped to overcome crises.

Speaking to Qatar News Agency (QNA), the experts noted that while the World Bank report projected global output growth to slow slightly to 2.6 percent this year, compared with 2.7 percent last year, the upward revision relative to earlier estimates indicates that the global economy has become more capable of absorbing shocks, particularly those linked to trade and fiscal policies. They explained that this improvement reflects the ability of major economies to avoid slipping into recession rather than a broad-based recovery.

The report, which reviewed key indicators and anticipated challenges facing global growth and highlighted disparities in its impact between advanced and developing economies, warned that the improvement in global growth does not extend equally to all countries. It clarified that advanced economies are the main contributors to growth, while developing countries and smaller economies are expected to face greater challenges in achieving strong and sustainable growth. This means that the improvement in global growth will have only a limited effect on reducing extreme

poverty in those countries.

Economists believe that this divergence in global growth suggests that the gap between advanced and developing economies may persist or widen, making development and poverty reduction an ongoing concern for the global economy.

Commenting on the indicators cited in the World Bank report, economic expert Dr Abdullah al-Khater told QNA that the global economy has shown greater resilience and an improved ability to overcome recent crises, such as disruptions to trade through international corridors. He noted that while significant impacts on global markets - especially oil markets - had been expected, oil prices remained stable and favourable for the global economy, helping to prevent a rise in global inflation rates.

Dr al-Khater added that this created an unexpected level of stability, enabling the global economy to adapt to crises and sharp fluctuations in the geopolitical landscape, making it more rational and mature. He noted that fears and perceptions are no longer the main drivers of oil prices, contributing to stability and moderate economic growth.

Traditional assumptions
He explained that the World Bank based its growth projections on traditional assumptions, but the coming years are expected to be fundamentally different, as the global economy will increasingly rely on technological developments as core infrastructure across all economic activities.

This, he said, will depend on countries, companies, and economic institutions capable of effectively integrating rapid technological advancements, which are likely to achieve exceptional growth rates. Dr al-Khater expected global growth rates to rise in sectors such as electric vehicles and artificial intelligence applications, leading to a significant reduction in manufacturing costs and

translating into overall global economic growth.

Chinese economy

He added that the Chinese economy will be among the biggest beneficiaries, while the United States will remain capable of competing. Europe, he said, is likely to remain outside the race for higher growth rates, while the Middle East has numerous projects that will contribute to raising global growth rates.

He noted that if global production costs are reduced, growth rates could exceed 2.7 percent, with countries contributing to technological advancements reaping the greatest economic benefits.

Dr al-Khater also pointed out that the economies of countries such as Vietnam, South Korea, and Japan may possess advanced economic solutions, which could significantly boost growth rates in those economies in particular and in the global economy overall.

He added that traditional assumptions previously used to assess global economic growth will no longer form the basis for such assessments over the next five years. Instead, artificial intelligence (AI), smart robotics, and autonomous driving will become the most important indicators for forecasting global economic growth.

The economist stressed that raising global economic growth and making it more impactful requires attention to the structural aspects of economic policies, reinforcing the concept of technological globalisation and expanding its scope, and resolving the issue of tariffs at the global level due to their disruptive impact on supply chains and commercial transport activity. He added that adopting international commercial law would enable the world to achieve higher global growth rates in the current year.

Concluding his remarks to QNA, Dr Abdullah al-Khater said that 2026 will be an exceptional year for the use, development, and

integration of artificial intelligence and future technologies into local and global economies, as well as for assessing their efficiency in economic operations.

A recent World Bank report on global economic prospects paints a mixed picture of the world economy, showing weaker growth but greater resilience in the face of ongoing shocks, according to a Jordanian academic.

Dr Omar Gharaibeh, a professor at the Faculty of Business at Al Al Bayt University in Jordan, said the report indicates that global growth is expected to slow to 2.6% in 2026, down from 2.7% in 2025, but noted that upward revisions to earlier forecasts suggest the global economy has become more capable of absorbing shocks.

