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BUSINESS | Page 1

Expert calls for
strengthening cyber
resilience across
Qatar's key sectors

In Brief

PM receives phone
call from Turkish FM

HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani received yesterday a phone call from Minister of Foreign Affairs of Türkiye Hakan Fidan. They discussed the relations of co-operation between the two countries and ways to support and enhance them, and the latest developments in the region, in addition to several topics of mutual interest. The two sides also stressed the importance of intensifying regional and international efforts to reduce escalation and tensions in the region through dialogue and peaceful means, in order to consolidate regional security. (QNA)



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani holds talks with International Olympic Committee (IOC) President Kirsty Coventry ahead of the opening of the Milano Cortina 2026 Winter Olympic Games in the Italian city of Milan yesterday.

Amir, Italian PM discuss ways
to enhance bilateral relations

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani yesterday held talks with Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni on enhancing bilateral co-operation between the two countries, as well as a number of issues of common interest. In a post on X platform, His Highness said the meeting with the Italian PM in Milan, held on the sidelines of the opening ceremony of the Olympic Winter Games Milano Cortina 2026, provided an opportunity to review ways to strengthen co-operation between the two friendly countries and to exchange views on regional and international developments and issues of mutual interest. (QNA)

Qatar hopeful on positive outcome of US-Iran talks

Qatar has welcomed the negotiations between the United States of America and Iran, which were held in Muscat yesterday, expressing in this context its hope that they will lead to a comprehensive agreement that achieves the interests of both parties and enhances security and stability in the region.

In a statement, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) expressed State of Qatar's full appreciation to the Sultanate of Oman for hosting and facilitating the negotiations, and for its good offices with several friendly countries to defuse the crisis and enhance opportunities for constructive dialogue to address all outstanding issues. The ministry also renewed Qatar's firm support for de-escalation efforts, resolving conflicts through diplomatic means, and bolstering peace and regional stability.

Meanwhile, Egypt has reaffirmed its full support for the resumption of negotiations between the United States and Iran through the meeting being held in Muscat, under the mediation



US special envoy Steve Witkoff, Jared Kushner and Oman's Foreign Minister Badr bin Hamad al-Busaidi during a meeting in Muscat. (AFP)

of the Sultanate of Oman. In a statement, Egypt's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that Cairo's backing of efforts aimed at de-escalation and reaching a peaceful and sustainable settlement to the Iranian nuclear file comes in line with the directives of President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi.

The statement stressed that the core of these efforts must be based on creating a conducive atmosphere founded on goodwill and mutual respect, enabling the swift conclusion of a lasting

agreement and sparing the region the risks of military escalation, whose catastrophic consequences would affect all countries in the region.

The ministry emphasised that there are no military solutions to the Iranian nuclear issue, noting that dialogue and negotiations remain the only viable path forward, in a manner that takes into account the interests of all concerned parties. It affirmed that Egypt will continue to support efforts aimed at reaching an

agreement on the Iranian nuclear file, in co-ordination with its regional partners, in a way that serves the interests of both negotiating sides and the region as a whole.

The statement specifically commended the constructive efforts undertaken by Qatar, Türkiye, Oman, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan in this regard, expressing Egypt's hope that these sincere endeavours will lead to a positive breakthrough that enhances prospects for stability and peace in the region.

The ministry also underscored the importance of strengthening international efforts to address nuclear non-proliferation risks in the region in a comprehensive manner, including support for the establishment of a Middle East free of nuclear weapons without exception, the universalisation of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) in the region, and the application of comprehensive safeguards by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to all nuclear facilities. (QNA) Page 4

Al-Attiyah and Carrera in cruise control after opening leg at Qatar International Rally

Qatar's Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah and his co-driver Candido Carrera were firmly in command of the Qatar International Rally after six special stages to the north of Doha yesterday. The duo won five of the gravel speed tests in their Autotek Skoda Fabia RS to take a comfortable advantage of 92 seconds over Abdulaziz al-Kuwari and his brother Nasser. Six further special stages are planned today before the rally reaches a conclusion with the ceremonial finish at Lusail. Sport Page 4

Syrian president meets culture minister



Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa met yesterday with HE the Minister of Culture Sheikh Abdulrahman bin Hamad al-Thani, who is currently visiting Syria. During the meeting, they discussed aspects of co-operation between the two countries in cultural fields, and ways to support and develop them, as this year Qatar is the Guest of Honour of the Damascus International Book Fair. (QNA)

National Sport Day an investment in community health: PHCC

As Qatar National Sport Day represents one of the state's leading national initiatives, embodying Qatar's vision of building a healthy, active, and productive society, Primary Health Care Corporation (PHCC) has highlighted its pivotal role in embedding this concept by implementing awareness and community programmes that encourage physical activity.

PHCC notes that this year's National Sport Day (Feb 10) slogan, 'I Chose Sport', delivers a clear message that reflects community awareness of the importance of making conscious, responsible decisions about health. Dr Mariam Ali Abdul Malik, managing director of PHCC, said that Qatar National Sport Day reflects the country's commitment to preventive health and to embedding sport as a fundamental part of daily life. She noted that PHCC views this day as a national platform for raising health awareness and promoting positive behaviours across society.



PHCC notes that this year's National Sport Day slogan, 'I Chose Sport', delivers a clear message that reflects community awareness of the importance of making conscious, responsible decisions about health.

She explained that physical activity directly contributes to preventing many chronic diseases and improving both mental and physical health. The corporation integrates the concept of physical activity into healthcare services delivered through its health centres via awareness campaigns, preventive screenings, and health counselling.

Dr Zelaikha al-Wahedi, assistant managing director of Quality and Workforce Development at PHCC, stated that National Sport Day reflects the country's commitment to investing in human health as the true capital of sustainable development. Promoting physical activity improves work performance and enhances the

psychological and physical well-being of employees and the wider community.

Meanwhile, Musallam Mubarak al-Nabit, assistant managing director, Administration and Corporate Services at PHCC, stressed that National Sport Day provides an opportunity to strengthen a culture of health within workplace

"National Sport Day reflects the country's strategic vision to promote physical activity as a lifestyle for building a healthy, active society and preventing chronic disease"

and institutions. Sport contributes to higher productivity, reduced work stress, and improved quality of life for employees.

As for Dr Samya Ahmad al-Abdullah, assistant managing director, Operations and Clinical Affairs and Executive Director of Operations at PHCC, National Sport Day is strengthening preventive health. She emphasised that regular exercise improves health outcomes and reduces the need for medical interventions.

Dr Mohammed Ghaith al-Kuwari, assistant managing director of strategy and business development at PHCC, stated that National Sport Day reflects the country's strategic vision to promote physical activity as a lifestyle for building a healthy, active

society and preventing chronic disease.

Furthermore, Dr Abdullah Mohammed al-Mansoori, executive director, Administration and Finance Directorate at PHCC, said investing in physical activity yields long-term reductions in healthcare costs. Prevention through sport helps decrease rates of chronic disease.

Finally, Huda Mohsen al-Wahedi, executive director, Corporate Communications Directorate at PHCC, added that National Sport Day is an important opportunity to promote awareness messages encouraging healthy lifestyles. She emphasised the central role of Corporate Communications Directorate in delivering these messages to all segments of society.



Qatar participates in high-level meeting in Slovenia

Qatar, alongside Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt, and Bahrain, participated yesterday in a high-level meeting in Ljubljana on regional issues with Slovenian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign and European Affairs Tanja Fajon.

Qatar was represented at the meeting by HE the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sultan bin Saad al-Muraikhi.

The meeting discussed a number of issues, foremost among them developments in the Gaza Strip and the need to adhere to the ceasefire agreement and fully implement its provisions, ensure the entry of sufficient and sustained humanitarian assistance into the Strip, support efforts to ensure the success of the peace plan launched by US President Donald Trump, and move toward a clear political horizon that embodies an independent, sovereign Palestinian state

along the June 4, 1967 lines, with East Jerusalem as its capital, based on the two-state solution.

The meeting also dealt with developments in the occupied West Bank, stressing the need to halt illegal unilateral Israeli measures in the West Bank and Israeli violations against Islamic and Christian holy sites in occupied Jerusalem, which exacerbate tensions and undermine all efforts at de-escalation.

The meeting commended Slovenia's positions in support of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people and its recognition of the State of Palestine based on the two-state solution.

Furthermore, the meeting addressed developments in the region, ways to reduce escalation through negotiation and dialogue, and efforts to resolve the Russian-Ukrainian crisis.

- QNA



Youth empowerment 'central to Qatar's innovation future'

By Peter Alagos
Business Editor



Applied AI learning and youth empowerment are emerging as central pillars of Qatar's innovation strategy, according to a top executive of a Qatari tech firm.

Nayef al-Ibrahim, co-founder and chief executive of Ibtechar, said that the country is scaling initiatives to reach more young innovators, particularly as Doha recently hosted Web Summit Qatar 2026.

"Youth empowerment is at the heart of Qatar's innovation future," al-Ibrahim told *Gulf Times* in an interview. "Applied AI learning not only builds technical skills, but also cultivates problem-solving, creativity, and critical thinking among young innovators."

He explained that these programmes are expanding through partnerships with local organisations, international collaborators, and startups, offering hands-on and accessible experiences to a wider audience.

"With Doha in the global spotlight at Web Summit, we have a unique opportunity to showcase these initiatives, spark international collaboration, and inspire the next generation to engage with AI in meaningful and impactful ways, helping shape Qatar's innovation ecosystem for years to come," al-Ibrahim said.

Asked about the skills most critical for young innovators, he said that technical knowledge alone is insufficient, emphasising the importance of critical thinking, creativity, adaptability, and a strong ethical mindset, combined with artificial intelligence (AI) literacy and collaborative approaches.

"Combining AI literacy with problem-solving skills and collaborative approaches ensures technology is used responsibly to create positive societal impact," he said.

On fintech, al-Ibrahim said that Qatar presents enormous opportunities in digital payments, financial inclusion, and smart banking services.

He noted that local startups can compete globally by leveraging AI, data analytics, and agile innovation, while tailoring solutions to the local market.

"Collaborations with innovation labs, mentors, and international partners further accelerate growth and global readiness," al-Ibrahim added.

He noted that Ibtechar supports startups through mentorship, tailored strategies aligned with national priorities, and collaborative environments designed to accelerate growth.

On frontier technologies, al-Ibrahim said that quantum computing, AI, and blockchain will redefine problem solving across

multiple sectors.

In Qatar, he said these technologies can enhance data driven decisions, accelerate research, and open new opportunities in energy, healthcare, and finance.

"The key is preparing talent and building the right infrastructure today so that these technologies can be adopted strategically rather than reactively," al-Ibrahim pointed out.

Asked to elaborate on his leadership approach, he said that balancing visionary ideas with practical implementation is essential.

Al-Ibrahim explained that Ibtechar combines strategic planning, experimentation, and flexible learning to ensure bold ideas are tested, refined, and scaled into tangible impacts.

"It's all about balance and focus," he explained. "Vision sets the direction, yet practical implementation requires structured processes, measurable milestones, and strong collaboration."

"It is crucial to maintain such a balance... such an approach allows us to turn bold ideas into real and tangible impacts that align with national priorities and global practices," al-Ibrahim said.

"We hope Ibtechar is recognised as a strategic regional enabler of innovation and capacity building, empowering governments, organisations and individuals to turn ambition into measurable impact through innovation labs, digital capabilities, and AI-powered solutions," he stated.

"By fostering collaboration and knowledge exchange, our goal is to position Qatar as a global leader in innovation that delivers measurable societal and economic impact responsibly," al-Ibrahim added.



Attorney-general meets Arab League secretary-general

Arab League Secretary-General Ahmed Aboul Gheit met with HE the Attorney-General of Qatar Dr Issa Saad al-Jafali al-Nuaimi in Cairo. During the meeting, the two sides exchanged views on topics of mutual interest, and discussed ways to support and develop them.

- QNA

Qatar condemns bomb attack on Pakistan mosque

Qatar has expressed its condemnation and denunciation of the bombing that targeted a mosque in Islamabad, which resulted in deaths and injuries. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) expressed in a statement yesterday Qatar's condolences to the families of the victims and to the government and people of Pakistan, and its wishes for a speedy recovery for the injured.

- QNA

Judicial online auctions on real estate, vehicles

The Department of Judicial Evictions and Auctions at the Supreme Judicial Council has announced that a judicial vehicle auction will be held through the "Court Auctions" application tomorrow (February 8), from 4pm-7pm.

Another judicial auction on real estate will also be held tomorrow through the "Court Auctions" application from 9.30am-11am.



Lebanon PM meets Qatar's ambassador

Lebanese Prime Minister Nawaf Salam met yesterday with Qatar's ambassador to Lebanon Sheikh Saad bin Abdulrahman al-Thani. The meeting dealt with bilateral co-operation between the two countries.

- QNA

Marijuana seized

The Air Cargo Customs Department at the General Authority of Customs (GAC) has thwarted an attempt to smuggle 590g of marijuana. The GAC inspector on duty suspected the contents of an incoming postal parcel and upon thorough search and inspection, the illicit drug was found secretly hidden inside tightly closed food cans inside the parcel.



Aspetar highlights innovative health, wellness initiatives on National Sport Day



By Joseph Varghese
Staff Reporter

Aspetar, Orthopaedic and Sports Medicine Hospital, has appealed to community members to make use of its "National Physical Activity Guidelines for Qatar" for regular physical activity as Qatar celebrates National Sport Day 2026.

Aspetar has launched the "National Physical Activity Guidelines for Qatar", a national reference that helps community members, fitness enthusiasts, and amateur athletes to adopt a more active and healthier lifestyle.

The guidelines aim to improve public health and prevent chronic diseases through simple, yet effective advice centred on regular movement rather than medication alone.

"At Aspetar, we believe that sport is a fundamental pillar of building a healthy and progressive society," said acting Aspetar

director-general Khalid Ali al-Mawlawi. "Physical activity is not just exercise – it is a lifestyle that enhances health, wellbeing, and safety."

"Our approach to sports medicine goes beyond treatment; it empowers individuals to move intelligently, safely, and sustainably," he added.

The guidelines recommend 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic exercise per week for adults, and 60 minutes daily for children, with tailored advice for specific groups such as pregnant women and older adults.

They highlight the proven benefits of physical activity in reducing the risk of more than 40 chronic conditions commonly seen in primary care, including diabetes, hypertension, and cardiovascular disease.

The document introduces the concept of a "movement prescription", based on four elements – frequency, intensity, type, and du-

ration – to help design exercise programmes suited to everyone's needs and abilities.

It offers practical examples of daily activities that meet these recommendations while emphasising reduced sitting time and integrating movement into everyday routines.

As part of its National Sport Day celebrations, Aspetar will host an interactive event to raise health and wellness awareness among its staff and athletes.

The Departments of Physiotherapy and Sports Podiatry will organise a two-day activity on February 8-9 under the theme *Steps Towards Better Health*.

Participants will have the opportunity to assess their personal "walking and running patterns" using state-of-the-art motion analysis systems typically used in evaluating elite athletes.

Aspetar's expert team will provide on-the-spot movement assessments, personalised advice on foot health, guidance on

choosing the right footwear, and tips on injury prevention.

This year, Aspetar will also participate in the Aspire Zone Foundation's National Sport Day activities at Aspire Park.

