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BUSINESS | Page 1

LNG2026 ends on
high note; baton
handed over to
Australia

Amir, Merz pledge to deepen economic relations

Official talks focus
on co-operation
in multiple fields

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani and German Chancellor Friedrich Merz held yesterday an official session of talks at the Amiri Diwan.

At the outset of the session, His Highness the Amir welcomed the chancellor and his accompanying delegation, hoping that the visit would contribute to developing relations between the two countries, pushing them to broader levels.

The chancellor voiced his thanks and appreciation to HH the Amir for the warm welcome, stressing Germany's keenness to strengthen co-operation between the two countries in various fields, especially in the economic and investment fields.

The session discussed ways



to support and strengthen the strategic relations between the two countries and ways to develop them across various areas of partnership, particularly in the economy, investment, trade, energy, and military co-operation. In addition, it discussed key regional and international issues and developments.

HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani, HE the Chief of the Amiri Diwan Abdullah bin Mohammed al-Khulaifi, and a number of Their Excellencies the Ministers and senior officials attended the meeting.

On the German side, the session was attended by a number of Their Excellencies ranking officials, members of the official accompanying delegation.

HH the Amir and the chancellor held a bilateral meeting, where they exchanged views on regional and international developments of common concern.

HH the Amir also held a lunch-eon banquet in honour of the chancellor and his accompanying delegation.

Earlier, the chancellor arrived at the Amiri Diwan, where he was accorded an official reception ceremony. (QNA) Page 12

Amir hails outcome of strategic co-operation with Germany

In a post on his official X account, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani said Qatar values the results of the fruitful strategic co-operation with Germany and looks forward to further strengthening and expanding it into new and promising areas. His Highness the Amir noted that these issues were among the topics addressed during his extensive talks held yesterday with Chancellor Friedrich Merz.

Hamad Airport leads Middle East in duty-free sales

Duty-free accounts for 38% of total airport sales: Study

By Santhosh V Perumal
Business Reporter

Hamad International Airport's duty free sales' share to total sales was seen highest among the Middle Eastern airports and its revenue dependence on duty free was also seen higher, according to The Airports Council International Asia-Pacific and Middle East, the trade group representing over 600 airports across 44 countries and territories.

The Middle Eastern airports otherwise saw electronics spend climb 14% as passengers increasingly leveraged tax advantages and sought out airport-exclusive collections unavailable in malls, a shift toward more deliberate, value-driven purchasing at the airport, revealing a fundamental change in airport retail dynamics, revealing a fundamental change in airport retail dynamics, said 'Travel Retail Study in the Post-Pandemic Era', developed by ACI Asia Pacific and Middle East, in partnership with Auran and Steer.

"Duty-free has become the financial backbone of airports across Asia-Pacific and the Middle East, delivering a significant share of retail revenue and driving commercial performance at major hub," it said.

Highlighting that in the Middle East, duty-free is not just important, it is central to airport economics; it said within total sale, the duty-free sales shares are consistently high across the region, with Qatar at 38%, followed by the UAE 36%, Bahrain at 34%, Saudi Arabia 31% and Oman 31%.

"The revenue dependence is even higher, around 60% in Saudi Arabia and Qatar, and over 50% across the UAE, Bahrain and Oman," said the study.

The Middle East duty-free baskets favour confectionery and perfumes, while Asia-Pacific and Oceania hubs are more premium and alcohol-driven, it said, adding across Asia-Pacific and the Middle East, airport retail performance shows strong uniformity, with the same categories consistently leading sales.

Luxury goods and perfumes and cosmetics rank as the top two categories in both regions, reinforcing airports as trusted destinations for premium, duty-free and gifting purchases. Electronics typically rank third, supported by pricing advantages and last-minute convenience, and together these top three categories generate the highest net margins for airports.

Beyond the top tier, regional preferences emerge, with local products performing strongly in Asia-Pacific, while confectionery and impulse gifting categories show greater strength in the Middle East.

As much as 56% of responding airports held their commercial revenue is now stronger than 2019

levels, it said, adding as much as 44% of airports also expect higher commercial revenue per passenger in the next 12 months.

Referring to the UAE and Saudi Arabia; it said outbound travellers from these nations are now top spenders, characterised by high disposable income and a strong gifting culture.

"The strongest spenders today originate from China, India, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia, reflecting the specific traveller segments, trip purposes, and purchasing behaviours that these markets currently generate," it said.

The study also points out that younger travellers are now driving spend, while passenger behaviour, rather than sheer traffic volumes, has become the defining factor of airport travel retail performance.

"Airports that align their commercial strategies with evolving passenger behaviour are better equipped to manage revenue volatility, sustain investment capacity, and remain competitive over the long term," said Stefano Baronci, Director General of ACI Asia Pacific and Middle East.

The study found Gen Zs (1997-2012) and Millennials (1981-1996) spend 3.5 times higher than Gen X (1965-80) & Boomers (1946-64).

Gen Zs are four times more likely than Boomers to buy electronics, it said, adding Gen Zs are 2.5 times more likely than Boomers to buy luxury products and Boomers are 1.4 times more likely than Gen Z to buy confectionery products.



An inside view of the Hamad International Airport.

Qatar, Germany explore expanded investment



HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani and German Chancellor Friedrich Merz co-chairing the meeting of the Qatari-German Business Roundtable.

PM underpins role connecting East and West markets

HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani and German Chancellor Friedrich Merz co-chaired the meeting of the Qatari-German Business Roundtable, held in Doha yesterday.

At the outset of the meeting, HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs welcomed the Chancellor and the accompanying delegation, affirming that the foundations of co-operation between Qatar and Germany are solid.

The prime minister pointed out that over the past decades, Qatar has sought to develop its relations with Germany. He noted that through the Qatar Invest-

ment Authority (QIA), Qatar has succeeded in becoming one of the largest foreign investors in Germany. He pointed out that German companies operating in Qatar have added significant value to its economy.

German commentators highlight strength of ties

The PM mentioned that co-operation between the two countries encompasses the fields of energy, infrastructure, manufacturing, and financial institutions, emphasising that Qatar aspires to expand this co-operation to include technology, healthcare, and artificial intelligence, which, in Qatar's view, are the industries of the future.

He reaffirmed Qatar's strong interest in expanding co-operation and increasing business ties between companies in both countries. He noted that Qatar is cur-

rently undergoing a transitional phase and has already begun reviewing several laws and regulations to ensure they keep pace with contemporary developments.

He further emphasised Qatar's commitment to providing a welcoming environment for all, while underscoring the importance of being viewed by Germany and other European countries as a reliable partner capable of connecting East and West. He highlighted that this approach has guided Qatar's efforts in geopolitics and should likewise be applied in the economic sphere to achieve prosperity for its people.

The meeting also reviewed ways to strengthen co-operation and partnership across various sectors, as well as investment opportunities available in both countries.

A number of CEOs representing groups, companies, organisations, and agencies from both countries attended the roundtable. (QNA) Page 2

Qatar Economic Forum to be held from May 12

The sixth Qatar Economic Forum, powered by Bloomberg and the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, will convene May 12-14, 2026, under the theme 'The Global Rebalance: Capital, Power and the Middle East.'

The event will gather heads of state, global CEOs, and investors to examine how shifting capital and power dynamics are reshaping worldwide growth, risks, and opportunities.

Speakers include Oman Investment Authority President Abdul Salam al-Murshidi, TKO Group CEO Ari Emanuel, and Citadel's Kenneth Griffin.

The forum highlights the Middle East's growing economic influence through sovereign wealth funds and strategic energy assets. Last year's edition attracted over 3,000 participants from 95 countries.

Business Page 1



PM meets Albania's minister of economy and innovation



HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani met yesterday with Minister of Economy and Innovation of the Republic of Albania Delina Ibrahimaj, who is visiting the country. The meeting discussed co-operation relations between the two countries and ways to support and strengthen them. In addition, it discussed a number of topics of common interest. (QNA)

UN welcomes progress achieved in Qatar-facilitated talks between DRC and AFC/M23

QNA
New York

Spokesperson for the UN Secretary-General Stephane Dujarric welcomed the progress announced by Qatar in the talks it facilitated between the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and the Alliance Fleuve Congo/ March 23 Movement (AFC/M23), indicating that this progress includes an agreement to operationalise the cease-fire monitoring and verification mechanism that was established under the ceasefire framework.

The official Spokesperson for the UN Secretary-General reiterated the call for a cessation of hostilities at a press conference, explaining that the UN Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) is explicitly authorised to support the implementation of a permanent ceasefire, in accordance with the Security Council resolution 2808.



Dujarric affirmed that the peacekeepers stand ready to support a credible ceasefire monitoring and verification mechanism, within the limits of its Security Council mandate and in full respect of the sovereignty of the DRC.

He also welcomed the sustained engagement of the State of Qatar, the US, the African Union and its Mediator, the East African Community, the South-

ern African Development Community, and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR).

The spokesperson for the UN Secretary-General affirmed the commitment of the MONUSCO in the DRC to support efforts to reduce violence, protect civilians, and create the conditions for a sustainable political solution in the eastern part of the DRC.

Qatar partakes in ministerial meeting on critical minerals in Washington, DC

QNA
Washington

Qatar has participated in the first ministerial meeting on critical minerals, organised by the US Department of State in Washington, DC. HE the Minister of State for Foreign Trade Affairs, Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al-Sayed represented Qatar at the meeting.

The meeting was attended by Vice-President of the United States, JD Vance and US Secretary of State, Marco Rubio along with a lineup of ministers and senior officials from several countries.

The meeting discussed ways to enhance international co-operation to secure supply chains for critical minerals, support the diversification of mining sources, and encourage investments and joint ventures in the mining, processing, and recycling sectors. It also addressed strengthening environmental, social, and



governance standards for supply chains, given the strategic importance of these minerals in the clean energy, semiconductor, artificial intelligence, and defence industries. HE al-Sayed also attended the Business Forum, held the day before the

ministerial meeting at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), which focused on discussing the challenges and opportunities related to the sustainability of supply chains and the strengthening of public-private partnerships.

Regional forum on surveying traditional crafts begins in Egypt

A regional forum on surveying craft traditions in the Arab World began yesterday in Egypt. The forum includes several activities, including a session on the experiences of Arab countries in conducting those surveys. Participants include Qatar, Yemen, Saudi Arab, Syria, Egypt, Palestine, and Mauritania. Egypt's Minister of Culture Dr Ahmed Fouad Henno said that the forum was an important step in building the capabilities to tackle one of the most important cultural issues. He stressed that cultural heritage was not just a part of history to be celebrated, but also an important component of identity. The forum, organised by the Egyptian Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research in Egypt, in co-operation with the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organisation, aims to promote joint Arab co-operation and the exchange of expertise in the field of preserving intangible cultural heritage. (QNA)

PM meets German chancellor

HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani met yesterday with Chancellor of Federal Republic of Germany Friedrich Merz. The meeting discussed co-operation relations between the two countries and ways to support and strengthen them. In addition, it discussed a number of topics of common interest. Chancellor Friedrich Merz left Doha yesterday, following an official visit to the country. Chancellor Merz and the accompanying delegation were seen off upon departure from Hamad International Airport by HE the Minister of Commerce and Industry Sheikh Faisal bin Thani bin Faisal al-Thani, ambassador of Qatar to Germany Abdullah bin Ibrahim al-Hammar and ambassador of Germany to Qatar Oliver Owczka. (QNA)



Al-Misnad meets UNITAC delegation

HE the Minister of State for International Co-operation Dr Maryam bint Ali bin Nasser al-Misnad, met with a delegation from the United Nations Centre for Innovation and Technology Acceleration for Cities (UNITAC), currently visiting Qatar. They reviewed avenues of co-operation, particularly in leveraging innovation and technology, including artificial intelligence, to support early crisis foresight and enhance diplomatic and humanitarian efforts. (QNA)



King of Belgium receives credentials of Qatar envoy

King Philippe of the Kingdom of Belgium received the credentials of ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary of Qatar to Belgium Talal bin Almas al-Saleh al-Sulaiti. The ambassador conveyed to the king the greetings of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani and His Highness's wishes to the king for continued good health and happiness, and to the government and people of Belgium for ongoing progress and prosperity. For his part, the king of Belgium entrusted the ambassador with his greetings to the Amir, wishing



His Highness good health and happiness, and the State of Qatar continued advancement and prosperity. (QNA)

Importance of co-ordinating charitable efforts during Ramadan highlighted

QNA
Doha

HE the Minister of Endowments (Awqaf) and Islamic Affairs Ghanem bin Shaheen bin Ghanem al-Ghanem has stressed the importance of joint work and the integration of roles among various charitable organisations.

He emphasised the need to unify visions and programs during the holy month of Ramadan, which will contribute to maximising the humanitarian and social impact of charitable initiatives and reflect the civilised image of the State of Qatar in the field of humanitarian and charitable work.

This came during a co-ordination meeting between the Ministry of Endowments (Awqaf) and Islamic Affairs, the Regulatory Authority for Charitable Activities, and charitable societies to discuss preparations and arrangements for the holy month of Ramadan and to unify efforts to organise charitable initiatives and programmes during this blessed month.



for the holy month of Ramadan and to unify efforts to organise charitable initiatives and programmes during this blessed month.

For their part, the participants affirmed their commitment to strengthening the partnership

with the Ministry of Endowments (Awqaf) and the Charitable Activities Regulatory Authority, and to working within an integrated institutional framework that facilitates the smooth and transparent delivery of aid to those in need.

This framework aims to achieve the noble goals of charitable work, grounded in the tolerant values of Islam, and in a manner that meets the demands of the current phase and the needs of the community during the holy month.

This meeting is part of the ongoing efforts of the Ministry of Endowments (Awqaf) and Islamic Affairs to enhance co-ordination with relevant entities and solidify the principles of integration and institutional co-operation. This ensures the success of charitable programmes and initiatives during the blessed month of Ramadan and achieves a lasting humanitarian impact.

Electoral General Assembly of Arab Police Sports Federation convenes

QNA
Doha

Under the auspices of HE the Minister of Interior and Commander of the Internal Security Force "Lekhiya" Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, and in the presence of HE the Minister of State for Interior Affairs Sheikh Abdulaziz bin Faisal bin Mohammed al-Thani, the 49th Electoral General Assembly of the Arab Police Sports Federation commenced yesterday, hosted by Doha with a broad participation from representatives of Arab federations and delegations.

The opening session was attended by Secretary-General of the Council of Arab Interior Ministers Dr Mohammed bin Ali Koman; Secretary of the Supreme Council of Naif Arab University for Security Sciences and Vice-President for External Relations Dr Khaled bin Abdulaziz al-Harash; in addition to heads of Arab police sports federations and members of the Executive Bureau.

On the sidelines of the General Assembly, HE the Minister of State for Interior Affairs met with the Secretary-General of the Council of Arab Interior Ministers. The meeting discussed a number

of topics of mutual interest and ways to enhance co-operation and co-ordination in the security and police sports fields, in a manner that serves joint Arab action.

President of the Qatari and Arab Police Sports Federations Major General Khaled bin Hamad al-Attiyah affirmed that the Doha meeting, held concurrently with the celebrations marking the golden jubilee of the Arab Police Sports Federation, embodies the spirit of Arab cooperation and integration in strengthening joint police sports activities, contributing to security and reinforcing rapprochement among Arab states.