Speaking to QNA, Dr Gharaibeh said the improvement reflects the ability of major economies to avoid recession rather than the start of a broad-based recovery, particularly amid trade and fiscal policy uncertainties.

He highlighted that nearly two-thirds of the upward revision in growth forecasts is driven by stronger-than-expected performance in the United States, which is projected to grow by 2.2% this year. This, he said, points to increasing reliance on a single economic engine, while other regions - especially Europe and developing economies - remain less able to drive global growth.

Dr Gharaibeh noted that while global GDP per capita in 2025 has exceeded pre-pandemic levels by around 10%, marking the fastest recovery in six decades, this headline figure masks deep disparities. About a quarter of developing countries still have lower per capita income levels than in 2019, particularly among the poorest nations.

He added that rising trade restrictions and high external debt levels in parts of Africa are making it harder for these economies to close the gap, resulting in what he described as non-inclusive growth.

According to Dr Gharaibeh, there is no contradiction between economic resilience and slowing growth. "Resilience means the global economy has not collapsed despite repeated shocks," he said, "but it has not regained its previous dynamism."

He echoed the World Bank's assessment that the global economy is now less capable of achieving strong growth, yet more robust in dealing with political and trade-related uncertainty.

He argued that the report exposes deeper structural challenges, including weak investment and productivity, rising trade barriers and mounting debt burdens in some countries. He called for a global policy shift towards supporting trade, stimulating private investment, and increasing spending on technology and human capital, rather than relying solely on short-term crisis management.

Economic reports suggest that while the World Bank's latest outlook offers a cautiously positive signal on the global economy's ability to withstand shocks, growth remains insufficient to significantly reduce extreme poverty in developing countries, particularly given the stark disparity between advanced and emerging economies.



An employee works next to a reel of copper flat wire on the production line at the Wellascent factory in Ganzhou, Jiangxi province, China. Asia's factory powerhouses closed 2025 on a firmer footing, with activity swinging back to growth in several key economies as export orders picked up, helped by new product launches and blistering demand for artificial intelligence. — Reuters

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France PM set to pass budget without a vote

Reuters/AFP
Paris



France's government is now expected to force through a 2026 budget bill without a vote in parliament after months of talks with lawmakers failed to reach a compromise.

Bypassing parliament to get the budget passed would inevitably trigger a no-confidence motion, which could lead to the collapse of government, unless it includes revisions to the bill that placate Socialist lawmakers.

"We tried. We went as far as we could," Laurent Panifous, a junior minister in charge of relations with parliament, said of three months of trying to find a deal on the budget in parliament.

Talks were suspended by the government yesterday.

Investors and ratings agencies are scrutinising Prime Minister Sébastien Lecornu's attempts to reduce France's fiscal deficit which is the highest in the euro zone.

Lecornu (pictured) will later propose an amended draft of the budget bill, officials said.

He is now looking at how to pass that new bill without a vote in parliament, despite the likelihood opposition lawmakers will respond with a vote of no confidence, Panifous told BFM TV.

"What is the most important thing for the prime minister?" Panifous said. "It's the budget – it's not about whether the government stays... more important than a no-confidence vote, more important than a dissolution: for the prime minister and his government, the budget is what matters most."

Lecornu could choose to invoke Article 49.3 of the Constitution, which allows the government to push through a bill without a vote, unless lawmakers back a vote of no confidence.

However, he had for months vowed not to do that, saying he wished for parliament to come to an agreement.

The alternative could be to invoke Article 47 – an executive order also allowing the government to pass the budget without a vote.

With that second option, which has never been used to pass a finance bill, the budget would be adopted independently of whether motions of no confidence succeed.

With Article 49.3, the budget is not adopted if the government falls.

However, using Article 47 is not necessarily the easier option, not least because many lawmakers are against it.