Aspetar will offer mobile health units providing free health checkups including blood pressure, glucose, and nutrition consultations – along with educational sessions focused on healthy eating.

The Aspetar Sports Nutrition department has launched a comprehensive digital platform providing credible information on the safe use of dietary supplements, addressing common questions and empowering active individuals with reliable knowledge.

Additionally, the department recently published a scientific study exploring the relationship between nutrition and bone injuries among runners, particularly stress-related bone injuries caused by repetitive strain.



Carnegie Mellon University - Qatar honours 182 outstanding students

Carnegie Mellon University in Qatar (CMU-Q), a Qatar Foundation (QF) partner university, has recognised the outstanding academic performance of 182 students who were named to the Dean's List for the fall 2025 semester.

The Dean's List ceremony is held twice each academic year to celebrate students who have demonstrated exceptional academic achievement in the previous semester.

The honourees were 28 first-years, 37 sopho-

mores, 55 juniors, and 62 seniors.

Addressing students at the event, CMU-Q dean Michael Trick said the Dean's List represents one of the most prestigious forms of recognition for students who consistently achieve outstanding academic performance.

"It is a testament to their perseverance and determination to excel," he said. "We are incredibly proud of their accomplishments and look forward to seeing them continue to thrive in their academic and professional pursuits."



Noble Queen Globe 2025 to attend Filipino business conference in Qatar

Jeanette U Gotanggogan, crowned Noble Queen Globe 2025, is set to return to Qatar as one of the distinguished personalities who will grace the 'Kabayan Connect Qatar Business Conference & Exhibition' at the Crowne Plaza Doha - The Business Park on February 16.

Gotanggogan, who represented the Filipino community in Qatar, was crowned during the Noble Queen of the Universe 2025 Coronation Night held at Okada Manila on December 4, 2025. She also received special recognitions as Best in Advocacy and Legacy Crown Brand Ambassador.

Other 2025 Noble crown titlholders include Alexia Nunez Muller Roger of Brazil (Noble

Queen of the Universe), Sara Lopez of Luzon, Philippines (Noble Queen International), Brenda Shangme Darrough from the Filipino community in the USA (Noble Queen Earth), Gail De Asis of Mindanao, Philippines (Noble Queen Nation), and Hinata Tarutani of Japan (Noble Queen Princess International).

Gotanggogan spent over two decades working in Qatar's oil and gas industry before establishing a multi-awarded manpower recruitment agency in the Philippines. Through her company, she has successfully deployed thousands of overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) to Qatar and other countries worldwide. She remains actively involved in outreach programmes both in

Qatar and the Philippines, with a strong advocacy focused on uplifting the lives of OFWs through financial literacy, empowerment events, and community initiatives.

Apparently, Jeanette was also proclaimed as "Best in Advocacy" and "Legacy Crown Brand Ambassador" during the Asia Golden Legacy Charity Awards held on December 20, 2025, at Heritage Hotel, Manila, Philippines.

During the much-anticipated Kabayan Connect Qatar event, Gotanggogan will lead the ceremonial ribbon-cutting alongside other dignitaries and deliver an inspirational talk on OFW financial literacy, with particular emphasis on practical retirement planning.



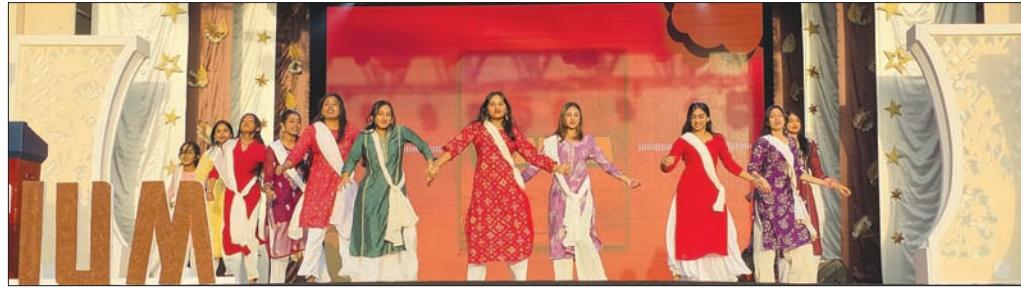
Jeanette Gotanggogan



Jeanette (second right) with other titlholders.



BPS bids fond farewell to Grade 12 students



Birla Public School (BPS), Doha, organised a farewell ceremony, titled "Elysium" for the Grade XII students on January 29 at the main school campus.

The ceremony was organised by students of Grade XI. The programme featured a blend of

cultural performances, nostalgic moments, and warm tributes.

Adding to the celebratory spirit, the Grade XI students presented a melodious group song.

Speeches were also delivered by Grade XII students representing the Science, Commerce, and Humanities streams. This

was followed by a group dance by Grade XI. A much-awaited moment of Elysium was the announcement and crowning of Birla prince and princess. Beno Arimboor was crowned as 'Birla Prince' and Lena Mariya Thomas as 'Birla Princess'. It was followed by a cake-cutting ceremony.

Students receive blessings ahead of CBSE exams



The Blessing Ceremony for Grade 10 students of Birla Public School (BPS) was held recently at the Basant Kumar Birla Auditorium, marking an important milestone in their academic journey as they prepare to appear in their forthcoming CBSE Grade 10 board examinations.

The ceremony was graced by principal, Dr Anand R Naik; vice-principals Radhika Rele and Edna Fernandez; the heads of various sections; along with faculty members and students.

The prayer was led by Smitha Kodale, the head of the Social Science Department.

Lissy Mathew, the headmistress of secondary section, welcomed the dignitaries.

A special segment of the ceremony featured student reflections. Arshal Kanichai Remin and Khadija Mohammed Noorul Hasan of Grade 10 shared their journey from kindergarten to the first National examinations, expressing gratitude to their teachers.



The central highlight of the ceremony was the formal distribution of Good Luck cards and blessings for each student.

The ceremony concluded with a vote of thanks proposed by Shaikh Waahida, year co-ordinator of Grade 10.

IIS student finishes second in quiz contest

Davin Sheldon D'Souza of Ideal Indian School (IIS) Class X secured the second position in "Quiz Quest", an inter-school competition organised by the Ishrae-K12 Qatar chapter, held at ICC - Ashoka Hall recently. The event witnessed the participation of 45 students representing various CBSE schools across Qatar. The chairman, president and principal have congratulated the student.



Innovation, creativity showcased at Mesis



MES Indian School - Abu Hamour branch (Mesis) recently hosted Crescendo IV, an event celebrating innovation, creativity, and experiential learning through Project-Based Learning (PBL) on the theme "Around Us". The programme was inaugurated by chief guest, Saejee Bin Abutty, director of ministry, embassy affairs and public relations, accompanied by Shaheed Alungath, Faisal Mayan, and Firoz Kolathay-

il, members of the MES Governing Board.

Around 1,200 students from Grades 3-9 and Grade 11 participated.

Each class explored a distinctive theme, ranging from nature-based topics such as Weather and Seasons, Water, Natural Disasters, Air Pollution, Jungle Verse, Farming and Agriculture, Ice Age, and Planets, to real-world and societal applications including Road Safety, Mysteries

and Miracles of the World, Souq to the Silk Roads, Blood, Unity, Sports, Media Literacy, Colours of Life, Oil and Natural Gas Industry, and Innovation, Technology and Society.

Participants were assessed across three competitive categories - Grades 3-5, Grades 6-8, and Grades 9 and 11.

The chief guest, along with the school principal, Pramila Kannan, and the vice-principal, lauded the students' efforts.

DPS-MIS conducts art festival to mark silver jubilee



DPS-Modern Indian School (DPS-MIS) conducted the fourth edition of Silver Spectrum Aakaar 2025-26 art fest on January 31 as part of its silver jubilee celebrations.

The theme was "Art Has the Power to Bring Peace".

In his address, chief guest Rocky Fernandes lauded students for bringing emotions to life on canvas and the art department for bringing the exhibition to life, which included the record-setting largest sustainable mosaic artwork.

Principal Asna Nafees emphasised art as a medium of expression and peace, acknowledging Qatar's efforts to harness art as a voice of solidarity with humanity, the environment, and the global community. Tessema Asrate, the Ethiopian artist was the special guest.

The exhibition featured diverse artworks in watercolours, acrylics, and mixed media. The collaborative masterpieces, inspired by Qatar National Vision 2030, wove together threads of sustainability, innovation, and cultural harmony.

The highlight was a 2,500sq ft sustainable mosaic created by 2,500 students from KG to Grade X using recycled materials, officially recognised by the India Book of Records and Asia Book of Records. The artwork depicted India-Qatar monuments, celebrating academic excellence, Indo-Qatar friendship and Qatar National Vision 2030.





Expatriate forum marks silver jubilee with cultural grandeur

Tulukoota Qatar (TKQ), a leading associate of the Indian Cultural Centre under the Indian embassy, celebrated its silver jubilee, Tulusiri, recently, at DPS-MIS auditorium.

The event drew a vibrant audience and showcased Tulunadu's rich heritage through music, dance, and visual storytelling.

Guests were welcomed with an artistic entrance featuring an elephant adorned with Poorna Kumbha, flower petals, and Pili Vesha, alongside a striking tableau of Mangaluru's iconic Kalasha. Panaka, TKQ shawls and silver jubilee souvenirs further enhanced the cultural spirit.

The programme opened with Cultural Secretary Divyashree, introducing M C Navaneeth Shetty Kadri, followed by the ceremonial lamp lighting by TKQ president Sandesh Anand, dignitaries, and founder members.

In his address, Anand thanked members, volunteers, sponsors and the community for the social



service, which included recent wheelchair donations to Mangalore's Government Hospital.

General secretary Pravina Shetty presented the annual report,

followed by a welcome dance choreographed by Divyashree. The chief guest, Indian ambassador Vipul and ICC president Manikantan praised TKQ.

Special awards were also given. Ashley Fernandes received the Tulunada Seva Tudar Award. Nadoja Dr G Shankar and Haji Zakariya Jokatte were honoured with Tulunada Bolpu, and Vishweshwara Bhat and Deepak Shetty were also felicitated. The silver jubilee souvenir, Nirel was also released. A highlight was "Journey of Silver Legacy", a grand enactment of TKQ's 25-year journey by over 150 members, followed by the Gurukiran musical show. Gurukiran was conferred Tulunada Nada Guru, and Anushree received Tulunada Dhruva Siri.

SIS student excels in national contest



Nemsith Nimpura, a student of Grade VIII at Shantiniketan Indian School (SIS), emerged as the winner in the Veer Gatha 5.0 competition held under the Middle Stage (Grades 6-8) category. He was also recognised as the winner from the GCC region. Veer Gatha 5.0 is a prestigious national-level initiative jointly organised by the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Education, and MyGov, Government of India. Nemsith's winning artwork stood out for its creativity, historical insight and emotional depth, reflecting a deep sense of patriotism and respect for national heroes. Nemsith received a special invitation to New Delhi and was personally appreciated during the Republic Day celebrations on January 26, 2026, a rare honour. The school has congratulated the student and acknowledged the guidance of art teacher, Noufal K V, as well as the support of his parents.

Iran says talks with US in Oman were 'good start', will continue

Reuters
Muscat/Dubai

Iran's top diplomat said yesterday that nuclear talks with the US mediated by Oman were off to a "good start" and set to continue, in remarks that could help allay concern that failure to reach a deal might nudge the Middle East closer to war.

But Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said after the talks in the Omani capital Muscat that "any dialogue requires refraining from threats and pressure. (Tehran) only discusses its nuclear issue... We do not discuss any other issue with the US."

While both sides have indicated readiness to revive diplomacy over Tehran's long-running nuclear dispute with the West, Washington wanted to expand the talks to cover Iran's ballistic missiles, support for groups around the region and "treatment of their own people", US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said on Wednesday.

Iranian officials have repeatedly ruled out putting Iran's missiles — one of the largest such arsenals in the Middle East — up for discussion, and have said Tehran wants recognition of its right to enrich uranium.

For Washington, carrying out enrichment — a possible pathway to nuclear bombs — inside Iran is a red line. Tehran has long denied any intent to weaponise nuclear fuel production.

"It was a good start to the negotiations. And there is an understanding on continuing the talks. Co-ordination on how to proceed will be decided in the capitals," Araghchi told Iranian state TV. "If this process continues, I think we will reach a good framework for an understanding."

TALKS WERE 'VERY SERIOUS', SAYS OMAN

Mediator Badr al-Busaidi, Oman's foreign minister, said the talks had been "very serious", with results to be considered carefully in Tehran and Washington. The goal was to reconvene in due course.



Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi meets with Omani Foreign Minister Sayyid Badr al-Busaidi in Muscat, yesterday.

Despite the talks, the US announced yesterday it was sanctioning 15 entities and 14 shadow-fleet vessels connected to illicit trade in Iranian petroleum, petroleum products and petrochemical products, the latest US economic measures targeting Tehran and trade with it.

The Islamic Republic's leadership remains deeply worried that Trump may still carry out his threats to strike Iran after a US naval buildup in seas in the region.

"The lack of trust is a huge challenge during the talks and it should be overcome," Araghchi said.

Last June the US struck Iranian nuclear targets, joining in the final stages of a 12-day Israeli bombing campaign. Tehran has since said it has halted uranium enrichment activity.

The naval buildup, which Trump has called a massive "armada", has followed a government crackdown on nationwide protests in Iran last month, heightening tensions between Washington and Tehran.

Trump has said "bad things" will probably happen if a deal cannot be reached, increasing pressure on the Islamic Republic in a standoff that has led to mutual threats of airstrikes.

World powers and regional states fear a breakdown in the ne-

gotiations would ignite another conflict between the US and Iran that could spill over to the rest of the region.

Iran has vowed a harsh response to any strike.

IRAN'S 'RED LINE'

Negotiators in Oman will have to navigate Iran's "red line" on discussing its missile programme to reach a deal and avert future military action. Tehran has ruled out talks on its "defence capabilities, including missiles and their range".

In a show of defiance, Iranian state TV said hours before the talks that "one of the country's most advanced long-range ballistic missiles, the Khorramshahr-4", had been deployed at one of the Revolutionary Guards' underground "missile cities".

However, Tehran is willing to show "flexibility" on uranium enrichment, including by handing over 400kg of highly enriched uranium — refined closer to bomb-grade — and accepting zero enrichment under a consortium arrangement as a solution, Iranian officials told Reuters last week.

Iran also demands the lifting of US sanctions, reimposed since 2018 when Trump, during his first term in the White House, ditched Iran's 2015 nuclear deal with six world powers.

"I long to return to my homeland, despite everything that happened, the bombardment, and despite the fact that I will be returning to live in a tent," Rayyan, who fled in March 2024, told Reuters from Egypt before crossing back in on Thursday.

After months of treatment in Egypt, Rayyan was eventually able to walk again. And on Thursday, she, her mother and her children were among a small number of Palestinians allowed to return to Gaza after Israel reopened the Rafah border crossing, largely shut since the start of the fighting in October 2023.

"I long to return to my homeland, despite everything that happened, the bombardment, and despite the fact that I will be returning to live in a tent," Rayyan, who fled in March 2024, told Reuters from Egypt before crossing back in on Thursday.