Top official reviews DMC-10 programmes

The 10th Disaster Management Camp (DMC-10), organised by the Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS) and sponsored by the Qatar Fund for Development (QFFD), for the training of relief personnel in health, emergency response, and disaster co-ordination, has welcomed Brigadier-General (Air Force) Rashid al-Hitmi to review the camp's facilities and programmes.

Brig-Gen al-Hitmi, the commander of the Doha Joint Rescue Co-ordination Centre (DJRCC), was attending on behalf of HE the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defence Affairs Sheikh Saad bin Abdulrahman bin Hassan al-Thani.

Brig-Gen al-Hitmi was welcomed by Mohamed Bader al-Sada, the assistant secretary-general for Relief and International Development at the QRCS and chairman of DMC-10, along with camp management, and was taken on a tour of the camp's training rooms, field hospital, Disaster Information Management Centre (DIMC), Emergency Response Unit for Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (ERU-MPHSS), and other facilities.

He lauded the organisation and qual-



ity of the camp's programmes, highlighting the variety of scenarios and resources that prepare relief personnel to respond to natural and manmade disasters.

Brig-Gen al-Hitmi also welcomed further collaboration between the QRCS and the Ministry of Defence on humanitarian operations, including the joint deployment of the field hospital to support victims in refugee and displacement areas.

The camp's training programme, which began on day two, is divided into specialised morning sessions and general evening sessions.

In the morning, participants are as-

signed to six teams – Red, Blue, Green, Gray, Yellow, and Purple – for four hours of hands-on training in topics such as Field Assessment and Co-ordination, Emergency Shelter, Water and Sanitation, Food Security and Livelihoods, Emergency Planning and Operations, and Health in Emergencies.

By the end of the week, each team will complete all modules.

Evening sessions involve six groups, focusing on Media and Communications in Emergencies, Disaster Management and Humanitarian Standards, Humanitarian Information Analysis, Psychological Support,

Safer Access, and Restoring Family Links.

On the first day, the Red Team received practical and theoretical training in assessment and field co-ordination, led by Dr Raad al-Hadid, the head of the IFRC (International Federation of the Red Crescent) mission in Libya.

Sessions covered assessment concepts, methodology, priority sector evaluation, field visits, and data analysis.

Meanwhile, Group 2 trained on disaster management principles and core humanitarian standards, exploring disaster types, phases, impacts, and accountability frameworks.

On day three, the Yellow Team focused on Health in Emergencies, learning preparedness and response techniques, rapid health assessment, and public health considerations in displacement settings.

Dr Ahmed Mohamed Idlibi, the head of Health Education at the QRCS, led practical sessions on first aid, CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation), victim and responder safety, triage, and the management of injuries ranging from fractures and burns to heatstroke and poisoning.

Trainees also face daily surprise disaster simulations.

In the first scenario – a fire at a refugee camp – Al Fazaa and civil defence teams responded immediately, while trainee teams contained the situation, evacuated and assisted affected people, assessed their needs, and established emergency shelters with separate areas for men and women.

DMC-10 manager Mohamed al-Mansouri lauded the event's success, noting the four months of planning and co-ordination, and thanked the QFFD for its support, which enabled the camp's smooth execution.

MoJ takes part in Manama conference

The Ministry of Justice (MoJ), represented by the Arbitration Affairs Department, has taken part in the 2nd GCC Law and Arbitration Week conference held in Bahrain.

The conference brought together experts and specialists in legal and arbitration fields from the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) countries.

The ministry noted in statement that its participation in the conference included a dialogue session on "The Role of Women in Law, the Judiciary, and Arbitra-

tion in the GCC Countries".

During the session, Arbitration Affairs Department legal researcher Mariam Jassim al-Tamimi presented Qatar's experience in empowering women and enhancing their presence within the justice system.

In response to a question about the alignment of women's empowerment in arbitration with Qatar National Vision 2030, she said that the National Vision prioritises women's empowerment as a fundamental pillar for achieving sustainable development.

Al-Tamimi added that women hold leadership positions within the Ministry of Justice and play pivotal roles with efficiency and responsibility in supporting the justice system.

During her presentation on the significance of the increase in the number of female arbitrators between 2019 and 2025, she explained that these indicators reflect the evolution of the professional arbitration environment, which is now based on merit and competence.

Al-Tamimi emphasised that



women's participation has become an active and influential element in this specialised field, alongside a growing awareness of the importance of diversity in the composition of arbitration panels.

The session addressed the qualitative shifts in the participation of Gulf women, particularly in Qatar, where they have moved from limit-

ed presence to active contributions in the fields of law, the judiciary, and arbitration.

This progress is supported by legislative and constitutional frameworks that promote equal opportunities and empower women within the country's justice system.

The conference witnessed discussions on a number of topics

related to legislation, investments and major projects, in addition to highlighting the role of arbitration as an effective tool for settling disputes and enhancing the business environment in the region, reflecting the Gulf trend towards developing legal systems to keep pace with economic and developmental changes. – QNA

Visit Qatar bringing culture, connection, cuisine to Art Basel

By Shaima Sheriff
Staff Reporter

partner for Art Basel, Doha, for its first time launching in Qatar, specifically in Msheireb district."

"This definitely leverages the destination strategy," she said. "It brings art and the creative industry under one umbrella, and it also leverages dialogue between local artists and global artists in Qatar."

In collaboration with Qatar Sports Investments and QC+, the fair celebrates Qatar's vibrant cultural landscape while fostering rich dialogue between local and international creatives.

Central to the lounge's concept is a culinary collaboration between Qatari chef Salman al-Jaidah, the country's first Bachelor of Culinary Arts graduate – and internationally acclaimed chef Izu Ani.

Together, they curate canapés that spark a cultural conversation between Qatar and the international community.

Chef Salman invites visitors to experience this firsthand at the Visit Qatar Lounge, encouraging them to explore Qatar's culture through the fair.

He highlighted the abundance of remarkable artwork and talented artists across Msheireb, from M7 to the Design District, and invited guests to enjoy the canapés he created in collaboration with Chef Izu Ani, designed to complement the immersive cultural experience.

Fire Station unveils three major solo exhibitions during Art Basel Qatar

Fire Station Museum has announced the opening of three major solo exhibitions by internationally acclaimed artists Chung Seoyoung, Haroon Mirza, and Ho Tzu Nyen.

The exhibitions will open on the same day Art Basel Qatar launches today, and will remain on view beyond the fair dates, positioning Fire Station as a key cultural destination during this significant moment in Doha's international arts calendar.

Presented across the Garage Gallery, Gallery 3, Gallery 4, and the Tower in the Fire Station's courtyard, the exhibitions offer an immersive journey across sculpture, sound, moving image, performance, and outdoor installation.

Timed to coincide with Art Basel Qatar, the exhibitions invite audiences to experience artistic practices from across Asia, and Europe.

"These three exhibitions reflect Fire Station's commitment to presenting artistic practices that challenge how we see, listen, and think," said Fire Station artistic director Wael Shawky. "Bringing together artists whose work engages deeply with history, materiality, sound, and philosophy, they position Fire Station as a vital platform for experimentation and intellectual discourse during Art Basel Qatar."

"Chung Seoyoung: Endless Facts" marks the artist's first solo exhibition in the Middle East, bringing together pivotal works from across more than three decades of practice alongside a newly commissioned work produced especially for Fire Station.

Through precise arrangements of everyday and industrial materials presented in the Garage Gallery, Chung explores the layered relationships between objects, collective memories, and lived experience.

The exhibition runs until April 20.

In Gallery 4, "Ho Tzu Nyen: Hotel Aporia" presents a haunting multi-channel video installation that unfolds as a cinematic and philo-



sophical meditation on history and ideology that zooms in on the ideological shadows of interwar Japan.

Drawing on archival material and film history, the work constructs a shifting narrative populated by historical and cultural figures, blurring the boundaries between fact and fiction and leaving viewers suspended in a state of critical uncertainty. The exhibition runs until May 31.

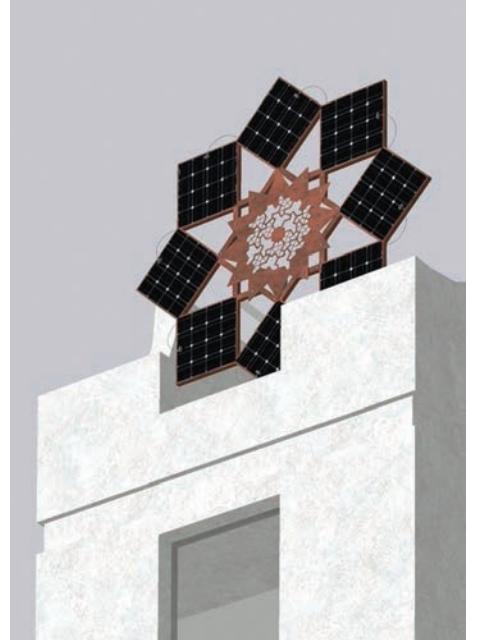
Spanning Gallery 3 and the Tower, "Haroon Mirza: Everything was, is and always will be" is the artist's first institutional solo presentation in the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC).

The exhibition features two installations and a performance that animate Fire Station through evolving compositions of light and sound generated by electrical signals and solar energy.

Newly realised installations respond directly to the site's architecture and landscape, while a solar-powered public artwork activates daily in the moments leading up to sunset, ending precisely as the sun sets.

The exhibition featured a live performance yesterday that extends Mirza's investigation into resonance, cosmology, and collective experience.

The exhibition runs until May 31. – QNA



German political commentators highlight strength of ties between Qatar, Germany

The visit of German Chancellor Friedrich Merz to Qatar comes at a regional and international moment in which considerations of security and stability intersect with energy and economic interests.

Among these is Berlin's effort to expand its partnerships in the Gulf region on the basis of mutual trust and a strategic partnership, as emphasised by the German chancellor prior to the start of his Gulf tour.

The German government affirmed that the objective of Merz's visit is to strengthen and deepen partnerships with Gulf states, stressing that stability in the Middle East lies within Germany's national interest.

He said that the visit was aimed at building a strategic partnership, reinforce bilateral relations, and work jointly to pro-

mote peace and stability in the region.

The Doha visit is particularly important given the country sits at the intersection of issues that are key to Berlin.

The most notable among them is energy security, economic and investment co-operation, and political dialogue on regional issues.

The Jean Monnet Professor for European Studies at Stanford University in Berlin, Prof Ulli Brueckner, described Merz's visit to Qatar as a strategic realignment at a time of global transformation.

In a statement to the Qatar News Agency (QNA), Brueckner said that the visit comes amid a phase of profound global turbulence and multiple, intensive, and simultaneous strategic trajectories.

He noted that these trajectories include an additional step by Germany to-

ward risk reduction and diversification of partnerships, securing energy supplies, and strengthening diplomatic channels in crisis regions with support and assistance from Qatar, alongside backing economic transformation through Qatari and Gulf investments.

Brueckner said that Qatar plays three important roles for Germany; as an energy partner, an investor, and a diplomatic mediator in regional crises.

He added that the German government was focused on the importance of energy security.

The expert said that areas of co-operation include trade and industrial policy through securing supply chains for critical raw materials, technology transfer, and building reciprocal investment partnerships, in addition to climate and science

co-operation through the establishment of joint research centres focused on decarbonisation in order to reduce reliance on fossil fuels.

German researcher specialising in Middle-Eastern affairs Carmen Hans said that the German chancellor's visit to Qatar advances bilateral co-operation.

She pointed to Doha's policy of establishing new relationships or expanding existing ones, as long as the shared objective is to achieve mutual benefit for peoples.

Hans referred to the energy partnership agreement signed between the two countries in 2022 as an existing institutional framework for dialogue in the energy sector, making the chancellor's visit a political opportunity to reaffirm continuity and expand co-operation, particularly in light of Germany's interest in se-

curing and diversifying energy supplies.

She added that the German chancellor's visit to Qatar could move co-operation in the fields of economy and investment from the stage of partnership declaration to a phase of more active implementation.

Regarding Qatari-German co-operation on matters of security, the researcher observed that Germany and Qatar share a common foundation centred on achieving stability.

Hans noted that the unity of this principle, combined with Germany's strong interest in ensuring security calm in the Middle East, will facilitate the expansion of security and strategic co-operation between the two sides and may even lead to the identification of new areas of security partnership suited to the challenges of the current phase. – QNA



Dr Buthaina al-Janahi



Chef Salman al-Jaidah.



Damascus International Book Fair opens with Qatar as guest of honour

The Damascus International Book Fair began yesterday with the theme *A history we write... a history we read.*

The book fair was inaugurated by Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharqi, HE the Minister of Culture Sheikh Abdulrahman bin Hamad al-Thani and Syrian Minister of Culture Mohammed Yassin Saleh, along with the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Culture Ghanem bin Mubarik al-Ali, ambassador of Qatar to Syria Khalifa bin Abdullah al-Mahmoud, and several of ministers and ambassadors in Syria.

The Ministry of Culture is participating in the book fair, which runs until February 16, to enhance cultural and intellectual communication and promote its own electronic library.

The director of the ministry's Libraries Department and director of the Doha International Book Fair, Jassim Ahmed al-Buainain, told the Qatar News Agency (QNA) that the ministry was keen to participate in the fair and present its own intellectual work.

He said that the choice of Qatar as the guest of honour for this year's edition of the Damascus International Book Fair highlights the strong cultural ties between the two countries.

Over 500 publishing houses from 35 countries are participating in this year's edition.

Alaqraboon Centre launched to strengthen social welfare

Qatar Charity (QC) has launched the Alaqraboon Centre, marking a new and expanded chapter in its efforts to enhance social welfare and humanitarian assistance within Qatar.

The centre was established following approval by Qatar Charity's Board of Directors in December last year.

Alaqraboon Centre executive director Faisal al-Fehaida said that the establishment of the centre – and the transformation of Qatar Charity's Social Welfare Department into an entity with its own administrative structure – came in response to growing community needs and a desire to further develop the QC's local social welfare sector, which has grown into one of the organisation's largest and most impactful sectors.

He added that the move required the establishment of a specialised entity with greater operational and administrative flexibility, enabling the development of programmes and procedures aligned with local needs, while strengthening governance, transparency, and efficiency, and supporting a more sustainable, technology-driven operating model to expand assistance across Qatar.

Al-Fehaida expressed his aspiration for Alaqraboon Centre to become the leading institutional reference for humanitarian and social assistance within the country, contributing to social development through specialised initia-



tives grounded in authentic Qatari values and aligned with global best practices.

He indicated that, as part of its upcoming Ramadan efforts, the centre aims to raise QR100mn to expand its assistance programmes.

These include support for low-income families, orphans, widows, divorced and abandoned women, patients, persons with disabilities, debtors, senior citizens, prisoners and their families, workers, students, individuals preparing for marriage, community funds, and emergency humanitarian cases.

Alaqraboon Centre represents a natural extension of Qatar Charity's Social Welfare Department and the Alaqraboon digital platform, which provided more than QR639mn in assistance within Qatar between 2023 and 2025, benefiting more than 324,177 people, with Qatari beneficiaries accounting for approximately 70% of the total value of aid.

This year the Alaqraboon Centre plans to implement 32 projects, covering health and education support, as well as various sponsorship programmes.

It also aims to increase the number of sponsored families from 1,500 to 2,500, alongside seasonal initiatives, particularly Ramadan programmes such as food baskets, Khair kitchens, Zakat Al-Fitr distribution, and Eid gifts for orphans.

Alaqraboon Centre places strong emphasis on rapid response to emergency cases through an integrated support system, using digital verification and social assessment to ensure efficient delivery of assistance, in line with its broader programmes aimed at achieving sustainable social impact and directing support to those most in need.