The Socialists' pointman on the budget, Philippe Brun, said:

His group has a number of demands on the budget, adding that he would back a no-confidence vote "without hesitation" if the government tried to pass the budget by executive order.

Lecornu has said the budget must keep the fiscal deficit to a maximum of 5% of economic output, but ministers have warned that lawmakers had been working on a version with a deficit closer to 5.4%.

Lecornu appeared to be working yesterday on concessions to secure the backing of the Socialists, a key swing group in parliament, to survive any motion to topple him.

The prime minister would be "making €1 university meals available to all students" as part of the final budget bill, an adviser said, evoking a measure the Socialists had requested.

The party had in 2024 put forward a bill for all students to pay just €1 (\$1.16) for a meal, not just some with scholarships or within lower income brackets. Other students now pay €3.30.

A poll of around 800 people that year found that a third of students at times skipped a meal "for lack of money".

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

His problems worsened when he called early legislative elections in mid-2024, only to deliver a hung parliament split between three distinct ideological blocs: his centre-right alliance, the left, and the far-right National Rally.

Lawmakers from across the political spectrum have emerged exasperated after months of back and forth, and are looking for a swift resolution.

"I'm tired of having the same debate over and over again," said right-wing Republicans lawmaker Marie-Christine Dalloz. "I'm really looking forward to the end of this episode."

Greens member of parliament Steevy Gustave said he felt like a "robot" repeating the same thing every day.

"If only there had been results, some compromises – but no," he said.

Greek court acquits aid workers of migrant-smuggling

Reuters
Lesbos, Greece



Sean Binder (second left) and Sarah Mardini (second right) celebrate with other aid workers involved in refugee rescues, after the verdict in their trial at the town of Mytilene on the island of Lesbos, Greece.

Reuters

More than two dozen aid workers involved in refugee rescues in Greece were acquitted of migrant smuggling charges in a multi-year case that rights groups said was a baseless attempt to ban aid for refugees heading to Europe.

European Union countries, including Greece – where more than 1mn people came ashore during Europe's refugee crisis in 2015-16 – are tightening rules on migration as right-wing parties gain ground across the bloc.

In the trial on the Aegean island of Lesbos, the 24 defendants faced charges including involvement in a criminal group facilitating the illegal entry of migrants as well as money laundering linked to their organisation's funding.

The defendants were affiliated with the Emergency Response Centre International (ERCI), a nonprofit search-and-rescue group that operated on Lesbos from 2016 to 2018.

Among them was Sarah Mardini, one of two Syrian sisters who saved refugees in 2015 by pulling their sinking dinghy to shore and whose story inspired the popular 2022 Netflix movie *The Swimmers*, and Sean Binder, a German national who began volunteering for the ERCI in 2017.

The two were arrested in 2018 and spent over 100 days in pre-trial detention.

The court dismissed all charges, a ruling which defence lawyer Zacharias Kesses called "courageous" but said it was met with "bittersweet relief".

Some of the defendants

plunged into the sea to celebrate the verdict late on Thursday.

Although the charges were unfounded, Kesses said, Greece's judicial system delayed a resolution of the case, leading hundreds of people to withdraw from humanitarian aid activity.

"It took 2,897 days for justice to be delivered and for the authorities' false narrative to collapse. The largest case of criminalisation of humanitarian assistance was built on a manual of inhumanity," Kesses told Reuters.

In recent years, Greece has toughened its stance on migrants.

Since 2019, the centre-right government has reinforced border controls with fences and sea patrols.

"The Greek authorities should stop criminalising solidarity, end pushbacks, and prioritise saving lives," said Eva Cossé, senior researcher in the Europe and Central Asia division at Human Rights Watch, calling the prosecutions "abusive".

Greece, which has recently seen a steep new rise in migrant arrivals from Libya, says it respects international law and human rights.

AFP/Reuters
Sofia

Bulgaria's president said yesterday that the Balkan country will hold snap elections – its eighth vote in five years – after several parties declined to form a new government.