Reuters followed her journey from the Egyptian town of Al Arish, where thousands of Palestinians have taken refuge. Her children — Hanan, 8, Ezz, 5, and Mohammad, 4 — grinned from ear to ear as they packed their suitcases with blankets and winter coats. Hanan put a bow in her hair in anticipation of the reunion with her father. "We are going to Gaza!" the kids chanted excitedly before heading off towards the border.

Rayyan and her children left midday on Thursday for the Rafah crossing, about 50 kilometres from Al Arish. Once there, they would have to clear three checkpoints: one run by Egypt, another by Palestinian and European officials, and a third by Israeli security forces.

A bus would then carry them from Rafah, which Israeli forces have destroyed and depopulated after retaining control of the town following the October ceasefire deal, to the city of Khan Younis in Hamas-controlled territory. It was nearly midnight.

For Palestinians returning to Gaza, a bittersweet reunion

Reuters
Gaza/Cairo

Eatedal Rayyan waited for two years: a reunion with her husband in Gaza, where she says yearning for family and homeland has persisted despite widespread destruction from the enclave's two-year war.

Rayyan, 29, left Gaza with her mother and three children after suffering a leg injury that doctors warned could need amputation if left untreated. She was one of tens of thousands who fled to Egypt in the early months of the conflict.

After months of treatment in Egypt, Rayyan was eventually able to walk again. And on Thursday, she, her mother and her children were among a small number of Palestinians allowed to return to Gaza after Israel reopened the Rafah border crossing, largely shut since the start of the fighting in October 2023.

"I long to return to my homeland, despite everything that happened, the bombardment, and despite the fact that I will be returning to live in a tent," Rayyan, who fled in March 2024, told Reuters from Egypt before crossing back in on Thursday.

Reuters followed her journey from the Egyptian town of Al Arish, where thousands of Palestinians have taken refuge. Her children — Hanan, 8, Ezz, 5, and Mohammad, 4 — grinned from ear to ear as they packed their suitcases with blankets and winter coats. Hanan put a bow in her hair in anticipation of the reunion with her father. "We are going to Gaza!" the kids chanted excitedly before heading off towards the border.

Rayyan and her children left midday on Thursday for the Rafah crossing, about 50 kilometres from Al Arish. Once there, they would have to clear three checkpoints: one run by Egypt, another by Palestinian and European officials, and a third by Israeli security forces.

A bus would then carry them from Rafah, which Israeli forces have destroyed and depopulated after retaining control of the town following the October ceasefire deal, to the city of Khan Younis in Hamas-controlled territory. It was nearly midnight.



Palestinian mother of three, Eatedal Rayyan, 29, reunites with her husband, Ahmed Rayyan, as she returns to Gaza with their children after she received medical treatment in Egypt, at Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip.



Palestinians coming from Rafah crossing arrive at Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip.

when Rayyan and her family arrived in Khan Younis, her husband Ahmed eagerly waiting. The two held each other in a long embrace. Ahmed kissed and hugged his children. The girl, Hanan, clung to her father's leg.

Rayyan said she knew much of Gaza had been demolished in the war but that re-entering still shocked her to the core.

"No building is standing," Rayyan said. "Everything is destroyed, destroyed. There is no electricity, or anything."

Their family used to have a large house in Al-Saftawi, a district near Gaza City in the north, but it was destroyed in the war, Ahmed said. They would now live together in a tent in a Gaza City encampment.

"I tried in every possible way and managed to get three mattresses for five people to sleep on," Ahmed said. The Rafah crossing is the only exit and entry point for nearly all of Gaza's more than 2mn residents. Its limited reopening on Monday was a key element of US President Donald Trump's plan to end the Israel-Hamas war.

Around 50 people had been expected to cross in each direction daily, but the actual numbers have been far fewer. On Thursday, only 21 Palestinians, including Rayyan and her children, re-entered Gaza, according to enclave authorities.

Those who have crossed back into Gaza say they were harassed and interrogated by Israeli forces and by members of a local gang backed by Israel. Israel's military denies this.

"There were some people (who were travelling) with us, like young men, they abused them — for example, they tied their hands, blindfolded them, humiliated them, they kept interrogating them," Rayyan said.

She said many people had asked her why she would want to leave Egypt for isolated, rubble-covered Gaza, where food and water are scarce, most of the population is displaced and frequent ceasefire violations have killed hundreds of people.

"It is true that life in Egypt was good, everyone was kind to us," Rayyan said.

"But still, you long for your country, your family, your relatives, your husband, your life. Being away from home is hard. Life in Gaza is still beautiful, even though it's been destroyed."

Pro-Palestinian flotilla reveals new mission to Gaza

AFP
Tunis

A flotilla of pro-Palestinian activists who attempted to reach Gaza last year will set sail for the besieged territory again next month, one member said yesterday.

The Global Sumud Flotilla said the new mission set for March 29 would be "the largest co-ordinated humanitarian intervention for Palestine in history" and will mobilise "thousands from over 100 countries". "We will be sailing from Barcelona, Tunis, Italy and

many other ports not yet made public," Brazilian activist Thiago Avila said. The group said an overland convoy would also leave for Gaza on the same day, without specifying from where.

The campaigners sought to break an Israeli blockade by delivering aid to Gaza by sea last October, before they were intercepted by Israel, detained and deported.

Israel controls Gaza's borders and scrutinises all aid coming into the territory. The activists describe their actions as a "non-violent response to genocide, siege, mass starvation, and the destruction of civilian life in Gaza".



Syria's Justice Minister Mazhar al-Wais (left) and Lebanese Deputy Prime Minister Tarek Metri, exchange signed prisoner swap agreements at the Government Palace, in Beirut, yesterday.

Lebanon, Syria ink deal on prisoner handover

AFP
Beirut

Lebanon inked an agreement with Syria yesterday to hand some 300 convicts over to Damascus, a move seen as key to helping turn a new page in ties between the countries.

Overcrowded Lebanese prisons hold more than 2,200 Syrians held on various charges.

Many of them are still awaiting trial, while others are in custody for alleged membership in fighter groups that were opposed to

now ousted Syrian president Bashar al-Assad, who was supported by Lebanon's Hezbollah group during the Syrian civil war. Lebanese Deputy Prime Minister Tarek Mitri and Syrian Justice Minister Mazhar al-Wais announced the signing of the agreement at a press conference in Beirut. Wais called it "an important step on the path to justice in addressing the situation of convicts who have spent a long time in prison and whose cases were among the most complex legally".

The agreement covers around 300 convicts, while the remaining detainees require "long procedures" before a similar agreement on them can be reached, Wais said.

The deal reinforces "the trust and political will that already exists between the two countries" he said, expressing hope it would help improve ties.



US condemns Nigeria attack that killed 162

AFP
Lagos

The US yesterday condemned the killing of at least 162 villagers by gunmen in western central Nigeria, calling it "horrific" and "senseless violence".

The attack late Tuesday on the village of Woro in Kwara state came after the military recently carried out operations in the area against what it called "terrorist elements".

Suspected militants burned shops and a traditional ruler's home, with wounded people fleeing into the bush, said Babaozo Ayodeji, Kwara state secretary of the Red Cross.

Villagers told AFP that more than 160 bodies were found, with the Red Cross putting the death toll at 162.

The state governor Abdul-Rahman AbdulRazaq, however, gave a lower toll of 75 dead.

"The US condemns the horrific attack in Kwara state in Ni-

geria, which claimed the lives of more than 160 people, with the death toll still unconfirmed and many still unaccounted for," the US embassy in Nigeria said in a post on X.

Ordering a battalion to secure the area on Wednesday, Nigerian President Bola Ahmed Tinubu condemned the "beastly attack", which he said was carried out against villagers who had rejected the militants' ideology.

The US welcomed Tinubu's deployment of security forces to protect villages and his order for the immediate provision of aid to victims, the embassy said.

Insecurity in Africa's most populous country has been under intense scrutiny in recent months since US President Donald Trump alleged a "genocide" of Christians in Nigeria.

The claim has been rejected by the Nigerian government and many independent experts, who say the country's security crises claim the lives of different religious communities, often without distinction.

Nigerian court orders UK to pay compensation over colonial-era killings

AFP
Lagos

A Nigerian court has ordered the British government to pay £420mn (\$570mn) to the families of 21 miners who were shot dead by the colonial authorities nearly 80 years ago, their lawyer said yesterday.

Police opened fire on the workers, who were staging a sit-in protest against working conditions and unpaid salaries at the mine in the Iva Valley in the southeastern state of Enugu on November 18, 1949.

Fifty-one others were wounded in the shooting that fuelled growing calls for Nigerian independence, which was finally achieved in 1960.

The case was brought by Nigerian human rights activist Mazi Greg Onoh at a court in

Enugu. Judge Anthony Onovo ruled in a decision handed down on Thursday that the UK government should pay £20mn to each of the victims' families.

The families' lawyers, Yemi Akinseye-George, said that once they had a copy of the judgment, they would ask Nigeria's attorney general and foreign ministry in Abuja to notify London and initiate "diplomatic steps toward compliance".

"The British authorities, despite proper service, declined to enter or respond to the court process," he added.

In 2013, the UK agreed to pay damages to more than 5,000 Kenyans who had been victims of torture and ill-treatment during the Mau Mau uprising in the 1950s.

It expressed its "sincere regrets" and paid some £20mn in compensation.

Drought spreads beyond Kenya's arid north, plunging herders into crisis

Reuters
Shompole

The dozens of cow and goat carcasses scattered around Maria Katanga's family compound testify to the grinding impact of an ongoing drought on Kenya's pastoralist communities who rely on livestock for survival.

Since August, the 24-year-old Maasai herder has lost more than 100 cattle and 300 goats to drought — and the animals still in her care are too emaciated to produce milk.

Kenya has been here before, most recently in 2022 when a record drought decimated livestock populations and plunged pastoralists in the East African country's arid north and north-east into a hunger crisis.

But now, as such climate disasters become more frequent, their impact is also spreading to areas that have traditionally not been deeply affected by drought such as Kajiado county, which borders the capital Nairobi and where Katanga lives. As the animals have grown weaker, their value has also shrivelled, Katanga's stepson Emmanuel Loshipae told Reuters.

"A cow that was being sold for 60,000 or 70,000 Kenyan shillings (before the drought) is being sold for 5,000 shillings," Loshipae, 19, said.

He added that the family had been forced into distress sales to pay for animal feed in the absence of grazing land.

Local administrator Lemaiyan Samuel Kureko said groups of



Maasai pastoralists lead emaciated cattle, affected by the worsening drought due to the failed rainy season, to a watering point, near Magadi township of Kajiado, Kenya.

herders were moving further afield, even crossing the border into Tanzania, in search of pasture and water.

"There have been droughts before in the region but this one is the worst," he told Reuters.

Kenya's National Drought Management Authority (NDMA) warned last month that recurrent droughts were increasing competition for scarce resources and raising the risk of violent conflict.

"A cow that was being sold for 60,000 or 70,000 Kenyan shillings (before the drought) is being sold for 5,000 shillings," Loshipae, 19, said.

The crisis has also hit countries in the Horn of Africa, with Somalia declaring a national drought emergency in November after re-

Palestinian solidarity rally in Yemen



Protesters, mainly Houthi supporters, rally in solidarity with Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, in Sanaa, Yemen, yesterday.

SA launches foot-and-mouth vaccine as infections spread

Reuters
Johannesburg

South Africa yesterday announced its first foot-and-mouth vaccine in 20 years as it seeks to boost local production of inoculation doses to fight the country's worst outbreak of the disease in many years.

Foot-and-mouth is a highly contagious viral disease that mainly affects cattle, causing painful blisters in the mouth and on hooves. Although it is not often fatal, especially among adult cattle, it affects livestock's productivity.

Developed by the government's Agricultural Research Council (ARC), the vaccine will be part of South Africa's bid to vaccinate 80% of its national herd of about 12mn cattle, 7.2mn of which are on commercial farms.

The ARC will supply 20,000 vaccine doses per week from March 2026, raising its output to 200,000 doses per week from 2027, the Agri-



File photo of cattle as foot-and-mouth disease vaccinations are conducted at Karan Beef, which operates

culture Ministry said in a statement.

South Africa is having to import most of its foot-and-mouth vaccines, including from Botswana, Argentina and Turkey, due to the limited capacity of its underfunded state-owned manufacturing entities.

"What today means is that when we are able to manufacture

at scale and at full production, this

vaccine will ensure South Africa's vaccine sovereignty when dealing with foot-and-mouth disease," Agriculture Minister John Steenhuisen said during a media briefing.

The government has faced criticism from livestock farmers who say they are suffering heavy losses over

its handling of the outbreak.

Two farmer groups, the Southern African Agri Initiative and Free State Agriculture, have threatened legal action against the government, saying its response has been "fragmented, slow and structurally incapable of matching the scale and pace of the outbreak".

Thousands attend burial of slain son of Libya's Gaddafi

AFP
Bani Walid

Thousands turned out yesterday for the burial of the slain son of former Libyan ruler Muammar Gaddafi in a town that still holds allegiance to the late longtime leader.

Saif al-Islam Gaddafi, once seen by some as Libya's heir apparent, was shot dead in his home in the northwestern city of Zintan on Tuesday.

His burial in the town of Bani Walid, some 175 kilometres south of Tripoli, brought together thousands of Gaddafi loyalists, nearly 15 years after the ruler was toppled and killed in a 2011 Nato-backed uprising.

Some came from other parts of the country.

"We are here to accompany our beloved one, the son of our leader in whom we placed our hope and our future," said Waad Ibrahim, a 33-year-old woman from Sirte, nearly 300 kilometres away.

The woman blamed the country's eastern and western rival powers for Saif's killing.

"They met in France to agree that the only obstacle standing in their way was Saif," she said referring to a recent US-brokered meeting in Paris between officials from both sides.

Libya remains split between Prime Minister Abdelhamid Dbeibah's UN-backed government based in Tripoli and an eastern administration backed by

Khalifa Haftar. The North African has struggled to recover from chaos that erupted following the 2011 Arab Spring uprising.

Each year, Bani Walid celebrates the anniversary of a 1969 coup that brought Gaddafi to power, with people parading through the streets with portraits of the ex-leader and Libya's green flag from before the revolt.

Ahead of the burial yesterday, locals also carried those portraits and flags while chanting pro-Gaddafi slogans and declaring that "the martyrs' blood will not be shed in vain".

Sabri Gachout, a 66-year-old from Tripoli, said Saif's killing meant that "elections can now be organised without him in the electoral process".

In 2021, Saif announced he would run for president, but the elections aiming to unify the country under a UN agreement were indefinitely postponed.

Marcel Ceccaldi, a French lawyer who had been representing Saif, told AFP he was killed by "four-man commando".

Authorities said they were probing his death as the assailants remained at large.

Saadi Gaddafi, Saif's younger brother, said his dead sibling would be buried "next to his brother Khamis Gaddafi", who was killed during the 2011 unrest.

Under his father's 40-year rule, Saif was described as the de facto prime minister, cultivating an image of moderation and reform despite holding no official position.

current seasons of poor rainfall. The UN World Food Programme warned last month that millions of Somalis were grappling with severe hunger, even as foreign aid cuts have hamstrung NGOs' capacity to respond to skyrocketing needs.

"Malnutrition is also alarmingly high with almost half of all children malnourished and in need of urgent treatment," WFP said in a statement.