The centre relies on a network of strategic partnerships, notably with the Ministry of Social Development and Family and the Regulatory Authority for Charitable Activities, while expanding co-operation with corporate and institutional partners to enhance its social impact.

Qatar Charity has called on philanthropists, institutions, and the private sector to support Alaqraboon Centre – especially during Ramadan – to expand its assistance and advance sustainable social welfare efforts in Qatar.

Inquiries can be directed to the centre's hotline at 40042400, available via phone or WhatsApp. – QNA

Analytical Thinking Workshop empowers QU staff

Qatar University (QU) conducted a training workshop to equip staff with advanced analytical thinking skills, enabling them to interpret data, draw meaningful conclusions, and provide evidence-based recommendations to guide university decision-making.

Organised by the Strategy and Institutional Effectiveness Office, the workshop, titled "Analytical Thinking Skills in the University Workplace: From Data Collection to Decision-Making", brought together staff from the QU's Department of Strategy and Performance Quality and the Department of Institutional Analytics and Research.

Delivered by Institutional Analytics and Research Department



manager Dr Mahmood Ahmed, the workshop aimed to strengthen participants' analytical capabilities, helping them move beyond basic data collection to meaningful analysis aligned with the QU's strategic objectives.

The sessions covered a wide

range of applied topics, including analytical thinking methodologies, transforming numerical data into actionable insights through pattern and relationship analysis, distinguishing correlation from causation, evaluating evidence quality, and developing institu-

tional recommendations linked to strategic indicators.

The workshop featured practical exercises and case studies drawn from the QU's work environment.

Dr Muna al-Marzouqi, the vice-president for Strategy and Institutional Effectiveness, emphasised that the initiative forms part of the Office's ongoing professional development efforts.

She highlighted its role in fostering a unified institutional analytical culture, improving the quality of reports and analyses, and strengthening collaboration between planning, performance, and institutional research units to support the University's development and transformation journey.

QPO to perform Brahms, Strauss and Beethoven's *Eroica*



Pablo Mielgo



German Diaz Blanco



Joo Young Oh

The Qatar Philharmonic Orchestra (QPO) has announced a major concert featuring iconic symphonic works to be held at the Katara Opera House on February 7 at 7:30pm under the baton of internationally acclaimed conductor Pablo Mielgo.

The programme opens with Johannes Brahms' *Variations on a Theme by Haydn*, a work celebrated for its elegance and structural refinement, highlighting the orchestra's tonal richness and precision.

The spotlight then shifts to QPO principal oboist German Diaz Blanco, who will appear as soloist in Richard Strauss's *Oboe Concerto in D major, Tvr 292*.

Known for its lyrical charm and technical brilliance, the concerto unfolds seamlessly across three interconnected movements, exemplifying Strauss's mastery of dialogue between soloist and orchestra.

The evening culminates with Ludwig van Beethoven's revolutionary *Symphony No. 3, Eroica*, a landmark composition that reshaped the symphonic form and expanded its emotional and thematic scope.

Led by Concertmaster Joo Young Oh, the QPO will bring the work's dramatic intensity and expressive depth to life, offering audiences a powerful interpretation of one of the most enduring pillars of the orchestral repertoire.

Casato brings Italian elegance to Doha

After the opening of its first boutique in Riyadh, Casato inaugurates its second boutique at Doha Festival City, within the Alfardan Jewellery.

The DNA of Maison Casato is a refined blend of elements, evident in the design and craftsmanship of its jewels and boutiques, where timeless Italian style, harmonious volumes, and innovative elegance come to life.

The concept and design of the new Casato's luxury space in Doha were entrusted to Alessandra Lavinato, who has masterfully highlighted the signature that defines the brand across multiple aspects of the project.

The boutique features ceramics inspired by the ancient techniques of Venetian tradition, adorned with a delicate motif recalling dragonfly wings – the symbol and muse of Casato's collections.

This motif flows gracefully throughout space, from bronze-toned glass elements to the carefully designed lighting that decorates the ambience, creating an elegant dialogue between nature and jewellery.

Casato founder and designer Federico Gattieri envisioned the Doha boutique as a refined jewel box, perfectly designed to showcase and celebrate the artistry and craftsmanship of its Italian-designed creations.

The new boutique presents some of Casato's most iconic collections: Mikou, inspired by the charming narrow streets of Mykonos, with delicate details combined in innovative

and unique designs; Mikoulette, a sparkling celebration of diamonds, sapphires, and emeralds; the legendary Boutique collection, a timeless expression of Casato's vision; and Maureen, the majestic collection that marks a new chapter in fine jewellery, capturing the dreams of every woman.

These collections, among others and alongside exclusive new pieces, will be unveiled during the opening event on February 8 and 9, celebrating the boutique's debut.

There is no success without a diva.

Thus Casato celebrates the success of the Mikou collection by introducing its red carpet version: here is Mikoulette.

An ultra-exclusive selection of new jewels that retain the original shape, illuminating it with a feast of diamonds and lights of sapphires and emeralds.

The volumes of Mikoulette jewellery do not increase; the design is instead collected in its most precious essence, this time Casato has created a true distillate of wearable wonder.

Gold, diamonds and enamel come together in Mikou.

Their mission is to become the protagonists of every woman's beauty.

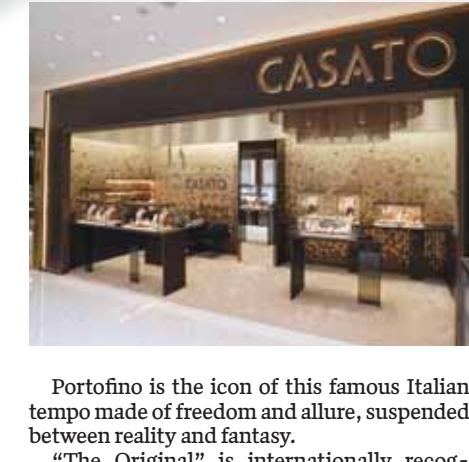
The unusual silhouette of the design is a clear reference to the small Greek streets of Mykonos, which smell of sun and saltiness, symbols of freedom in our imagination.

The east wind reaches Italy to blow into these jewels, mixing exotic influences with the land of the dolce-vita.

Thanks to the craftsmanship that forged it, the design of Yasmeen creations is a hymn to lightness, with magnificent volumes combined with easy-to-wear structures.

Each piece of jewellery seems to fly with diamond-covered wings, as sumptuous and free as the woman on whom it will choose to rest.

The scent of the salty sea is in the air and the waves keep the beat of the Dolce Vita summer.



Portofino is the icon of this famous Italian tempo made of freedom and allure, suspended between reality and fantasy.

"The Original" is internationally recognised as a term used to announce an invention that marks a moment of change in history; in fashion, it's the beginning of a new style.

Casato's "Maureen the Original" is the collection that marks the before and after in the world of jewellery.

Its majestic pieces proudly display their innovative design, floating into every woman's desires until they become reality on her fingers.

"Back to Love" is a call to the most ancient and eternal feeling: love that connects, that returns, that embraces.

The heart of the collection is the washer, which is reinterpreted in two variants – woven and round – a symbol of continuity, harmony and unbreakable bond.

The soft, embracing chains evoke the intimate and cozy hug of lovers, transforming each piece of jewellery into a message to wear.

The protagonist stones, the colourless and brown diamonds, create contrasts that instead of clashing with each other enhance one another, thus conveying the beauty of differences and the strength of the unity.



QM and Google Cloud sign agreement to launch a new frontier in cultural gaming

Qatar Museums (QM) and Google Cloud announced a strategic partnership at Web Summit Qatar 2026 to develop a first-of-its-kind museum-themed racing game.

The project leverages Google Cloud's advanced artificial intelligence (AI) and cloud technologies to bring Qatar's cultural heritage to a global audience through an interactive gaming experience. Seen above are the officials at the signing ceremony.

PICTURE: Google Images



Captured seagulls freed by wildlife protection patrols

The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change (MoECC), in co-operation with the Environmental Security Group of the Internal Security Force (Lekhwiya), has identified a group of hunters who illegally captured several seagulls, in clear violation of environmental laws governing hunting and wildlife protection.

This was part of a large scale campaign conducted by the Wildlife Protection Department, within ongoing efforts to safeguard wildlife, preserve biodiversity, and enhance compliance with the environmental laws and regulations in force in Qatar.

The department also released the birds into their natural habitat to ensure their well-being and the ecological equilibrium.

The MoECC revealed that the Wildlife Protection Department patrols found the birds hidden inside a farm in the Abu Nakhlah complex, intended for trading.

The necessary legal measures were taken against the violators in accordance with applicable legislation, as part of the enforcement of environmental laws aimed at reducing practices that harm wildlife and natural habitats.





MES Indian School awarded Worldwide Book of Records title for Largest Human Qatar Flag Formation

In a vibrant validation ceremony held at its Conference Hall, MES Indian School announced the official recognition of its record-breaking achievement – the formation of the Largest Human Qatar Flag.

The feat was certified by the Worldwide Book of Records, an internationally registered organisation renowned for validating, verifying, and cataloguing exceptional human accomplishments.

Unveiling the validation case containing the certificate of authentication and a gold medal, B M Sidhique, president of the MES Governing Board, congratulated the students and staff for their monumental achievement. He also expressed heartfelt appreciation to the parents for their unwavering support of the school's initiatives, which contribute significantly to students' overall development and success.

The record-setting formation took place recently on the school's sprawling grass field, involving a total of 7,700 students and staff. Dressed in co-ordinated white and maroon attire representing the Qatari national flag, participants formed the Largest Human Qatar Flag with remarkable precision in 140 rows and 55 columns, maintaining a spacing of 0.5 metres.



Covering an area of 1,925sq m, the display created a lifelike representation of Qatar's national flag – a visually stunning tribute to the nation's unity and identity. The extraordinary formation highlighted meticulous planning, discipline, and national pride, leaving an unforgettable impression on all who witnessed it. The ceremony was attended by the directors and esteemed members of the MES Governing Board, Dr Hameeda Kadar, principal of MES Indian School,



Pramila Kannan, principal of MES Abu Hamour Branch, school officials, teaching and non-teaching staff, and students. Fiona D'Cruz, teacher representative, delivered the welcome speech, while Rema Devi, a teaching faculty



member, proposed the vote of thanks. The event was expertly co-ordinated by Salim J Nadaf, co-ordinator of the department of physical education, and Anver, convener of the Cultural Committee, along with a dedicated team of teachers.

MES Evening Shift holds Republic Day activities



Republic Day celebration for the Evening Shift of MES Indian School conducted for students of classes I to VIII was held on January 25, 2026 with vibrant participation and patriotic spirit.

The programme commenced with a special talent show assembly, beginning with a prayer that set a dignified and respectful tone for the day.

A range of thoughtfully planned, age-appropriate activities were organised to help students understand the significance of Republic Day and the core values of the Indian Constitution. These activities encouraged crea-



tivity, confidence, and a deeper sense of national identity.

Students of classes VI to VIII participated in a Table Talk Forum, engaging in meaningful discussions on topics such as 'How Young

Minds Shape the Nation', 'National Integration in Daily Life', and 'The Role of Youth in Nation-building'.

The forum enhanced critical thinking and public speaking skills. For classes I and II, a colour-

ing activity featuring the national flag and the Ashoka Chakra helped young learners recognise and appreciate national symbols. Classes III to V took part in a storytelling session on 'Why Do We Celebrate Republic Day?', showcasing their understanding of democratic values.

The event was conducted under the supervision of senior vice principal Shihabudeen Pulath, headmistress Sameena Ashfaq, and other faculty members. The celebration was a meaningful and enriching experience, fostering patriotism, civic responsibility, and pride in India's democratic heritage.

Philippine School Doha to launch 'PSD Got Talent Season 2'

Philippine School Doha (PSD), through its Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), will officially launch PSD Got Talent Season 2 tomorrow, highlighting student creativity and strengthening community engagement within the Filipino community in Qatar.

The launch event will take place from 9am at the Edgar V Bondoc Gym on the PSD campus. It will feature performances by student representatives from all five school departments, showcasing a wide range of artistic talents and underscoring the school's commitment to nurturing creativity and self-expression among learners. The event also marks the opening of public voting, a key component of the competition designed to encourage wider community participation and support for young performers.

Organisers said the initiative goes beyond competition, aiming to build students' confidence, discipline, and stage presence while fostering unity

within the school and the broader Filipino community.

PSD Got Talent has become a platform for students to express their skills in music, dance, and other performing arts, while also serving as a collaborative effort between the school, parents, and community partners.



School applauds student's record feat

MES Indian School Evening Shift acknowledged an exceptional achievement that has brought honour to the institution, as Durga Rajeeva, a bright Grade 1 student, entered the India Book of Records. She successfully recited the names of all 28 Indian states and their capitals in just 50 seconds, demonstrating remarkable memory, focus, and enthusiasm for learning.

This notable accomplishment at such a young age reflects both Durga's dedication and the sup-

portive, nurturing learning environment fostered at MES Indian School. Durga was congratulated and appreciated by principal Dr Hameeda Kadar, senior vice-principal Shihabudeen Pulath, and headmistress Sameena Ashfaq, who applauded her confidence and determination.

MES Indian School extended its heartfelt congratulations to Durga Rajeeva and her parents on the proud milestone and reaffirmed its commitment to nurturing young talent and excellence.

LIS hosts Annual Athletics Meet

The Al Arabi Stadium buzzed with excitement as Loyola International School (LIS) hosted its Annual Athletics Meet, uniting students from both campuses in a vibrant celebration of excellence and sportsmanship.

Held ahead of Qatar National Sport Day, the event highlighted the school's commitment to fitness, participation, and sporting spirit.

The meet began with the arrival of the chief guest, Saman Fonseka, head coach of the Qatar National Women's and Under-19 cricket teams, accompanied by the managing director of Loyola International Schools – Qatar, Anup Chakravarthy.

The event was officially opened with the hoisting of the school flag, a torch relay, and the ceremonial lighting of the cauldron.

The march past and salutation were among the ceremony's highlight. The sports oath was administered by the sports captain.

Addressing the gathering, Fonseka praised the school for its structured sports programme and the discipline of its students.



Principal Bhavana Vijaykumar highlighted the role of sports in fostering purpose and resilience among students. Chakravarthy also spoke.

During the prize distribution, the overall championship was awarded to Diamond House from the Al Wukair Campus and Emerald House from the Al Nasr Campus.

The principal has congratulated all participants and the sports department for their dedication and efforts.



Malayali Samajam honours Shantiniketan Indian School students and teachers

Malayali Samajam felicitated teachers and students of Shantiniketan Indian School for their outstanding performance in Malayalam language in the CBSE class X examination for the 2024–25 academic year across Indian schools in Qatar.

The event recognised the teachers whose guidance played a pivotal role in the students' success.

In collaboration with Radio Malayalam (98.6 FM), Malayali Samajam honoured the achievers at the Pratibha Sangamam programme. Students Muhammad Odam Maniyil, Haifa Sherin, and Tamanna Fatima received special awards for their exceptional performance in the Malayalam examination.

The Malayalam department head, Prasad, and Malayalam

teacher Lini Varghese were also honoured for their dedicated guidance and support, which contributed significantly to the students' achievements. The programme was graced by Lok Sabha member Adoor Prakash as the chief guest and was held at ICC Ashoka Hall on January 17.