None of the parties in question command enough seats in a fragmented parliament to put together a stable majority.

The EU member, which introduced the euro earlier this month, was plunged into fresh political turmoil after a series of widespread anti-corruption protests swept a conservative-led government from office in mid-December.

Yesterday President Rumen Radev offered the Alliance for Rights and Freedoms the last chance to try to form a government but it declined the request, the third to do so this week, setting the stage for snap elections.

"We are going to elections," he said. Radev will have to appoint an interim prime minister from a list of senior state officials and set a date for fresh elections, which are expected to be held in late March or April.

The conservative GERB party is currently credited with about 18% of voting intentions, followed by the liberal reformist PP-DB coalition with about 14%, according to a recent poll by the Market Links institute.

However, around 20% of voters are still undecided, and half of them might be inclined to support any new political party, said Market Links director Dobromir Zhivkov.

Radev has fuelled speculations he may take part in the elections, calling for them to be "free and fair".

A party headed by Radev could attract voters across the patriotic and eurosceptic spectrum, Zhivkov said.

Bulgaria has seen seven snap elections

in the wake of massive anti-graft protests in 2020 against the government of three-time premier Boyko Borisov of GERB.

GERB topped the most recent election last year and formed a short-lived coalition government.

The demonstrations that began in late November were provoked by a 2026 draft budget, which protesters branded as an attempt to mask rampant corruption.

Bulgaria is the poorest member of the European Union.

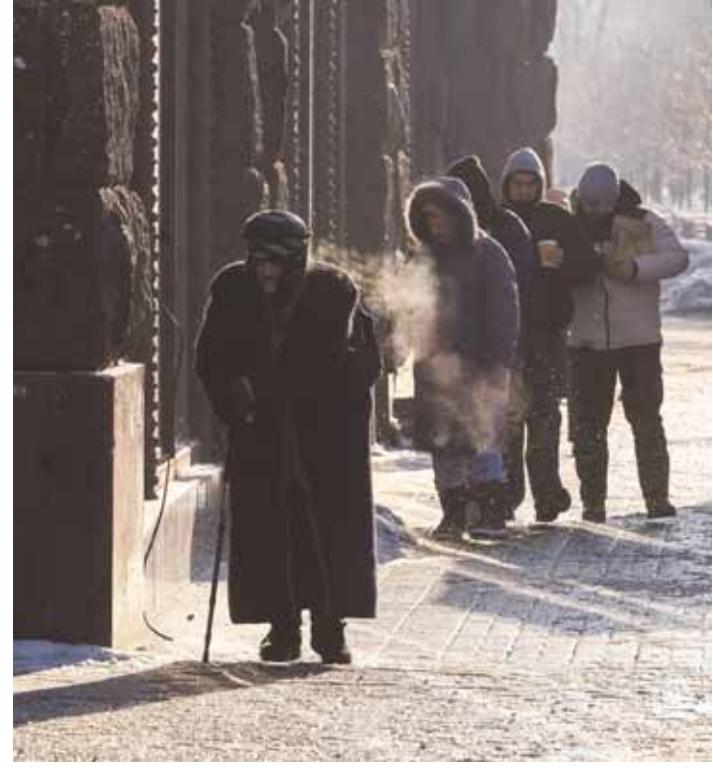
Mayor says Kyiv has only half of the electricity it requires

Reuters/AFP
Kyiv



Klitschko: It's the first time in the history of our city that, in such severe frosts, most of the city was left without heating and with a huge shortage of electricity.

Right: People are seen on a Kyiv street during a frosty winter day. - Reuters



Engineers and rescue crews have been braving sub-zero temperatures to restore operations at power plants and substations battered over recent days by Russian drones and missiles.

State companies, primarily Ukrainian Railways and Naftogaz, must urgently ensure the procurement of imported electric energy during the 2025-26 heating season amounting to at least 50% of total consumption," Energy Minister Denys Shmygal said in a statement.

