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BUSINESS | Page 1

Qatar's venture
funding surges 81%
year-on-year in 2025:
QDB-MAGNiTT report



Sheikha Moza, PM to take part in Web Summit Qatar 2026

The Permanent Web Summit Organising Committee announced that Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, Chairperson of Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development, will participate in the 3rd edition of Web Summit Qatar 2026, taking place from February 1-4 at the Doha Exhibition and Convention Center. In a statement yesterday, the Committee said: "The participation of Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser will advance the Summit's discussions, particularly around the role of technology in serving society, strengthening education systems through innovation, and empowering communities amid rapid digital transformation". The Committee also confirmed the participation of HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani in Web Summit Qatar 2026, the region's largest and fastest-growing technology event. The Committee mentioned: "Web Summit Qatar 2026 will also feature Qatari industry leaders, including HE the Chairperson of Qatar Museums Sheikha Al Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani; HE the Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Ibrahim bin Ali bin Issa al-Hassan al-Mohannadi; and HE the President of the Civil Service and Government Development Bureau and Secretary-General of the National Planning Council Dr Abdulaziz bin Nasser bin Mubarak al-Khalifa".

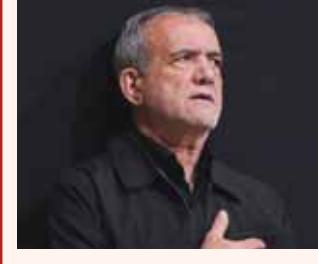
The statement added: "Qatari senior executives will also participate in the Summit's programme, including HE the Managing Director of the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy Hassan bin Abdulla al-Thawadi; CEO of Invest Qatar Sheikh Ali bin Alwaleed al-Thani; Chairman of Qai Abdulla bin Hamad al-Misnad; Director General of Al Jazeera Media Network Sheikh Nasser bin Faisal bin Khalifa al-Thani; and Secretary-General of the Qatar Research and Development (QRDI) Council Engineer Omar Ali al-Ansari". Web Summit Qatar 2026 is expected to host 30,000 participants, more than 1,600 startups, over 800 investors, over 180 global partners, and more than 400 speakers from around the world. The Summit will also receive extensive international media coverage, with over 600 media professionals attending, making it the largest edition of the global event to be hosted in Qatar. (QNA)

PM, Senegal minister review developments



HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani met yesterday with Senegal's Minister of African Integration, Foreign Affairs and Senegalese Abroad Cheikh Niang, who is visiting Doha. Discussion during the meeting dealt with bilateral relations and ways to bolster them; regional developments; and boosting efforts aimed at cementing security and stability in Africa in addition to a host of topics of mutual interest. (QNA)

Amir, Iranian president urge diplomacy to resolve issues



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani discussed with Iranian President Dr. Masoud Pezeshkian bilateral relations and ways to strengthen them in various fields. This followed a phone call His Highness the Amir held yesterday with the president. They also discussed the latest regional and international developments, particularly the current situation and the efforts being made to de-escalate tensions and establish stability. Both sides emphasised the importance of dialogue and diplomacy in addressing regional issues, in a way that contributes to consolidating peace and security and achieving the region's interests. (QNA)

Doha braces up for a February to remember

By Ayman Adly
Staff Reporter



two significant events reflecting Qatar's growing influence in science and culture. The first Qatar International Reproductive Medicine Conference will gather leading medical researchers and practitioners to explore breakthroughs in fertility and women's health.

Running concurrently, Art Basel Qatar will spotlight contemporary artists from the region and around the world, expanding Doha's profile as a leading art destination following recent international exhibitions at M7 and Qatar Museums.

The action shifts courtside from Feb 8-14 with the Qatar TotalEnergies Open 2026, which brings top WTA players to compete at the Khalifa International Tennis and Squash Complex.

The tournament is consistently recognised for attracting some of the game's biggest names early in the tennis season.

The prestigious HH The Amir's Sword International Equestrian Festival (Feb 11-14) follows, uniting the world's elite riders at Al Rayyan Racetrack. The event blends high performance and elegance, celebrating Qatar's enduring equestrian heritage. [To Page 4](#)

From Feb 5-7, Doha will host

Qatar launches project to protect fragile ecosystems

By A Staff Reporter
Doha

The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change (MECC), through its Wildlife Development Department, yesterday launched the Rawda Fencing Project at Rawdat Selaimi Al Bambara, situated north of the Al Atouriya area, as part of an ongoing drive to safeguard Qatar's vulnerable ecosystems. The event was attended by senior ministry officials, representatives from partner institutions, and stakeholders from the environmental and financial sectors.

According to the Ministry, the project – implemented in collaboration with Masraf Al Rayan – seeks to strengthen environmental



awareness, conserve natural rawdas (grassland depressions), and encourage responsible engagement with Qatar's natural landscapes. The initiative supports the nation's long-term vision of achieving environmental sustainability and ensuring the prudent use of natural resources.

Speaking about the initiative, Adel Mohammed al-Yafei, Head of the Wild Plant Life Section at MECC, described it as a strategic environmental tool designed

to protect the natural habitats of wild plants and reduce human encroachments that threaten vegetation cover and biodiversity.

"Fencing these rawdas creates a safe environment for wild plants to grow and regenerate naturally," he said, adding that the measure helps restore ecological balance, especially in areas that have suffered from environmental stress in recent years.

Al-Yafei noted that the Ministry applies a scientific and carefully structured approach tailored to the ecological characteristics of each specific site. The Rawda Fencing Project, he explained, forms a core component of a broader national framework for the conservation and protection of Qatar's terrestrial natural resources. [To Page 4](#)

First Qatari aid tranche arrives in Lebanon

The Lebanese Army yesterday received 37 vehicles from Qatar, delivered through the Qatar Fund for Development as part of a 162-vehicle grant to bolster operational capacity. "This support reflects Qatar's steadfast commitment to Lebanon's security and stability," said Sheikh Saud bin Abdulrahman al-Thani, Qatar's ambassador to Lebanon. Brigadier General Amin al-Qaai, representing the Lebanese Army Commander, thanked Qatar for "its continued and sincere support to the Lebanese military institution." [Page 4](#)



Qatar's timeless dhows keep maritime legacy afloat

By Tawfiq Lamari
Staff Reporter



Khalid Ali Abdul Jabbar's 200 feet dhow.

for leisure and for business.

Wooden ship expert and appraiser for the Ministry of Justice and Qatari courts, Khalid Ali Abduljabbar, has been passionate about dhows since his teenage years. "I have carried this

passion for traditional dhows since I was fourteen. Once I set foot on a dhow, I would not leave except to sleep at night when it returned to its anchorage," he told *Gulf Times*.

Jabbar, the only legal expert in this field in Qatar, explained, "I have been

appointed on several missions to appraise dhows – whether to assess their value for sale or purchase, for the government or private citizens, and to advise on the best type of maintenance and its cost."

He emphasised the high value of these boats, which are traditionally made from rare teak wood – a species protected by law in India. "Dhow builders must comply with strict regulations to apply for teak export permits, as the trees are safeguarded from overexploitation after being heavily logged by craftsmen in the past," he said.

Jabbar runs his own traditional dhow-building workshop. "The construction of each dhow is a project in itself," he explained. "The advantage of teak wood at

sea is its longevity – a well-maintained dhow can last between sixty and one hundred years. We use natural materials for sealing and insulation, such as dammar bata (a tree resin mixed with oil for a hard, water-resistant coating), particularly on submerged sections during annual maintenance."

Today, the process begins in Indian shipyards, where the hull frame and main structure are cut from teak. The long-held tradition of building dhows without blueprints – relying solely on the inherited knowledge of master craftsmen – continues. Once assembled, the vessel is sailed or transported from Kolkata to Doha in a fifteen-day journey, before completing its interior fittings in Qatar. [To Page 4](#)

COMMUNITY See Page 5



Al-Misnad in Doha meetings

HE the Minister of State for International Cooperation, Dr Maryam bint Ali bin Nasser al-Misnad met yesterday with Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Afghanistan and Resident Coordinator for Humanitarian Affairs, Nderika Ratwatte, who is currently visiting the country. They reviewed the co-operation between Qatar and the United Nations and discussed ways to support and strengthen it, particularly in humanitarian and development fields in Afghanistan.

HE al-Misnad affirmed that Doha would remain a platform for dialogue and a logistical, political, and humanitarian partner for the United Nations to facilitate its



missions in Afghanistan. She also reiterated Qatar's firm stance in support of the brotherly Afghan people, stressing the significance of continued international efforts

to provide urgent humanitarian aid and support the health, education, and economic empowerment sectors in Afghanistan.



HE the Minister of State for International Co-operation, Dr Maryam bint Ali bin Nasser al-Misnad met with Secretary-General of the International Civil Defence Organisation, Arguj Kalantarli, who is visiting the country. The two officials discussed the ongoing co-operation between Qatar and the International Civil Defence Organisation, ways to enhance it, and the development of rapid response mechanisms for natural disasters and humanitarian crises worldwide. HE the Minister reaffirmed Qatar's commitment to continuing its humanitarian and relief role on the international stage, prioritising humanitarian situations, and emphasising the importance of partnerships with specialised international organisations to ensure civilian protection and mitigate the impact of natural disasters. (QNA)



Attorneys' Admission Committee holds first meeting following reconstitution

QNA
Doha

The Attorneys' Admission Committee, chaired by HE the Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Ibrahim bin Ali al-Mohannadi, convened yesterday at its permanent headquarters in the Ministry of Justice.

At the outset of the meeting, HE the Minister welcomed the new members of the committee following the issuance of the ministerial decision No. 10 of 2026 to reconstitute it. He stressed the importance of the topics entrusted to the committee within its jurisdiction to develop the legal profession and consider new registration applications submitted, and to expedite their resolution,

which reflects the role played by the legal profession in embodying the vision of the wise leadership to consolidate effective justice and advance the Qatari legal system, and the legal effort undertaken by lawyers as assistants to the judiciary.

During the meeting, the committee reviewed the topics on its agenda, including the restructuring of its subcommittees, witnessed eight new lawyers taking the legal oath, and considered applications from several business owners to register as practicing lawyers.

The committee also considered the requests of a number of new lawyers whose training period had ended, and approved the minutes of previous subcommittees, reviewing requests to transfer the registration of lawyers to the reg-

ister of lawyers practicing before the Court of Cassation, and approving requests of lawyers under training, in addition to a number of organisational topics and controls for the work of the legal profession, including discussing a proposal to develop tests for lawyers applying for registration and practicing the profession, and appropriate decisions were made regarding them.

The committee emphasised the need for the participants of the 16th mandatory programme for lawyers in training to adhere to the approved programme within the specialised legal training plan for 2026, and to commit to discipline in attending lectures according to the dates announced in the lecture schedule as stipulated in the training regulations of the Center for Legal and Judicial Studies.

Qatar partakes in Middle East Green Initiative ministerial council meeting

Qatar participated in the second meeting of the Ministerial Council of the Middle East Green Initiative, held in the city of Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, with the attendance of Their Excellencies the Ministers and representatives of the participating countries. Qatar was represented at the meeting by HE the Minister of Environment and Climate Change Dr Abdullah bin Abdulaziz bin Turki al-Subaie. In the State of Qatar's speech during the meeting, HE al-Subaie affirmed the strategic significance of the Middle East Green Initiative for the region, noting that it represents an important



transformation that can turn environmental and climate challenges into real opportunities benefiting current and future generations. He also considered that the success of the initiative reflects the spirit of solidarity

and co-operation among the countries of the region, and confirms the collective ability to actively contribute to shaping environmental and climate solutions, thereby supporting the achievement of a safer and more sustainable future. (QNA)

Labour minister chairs WPC meeting



HE the Minister of Labour and Chair of the Workforce Planning Committee (WPC), Dr Ali bin Smaikh al-Marri yesterday chaired the WPC's regular meeting, which reviewed key developments shaping Qatar's labour market landscape. The meeting examined the advancement of strategic initiatives and national programmes designed to strengthen the capabilities of Qatari talent, expand national workforce participation in the private sector, and attract highly skilled expatriate professionals in alignment with evolving labour market demands and long-term economic priorities. Discussions underscored the body's commitment to fostering a competitive, resilient and sustainable labour market, consistent with the objectives of the National Strategy for an Effective and Highly Productive Workforce and Qatar's Third National Development Strategy. (QNA)

Qatar approves three Egyptian universities for PG courses

QNA
Doha

Qatar's Ministry of Education and Higher Education has added three Egyptian universities to its list of approved institutions for post-graduate (PG) study abroad, allowing students to pursue master's and doctoral degrees at their own expense.

The newly approved universities are Cairo University, Ain Shams University, and The American University in Cairo, according to a statement issued by the ministry.

The decision forms part of the ministry's regular updates to its list of recognised higher education institutions, which are used to regulate overseas study and ensure academic quality. The approval applies exclusively to postgraduate programmes (master's and PhD) and only for full-time, on-campus study.

Officials said the updated lists were prepared in line with internationally recognised academic ranking criteria, while also taking into account the needs of stu-

The revised lists now include 19 approved Arab universities across seven countries: Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Kuwait, Tunisia, Iraq, and Egypt

dents seeking to continue their higher education outside Qatar.

The ministry stressed that obtaining prior approval remains a mandatory requirement for all students wishing to study abroad, whether self-funded or sponsored by an employer. This approval is also a key condition for the recognition and equivalency of academic qualifications after graduation.

Director of the Department of Equivalency of University Degrees, Jaber Ahmed al-Jaber, said the updates aim to safeguard students' academic pathways and ensure that qualifications align with Qatar's educational standards and national priorities.

He added that the approval process helps ensure the quality of educational outcomes and supports the country's broader development goals.

The revised lists now include 19 approved Arab universities

across seven countries: Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Kuwait, Tunisia, Iraq, and Egypt. The expansion followed a review of the institutions' standings in recognised academic ranking systems.

Students must apply for prior approval through an online service on the ministry's website and adhere to several academic conditions.

These include not changing the country of study, university, specialisation, or degree level without new approval, and completing all coursework and examinations at the institution's main campus.

The ministry also requires students to begin in-person study within six months of approval. Failure to do so renders the approval invalid, requiring a fresh application. Only one prior approval is permitted per academic degree.

The update comes as part of Qatar's efforts to regulate higher education pathways and enhance academic outcomes, in line with Qatar National Vision 2030, which places human development and investment in national talent at the centre of its strategy.

PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENT NOTICE

To all Ships, Fishermen, and Mariners

Pursuant to and in accordance with the directives of the Department of Marine Regulations, Ministry of Transport, State of Qatar, this announcement is issued to inform all vessels, mariners, and fishermen that QatarEnergy LNG intends to mobilize the vessel Halul 51 owned by Halul Offshore Services Company W.L.L. to carry out Remotely Operated Vehicle (ROV) operations on QatarEnergy LNG subsea pipelines, cables, and structures within the North Field area.

Duration: 21 January 2026 to 31 May 2026

The operations will be conducted within the area bounded by the following coordinates:

Proposed Location Coordinates (Geodesy: WGS84)		
Location	Latitude	Longitude
• Point 1:	N 2,876,794.60	E 551,182.25
• Point 2:	N 2,963,243.63	E 588,471.58
• Point 3:	N 2,918,828.36	E 633,874.68
• Point 4:	N 2,880,000.00	E 597,509.01
• Point 5:	N 2,869,594.09	E 570,904.01



Important Notice:

All vessels, mariners, and fishermen are required to keep well clear of the above-mentioned operational area for the duration of the activities.

Following publication of this notice, QatarEnergy LNG and/or Halul Offshore Services Company W.L.L. shall not be held responsible for any loss or damage incurred by third parties in connection with this operation.

For more details contact: +97444949666



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talabat offers free delivery, exclusive perks to Web Summit Qatar attendees

Leading on-demand delivery platform talabat is building anticipation ahead of Web Summit Qatar 2026, where it will return as a platinum sponsor on February 1-4 at the Doha Exhibition and Convention Centre (DECC).

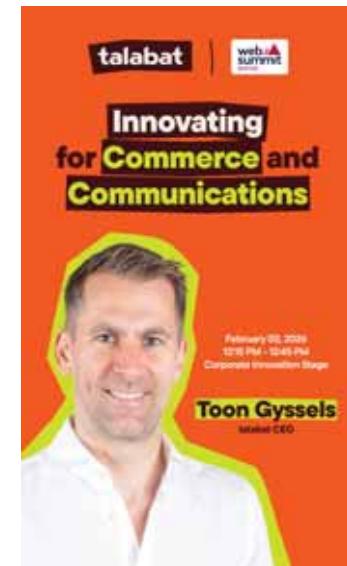
As part of its commitment to creating more seamless, customer-centric experiences, talabat will offer free delivery during the summit to orders placed from the venue and the dedicated Web Summit collection on the app.