As part of the celebrations, an inter-school quiz competition on

the Malayalam language and Kerala culture was conducted. Shantiniketan Indian School secured third place, with students Bhagya Sree Binu and Mikha Mary Jimish achieving notable success. Prizes were presented by the chief guest, Adoor Prakash, highlighting the school's strong performance in both academics and cultural knowledge.





Trump tightens control over 50,000 federal workers

Reuters
Washington

US President Donald Trump will have more power to hire and fire up to 50,000 career federal employees in an overhaul of the government's civil service system announced by his administration yesterday.

The overhaul, released by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), fulfills Trump's campaign pledge to strip job protections from federal workers deemed by the president's team to be "influencing" government policy.

It is the biggest change to the rules governing the civil service in more than a century and targets employees that the administration sees as undermining the president's priorities.

Trump called the overhaul "Schedule F" during his first administration.

"You can't run an organisation if people are refusing to actually

carry out the lawful objectives and orders of the administration," said OPM Director Scott Kupor, the administration's top human resources official.

The rule will be scrutinised by a federal judge.

Federal worker unions and their allies sued in January to stop the policy before it was fully developed.

Federal judges paused the litigation while the Trump administration finalised changes.

A court challenge will resume in the coming days, said Skye Perryman of Democracy Forward, one of the groups behind the lawsuit.

"We will return to court to stop this unlawful rule and will use every legal tool available to hold this administration accountable," she said in a statement.

Trump will have the power to select which government positions will lose their job protections, according to the policy the Trump administration released yesterday.

The Trump administration is also changing how long-standing legal protections that prohibit US government agencies from retaliating against whistleblowers will be enforced, the OPM statement said.

Federal agencies will be in charge of setting up job protections for their own employees who accuse them of wrongdoing, such as violating the law or wasting money.

That would be a change from the past, when an independent office known as the Office of the Special Counsel was charged with protecting whistleblowers from reprisal.

The Trump administration will require agency officials be "unbiased" when investigating accusations from whistleblowers that their employer retaliated against them, an OPM official told reporters yesterday morning.

Reuters previously reported that the Trump administration was close to making this change.

UN: January settler attacks cause record West Bank displacement

Israeli settler violence and harassment in the occupied West Bank displaced nearly 700 Palestinians in January, the UN said yesterday, the highest rate since the Gaza war erupted in October 2023.

At least 694 Palestinians were forcefully driven from their homes last month, according to figures from the UN's humanitarian agency OCHA, which compiles data from various United Nations agencies.

The UN Human Rights Office (OHCHR) said in late January that settler violence has become a key driver of forced displacement in the West Bank.

January's displacement numbers were particularly high in part due to the displacement of an entire herding community in the Jordan Valley, Ras Ein al-Auja, whose 130 families left after months of harassment.

"What is happening today is the complete collapse of the community as a result of the settlers' continuous and repeated attacks, day and night, for the past two years," Farhan Jahaleen, a Bedouin resident, told AFP at the time.

Settlers in the West Bank, which Israel has occupied since 1967, use herding to establish a presence on agricultural lands used by Palestinian communities and gradually deny them access to these areas, according to a 2025 report by Israeli non-governmental organisation (NGO) Peace Now.

To force Palestinians out, settlers resort to harassment, intimidation and violence, "with the backing of the Israeli government and military," the settlement watchdog said.

"No one is putting the pressure on Israel or on the Israeli authorities to stop this and so the settlers feel it, they feel the complete impunity that they're just free to continue to do this," said Allegra Pacheco, director of the West Bank Protection Consortium, a group of NGOs working to support Palestinian communities against displacement.

She pointed to a lack of attention on the West Bank as another driving factor.

"All eyes are focused on Gaza when it comes to Palestine, while we have an ongoing ethnic cleansing in the West Bank and nobody's paying attention to the West Bank," she told AFP.

Excluding Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem, the West Bank is home to around 490,000 Israelis living in settlements and outposts considered illegal under international law.

Around 3mn Palestinians live in the West Bank. - AFP

Kinshasa 'fashion lab' taps Central African talent

AFP
Kinshasa

In an abandoned hangar surrounded by dusty trucks in Kinshasa, young student models strut down a catwalk of artificial grass, showcasing their first-ever collection to their Congolese fashion school peers.

Container ships rumble outside in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DR Congo)'s capital, but the room holding the makeshift runway in the Regional Fashion Institute in Africa (IRMA) reverberates with chic electro basslines.

IRMA welcomed a dozen students from five African countries in July, offering them free training in the basics of sewing and fashion entrepreneurship.

"I want to get noticed by brands or sponsors," Benjamin Biloa, a 24-year-old Cameroonian designer who dreams of opening a "haute couture house" in Yaounde, told AFP.

The France-backed project aims to train more than 200 young people by 2026 in a bid to scout talent and boost the Congolese fashion industry, which is struggling in the face of low-price textiles imported from Asia.

"The idea is to turn it into a fashion laboratory" in Central Africa, explained director Sidonie Latere during a tour of the institute, which boasts a photography studio, a library and an exhibition space.

The students rush to apply the finishing touches before gracing the catwalk.

One model slips into a pair of tartan ankle boots designed by the Congolese sapeur designer Koko Lingwala.

The model's immaculate suit, completed with a top hat and feathered cane, is an expression of "Sape," which stands for Societe des Ambianceurs et des Personnes Elegantes - roughly



A model presents a creation on the catwalk during a dress rehearsal ahead of a fashion show at the Regional Fashion Institute in Africa (IRMA) in Kinshasa. - AFP

translating from French as the Society of Ambiance Makers and Elegant People.

The subculture traces its origins to the colonial era when lo-

South Carolina measles vaccinations jump in January after major outbreak

Measles vaccinations have doubled in recent months in a South Carolina region hit hard by the disease's worst outbreak in the US in more than two decades, but health officials warned that far more immunisations are needed to contain the virus' spread.

The outbreak, like those in other regions, has been fuelled by a rise in vaccine hesitancy since the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic, leaving many US communities vulnerable to outbreaks of measles and other vaccine-preventable diseases.

The number of measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine doses administered in Spartanburg County, near the North Carolina border and the epicentre of the latest outbreak, has increased 102% over the past four months compared with the same period a year earlier, according to state data shared with Reuters.

More than 1,000 additional shots were delivered in January.

Statewide, MMR immunisations were up 28% during the same four-month period.

"These monthly totals are some of the highest we've seen in years," Dr Linda Bell, South Carolina's state epidemiologist, said in e-mailed comments to Reuters.

She said 1,178 doses of MMR vaccines were given to infants aged six to 11 months across the state.

Of those, 55% were in Spartanburg County and neighbouring Greenville County.

"These early doses are essential to protecting young children from measles," she said.

Bell said there are likely a few thousand children and adults, however, who remain unvaccinated against measles in Spartanburg County.

Measles, among the most infectious of pathogens, requires that 95% of the population be vaccinated in order to prevent its spread.

In Spartanburg County, 89% of schoolchildren have received the required vaccinations, state data show.

Three paediatricians in the Spartanburg area told Reuters that the increase in vaccinations likely reflected a variety of patients and motives.

Many parents have sought early MMR shots for children who are 6-11 months old rather than waiting for the first dose normally given at 12 months, doctors said.

Parents also have moved up the second dose, which is normally given at age four. The MMR vaccine is 97% effective after two doses.

They added that some families are catching up on routine shots that were missed prior to the outbreak, while other patients may be seeking vaccination after exposure, which can exempt them from quarantine if administered within 72 hours. - Reuters

Iran Guards seize two ships for fuel smuggling: news agency

Iran's Revolutionary Guards have seized two oil tankers with their foreign crews near Iran's Farsi island in Gulf waters for "smuggling fuel," the Tasnim news agency reported yesterday.

It was not immediately clear what flags the tankers were carrying nor the nationalities of the crew.

"More than 1mn litres of smuggled fuel were found on board of the two vessels," Tasnim reported, and a total of "15 foreign crew members were referred to the judiciary". - AFP

New York City joins UN global health network

The New York City Health Department said on Wednesday that it has joined the World Health Organization (WHO)'s global outbreak response network following President Donald Trump's withdrawal of the US from the UN health agency.

Following the Republican president's decision to pull the US out of the WHO, some Democratic leaders have made their regions join the WHO's Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network (GOARN) in defiance of Trump.

New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio has been critical of the president's policies.

California Governor Gavin Newsom and Illinois Governor J.B. Pritzker, both Democrats, have also said their states will join the WHO's global outbreak response network.

The network responds to public health events around the world, such as pandemics and disease outbreaks, and comprises of more than 360 technical institutions.

The US formally left the WHO last month after completing a one-year waiting period following an executive order that Trump signed in January 2025.

Since taking office, Trump has withdrawn the US from dozens of global and UN entities, saying that they do not benefit Washington.

His steps have been condemned by health and human rights experts. - Reuters

US charges 11 over sham marriages

US authorities have charged 11 people for their alleged involvement in a scheme to recruit Americans into sham marriages with Chinese nationals seeking to fraudulently obtain residency papers, the Justice Department said on Wednesday.

The scheme involved setting up marriages of convenience around the country between US citizens and Chinese immigrants, targeting members of the armed forces who received thousands of dollars for the arrangements.

Four former US Navy personnel previously pleaded guilty to taking part in the scam and are awaiting sentencing, authorities said.

They each face up to five years in prison. - AFP

Washington Post announces job cuts

AFP
Washington

The Washington Post, owned by billionaire Jeff Bezos, announced major job cuts on Wednesday, saying that "painful" restructuring was needed at the storied newspaper.

The Post, which gained legendary status when its reporting helped bring down president Richard Nixon in the Watergate scandal, will see "substantial" reductions in its newsroom, executive editor Matt Murray said.

The shrinking of the Post comes as major traditional media outlets in the US face intense pressure from President Donald Trump, who routinely denigrates journalists as "fake news" and has launched multiple lawsuits over coverage of his presidency.

Bezos, one of the world's richest people, has become close to Trump in the Republican's second term.

The White House's communications director, Stephen Cheung,

His Amazon behemoth controversially paid Trump's wife, First Lady Melania Trump, a reported \$40mn for a documentary this year, along with another \$35mn for marketing.

Murray said the shifts at the Post reflect the radically changing economy for news media.

This "will help to secure our future... and provide us stability moving forward," Murray said in a note to employees.

The Post did not disclose the number of job cuts, but the New York Times reports approximately 300 of its 800 journalists were laid off.

Most of the paper's journalists overseas were let go.

"These layoffs are not inevitable.

A newsroom cannot be hollowed out without consequences and its future," the labour union representing many Post journalists said in a statement.

The White House's communications director, Stephen Cheung,

issued a typically scornful message.

"Just a reminder that printing fake news is not a profitable business model," he posted on X.

Marty Baron, the Post's executive editor until 2021, said that Bezos had resisted "brutal pressure" from Trump in the past, but it was battered by "ill-conceived decisions that came from the very top."

Bezos reigned in a liberal-leaning editorial page and blocked an endorsement of Democratic presidential candidate Kamala Harris days before the 2024 election - breaking the so-called firewall of editorial independence, and seen as bowing the knee to Trump.

In response, loyal readers "fled the Post. In truth, they were driven away," Baron said.

The *Wall Street Journal* reported last month that 250,000 digital subscribers left the Post after it refrained from endorsing Harris and the paper lost around \$100mn in 2024 as advertising and subscription revenues fell.

All 172 kidnapped Nigerian churchgoers rescued

The last 89 Christians held captive since criminal gangs attacked three churches in northern Nigeria in mid-January were released yesterday, according to local officials and an AFP journalist.

The worshippers, dressed in yellow, arrived on a bus escorted by security forces, and were received by the governor of Kaduna state, Uba Sani, who said that 183 people were initially abducted: 11 managed

to escape and 83 returned three days ago.

The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) credited the power of prayer and the military for the success of the operations in Kaduna state, but did not go into details on how the churchgoers were freed or when.

CAN, which represents congregations across Nigeria, said gunmen stormed the churches on January 18. - AFP/Reuters

PEOPLE

Impeachment complaints against Marcos rejected

A Philippine congressional committee rejected impeachment complaints against President Ferdinand Marcos that could have forced him from power over allegations he swindled taxpayers out of billions of dollars. Marcos is facing a public firestorm over ghost infrastructure projects to help control floods in the country. One of two complaints had accused Marcos of packing the national budget with projects aimed at redirecting funds to his allies. Another focused on allegations that the arrest of ex-president Rodrigo Duterte, and his transfer to the International Criminal Court, constituted kidnapping. - **Reuters**

LEGAL

Assassin of Japan's former PM Abe appeals life sentence

A Japanese man has appealed against his life sentence for fatally shooting former prime minister Shinzo Abe, a district court spokesperson said. Tetsuya Yamagami, 45, sent shockwaves through Japan after he shot and killed its longest-serving prime minister with a homemade gun in July 2022, while Abe was delivering a campaign speech in the western city of Nara. "An appeal was filed," said the spokesperson. The Osaka High Court will review the appeal. Yamagami, who admitted to killing Abe, was handed a life term by the court last month, in line with prosecutors' demands, though his defence had sought no more than 20 years. - **AFP**

DECISION

Mount Fuji cherry blossom fest cancelled due to overtourism

A cherry blossom festival boasting a highly Instagrammable view of Japan's Mount Fuji has been cancelled after residents complained of overtourism fuelled by the weak yen. The city of Fujiyoshida, in central Japan's Yamanashi region, said the weeks-long event attracting around 200,000 people will be called off this year because "the quiet lives of local residents are threatened". About 42.7mn tourists flocked to Japan in 2025, an all-time high, topping 2024's record of nearly 37mn as the weak yen boosted the appeal of the "bucket list" destination. But complaints of overcrowding have grown in hotspots like Kyoto. - **Reuters**

POLICY

Malaysia imposes ban on e-waste imports

Malaysia has imposed a ban on imports of electronic waste, as it looks to tighten controls on the entry of hazardous materials and safeguard the environment, the head of the country's anti-graft body said. The country is among the world's top destinations for plastic waste and other scrap, but has struggled to fend off a deluge of generally illegal unrecyclable garbage. Malaysia anti-corruption commission chief commissioner Azam Bakri, who chairs a government taskforce on the issue, said e-waste would be reclassified under the "Absolute Prohibition" category in customs regulations effective immediately. - **AFP**

China shuns calls to enter nuke talks after US-Russia treaty lapses

AFP
Beijing

China rejected calls to enter talks on a new nuclear treaty after a US-Russian agreement expired yesterday, ending decades of restrictions on how many warheads the two powers can deploy.

Campaigners have warned that the expiry of the New START treaty could trigger a global arms race, urging nuclear powers to enter negotiations.

The US has said any new nuclear agreement would have to include China, whose nuclear arsenal is rapidly expanding.

China's foreign ministry joined a growing international chorus expressing regret yesterday over the treaty's expiry, but said Beijing "will not participate in nuclear disarmament negotiations at this stage".

"China's nuclear capabilities are of a totally different scale as those of the US and Russia," foreign ministry spokesman Lin Jian told a news conference. Russia and the US together control more than 80% of the world's nuclear warheads.

China's nuclear arsenal, meanwhile, is growing faster than any country's, by about 100 new warheads a year since 2023, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI).

China is estimated to have at least 600 nuclear warheads, SIPRI says – well below the 800 each at which Russia and the US were capped under New START.

France and Britain, treaty-bound US allies, together have another 100.

Signed during a warmer period of relations, US President Donald Trump did not follow up on Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin's proposal to extend New START's limits for one year. UN secretary-general Antonio Guterres called the expiry a "grave moment".