The minister did not give data on how much electricity Ukraine currently generates or imports, information that authorities have withheld due to war-time sensitivities.

Russian drone and missile attacks have recently plunged entire

cities into darkness and left millions with sporadic or no heating at all, as temperatures dip to -20°Celsius in some areas.

Over recent days, AFP journalists in Kyiv have seen traffic lights powered down, shops and restaurants closed, and residents warming up and charging phones in tents set up by the state.

President Volodymyr Zelensky announced late on Thursday that 400,000 people had been left without electricity after Russian aerial attacks on Kharkiv, the

country's second-largest city.

Also late on Thursday, Prime Minister Yulia Svyrydenko announced that strict curfew rules put in place at the beginning of Russia's invasion in February 2022 would be eased to allow Ukrainians to access emergency hubs providing heating and electricity.

The Kremlin has said the attacks are only targeting military facilities, and in previous years blamed civilians' suffering on Kyiv's refusal to accept Russian peace demands.

Ex-PM Tymoshenko released on bail in graft probe

AFP
Kyiv

A court in Kyiv released former prime minister Yulia Tymoshenko on bail yesterday pending a trial to determine whether she paid members of Ukraine's parliament to sway their voting.

The 65-year-old stalwart of Ukrainian politics, who has denied the charges and said that the case is politically motivated, served as prime minister twice after 2005.

After losing the 2010 presidential election to pro-Russian figure Viktor Yanukovych, she was jailed for abuse of office – a case her backers, rights groups and Western governments said was political retribution.

Yesterday the anti-corruption court set bail at around \$762,000, an AFP journalist reported from the session, barred Tymoshenko from leaving the capital without permission, and ordered her to hand over her passport.

Prosecutors claimed Tymoshenko divulged details of a cash-for-votes scheme to another member of

parliament and that payments were \$10,000 a month.

Tymoshenko appeared in court in her trademark crown braid and described the allegations as a "provocation".

In court, Tymoshenko said she was unable to post bail herself because her bank accounts had been frozen.

Local media reported that she was given five days to pay.

Since Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine nearly four years ago, political campaigning has been largely on hold as Ukraine banned elections under martial law and the country rallied behind the war effort.

However, a string of sweeping corruption scandals has rocked the war-torn country in the past months, forcing government ministers as well as President Volodymyr Zelensky's top aide, Andriy Yermak, out of office.

Ukraine has long been plagued by corruption and cracking down on graft is seen as a key requirement of its bid to join the European Union.



Tymoshenko at the court hearing in Kyiv. - AFP

Six foreigners charged with 'terrorism' in Lithuania

Lithuanian officials said yesterday that six foreign nationals were being charged with "terrorism", following a 2024 attempt to set fire to Ukraine-bound military aid.

The defendants detained in Lithuania "include one Spanish citizen, one dual Spanish-Colombian citizen, and citizens of Colombia, Cuba, Russia and Belarus", prosecutor Arturas Urbelis told reporters.

He added that the investigation "allows for reasonable suspicion" that the acts were carried out "on the instructions and for the benefit of" Russia's military intelligence agency, GRU.

They were paid €5,000-10,000 for their actions, Urbelis said.

"The perpetrators were mainly motivated by money."

There was no immediate reaction from Russia which has repeatedly denied accusations that it has stepped up sabotage and other attacks in the region since its invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

According to prosecutors, the intended target of the attack was Lithuanian company TVC Solutions, as well as some of its products, which include mobile radio stations intended for Ukrainian forces.

They claim the attempt failed because the suspects were spotted by passers-by.

Two suspects then fled to Latvia, where they were detained the same day.

A Russian and Belarusian national also travelled to Lithuania to repeat the attack, but also failed to set fire to the equipment.

A Cuban national later arrived in Lithuania from Russia, aiming to assess the damage.

She tried to leave Lithuania, but was arrested, officials said.

The six detainees are being charged with financing terrorist activities, attempting to commit a terrorist act and participating in a terrorist group, the last of which carries a prison sentence of up to 15 years.