On Wednesday, the Kenya Meteorological Department released its forecast for the March-May monsoon, with Kajiado expected

to receive near-average to below-average rainfall.

Last month the NDMA said it had distributed cash aid to over 130,000 households in historically arid counties — mainly in the north — to help them cope with rising hunger due to the drought. But the relief measures did not extend to Kajiado.

"No people have died yet, but the livestock are gone and the sun is getting hotter every day," administration official Kureko said. "We have been weakened to such a level that we can only pray for God's help."



Trump unveils TrumpRx discounted drugs website

Reuters
Washington

US President Donald Trump has unveiled TrumpRx.gov, a website meant to offer consumers access to discounted prescription medicines and a central pillar of the president's efforts to lower drug prices in the US, the White House said.

Trump announced the new website at a White House event alongside Centres for Medicare & Medicaid Services Administrator Dr Mehmet Oz and National Design Studio Director and Airbnb co-founder Joe Gebbia.

Sixteen of the largest global drugmakers have struck "most-favoured nation" deals with the Trump administration to cut drug prices for Americans in exchange for ex-

emptions from US tariffs.

Under those agreements they will lower prices for the government's Medicaid programme and, via TrumpRx, to cash-paying consumers.

Those deals include agreements with Eli Lilly and Novo Nordisk to slash the prices of popular GLP-1 weight-loss drugs.

The government has said these would reduce prices to between \$149 and \$350 a month on average for Americans.

Novo and Lilly currently sell their weight-loss drugs directly to consumers, accounting for over 10% of total sales, the companies have said.

Novo's Wegovy pill, launched early last month, is currently being sold exclusively in direct-to-consumer channels as it waits on insurers to set coverage terms.

White House spokeswoman Karoline Leavitt said in a post on X that the direct-

to-consumer website would be "state of the art" and "will save millions of Americans money".

The website will be powered by prescription drug savings site GoodRx, according to STAT News.

They reported that TrumpRx will not sell the drugs directly but rather send patients to other sites to buy the medicines.

How much consumers will save is uncertain.

The website is targeted at consumers looking to buy drugs without using insurance, meaning that most purchases would not count toward patients' insurance deductible.

"There is a real question about the value of this for people with insurance," said Juliette Cubanski, deputy director for Medicare policy at health policy organisation KFF. "In some cases, we could be looking

at out-of-pocket costs that are still relatively unaffordable for a lot of people."

US patients currently pay far more for prescription medicines, often nearly three times more than in other developed nations, and Trump has been pressuring drugmakers to lower US prices to levels paid abroad.

Other drugmakers that have signed the

deals include Pfizer, AstraZeneca, Merck and GSK.

Aside from the obesity drugs, medicines that will be available on the website include Merck's diabetes drug Januvia, Sanofi's blood thinner Plavix, GSK's asthma inhaler Advair Diskus 500/50, Amgen's cholesterol medication Repatha and Gilead's hepatitis C treatment Epclusa.



Trump speaking about the TrumpRx website in the South Court Auditorium of the White House in Washington, DC. -AFP

Luigi Mangione faces June 8 trial

The state trial of Luigi Mangione, accused of gunning down a US health insurance executive in New York, will begin on June 8, local media reported yesterday.

New York State judge Gregory Carro set the date, ABC News and NBC reported, amid a spat over the scheduling of a separate federal case linked to the killing of Brian Thompson, which is slated to begin September 8.

The December 2024 murder of UnitedHealthcare executive Thompson, captured on surveillance video, shocked the United States and highlighted deep public anger with the country's profit-driven private healthcare system.

Mangione was arrested five days after the killing at a McDonald's restaurant in Altoona, Pennsylvania, 230 miles (370km) from the crime scene, following a tip from a staff member.

At the state level, he is charged with murder and could face life imprisonment without parole if convicted. -AFP

Work suspended on NYC project

Worked was suspended yesterday on the \$16bn New York City (NYC) Hudson Tunnel Project because President Donald Trump's administration has refused to lift a four-month-old freeze on federal funding, the Gateway Development Commission said.

Yesterday Democrats condemned Trump's demand that Washington Dulles Airport and New York's Penn Station be renamed for him in exchange for unfreezing billions of dollars for the project.

A US judge is due to hold a hearing on the emergency request by New York and New Jersey to force the restoration of funding.

Gateway said the suspension will idle 1,000 construction workers. -Reuters

Watchdog to review failure rate in FAA air traffic control training

Reuters
Washington

The US Transportation Department Office of Inspector-General (OIG) said on Thursday that it will open a probe into high failure rates among air traffic control trainees amid a long-standing shortage of controllers to manage US air traffic.

The Trump administration has vowed to take action to address the persistent shortage of air traffic controllers.

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) is about 3,500 air traffic controllers short of targeted staffing levels.

Many are working mandatory overtime and six-day weeks and the FAA's air traffic

control training academy faces serious issues.

"Attrition, retirements, and programme washouts are severely impacting the overall success of increasing the number of certified controllers," the inspector-general said, adding the failure rate was more than 30% among trainees in 2024. "The training academy is facing considerable challenges with training, including a shortage of qualified instructors, training capacity limitations, an outdated curriculum, and high training failure rates."

The FAA said in a statement that it agrees with the inspector-general that "the previous washout rate at the academy is unacceptable" and noted it has increased the success rate at the academy and expanded

partnerships. "As a result, hiring is up significantly year over year and in the year ending September 30 the FAA hired 2,028 new controller trainees."

This week Congress approved funding to hire 2,500 additional controllers this year.

US Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy has announced a campaign to "super-charge" controller hiring, which resulted in more than 10,000 applications, the inspector-general said.

The OIG said that more than 8,300 applicants were referred to the FAA academy.

The FAA said it resulted in 618 trainees getting onboarded in September alone.

The FAA said in December that a 43-day government shutdown had hurt training efforts and noted the high washout rate.

"We lost, I don't know, 400-500 of our trainees that just sort of gave up during the lapse even though we kept the school open," FAA Administrator Bryan Bedford said at a US Senate hearing in December, vowing to improve the curriculum.

Duffy has taken a number of steps to boost controller staffing.

The FAA is offering retirement-eligible controllers who are under the mandatory retirement age of 56 a lump sum payment of 20% of their basic pay for each year they continue to work.

The FAA has increased starting salaries by 30% for candidates who go to the FAA training academy and is speeding time-to-hire by cutting more than four months off the prior process.

No 'formal plans' to deploy ICE at polling sites

Reuters
Washington

President Donald Trump has not discussed "formal plans" to deploy US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents to polling sites at November's midterm elections, the White House said on Thursday, while declining to rule out their presence near voting locations.

Trump said on Monday that Republicans should "nationalise" and "take over" voting in at least 15 unspecified locations, repeating his false claims that US elections are plagued by widespread fraud.

His remarks were echoed by Steve Bannon, a former Trump adviser and influential right-wing commentator, who repeated false claims that people living in the US illegally vote in large numbers and said on his War Room podcast on Tuesday:

"You're (expletive) right we're gonna have ICE surround the polls come November."



Observers film ICE agents as they hold a perimeter after one of their vehicles got a flat tire on Penn Avenue in Minneapolis. -AFP

Asked about Bannon's comments, White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said: "I can't guarantee that an ICE agent won't be around a polling location in November... but what I can tell you is I haven't heard the president discuss any formal plans to put ICE outside of polling locations."

Federal law prohibits the presi-

dent from deploying military troops at any location holding a general or special election, and several states criminalise carrying firearms at or near polling places.

Immigration enforcement, in particular, has caused both US citizens and legal residents to stay home out of fear of detention or racial profiling.

Democrats have raised con-

cerns in recent months that Trump could deploy troops at polling locations to intimidate voters and interfere with the November elections that will determine control of Congress.

Some Republican lawmakers have been reluctant to back Trump's call to nationalise elections.

Senate Majority Leader John Thune said he is "not in favour of federalising elections", while House Speaker Mike Johnson noted that "it's always been the responsibility of the states to administer elections".

Trump's push to expand federal control over elections comes as his administration has stepped up pressure on many Democratic-led states to turn over voter data, with the Justice Department suing nearly two dozen states over their voter rolls.

Last week, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) searched an election office in Georgia's Fulton County for records related to the 2020 election, as Trump continues to press false claims of fraud in his defeat.

Michelangelo foot sketch sells for record \$27.2mn at US auction

AFP
New York

A newly discovered Michelangelo drawing of a foot sold for \$27.2mn at a US auction on Thursday, a new record for any work created by the Renaissance master.

The tiny, red-chalk sketch is one of around 50 studies Michelangelo made for the Sistine Chapel, among his most famed works alongside sculptures David and Pieta.

New York-based Christie's said the drawing sold for almost 20 times its low estimate after a 45-minute bidding war. It did not share the buyer's identity.

Only around 10 Michelangelo drawings are known to be in private hands.

Christie's identified the sketch as an original by Michelangelo after the owner sent a photograph to its online auction estimate request portal.

An expert established that it represented the right foot of the figure of the Libyan Sibyl, at the far east end of the Sistine ceiling.

"This was an exceptional piece with a wonderful story," Andrew Fletcher, global head of the Old Masters Department at Christie's, said in a statement.

"We had multiple bidders in the room, on the phone, and online because this was likely to be the only chance a collector might have to acquire a study for arguably the greatest work of art ever made."

The previous record for a Michelangelo was \$24.3mn for a sketch representing a naked man with two other background figures, which sold at Christie's in Paris.

Rubio steps down as acting head of the US National Archives

Reuters
Washington



US Secretary of State and National Security Adviser Marco Rubio (pictured) is no longer the acting archivist of the United States, a spokesman of the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) said on Thursday.

The national archivist is responsible for overseeing government records and heads the National Archives, an agency Trump used to criticise after it alerted the Justice Department to his handling of classified documents in 2022.

Within weeks of taking office last year,

Trump fired then-US archivist Colleen Shogan and appointed Rubio as acting head of the archives, one of many hats he has worn in the administration.

Rubio's many roles, which have sparked

jokes and spawned Internet memes, underscore the trust Trump has in him, even though the two exchanged insults a decade ago when running against each other for the Republican presidential nomination.

He has been central to Trump's push for US oversight of Venezuela after the seizure of Venezuelan leader Nicolas Maduro, the dismantling of the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and the president's crackdown against pro-Palestinian protesters through revocations of visas and green cards.

Rubio stepped back from the National Archives job in compliance with the Federal Vacancies Reform Act, which limits how long officials can serve in Senate-confirmed

roles in an acting capacity, NARA General Counsel Matt Dummermuth said in an email.

Rubio has delegated his authority at the National Archives to James Byron, who was a senior adviser to the archivist, Dummermuth said.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) raided Trump's Mar-a-Lago estate in 2022 as part of an investigation into removal of official presidential records from the White House after his first term.

The National Archives had been seeking the documents.

Trump was subsequently indicted and the case was dropped after he won the 2024 election.

ers. "Was this foreseeable to Uber? And the answer to that has to be no."

US District Judge Charles Breyer, who normally sits on the bench in San Francisco, oversaw Dean's case in Phoenix.

He is managing all of the similar federal cases against Uber, which have been centralised in his court in San Francisco.

The company is also facing more than 500 cases in California state court.

In the only one of those cases to go to trial so far, a jury in September sided with Uber.

The jury found that while the company had been negligent with its safety measures, that negligence was not a substantial factor in causing the woman's harm.

Uber rival Lyft is facing similar lawsuits in both state and federal court, although there is no co-ordinated federal litigation for those claims. -Reuters

Uber ordered to pay \$8.5mn in trial over driver assault claims

than \$140mn in damages.

In a statement, an Uber spokesperson noted that the jury rejected Dean's other claims, that the company was negligent or that its safety systems were defective, adding that the company plans to appeal.

"This verdict affirms that Uber acted responsibly and has invested meaningfully in rider safety," the spokesperson said.

Sarah London, an attorney for Dean, said during the trial's closing arguments that Uber had marketed itself as a safe option for women travelling at night.

"Women know it's a dangerous world. We know about the risk of sexual assault," Walsh said. "They made us believe that this was a place that was safe from that."

Uber, which has faced numerous safe-

Uber in 2023, one month after her alleged assault in Arizona.

She said Uber was aware of a wave of assaults committed by its drivers, but had failed to take basic actions to improve the safety of its riders.

Such assertions have long dogged the company, drawing headlines and congressional scrutiny.

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Uber, which has faced numerous safe-

US accuses China of secret nuke testing

The United States has accused Beijing of conducting a secret nuclear test in 2020 as it called for a new, broader arms control treaty that would bring in China as well as Russia.

The accusations at a global disarmament conference highlighted serious tension between Washington and Beijing at a pivotal moment in nuclear arms control, a day after the treaty limiting US and Russian missile and warhead deployments expired.

"I can reveal that the US government is aware that China has conducted nuclear explosive tests, including preparing for tests with designated yields in the hundreds of tons," US Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security Thomas DiNanno told a Disarmament Conference in Geneva.

The Chinese military "sought to conceal testing by obfuscating the nuclear explosions because it recognised these tests violate test ban commitments."

"China has used 'decoupling,' a method to decrease the effectiveness of seismic monitoring, to hide their activities from the world," he said.

DiNanno said that China had conducted one such "yield-producing test" on June 22, 2020.

US President Donald Trump had already hinted at similar ac-

cusations late last year, but without providing the same level of detail.

Trump said on October 31 that Washington would start testing nuclear weapons "on an equal basis" with Moscow and Beijing, but without elaborating or explaining what kind of nuclear testing he wanted to resume.

China's ambassador on disarmament, Shen Jian, did not directly address DiNanno's charge but said that Beijing had always acted prudently and responsibly on nuclear issues.

"China notes that the US continues in its statement to hype up the so-called China nuclear threat. China firmly opposes such false narratives," he said. "It (the US) is the culprit for the aggravation of the arms race."

Diplomats at the conference said that the US allegations were new and concerning.

China, like the US, has signed but not ratified the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), which bans explosive nuclear tests.

Russia signed and ratified it, but withdrew its ratification in 2023.

The 2010 New START treaty which ran out on Thursday left Russia and the United States for the first time since 1972 without any binding constraints on their



This picture taken last year shows a member of China's People's Liberation Army near a display of DF-5C nuclear missiles, during a military parade to mark the 80th anniversary of the end of World War II, in Beijing. - **Reuters**

deployments of strategic missiles and warheads.

US President Donald Trump wants to replace it with a new agreement including China, which is rapidly increasing its own arsenal.

In the meantime, Washington says it will keep modernising its own nuclear forces.

"Russia and China should not expect the United States to stand still while they shirk their obligations and expand their nuclear

forces. We will maintain a robust, credible, and modernized nuclear deterrent," US Secretary of State Marco Rubio wrote in a post on the online publishing platform Substack.

DiNanno told the Geneva conference: "Today, the United States faces threats from multiple nuclear powers. In short, a bilateral treaty with only one nuclear power is simply inappropriate in 2026 and going forward."

He reiterated US projections

that China will have over 1,000 nuclear warheads by 2030.

Shen, the Chinese delegate, reiterated that his country would not participate in new negotiations at this stage with Moscow and Washington.

Beijing has previously highlighted that it has a fraction of their warhead numbers – an estimated 600, compared to around 4,000 each for Russia and the US.

"In this new era we hope the US will abandon Cold War thinking... and embrace common and cooperative security," Shen said.