"For the first time in more than half a century, we face a world without any binding limits on the strategic nuclear arsenals" of Russia and the US, Guterres said in a statement.

"This dissolution of decades of achievement could not come at a worse time – the risk of a nuclear weapon being used is the highest in decades," he said, after Russian suggestions of using tactical nuclear weapons early in the Ukraine war.

A Nato official, speaking on condition of anonymity, called for "restraint and responsibility" and said that the US-led military alliance "will continue to take steps necessary" to ensure its defence.

The official condemned "Russia's irresponsible nuclear rhetoric".

China, meanwhile, "continues to rapidly expand and diversify its nuclear arsenal," they added.

A group of Japanese survivors of US atomic bombs during World War II said they feared the world was marching towards nuclear war.

"I have a feeling that in the not-too-distant future, we'll actually have a nuclear war and head toward destruction," Terumi Tanaka, co-chair of the Nihon Hidankyo group, told a press conference.

In the run-up to the treaty's expiry, the metaphorical "Doomsday Clock" representing how near humanity is to catastrophe moved closer than ever to midnight, as its

board warned of heightened risks of a nuclear arms race.

Moscow said it considered that both Russia and the US were "no longer bound by any obligations" under New START.

"The Russian Federation intends to act responsibly and prudently," it added, but warned it was ready to take "decisive" countermeasures if its national security is threatened.

China urged Washington to "handle follow-up arrangements of the treaty in a responsible way, and resume strategic stability dialogue with Russia", foreign ministry spokesman Lin said.

Trump, who has frequently lashed out at international limits on the US, also looked ready in his first term to let New START lapse as he insisted on including China.

But some observers say the expiry owes less to ideology than to the workings of the Trump administration, where career diplomats are sidelined, simply not having the bandwidth to negotiate a complex agreement. On Wednesday, Secretary of State Marco Rubio reiterated a call for a new agreement to include Beijing. "The president's been clear in the past that in order to have true arms control in the 21st century, it's impossible to do something that doesn't include China," Rubio said.

Daryl Kimball, executive director of the Arms Control Association, which warns of nuclear risks, agreed that China should engage.

But "there is no indication that Trump or his team have taken the time to propose risk reduction or arms control talks with China since returning to office in 2025", Kimball said.

Australia's PM arrives in Jakarta



Australia's Prime Minister Anthony Albanese (centre) walks with Indonesian Foreign Minister Sugiono (left) and Dananarta Indonesia chief executive officer Rosan Roeslani upon his arrival at the Halim Perdanakusuma International Airport in Jakarta yesterday.

S Korea seeks critical minerals ties with China

Reuters
Seoul

South Korea is seeking closer co-operation with China on critical mineral supply chains, its trade ministry said yesterday, as Seoul unveiled plans to secure stable supplies of rare earths needed for cutting-edge technologies.

The announcement comes after South Korea this week joined a US-led trade bloc for critical minerals with allies and partners that aims to guard against heavy reliance on China for materials strategically critical to advanced manufacturing.

The trade ministry said it would

establish a hotline and joint committee with Chinese authorities to help South Korean companies import Chinese minerals more quickly and reliably.

South Korea, which is home to leading semiconductor, electric-car battery and petrochemical companies, lacks a full supply chain for rare earths, the ministry said in a statement.

Authorities will designate 17 critical minerals needed for national security and tighten monitoring and analysis on their supplies in order to prevent an unexpected shortage, it said.

To diversify sourcing, Seoul will also co-operate with other countries including the US, Vietnam and Laos, the ministry said.

The government plans to allocate 250bn won of (\$172.35mn) of state funds to support local companies developing overseas mines.

In October, Beijing expanded control over its rare earths, including extra scrutiny for semiconductor users. At the time, South Korea's trade ministry said China's monopoly on rare earths increased instability in global supply chains.

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New Zealand PM heckled by Maori crowd at event

AFP
Waitangi, New Zealand

New Zealand's Prime Minister Christopher Luxon was heckled by a Maori crowd yesterday during a speech marking national Waitangi Day celebrations, an annual political gathering that gives Indigenous tribes a chance to air grievances.

Luxon's speech at the site where New Zealand's founding document, the Treaty of Waitangi, was signed in 1840, was at times drowned out by cries of "treason" from the large crowd.

And he accepted the country's Indigenous population were not treated equally in New Zealand society.

"No country is perfect. We're all on a journey," Luxon said. "We want equality of opportunity."

He celebrated the fact that people could heckle him during his speech, saying it was "unique and pretty special" that New Zealand's politicians could face up to robust criticism during "challenging" times.

Luxon avoided last year's event as his government faced a level of Indigenous discontent not seen for more than two decades.

Topping the list of grievances was the Treaty Principles Bill, seen by critics as an attempt to wind back the special rights given to the country's 900,000-strong Maori population.

The bill was voted down last year at its second reading in parliament.

Luxon's yesterday rejected claims his government had pushed a divisive agenda.

China removes three lawmakers with defence-sector links

Three Chinese lawmakers with ties to the defence sector have been removed from their positions, state media said in the wake of an investigation of the nation's top general. The announcement on Wednesday evening by the Xinhua news agency did not give a reason for the dismissals or say that the lawmakers, who are from the defence, aerospace and nuclear industries, were under investigation. In President Xi Jinping's years-long corruption purge, the defence ministry said on January 24 it was investigating General Zhang Youxia – second only to Xi in China's military leadership – over suspected "serious violations of discipline and law". The probe of Zhang, seen as a top Xi ally, meant the US lost a respected, well-known contact within China's military as successive US administrations have worked to build senior-level ties to avoid mishaps between the world's two most powerful militaries. - **Reuters**

Bangladesh poll preparations



Bangladesh army personnel gather at the National Stadium in Dhaka yesterday, as they prepare for the upcoming country's general election on February 12.

Japan's first woman PM tipped for thumping election win

AFP
Tokyo

Japan votes in snap elections on Sunday with polls pointing to a resounding win for Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's conservatives after a honeymoon start for the country's first woman leader.

But having angered China and rattled markets in her three months so far, it is unclear what a more confident and secure Takaichi will mean for the region or Asia's number two economy.

The arch-conservative Takaichi, 64, a heavy metal drummer in her youth and an admirer of Margaret

Thatcher, became Japan's fifth prime minister in as many years in October.

This followed a string of calamitous elections for the once-mighty Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), leaving it short of a majority in both houses of parliament.

With ordinary Japanese, especially younger ones, Takaichi has got off to a flier, becoming something of a fashion icon and a hit on social media.

"It's not just because she's a woman... overall, it's because she championed the idea of a society where the people can have hope for the future," high-school student Makoto Hara, 17, said.

Her tough talk on immigration

appears, for now, to have snuffed out the rise of the populist "Japanese first" Sanseito party.

"The words she uses are easy to understand," Mikitaka Masuyama, professor of Japanese politics at the National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies (GRIPS), said.

Her predecessor Shigeru Ishiba "had lots of thoughts inside himself, but he spoke like an academic."

Despite dipping in recent weeks, her cabinet has enjoyed approval ratings of around 70%, much higher than previous administrations.

Surveys ahead of Sunday's lower house election indicate – with some caution due to undecided voters – that the LDP will easily win more

than the 233 seats needed to regain a majority. The ruling bloc of the LDP and its coalition partner Japan Innovation Party (JIP) could surpass 300 seats out of 465 up for grabs, giving it a two-thirds majority.

The new Centrist Reform Alliance of the main opposition Constitutional Democratic Party (CDP) and the LDP's previous partner Komeito could lose half their current 167 seats.

But how relations with China might develop is an open question.

Before becoming premier Takaichi was a regular at the Yasukuni shrine, a flashpoint site honouring Japan's war dead that has long been a thorn in regional ties.

Barely two weeks in office, Takaichi suggested that Japan would intervene militarily if China sought to take self-ruled Taiwan by force.

China has never ruled Taiwan, but Beijing claims Taiwan as part of its territory and has not ruled out force to annex it.

With Takaichi having days earlier pulled out all the stops to welcome US President Donald Trump, Beijing's reaction to the unscripted remarks was furious.

It summoned Tokyo's ambassador, warned its citizens against visiting Japan and conducted joint air drills with Russia around the archipelago.

Last month, Japan's two remain-

ing pandas – animals long used by Beijing as diplomatic tools – were even returned to China.

Yee Kuang Heng, a professor in international security at the University of Tokyo, said however that tensions with China might in fact ease if the election bolsters Takaichi.

"Beijing recognises strength and could calculate that she has more staying power than anticipated and had not buckled under pressure, and therefore will have to somehow deal with her," Heng said.

Takaichi's economic policies, including a \$135bn stimulus package, have also worried investors, with bond yields rising and the yen seesawing.



Air India probes if crew followed protocols in Boeing fuel-switch incident

Reuters

New Delhi

Air India yesterday said it was investigating if its crew followed all compliance procedures when a Boeing jet took off from London with a possible fuel-switch defect, only to be later grounded in India.

Reuters is the first to report the

airline's investigation of Sunday's incident, after reporting that Britain's aviation authority had privately asked Air India for details of all maintenance actions before the decision to take off.

Britain has given Air India a week's deadline to submit a complete response, or face regulatory action against it and its fleet of 33 Boeing 787s.

Authorities have said pilots

in London had observed the fuel control switch did not stay latched in the 'run' position on two attempts, but was stable on a third.

The crew decided to fly to India, where the pilot reported a possible "defect" on landing, forcing the grounding of the plane for checks.

In a statement, Air India said it will be "following its safety investigation protocol and take appropriate action," in response to

a query whether the pilots had flagged concerns to British authorities before takeoff. It did not elaborate on possible action.

A source with direct knowledge of the matter said Air India's investigation would question the crew why they did not report the incident in London, and if they felt it was safe to fly, why they reported it later in India.

India's civil aviation authority

did not immediately respond to queries.

Fuel switches, which regulate the flow of jet fuel to a plane's engines, were at the centre of last year's crash of an Air India Dreamliner in the western state of Gujarat that killed 260 and triggered tighter scrutiny of the airline.

After Sunday's incident, Air India and Indian authorities have said there were no issues with fuel

control switches on the airline's Dreamliner fleet.

Britain's watchdog has sought a "comprehensive root-cause analysis" of the incident and a "preventive action plan" however, to avert any recurrence across Air India's Boeing 787 fleet.

"The safety of our passengers and crew remains Air India's highest priority," the airline added in its statement.

India to sign trade deal with US in March, says minister

Reuters

New Delhi

India and the US expect to sign a formal trade deal in March, after which New Delhi will lower tariffs on US goods, Trade Minister Piyush Goyal said yesterday, giving the first official timeline for the deal's adoption.

The two countries will issue a joint statement within four or five days, after which Washington will cut duties on Indian exports to 18% from 50%. India, in turn, will buy about \$500bn worth of US goods over the next five years, including \$70bn-\$80bn of Boeing aircraft, Goyal said.

Under the deal announced on Monday, US President Donald Trump slashed US tariffs on Indian goods in exchange for New Delhi stopping Russian oil purchases, bringing down tariffs and purchasing \$500bn worth of American goods.

A formal agreement on this deal will take 30-45 days and will be signed in March," Goyal told reporters in New Delhi.

Goyal said India will increase purchases of energy, aircraft and chips from US. He added orders placed or ready to be placed for aircraft, along with engines and other parts, would be worth about \$100bn.

Last month, Tata Group-owned Air India said it had nearly

India, GCC agree on terms to start free trade pact talks

India and the six-nation Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC), that includes Saudi Arabia and the UAE, have agreed on the terms to start negotiations for a free trade agreement, India's Trade Minister Piyush Goyal said yesterday.

Reuters

200 aircraft on order with US planemaker Boeing, while another smaller airline, Akasa Air, said it has orders for 226 Boeing 737 MAX jets.

Indian stocks rallied after Monday's announcement of the India-US deal, as the agreement removed uncertainty about the future of the relationship between the two allies.

However, India's main opposition party is putting pressure on the government to give details on the deal as there is concern about how much the agriculture sector has been opened.

On Tuesday, officials from both sides said India will grant the US some limited access to its market for agricultural products but maintain key protections.

Goyal on Wednesday said the government had succeeded in protecting the country's critical agriculture and dairy sectors in its trade deal.

UK court jails Russian captain for 6 years for fatal North Sea crash

A UK court yesterday handed a six-year jail sentence to the Russian captain of a cargo ship that hit an anchored oil tanker in the North Sea last year, killing one crew member.

Vladimir Motin was an "accident waiting to happen," judge Andrew Baker said as he sentenced the captain at London's Old Bailey court for the manslaughter by gross negligence of Filipino sailor Mark Angelo Pernia.

"This was a gross failure to identify the collision risk," he said.

The 38-year-old seaman who died had been married with a young child. He was lost at sea following the crash and his body has never been recovered.

Pernia's wife had been pregnant with the couple's second child at the time of the "wholly avoidable" accident, the judge said.

"The blame for it lies squarely at your hands," he said. - Reuters

Royals meet archbishop of Canterbury



The archbishop of Canterbury Sarah Mullally (left) welcomes Britain's Prince William (right), Prince of Wales and Catherine, Princess of Wales at Lambeth Palace in London yesterday. The Prince and Princess of Wales have formally met the archbishop of Canterbury for the first time since she took up office.

UK prime minister apologises to Epstein victims

AFP

London

UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer, battling for his political future, yesterday apologised to the victims of Jeffrey Epstein for appointing disgraced Peter Mandelson, a friend of the sex offender, as US ambassador.

Starmer, who also indicated he would not resign over the scandal, issued the apology after being dogged for days by his decision to send veteran politician Mandelson to Washington last February despite his ties to Epstein.

The latest crisis to hit his strug-

ging government, follows fresh allegations about the ex-envoy's cosy ties to Epstein which emerged in newly-released files last Friday.

They have left many doubting Starmer's judgement and some – including within his ruling centre-left Labour party – questioning if he can remain prime minister.

"I am sorry," an impassioned Starmer said, addressing his apology to Epstein victims who "have seen accountability delayed and too often denied to them."

"Sorry for what was done to you, sorry that so many people with power failed you, sorry for having believed Mandelson's lies and appointed him," he added, ahead of

delivering a speech on defending British values.

Facing questions about whether he could remain in power, Starmer detailed his government's priorities, before adding: "I intend to go on doing that vital work."

Starmer fired former UK minister and EU trade commissioner Mandelson in September after only seven months as US ambassador, following an earlier release of files about Epstein.

The ex-envoy was one of numerous prominent figures again embarrassed by last week's latest revelations of ties to the late US financier, who died in jail in 2019 by suicide while facing charges of alleged sex

trafficking. E-mail exchanges between them showed a warm, intimate friendship, financial dealings, private photos as well as evidence that Mandelson passed confidential and potentially market-sensitive information to Epstein nearly two decades ago. Starmer reiterated yesterday that Mandelson repeatedly lied to secure the Washington job and that he had not previously known about the "depth and darkness" of his Epstein friendship.

However, the prime minister confirmed Wednesday he was aware ties had endured despite the disgraced financier's 2008 US conviction, prompting deep unease among Labour lawmakers increasingly un-

willing to defend yet another misstep. MPs forced the government in a vote to submit all documents related to the appointment to parliament's cross-party Intelligence and Security Committee for disclosure, rather than allowing ministers and officials to choose what to release.