Investigations are also pending into four additional suspects in coordination with the attack, including a Colombian national awaiting extradition to Lithuania.

Three international arrest warrants have been issued for the remaining suspects, all of them foreign nationals. - AFP/Reuters

Bulgaria to hold snap elections after parties fail to form government

AFP/Reuters

Sofia

Bulgaria's president said yesterday that the Balkan country will hold snap elections – its eighth vote in five years – after several parties declined to form a new government.

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Bulgaria has seen seven snap elections



Ethiopian runners dominate at Doha Marathon by Ooredoo

From Page 1

Kenya's Amana Mursi Kipyatich finished fourth in 2:23:43, while Ethiopian runners filled positions five through ten, led by Roman Gidey (2:25:29) and Alemtsehay Mekuria (2:26:18), further highlighting Ethiopia's overwhelming presence in the women's field. The event also drew thousands of participants from across Qatar's diverse communities, blending world-class sport with mass participation. International endurance runner and Paralympian Richard Whitehead was also among the field, completing his 101st marathon, a milestone that drew widespread admiration. (Sources: <https://www.watchathletics.com> and <https://www.olympics.com>)



Thousands took part in the event yesterday. **PICTURES:** Shaji Kayamkulam and supplied



Open Fire show by Steve Harvey ignites flavour and connection at QIFF



Steve Harvey (second left) at the panel discussion. **PICTURES:** Shaji Kayamkulam

By Shaima Sheriff

Staff Reporter

The Open Fire show by Steve Harvey opened at the Qatar International Food Festival (QIFF), bringing together top international pitmasters, live-fire cooking, and shared stories that celebrate food as a universal language.

Designed as more than a cooking showcase, Open Fire blends live demonstrations, masterclasses and panel discussions, turning barbecue into an experience rooted in culture, memory and skill. Supported by Visit Qatar, the programme highlights Qatar's growing role as a global meeting point for culinary talent.

American pitmaster Bob "Bobby T" Trudnack from Pennsylvania said bringing live-fire cooking to Qatar was about sharing flavour and feeling. "I grilled whole fish today with citrus chimichurri and lemon mint garlic sauce. Tomorrow, I'll be cooking my competition-style barbecue chicken," he said.

Beyond recipes, Bobby T emphasised the discipline behind open-fire cooking. "You can't walk away from the fire. You have to control it – the flames, the coals, the distance. It's fast, it's hot, and you have to pay attention," he explained, recalling his first experience cooking on fire at the age of seven.

For Bobby T, food is about generosity, saying: "Anybody who walks up to my grill is going to get fed. Watching people smile when they eat, nothing means more to me than that!" He added that Qatar's waterfront setting, cleanliness and welcoming atmosphere made the experience even more special.

Chef Moe Cason from Iowa in the United States echoed that sentiment, describing the festival as

deeply personal: "This has been a great experience. We did a grilling demo today, and tomorrow I'm hosting a masterclass on barbecue beef brisket."

Cason said travelling through food has shaped his career: "I feel blessed to see different cultures. I learn everywhere I go, and it deepens my understanding of the world."

He cited his admiration for Qatar's diverse food scene, adding that "the food here is amazing, you don't get this kind of variety back home". The panel discussion, led by Steve Harvey, focused on the deeper meaning of food and fire. "There are a few things that bring people together. Music is one, but nothing unites people like food," he said. "You come here, you taste each other's cultures, you laugh, you talk, that's the power of food."

Chefs also reflected on how live-fire cooking creates shared memories. Chef Melissa spoke about fire as an emotional experience. "When you cook with live fire, you bring people together – family, friends, neighbours. That's where memories are made," she said, recalling childhood moments cooking with her grandfather.

Cason added that barbecue is rooted in togetherness. "Holidays meant firing up the grill, family gathered around, talking, laughing. Those memories stay with you forever," he said, describing live-fire cooking as "a show" where flames, hanging meats and dripping juices engage all the senses.