To ensure a smoother, more convenient experience, there will be a designated pickup spot, making it easier for customers, riders, and partners to collect orders.

Additionally, first-time talabat users will benefit from exclusive offers during this period, with free delivery available on their first four orders across Qatar within the first two weeks of signing up.

Beyond free delivery, talabat will engage with attendees through interactive experiences designed to bring the brand to life.

Visitors to the talabat booth will be able to take part in interactive displays, including a dedicated photo booth, and receive a complimentary three month talabat pro voucher.



The voucher is available to both new and existing talabat pro users with the exception of customers currently subscribed to the annual or family plan.

The leadership of talabat will also play a prominent role, taking centre stage across key sessions, contributing to conversation shaping the future of technology and innovation.

Chief executive Toon Gyssels

will speak at the Corporate Innovation Stage (CIS), sharing insights on innovation at scale, while chief technology officer Sven Herzing will lead a dedicated tech talk at the talabat booth, focused on how technology drives platform innovation and operational excellence.

Attendees will also be engaged through interactive booth experiences and meetups, exploring digital transformation and the future



of on-demand platforms.

Francisco Miguel De Sousa, managing director of talabat Qatar, said: "As we count down to Web Summit Qatar 2026, we're excited to bring the spirit of the event

closer to our customers through a community-focused free delivery initiative."

"At the same time, we look forward to engaging with the global tech community during the sum-

mit through thought leadership, meaningful conversations, and interactive experiences that showcase how technology continues to enhance everyday experiences," he said.

QU, QT create endowed chair for business sustainability

Qatar University (QU) has signed an agreement with Qatar Tourism (QT) to strengthen collaboration across research, education, consultancy, and training, while supporting the Endowed Chair in Business Sustainability in line with sustainable development goals and the development of national capacities.

The agreement was signed by QU president Dr Omar al-Ansari and Qatar Tourism chairman Saad bin Ali al-Kharji, in the presence of officials from both entities.

As part of this collaboration, the agreement stipulates the funding of the Endowed Chair in Business Sustainability, with both parties jointly overseeing the selection and appointment of the chair holder no later than the start of the Fall 2026 academic semester.

"This agreement reflects Qatar University's commitment to strengthening national partnerships that contribute to the advancement of applied scientific research, support sustainability concepts, and link academic knowledge with the needs of vital sectors in the country, thereby contributing to the preparation of national cadres capable of advancing sustainable business," Dr al-Ansari said in a statement.

"We are pleased to strengthen our partnership with Qatar University, a leading national institution, through this agreement," said al-

The Signing Ceremony of the Joint Cooperation Agreement between Qatar University and Qatar Tourism for the Endowed Chair in Business Sustainability

Thursday, 29 January, 2026



Kharji. "By fostering collaboration in research, education, and professional training, we aim to align academic expertise with the evolving needs of the labour market, particularly in the tourism sector."

"This co-operation will enhance knowledge exchange, build research capabilities, and contribute to a competitive and sustainable business environment that supports Qatar's long-term economic growth," he said.

QRDI Council announces schedule for Web Summit

The Qatar Research, Development, and Innovation (QRDI) Council has confirmed a comprehensive and engaging agenda for Web Summit Qatar, scheduled to take place on February 1-4.

As the strategic partner of Web Summit Qatar and the exclusive partner of the Corporate Innovation Summit for the third consecutive year, the QRDI Council will host a diverse lineup of local and international experts in research, development, and innovation (RDI), alongside senior leaders from government, industry, and the startup ecosystem.

Among these contributors are the Ministry of Public Health, Qatar Investment Authority, Qatar Development Bank, and Qatar Airways.

The programme will feature a series of high-impact sessions, including "From Pilot to Market Entry: Qatar as a Platform for Startup Expansion", examining how Qatar supports startups in scaling regionally and globally, and "Seeding Innovation: How the Small Business Innovation Grant Strengthens Qatar's Startup Ecosystem", which will spotlight the programme's impact, announce the launch of its next cycle, and reveal the winners of the first cycle.

These sessions represent just a selection of a broader, multi-day programme, with additional panels, discussions, and activations taking place throughout the summit at the QRDI Council Pavilion.

At this year's Web Summit, the QRDI Council will also recognise outstanding achievements through its Rising Innovators Award, celebrating emerging talent and contributions that support Qatar's broader economic and innovation vision.

The Council's pavilion will provide a hub for thought leadership, knowledge sharing, and networking, offering participants insights into the QRDI Council's commitment to developing a strong research, development, and innovation ecosystem in Qatar.

The QRDI Council's pavilion will be located at E515 in the Doha Exhibition and Convention Centre.

YoC announces initial programming for Qatar-Mexico 2026 Year of Culture

Qatar Museums (QM)'s Years of Culture (YoC) initiative has announced an initial programme for its 2026 Year of Culture with Mexico.

During the year-long initiative, Qatar will welcome a distinguished cohort of Mexico's most influential chefs, designers, and artists and introduce Qatari culture to audiences across Mexico.

The programmes seek to establish Mexico as a central partner in a sustained cultural collaboration that places creativity, knowledge exchange, and people-to-people connection at its core.

Years of Culture adviser on Latin America and former Qatar ambassador to Mexico, Mohammed al-Kuwaiti, said: "Years of Culture is about building relationships that endure. In 2026, Qatar will

welcome an exceptional group of Mexican cultural voices to Doha, including chefs, artists, and designers who will collaborate, exchange knowledge, and form partnerships that extend well beyond the year itself."

"At the same time, we are proud to share Qatar's culture and values with the people of Mexico, deepening mutual understanding between our societies," he said.

"Our work with Mexico demonstrates the power of Years of Culture as a sustained platform for engagement," said Acting Design Doha Biennial director Fahad al-Obaydah.

"Collaboration does not begin or end within a single calendar year," he said. "We have been building partnerships in Mexico for several years, and we are excited to

see these relationships take shape during Mexico Design Week, a pivotal moment in Mexico's cultural calendar, with projects that will continue to resonate in Qatar and beyond."

Gastronomy is one of the first anchors of the cultural year beginning with the Qatar International Food Festival (QIFF) 2026 in January in Doha.

Mexican chefs participated in the QIFF, and shared practices rooted in regional knowledge, research and community-led food traditions.

The programme will include a special edition of Mal Lawal at the National Museum of Qatar, bringing together Qatari and Mexican private collections to examine clothing and textiles as living cultural archives.

In parallel, a travelling photography exhibition "Under One Sky" will celebrate the spirit of togetherness experienced during the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022.

Presented by the QM's Tasweer Photography initiative in collaboration with the Art in Embassies programme, the exhibition will tour cities across Canada, Mexico, and the United States, extending the World Cup's legacy of friendship and cross-cultural exchange.

Public art collaborations are central to the initiative, with new commissions by Mexican artists planned for key sites in Qatar, and the continuation of the QM's JE-

DARIART mural programme. Design projects will also bridge tradition and innovation through Design in Dialogue, a Qatar-Mexico residency that will culminate in a public exhibition at G56 during Mexico Design Week, before travelling to the Design Doha Biennial. - QNA



Applications open for 2027-28 Fulbright Visiting Scholar Programme

The US embassy in Doha has announced the opening of the Fulbright Visiting Scholar Programme for the 2027-28 academic year, inviting qualified Qatari faculty members, researchers, and professionals to apply for this prestigious international exchange opportunity.

The Fulbright Visiting Scholar Programme enables Qatari scholars to conduct advanced post-doctoral research, lecture, or pursue a combined lecture and research programme at leading universities and research institutions across the US.

The programme promotes academic excellence and innovation by supporting meaningful collaboration between American and Qatari institutions.

For a minimum of three months to a maximum of 10 months, Fulbright Visiting Scholar participants gain access to world-class American research environments, cutting-edge methodologies, and interdisciplinary networks, while contributing Qatari perspectives to US academic and



professional communities.

The programme supports a wide range of disciplines and encourages projects that address shared global challenges and advance knowledge in both countries.

Dr Siham al-Qaradawi, professor of Organic Chemistry at Qatar University and a 2010-11 Fulbright Visiting Scholar at Temple University, reflected on her experience.

"The prestigious Fulbright scholarship provided me with an exceptional opportunity to conduct advanced research in a highly competitive, interdisciplinary



environment," she said. "During my stay at Temple University, I gained extensive hands-on experience in drug discovery and pharmaceutical research, worked closely with leading researchers, and was exposed to state-of-the-art research methodologies and instrumentation."

"The Fulbright programme significantly strengthened my research skills, broadened my scientific perspective, and enhanced my ability to conduct independent and collaborative research at an international level," Dr al-Qaradawi added.

"The experience also played a vital role in shaping my academic career and fostering long-term professional collaborations."

The programme also brings American scholars to Qatar, reinforcing two-way academic exchange and long-term institutional partnerships.

Dr Feras Batarseh, associate professor at Virginia Tech and a 2025-26 Fulbright US Scholar hosted by Qatar Environment and Energy Research Institute (QEERI) at Hamad Bin Khalifa University (HBKU), highlighted the impact of bringing US technical

leadership to the local landscape.

"The Fulbright programme is a bridge for American research excellence and innovation, bringing highly vetted, world-class scholars to foster, build, and work with industry, academic, and government partners," she said.

"By sharing advanced methods and strategic visions with our partners at the HBKU's QEERI, we solve shared challenges and learn from each other's experiences," Dr Batarseh said. "This exchange of top-tier intellectual capital strengthens our institutions and creates a lasting impact on the scientific communities in both countries, helping to inform better future technology policies."

Qatari citizens with strong academic and professional credentials are encouraged to apply.

The application deadline is October 15. Additional information on eligibility requirements, fields of study, and the application process is available on the US embassy in Qatar's website at <https://qa.usembassy.gov/fvsp2027>



Place Vendôme partners with Match For Hope 2026

Place Vendôme, Qatar's premier luxury shopping, lifestyle, and entertainment destination, has become the beating heart of fan excitement, exclusively hosting the Match for Hope Fan Festival, bringing together community, sport, and purpose in support of the global Match for Hope initiative.

Running until tomorrow (January 31) on the second floor at Gate 1, the exclusive Match for Hope Fan Festival invites families, fans and visitors of all ages to experience an immersive destination dedicated to unity, engagement and charitable impact.

Organised by Q Life, the cultural initiative under Qatar's International Media Office, in collaboration with the Education Above All Foundation and the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy, the Match for Hope Fan Festival at Place Vendôme builds anticipation for the third edition of the Match for Hope charity football match.

Scheduled to take place today (January 30) at Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium, the event is bringing together football legends and global content creators to raise awareness and support to provide quality education for out-of-school children worldwide.

The Match for Hope Fan Festival transforms Place Vendôme into a vibrant hub of interactive, family-friendly activities.

Highlights include FIFA tournaments and basketball activities delivered in collaboration with the Organising Committee of the FIBA Basketball World Cup Qatar 2027 and the Qatar Basketball Federation, alongside dynamic fan engagements designed to appeal to visitors of all ages.

Guests can also enjoy live meet-and-greet sessions with selected Match for Hope influencers, explore exclusive brand activations, and purchase official Match for Hope merchandise.

They can also unwind at a variety of cafés participating in the festival, creating

a lively atmosphere that encourages families and friends to spend time together and enjoy the community spirit.

Sanjay Mehta, group director of marketing at United Developers, said: "At Place Vendôme, we aim to create experiences that go beyond shopping. Hosting the exclusive Match for Hope Fan Festival reflects our vision of positioning the mall as a destination where entertainment, community engagement and meaningful initiatives come together under one roof."

Place Vendôme mall manager Carole Sabbagh emphasised the family-focused nature of the event.

"The Match for Hope Fan Festival has added a vibrant energy to the mall, offering visitors an engaging and welcoming environment," she said. "From interactive games to live engagements, the experience has been thoughtfully curated to ensure families and fans create lasting memories during their visit."



Lebanon's military receives first tranche of Qatari grant

The Lebanese Army yesterday received 37 vehicles provided by Qatar through the Qatar Fund for Development, representing the first tranche of an overall grant comprising 162 vehicles designed to support the Lebanese military institution.

During the handover ceremony marking the delivery of the first tranche, Qatar's ambassador to Lebanon Sheikh Saud bin Abdulrahman al-Thani affirmed that this grant comes under the directives of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, in support of the Lebanese Army, which is the main pillar of



Lebanon's security and stability.

He noted that the initiative aims to enhance the army's capabilities and enable it to carry out its national duties across all Lebanese territory, reflecting Qatar's steadfast commitment to standing alongside brotherly Lebanon and its constant keenness on its sovereignty and prosperity.

Brigadier-General Amin al-Qaai, representative of the Com-

mander of the Lebanese Army, expressed the Lebanese military institution's gratitude to Qatar for its continued support.

The ceremony was attended by US ambassador to Lebanon Michel Issa and British military attaché Lieutenant-Colonel Charles Smith, who was representing the UK ambassador to Lebanon. Qatari liaison officers were also present. - QNA



Qatar Pooram Season 2 set to dazzle the Malayali community today

Qatar Malayalees, the largest social media collective of Malayalis in Qatar, has officially announced Qatar Pooram 2026, marking the second season of the annual festival celebrating Kerala's rich cultural heritage.

The announcement was made at a press conference on Monday, attended by representatives from Qatar Malayalees, 974 Events, and the festival's main sponsors.

Qatar Pooram Season 2 is set to take place today (January 30) at the Ideal Indian School, Abu Hamour.

Organisers expect enthusiastic participation from the Malayali community, promising a grand celebration of music, dance, art, and cuisine.

The festival aims to recreate the vibrant atmosphere of Kerala's traditional Pooram grounds while complying with Qatar's legal framework.

Cultural performances will feature traditional music and dances such as Muttippattu, Kaikottikali, Panchari Melam, Oppana, Kolkali, and band performances, offering a rich showcase of Kerala's heritage.

In addition to performances, attendees can enjoy food stalls serving Kerala's signature flavours, mehndi application, clothing stalls, face paint-

ing, and entertainment activities for all ages.

The venue will also provide opportunities for business networking and community engagement, strengthening connections among cultural and social organisations in Qatar.

The festival will run from 2pm-11pm, with the official inauguration ceremony at 7.30pm, attended by distinguished guests and representatives from various organisations.

At the press conference, speakers highlighted that Qatar Pooram Season 2 is not merely a festival, but a celebration of tradition, culture, and community unity.

Qatar Malayalees has invited the general public, businesses, and organisations to participate and contribute to making the event a resounding success.

Speeches were delivered by Qatar Malayalees representative KT Bilal, 974 Events partner Russell, and festival sponsors.

Representatives from Radio Suno and the Qatar Malayalees administration were also present.

The festival promises an immersive cultural experience, bringing together the Malayali community in Qatar to celebrate the traditions, colours, and flavours of Kerala.



Khalid Ali Abdulnoor Abdul Jabbar

taris or maritime enthusiasts.

"The government supports this legacy by offering annual maintenance subsidies to private owners," Jabbar said. "His Highness the Father Amir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani also exempted imported wooden dhows from customs duty - a decision that encouraged citizens to keep this heritage alive."

Centuries after they first sailed Qatari's azure waters, the dhow endures - not merely as a vessel of trade or travel, but as an enduring emblem of national pride and identity.

harbour, some more than a century old.

"I conduct their annual maintenance appraisal to preserve them in mint condition," he said with pride.

Tourists today can enjoy dhow cruises along the Doha Corniche and Old Doha Port, offering sightseeing opportunities and cultural performances.

Jabbar noted that these smaller dhows, ranging from 10'-50', travel at speeds of about 5.4 nautical miles (10kph).

Luxury dhows, which can cost between QR10mn and QR45mn, meanwhile reach speeds of up to 16.2 nautical miles (30kph), depending on their size rather than engine power.

Most are built to order for Qa-

Qatar's timeless dhows keeping country's maritime legacy afloat

From Page 1

Each project takes between three and five years from start to finish.

After registration at Doha Port, the dhow is customised according to the owner's preference.