"The mood yesterday was the angriest I think I've ever seen Labour MPs in the 16 years that I've been in parliament," Labour lawmaker Karl Turner told Times Radio yesterday. "We can't pretend that this is not a crisis situation."

There have been growing calls from opposition parties for Starmer to fire his chief of staff Morgan McSweeney, a longtime Mandelson ally

who reportedly advocated for his Washington appointment.

The prime minister has publicly defended his aide.

Conservative leader Kemi Badenoch yesterday said Starmer's position

was "clearly untenable".

Urging Labour MPs to support calls to hold a no-confidence vote in him in parliament – where Labour has a comfortable majority – she said it was "a question of when, not if, he goes."

The furore comes ahead of a key by-election for one of Labour's parliamentary seats this month and local elections in May when the centre-left party is predicted to perform poorly.

Seeking forgiveness: Tradition of the Prophets and the righteous

The Prophets, may Allah exalt their mention, and the virtuous and righteous people were the quickest of all to comply with the call of Allah The Almighty.

Our father Adam (Adam) and our mother Hawwa' (Eve), may Allah exalt their mention:

They responded to the call of Allah The Almighty immediately after they disobeyed Him when Shaytaan (Satan) caused them to slip and drove them to commit a sin. They hastened to show remorse and to repent. Allah The Almighty Says (what means): *{They said, "Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves, and if You do not forgive us and have mercy upon us, we will surely be among the losers.}* [Qur'an 7:23]

Nooh (Noah), may Allah exalt his mention:

When he, may Allah exalt his mention, felt sympathy for his disbelieving son, he said (what means): *{...} My Lord, indeed my son is of my family; and indeed, Your promise is true; and You are the most just of judges!* [Qur'an 11:45] Then Allah The Almighty Said to him (what means): *{...} O Nooh, indeed he is not of your family; indeed, he is [one whose] work was other than righteous, so ask Me not for that about which you have no knowledge. Indeed, I advise you, lest you be among the ignorant.* [Qur'an 11:46]

Then, Nooh, may Allah exalt his mention, asked for the forgiveness of Allah The Almighty, repenting of what he said. Allah The Almighty Says (what means): *{...} My Lord, I seek refuge in You from asking that of which I have no knowledge. And unless You forgive me and have mercy upon me, I will be among the losers.* [Qur'an 11:47]

Besides, after Allah The Exalted had punished the disbelieving people of Nooh, may Allah exalt his mention, with drowning and saved the believing people with Nooh, he said (what means): *{My Lord, forgive me and my parents and whoever enters my house a believer and the believing men and believing women. And do not increase the wrongdoers except in destruction.}* [Qur'an 71:28]



Ibraheem (Abraham), may Allah exalt his mention:

Ibraheem, may Allah exalt his mention, who was the intimate friend of Allah The Exalted, said in the verse (what means): *{And who I aspire that He will forgive me my sin on the Day of Recompense.}* [Qur'an 26:82]

Moosa (Moses), may Allah exalt his mention:

Moosa, may Allah exalt his mention, says in the verse (what means): *{He said, "My Lord, indeed I have wronged myself, so forgive me," and He forgave him. Indeed, He is the Forgiving, the Merciful.}* [Qur'an 28:16]

He, may Allah exalt his mention, also says (what means): *{[Moosa] said, "My Lord, forgive me and my brother and admit us into Your mercy, for You are the Most Merciful of the merciful.}* [Qur'an 7:151]

Muhammad, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam:

The Companions of the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, narrated that the Prophet used to seek the forgiveness of Allah The Almighty at least one hundred times in each gathering, saying: "O Lord, forgive my sins and grant me (accept my) repentance; for You are the Accepting of repentance, the Merciful." In another version: "... You are the Forgiving, the Merciful." [Abu Daawood] The Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "By Allah! I ask for forgiveness from Allah The Exalted and turn to Him in repentance more than seventy times a day." [Al-Bukhari]

Furthermore, Allah The Almighty urges the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, to seek His forgiveness. He, the Exalted, Says (what means): *{... ask forgiveness for your sin and for the believing men and believing women...}* [Qur'an 47:19]

Yoonus (Jonah), may Allah exalt his mention:

Prophet Yoonus, may Allah exalt his mention, called out in the darkness of the whale's belly (what means): *{There is no deity except You; exalted are You. Indeed,*

I have been of the wrongdoers.} [Qur'an 21:87]

Daawood (David), may Allah exalt his mention:

Daawood, may Allah exalt his mention, supplicated Allah The Exalted as Allah The Exalted Says (what means): *{And Daawood became certain that We had tried him, and he asked forgiveness of his Lord and fell down bowing [in prostration] and turned in repentance [to Allah].}* [Qur'an 38: 24]

Abu Bakr, may Allah be pleased with him:

Abu Bakr, may Allah be pleased with him, the best of this nation after the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, asked the Prophet, "O Messenger of Allah, teach me an invocation with which I may invoke Allah in my prayers." The Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "Say, 'Allahumma inni thalathu nafsi thulman kathiran wa la yaghfir ath-thunoob illa ant; ighfir li maghfiratan min 'indik wa irhamni, innaka anta Al-Ghafoor Ar-Raheem' (O Allah, I have wronged my soul very much and none forgives the sins but You; so please bestow Your forgiveness and mercy upon me. No doubt, You are the Off-Forgiving, the Most Merciful)."

'Umar, may Allah be pleased with him:

'Umar, may Allah be pleased with him, said to the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, "O Messenger of Allah, ask for my forgiveness for me."

There are numerous righteous and devout people other than these, who used to seek the forgiveness of Allah The Almighty frequently; repentance was their banner, their request for forgiveness was their slogan, and they repeatedly turned to Allah The Almighty.

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



Allah burdens not any soul beyond its scope

Our understanding of religious texts and rules of Islamic Law (Shari'ah) sometimes causes us to seek to free ourselves from necessary duties and responsibilities and lean toward neglect, abandonment, and seeking excuses for ourselves. When we read the words of the Most High: Allah burdens not any soul (person) beyond its scope [Surah Al-Baqarah: 286], we attempt to interpret the aayah (verse) as a licence to refrain from being burdened with obligations so we use it when we are asked to perform any particular task.

We make the excuse that it is not within our ability or power while we forget that the aayah actually obligates us to the utmost of our human capacity. It is a proof upon the slave (al-'abd) for the necessity of expending maximum effort and capacity to perform all moral obligations. All who seek excuse from performing legal and moral obligations look at the relief in the aayah for those who are incapable, but they are blind to what it obligates up to one's capacity.

Most remarkable is the (mis)understanding of al-war'a. This (al-war'a) has a precise meaning applicable in particular to those who are the most persevering, and forbearing in eemaan (faith) among the imams and scholars who never fell short in the performance of obligatory duties or even recommended ones, nor did they neglect abandonment of that which is disliked or forbidden. They did so to the point that they left every superfluous deed that had neither benefit for the Hereafter or was unnecessary for this life.

This thin definition is applied by some to the degree that you will find those who apply abandonment of doing something for fear that it may possibly be detestable (makrooh) in Allah's sight, harmful, or even leading to either. However they do not abandon not doing something for a particular reason! Meaning, that a person may be inclined to abandon things that may seem similar to what is detestable or forbidden but they will not lean toward acting upon something that may be similar to what is commendable (mustahabb) or obligatory (waajib).

There are many who avoid particular foods, drinks, clothing or deeds fearing that within them may be that which would detract from or mar their righteousness. This is well and good. However, you will not find anything which mars or detracts in doing da'wah or jihada, correction or ordering good and forbidding evil, giving charity in the way of Allah or rushing to perform acts of good and righteousness. One may associate this as a particular obligatory duty upon a person. You may find actions that are not actually commendable however they may associate them as such. Yet you don't find anyone inclined toward doing what may be associated with an obligation or that which may be commendable. Why?

It is because we have come to prefer sitting and neglect and lightening burdens and responsibilities! It has become easier for us not to do something out of precaution of harming our Deen but not easy to act as a means of al-war'a or precaution.

The true definition of al-war'a is doing that which is similar to and associated with the obligatory or the commendable, and abandoning what is similar to or associated with the forbidden or the detestable. In the hadith related by An-Nu'maan Ibn Basheer that is agreed upon as authentic by Al-Bukhaari and Muslim, the Prophet of Allah, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: Verily the halal is clear and the haram is clear, and between the two are doubtful matters about which not many people know.

Therefore, whoever fears and avoids doubtful matters



clears his Deen of fault and whoever falls into the doubtful matters falls into the haram as the shepherd who herds his flock near a sanctuary is feared to possibly stray into it... Therefore, whoever does what could be considered or associated with the detestable will indeed fall into it in actuality and consequently possibly into the forbidden. Whoever abandons doing what is similar to the commendable will also fall into that and will possibly not do what is truly commendable and as a consequence end up neglecting necessary obligations.

The true believer must hold strongly to the Qur'an and possess the readiness to act just as much as possessing the readiness to abandon. Yes, a part of giving obedience to Allah involves the slave of Allah (al-'abd) relinquishing his relaxation and comfort with the resulting effect of then exerting efforts in work seeking the pleasure and acceptance of Allah ta'alaa and getting closer to Him, even if this involves some hardship and toil.

Action and abandonment are a part of Deen (Islam), and for this reason, ordering good (al-amr bil-ma'ruf) and forbidding evil (an-nahy 'an-anil-munkar) are at its root. Ordering the good is a call to action, while forbidding evil is a call to cessation and abandonment, and the former (ordering and forbidding) is the root of the latter (action and cessation). And Allah knows best.

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

Seek forgiveness and do not despair

Here is a Qudsi Hadith (sacred narration) that gives boundless hope to believers, and it depicts the depth of Almighty Allah's Great Forgiveness and Mercy.

Anas, may Allah be pleased with him, reported: "I heard the Messenger of Allah, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam (may Allah exalt his mention), say": Allah the Almighty said: "O son of Adam, so long as you call upon Me and ask of Me, I shall forgive you for what you have done, and I shall not mind. O son of Adam, were your sins to reach the clouds of the sky and were you then to ask forgiveness of Me, I would forgive you. O son of Adam, were you to come to Me with sins nearly as great as the earth and were you then to face Me, ascribing no partner to Me, I would bring you forgiveness nearly as great as it." (Imam At-Tirmithi)

In this Hadith, Allah the Almighty gives hope to humanity more than in any other narration. It displays the quality and attribute of the Mercy of Allah the Almighty. Indeed, He is Ar-Rahman (the Most Compassionate), and Ar-Raheem (the Most Merciful). In this Hadith, Allah the Almighty tells man of the greatness of His Forgiveness and Mercy so that no one would despair due to the excessive quantity of sins he may have committed.

This is supported by the following verse of the Noble Qur'an:

{Say, "O My servants who have transgressed against themselves [by sinning], do not despair of the Mercy of Allah. Indeed, Allah forgives all sins. Indeed, it is He who is the Forgiving, the Merciful."} [Qur'an 39:53]

This Hadith teaches us the importance of realising the Mercy of Allah the Almighty, having faith and hope in Him especially when making supplications, calling to Allah the Almighty alone for forgiveness, and the importance of repentance in the life and faith of a believer.

Allah the Almighty catches the attention of humankind by calling out: O son of Adam! This is a call to every human being. Why didn't Allah the Almighty say, 'O humankind or O people'?

The significance of this specific call is because it was the first human being, Adam, may Allah exalt his mention, who committed the first sin. Adam was an example to all humans of the consequences of sin and how to turn to Allah the Almighty for forgiveness of one's sins. This gives hope that even after committing a violation, one's sins can be forgiven if one repents to Allah the Almighty sin-

cerely the same way that the father of humankind sinned, repented, and was forgiven by Allah the Almighty. This was clearly mentioned in the Qur'an. Allah Says (what means): *{Then Adam received from his Lord [some] words, and He accepted his repentance. Indeed, it is He who is the Accepting of repentance, the Merciful}* [Qur'an 2:37]

Allah the Almighty calls out to His servants, a call of forgiveness, mercy, and compassion, for He Knows that man was created weak and is prone to fall into sin. After calling out to humankind, Allah the Almighty informs them that as long as they call on Him and put their hope in Him, He will forgive them and not mind. This statement alone can convince one to have hope and never to despair.

When one calls out to Allah the Almighty or supplicates Him, he is displaying his need and dependence on Allah the Almighty. He is demonstrating his weakness to the fact that he has no power to do anything for himself. This is the essence of submission and servitude. It is also recognition of Allah's attributes of Kindness, Generosity, Forgiving and Merciful nature, and His unlimited Power and Knowledge. Humans are never in a situation where they are not in need of Allah the Almighty. A believer always turns to Him to ask for guidance as well as to seek forgiveness of sins and shortcomings.

One of the most important conditions of supplication is that one must completely trust that Allah the Almighty will respond. One must also supplicate with sincerity, hope, and seriousness.

One must not have any doubt at all on whether Allah the Almighty will respond to one's call or if He will accept the supplication. The Messenger of Allah, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, asked us to supplicate to Allah the Almighty while being certain of a response. We must also know that Allah the Almighty does not respond to a supplication from a heart that is heedless and inattentive. The Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, also forbade that one say: 'O Allah, forgive me if You will! Instead, he, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, asked us to supplicate with will and conviction, for there is nothing so great to Allah that He cannot grant it.

Allah the Almighty Says (what means): *{And to Allah belongs the depositories of the heavens and the earth, but the hypocrites do not understand}* [Qur'an 63:7]

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

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GULF TIMES

Decisive win for Japan PM Takaichi may be best scenario for bonds, yen

A landslide win for Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) at Sunday's election may be the best outcome for bonds and the yen, analysts say, even as Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's spending pledges have repeatedly rocked markets.

The vote has investors on edge because fiscal worries have sparked a stomach-churning sell-off in the currency and bond markets, and a further leg lower would likely reverberate globally.

Last month's shakeup of Japanese debt pushed up borrowing costs from the US to Germany and provided a stark reminder to markets of the high debt levels and government spending coursing through major economies. However, analysts say an overwhelming LDP victory may in the end be positive for bonds, as it would eliminate the need for Takaichi to negotiate with opposition parties, who are touting even deeper tax cuts and broader fiscal spending.

And a big buffer would give her a freer hand to respond to pressure from markets, as she has in the past, and adjust policies to head off yen weakness or higher borrowing costs. The LDP and coalition partner Ishin could together capture as many as 300 seats in the 465-seat lower house, a poll this week showed.

"I don't know if it's going to be a landslide, but certainly Takaichi finds herself in an advantageous situation," said Shoki Omori, chief Japan desk strategist at Mizuho Securities. "That's why she doesn't necessarily need to worry about further ramping up spending," he said. "Initially, I think the LDP and Takaichi were a little bit desperate, so to speak."

Japanese government bond (JGB) yields have soared to all-time peaks since October, when Takaichi – a fiscal dove and acolyte of former premier Shinzo Abe's "Abenomics" policies – won the LDP leadership. Yields rise when bond prices fall.

The yen, meanwhile, has languished at a near 18-month low against the dollar, prompting Japanese policymakers to repeatedly threaten action – code for intervention in markets – to defend the currency.

Japanese government bond (JGB) yields have soared to all-time peaks since October, when Takaichi – a fiscal dove and acolyte of former premier Shinzo Abe's "Abenomics" policies – won the LDP leadership

The rising cost of living is a core issue at this election, and voter angst has partly been directed at persistent yen weakness for driving up the cost of imports.

Climbing bond yields push up mortgage rates and borrowing costs for businesses, and a debt market rout risks spilling over into Japanese equity markets, like it did last month.