Tomas Nagy, a nuclear expert at security think-tank GLOBSEC in Bratislava, said that Washington had chosen this moment to call out Beijing for alleged secret testing from nearly six years ago because it felt Beijing was unlikely to co-operate on the issue.

"This is a reflection of the fact that the Americans have actually understood by now that for the next couple of years, there's going to be no motion in a positive direction with the Chinese," he said in a phone interview. "So they decided to disclose this information."

Trump held what he called "very positive" talks with China's President Xi Jinping on trade and wider security issues this week and is due to visit Beijing in April.

Security analysts say a new nu-

clear arms control deal would take years to negotiate, with Russia and the US developing new weapons and tension over Ukraine, the Middle East and other flashpoints resulting in a higher risk of miscalculation.

Forced to rely on worst-case assumptions about the other's intentions, the US and Russia would see an incentive to increase their arsenals, especially as China plays catch-up.

Russia would prefer to have a dialogue with the United States after New START but is ready for any scenario, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said yesterday.

The Kremlin said the two sides, at talks in Abu Dhabi this week, had reached an understanding they would both act responsibly.

Russia says the nuclear allies of North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato) members Britain and France should also be up for negotiation – something those countries reject.

At the Geneva forum, Britain said that China, Russia and the US should come to an understanding, adding that it shared US concerns about Beijing's rapid expansion of its nuclear arsenal.

France said agreement between states with the biggest nuclear arsenals was crucial at a time of an unprecedented weakening of nuclear norms.

US strike on boat kills two in Pacific

The US military said on Thursday that it killed two alleged drug traffickers in a strike on a boat in the eastern Pacific, bringing the death toll from Washington's campaign to at least 128.

President Donald Trump's administration began targeting alleged smuggling boats in early September, insisting that it is effectively at war with alleged "narco-terrorists" operating out of Venezuela.

However, administration officials have provided no definitive evidence that the vessels are involved in drug trafficking, prompting heated debate about the legality of the operations that have expanded from the Caribbean to the Pacific.

"Intelligence confirmed the vessel was transiting along known narco-trafficking routes in the Eastern Pacific and was engaged in narco-trafficking operations," the US Southern Command said in a post on X on Thursday.

"No US military forces were harmed" in the operation, the post said.

It was the second reported US strike on an alleged drug boat in the region since the January 3 capture of Venezuelan leader Nicolas Maduro, who had said the US campaign of strikes was aimed at regime change in the South American country. - **AFP**

Cuba willing to hold talks with US, but not 'under pressure'

AFP/Reuters
Havana/Washington

Cuba is prepared to hold dialogue with the United States but not under pressure, President Miguel Diaz-Canel insisted on Thursday after months of threats from US President Donald Trump.

Trump has vowed to cut off Cuba's access to oil and stated the communist island was "ready to fall" as he warned it to "make a deal" with Washington "BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE".

The Republican did not say what kind of deal he was after, but has repeatedly stated the two countries were in negotiations, which Havana has denied.

"Cuba is willing to engage in dialogue with the United States, a dialogue on any topic... but without pressure or preconditions," Diaz-Canel said on state TV and radio.

He said any talks must take place "from a position of equals, with respect for our sovereignty, our independence, and our self-determination" and without "interference in our internal affairs".

Trump and Secretary of State Marco Rubio, the Miami-born son of Cuban exiles, have made no secret of their desire to bring about regime change in Havana.

White House spokeswoman Karoline Leavitt told reporters on Thursday: "I think the fact that the Cuban government is on its last leg and its country is about to collapse, they should be wise in their statements directed towards the president of the United States."

Asked about Cuba's denial of the existence of negotiations, she said her boss was "always willing to engage in diplomacy and I believe that is something that is taking place, in fact, with the Cuban government".

Cuba, in the grips of an economic crisis, had long relied on oil supplies from Venezuela, whose leader was ousted in a deadly US military operation last month.

Trump subsequently claimed to have taken control of Venezuelan oil, vowed to starve Cuba of the commodity, and threatened tariffs on any other nation stepping in to help US-sanctioned Havana.

The pressure tactics threaten to plunge Cuba into complete darkness as its power plants struggle to keep the lights on due to fuel shortages.

Earlier on Thursday, hundreds of thousands of people in the country's east were left without electricity for hours after an electricity grid failure.

Diaz-Canel insisted his country still had friends, which he did not name, as it confronts what he described as an "acute fuel shortage".

"We cannot openly explain everything we are doing," he said, but "Cuba is not alone."

He said energy production from diesel- and oil-powered generators has been "zero" for weeks.

Mexico's President Claudia Sheinbaum said this week that her country was using all available diplomatic channels to ensure a resumption of crude shipments to Cuba, but would not put itself at risk of punitive US tariffs.

Diaz-Canel said the pressure that Cuba



View of a TV showing Cuba's President Miguel Diaz-Canel speaking on national television at a house in Havana. Cuba is prepared to hold dialogue with the United States but not under pressure, Diaz-Canel insisted on Thursday after months of threats from US President Donald Trump. - **AFP**

found itself under highlighted the importance of its drive for greener energy and reducing reliance on others.

Cuban officials blame US sanctions for Cuba's worst economic crisis in decades, marked by shortages of fuel, food and medicine.

However, observers say poor economic management and a tourism collapse following the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic contributed to the island's woes.

Meanwhile, the US State Department aid official said on Thursday that the US will provide an extra \$6mn in humanitarian aid to Cuba, even as Washington has stepped up efforts to block oil supplies to the Caribbean island nation, causing crippling shortages.

Aid official Jeremy Lewin said at a news

conference the new US commitment would bring to \$9mn the amount of assistance provided to the people of Cuba since Hurricane Maria struck in October.

The aid is being delivered by the Catholic Church and Lewin said Cuba's communist authorities had so far not interfered with its distribution.

Despite the US moves on oil imports, Lewin argued that the humanitarian crisis in Cuba, which goes beyond the damage from Hurricane Maria, was the fault of Cuba's government.

"It's because the government can't, you know, put food on the shelves. They let these government-run stores go completely empty. They're not stocked," Lewin said. "And so what you've had is a humanitarian catastrophe."



Fiamoncini celebrates after completing his challenge of running 188km in 24 hours on a treadmill. - **AFP**

In 'most boring' feat, Brazilian runs for record 24 hours on treadmill

A Brazilian man with a penchant for sporting records broke a new one on Thursday after tackling the most boring physical challenge he could dream up: running on a treadmill for 24 hours.

Pepe Fiamoncini ran 188km (116 miles) – more than four marathons – on a treadmill at an open-air gym on Rio de Janeiro's Ipanema beach.

Once validated by officials who watched the challenge via live stream, the feat will earn him a third Guinness World Record.

The 35-year-old took only short breaks to change his shoes or go to the bathroom.

"I define myself with one word: curious. I'm curious about my abilities," Fiamoncini told AFP.

He said that he started doing sport during the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic, when he signed up for an Iron Man, a long-distance triathlon, which he saw as the "pinnacle of human capacity".

After conquering that he did an Ultraman – more than double the distance – and set his sights on

Guinness World Records.

The first record he broke was in May 2023, when he crossed the Uyuni salt flats in Bolivia, covering 170km in a little over 33 hours.

The vast white expanse sits at 3,600m above sea level, with extreme temperatures ranging from 30°C during the day to -10°C at night.

The previous record was 55 hours.

Having conquered such extremes he sought to challenge his mental limits.

"So I thought, what's the most boring thing I hate? Running non-stop in the same place."

In October, Fiamoncini set his second Guinness record when he ran 110km in 12 hours on a treadmill as a warm up for the challenge he finished on Thursday. - **AFP**

New AI method helps identify which dinosaur made which footprints

By Will Dunham
Reuters

Footprints are among the most common kind of dinosaur fossils. Sometimes scientists find a single, lonely footprint.

Sometimes they come across a chaotic jumble of tracks resembling a dance floor, sort of a dinosaur discotheque.

However, identifying which dinosaur left which track has been notoriously difficult.

Researchers have now developed a method harnessing artificial intelligence (AI) to assist in pinpointing the type of dinosaur responsible for the tracks, based on eight different traits of a given footprint.

"This is important because it provides an objective way to classify and compare tracks, reducing reliance on subjective human interpretation," said physicist Gregor Hartmann of the Helmholtz-Zentrum Berlin research centre in Germany, lead author of the research



This picture taken in 2016 shows palaeontologist Sebastian Apesteguia measuring a footprint made by a meat-eating dinosaur some 80mn years ago, at the Maragua Syncline, Bolivia. - **Reuters**

published in the scientific journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.

"Matching track to trackmaker is a huge challenge, and palaeontologists have been arguing about this for generations," University of Edinburgh palaeontologist and study senior author Steve Brusatte said.

Dinosaurs left behind numerous kinds of fossilised remains,

including bones, teeth and claws, impressions of their skin, faeces and vomit, undigested remains in their stomach, eggshells and the remnants of nests.

However, footprints often are more abundant and can tell scientists a lot, including the type of environment a dinosaur inhabited and, when other tracks are present, the types of animals that shared an ecosystem.

The new method was honed with an analysis by the algorithm of 1,974 footprint silhouettes spanning 150mn years of dinosaur history, with the AI discerning eight features that explained variation in the shapes of these tracks.

These features included: overall load and shape, reflecting the foot's ground contact area; the position of loading; the spread of the toes; how the toes attach to the foot; heel position; the load from the heel; the relative emphasis of toes versus heel; and shape discrepancy between left and right sides of the track.

Many of the footprints previously had been identified as a specific kind of dinosaur with confidence by experts.

After the algorithm identified the differentiation traits, the experts charted to the various kinds of dinosaurs believed to have made the tracks in order to guide identification of future tracks.

"The problem is that identifying who made a fossilised footprint is inherently uncertain," Hartmann said.

"The shape of a track depends on many factors beyond the animal itself, including what the dinosaur was doing at the time, such as walking, running, jumping or even swimming, the moisture and type of the substrate (ground surface), how the footprint was buried by sediment, and how it was altered by erosion over millions of years.

As a result, the same dinosaur can leave very different-looking tracks," Hartmann added.

Dinosaur footprints also come in various sizes.

"The size variation can be quite extreme – from little meat-eating

dinosaur footprints about the size of chicken tracks in the barnyard to long-necked sauropod dinosaur footprints that are the size of a bathtub," Brusatte said.

Brusatte said he could think of only one instance in which a palaeontologist found a dinosaur skeleton at the end of a trackway made by the animal.

"The problem is that identifying who made a fossilised footprint is inherently uncertain," Hartmann said.



Japan to restart world's biggest nuclear plant

AFP
Tokyo

Japan will switch the world's largest nuclear power plant back on next week, after a glitch with an alarm forced the suspension of its first restart since the 2011 Fukushima disaster.

Takeyuki Inagaki, the head of the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant run by Tokyo Electric Power (Tepco), told a press conference yesterday that they planned "to start up the reactor on February 9".

The announcement came after Tepco restarted the reactor on January 21 but shut it off the following day after an alarm from the moni-

toring system sounded. Due to an error in its configuration, the alarm had picked up slight changes to the electrical current in one cable even though these were still within a range considered safe, Inagaki said.

The firm has now changed the alarm's settings as the reactor is safe to operate, Inagaki said.

The commercial operation will

commence on or after March 18 after another comprehensive inspection, he said.

Kashiwazaki-Kariwa is the world's biggest nuclear power plant by potential capacity, although just one reactor of seven will restart.

The facility had been offline since Japan pulled the plug on nuclear power after a colossal earthquake

and tsunami sent three reactors at the Fukushima atomic plant into meltdown in 2011.

The company also operates the stricken Fukushima Daiichi plant, now being decommissioned.

Resource-poor Japan now wants to revive atomic energy to reduce its reliance on fossil fuels, achieve carbon neutrality by 2050 and meet growing energy needs from artificial intelligence.

Kashiwazaki-Kariwa is the first

Tepco-run unit to restart since 2011. The company also operates the stricken Fukushima Daiichi plant, now being decommissioned.

Public opinion in the area around the plant is deeply divided: Around 60% of residents oppose the restart, while 37% support it, according to a survey conducted by Niigata prefecture in September.

UN 'to exempt sanctions on humanitarian aid for N Korea'

AFP
Seoul

The UN Security Council sanctions committee on North Korea is to give exemptions for humanitarian aid projects in the impoverished country, diplomatic sources in Seoul said yesterday.

The nuclear-armed country is under multiple sets of UN sanctions over its weapons programmes and has long struggled with its moribund state-managed economy and chronic food shortages.

The 17 humanitarian assistance projects are all being implemented by major international organisations such as Unicef, or by NGOs from South Korea and the US, the sources said.

Humanitarian assistance to the nuclear-armed state can only proceed with approval from a UN sanctions committee, on which Washington has for months blocked clearances.

Analysts say the move would allow those groups to provide humanitarian aid, such as nutritional supplements, medical equipment and water purification systems, to North Korea.

The North has long been criticised for prioritising the military over adequately providing for its people.

Elizabeth Salmon, the UN special rapporteur on human rights in

North Korea, said yesterday that food shortages remain a key humanitarian concern in the country.

A foreign ministry official said Seoul has made "various efforts" to ensure that humanitarian aid reaches the North, regardless of politics.

"We hope that North Korea will respond positively to our government's efforts for peaceful co-existence on the Korean Peninsula," the official said.

The sources spoke hours after a senior South Korean official said "new progress" on North Korea could come within days.

The foreign ministry official's comments came while discussing US President Donald Trump's scheduled trip to China in April.

Reports have suggested both Seoul and Washington are keen to use Trump's upcoming China trip as an opportunity to restart dialogue with Pyongyang.

The US leader made repeated overtures to Pyongyang's leader Kim Jong-un during a tour of Asia last year, saying he was "100%" open to a meeting.

"Trump stands to gain politically from meeting Kim - even without concrete results, the optics alone, including photo opportunities with Kim in North Korea, would carry value," Lim Eul-chul, a professor at the Institute for Far Eastern Studies at Kyungnam University, said.

Analysts say the move would allow those groups to provide humanitarian aid, such as nutritional supplements, medical equipment and water purification systems, to North Korea.

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Elizabeth Salmon, the UN special rapporteur on human rights in

Australia, Indonesia sign security treaty

Australia and Indonesia signed a security treaty yesterday, paving the way for closer co-operation and new military training facilities in the latter. The pact will facilitate defence initiatives that include embedding a senior Indonesian officer within Australia's defence force. Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said after the signing in Jakarta, Australia will also support the development of military training facilities to boost Indonesia's ability to conduct joint drills, he said. Canberra has been seeking to bolster its military power in the Asia-Pacific region to counter China's growing influence. Indonesia has proven more cautious with its foreign policy, not wanting to be seen taking sides and upsetting Beijing, its biggest trading partner. Albanese hailed the agreement as "a historic moment in our nations' relationship". Australia and Indonesia share one of the world's longest maritime boundaries, which naturally makes us close partners. But today, we are more than just partners, we are close friends," he added. - Reuters

Philippines storm leaves four dead, thousands displaced



People wade through floodwaters brought by Tropical Storm Penha in Iligan, Lanao del Norte province, Philippines, yesterday. Officials yesterday said four people have died and more than 6,000 displaced in the disaster. Many residents were trapped in houses in two flooded villages, officials added.