In Qatar, dhows are classified into various types, including the Jalboot, Sambuk, Shayui, Baghlah, Boom, and Bagarah, with lengths ranging from 30' to 200'.

"Those who once owned transport dhows were like airline owners today," Jabbar noted. "They carried people, their luggage, and goods across the Gulf and beyond."

He added that the Museum of Islamic Art (MIA) maintains around 13 traditional dhows at its

Environmental and food security priorities take the spotlight next with the 13th Qatar International Agricultural Exhibition (AgriteQ 2026, on February 12-16).

The exhibition will showcase innovations in agricultural technology, sustainable farming, and climate resilience in food production, contributing to the country's self-sufficiency goals.

Tennis returns with the Qatar ExxonMobil Open 2026 (February 16-21), one of the ATP Tour's leading events in the Middle East.

Over the years, the Doha tour-

nament has hosted legends such as Roger Federer and Novak Djokovic, strengthening Qatar's reputation as a top-tier sporting venue.

February will also offer lighter cultural moments.

The Throwback Food Festival (February 17-19) will combine tradition and modernity through cuisine and live entertainment, presenting a family-friendly celebration of local heritage.

Closing the month is the prestigious CHI Al Shaqab presented by Longines (February 19-21), hosted at the acclaimed Al Shaqab equestrian facility.

The championship, combining show jumping, dressage, and para-

dressage, continues to attract top riders from around the world to one of Qatar's most iconic arenas.

Together, these events make February one of the most dynamic months on Qatar's calendar to date.

From technology and trade to art, sport, and sustainability, Doha will once again stand at the crossroads of innovation and culture - a global meeting place for ideas, exchange, and exchange.

As one event organiser put it, "each February, Doha tells the world that progress and tradition can thrive side by side - and that Qatar's story is still being written on every world stage it hosts".

GWC is the official logistics partner of Art Basel Qatar 2026

Gulf Warehousing Company (GWC) has been chosen as the official logistics partner for the inaugural edition of Art Basel Qatar, marking the first time the world-renowned art fair is staged in the Middle East.

The fair will take place on February 5-7, in partnership with Qatar Sports Investments (QSI) and QC+.

Art Basel is the world's leading international modern and contemporary art fair, staging premier shows in Basel, Miami Beach, Hong Kong, Paris, and Qatar, and is widely regarded as the global benchmark for excellence in the art market.

GWC will manage and deliver all fine art and high-value logistics for Art Basel Qatar 2026, supporting the fair's operational requirements and ensuring the successful delivery of one of the world's most prestigious cultural events as it makes its regional debut.

The partnership between Art Basel Qatar and GWC banks on the latter's extensive experience and growing role in supporting museums, galleries, collectors, and cultural institutions in Qatar and internationally.

"Art Basel Qatar marks the first time this globally renowned fair is staged in the Menasa region, representing a significant milestone for the cultural landscape



GWC managing director Sheikh Abdullah bin Fahad bin Jassim bin Jaber al-Thani.

of this part of the world," said GWC managing director Sheikh Abdullah bin Fahad bin Jassim bin Jaber al-Thani.

"We are proud to support its launch as the official logistics partner, leveraging more than 15 years of expertise in fine art logistics to ensure the success of this landmark event, hosted in Qatar for the first time," he said.

The partnership builds on GWC's established involvement in fine art and cultural logistics, including its collaboration with Qatar Museums' commercial arm to develop the region's largest fine art storage and logistics hub in Doha.

GWC Group chief executive Matthew Kearns said that de-



GWC Group chief executive Matthew Kearns.

livering the first Art Basel fair staged in the region requires logistics capabilities that operate at the highest international standards.

"Our role extends beyond transportation to safeguarding the creative, cultural, and human value embodied in these works, a responsibility that demands precision, expertise, and absolute trust," he said.

Alongside this mandate, and through its strategic partnership with QC+, Kearns said that "we are advancing plans to build the largest fine art logistics hub in the region, investing in the infrastructure and capabilities needed to position Qatar as a leading regional centre for fine art logistics and stewardship, delivered to the highest international standards".

Art Basel Qatar 2026 will bring leading galleries, artists, collectors, and cultural leaders from around the world to Doha.

The fair will feature 87 galleries and exhibitors from 31 countries and territories, including 16 making their Art Basel debut, showcasing works by 84 international artists, establishing Art Basel Qatar as a major new cultural platform in the Menasa (Middle East, North Africa and South Asia) region and a powerful conduit to the Art Basel network worldwide.

Qatar launches project to protect ecosystems

From Page 1

Talafat added that the Rawda Fencing Project is part of the bank's continued co-operation with the MoECC to safeguard rawdas and the wider natural environment.

The initiative, he explained, also serves as a platform for raising environmental awareness across different sectors of society - fostering a culture of ecological responsibility in alignment with the objectives of the Qatar National Vision 2030.

The launch of the project forms part of a broader series of national programmes and community-based initiatives aimed at engaging citizens and residents alike in protecting Qatar's delicate natural balance.

It also signals the growing importance of public-private partnerships in addressing environmental challenges and embedding sustainability within the country's development agenda.

Rawda Fencing Project



Indian schools celebrate 77th Republic Day with patriotic pride



Birla Public School

Birla Public School celebrated the 77th Republic Day of India with great pride, solemnity, and patriotic zeal, reaffirming its commitment to the values enshrined in the Indian Constitution. The celebration commenced with the guests of honour – director Gope Shahani; management representatives Chindhu Anthony and Neville Lukose, being ushered by the principal, Dr Anand R Nair; vice-principals Radhika Rele and Edna Fernandez; HM Discipline and Activities Shijo Pullen and the headmistresses of various sections along with the School Band and a contingent of Scouts and Guides.

The national flag was hoisted by the director, Shahani. The gathering then stood united for the national anthem, followed by a prayer invoking peace, harmony, and national integrity. Devasree Poluru, of grade VIII extended a warm welcome to the dignitaries, staff, and students, and set the tone for the celebrations. Addressing the gathering, Dr Nair emphasised the importance of constitutional values, civic responsibility, and the role of education in shaping responsible citizens.

The occasion was further enriched by the address of Shahani who inspired the audience with his insightful reflections on the responsibility of the younger generation in upholding democratic ideals and leading the nation to the future. A vibrant cultural programme added colour and meaning to the celebration. The thematic dance "One Nation, One Heart" beautifully portrayed India's unity in diversity, while patriotic songs, sung by the students of primary, grades IV and V, filled the atmosphere with pride and emotion. The programme also featured impactful performances such as the dance "Empower Her Strength," highlighting the importance of women empowerment, and a thought-provoking skit titled "The Indian Constitution - Invisible Guardian," which brought alive the enduring relevance of the Constitution as a protector of citizens' rights and duties.

Kailasnath Sinu Nair of VII H proposed the vote of thanks, expressing gratitude to the management, dignitaries, staff, parents and students whose collective efforts made the event a memorable and meaningful tribute to the nation.



MES Indian School

MES Indian School celebrated the 77th Republic Day of India on January 26 with vibrancy and patriotic spirit. The occasion was graced by the esteemed presence of the directors and members of the school management. The chief guest, Kashif Jaleel, president, officiating, MES Governing Board, hoisted the national flag, inspiring a deep sense of patriotism. This was followed by a soulful patriotic song rendered by the school choir, stirring patriotic feelings and pride among the audience. In a speech, principal Dr Hameeda Kadar highlighted the

vital importance of discipline, civic responsibility, and ethical values in shaping a progressive society. She underscored the enduring significance of the constitution and urged students to uphold its core values: democracy, unity, and integrity. The cultural segment came alive with a sequence of flawlessly co-ordinated performances. Patriotic dance presentations by students from the junior, girls', and boys' sections, along with the evening session of the school, captivated the audience, evoking patriotic spirit through their expressive movements.



Traditional costumes and vibrant props added colour and authenticity to the performances. The inspiring speech delivered by Mukesh Adhityan underscored the ideals of national unity and social responsibility, while highlighting the pivotal role of youth in nation-building.



The event served as a reminder of the responsibilities entrusted to every citizen to uphold the sovereignty and harmony of the nation. The event witnessed the participation of distinguished

guests, school officials, faculty members, parents and students. Fiona D'Cruz and Davidson, members of the teaching faculty compered the proceedings with poise and professionalism. The

event was meticulously co-ordinated by Anwar and Sumitha Nassar, cultural co-ordinators, along with a dedicated team of teachers, ensuring its resounding success.



Noble International School



Noble International School celebrated the 77th Republic Day with great patriotic zeal at the Al Wukair Campus. The solemn ceremony began with the unfurling of the national flag by the directors of the school, R S Moideen, and Nazer, in the presence of the principal, Dr Shibu Abdul Rasheed, vice-principals, teachers, and students. Following the national anthem, the campus resonated with the spirit of the motherland through a series of vibrant cultural programmes, including stirring patriotic songs, energetic dance performances, and an impressive school orchestra.



The formal event commenced with a welcome address by the vice-principal (Academics), Jayamon Joy. In his keynote address, Principal Dr Shibu Abdul Rasheed highlighted the vital role of youth in shaping the nation's future and reflected in the guiding principles enshrined in the preamble of the Constitution. He encouraged teachers to instil in students a deep understanding of the fundamental rights and the values embodied in the preamble. The principal further highlighted the life and contributions of Dr B R Ambedkar



and reflected on the history of the nation, emphasising that great leaders emerged through their own potential and calibre, not through patronage or external influence. The celebration, which beautifully

blended solemnity with cultural pride, concluded with a gracious vote of thanks by Shihabudheen Maruthath, vice-principal (CCA), leaving the students inspired to uphold the democratic values of the nation.



Ideal Indian School



The 77th Republic Day of India was celebrated at Ideal Indian School with great enthusiasm, patriotism, and solemnity. Observed on January 26 each year, Republic Day commemorates the day the Constitution of India came into effect, establishing India as a sovereign democratic republic. The celebrations began with the hoisting of the national flag by school president Dr Hassan Kunhi MP, accompanied by the school choir's rendition of the national anthem. The event was attended by Zaheeruddin Ibrahim, chairman of the HR and Finance Committee; Binu Kumar, member of the committee; acting principal Mohammad Azam Khan; heads of departments and sections; staff; scouts and guides; parents; and students.

In his address, Dr Hassan Kunhi MP emphasised that the Republic Day is a reminder of the Constitution's strong foundations, highlighting the ideals of justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity. He encouraged students and attendees to uphold these values, stressing the importance of responsible citizenship in building a united and progressive India. Khan urged students to take pride in their heritage while embracing progress and innovation. He motivated them to pursue careers in the humanities and civil services to contribute meaningfully to the nation. He reminded them to represent India with discipline, civic sense, and dignity wherever they go. A guard of honour by the School Scouts and Guides added solemnity to the occasion.



The flag-hoisting ceremony commenced with a prayer by Mohammed Misbahuddin (class IX). Students expressed their patriotic sentiments through speeches, with Danish Ishaq Rasulbhai (class VIII) speaking in Hindi and Hishana Manoj (class IX) delivering her address in English. Performances by students



from boys', girls', and junior sections of the morning and evening sessions enthralled the audience with a stirring patriotic song. During the ceremony, the school's academic excellence was recognised at the CBSE Gulf Sahodaya Principals' Conference for outstanding performance in the grade XII Examinations 2025.

Certificates and mementoes were presented to parents, and Scouts and Guides received awards for their services. Saja Amina, assistant head-girl, welcomed the gathering, while Leonel Mathew, assistant head-boy, proposed the vote of thanks. The programme was conducted by Tanu Madvi, a teacher in the junior section.



HMC 'committed to providing world-class specialist care'

Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC) managing director Mohammed bin Khalifa al-Suwaidi has affirmed that the corporation places the provision of specialised healthcare services that meet the highest international quality standards at the forefront of its priorities, noting the institution's success in developing advanced treatment pathways across key specialties like cancer care, cardiology, stroke, and trauma and emergency services.

This came during his opening address at the Qatar Health Congress 2026, held in the presence of HE the Minister of Public Health Mansoor bin Ebrahim al-Mahmoud, with the participation of more than 2,000 healthcare professionals, experts, and decision-makers, to discuss ways and prospects for advancing the quality of healthcare, enhancing patient safety, and improving the patient experience.

Al-Suwaidi said that the corporation's vision extended beyond providing treatment, to facilitating patients' access to services through the expansion of digital solutions, such as the Lbain app and the expansion of



virtual consultations, ensuring that healthcare is closer to the community and more responsive to its needs and aspirations.

The three-day Qatar Health Congress 2026's agenda reflects an ambitious vision aimed at narrowing the gap between diagnosis and treatment, showcasing the latest rapid diagnostic technologies that ensure immediate medical intervention, and ultimately building an integrated care model for patients with chronic diseases that guarantees precise and comprehensive follow-up.

The scientific discussions at the congress review the best clinical practices in the treatment of

diabetes and cardiovascular diseases, and the development of practical strategies to enhance patient safety and reduce medical errors, alongside the updating of emergency protocols and the management of infectious diseases.

Its sessions explore innovative approaches to providing specialised psychological support and integrated care for patients and the injured arriving from the Gaza Strip, reflecting the inclusiveness and advancement of healthcare services.

A series of intensive workshops were held at the Itqan Clinical Simulation and Innovation Centre

at the HMC before the launch of the congress.

Participants underwent realistic simulation training aimed at enhancing efficiency in handling complex medical procedures, reflecting the corporation's role in adopting the latest techniques in continuing medical education.

The Qatar Health Congress 2026 is a strategic platform that brings together local and global expertise to chart a roadmap for a sustainable healthcare system, reaffirming the HMC's commitment to building a resilient healthcare system that innovates, responds to change, and consistently places people at the heart of its priorities. — QNA

Alexandria tramway prepares to shut ahead of overhaul

By Mariam Rizk and Mohamed Ezz
Reuters

As the blue-and-white tram carriages rattle into a large square in the heart of Alexandria, doors creak open to a crush of passengers, many of whom can recite every stop by heart.

However, the clatter of single and double-deck trams along this century-and-a-half-old line — a source of civic pride and transport alike for tens of thousands of daily commuters in Egypt's second city — is soon to be stopped.

Next week, authorities are starting a sweeping renovation aimed at replacing the nearly 14km (nine-mile) line's worn but beloved trams with a digitally controlled light rail system, one of the latest projects in a broader push to revamp Egypt's road and rail networks under President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi.

The National Authority for Tunnels says the renovations should roughly double current speed, cutting end-to-end travel time along a similar route by over half an hour, and boost passenger capacity.

While some commuters welcome the renovation plan, others worry that construction could ensnarl narrow streets, that ticket prices could jump, or that works, planned over two years, might have to be extended.

Some are mourning the loss of one of the Mediterranean city's most treasured features.

"It's not just a means of transport," said Fatma Hussein, 63, a retired agricultural engineer who has



A woman gestures towards a moving tram in Alexandria. — Reuters

Revolutionary Guards put on EU blacklist

European Union foreign ministers have agreed to include the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) on the bloc's list of terrorist organisations, marking a symbolic shift in Europe's approach to Iran's leadership.

Set up after Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution to protect the Shia clerical ruling system, the IRGC has great sway in the country, controlling swathes of the economy and armed forces.

The guards were also put in charge of Iran's ballistic missile and nuclear programmes.

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi criticised the EU ministers' decision.

Europe is "making another major strategic mistake", the Iranian minister wrote on X, adding that "the EU's current posture is deeply damaging to its own interests".

The EU's move is expected to have little practical impact, as the IRGC and senior commanders are already under EU sanctions.

Iranian officials have also ratcheted up warnings that Tehran would respond forcefully to any US military action, while not ruling out diplomatic solutions.

Turkiye said yesterday that it would offer to mediate between Washington and Tehran during an upcoming visit by Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, after Ankara's top diplomat urged Washington to start nuclear talks with Tehran. — Reuters/AFP

S Africa drops Melania just ahead of release

South Africa's main cinema houses have pulled a documentary about US First Lady Melania Trump just ahead of its release, with the distributor citing "the current climate", local media reported.

Melania was not listed on the websites of the Nu Metro or Ster Kinekor theatres yesterday, the day before its international release on January 30.

News24 media reported on Wednesday that the South African distributor Filmfinity had abruptly dropped the film.

"Given the current climate, the film will no longer be releasing theatrically in (the) territory," the site quoted the distributor's head of marketing, Thobashan Govindarajulu, as saying.