Immediate reactions following Sunday's election result could send the yen and bonds lower, analysts said, but that in turn could prompt a policy response or at least an acknowledgement of market concerns from Takaichi – perhaps as soon as a post-election news conference on Monday.

Earlier this week, Takaichi hastily backtracked on campaign-trail remarks seen as favouring a weak yen. Back in November, she was forced to clarify her fiscal doctrine after the bond market balked at a 21.3tn yen (\$135.72bn) stimulus package.

The US, which has criticised convulsions in Japanese markets for spilling over to the United States, has also been asking Tokyo to calm the market – something which may be easier with a large parliamentary majority. "Although the administration may initially aim to strengthen its proactive fiscal expansion, pressure from the markets and the US administration would compel it to exercise restraint," Barclays analysts led by Shinichiro Kadota, head of Japan FX and rates strategy, wrote in a client note. "The reduced need for co-operation with the opposition would also support this shift."

So-called super-long bonds have been particularly sensitive to perceived loosening of fiscal restraint in Japan, the developed world's most indebted nation.

Yields on 30-year bonds surged to a record 3.88% on January 20 after Takaichi called Sunday's election and pledged a two-year hiatus on food tax without specifying how she would fill the estimated 10 trillion yen revenue hole.

To be sure, that sell-off could very well find further traction, said David Roberts, head of fixed income at Nedgroup Investments in London, and investors around the world are watching. – **Reuters**

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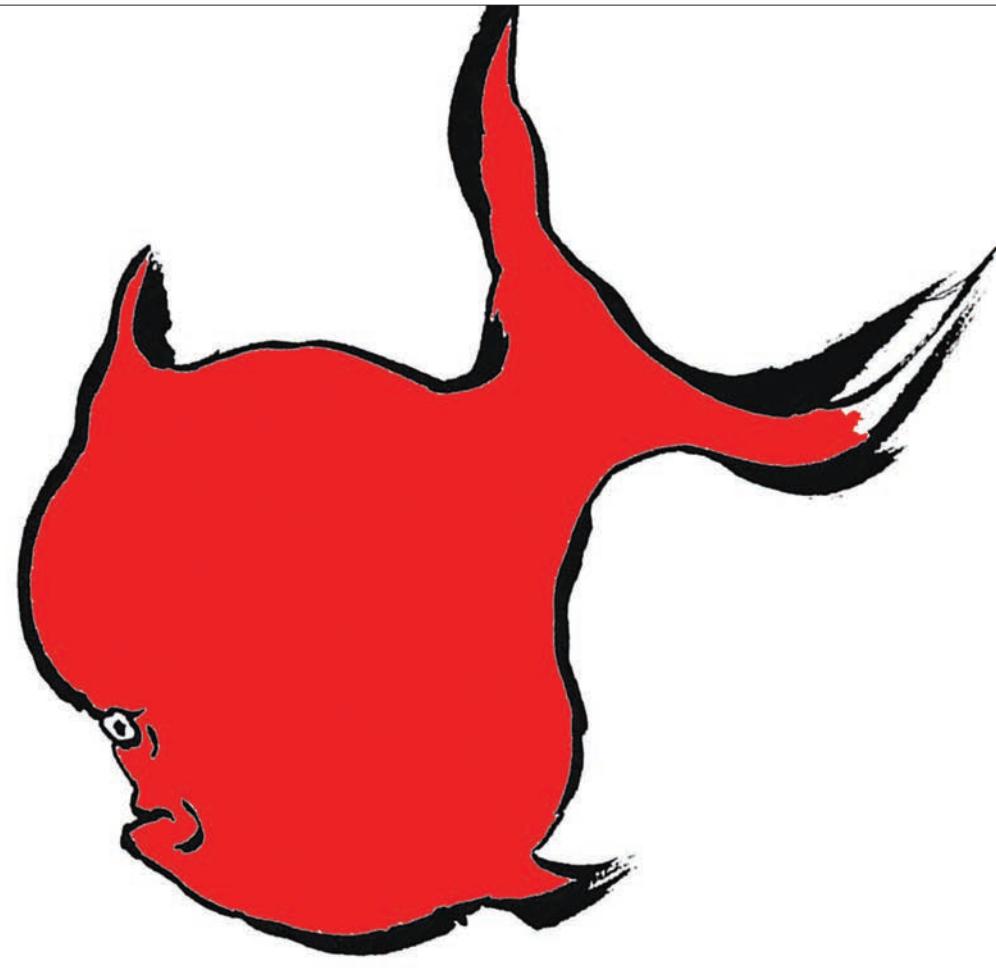
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Web Summit Qatar positioned itself as a global event in tech and innovation: GCO director

QNA
Doha

He the Director of the Government Communications Office and Chair of the Permanent Committee for Hosting the Web Summit Sheikh Jassim bin Mansour bin Jabor al-Thani affirmed that Web Summit Qatar 2026 has established itself as a leading global event in technology and innovation, having moved from the founding phase to one of maturity and impact.

He highlighted that the summit recorded a record participation of over 30,000 attendees from 124 countries, in addition to thousands of startups, investors, and international speakers, reflecting growing confidence in the summit and in Qatar as a global platform for entrepreneurs and decision-makers. In an interview with the Qatar News Agency (QNA) at the conclusion of the third edition of the summit, His Excellency noted that the unprecedented turnout, reflected in the early sell-out of attendee tickets and the startup programme, confirms Web Summit Qatar's prominent status on the international tech events map.

He emphasised that this momentum demonstrates the quality of content, the strength of the networking opportunities the summit provides, the attractiveness of Qatar's investment environment, and the government's clear support for the innovation and digital economy sectors.

He explained that Web Summit Qatar serves as a strategic tool to support sustainable development and diversify the national economy by attracting quality investments, enhancing international partnerships, and building a knowledge-based economy.

He stressed that the summit's positive impact extends beyond direct economic returns to reinforcing Qatar's position as a regional and global hub for technology and innovation, and as a launching point for a broader agenda of specialised tech conferences and events in the future. His Excellency noted that achieving this qualitative momentum reflects the summit's success in meeting its core objectives, foremost among them supporting the innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem, strengthening international

partnerships, and connecting the national digital economy with the global economy, in line with Qatar National Vision 2030 and the Third National Development Strategy. The summit also underscores

Qatar's role as a global platform for dialogue on the future of technology and the digital economy.

Record turnout

Regarding the current edition's record turnout, which led to early ticket sell-outs, HE the Director of the Government Communications Office and Chair of the Permanent Committee for Hosting the Web Summit confirmed that



HE the Director of the Government Communications Office and Chair of the Permanent Committee for Hosting the Web Summit Sheikh Jassim bin Mansour bin Jabor al-Thani speaking to QNA.

participation was exceptional in both number and quality, across startups, investors, international speakers, and partners. He pointed out that the high demand for participation reflects the global interest in the event and confirms that Web Summit Qatar has become a key destination on the international tech events calendar.

He added that this turnout is due to several factors, most notably the quality of content, the diversity of tracks, the strength of the networking opportunities the summit provides, in addition to Qatar's attractive investment environment, advanced infrastructure, and the government's clear support for the innovation sector.

Looking ahead, he said, they are exploring options to expand the summit's capacity and develop organisational models that ensure the sustainability of this exceptional participant experience while maintaining the highest standards of quality and management.

His Excellency highlighted that the summit witnessed the signing of numerous memorandums of understanding between government entities, private companies, and international institutions, focusing primarily on advanced technology, artificial intelligence, fintech, the digital economy, media, investment, and entrepreneurship.

He explained that these agreements go beyond investment aspects to include knowledge transfer, capacity building, digital solutions development, and enhancing public-private sector collaboration, contributing to the national innovation ecosystem and turning summit outcomes into practical partnerships with sustainable impact.

On the international participation and turnout, HE Sheikh Jassim bin Mansour bin Jabor al-Thani emphasised that this edition saw unprecedented global participation, both in terms of the number of countries and the size of investor and entrepreneur delegations. He added that this presence reflects growing recognition of Qatar's role as a trusted business and technology platform in the region, bridging regional and global markets.

He explained that key drivers for this turnout include Qatar's attractive legislative and economic environment, stability, high-quality

investment opportunities, and the summit's ability to provide direct access to decision-makers and build strategic partnerships in future-oriented sectors.

Moreover, His Excellency added, the accumulated success of previous editions has strengthened the summit's reputation, making it a central meeting point for investors and entrepreneurs seeking real growth opportunities.

Regarding iHeartMedia's announcement of launching "iHeart Arabic," His Excellency noted that this platform launch comes as part of a strategic partnership signed last year between the Government Communications Office and iHeartMedia, which includes establishing a regional podcast centre in Qatar. This step reflects a clear vision to develop the Arab audio content industry and enhance Qatar's position as a major hub for digital content production in the country and the region.

He added that this partnership gains additional practical significance with iHeartMedia being chosen as the official podcast partner for Web Summit Qatar 2026, providing the summit with a global platform to showcase high-quality Arabic content, connect content creators with the international tech and investment ecosystem, and transfer global expertise in production, distribution, and digital content governance.

His Excellency concluded that this initiative will focus on elevating the quality of Arabic audio content on digital platforms, promoting responsible content that balances openness with adherence to cultural and social values, in line with Qatar's approach to supporting the creative economy, empowering Arab talent, and strengthening the presence of the Arabic language in the global digital space.

Added value

He said the summit's impact extends beyond its duration, creating long-term added value for the national economy, while also stimulating sectors such as tourism, aviation, hospitality and services, and attracting high-quality

investments. HE Sheikh Jassim described Web Summit Qatar as an exceptional success despite being in its third year, noting that participation exceeded initial targets set for 2028. He said the summit has

enhanced Qatar's regional and global reputation as a hub for entrepreneurs and the digital economy, supported by advanced infrastructure, enabling legislation and strong investor access. He added that the summit has helped build international partnerships with major global technology companies such as Google, Microsoft and TikTok and encouraged hundreds of investors and trade delegations to explore cooperation with Qatari institutions.

This year's edition has drawn more than 30,000 participants from 124 countries, including over 1,600 start-ups and 800 investors. HE Sheikh Jassim said these record figures are expected to drive increased spending, hotel bookings and air travel compared with previous editions, delivering a clear boost to sectors including tourism, hospitality, aviation and services.

His Excellency noted that such a huge turnout would also support long-term growth and strategic partnerships beyond immediate financial gains.

HE the Director of the GCO Sheikh Jassim bin Mansour bin Jabor al-Thani stressed that the Web Summit Qatar has become a clear example of how to capitalise on major international events as an effective economic tool, rather than having it be solely a platform for networking and knowledge exchange. He added that this year's summit integrated perfectly and directly with the goals of Qatar National Vision 2030 and the Third National Development Strategy. He added that its contribution to sustainable development can be seen in many avenues, led with national economic diversification by attracting high-quality investments to the technology and innovation sectors, in addition to helping build a knowledge-based economy.

His Excellency said that the summit also helps transfer best practices and international expertise into the national innovation system, not to mention its ability to introduce high-quality job opportunities in the technology and digital sectors and the boost it provides to entrepreneurship locally. He added that this was reflected in the growth of number of Qatari startups participating each year, and enhancing the state's digital infrastructure, as well as bolstering the state's soft power and status as a global hub for technology and innovation, all of which can have economic and investment gains that extend beyond the days during which the summit is held.

On why tickets for Web Summit 2027 were offered early, His Excellency said that the measure was done in co-operation with the Web Summit to build on the momentum of this year's event and encourage participants to book their tickets early. He noted that this sends a strong message on the stability of the business and investment environment in Qatar and allows companies and governmental delegations to put the event on their agenda, giving them enough time to plan for it.

Spain, Portugal face floods and chaos after deadly new storm

Alcácer do Sal, Portugal: Spanish rescuers searched yesterday for a woman missing after a new storm hit the Iberian peninsula, as Portugal warned of a heightened flood risk after several months' worth of rain fell in a few hours. One death has already been confirmed in Portugal from the seventh storm to hit the peninsula this year. Portugal has barely recovered from last week's battering by rain and winds that killed five people, injured hundreds and left tens of thousands without power. Scientists say human-driven climate change is increasing the length, intensity and frequency of extreme weather events such as the floods and heatwaves that have struck the Spain and Portugal in recent years. Storm Leonardo on Wednesday dumped more than 40 centimetres (15 inches) of rain in some districts of Andalusia, southern Spain, the equivalent of several months of rainfall. Thousands of people were evacuated and roads and rail lines paralysed. Portuguese officials yesterday issued their highest flood alert for the Tagus river in the Santarem region.



City hall workers wade through floodwaters from the Sado river covering a street in Alcácer do Sal, south of Portugal, amid Storm Leonardo yesterday. (AFP)

Authorities in Sanarem evacuated people from homes near the river. Portugal's civil protection chief Mario Silvestre said it was the worst flood threat along the Tagus in nearly three decades. Already Wednesday, at Alcácer do Sal,

south of Lisbon, the Sado river burst its banks and flooded the town centre. Fire brigade divers helped evacuate residents on inflatable boats. The Civil Protection authority told AFP that 89 people had been rescued.



Emergency personnel get ready to carry out a total evacuation of the town of Grazalema, southern Spain, yesterday, amid Storm Leonardo. (AFP)

Spain's Civil Guard told AFP they were searching for a woman who had fallen into the Turvilla river in the Sayalonga municipality Wednesday. Spain's AEMET national weather agency lowered its warning level for Andalusia,

saying it would rain "less intensely". Schools reopened in most of Andalusia but remained suspended in worst-hit areas where roads and railways were still out of service.

"It's unheard of, with a little uncertainty, but whether we like it or not, Mother Nature has to find her place," Mohamed Amar Mohamed told AFP in the village of Jimera de Libar on Wednesday.

"All we can do is try to adapt and hope for the best," said the 34-year-old construction worker.

"It is clear that these are complicated, difficult days," said Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez.

Portugal's IPMA weather agency said it had been the country's second-wettest January since 2000.

Train services were suspended in the north and central Portugal. In Lisbon, municipal authorities shut parks and tunnels and suspended several river transport connections faced with the risk of floods and falling trees. A man in his 60s died in the southeast on Wednesday after being swept away by the current while attempting to drive across a flooded area. (AFP)

Russia and US agree to resume military contacts at Ukraine talks

AFP
Abu Dhabi

Russia and the United States have agreed to resume high-level military contacts at two-day Ukraine talks in Abu Dhabi yesterday, in a major step of rapprochement between the world's top nuclear powers.

Moscow and Washington suspended senior military dialogue shortly before Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, with then US President Joe Biden severing almost all contact with Russia.

But US President Donald Trump has restored communications with Moscow since he returned to the White House last year, holding several talks and a summit with Russian leader Vladimir Putin.

The agreement to restore military contacts came after two days of talks between US, Russian and Ukrainian delegates in Abu Dhabi, searching for a deal to end the war in Ukraine.

Those negotiations resulted in the first prisoner exchange in four months, but Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky called the discussions complicated and urged faster progress.

It was also announced hours after the New START treaty - the last nuclear agreement between Moscow and Washington - expired, triggering fears of a global arms race.

"The U.S. and Russian Federation agreed today in Abu Dhabi to reestablish high level military-to-military dialogue," the US military's European Command said in a statement, adding that "the parties continue to work towards a lasting peace."

"Maintaining dialogue between militaries is an important factor in global stability and peace, which can only be achieved through strength, and provides a means for increased transparency and de-escalation," it added.