Philippines aims to wrap up talks on South China Sea code this year

AFP
Singapore

The Philippines yesterday said it will seek to accelerate long-running talks on a South China Sea code of conduct to a conclusion this year as chair of the ASEAN regional bloc.

Foreign Secretary Theresa Lazaro told a forum in Singapore that the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and China will increase the pace of working group meetings to monthly gatherings from the current three-month intervals.

The code has been under discussion for

years, but the talks have stalled repeatedly over disagreements on its scope, enforcement and legal status.

Four ASEAN members - Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines and Vietnam - have laid partial claims to the South China Sea.

China claims the crucial waterway almost in its entirety despite an international ruling that its stance has no legal basis.

Beijing and Manila have had a series of confrontations in the sea in recent years, including collisions and Chinese ships using water cannons on Filipino vessels.

Lazaro said there will also be additional meetings between senior officials under the new schedule.

The foreign secretary told the forum organised by a Singapore-based think-tank that the goal was to produce a code that is "effective and substantive" and in line with international law.

"This year, we will endeavour to conclude the ASEAN-China Code of Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea," Lazaro said, in line with a mandate agreed by ASEAN foreign ministers in 2023.

"I have to emphasise the word 'endeavour' to finish. As I said, I'm an optimist and also a pragmatist because we really don't know how things will work."

The Philippines took over as chair of the 11-nation bloc from Malaysia in January.

Gangster walks free after police informant scandal

AFP
Sydney

One of Australia's most famous gangsters will walk free after prosecutors yesterday said they would drop a planned retrial on drug trafficking charges.

Sixty-year-old Tony Mokbel - one of the key figures in Melbourne's years-long gangland war - was jailed for 30 years in 2012 after pleading guilty to masterminding an elaborate drug syndicate.

But his case fell apart after it was revealed that his high-profile lawyer at the time, Nicola Gobbo, was feeding information to police while supposedly defending her clients.

Mokbel spent about 18 years behind bars but was released on bail last April after a court ruled he had a strong chance of overturning the criminal convictions.

A court subsequently acquitted him of one charge and ordered a possible retrial over allegations he tried to import a

commercial quantity of designer drug MDMA in 2005.

Prosecutors in the state of Victoria yesterday said they had decided not to pursue that planned retrial.

"This decision was reached after careful consideration of all aspects of the matter relevant to the prospects of conviction and the public interest in a retrial," the Victoria Office of Public Prosecutions said in a statement.

Prosecutors said they took into account Mokbel's age and health as well as time already spent behind bars.

"It feels really nice, and life goes on," the ageing mobster told local media outside a Melbourne courthouse.

And he said he was keen to go abroad, something he said he had dreamed about while in prison. "It'd be great to get on a nice plane," he said.

Violence linked to Mokbel's group, known as "The Company", claimed dozens of lives and was later immortalised in the hugely popular Australian TV series "Underbelly".

'Eyes of world on Hong Kong' as Jimmy Lai awaits sentencing

Reuters
Hong Kong

Hong Kong media tycoon Jimmy Lai will be sentenced on February 9, the city's judiciary said yesterday, in a closely watched national security trial that has drawn international criticism including from the US and Britain.

Lai, 78, the founder of the now-shuttered pro-democracy Apple Daily newspaper, was found guilty in December of two charges of

conspiracy to collude with foreign forces under a China-imposed national security law, as well as a charge of conspiracy to publish seditious material.

Lai, who suffers from heart palpitations and high blood pressure after more than five years in solitary confinement, has pleaded not guilty to all the charges.

The landmark case has drawn international scrutiny of Hong Kong's judicial independence amid a years-long crackdown on rights and freedoms in the global financial hub after 2019 pro-democracy protests that Beijing saw as a chal-

lenge to its rule. Hong Kong, a former British colony, returned to Chinese rule in 1997 amid guarantees it would maintain its own judicial system and freedoms distinct from mainland China.

"The eyes of the world will be on Hong Kong," said Aleksandra Bielakowska, an Asia manager with Reporters Without Borders, a press freedom advocacy group, in a statement.

"The outcome will resonate far beyond Jimmy Lai himself, sending a decisive signal about the future of press freedom in the territory," she added.

US President Donald Trump had raised Lai's case with Chinese President Xi Jinping in a meeting last October and has pledged to "save" Lai, who faces a possible life sentence.

Some countries, including the US and Britain, have said the trial is politically motivated and demand Lai's immediate release.

Beijing, however, regards Lai as a mastermind of the 2019 protests and a conspirator advocating for US sanctions against Hong Kong and China.

Lai was arrested in 2020, but his trial didn't begin until December

2023 and ran for 156 days. Chinese and Hong Kong authorities have defended the national security law for restoring stability to Hong Kong and say Lai is being given a fair trial.

Among the allegations, Lai was found guilty of using Apple Daily as a platform to conspire with six former executives and others to produce seditious publications between April 2019 and June 2021, as well as to collude with foreign forces, including the US, to impose sanctions, blockades and other hostile activities against China.

Chief Justice Andrew Cheung, Hong Kong's top judge, recently said that calls to free Lai prematurely would undermine the rule of law.

"Such demands not only circumvent the legal procedures established to ensure accountability under the law, but also strike at the very heart of the rule of law itself," he said.

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer said he had a "respectful discussion" regarding Lai with Chinese President Xi Jinping during a recent trip to Beijing, though he declined to provide details.

India's Russian oil imports down in January

Reuters
New Delhi

India's Russian oil imports slipped in January, continuing a downturn that began in December, as refiners sought more alternative barrels under Western sanctions pressure and ongoing

US-India trade talks, Reuters sources said and data showed.

Analysts and traders have said Moscow faces a steep decline in oil and gas revenue, which accounts for nearly a quarter of the Russian government's budget revenue, if Washington succeeds in persuading India to stop importing Russia's oil.

On Monday, US President Donald Trump announced a trade deal with India to cut tariffs to 18% from 50% in exchange for New Delhi halting Russian oil purchases and lowering trade barriers.

Indian refiners have been re-drawing crude import strategies in recent months to shift away from top supplier Russia and boost imports from the Middle East.

India imported 1.215mn barrels per day (bpd) of Russian crude in January, of which the Nayara refinery accounted for 0.41mn bpd, with IOC and BPCL taking 0.58mn bpd and 0.19mn bpd, respectively, while Reliance imported no Russian crude last month, according to provisional data from analytics firm Kpler.

sian imports at around 0.8-1mn bpd, accounting for 17-21% of total crude imports," JPMorgan said in a note.

Russia's foreign ministry said it had no reason to believe that India had reconsidered its approach to Russian oil imports following a trade deal that New Delhi struck with the US.

India's central bank holds rates as trade deals ease pressure

Reuters
Mumbai

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) kept its key repo rate unchanged yesterday, buoyed by a positive economic outlook and reduced pressures following trade deals with the US and Europe.

The conclusion of a free trade pact with the EU and a tariff deal with Washington, likely to be finalised by March that includes a reduction in US tariffs on Indian imports, will ease a key pressure point for India's economy and markets.

The RBI's six-member monetary policy committee voted unanimously to keep the repo rate at 5.25%, in line with the consensus view in a Reuters poll.

"The MPC noted that since the last policy meeting, external headwinds have intensified though the successful completion of trade deals augurs well for the economic outlook," governor Sanjay Malhotra said in his policy statement.

The monetary policy stance was retained at "neutral," suggesting rates will stay low for some time to come. The current policy rate is appropriate, Malhotra said, adding that inflation was benign and future rate moves would depend on the outlook for growth and inflation.

The central bank has now cut rates by a total of 125 basis points since February 2025, the most aggressive easing since 2019. It cut rates by 25 basis points at its last meeting in December.

India remains one of the world's fastest-growing major economies, bolstered by strong domestic de-

mand, public infrastructure spending and a relatively resilient services sector.

The economy is expected to grow 7.4% in the current financial year and the government's economic adviser has forecast growth at 6.8-7.2% next year.

While trade tensions with the US have been a drag on the world's fifth-largest economy, the US has agreed to cut tariffs on Indian imports from nearly 50% to 18% in exchange for India halting Russian oil purchases and lowering trade barriers.

Inflation in India has been low and expected to average close to 2% in the current financial year, below the central bank's target of 4%. In December, retail inflation stood at 1.33%, the highest in three months.

India's benchmark 10-year bond yield rose after the RBI did not announce any liquidity supporting measures. The rupee was 0.1% lower, while benchmark equity indexes recouped losses and were last trading little changed.

Economists expect the RBI to stay on hold in the near term, aligning with several Asian central banks, including South Korea and Indonesia, which have signalled pauses in their easing cycles amid inflation concerns and external pressures.

"We expect the central bank to remain on an extended pause amid a positive cyclical up-cycle and gains from the successful conclusion of US trade negotiations," said Radhika Rao, senior economist at DBS Bank in Singapore.

The central bank rate was lowered to 5.25% in a December meeting.

The central bank did not provide a full-year GDP forecast for the next

financial year as a new data series will be rolled out in February.

The central bank, however, expects growth in the April-June 2026 quarter at 6.9% and at 7% in the subsequent three months.

India's government has forecast growth in a range of 6.8-7.2% for the financial year, supported by recent trade deals, robust agricultural output following 2025's abundant rains, and tax cuts aimed at boosting urban consumption.

The RBI raised its inflation projection for the current financial year to 2.1% from 2%.

In the first and second quarters of next year, inflation is forecast at 4% and 4.2%, respectively. A projection for the full financial year will be released in April, Malhotra said.

The rollout of a new retail inflation data series could recalibrate pricing dynamics but the governor flagged risks.

"Geopolitical uncertainty coupled with volatility in energy prices and adverse weather events pose upside risks to inflation," Malhotra said.

While holding rates, the RBI assured markets of its commitment to "proactive" liquidity management.

Large government borrowings and the central bank's forex market interventions have sapped rupee liquidity from the markets, pushing up bond yields.

"While uncertainty remains on the growth-inflation figures as we await the new series, the uptick in commodity prices and weaker currency may pose upside risks to inflation," said Upasna Bhardwaj, chief economist at Mumbai-based Kotak Mahindra Bank.

Three militants killed in Kashmir



Indian security forces search a shop during an operation in a market area in Srinagar, Kashmir. Clashes between security forces and militants in Kashmir killed three gunmen, the army said. An army statement said the militants were killed following exchange of fire with soldiers that began in Basantgarh, in the southern part of Kashmir.

India probes suspected suicide of three sisters

AFP
New Delhi

Indian police yesterday said an investigation had been launched into the suspected suicide of three young sisters over concerns that they were heavily "influenced" by games and movies online that they were later denied access to.

Local media reported the sisters, aged 12, 14 and 16 had jumped from their home on Wednesday in the city of Ghaziabad on the outskirts of the country's capital.

Concern among experts and regulators has grown in recent years that too much screen time and addictive algorithms are harming child development, sparking authorities, including in India, to push for social media bans for children and teens.

The sisters had been "denied access" to K-Pop music and Korean games and movies that they had previously played and watched online.

"They were influenced by Korean culture: K-pop music, games and movies," Patil said.

He added that the family also

appeared to be under financial distress.

Their father had recently taken away their devices and barred them from watching Korean dramas and playing online games, the Indian Express newspaper reported. Family members could not be immediately reached for comment.

Korean culture has surged in popularity, especially among young people, in India over the past decades, beginning with rapper Psy's 2012 hit "Gangnam Style" and expanding through K-pop and streaming platforms packed with Korean dramas.

Danone recalls batches of infant formula in UK

AFP
London

Danone recalled "several batches" of infant formula due to the possible presence of a toxin, the UK's food safety watchdog said yesterday after the French food giant did the same in multiple European countries.

"Danone is recalling several Aptamil and Cow & Gate First Infant Milk and Follow on Milk formula products because cereulide toxin may be present in some batches of the products," the Food Standards Agency (FSA) said in a statement.

Several manufacturers have issued recalls in more than 60 countries since December of infant formula that could be contaminated by the toxin which can cause nausea, vom-

iting and diarrhoea. On Thursday, Danone issued recalls of its infant formula to Austria, France, Germany, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Switzerland, the company and national health authorities confirmed.

It previously recalled one batch of its Aptamil First infant formula in the UK because "cereulide toxin has been found in the product," the FSA said in January.

Swiss food giant Nestle also undertook a recall of several batches of infant formula in the UK at the start of January as a precaution.

The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) on Thursday said it was investigating 36 cases where children developed "symptoms consistent with cereulide toxin poisoning across the UK, after consuming implicated batches."

Court clears animal rights activist's US extradition

An alleged animal rights extremist can be extradited from Britain to the US to stand trial over bombings linked to animal testing more than two decades ago, a London court ruled yesterday. US citizen Daniel San Diego, 47, is accused in relation to bombings in California in 2003, with the so-called Revolutionary Cells of the Animal Liberation Brigade claiming responsibility. No one was injured in either of the incidents. San Diego was found in Wales in November 2024, having been on the FBI's most-wanted terrorist list since 2009 - the first domestic terrorist on the list, alongside the likes of late al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden. Judge Samuel Goode ruled San Diego could be extradited, saying in his ruling there was "no evidence of any improper political involvement in (San Diego's) case or any evidence of any presidential interference in (San Diego's) case, now or in the future". - Reuters

King Charles visits Dedham



Britain's King Charles III meets members of the community during a visit to Dedham, near the city of Colchester, eastern England.

Elton John slams *Daily Mail* over hacking allegations

Reuters
London

Singer Elton John told London's High Court yesterday he was incensed to learn of allegations his landline phones had been bugged on behalf of the *Daily Mail*, saying the papers' actions were "outside even the most basic standards of human decency".

The veteran singer, known for hits such as *Rocket Man* and *Your Song*, is suing Associated Newspapers, publisher of the *Daily Mail*, for alleged widespread privacy intrusions along with his partner,

Prince Harry and four others.

Associated denies allegations of phone hacking and other unlawful acts, saying its newspapers' stories were based on information which was already in the public domain or obtained from legitimate sources, such as celebrities' "leaky" social circles.

It has called the claims "preposterous smears".

John, who appeared by videolink wearing a blue shirt and green jacket, said he had only learned of the Mail's alleged wrongdoing when he was told by his close friend, actor Elizabeth Hurley, who is another of the claimants.

Hurley had been informed by a private investigator that John's landline phones had been bugged when she was staying with him shortly after the birth of her son.

The evidence from the private investigator is one of the main issues of contention in the case as, having originally given a statement in support of the claimants, he has now retracted it and cast doubt on its authenticity.

"When we realised the seriousness of what had happened... We were outraged," said John, who has sold more than 300mn records over a six-decade career.

John, who said he did not own

a mobile phone, said that while Hurley was staying with him his three landline phones were "hacked".

"I was incensed," said the singer, who apologised for having to appear by videolink because the "inconvenience of my eyesight" meant he was not able to attend in person.

"I've never been afraid of fighting my corner... with the British press when I think I've been treated badly or there's been an injustice."

Associated's lawyer Catrin Evans questioned John about some of the 10 articles published between 2002 and 2015, putting to

him that information might have come from his own spokesperson or other lawful sources, such as his circle of friends.

"My friends do not talk to the press and that is why they are still my friends to put it bluntly," John said, later saying Evans was "clutching at straws" and asked why she was not focusing on the "horrendous things" Associated had done.