It was not clear what "climate" he was referring

to and AFP could not immediately reach a company representative for details.

Nu Metro confirmed to AFP yesterday that it had been told by Filmfinity to withdraw the film.

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The South African government has strained ties with the administration of President Donald Trump, which has criticised Pretoria's position on a range of domestic and international policies.

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COMMENT

China warns US attempts to contain it 'doomed to fail'

Beijing yesterday said attempts to contain it are "doomed to fail", days after the US defence department announced it would prioritise curbing China this year while maintaining respectful ties. "Facts have proven that any attempt to contain or block China is doomed to fail," defence ministry spokesman Jiang Bin said. But he added that Beijing was "willing to work with the US side" to promote ties, with President Donald Trump expected to visit China in April for talks with his counterpart Xi Jinping. The US' 2026 National Defence Strategy, released last week, said Washington would "deter China in the Indo-Pacific through strength, not confrontation". - AFP

TRAGEDY

Thai military plane crash kills two pilots

A military plane crashed in a forested area of northern Thailand during a training flight yesterday, killing the two pilots on board, the air force said. "Two pilots died in an aircraft accident involving a light attack aircraft AT-6TH yesterday morning during training," air force spokesman Jackkrit Thammanivachai said. The two-seater plane crashed in Chiang Mai province at around 10.20am (0320GMT) during a combat search and rescue training mission, the air force said in a statement. The crash "did not affect local residents or cause damage to civilian property", the statement said. Authorities were investigating the cause of the crash, it added. - Reuters

TREND

Japan PM's party 'seen gaining majority in election'

Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's Liberal Democratic Party is likely to increase seats and gain a majority in the lower house in a general election on February 8, a preliminary survey by the *Nikkei* newspaper showed yesterday. Prime Minister Takaichi called the snap general election to seek a mandate to gear up her expansionary fiscal policy. While still early in the race, the LDP is gaining momentum and likely to see its seats exceed the 233 majority of 465 up for grabs in the lower house, up from 198 seats it holds before the election, the *Nikkei* said. - Reuters

POLITICS

Preparations for March 5 elections on track, says Nepal

Nepal's election commission said it is ready to hold elections as planned, despite concerns over weather conditions in high-altitude regions when the vote takes place on March 5. The poll follows anti-corruption protests in September that toppled the previous government, prompting an accelerated election schedule and an unusual early-year date for voting. "We are prepared to conduct the election in all locations," the commission's assistant spokesman, Prakash Nyapane, said adding logistical, administrative and security arrangements were progressing as planned. - Reuters

Britain, China hail reset in ties as Starmer seeks 'sophisticated' relationship

Reuters

Beijing

Britain and China hailed a reset in relations yesterday, after Prime Minister Keir Starmer and President Xi Jinping pledged greater co-operation on trade, investment and technology to the mutual benefit of both countries.

With Western leaders reeling from the unpredictability of US President Donald Trump, Starmer became just the latest to head to China, where he called for a "more sophisticated relationship" with improved market access, lower tariffs and investment deals.

Hosting a British leader for the first time in eight years, Beijing agreed to 30 days' visa-free access for Britons and to halve Chinese tariffs on spirits, while UK drugmaker AstraZeneca announced a \$15bn investment into China.

Starmer spent around three hours with Xi at a formal summit and a lunch, during which the pair discussed trade and security, the war in Ukraine, and also soccer and Shakespeare.

Starmer, whose centre-left Labour government has struggled to deliver the economic growth it promised, has made improving relations with the world's second-largest economy a priority.

That has drawn criticism from some British and US politicians who accuse China of waging industrial levels of espionage and of abusing human rights.

The British premier held up a plan by AstraZeneca to pioneer new medicines by investing heavily in its Chinese operations as proof of

the benefits that could flow to both countries.

But he also said the closer ties would enable Britain to engage in "frank dialogue" when there was disagreement.

"China is a vital player on the global stage, and it's vital that we build a more sophisticated relationship where we can identify opportunities to collaborate, but of course, also allow a meaningful dialogue on areas where we disagree," Starmer told Xi at the start of their meeting.

Xi said China was ready to develop a long-term partnership with Britain following "twists and turns" in the relationship that did not serve the interests of either country.

"We can deliver a result that can withstand the test of history," Xi told Starmer, flanked by his top ministers, at their summit at the Great Hall of the People.

Starmer later told reporters he had a "respectful discussion" with Xi about the case of Jimmy Lai, the former Hong Kong media tycoon and British citizen who was convicted in December of national security crimes.

Starmer's visit comes amid Trump's on-off threats of trade tariffs and pledges to grab control of Greenland, an autonomous territory of Denmark, which have rattled long-standing US allies such as Britain.

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz is expected to travel to China soon and Trump himself has said he will visit in April.

While Starmer has so far not secured the scale of trade deals that were struck on a recent visit by Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney, he has gone some way to rebuilding ties that had deteriorated under pre-

vious Conservative governments.

Under them, Britain curbed some Chinese investment over national security worries and expressed concern over a crackdown on political freedoms in Hong Kong.

Kemi Badenoch, the leader of Britain's opposition Conservative Party, said on Wednesday she would not have gone to China because of the security risks the country poses.

British security services say China routinely spies on the government. China denies the claims.

Starmer, who was accompanied by more than 50 business leaders, said the relationship with China was now in "a strong place" and said he saw Xi as someone he could do business with.

He described the meeting as warm and constructive, adding that the pair chatted about English Premier League soccer, which has a massive fan base in China, as they dined on roasted cod and sweet rice dumplings.

He gifted Xi a ball from a recent match between Manchester United, the Chinese president's favoured team, and the British premier's team Arsenal.

Chinese Commerce Minister Wang Wentao said after meeting British Business Minister Peter Kyle that Beijing wanted to deepen their services trade, import high-quality UK products, and, in return, enjoy a predictable investment environment in Britain.

Starmer, who has also agreed deals to improve trade with the US, the European Union and India, is also seeking Beijing's help to bolster security, announcing that the countries would jointly tackle gangs involved in trafficking illegal migrants.

Taiwan military drill



Soldiers fire an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) during the spring military drills at the Tsoying Naval Base in Kaohsiung, Taiwan, yesterday.

China executes 11 linked to Myanmar scam compounds

AFP

Beijing

China yesterday executed 11 people linked to telecom scam operations, state media reported, as Beijing toughens its response to the sprawling, transnational industry.

Fraud compounds where scammers lure internet users into fake romantic relationships and cryptocurrency investments have flourished across Southeast Asia, including in the lawless borderlands of Myanmar.

Initially largely targeting Chinese speakers, the criminal groups behind the compounds have expanded operations into multiple languages to steal from victims around the world.

Those conducting the scams are sometimes willing con artists, and other times trafficked foreign nationals forced to work.

In recent years, Beijing has stepped up co-operation with regional governments to crack down on the compounds, and thousands of people have been repatriated to face trial in China's opaque justice system.

The 11 people executed yester-

day were sentenced to death in September by a court in the eastern Chinese city of Wenzhou, state news agency Xinhua said, adding that the court also carried out the executions.

Crimes of those executed included "intentional homicide, intentional injury, unlawful detention, fraud and casino establishment", Xinhua said.

The death sentences were approved by the Supreme People's Court in Beijing, which found that the evidence produced of crimes committed since 2015 was "conclusive and sufficient", the report said.

Philippines posts worst economic growth since '11

AFP

Manila

The Philippines economy grew at its slowest non-pandemic pace in 14 years in 2025, data showed yesterday, as it was swiped by a corruption scandal and climate change-fuelled weather woes.

The 4.4% expansion was well below a June projection of 5.5%-6.5%, which was already a downgrade that took into consideration the imposition of US tariffs and "global uncertainties".

The full-year figure was the worst since a 3.9% rate in 2011 - though it contracted 9.5% in 2020 during the Covid crisis.

The data also showed just 3% growth in October-December, compared with 5.3% the year before, marking the second straight quarter that targets have been missed.

Economic Planning Secretary Arsenio Balisacan told reporters

yesterday that a spiralling scandal over bogus infrastructure projects had weighed heavily on short-term growth.

"Admittedly, the flood corruption probe scandal weighed on business and consumer confidence," Balisacan said of alleged fraud that is believed to have cost taxpayers billions of dollars.

Construction spending has cratered since the scandal over bogus flood control projects erupted in July, when President Ferdinand Marcos made it the centrepiece of a speech. Scores of officials, lawmakers and construction firm owners have now been implicated.

Balisacan yesterday said that even normal figures from the sector would have improved 2025's growth numbers dramatically.

"If public construction (had not been) been flat, GDP for 2025 would have actually increased from 4.4% to 5.5%," he said of a 0.24% dip for the year.

Bodies pulled from sea as Philippine ferry toll rises to 29

Eleven more bodies were pulled from waters off the southern Philippines yesterday, the coast guard said, days after a ferry capsized and threw hundreds of people into the sea.

The discovery brought the confirmed death toll to 29, officials said in a statement, three days after the MV Trisha Kerstin 3 went down off southwestern Mindanao in the early hours of Monday.

The ferry was carrying at least 344 passengers and crew, most of whom were rescued in the immediate aftermath.

Rescuer Yushrina Julkainan said yesterday the latest casualties had mostly been found in the vicinity of Baluk-Baluk Island, near where the ferry sank.

"They have been turned over to the coast guard," she said, adding that some had been discovered by fishermen. A video uploaded to Facebook showed a fisherman pulling a victim, still wearing her life jacket, from the water with a hook. Another video showed what appeared to be a small child. - AFP

Preparations for Chinese Lunar New Year



A woman holds a traditional Chinese tiger plush toy, as she walks next to a replica of the Horse zodiac that is part of the "Guardians of Legacy" installation prepared for the upcoming Chinese Lunar New Year, which will welcome the Year of the Horse, at Kwai Chai Hong in Chinatown, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, yesterday.

Thailand urges 'calibrated engagement' with Myanmar's next govt

Reuters
Cebu, Philippines

Myanmar's Southeast Asian neighbours should adopt a "calibrated engagement" with its military-controlled post-election government while still pressing for an end to conflict, Thailand said yesterday, signalling a possible softening in stance.

At a meeting of foreign ministers from the 11-nation Association of Southeast Asian Nations, hosts and chair the Philippines also said

the bloc saw some potential positives in the vote even if it did not endorse it.

Myanmar's military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party is set to lead government after winning the poll held over three rounds on December 28, January 11 and January 25 that was not contested by opposition groups amid a civil war triggered by a 2021 coup.

With rights groups, the UN and the UK denouncing the vote as a sham to perpetuate the military's grip, junta chief Min Aung Hlaing said the people's vote provided

legitimacy, regardless of international postures.

Thai Foreign Minister Sihasak Phuangketkeow said that despite ASEAN's bar on Myanmar's military leaders since 2022, the vote may lead to engagement if some requirements are met like expanding aid access and reducing violence.

"We think that we have to engage with the regime in Naypyitaw, the new one. They're going to form a government probably in March," Sihasak said in the interview on the sidelines of the meeting, adding that hopefully Myanmar would

respond with positive steps.

"We don't anticipate Myanmar returning (to ASEAN) right away. So that's why we're proposing that there will be a sort of calibrated engagement where we have benchmarks."

Myanmar has been in turmoil since the 2021 overthrow of the elected civilian government of Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, triggering pro-democracy protests that morphed into a widening armed rebellion that has taken over swathes of the country.

Philippine Foreign Affairs Sec-

retary Ma. Theresa Lazaro told a press conference after the ministerial retreat that some ASEAN members were still looking into the results of the election.

"It's not an expression of support, but with a view that these elections might be something positive," Lazaro said.

ASEAN's engagement with Myanmar remains guided by the "five-point consensus" that includes a cessation of violence, dialogue among concerned parties and provision of humanitarian assistance, the official added.

While reaffirming ASEAN's call for a free, fair and inclusive election, "even a certain compliance in the implementation of the Five-Point Consensus is something that will make things move," Lazaro said.

The Philippines recently hosted a dialogue among opponents of Myanmar's ruling junta to try and assist dialogue and aid. Lazaro also said the Philippines will push to finish this year a long-delayed code of conduct for the South China Sea, where Manila and Beijing dispute some territory.



India's gold demand likely to fall in 2026: WGC

Reuters
Mumbai

India's gold demand is likely to fall in 2026 following a drop of 11% last year, as a surge in prices dampens jewellery sales and offsets an uptick in investment buying, the World Gold Council (WGC) said

yesterday. Demand for gold could stand between 600 metric tonnes and 700 metric tonnes, compared to 710.9 tonnes last year, which was the lowest in five years, Sachin Jain, chief executive of the WGC's Indian operations, said.

Jewellery buyers prefer stable prices of gold, but the volatile rising prices of recent months have far

outripped consumer budgets, Jain said.

"Inflow into exchange-traded funds (ETFs) will continue to grow," he said. "The stock market hasn't performed very well in 2025, so investors are looking for better returns from gold."

Inflows into gold ETFs jumped 283% in 2025 from a year earlier to a

record Rs429.6bn (\$4.67bn).

Domestic gold prices surged 76.5% in 2025, while India's benchmark Nifty 50 has risen 10.5% in 2025.

Jewellery demand in 2025 fell 24% from a year earlier to 430.5 metric tonnes, its lowest in nearly three decades except for 2020, when the Covid-19 pandemic dis-

torted figures, the WGC said in a report published yesterday.

By contrast, investment demand rose 17% in 2025 to 280.4 tonnes, its highest since 2013, the WGC said. Investment demand accounted for a record roughly 40% of India's total gold consumption in 2025, up from a usual share of about a quarter.

"Equities may stay subdued and

less attractive amid high valuations, tariffs, and foreign outflows," the WGC said. "A gradual shift from jewellery to pure investment demand should continue to support bars and coins."

Higher gold prices have historically spurred Indians to sell jewellery and coins, in a category called scrap supplies.

India sees 6.8%-7.2% economic growth next year, flags risks from geopolitics

Reuters
New Delhi

India's economy is forecast to grow between 6.8% and 7.2% in the fiscal year starting in April on the back of strong domestic demand, the government said yesterday, even as global volatility weighs on the outlook.

The finance ministry's forecast in the annual economic survey represents a slowdown from this fiscal year's 7.4% projection.

The annual economic survey, presented in parliament by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, says the outlook for the domestic economy "is one of steady growth amid global uncertainty, requiring caution, but not pessimism".

The government projects this fiscal year's growth at 7.4%, beating the 6.3%-6.8% forecast range from last year's survey.

For India, global conditions translate into uncertainties rather than immediate macroeconomic stress. Slower growth in key trading partners, tariff-induced disruptions to trade and volatility in capital flows could intermittently weigh on exports and investor sentiment, the report says.

The report's growth assessment is broadly consistent with recent analyses on India's momentum by

international agencies.

The report is a precursor to the federal budget on Sunday, which will seek to bolster fast economic growth and buffer the country from geopolitical shocks and the tariff uncertainty from Washington that has upended global trade.

President Donald Trump in August slapped a 50% tariff on some Indian goods entering the US.

In recent months, New Delhi has raced to diversify its market and struck a long-pending trade deal with the European Union, as well as deals with New Zealand and Oman.

Since Trump imposed the levies, the rupee has fallen 5% and is now, according to the economic survey, "punching below its weight".

The rupee's valuation does not accurately reflect India's stellar economic fundamentals," the report says, but the "undervalued" currency "offsets to some extent the impact of higher American tariffs on Indian goods."

The weaker rupee does not hurt at a time when inflation in India is exceptionally low, but "it does cause investors to pause", the survey says, adding that "investor reluctance to commit to India warrants examination".

The rupee fell to a record low

91.9850 per dollar yesterday. Foreign investors withdrew a record \$19bn from Indian equities in 2025 and have remained sellers in January.

Yesterday's report was authored by chief economic adviser V Anantha Nageswaran and his team, which is separate from the group compiling Sunday's budget.