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky (right) and Poland's Prime Minister Donald Tusk shake hands after a document signing ceremony at the Mariinsky Palace in Kyiv yesterday, amid Russian invasion in Ukraine. (AFP)

Moscow had not commented on the announcement.

Not easy

Moscow and Kyiv agreed to swap more than 300 prisoners at the talks in Abu Dhabi, but there were no immediate signs of progress on the thornier issue of territory.

"It is certainly not easy, but Ukraine has been and will remain as constructive as possible," Zelensky said of the talks.

"We want faster results," he told a press conference in Kyiv, speaking alongside Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk.

US mediator Steve Witkoff conceded that "significant" work still lay ahead in the quest for a broader deal to end the war, dimming hopes for a quick breakthrough.

The negotiations are the latest bid in diplomatic efforts to halt the fighting - Europe's deadliest conflict since World War II, with hundreds of thousands killed, millions forced to flee their homes and much of eastern and southern Ukraine left decimated.

As talks were underway, large swathes of the Ukrainian capital were still without heating in sub-zero temperatures, after successive Russian strikes knocked out energy supplies to hundreds of apartment blocks.

Kyiv's mayor Vitali Klitschko warned that more than 1,000 apartment blocks could be without heating for two months after a Russian strike earlier this week destroyed a critical power station.

Territory deadlock

The main sticking point in the negotiations is the long-term fate of territory in eastern Ukraine.

Moscow is demanding that Kyiv pull its troops out of swathes of the Donbas, including heavily fortified cities atop vast natural resources, before any deal.

It also wants international recognition that land seized in the invasion belongs to Russia.

Kyiv has said the conflict should be frozen along the current front line and has rejected a pull-back of forces.

Trump has been pushing both sides to negotiate an end to the war since he returned to office, boasting he could strike a deal in hours.

Zelensky said the US president's role was crucial, telling French television in an interview broadcast Wednesday that "Putin is only scared of Trump".

In a rare official admission of battlefield losses, Zelensky said Wednesday that at least 55,000 of his country's troops had been killed since Russia invaded in February 2022 - a figure lower than many independent estimates.

Russia has not disclosed how many of its soldiers have been killed. Tracking of obituaries and family announcements by the BBC and independent MediaZone outlet has found the names of more than 160,000 Russian soldiers killed in the conflict.

Russia occupies around 20 percent of Ukraine. It claims the Donetsk, Lugansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions as its own, and holds pockets of territory in at least three other Ukrainian regions in the east.

Kyiv still controls around one-fifth of the Donetsk region that Moscow demands it withdraws from. Ukraine has warned that ceding ground will embolden Moscow, and that it will not sign a deal that fails to deter Russia from invading again.

Kyiv plant that heated over 1,000 homes will take two months to repair: mayor

Kyiv: A Ukrainian power plant that was damaged in Russian strikes and that supplied heating to more than 1,100 apartment buildings in Kyiv may need two months to repair, mayor Vitali Klitschko said yesterday.

The Darnytsia thermal power plant, the capital's most important, was battered in Russia's massive barrage on Tuesday, launched on the eve of the talks in Abu Dhabi.

"Experts conclude that the facility has suffered critical damage and that it will take at least two months to restore its systems," Klitschko said, referring to the Darnytsia plant.

"This thermal power plant provided heat to more than 1,100 high-rise buildings in the Darnytsia and Dniprovska districts," he added.

Touring the site on Wednesday, AFP saw the vast extent of the damage to the plant, where almost nothing was left intact.

"It was like from a dystopian movie scene," EU ambassador to Ukraine Katarina Matherova told AFP after the visit.

Tuesday's strike on Ukraine's battered energy facilities was "the most powerful" since the start of 2022, the country's largest private energy provider said.

Recent Russian strikes have repeatedly cut power and heating to tens of thousands of homes in the coldest winter since the start of the invasion in 2022. (AFP)

France charges four suspected of spying for China, says prosecutor

AFP
Paris

French authorities yesterday charged four people, including two Chinese nationals, on suspicion of having intercepted sensitive military data for Beijing, the Paris prosecutor's office said.

The move comes after police arrested the four individuals at the weekend in the southwestern Gironde region where the two Chinese suspects allegedly rented an Airbnb as part of a plan to capture sensitive information, including military intelligence.

The Paris prosecutor's office said two individuals have been remanded into custody and two others placed under judicial supervision, without offering details on their identities.

The probe focuses on the "delivery of information to a foreign power" likely to harm key national interests. This is punishable by up to 15 years behind bars.

The case was triggered after residents on January 30 spotted the installation of a satellite dish approximately two metres (around six-and-a-half feet) in diameter, which coincided with a local Internet outage.

A search conducted the following day led to the discovery of "a system of computers connected to satellite dishes enabling the capture of satellite data", according to the prosecutor's office.

The set-up made it possible to intercept "exchanges between military entities", it said.

The two Chinese nationals had allegedly travelled to France with the intent to capture data

from the Starlink satellite Internet system and other "entities of vital importance" and transmit it back to China.

Their visa applications stated that they worked as engineers for a research and development company specialising in wireless communication equipment.

The two other suspects were arrested over allegations they illegally imported the equipment, the prosecutor's office said, without adding details of their identities.

In a separate case, a French applied mathematics professor was in December charged with allowing a Chinese delegation to visit sensitive sites in a case of suspected espionage. The engineering institute where he works has been partially designated as a "restricted area" since 2019.

US ambassador accuses Poland parliament speaker of insulting Trump

AFP
Warsaw

The United States embassy will have "no further dealings" with the speaker of the Polish parliament after claims he insulted President Donald Trump, its ambassador said yesterday.

Tom Rose said the decision was made because of speaker Włodzimierz Czarzasty's "outrageous and unprovoked insults" against the US leader.

"We will not permit anyone to harm US-Polish relations, nor disrespect (Trump), who has done so much for Poland and the Polish people," Rose wrote on X.

Poland's Prime Minister Donald Tusk responded the same day, writing on X: "Ambassador Rose, allies should respect, not lecture each other."

"At least this is how we, here in Poland, understand partnership."

On Monday, Czarzasty criticised a joint US-Israeli proposal to support Donald Trump's candidacy for the Nobel Peace Prize.

"I will not support the motion for a Nobel Peace Prize for President Trump, because he doesn't deserve it," he told journalists.

Czarzasty said that rather than allying itself more closely with Trump's White House, Poland should "strengthen existing alliances" such as Nato, the United Nations and the World Health Organisation.

He criticised Trump's leadership, including the imposition



Włodzimierz Czarzasty.

of tariffs on European countries, threats to annex Greenland, and, most recently, his claims that Nato allies had stayed "a little off the front lines" during the war in Afghanistan.

He accused Trump of "a breach of the politics of principles and values, often a breach of international law".

After Rose's reaction, Czarzasty told local news site Onet: "I maintain my position" on the issue of the peace prize. "I consistently respect the USA as Poland's key partner," he added later on X.

"That is why I regretfully accept the statement by Ambassador Tom Rose, but I will not change my position on these fundamental issues for Polish women and men."

The speaker heads Poland's

New Left party, which is part of Tusk's pro-European governing coalition, with which the US ambassador said he has "excellent relations".

It is currently governing under conservative-nationalist President Karol Nawrocki, a vocal Trump supporter.

In late January, Czarzasty, along with several other high-ranking Polish politicians, denounced Trump's claim that the United States "never needed" Nato allies.

The parliamentary leader called the claims "scandalous" and said they should be "absolutely condemned".

Forty-three Polish soldiers and one civil servant died as part of the US-led Nato coalition in Afghanistan.

Versace names Mulier as new creative head

Pieter Mulier will be the new chief creative officer at Versace, the luxury label's owner Prada said yesterday, bringing the Belgian designer under the same roof as longtime collaborator Raf Simons. Mulier, 46, who spent five years at Alaïa, replaces Dario Vitale, who worked just nine months at Versace during a surprise move in December. Mulier, who begins his new role on July 1, will reunite with fellow Belgian Simons, who has been co-designing at Prada with Miuccia Prada since 2020. Prada acquired the Versace brand last year from Capri Holdings for 1.25 billion euros (\$1.47 billion), hoping to breathe new life into a brand that had struggled under its US owner. Mulier has spent a large part of his fashion career at Simons' side, including at Jil Sander and Christian Dior, and later was creative director at Calvin Klein. "We believe

that he can truly unlock Versace's full potential and that he will be able to engage in a fruitful dialogue with the brand's strong legacy," Lorenzo Bertelli, the head of Versace, said in a statement. Mulier joined Alaïa in 2021 when he became the label's first creative director since the death of its founder, Azzedine Alaïa, whose body-moulding creations, often constructed of tight strips of knitted fabric, enjoyed their zenith in the 1990s. At Alaïa, the native of Ostend tapped his background in architecture for sculptural creations that played with volume and proportion, earning him an International Designer of the Year award at the prestigious CFDA Awards last year. A Mary Jane ballerina flat with studs, and a low and long "Le Teckel" (Dachshund) handbag, proved must-haves for many, helping to put the brand and its designer back at the centre of the fashion world.



Amir holds talks with German chancellor, discusses ways to enhance strategic ties



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani and German Chancellor Friedrich Merz held an official session of talks at the Amiri Diwan yesterday. The session discussed ways to support and strengthen the strategic relations between the two countries and ways to develop them across various areas of partnership, particularly in the economy, investment, trade, energy, and military co-operation. In addition, it discussed key regional and international issues and developments. (QNA)

Environment minister inspects nature reserves and meadows



HE Dr Abdullah bin Abdulaziz bin Turki al-Subaie, Minister of Environment and Climate Change, conducted an inspection visit to a number of rawdas (meadows) within Al Reem Reserve, including Rawdat Al Nu'man, Al Hamm, Al Haim, and the Umm Al Maa area, in addition to Ashirij Reserve. The visit came as part of efforts to monitor the condition of the rawdas and assess their environmental status. During the tour, the minister reviewed the level of vegetation growth in the rawdas and its response to the rainfall season. He also followed up on environmental rehabilitation work and the efforts to preserve soil and wild plants. The minister listened to briefings by specialists on the measures in place to protect the rawdas, as well as environmental awareness programmes aimed at ensuring their sustainability and safeguarding their biodiversity. During the visit, HE al-Subaie directed that field patrols at these sites be intensified to monitor compliance with approved environmental regulations, particularly on weekends, to curb environmental violations and protect rawdas and nature reserves.



'Qatar's approach to becoming a fashion hub distinct because it is rooted in cultural depth'

By Peter Alagos
Business Editor

Qatar's fashion industry will be defined by intentional growth, sustainability, and narrative-driven design over the next decade, according to a Doha-based Indian designer.

Manjulakshmi Bharathan noted that designers, policymakers, and consumers each play a vital role in shaping this future. She emphasised that designers must lead with vision and integrity, while policymakers must build enabling frameworks. Consumers, meanwhile, must engage with intention, she also pointed out.

In an exclusive interview with *Gulf Times*, Bharathan underscored that, through collaboration, Qatar can build an authentic, resilient, and globally respected fashion industry.

Bharathan believes this trajectory is already visible in the way Qatar is positioning itself. "Qatar's approach to becoming a fashion hub is distinct because it is rooted in cultural depth rather than commercial scale," she noted.

She said, "Unlike Dubai, which has positioned itself as a global retail and luxury marketplace, or Riyadh, which is rapidly building a mass fashion ecosystem driven by scale and youth demographics, Qatar is taking a more curated, intellectual, and design-led path."

Bharathan further explained that fashion in Qatar is closely intertwined with art, heritage, craftsmanship, and storytelling. "Platforms such as M7, museums, cultural foundations, and patronage systems play a significant role in shaping a fashion narrative that is meaningful and globally relevant," Bharathan noted.

She continued, "Qatar also offers designers the space to experiment and develop slowly and intentionally, with an emphasis on quality, sustainability, and long-term value over fast commercial turnover."

For young Qatari designers, Bharathan believes there is an opportunity and a challenge: "They are entering the industry at a pivotal



Doha-based Indian designer Manjulakshmi Bharathan.



Manjulakshmi Bharathan stands in front of a display of mannequins wearing traditional Qatari and Indian attire.

moment marked by institutional support, growing global visibility, and increasing appreciation for homegrown narratives."

While she describes the local market as "relatively small," Bharathan expressed optimism that designers will be able to navigate the challenges that come with "scaling, production access, pricing, and understanding global market dynamics."

She also stressed that mentorship is critical. "Structured mentorship helps emerging designers grow with intention, building continuity and long-term creative excellence," Bharathan said.

On sustainability, Bharathan observed that Qatar's values align naturally with a slower, more thoughtful approach to fashion. "The market is increasingly receptive to sustainable fashion, though it remains in an early stage of evolution," she said, adding that "designers play a vital role in shaping consumer awareness by communicating material choices, ethical production, and the value of slower fashion."

Retail trends are also shifting, she also pointed out, noting that international luxury brands "continue to dominate Qatar's fashion scene, but there is a growing curiosity and pride in local and regional designers." Bharathan explained, "Consumers are beginning to value narrative, authenticity, and cultural resonance alongside global luxury."

She emphasised that global connectivity is essential, further pointing out that "participation in international fashion platforms challenges designers to refine their voice and positions Qatari fashion within a broader creative context."

Bharathan said, "Balancing international exposure with a strong local identity requires clarity of vision. Authenticity and cultural confidence are what make Qatari fashion compelling on the world stage."

She also believes that investment and infrastructure will determine the industry's resilience, citing the need for "structured mentorship programmes, local production facilities, expanded education and skills training, and platforms for market access." Bharathan said, "Collaborative cultural institutions also play a vital role in elevating fashion as cultural expression."

Pointing to Qatar's cultural identity as a unique strength, Bharathan said, "Heritage and modest fashion traditions are best leveraged as a design philosophy rather than a category."

She explained, "Elegance, proportion, craftsmanship, and intention define a contemporary aesthetic that resonates globally. By reinterpreting heritage through a modern lens and positioning modesty as thoughtful luxury, Qatar can establish a refined, confident fashion narrative that is globally relevant."

MOVE Sports Festival kicks off at Old Doha Port

MOVE, Old Doha Port's six-day sports and wellness festival, launched yesterday, inviting visitors to explore expert-led panels, interactive fitness zones, and a diverse lineup of sports and wellness experiences at Mina Park.

Day 1 featured a series of fitness classes, including mobility-focused workouts and women's fitness delivered by A13 Academy and Matrix Gym, with guided sessions designed to support flexibility, strength, and recovery for participants of all fitness levels. A key highlight of the opening day was the panel discussion, "Samla: More than Just a Race," which explored the evolution of Samla from a homegrown endurance race into a nationally recognised symbol of resilience and determination.

The discussion featured Engineer Azzam al-Mannai, CEO of the Samla Race Organising Committee; Abdulaziz al-Tamimi, president of the Qatar Cycling and Triathlon Federation; and Abdullah Shaheen al-Kaabi, CEO of A13 Academy. Speakers shared insights into the values behind Samla, the role of endurance sports in shaping mindset and discipline, and the growing culture of fitness challenges in Qatar.

Across the festival, visitors explored immersive zones showcasing sportswear, equipment, and marine sports, alongside a range of family-friendly activities. A curated selection of food and beverage outlets offering fresh and healthy options complemented the festival atmosphere. MOVE continues at Old Doha Port until February 10. From February 5-9, the festival runs daily from 3:30pm to 9:30pm, while on Qatar National Sport Day, February 10, activities will take place from 7:30am to 1:30pm.