One of the articles he and his partner complain about relates to a 2010 article about the couple having had a child through surrogacy, saying the *Mail* obtained a copy of their son's birth certi-

cate before they did. "It has been truly sickening to see the disclosure in our case, with Zachary as a target when he was just born, with me as a target when I was sick and unwell," John wrote in his witness statement.

"I have found the *Mail*'s deliberate invasion into my medical health and medical details surrounding the birth of our son Zachary abhorrent and outside even the most basic standards of human decency."

John is the last of the seven claimants to give evidence, with the nine-week trial due to conclude next month.

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GULF TIMES**Big US banks boost lobbying muscle as policy fights heat up**

Big US banks' lobbying spend jumped 12% last year, the most in more than a decade, as they intensified efforts to navigate major policy flux in Washington under President Donald Trump's administration, according to a Reuters analysis of disclosure data and industry lobbyists.

The power of the crypto lobby and its policy gains have become a source of alarm and frustration for many banks, according to four other industry sources, two of whom said some in the industry want to take a more aggressive stance.

Among banks with at least \$50bn in assets, 38 reported lobbying last year. Those lenders, along with seven of their top trade groups, spent \$86.8mn on lobbying the White House, federal agencies and lawmakers, according to a Reuters analysis of data provided by the non-partisan organisation OpenSecrets, which tracks money in politics.

The 12% jump in 2025 was the largest since 2011 when the banking industry was scrambling to shape a slew of major new rules following the 2008 financial crash. Trump's bank regulators are working on a sweeping overhaul of those capital rules, and potentially transformative fintech and crypto policy changes, while Congress is considering landmark digital asset legislation, all of which promise the industry big wins but also potential losses.

"Because we are in such an active environment, you want to make sure you are fully at the table," said Ed Mills, a policy analyst at Raymond James. "There's a view that much of what DC is doing is positive for the banks, but you still want to shape that agenda." Trump himself has also proved a wildcard. Last year, he accused banks of politicised debanking, and more recently has pushed populist policies aimed at addressing cost-of-living concerns ahead of congressional elections this year, including a credit card interest rate cap, prompting some banks to push back. The disclosures show big banks hired several lobbyists with close ties to the President and the White House.

"The need to safeguard yourself to make sure that you're not being caught by surprise is really where their expenditures go," said James Ballentine, a former top lobbyist for the American Bankers Association who now runs a government relations firm for finance clients. One Washington lobbyist, who asked for anonymity to discuss sensitive policy issues, said the rise of affordability politics, in particular, had been a shock to banks.

Ballentine also cited a bill limiting credit card swipe fees, and tumult at the consumer finance watchdog as causes for increased vigilance by banks, as well as competition from crypto companies. "It's extremely important for the industry to guard itself from competition they see coming from other financial players, crypto being the largest one," he added. Crypto companies spent heavily to install industry-friendly lawmakers in the 2024 elections – an effort that led to stablecoin legislation last year, and a bill that would give crypto companies more regulatory clarity. Both present threats to banks.

The digital asset sector's lobbying spend surged 66% in 2025 to \$40.6mn, but remains well below the more established banking industry's spend, according to OpenSecrets. To be sure, banks are by no means Washington's biggest lobbyists, being routinely outspent by industries such as defence, telecommunications and insurance. Trump's return to office last year also sparked a general boom in government relations across industries, according to OpenSecrets.

In response to a query about industry efforts to shape policy, the White House said the Trump administration would not create "undue handouts or carveouts."

"The only special interest guiding President Trump's decision-making is the best interest of the American people," said White House spokesman Kush Desai.

A Washington lobbyist who represents financial sector clients said banks were eager to leverage political and personal White House connections. In 2025, Bank of America hired Bryan Lanza, a former communications director for Trump's presidential transition, Morgan Stanley hired Trump fundraiser Jeffrey Miller, and JP Morgan retained Ballard Partners, where White House Chief of Staff Susie Wiles previously worked. – Reuters

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On the campaign trail

Phu Thai Party's prime ministerial candidate Yodchanan Wongsawat poses with his son and daughter during a campaign rally ahead of the general election at Thephasadin Stadium in Bangkok. The general election is scheduled to be held tomorrow in order to determine the composition of the House of Representatives. A referendum will also be held on the same day so as to determine whether the 2017 constitution should be replaced with a new one. (AFP)

Rubaiya Qatar aims to empower new generations of artists and thinkers**QNA**

Doha

Qatar Museums (QM) announced the programme for Rubaiya Qatar, a new nationwide multidisciplinary contemporary art quadrennial developed under the auspices of Al Riwaq Art + Architecture, the contemporary art and architecture institution of Qatar Museums dedicated to research, exhibitions, and public art. Conceived to elevate Qatar's international presence and empower new generations of artists and thinkers, Rubaiya Qatar will present a dynamic programme of exhibitions, commissions, public art projects, residencies, publications, and more, organised every four years under a single theme.

As part of this inaugural programme, Qatar Museums also announced further details of *Unruly Waters*, the flagship and largest exhibition of Rubaiya Qatar. Referencing the book of the same title by environmental historian Sunil Amrit, *Unruly Waters* features works by more than 50 contemporary artists, many of whom have been commissioned to create new work for the project. The exhibition explores how both humans and nature have shaped today's realities across a region spanning from the Gulf to East Asia, while also examining Qatar's place within that region.

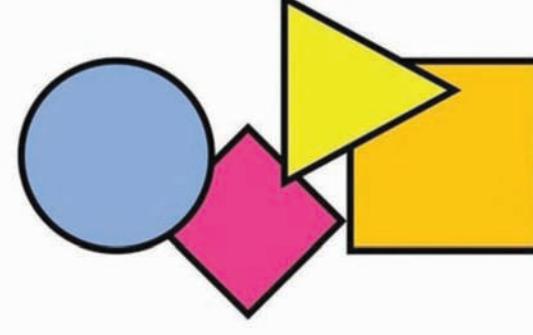
Global outlook

Sheikha Reem al-Thani, Qatar Museums Deputy CEO of Al Riwaq Art + Architecture, Public Art, and Rubaiya Qatar, said: "Rubaiya Qatar builds on the growth of Qatar Museums over the past two decades, aiming to reflect the country's aspirations by positioning Doha as a hub for global art practice. This inaugural edition of Rubaiya Qatar will foster new creative networks, support emerging artists who are pushing the boundaries of innovation, and showcase Doha as a platform for the exchange of cutting-edge ideas."

Sheikha Alanoor al-Thani, Director, Rubaiya Qatar, said: "Unruly Waters" locates Qatar as a meeting point for different cultures and traditions, underscoring the nation's past and present role as a geopolitical hub. Alongside works by major contemporary artists, the exhibition will present artefacts from Qatar Museums' extensive collections to propose new artistic and historical connections, shining a light on how the wider Gulf region has been shaped by nature and global weather systems as much as by commerce, trade, and culture."

Rubaiya Qatar will include multiple exhibitions, public artworks and activations across Qatar. Its largest exhibition, *Unruly Waters*, will be on view at Al Riwaq Arts + Architecture and part of Rubaiya Qatar's multi-site activations across Qatar. Curated by Tom Eccles (Executive Director, Center for Curatorial Studies and the Hessel Museum of Art, Bard College), Ruba Katrib (Chief Curator and Director of Curatorial Affairs, MoMA PS1), Mark Rappolt (Editor-in-Chief of ArtReview and ArtReview Asia), and Shabbir Hussain Mustafa (Chief Curator, Singapore Art Museum).

Tom Eccles said: "The quadrennial exhibition introduces a new type of transnational, transdisciplinary program to Doha, rooted in issues that affect both Qatar and the wider region. The artists exhibiting broadly represent the diverse nationalities that live in Qatar, while their work reflects the shared geographical, environmental and social realities of today. The programme builds upon the ambitious expansion of the arts in Doha over the past decade and represents another milestone in the evolution of Qatar's commitment to dialogue within the international arts community."



متادف قطر
QATAR MUSEUMS

The works on show span a range of media, from painting and sculpture, to moving image, storytelling, sound and performance. In all of this, art functions as a cross-border medium drawing up new solidarities and new connections

The more than 50 artists invited to participate in *Unruly Waters* come from a region informed by both the ancient Maritime Silk Road and Qatar's present demographics. A region that is locally rooted but often diasporic, and a site of artistic innovation and research and a region. Their works are engaged with the urgencies of ecologic transformation and geopolitical reality, and reflect the migratory patterns that have shaped the Gulf for more than a thousand years, continuing to today. Artists participating include Lawrence Abu Hamdan, Sophia Al Maria, Mohamed Bourouissa, Ade Darmawan, Alia Farid, Naiza Khan, Dala Nassar, Lydia Ourahmene, Marina Tabassum, and Rirkrit Tiravanija.

Exhibition themes will focus on the circulation and transport of people, goods, and ideas embedded histories and memories infrastructure, and speculative futurism. The works on show span a range of media, from painting and sculpture, to moving image, storytelling, sound and performance. In all of this, art functions as a cross-border medium drawing up new solidarities and new connections.

Unruly Waters will also present artefacts held by Qatar Museums, including objects from the Cirebon shipwreck, a late 9th- to 10th-century merchant vessel salvaged in 2003 in Indonesia's Java Sea. The wreck's cargo provides significant evidence of a Maritime Silk Road, early forms of globalisation, and trade across the Indian Ocean, suggesting a shared cultural history predating European colonialism, governed not by national borders, but by winds, tides, and rains. The wreck's artefacts allow the exhibition to speculate on entanglements that resist conventional geographic frameworks and the separate histories of West, South, and East

Asia. By presenting these objects alongside contemporary artworks, *Unruly Waters* aims to shine a light on a vast, interconnected Asia.

Unruly Waters builds on years of research, including the 2022 exhibition One Tiger or Another, presented at Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art and curated by Eccles and Rappolt, and "Water Ways: Epistemologies and Aesthetics", a three-day academic conference organised in February 2024 by Qatar Museums, Rubaiya Qatar, and Doha Institute for Graduate Studies.

Maritime heritage

In addition, Rubaiya Qatar will also present *Our Common Currents* curated by Lina Patmali, Acting Head of Curatorial Affairs, Rubaiya Qatar, at the QM Katara Gallery. The exhibition is anchored in Qatar, where water is a defining element of both the cultural and natural landscapes, including pearling and maritime trade heritage, nomadic traditions, and their environmental counterparts: the sea, the coast, and the deserts. Expanding to other contexts, the exhibition traces common experiences between humans and bodies of water while re-examining humans' relationship with water to imagine sustainable, viable futures.

At Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, the exhibition *Seething Sea* brings together modern and contemporary works by Gulf artists to reflect on the region's historic relationship with the sea as a source of life, danger, and storytelling. Drawing on maritime myths, rituals, and cultural memory, the exhibition considers how inherited knowledge and imaginaries confront ecological degradation and rapid transformations. The exhibition is curated by Wadah al-Aqeedi, a curator and art historian.

Further exhibitions, public art projects, and public programmes associated with Rubaiya Qatar include projects with Wael Shawky, Rirkrit Tiravanija, Qatar National Library, the Biennale of Sydney, and Qatar's pavilion at the Venice Biennale. And a series of public art unveilings throughout the duration of Rubaiya Qatar including works by Jitish Kallat and Minerva Cuevas.

Rubaiya Qatar is presented as part of Evolution Nation, a campaign honouring Qatar's cultural journey over the past 50 years, since the founding of the National Museum of Qatar, and 20 years since the founding of Qatar Museums. Curated by Qatar Creates, the national movement positioning Qatar as a global hub for art, culture, and creativity, Evolution Nation highlights both the nation's cultural milestones and its aspirations. Rubaiya Qatar will also act as the first major program ushering in the new era of Qatar Museums.

German exports to US plunge as tariffs exact heavy cost

AFP
Frankfurt

German exports to the United States plunged in 2025 amid President Donald Trump's tariff blitz, driving down the trade surplus of Europe's top economy with the crucial US market to a four-year low, data showed yesterday. Exports to China also fell, but total exports rebounded by around 1% following two years of contraction, as stronger trade with Europe offset falling shipments to the world's two biggest economies, statistics agency Destatis said.

The overall picture for Germany's foreign trade remains

bleak, experts warn, at a time the traditional export power is struggling after a long decline driven by a manufacturing slump, high energy costs and weak demand at home and abroad.

German exports to the United States fell 9.3% last year compared to 2024, and totalled around €147bn (\$173bn), while US imports to Germany rose slightly.

The trade surplus with the United States was €52.2bn, its lowest level since 2021, after a record surplus the previous year of nearly €70bn. "Higher US tariffs are making German goods less competitive on the US market," Commerzbank economist Ralph Solvene told AFP.

As a result, China returned as Germany's biggest trading partner last year, overtaking the US, according to the preliminary data. Europe was in Trump's cross-hairs when he launched his tariff onslaught as it runs a hefty trade surplus with the United States, much of it due to German exports.

Under a deal struck in July, EU exports to the United States face a baseline levy of 15% - far higher than before Trump's return to office.

It was a heavy blow for Germany, whose firms, from well-known automakers and machinery giants to smaller, family-owned companies, have long relied on robust trade with the United States.

According to data released previously by Destatis, exports of German cars and car parts to the United States dropped 17.5% between January and November from a year earlier. Exports of machinery were down 9% and shipments of chemical products fell over 14% in the same period.

German businesses have struggled in the Chinese market due to the emergence of homegrown rivals and weak consumer demand - German exports to China were down 9.3% last year. But Chinese exports to Germany jumped 9%, as firms are increasingly redirecting goods to European markets due to Trump hiking tariffs on Chinese imports.

German exports to other EU countries rose around 4% last year, driving the slight improvement in the overall figure. Germany's trade surplus narrowed to 200.4bn euros in 2025, a reduction of around €40bn from a year earlier. In other news Friday, German factory output dropped 1.9% in December from the previous month, according to Destatis, sharper than forecasts and a disappointment after three months of gains. But ING economist Carsten Brzeski said the drop was "only a temporary halt and not a new downward trend".

"In fact, German industry is at the start of a clear cyclical upswing," he said.

The German government expects the economy will grow 1% this year after several bleak years, and other recent data - from industrial orders to quarterly growth - have painted a rosier picture.

Chancellor Friedrich Merz, who is pushing a major fiscal stimulus and reform drive, struck an optimistic tone yesterday. Recent signs of a turnaround "encourage and embolden me to continue on this path of reforms and of changing the conditions for investment and for jobs in Germany", Merz said during a visit to Abu Dhabi.

"We are still far from where we want to be, but we are on the right path."

Russia says Kyiv behind shooting of army general in Moscow building

AFP
Moscow

A top Russian military intelligence general was shot in a Moscow apartment building yesterday and hospitalised, Moscow said, in what it said was an assassination attempt orchestrated by Ukraine. There was no comment from Kyiv, which has claimed responsibility for some of the several high-ranking military officials that have been killed since Moscow launched its full-scale offensive in February 2022.

Russian investigators said Vladimir Alekseyev - the deputy head of Moscow's GRU military intelligence, sanctioned in the West for his alleged role in cyber-attacks and charges that he organised a nerve agent attack on a Russian defector in Britain - was shot by an "unidentified individual".

It said the suspect fled the scene and the general was admitted to hospital.