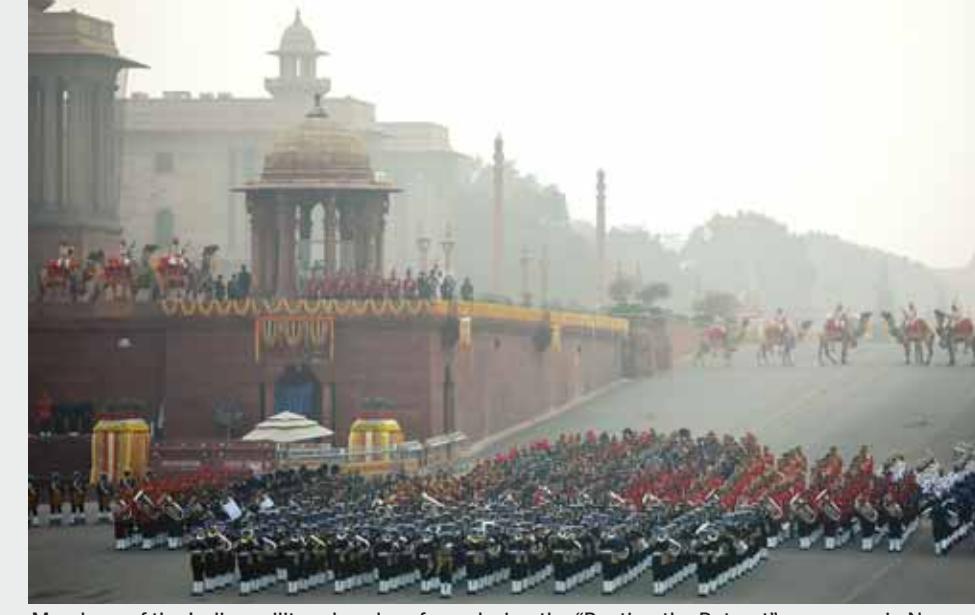
Investment and consumption are likely to gain strength as firms respond to recent reforms including consumption-tax cuts, the overhaul of labour laws and steps to open up the tightly controlled nuclear-power sector, the survey says.

"Ongoing trade negotiations with the US are expected to conclude during the year, which could help reduce uncertainty on the external front," the report says.

The IMF, in its latest global outlook, raised India's growth forecast for the coming fiscal year by 0.7 percentage point to 7.3%, while the World Bank upgraded its forecast by 0.9 point to 7.2%.

The Reserve Bank of India, in its January bulletin, said high-frequency indicators point to sustained buoyancy in demand as the new year begins. The central bank has cut interest rates by 125 basis points since February 2025, the most aggressive easing since 2019.

'Beating the Retreat' ceremony in New Delhi



Members of the Indian military band perform during the "Beating the Retreat" ceremony in New Delhi, India, yesterday.

Goa govt mulls social media ban for children

Reuters
New Delhi

India's top tourist state of Goa is considering a social media ban for children similar to one implemented in Australia, as concerns grow over mental health risks in a nation with more than a billion Internet users.

Among the top markets for tech giants such as Meta, Google's YouTube and X, India is thought to have many users aged under 18 but has imposed no national curbs on social media and there are no indications the fed-

eral government plans to do so.

Authorities in Goa are examining Australia's law to study how to regulate minors' access to social media platforms, said Rohan Khaunte, the state's infotech minister.

"If possible, (we will) implement a similar ban on children below 16 for usage of social media," he told reporters this week. "Details will follow."

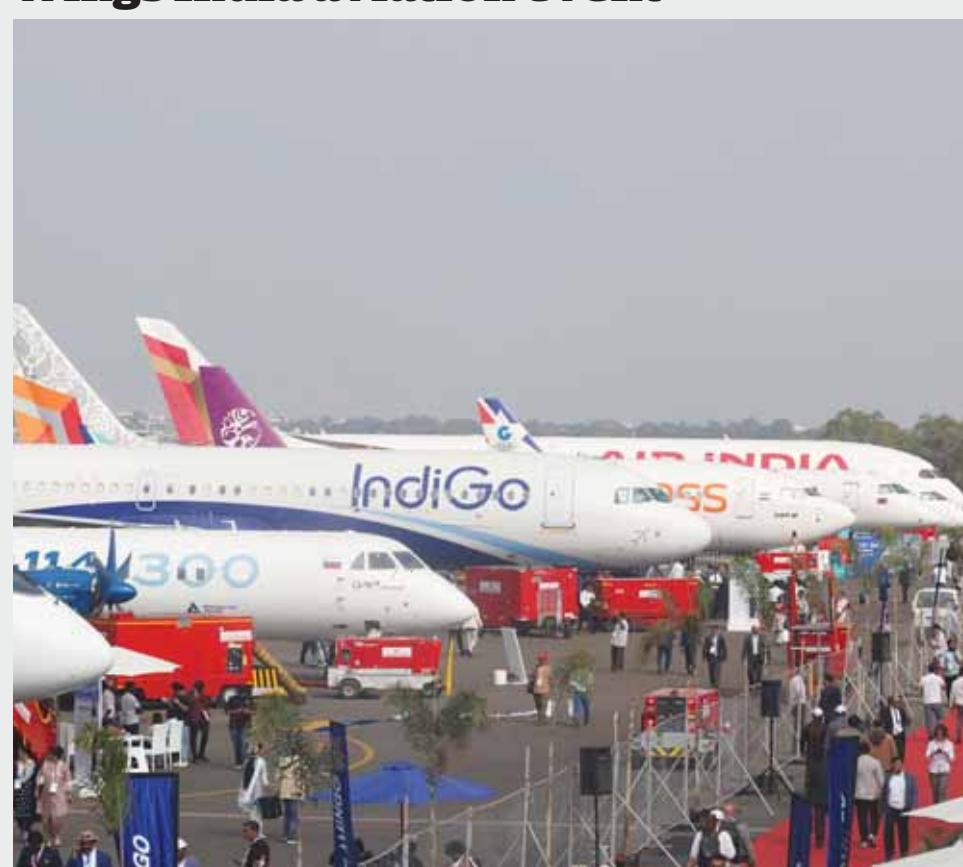
The southern state of Andhra Pradesh, with a population of more than 53mn, has said it is looking into similar measures. Goa, by contrast, is the smallest state by area, with a population

estimated at over 1.5mn.

India's IT ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Google and X also did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the plan. Meta said it supports laws which require parental oversight but that "governments considering bans should be careful not to push teens toward less safe, unregulated sites."

"We'll comply with social media bans, but with teens using 40 apps weekly, targeting a handful of companies won't keep them safe," a Meta spokesperson said in an e-mail.

Wings India aviation event



Visitors stand next to planes at Wings India 2026 aviation event at Begumpet Airport, in Hyderabad, India, yesterday. The Ministry of Civil Aviation said the four-day event, which began on January 28, showcases the rise of Indian aviation and the future of global flight.

UK immigration officers accused of misconduct

Reuters
London

Five British immigration officers appeared in court yesterday charged with misconduct in public office and conspiracy to steal from migrants who had arrived in Britain on small boats.

John Bernthal, 53, Ben Edwardes, 45, Lee-Ann Evanson, 42, Besmir Matera, 36, and Jack Mitchell, 33, are charged with stealing from migrants between August 2021 and November 2022.

All five are also charged with one count of misconduct in public office and one count of money laundering.

They sat in the dock at London's Westminster Magistrates' Court as prosecutor Rosalind Earis said the five worked on Britain's south coast "dealing with recent arrivals on small boats across the Channel".

The crossings of small boats carrying migrants from France, the most visible sign of arrivals, have become a focal point for British voters and has helped

propel Nigel Farage's anti-immigration Reform UK party into a commanding opinion poll lead.

Earis told the court that "many of these people arrive with relatively large sums of money in cash on their person". When the defendants discovered this "they worked together to take that money for themselves and share it", Earis added.

Matera is also charged with entering or remaining in Britain by deception and possession of three identity documents - a British passport and a full and provisional driving licences - in a false name.

Earis said Matera applied for asylum in 2003, claiming he was from Kosovo and had arrived in Britain in the back of a lorry. But, Earis said, Matera was from Albania and arrived in Britain on a school trip.

A sixth defendant, 43-year-old David Grundy, is only charged with one count of money laundering.

All six defendants were granted bail ahead of their next hearing at Southwark Crown Court in February.

Documentary showcases King Charles' work as nature campaigner

Reuters
Windsor, England

Britain's King Charles hosted the first film premiere at a royal palace on Wednesday when a documentary chronicling his lifetime work of championing nature was shown at his historic Windsor Castle home.

Filmed over seven months last year, *Finding Harmony: A King's Vision*, which will be shown on Amazon Prime next month, is

billed as providing a deeply personal insight into the 77-year-old monarch's decades of environmental activism and the philosophy which has motivated him.

It shows Charles wistfully reflecting on his experiences, from being dismissed as crazy for talking to plants to his hope that his vision of sustainability, which is being taken up in projects across the world, will save the planet.

"It all boils down to the fact that we are actually nature ourselves, we are a part of it, not apart from it,

which is really how things are being presented for so long," Charles says in the film, which was made in collaboration with the King's Foundation, a charity he founded in 1990.

"Maybe, by the time I shuffle off this mortal coil, there might be a little more awareness ... of the need to bring things back together again."

From organic farming to architecture and town planning, the king has long been outspoken on how human behaviour needs to

be in harmony with nature, drawing both praise for being ahead of his time on green issues as well as ridicule and charges of inappropriate meddling from a man constitutionally required - first as Prince of Wales and now as king - to be above politics.

"All this sort of thing was considered completely bonkers," he says with a chuckle at one point, while in another scene he is shown collecting eggs from a hen coop bearing the name "Cluckingham Palace".

Among those who contributed to the documentary is former US vice-president Al Gore, while actors Kate Winslet, who narrates the film, Judi Dench and Kenneth Branagh were among the guests joining Charles and Queen Camilla at the 1,000-year-old castle where a cinema has been set up for the occasion.

While the documentary aims to convey a message of hope on the environment, it also comes at a time when US President Donald Trump, who is not mentioned in the film, has described climate change as "the greatest con job" in the world. "It's rapidly going backwards. I've said that for the last 40 years but anyway, there we are," Charles ruefully says on the battle to save the planet. "So, that's why I get a bit, anyway ... I can only do what I can do, which is not very much."

The documentary will be available globally to viewers on Amazon Prime from February 6. "It would be nice to try and see if we can get through to people, but who knows?" Charles says.

Steps in Sha'baan to prepare for Ramadan

The Messenger of Allah, sallalahu `alaihi wa sallam, said about Sha'baan: "That is a month concerning which the people are heedless, between Rajab and Ramadan. It is a month in which good deeds are taken up to the Lord of the worlds, and I would like my deeds to be taken up when I am fasting." [An-Nasa'i; Al-Albaani; Hasan]

If you observe the habits of the successful people in different walks of life, you would notice that they strive hard to prepare and get ready for their tasks. A student who excels prepares for his studies before the year begins; a good runner prepares for the race long before it starts and there are other numerous examples in our daily life.

Not everyone who prepares gains the fruit of his endeavours or reaches the peak of success. People vary even in the success of their preparation and each one attains success according to the effort they exert. Keeping this in mind, we must ask ourselves: how can one attain any fruits without preparation, or rather without any concerns whatsoever to prepare for it?

The month of Sha'baan is the last stage in the preparation of entering the month in which one can be saved from Hellfire, i.e. the month of Ramadan, the month of the Qur'an and the month of mercy. So, contemplate the conditions of those who seek to win worldly competitions and the effort they exert to achieve that. What then should be the case with those who seek the reward of the Hereafter? Indeed, there is no point of comparison between them. Is not the reward of the Hereafter more deserving of our effort?

Immediately after Ramadan, our Salaf (righteous predecessors), may Allah have mercy upon them, used to ask Allah The Almighty for six months to accept Ramadan from them and then for the next six months, they would ask Him to enable them to live until the next Ramadan. This is the degree of importance they accorded Ramadan and its precious days.

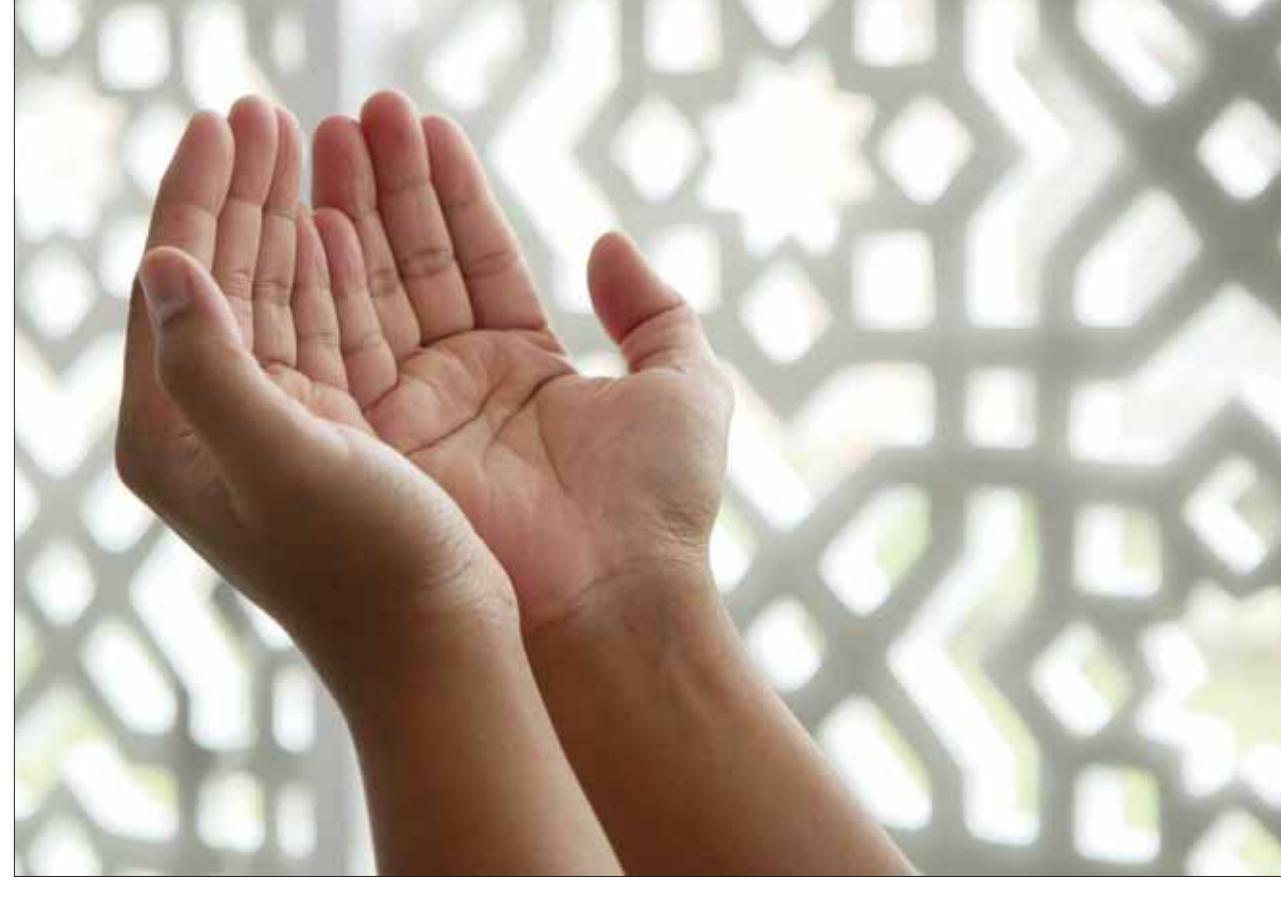
Allah willing, what we aim for and prepare for are acts of worship from the Sunnah (Prophetic tradition), not innovated acts, but our objective is to increase the frequency of performing these acts.

Allah The Almighty Says (what means): *{And hasten to forgiveness from your Lord and a garden as wide as the heavens and earth, prepared for the righteous.}* [Qur'an 3: 133]

{So for this let the competitors compete.} [Qur'an 83: 26]

We must be determined to make the best use of Ramadan by the will of The Most Gracious. Do not let its days slip by like any other days; the days of Ramadan are precious, if they lapse they may never come back again. How many people do not reach or witness Ramadan? How many people were not destined to reach the upcoming Ramadan? From now on, put down a plan with an objective and a sincere intention to prepare for Ramadan. Hence, if death overcomes you before reaching Ramadan, then you will die with a sincere intention and a righteous deed, Allah willing.

Let us take a look at some of the plans of preparation for Ramadan during the days of Sha'baan. However, before that, keep in mind the importance of time, do not let even a minute in Sha'baan pass



without benefiting from the preparation for Ramadan.

What would you do if you were to expect an important guest, while your home is in a mess and needs to be cleaned? Would you start decorating it in its unclean state or start cleaning before anything else?