The chefs stressed that Open Fire is not only about tasting but also about learning. Harvey highlighted that visitors can pick up techniques and try them at home. "They don't just cook for you, they teach you. You should try something new, learn a new way to cook," he said.



Katara Amber Exhibition ends with huge success

The 6th edition of Katara International Amber Exhibition concluded its activities yesterday, achieving remarkable success and an unprecedented level of public turnout. The exhibition underlined its status as one of the most prominent specialised events dedicated to this unique heritage art form, both regionally and internationally. This year's edition featured participation from 13 countries, with 82 pavilions offering rich experiences that brought together heritage, craftsmanship, and contemporary art.

The exhibition concluded amid widespread appreciation from participants and visitors, who commended the excellent organisation, the richness of the content, and the international diversity. They stressed that the exhibition has become a firmly established annual event that blends authenticity with innovation and opens new horizons for cultural and artistic exchange among nations.

This year's exhibition stood out for the diversity of its displays, which reflected different schools and approaches to working with amber stone, whether in jewellery, artefacts, prayer beads, or contemporary artworks. This made it a major destination for enthusiasts, collectors, and experts, as well as a broad audience of visitors.

Meanwhile, Amber Stone Company presented in its pavilion a distinguished collection of artefacts and artistic sculptures made from amber stone, inspired by Qatari and Gulf culture. Abdulrahman Mohamed al-Sulaiti, the pavilion supervisor, explained that this year's participation came with a different spirit, saying: "We were keen to break away from the conventional by producing special artistic sculptures from amber stone, executed entirely by hand. Each piece takes nearly a full month of meticulous work, with great attention paid to the finest details to ensure the sculptures faithfully reflect authentic heritage originals."

He added that the works were inspired by deeply rooted symbols of Qatari identity, such as tools used in sea voyages and pearl diving, falcons used in hunting, Arabian Oryx, camels, and horses. He confirmed that all the pieces were crafted from natural amber stone by specialised European artists and craftsmen, which gave them high artistic value and an international character while preserving the spirit of local heritage.

He noted that the artefacts section in his pavilion attracted strong visitor interest and widespread acclaim, motivating him to continue excelling and to present unique pieces unlike those available in the market. Further, the exhibition featured a select group of visual artists who



offered a live painting experience for the public throughout the exhibition days, drawing inspiration from the aesthetics of amber and its historical and spiritual symbolism.

This experience gave visitors a rare opportunity to follow the birth of an artwork moment by moment, through direct interaction between artist and audience. It reflected the spirit of the exhibition and reinforced the human and aesthetic dimension of visual art, adding distinctive cultural and artistic value to the events of the final day.

Khalid Abdulrahim al-Sayyid, director of the Events and Cul-

tural Affairs Department at Katara, said: "The current edition of the Katara International Amber Exhibition 2026 represented a distinguished cultural and artistic milestone, reflecting the exhibition's growing stature as an international platform that brings together heritage, authentic craftsmanship, and contemporary arts."

"The strong turnout of visitors and participants, the diversity of pavilions and exhibits, in addition to the interactive presentations and live painting in front of the public, all contributed to raising awareness of the historical and aesthetic value of amber and

opened new horizons for cultural and artistic exchange among different countries," he noted.

He also lauded the efforts of the participating companies, exhibitors, sponsors, and media partners, noting that Katara continues to support high-quality cultural initiatives that celebrate human creativity and showcase heritage in a contemporary format.

He said the exhibition achieved its highest sales volume in the current edition, and expressed his expectation that the next edition will see a high level of participation from exhibiting companies, based on the requests already received by the exhibition's management.

He added: "What distinguishes the exhibition in its current edition is that all exhibits were subject to inspection before being displayed to the public," stressing that the quality laboratory accompanying the exhibition, since its first edition, has examined more than two hundred samples submitted by buyers and issued certificates with test results.