Begin by setting right your obligations, adhere to the limits of Allah The Almighty, and hold yourself accountable for the sins you committed throughout the last 11 months since the past Ramadan. Repent from the past sins of the year before receiving the new month of Ramadan. Purify your heart of any doubts or desires, repent from every forbidden glance, or sins involving hearing, or any misdeed your hand committed and your feet walked towards. Remember that Allah The Almighty feels Jealous (which implies His wrath) when the matters He The Exalted has forbidden are violated. Beware of putting off repentance or procrastinating in this matter. Do not be deceived by the patience of Allah The Almighty and His concealment of your sins. Indeed, Allah The Almighty gives respite to the oppressor, but when He finally seizes him, He does not let him escape.

Do not start a deed unless you have a sincere intention. Your deed will not be accepted unless it is done with a sincere intention in accordance with the rulings of the religion (Islam). Therefore, you should learn the rulings of fasting and teach them to your family and acquaintances starting now.

Discipline yourself and be committed to righteous deeds as of now, for Ramadan is the school of the righteous. Allah The Almighty Says (what means): *{O you who have believed, decree upon you is fasting as it was decreed upon those before you}*

that you may become righteous.} [Qur'an 2: 183] And the Prophet, sallalahu `alaihi wa sallam, said: "Whoever does not give up false speech and ignorance and acting accordingly, Allah has no need of his giving up his food and drink." [Al-Bukhari]

Make haste to maintain the ties of kinship and beware of severing them.

Be keen on having a clean heart from now on, clearing it to be occupied by Ramadan and nothing else. The Messenger of Allah, sallalahu `alaihi wa sallam, was asked who is the best of people. He answered: "The one with a pure heart and a truthful tongue." They said: "The one with a truthful tongue we know, but who is the one with a pure heart?" He, sallalahu `alaihi wa sallam, replied: "He is pious and pure with no sin nor injustice nor grudge nor envy (against anyone)." [Ibn Maajah]

Hasten to make up for the days of fasting you missed in the past Ramadan for a legitimate excuse.

In Ramadan, most people are keen to make a complete recitation of the Noble Qur'an. In order to make the recitation and completion become easy and swift for you, begin reciting in the month of Sha'baan, increasing the time of recitation gradually, so if you are accustomed to recite one part daily let it be two or even three - in fact, why not complete a full recitation every 10 days?

In Ramadan, different voluntary prayers are performed such as Taraweeh (night prayer that takes place after the prayer of 'Isha), Qiyaam (standing in supererogatory prayer at night), and other supererogatory prayers. In order to get used to long periods of standing without any fatigue or exhaustion, dedicate a longer time for night prayer starting in Sha'baan. Begin by dedicating an hour, increase it gradu-

ally, and start getting used to long bowing and prostrating.

Accustom yourself to dedicating a longer period of time for supplicating Allah The Almighty, and memorise some of the authentic supplications of the Prophet, sallalahu `alaihi wa sallam, for they include precise words with comprehensive meanings, and they are better, more blessed, and more likely to be answered, Allah willing.

Accustom yourself to spending more time in the Masjid (mosque) after performing congregational prayer to prepare for I'tikaaf (staying in seclusion in the mosque with the intention of worship) in the last 10 days of Ramadan, Allah willing. If you cannot perform full I'tikaaf, you could prolong your stay in the masjid, which is also considered I'tikaaf, as there is no minimum stipulated time limit for it.

Get used to fasting so that you do not feel worn out while fasting the first couple of days in Ramadan. Fast on alternate days or in the most of the days of Sha'baan. Imam al-Bukhari, may Allah have mercy upon him, reported that 'A'ishah, may Allah be pleased with her, said: "The Prophet, sallalahu `alaihi wa sallam, did not fast in any month more than he did in Sha'baan, and he used to fast all of Sha'baan."

Be prepared to feed the poor and needy, and provide meals for the fasting people to break their fast. Increase the quantity of food you prepare for dinner, for instance, and give out the extra food to the poor. The Messenger of Allah, sallalahu `alaihi wa sallam, said: "Whoever gives Iftar (the meal to break the fast) to one who is fasting will have a reward like his, without that detracting from the reward of the fasting person in the slightest."

Give alms on a daily basis in the month

of Sha'baan, so that you may get used to daily charity in Ramadan and to be among those mentioned in the Hadith narrated by Abu Hurairah, may Allah be pleased with him, that the Messenger of Allah, sallalahu `alaihi wa sallam, said: "There is no day on which the people get up but two angels come down and one of them says, 'O Allah, give in compensation to the one who spends (in charity)', and the other says, 'O Allah, destroy the wealth of the one who withholds.'" [Al-Bukhari and Muslim]

If it was your habit to give charity in other than Ramadan, then increase the quantity you give out in Sha'baan whenever you can. Ibn 'Abbaas, may Allah be pleased with him, said: "The Messenger of Allah, sallalahu `alaihi wa sallam, was the most generous of people, and he was at his most generous during Ramadan, when Jibreel (angel Gabriel) met him. Jibreel used to meet with him every night and teach him the Qur'an. The Messenger of Allah, sallalahu `alaihi wa sallam, was the most generous person, even more generous and faster in spending than a strong blowing wind." [Al-Bukhari and Muslim]

Know that if you remain seated (in the masjid) after Fajr prayer until sunrise and perform two Rak'ahs (units of prayer) you would receive the reward of a complete Hajj and 'Umrah. Anas ibn Maalik, may Allah be pleased with him, narrated that the Prophet, sallalahu `alaihi wa sallam, said: "Whoever prays Fajr in congregation then remains sitting (in the masjid) remembering and mentioning Allah until the sun rises, then prays two Rak'ahs (15 minutes after the sun rises), will have a reward like that of performing Hajj and 'Umrah, complete, complete, complete."

Organise your time and make a timetable to evaluate your performance and the acts of worship you schedule for yourself. This is not an innovation in the religion, but is only a practical measure to monitor your acts of worship and to attain Paradise, Allah willing, which is your chief aim.

From this moment on, engage your tongue to be moist with the remembrance and mention of Allah The Almighty; do not slacken in the remembrance and mention of Allah The Almighty, seeking forgiveness, glorifying Allah The Almighty and reciting Takbeer (i.e. Allahu Akbar). It is an easy form of worship with a heavy and great reward from Allaah The Almighty.

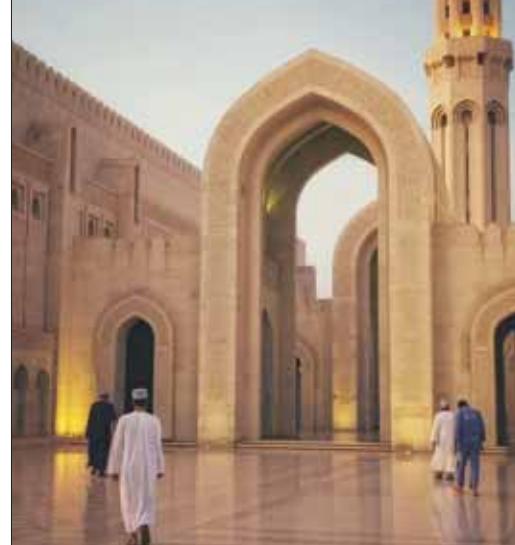
Revise what you have memorised of the Noble Qur'an or memorise some new Surahs (chapters) in Sha'baan so that you could recite it in your supererogatory prayers in Ramadan. How happy is one who prays and supplicates with verses he knows by heart!

This was an attempt to provide some guidelines to follow during the month of Sha'baan in preparation for the blessed month of Ramadan. However, one can custom make his own list and add to this whatever he/she sees more suitable for his/her own situation.

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

 **islamweb.net**
English

Causes and cure of ostentation



There is an abundance of proof in the Qur'an and Sunnah regarding the impermissibility of ostentation; and those who show off are often dispraised, as when Allah The Almighty Said (what means): {So woe to those who pray* [But] who are heedless of their prayer - those who make show [of their deeds]} [Qur'an 107:4-6]; and, {So whoever would hope for the meeting with his Lord - let him do righteous work and not associate in the worship of his Lord anyone.} [Qur'an 18:110]. Allah The Almighty also says, in a Divine Hadith: "I have absolutely no need of partners; and he who performs a deed wherein he associates others with Me, I will forsake him and his partner."

The Prophet, sallalahu `alaihi wa sallam (may Allah exalt his mention), said: "What I fear most for you is minor Shirk (associating partners with Allah The Almighty)." The Companions, may Allah be pleased with them, asked what that was, so he replied: "Ostentation."

Further, on the Day of Judgment, when Allah The Almighty will judge people for their deeds, He will tell them to: "[Go] to those whom you used to impress, in order to gain their praise; see if you will find your recompense there!"

That is why, when Abu Ummah, may Allah be pleased with him, saw a man weeping in prostration in the mosque, he asked him: "Would you do the same if you were at home?"

Causes of ostentation

In Arabic, ostentation is Riyaa, which is derived from the noun Ru'yah, which means vision. Perhaps that is so, because the essence of pretension is seeking praise and high status in the eyes of people, by showing them one's good characteristics. This is manifested in many, but chiefly five, external aspects, which include every action by which a person tries to be admired by others: in one's body, clothing, words, deeds and friends.

If we consider religious ostentation, then a person shows off by his or her body, by having a bony figure, so as to seem to people as persevering in worship, being seriously concerned with matters of religion and deeply fearing the Hereafter. As for appearance and clothing, a person may sometimes keep his or her hair unkempt, lower the head while walking, have a slow gait that suggests humbleness and make sure to retain the mark on the forehead that is caused by prostration. In speech, people's pretension is apparent when they may constantly admonish people regarding matters of their religion; they may also utter words of

knowledge and piety, to encourage people to marry him or her or trust him or her with their wealth. This is also forbidden, though on a lesser scale than the previous one, because the person seeks the permitted pleasures of the worldly life by means of showing obedience to Allah The Almighty.

A person may not aim at obtaining the pleasures of life such as money or marriage, but worships Allah The Almighty in front of people, to prevent them from looking down on, or thinking of, him or her as being inferior and not as distinguished in worship as ascetics, but as only one of the common people.

Hidden ostentation

Pretension can be either apparent or hidden. The evident kind is what motivates and urges man to do good deeds, even if he desires by them the reward of Allah The Almighty as well. The hidden type is the ostentation that does not actually motivate one to perform an act of worship which was originally intended for the Sake of Allah The Almighty, but makes it easier. For instance, a person may be accustomed to performing voluntary prayers every night, while feeling that it is heavy and difficult; however, when a guest visits, the same worship seems lighter and a person feels more active.

Another manifestation of unseen ostentation is when people conceal their worship but love that others meet them with smiles and reverence, praise them, hasten in fulfilling their needs, show partiality to them in trade by offering special prices and make place for them; and if that is not done for them, they become greatly offended.

Sincere worshippers, however, fear this type of pretension and attempt to conceal their worship more than sinners try to hide their immorality and wrongdoings. Their every effort is based in the hope that they are sincerely performing their good deeds for the Sake of Allah The Almighty, hoping for His reward for that, being fully aware that such deeds are the only type accepted by Him on the Day of Resurrection, when they will be in dire need of Him.

Cure of ostentation

Since ostentation invalidates good deeds and causes the pretentious person to be detested by Allah The Almighty, it is one of the destructive sins a person should try his or her best to cure within oneself. Indeed, anything with such serious consequences must be treated, so a Muslim must do one of two things:

Uproot the foundation of ostentation, namely, love of praise, abhorrence of criticism and the desire

to obtain what others possess. These three factors that prompt people to become affected, can only be treated when a person realises the harm of pretension, which is that it causes a decline in the righteousness of the heart and deprivation from success in the worldly life and of an honorable status with Allah The Almighty in the Hereafter; this, along with the inevitability of punishment, His abhorrence as well as people's and evident disgrace. Thus, when we compare the pleasure we will obtain from the attitudes of people toward us, with what we will have to forego in the Hereafter and the invalidation of our good deeds, abandoning ostentation will become as easy for us, as it is for a person who knows how delicious honey is, but leaves it if it contains poison.

Try to thwart any rising urge or incentive to be showy during worship, because though we may strive to cut off the roots of ostentation and pay no attention to any praise, or lack thereof, by others, Satan will not leave us and will cast pretentious thoughts in our hearts while we are busy in worship. Therefore, if the notion of people knowing of our obedience crosses our mind, we must dismiss it by reminding ourselves that it holds no importance as long as Allah The Almighty knows our intention and that we have no need for anyone to know. On the other hand, if we happen to long in basking in other's approval, we must remember what it is that entices us toward ostentation and that its only outcome would be that we will be susceptible to the Wrath of Allah The Almighty and loss in the Hereafter.

Quitting obedience for fear of ostentation

Some people stop performing a good deed out of fear that it may be a pretentious act on their part; however, that is a mistake. Not only does it fulfil Satan's wish, it is a pretext for laziness and abandoning what is good. As long as the motivation for a deed is sincere, sound and in accordance with Shar'i'ah, a person must not stop doing it because of fear of ostentation. Rather, he or she should counter such thoughts and humble him/herself in front of Allah The Almighty, replacing like of people's praise with His love.

Al-Fudhayl ibn 'Iyadh, may Allah have mercy upon him, said: "Doing good deeds for the sake of people is Shirk and quitting [them] for their sake is ostentation; and sincerity is when Allah The Almighty protects you from both." Someone else once said: "If a person abandons good deeds out of fear of pretension, he [or she] has renounced both good acts and sincerity."

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GULF TIMES

A year into Trump presidency, 'pivot to China' gathers pace

When US President Donald Trump took office a year ago with an "America First" agenda, many saw trouble for China's sluggish economy, but Beijing has thawed frosty relationships with other trade partners to post a record trade surplus.

While Trump's policies have strained ties with traditional US allies, China has turned its focus to fostering ties with key partners, including Canada and India, analysts say.

As a result, the world's second-largest economy's trade surplus hit a record \$1.2tn in 2015, monthly forex inflows touched \$100bn, the largest ever, and the global usage of China's currency, the yuan, has expanded. Backed by its \$20tn economy and \$45tn worth of stock and bond markets, China is emerging as a "steady partner" for many countries, said Aleksandar Tomic, economics professor at Boston College.

"I think China has done a good job and rightly so to position itself as the reliable and stable trade partner," said Derrick Irwin, co-head of intrinsic emerging markets equity at Allspring Global Investments.

"They basically said, look, you've got a massive trade partner in the US that's become a little more uncertain. We can offer predictability and certainty. And I think that's very fair."

Backed by its \$20tn economy and \$45tn worth of stock and bond markets, China is emerging as a "steady partner" for many countries

economic deal to tear down trade barriers and forge a new strategic relationship. Carney described China as "a more predictable and reliable partner".

But China is not alone in eyeing new trade pacts to de-risk from the United States. India and the European Union struck a long-delayed trade deal earlier this week that will slash tariffs on most goods, boosting two-way trade to potentially double European exports to the South Asian country by 2032.

While the world's two largest economies have been locked in geopolitical disputes for the past few years, Trump's return to the White House in January 2025 sharply escalated tensions on multiple fronts, including trade and technology.

Trump raised tariffs on China to over 100% in April, before partially reversing and settling for a temporary truce, while Beijing boosted its exports to non-US markets and rolled out support measures for its private enterprises and markets.

Chinese shipments to the US fell 20% in 2015, but rose 25.8% to Africa, 7.4% to Latin America, 13.4% to Southeast Asia and 8.4% to the European Union last year.

"Many countries previously have not been China-friendly are now kind of pivoting to China... because the United States is becoming a lot less predictable," Tomic said. "The more the US gets difficult to deal with, the more it opens up for China."

Despite the trade tensions with the US, China's economy, under deflationary pressure at home due to weak domestic consumption and a long-term property sector slump, has met the government's target of 5% growth in 2015.

In recent months China has taken a raft of measures to boost foreign investment, including pilot programmes in Beijing, Shanghai and other regions to expand market access in services such as telecoms, healthcare and education.

The country recorded the largest-ever monthly forex inflows of \$100.1bn in December, according to bank settlement data from its forex regulator. Its official forex reserves hit a 10-year high of \$3.36tn.

Its financial market has emerged robust from trade disputes with the Shanghai index climbing 27% over the past year, outperforming US equities, the market turnover hitting a record high and the yuan expanding its global usage.

With the dollar becoming less appealing to investors due to Trump's erratic approach to trade and international diplomacy, Beijing is also pushing ahead with its ambition to bolster the global usage of yuan, said bankers with knowledge of the matter.

Some of the big global banks are scrambling to boost yuan liquidity in offshore hubs and put in place frameworks for faster payment settlements in yuan in trade corridors of China and Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and Europe, they added. — Reuters

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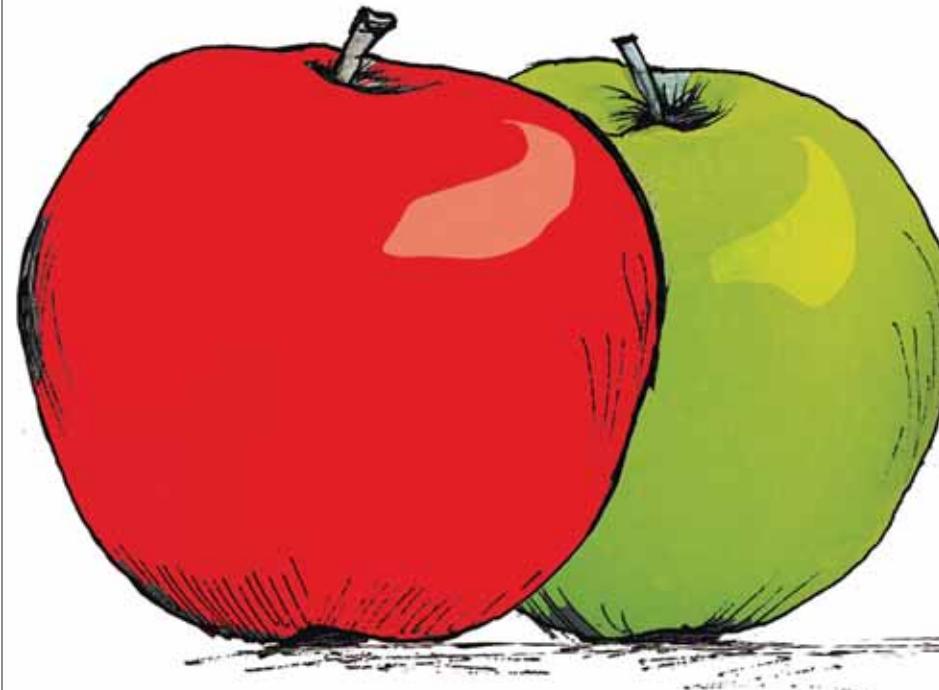
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Qatar key supporter of Arab and Islamic media: al-Leithi

QNA

Doha

Chairman of the Union of Radio and Television of the Organisation of Islamic Co-operation (OIC) Member States, Dr Amr al-Leithi, has said that the State of Qatar is among the most active and influential countries supporting all the Union's activities.

In an exclusive interview with Qatar News Agency (QNA) on the sidelines of his visit to Qatar, Dr al-Leithi said that this visit reflects the depth of the relationship between the Union and the State of Qatar, and the active role Doha plays in supporting Arab and Islamic media.

He added that the State of Qatar is a member of the Executive Committee of the OIC Member States and is among the most active and influential countries supporting all the Union's activities, noting that this support is manifested through several key areas, including Qatar's membership in the Union's various committees, its membership in the Executive Council and the General Assembly, in addition to its continuous support for all the Union's activities and initiatives in the field of media work.

Chairman of OIC States Broadcasting Union said that during his visit to Doha, he met with HE the CEO of the Qatar Media Corporation (QMC) Sheikh Khalid bin Abdulaziz bin Jassim al-Thani. Several meetings were also held at various levels, both with His Excellency and with representatives of Qatari media institutions, during which numerous issues related to strengthening support and solidifying the strong and robust relations with the State of Qatar were discussed.

Dr al-Leithi affirmed that the State of Qatar has a long history in the field of media work and possesses distinguished media infrastructure and outputs, whether in visual, audio, electronic, or print media, including distinguished newspapers and publications. He emphasised that this media standing is clear and well-established.

He noted that an agreement was reached with officials of the Qatar Media Corporation on a number of important matters, most notably those related to 2027, which has been designated the Year of Arab Media, and the selection of Doha as Arab Media Capital for 2027.

In this context, Dr al-Leithi noted the Union intends to establish and launch a major media festival in 2027, celebrating innovators in various fields of media creativity. Through this festival, the Union seeks to encourage media works that support the thought and values of Arab and Islamic countries.

He added that it was agreed



Dr Amr al-Leithi

that the State of Qatar would sponsor the festival of the Union of Radio and Television Organisations of the OIC, noting that the festival will encompass various forms of audio-visual media, in addition to electronic media.

Dr al-Leithi also addressed the topic of Qur'an radio stations, noting that the State of Qatar is chairing the seventh session of the committee dedicated to Qur'an radio stations. In this context, Qatar will host the next meeting of heads of Qur'an radio stations in September 2026.

The meeting will also honour prominent Qur'an reciters from across the Arab and Islamic world, as well as leading figures in Qur'anic programming across Qur'an radio stations.

Scientific media forum

He pointed out that the meeting will be accompanied by a scientific media forum attended by the heads of radio and television authorities in member states, along with senior media figures in Arab and Islamic countries who enjoy widespread popularity and influence.

He noted that the forum will witness a series of workshops specialising in artificial intelligence, the challenges of the age, media work in the digital age, and how to deal with artificial intelligence, in addition to discussing issues of verifying the accuracy of news in a complex media world where clear mechanisms for distinguishing true news from false news are not always available.

He noted that the Doha Forum is a continuation of the forum that was held in the Emirate of Fujairah in the United Arab Emirates last year.

Dr al-Leithi stressed that Qatar's sponsorship and hosting of the Media Forum, the meeting of the heads of Holy Qur'an radio stations, and the Media Festival, reflect the State's great interest in supporting Arab and Islamic media, and confirm the approach that Qatar is taking in promoting media unity and integration instead of competition, in light of the customs and traditions that unite Arab and Islamic countries.

He added that it was agreed

Radio and Television of the Organisation of Islamic Co-operation (OIC) Member States, Dr Amr al-Leithi affirmed in an interview with Qatar News Agency (QNA) his keenness to enhance joint co-operation and develop the Union and its committees.

He stressed that this development would not have been possible without the support of the member states, noting that among the most prominent supporters were the State of Qatar, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and the Arab Republic of Egypt, among others.

Their support contributed to revitalising the Union and strengthening its media presence through its digital platforms, in addition to media production, including the production of a television series to teach Arabic to non-native speakers, which was gifted to the Qatar Media Corporation, he added.

He explained that a news exchange sector had been established, along with the ASBU Academy, which includes a distinguished group of senior media professors and experts from Arab and Islamic countries.

The academy has implemented a large number of in-person and remote training courses. He also noted that the Union has expanded the scope of its co-operation with Asian, African, European, and Chinese broadcasting and television unions.

Dr al-Leithi revealed that the Union has opened a number of offices, including its first office in Palestine in the city of Ramallah, followed by offices in Senegal, Chad, the Arab Republic of Egypt, and London.

He announced that the Qatar Media Corporation has approved the opening of a Union office in Doha, which will focus on news and programme exchange and co-ordination with Qatari media institutions.

He emphasised that the presence of these offices, along with joint media production, contributes to removing political barriers and reinforces the concept of joint Arab and Islamic media co-operation.

Defining the Union, Dr al-Leithi explained that the Union of Radio and Television was established in 1975 during

a meeting of Arab and Islamic ministers of information. Its primary objective was to support the Palestinian cause, he said, noting that the Union's first president was the late media figure Ahmed Faraj.

He added that the Union currently includes 57 broadcasting and television organisations from OIC member states, making it the largest media union of its kind. Dr al-Leithi reaffirmed that the Union remains committed to supporting the Palestinian cause and was the first organisation to open a media office in Palestine, noting that the office issues daily news broadcasts that are transmitted to all Arab and Islamic countries. He explained that the Union has directed its awards to support the martyrs of Palestinian journalism, to honour the best Palestinian film at the Cairo International Film Festival, and to support the Festival in Tunisia, which features dramatic works addressing the Palestinian cause.

Regarding digital transformation, Dr al-Leithi noted that the Union established a specialised AI sector more than two years ago, which provides round-the-clock news bulletins using AI-generated male and female presenters, while preserving the Arabic language and Arab-Islamic identity.

Code of ethics

On combating misinformation, he explained that the Union works to organise specialised workshops and, for the first time in its history, adopted a Media Code of Ethics after 50 years since its establishment. The code was prepared with the participation of media experts from Islamic countries and was officially approved by the Executive Council and the General Assembly in October 2025.

He noted that the code focuses on professional values, verification of news, reliance on official sources, and avoiding being driven by content circulated on social media, stressing that trusted traditional media will continue to exist and will not disappear.

He concluded his remarks by expressing great optimism about the future of joint media action among Arab and Islamic countries, affirming that the Union is moving in the right direction through events, forums, workshops, training, and international co-operation. These efforts aim to elevate the status of Arab and Islamic media, correct the image of Islam, and keep pace with technological development through a collective, integrative spirit among member states, thereby establishing a common ground for interaction and full co-ordination through the news and exchange sector.

He added that this co-ordination has already begun through World Radio Day, which falls on February 13 each year, noting that this year a joint one-hour broadcast will be allocated among Union members.

Bangladesh-Pakistan direct flights resume after 14 years

AFP
Dhaka

Direct flights between Bangladesh and Pakistan resumed yesterday after more than a decade, as ties warm between the two nations that have long had an uneasy relationship.

Bangladesh and Pakistan – geographically divided by about 1,500 kilometres (930 miles) of Indian territory – were once one nation. They split after a bitter war in 1971.

Since 2012, travellers between Bangladesh and Pakistan had to use connecting flights through Gulf hubs such as Dubai and Doha.

Yesterday national carrier Biman Bangladesh Airlines departed for the Pakistani city of Karachi, the first regular flight since 2012.

Mohammad Shahid, one of 150 Karachi-bound passengers on board, said he was happy to be able to travel more frequently than before, when he could only make the journey once every two or three years.

"We had been waiting for such an opportunity because

we travel continuously," he told AFP in Dhaka.

"There are so many people waiting in Pakistan to come here, and some waiting here to go there."

Direct flights will now operate twice weekly.

Biman said in a statement that their resumption would "play a significant role in promoting trade and commerce, expanding educational exchanges, and fostering cultural ties between the two countries".

Ties with fellow Muslim-majority nation Pakistan have warmed since a student-led revolt in Bangladesh overthrew Sheikh Hasina in 2024, ending her autocratic 15-year rule. Over the same period, relations between Bangladesh and Hasina's old ally India have turned frosty.

Cargo ships resumed sailing from Karachi to Bangladesh's key port of Chittagong in November 2024.

Trade has risen since then and cultural ties have grown, with popular Pakistani singers performing in Dhaka, while Bangladeshi patients have travelled to Pakistan for medical care.

Portugal storm death toll climbs, 450,000 without power

Storm Kristin has claimed five lives and left nearly 450,000 clients without power yesterday, more than 24 hours after it barrelled through central and northern Portugal, authorities said. The storm brought heavy downpours and strong winds, reaching speeds of up to 178kmh (110mph), on the night from Tuesday to Wednesday. The fifth victim, whose death was announced yesterday, was a 34-year-old man who died in the centre of the country "as a result of the severe weather," according to civil protection officials, who did not provide details. Almost 450,000 customers were still without power early yesterday, mainly in the centre of the country, according to E-Redes, the electricity distribution network operator. The majority were in the Leiria district in central Portugal where the storm knocking down poles and high-voltage lines. Rail services remained suspended on several lines, including Lisbon to Porto, according to the state-owned rail company. (AFP)

Denmark hails 'very constructive' meeting with US over Greenland

AFP
Copenhagen

Denmark's foreign minister said yesterday he was "more optimistic" after technical talks kicked off with the United States over Greenland.

"We have had the very first meeting at senior official level in Washington yesterday regarding the Greenlandic issue," Lars Lokke Rasmussen told journalists at an EU meeting in Brussels.

"It went well in a very constructive atmosphere and tone, and new meetings are planned. It's not that things are solved, but it's good."

The trilateral talks come after US President Donald Trump last week backed down from his threats to seize the autonomous Arctic territory of EU and Nato member Denmark.

"There was a major detour. Things were escalating, but now we are back on track," Rasmussen said. "I'm slightly more optimistic today than a week ago."

Meanwhile, the Danish royal house also announced Thursday that King Frederik X would travel to Greenland on February 18 to show his "concern" for the island's inhabitants.

Trump's threats over Greenland plunged the transatlantic alliance into its deepest crisis in years. The unpredictable US leader backed off his desire to take control of Greenland after saying he had struck a "framework" deal with Nato chief Mark Rutte to ensure greater American influence.

But few concrete details appear to have been agreed – with authorities in Denmark and Greenland refusing to discuss handing over any sovereignty.

"I have stated on many occasions, we, of course, share the US security concerns regarding the Arctic, this is something we want to solve in close co-operation," Rasmussen said.

'Unfettered' access

As part of the compromise with Washington, Nato members are expected to bolster their activities in the Arctic, while Denmark and Greenland could renegotiate a 1951 treaty on US troop deployments. Louisiana governor Jeff Landry, who was named Trump's special envoy for Greenland in December said in an op-ed published in the *New York Times* that details were "being worked out".



Denmark's Foreign Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen talks to journalists ahead of a EU Foreign Affairs Council meeting at the EU headquarters in Brussels yesterday. (AFP)

"But the framework builds on the 1941 and 1951 defence agreements between the United States and Denmark and would enhance American, Nato and Greenlandic security and reaffirm longstanding trans-Atlantic defence obligations," Landry wrote.

"It would expand America's operational freedom, support new bases and infrastructure, facilitate deployment of advanced missile-defence systems like the Golden Dome and crowd out Chinese and Russian influence," he explained.

At the same time, Landry stressed that "the reality is that no nation, or group of nations, is capable of securing Greenland without the United States."

Landry continued to add that Trump recognised the "uncomfortable fact" that "America must guarantee its own unfettered and uninter-

rupted access to key strategic territories in the Western Hemisphere, including both Greenland and the Panama Canal."

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said Wednesday he expected a "good outcome" on Greenland as negotiations start.

Trump has repeatedly argued that the US needs the Arctic territory, home to some 57,000 inhabitants, for "national security".

In explaining his planned trip to Greenland, Denmark's King Frederik told reporters during a visit to Lithuania that "we feel very deeply for the Greenlandic people and we have been deeply affected by what has been happening in Greenland in recent weeks."

"We can sense from the media that the Greenlandic people have been very concerned. It is clear that this concerns us both," he added, referring to his wife, Queen Mary.

'I am a knight': Paris' last newspaper hawker gets top French award

AFP
Paris

Ali Akbar Akbar has been homeless, experienced extreme poverty and had been attacked.

On Wednesday, President Emmanuel Macron made Pakistan-born Akbar, believed to be the last newspaper hawker in Paris, a knight in the national order of merit in recognition of his service to France.

The French president praised Akbar's "incredible destiny", thanking the septuagenarian for arriving from Pakistan decades ago, selling newspapers for 50 years and carrying France in his heart.

"Dear Ali, thank you for bringing political news to our terraces at the top of your lungs, for warming the hearts of the Flore, the Deux Magots, the Lipp brasserie," Macron said in his speech at the Elysee Palace, referring to

some of the French capital's iconic cafés.

"You are the accent of the 6th arrondissement. The voice of the French press," Macron told Akbar, who was surrounded by his family.

Akbar, who is known for inventing sensational headlines, sells his wares round the upmarket streets of Saint-Germain-des-Pres where he has become a neighbourhood legend.

French has "become your language", Macron told the slim, sharply dressed man. "You have learned to play with it, making it your own."

"You have carried, if I may say so, the world in your arms and France in your heart," Macron added.

He praised Akbar as an example of integration which "makes our country stronger and prouder".

"He is a magnificent example at a time when we so often hear bad news," Macron said.

"There are also many sto-

ries like Ali's, of women and men who fled poverty to choose a country of freedom."

Akbar said he was "deeply moved" and already knew what he would shout on the streets of Paris in the coming days.

"That's it, I'm a knight! I've made it!" he said at the Elysee.

Akbar arrived in France, hoping to escape poverty and send back money to his family in Pakistan. He worked as a sailor then a dishwasher in a restaurant in the northern city of Rouen.

Then in Paris he bumped into French humorist Georges Bernier who gave him the chance to sell his satirical newspapers *Hara-Kiri* and *Charlie Hebdo*.

Akbar said last year he could not believe Macron wanted to give him France's top honour.

"We often crossed paths when he was a student," he said at the time.



Pakistani born 73-year-old newspaper hawker Ali Akbar sells newspaper copies in the street of the Latin Quarter in Paris. (AFP)

Spain minister says opposition spreading false train crash claims

AFP
Madrid

Spain's transport minister yesterday accused conservative opposition parties of spreading false claims and fuelling public confusion after a high-speed train collision that killed 45 people.

The January 18 accident near the southern village of Adama – one of Europe's deadliest rail disasters this century – has raised questions about the country's rail safety.

The main opposition conservative Popular Party (PP) has accused the Socialist-led government of misrepresenting how fully the line affected by the crash was renewed before the catastrophe.

Far-right party Vox has criticised the government for "criminal incompetence" and alleged underinvestment in maintenance and understaffing.

Addressing the Senate amid

shouts of "resign", Transport Minister Oscar Puente defended the government's management of the railway and said the investigation into the cause of the accident would be "absolutely transparent".

He accused the PP and Vox of spreading what he described as false information about the authorities' response and the government's rail safety policies.

"I have read and heard outright absurdities," the minister said, accusing the opposition of "spreading fear" and "fuelling chaos".

A preliminary report released last week suggested the track was cracked before the catastrophe. The final conclusions are not expected for several months.

King Felipe VI and Queen Letizia are scheduled to attend a memorial Mass for the victims on Thursday evening in the southern city of Huelva, the final destination of the train involved in the disaster which suffered the most deaths.

Vietnam designer makes history as Paris Haute Couture wraps up



Vietnamese founder and creative director Phan Huy grabs an item of his collection in Paris on Thursday. (AFP)

AFP
Paris

Vietnam's Phan Huy became the youngest-ever designer to present a collection on the official Haute Couture calendar in Paris aged just 27 yesterday, rounding out a week of major fashion debuts and celebrity sightings.

Phan thrilled the fashion scene at a venue in western Paris, having had a whirlwind rise into the world's most exclusive design club since creating his eponymous label in 2023.

His airy Spring/Summer 2026 collection of evening dresses made abundant use of light muslin and tulle fabric, as well as hand-stitched floral and beaded embellishments, all inspired by Vietnam's former royal Nguyen dynasty.

"I'm very happy and very proud because I can represent and bring the culture and creativity of Vietnam to the world," Phan told AFP earlier this week.

As well as being the youngest, he is the first Vietnamese designer on the programme.

Although Vietnam is well-known as a manufacturing hub for mass-market Western clothes, Phan's business partner Steven Doan stressed that the duo "want to prove that we can do fashion as well!"

Phan has been fast-tracked into a field that is becoming increasingly diverse under the impulse of the French fashion industry, FCHM.

The last day of Haute Couture Week included shows by Saudi label Ashi Studio as well as Syrian designer Rami al-Ali, who joined

the official schedule for the first time last year.

Debuts

The most-followed events of the last four days have been the Haute Couture debuts of new Chanel and Dior designers Matthieu Blazy and Jonathan Anderson, who took over the labels last year.

The two 40-something contemporaries were promoted as part of a vast overhaul of creative director positions in the European luxury clothing sector in the last 12 months.

Seen as new generational talents, the Franco-Belgian and Northern Irish designers have the daunting task of modernising some of the most venerable and profitable labels in fashion.

Blazy turned to birdlife for inspiration for his collection, producing

designs that made waves for appearing both wearable and relatable – and modelled by an unusual number of older models.

A-listers from actor Nicole Kidman and singer Dua Lipa to rapper A\$AP Rocky sat in the front row.

The Business of Fashion website called it a "slam dunk", while Paris-based fashion commentator Diane Pernet told AFP it was "everything that couture is supposed to be".

Anderson has had more mixed appraisals, with some critics seeing the more risk-taking designer as still searching for a clear identity for his LVMH-owned mega-brand.

Singer Rihanna was full of praise for the son of a rugby player backstage, telling him that the "show took my breath away. People were stunned", according to a video of the encounter posted online by a fashion journalist.



Santaolalla's art: Where pauses speak, melodies breathe

Two-time Oscar winner opens up on why restraint, imagination, and the unknown define his sound

By Anand Holla
Doha

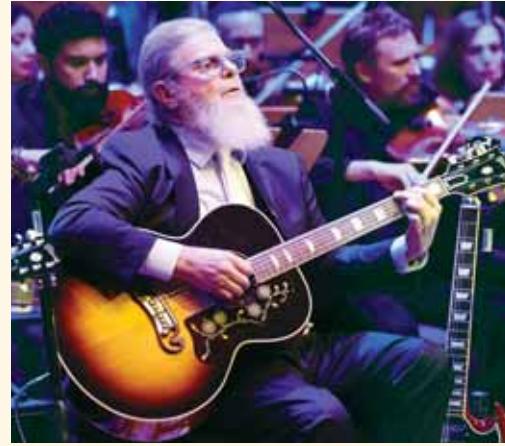
Silence is a cornerstone of Gustavo Santaolalla's music. A silence so loaded with meaning because of how and where it arises in his compositions that "sometimes it's louder than the notes," as he puts it.

At his recent special performance at QNCC with the Qatar Philharmonic Orchestra as part of the Doha Film Festival's music line-up — and also a part of the Qatar-Argentine and Chile 2025 Year of Culture activities — that majestic silence of his music kept shining through like gentle sunbeams filtering through the leaves of trees. Often, Santaolalla's signature ebbs and flows is described simply as music that "connects with the heart and with emotions" and his moving Doha debut show was instant proof.

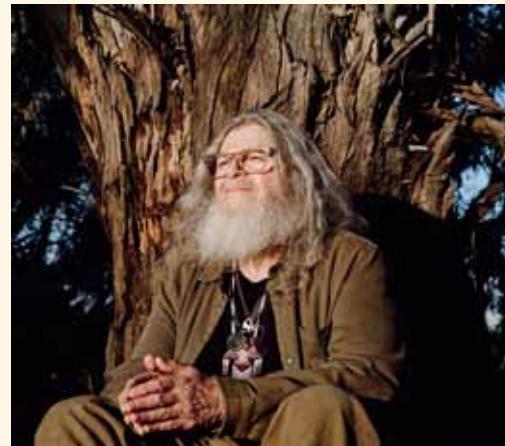
The two-time Oscar-winning composer, songwriter, and producer's iconic scores include *Brokeback Mountain*, *Babel*, *The Motorcycle Diaries*, *Amores Perros*, and most recently, *The Last of Us* (for both the video game and the web series). Towards the end of his visit to Doha, *Gulf Times* caught up with the 71-year-old Argentine multi-instrumentalist for an exclusive interview.

From winning two Oscars, two Grammys, a Golden Globe, and 17 Latin Grammy awards, to an almost six-decade-long musical career that shaped the soundscape of Latin rock music and world cinema, how do you look at your musical journey in its entirety?

Somewhere along the way, I realised that doing everything completes me. I love every aspect of making music; producing, composing by myself, composing with a group, composing for films, for animation, you name it. I love art and to be able to express my creativity. As an Argentinian, let me



Gustavo Santaolalla performs at the 'Scoring The Story' concert during the Doha Film Festival 2025 in Doha, Qatar. (Photo supplied by Doha Film Festival)



Argentine musician and composer Gustavo Santaolalla

use a football analogy. Sometimes, I'm a striker scoring goals. Sometimes, I'm a midfielder strategising, or a goalkeeper, manager, coach. Sometimes I'm just cheering. But I'm always in the match. I have endless curiosity. I love to learn and expand my knowledge. Apart from making music, I run a book publishing company, a beverage company, and I am working on a perfume that we will be releasing next year. Doing different things allows me to keep learning and applying those learnings to the multiple interests that I have developed.

Your Doha performance was phenomenal. Would it be correct to say that your ongoing global Ronroco Tour is a tribute to your vast body of work?

Yes, the Ronroco Tour is my tribute to a 10-stringed, Andean instrument called Ronroco, my special relationship with that instrument, and

the music that the Ronroco has inspired, including my album (Ronroco). This tour is my first such in my career where all my music is centred in one space, connected through the Ronroco. My concerts have always been marked with incredible eclecticism. So the Ronroco tour is very different and it has really blossomed.

You like to experiment with various stringed instruments. Tell us a little about how this influences your approach to a film score.

For *Babel*, I wanted to find an instrument that can connect the three stories. I wanted it to sound like world music and yet one shouldn't be able to tell from which part of the world it was. In *Oud* I found a wonderful Middle-Eastern instrument that could tie the story together. I'm not an oud player and it doesn't have frets like a guitar has. I played it with my fingers without using a plectrum. What I like about playing a

new instrument is that it demands me to be minimalist and allows me to play with silence and space. It was playful but it had an element of danger too.

Your music is most often described as very visual and that it "touches the heart". How does it play out deep inside you?

Sometimes, I feel that music is like scenes in a movie and the choice of instrumentation is like the set design. What elements would you put in the set and why? I like the idea of breaks and pauses in songs, which to me are like a movie's editing where you can move to an entirely different shot or thought. So I think almost in film terms when I'm making music. It's always about storytelling anyway. So the element of surprise is there. The moments of calm and action are at play. I'm always conscious about all of these things when composing and performing music.

Does this explain your usual approach where you read the film's script and talk to the filmmaker and then dive into scoring music?

Yes. That's because I haven't been trained to read or write music. Although I have composed music to visuals too, I find it very inspiring to write or compose based on the script, the story, the characters, and from a conversation with the director so that I see his or her vision. Once the vision is clear, it helps define. Filmmaker David Lynch said that the more you define something, the less things that thing is. So by defining something more specifically and giving more information about something, you kill it. If there's magic that you are to discover, it's gone. When you see it already on screen, then you know how someone looks, walks, and talks. But when I work out of a script or a conversation, it's all so abstract and can be musically interpreted in several ways. That's why it's important to retain the mystery that things have, and be wary of how much you define something.

Safe, easy, quick and comfortable: Main features of transportation within Qatar

By Ayman Adly
Staff Reporter

Moving around in Doha and across Qatar in general has become safe, quick, and cost-efficient, as the country has been considered one of the safest in terms of roads and traffic, with the number of serious injuries and fatalities steadily decreasing over the past few years.

While the country maintains strict traffic laws and regulations, motorists enjoy one of the most sophisticated road networks in the region, with efficient highways and easy-flowing traffic circulation, as there are over 9,000km of motorways with around 450km of highways, implementing the highest world safety standards with integrated traffic and security surveillance systems. Accordingly, most of the recently registered road accidents resulted in no injuries or only minor injuries, with a considerable number causing only vehicle damage.

Besides, pedestrian safety is a top priority in the country, with smart traffic signs and dedicated pedestrian crossings on all major roads across the country's cities. Further, during major events, popular activities, weekends, and public holidays, traffic police personnel and patrols are deployed across the areas of usual public turnout, such as the popular souqs (markets), Doha Corniche, Souq Waqif and other key areas, to regulate the movement of people and enhance their safety. In the meantime, the road network is integrated with various safe pedestrian crossings in all key areas, including pedestrian-friendly and well-equipped modern pedestrian tunnels and flyovers.



The introduction of the metro service has reflected positively on the lives of hundreds of thousands of people and made their mobility easier, more convenient and cheaper, especially with the free Metrolink services that effectively cover most areas in Doha and parts of Al Wakrah and Al Rayyan, among others.

The introduction of the metro service before the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 has reflected positively on the lives of hundreds of thousands of people and made their mobility easier, more

convenient and cheaper, especially with the free Metrolink services that effectively cover most areas in Doha and some parts of Al Wakrah and Al Rayyan, among others.

"One of the things I love most about Qatar is that it is very easy and cost-effective to move around the country with multiple options of means of transport. You can even get a taxi ride for less than

QR10, and it is quick, easy and comfortable," a journalist from one of the neighbouring countries stressed, as he frequently visits Doha.

He recalled that, many years

before the Metro entered service and the smart taxi application was not yet available, moving around in Doha was very slow, expensive, and exhausting. "It used to take hours waiting for a taxi or getting public bus services, and road congestion used to be the norm rather than the exception," he recalled his experience more than 15 years ago.

However, he noted that compared to many countries in the region known for their sophisticated roads and transportation systems, Qatar can be ranked among the best in all respects, making it attractive for tourism, business and all aspects of life.

In the meantime, the various means of transport in the country are easily and safely accessible to people with special needs, enabling them to exercise their right to move.

Accordingly, all Doha Metro stations and the Lusail Tram network are easily accessible to people with special needs, with level-boarding platforms, wheelchair spaces, tactile paving for people with visual limitations, and dedicated seating and family areas. Mowasalat (Karwa) buses are equipped with wheelchair ramps and designated spaces, and Metrolink buses are equipped with the same. Further, people with disabilities can easily book a well-equipped taxi at a very reasonable fare.

The development of road networks and the transport sector is set to continue with the Qatar Transport Master Plan for Qatar 2050 (TMPQ 2050), launched in 2022, which entails various ambitious objectives, such as making Qatar's transport sector ready for population and tourism growth and business diversification.

Swiss innovation, technology to go on show at Web Summit Qatar



Switzerland ambassador Florence T Mattli
PICTURE: Shaji Kayamkulam

The Embassy of Switzerland in Qatar, together with the Swiss Business Hub Middle East-Qatar, announced Switzerland's participation in Web Summit Qatar 2026, taking place from February 1-4 in Doha. This engagement reflects Switzerland's position as a leader and global hub for innovation, advanced technologies, and international financial markets, as well as the long-standing relationship between Switzerland and the State of Qatar.

Switzerland and Qatar share a history of constructive co-operation built on mutual trust, strong diplomatic ties, and expanding economic collaboration across finance, trade, investment, energy, and innovation. Web Summit Qatar 2026 provides a platform to further deepen this partnership by advancing dialogue in entrepreneurship, emerging technologies, and innovative ecosystems.

In press statement, Swiss ambassador Florence Tinguely Mattli said: "Switzer-

land's strength lies in its ability to transform innovation into economic success through entrepreneurship, global capital, and stable institutions. Web Summit Qatar is a powerful platform for connecting Swiss and Qatari startups, investors, technology experts and innovative minds. It fosters partnerships that promote forward-thinking initiatives. Our partnership with Qatar is evolving from co-operation to co-creation."

Adding a human-centred innovation perspective, Dr Peter O'Wotoki, founder and CEO of EmpathicAI.Life, said: "Qatar and Switzerland are paving the way for global leadership that is not defined by the size of a nation, but by the scale of its vision and drive for excellence. By fusing Swiss precision with Qatar's fearless ambition, we are not just advancing technology; we are setting a new standard where innovation is measured by its humanity, and where science and empathy converge to solve the hardest problems."

Echoing this perspective, one of the speakers at the Swiss pavilion, Dr Jessica Conser, Chief Impact Officer at Maginative, professor of Practice at Geneva Business School, and partner and facilitator to WISE Qatar and SkillupMENA, added: "Switzerland and Qatar are both approaching AI not simply as a technology challenge, but as an institutional one, requiring literacy, governance, trust, and human judgment to evolve together. Platforms like Web Summit create an important space for cross-national dialogue, where research, policy, and practice connect to shape responsible and resilient approaches to AI."

Adding an industry perspective, Thomas Giacomo, head of Fintech at Teranode Group, said: "Qatar and Switzerland share many similarities as small countries with highly qualified and talented people. It is encouraging to see collaboration taking shape around critical and innovative areas such as fintech. Both

countries stand to benefit from each other's strengths while jointly contributing to the redefinition of the financial market infrastructure of tomorrow."

Web Summit Qatar 2026 brings together global leaders from government, industry, investment, startups, and academia. Switzerland's participation aims to strengthen Swiss-Qatari co-operation, showcase Swiss excellence in innovation and financial services, and foster new partnerships across technology, AI and digitalisation, finance, and entrepreneurship ecosystems.

The Swiss Pavilion will serve as a hub for knowledge exchange, startup engagement, and cross-border collaboration. Through curated panel discussions, presentations, and networking activities, the pavilion will highlight Switzerland's integrated approach to innovation, where cutting-edge technology, research excellence, strong financial markets, and responsible governance evolve together.