In televised comments, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov accused Ukraine of being behind the "terrorist act", accusing Kyiv of trying to "disrupt the negotiation process" searching for an end to the four-year war. The Kremlin said its secret services were investigating the incident and keeping President Vladimir Putin informed. "The special services are doing their job," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

"We wish the general a speedy recovery. We hope that will be the case," he added.

In a northwestern Moscow suburb, a forensic truck was parked outside an apartment block and investigators had cordoned off access, AFP reporters saw.

A career military officer, Ale-



Police officers walk past a high-rise residential building, the scene of an assassination attempt on Russian Lieutenant General Vladimir Alekseyev.



A police car is parked outside a residential building where the shooting took place.

Alekseyev has been the first deputy chief of the GRU since 2011. He has been under Western sanctions over alleged cyberattacks and for what the West said was his role in organising the poisoning of Rus-

sian ex-spy Sergei Skripal in the UK in 2018.

That attempted assassination left one member of the British public dead and severely strained ties between London and Moscow.



Law enforcement officers and journalists work outside a residential building where the assassination attempt on Russian Lieutenant General Vladimir Alekseyev took place in Moscow, yesterday.

Alekseyev also led intelligence operations during the Russian intervention in Syria on behalf of now-outsted leader Bashar al-Assad.

And amid the Ukraine war he was despatched to negotiate with Wagner chief Yevgeny Prigozhin during his attempted mutiny against Russian military top brass in 2023. At the time Alekseyev was filmed sitting with Prigozhin in a Russian military compound taken over by Wagner, trying to convince the mercenary chief to call off his troops. Prigozhin died months after the aborted rebellion when his plane exploded mid-air.

Russia's Investigative Committee said yesterday Alekseyev had been hit by "several shots". There was no update on his condition other than that he had been hospitalised.

"Investigative actions and operational search measures are being carried out to identify the person or persons involved in committing the aforementioned crime," Investigative Committee spokeswoman Svetlana Petrenko said in a statement. Several senior military figures have been targeted and killed on Russian soil since Moscow sent troops into Ukraine.

Last month a Russian court sentenced an Uzbek man to life in prison for the 2024 killing of the head of the Russian army's radiological, chemical and biological defence forces. The general, Igor Kirillov, was killed when a booby-trapped scooter exploded as he left an apartment block in Moscow, in an attack Kyiv said it had orchestrated.

Orban blasted for scrapping lawsuits in tax row

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban yesterday faced mounting pressure over a decree ordering courts to terminate cases involving a controversial "solidarity" tax imposed by his nationalist government. The decree was issued using emergency powers Orban's government granted itself in 2022 after Russia invaded Ukraine.

It involves "solidarity contributions" levied on wealthier cities to be redistributed to poorer municipalities.

The capital Budapest, run by an opposition mayor, has launched a legal fight over the tax, arguing it cripples local financial autonomy. The decree states that the "determination, collection, and settlement" of the tax cannot be subject to "administrative litigation or immediate legal protection" and instructs courts to terminate "any ongoing litigation".

Judges in two separate cases decided Thursday to just postpone the trials.

Multiple rights organisations condemned the decree. The Hungarian Helsinki Committee, a prominent rights organisation founded in 1989, called it "a classic case of legal abuse". "It's like a team that is losing in the middle of a soccer match saying, 'Let's just call off the game now and say we won,'" the group's co-head Andras Kadar told independent news site 24.hu on Wednesday.

The Hungarian Bar Association said "it violates the independence of the judiciary... as well as the fundamental principle of the separation of powers under the rule of law". In response to media queries, Hungary's supreme court, Curia said that according to the constitution "judges in Hungary are independent and subject only to the law; they cannot be instructed in their judicial activities". But in a later statement, Curia - whose head Andras Varga is seen as an Orban ally - clarified it "did not take a position on the matter".

The government has defended the decree, claiming it does not violate legal principles and just implements a constitutional court ruling made two weeks ago related to the legal disputes surrounding the solidarity contributions. -AFP

Blast at Islamabad mosque kills 31

A suicide blast at a Shia mosque in Islamabad killed at least 31 people yesterday, with 169 more wounded in the deadliest attack in Pakistan's capital since the 2008 Marriott hotel bombing. City officials said 31 people died in the blast at the Imam Bargah Qasr-e-Khadijatul Kubra mosque in the Tarlai area on the city's outskirts, with scores more being treated for injuries. The death toll was expected to rise further. The explosion occurred at Friday prayers, when mosques are packed with worshippers. "The attacker was stopped at the gate and detonated himself," a security source told AFP. Muhammad Kazim, a 52-year-old worshipper, said an "extremely powerful" explosion ripped through the building as prayers were just starting. "During the first bow of the Namaz, we heard gunfire," he told AFP. "And while we were still in the bowing position, an explosion occurred," he said. Another worshipper, Imran Mahmood, told AFP there was a gunfight between the bomber, a possible accomplice and volunteer security personnel at the mosque. "The suicide attacker was trying to move forward, but one of our injured volunteers fired at him from behind, hitting him in the thigh," he told AFP. He then "detonated the explosives", Mahmood, in his fifties, added. No group immediately claimed responsibility, while Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said those behind the blast would be found and brought to justice. South Asia analyst Michael Kugelman said on X that the target suggested it was either the local affiliate of the Islamic State group or anti-Shia militants. The attack was the deadliest in the Pakistani capital since September 2008, when 60 people were killed in a suicide truck bomb blast that destroyed part of the five-star Marriott hotel. AFP journalists at the Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences hospital saw several people, including children, being carried in on stretchers or by their arms and legs. Medics and bystanders helped unload victims with blood-soaked clothes from the back of ambulances and vehicles. At least one casualty arrived in the boot of a car. Friends and relatives of the wounded wept and screamed as victims - dead or alive - arrived at the hospital's heavily guarded emergency ward. Another team of AFP journalists saw armed security forces outside the mosque, where pools of blood were visible on the ground. Yellow crime scene tape surrounded an investigation area, with shoes, clothing and broken glass scattered around the site. The attack comes as Pakistan's security forces battle intensifying insurgencies in southern and northern provinces that border Afghanistan. -AFP

Portugal heads for presidential vote tomorrow

AFP
Lisbon

Portugal ended campaigning yesterday for a presidential election this weekend amidst a battering by storms and fretting about the political whirlwind created by outspoken far-right leader Andre Ventura.

Ventura is almost certain to be beaten by Socialist candidate Antonio Jose Seguro in Sunday's election but the far-right score will be watched almost as much as the latest of a series of fierce gales that have swept in off the Atlantic since the start of the year.

Voting has been delayed by a week in some municipalities because of the storms, which have killed at least five people, triggered flooding and caused widespread damage.

A new storm is forecast for today. But Ventura's call to postpone the whole vote was rejected. Prime Minister Luis Montenegro said the storms had caused a "devastating crisis" but that the threats to voting could be overcome. The electoral law only allows for a postponement in individual localities.

Seguro and Ventura have drastically rewritten their election

scripts and appearances to focus on the towns and villages worst hit by floods, where the storm has torn down buildings and pylons.

Ventura, whose Chega (Enough) party was only created in 2019 but is now the biggest single opposition party in parliament, has attacked the response to the storm given by Montenegro's centre-right minority government.

Seguro has cast off his stance as a unifying candidate and also criticised the government. The 63-year-old former Socialist party leader said he was "shocked" by the state's efforts to get the country back on its feet.

Seguro has the advantage in the divisions caused by the rise of Chega in recent years. An opinion poll published by the Publico daily on Wednesday gave Seguro 67 percent of voter support and Ventura 33 percent.

Seguro led the first round of the presidential election in January with 31 percent of votes and he is now backed by a host of political figures from the far left to the mainstream right.

Montenegro, whose government

relied on the goodwill of the Socialists and Chega to survive, has not publicly backed any candidate, however. His own

party's candidate obtained only 11 percent in the first round and dropped out.

Ventura, 43, took 23 percent of the vote in the first round. The Portuguese establishment and analysts will be closely watching Ventura's final score on Sunday to see whether his support is "stagnating" or whether he is "conquering a new public", said Joao Cancela, political science professor at Lisbon's Nova University.

But the weather could have the final word in the debate as the storms and Seguro's predicted win may lower voter turnout.



Portrait of Presidential candidate of the Socialist Party, Antonio Jose Seguro.



Portrait of Portuguese presidential candidate and Chega party leader Andre Ventura.



Old Doha Port's 'MOVE' initiative champions community wellbeing

By Shaima Sheriff

Staff Reporter

Old Doha Port is positioning itself as a catalyst for community wellbeing with the launch of MOVE, a large-scale, community-first sports festival designed to make physical activity accessible to all ahead of Qatar National Sport Day.

Engineer Mohammed Abdulla al-Mulla, CEO of Old Doha Port, said the initiative was designed to create a lasting impact beyond a single event.

"We have initiated this festival, organised and managed by Old Doha Port, to build community awareness and strengthen support for an active, connected lifestyle. MOVE was designed as a community-first festival that celebrates movement as part of everyday life," he said.



Engineer Mohammed Abdulla al-Mulla, CEO of Old Doha Port.

Inspired by the Qatari expression 'Tarayyad', the concept centres on accessibility and inclusivity. "The idea is simple. Making physical activity accessible, enjoyable, and culturally resonant for everyone, regardless of age or fitness level," al-Mulla explained.

The port was selected as the host venue due to its unique set-



ting and operational capabilities.

"Old Doha Port was a natural choice because it combines a distinctive waterfront environment with the infrastructure required to deliver an event of this scale

and quality. From Mina Park to the Mina Corniche, the port offers open, walkable spaces alongside the facilities needed for multi-day programming," he said.

He noted that the event builds

on the port's growing reputation for large-scale public activations, referencing previous international events, such as the Aquabike World Championship activations and Polo AlMarsa.

The festival programme reflects what al-Mulla described as a "wide definition of movement". He said visitors can take part in functional training, running, cycling, strength and conditioning, Pilates, mobility sessions and stretching formats, all led by professional coaches.

"We wanted to ensure that the movement is accessible to the entire community. The overarching goal is to create an environment where everyone – from someone attending their first fitness class to someone training at an advanced level – can participate meaningfully and feel part of a shared community experience," he said.

According to al-Mulla, com-

petitive fitness elements add energy while maintaining inclusivity, complemented by interactive zones, family-friendly activities and expert-led panel discussions.

Aligning with Qatar National Vision 2030, al-Mulla said MOVE translates the message of active living into tangible action. "MOVE aligns with the spirit of National Sport Day by turning the national message of healthy, active living into an accessible experience."

"MOVE is designed for everyone. Whether you are curious about trying a yoga session or simply exploring the festival, this is the perfect opportunity to take that first step toward a healthier, more active lifestyle," al-Mulla said, adding that through MOVE, Old Doha Port reinforces its evolving role as both a destination and a platform for community wellbeing.

talabat cites Qatar as blueprint for regional growth

By Shaima Sheriff

Staff Reporter

talabat sees Qatar as a blueprint for regional growth, a company official pointed out at the recently concluded Web Summit Qatar 2026.

Speaking at a panel discussion on the sidelines of the event, talabat Qatar managing director Francisco Miguel De Sousa outlined how the global quick-commerce platform adapts its technology, partnerships, and operations to local market needs.

He said talabat's success in Qatar lies in its ability to think globally while acting locally, describing the country as a market that demands precision, speed, and deep cultural understanding.

"We are a global company, but our success depends on how local we can be. Qatar is not the same as any other market, even within the GCC," he said.

Describing talabat as the "number one quick-commerce business," De Sousa explained that the platform delivers "everything that fits in a box – food, groceries, pharmacy and many other items," while continuously evolving to match consumer behaviour. "People's routines, expectations and even their ordering times are different here. You cannot run a one-size-fits-all model," he explained.

According to De Sousa, localisation happens in layers: "We start by 'Arabising' the platform, then adapting it to the Middle East, then the GCC, and finally we 'Qatarise' it. Even within Qatar, behaviour changes from one area to another. That's why localisation never really stops."

At the same time, he said seasonal and cultural moments, particularly the holy month of Ramadan, require heightened adaptation. "It's not just about consumer behaviour. The



talabat Qatar managing director Francisco Miguel De Sousa (seated, second from right) during a panel discussion held on the sidelines of Web Summit Qatar 2026.

conditions, routines and daily rhythms of the country have to be totally tailored, especially during peak moments like Iftar and Suhoor," De Sousa said. He further explained that speed, affordability, and choice remain the cornerstones of talabat's strategy. "In this delivery business, whoever wins on speed, daily value, and a seamless experience is the one who succeeds," De Sousa said, adding that these principles shape decision-making across operations in Qatar. De Sousa stressed that strong partnerships underpin the platform's ecosystem, explaining that talabat works closely with restaurants, suppliers, and retailers to ensure long-term sustainability.

Reflecting on the Covid-19 pandemic, he said the company actively surveyed partners to understand their challenges.

"Cash flow was one of the biggest pain points. That's why fast payments became crucial for us. Today, partner settlements are completed within three days," he said.

talabat also introduced cloud kitchens in Qatar, renting and sub-renting kitchen spaces to reduce financial pressure on restaurant partners. "It helps

restaurants grow without carrying heavy overheads while expanding their reach to customers," De Sousa said.

The platform has also focused on geographic inclusion, ensuring retail access in remote and industrial areas. "If people need Monoprix in Dukhan or the north of Al Khor, we try to bring it to them," De Sousa stressed. He said Qatar has additionally served as a testing ground for social-impact initiatives. "talabat Qatar was the first globally to launch in-app donation delivery. All the money went directly to NGOs, such as Qatar Charity, Qatar Red Crescent, and Qatar Cancer Society," De Sousa said, adding that the model was later replicated internationally.

De Sousa explained that innovation is often piloted locally before being scaled.

AI-driven forecasting, customer feedback tools, and delivery-time alerts were refined in Qatar due to high user expectations, he noted. "The most important thing is not clicks; it is how people feel," he said.

For global platforms entering Qatar or the wider region, De Sousa's advice was simple: "Be close to the customer, listen constantly, and keep evolving.

Local relevance is not optional – it's the strategy."

QSI blends elite sport, art and innovation at Web Summit Qatar 2026

Qatar Sports Investments (QSI) has concluded its landmark participation in Web Summit Qatar 2026.

Hosting a record 30,274 attendees from 127 countries at the Doha Exhibition and Convention Centre (DECC), QSI leveraged the region's largest technology conference to redefine the parameters of sports innovation.

Under the overarching theme of 'Art in Sporting Action,' the group demonstrated how elite athletic performance, digital innovation, and high culture are converging to drive the global passion economy.

The 2026 edition underscored QSI's institutional evolution into a mature, fully integrated ecosystem – presenting its diversified multi-club football ownership model under one roof.

Paris Saint-Germain showcased the 2024–2025 UEFA Champions League trophy next to inspiring content spanning the entire multi-sport portfolio. Alongside the French champions, SC Braga and KAS Eupen were highlighted as centres of excellence for talent development and youth academy innovation, demonstrating the depth of QSI's football operations beyond Paris.

By aligning its flagship assets with the cultural prestige of its strategic partnership with Art Basel, QSI also reaffirmed its role as an integral part of Qatar National Vision 2030 and a custodian of the country's burgeoning knowledge economy.

In a move to disrupt traditional corporate networking, QSI and Premier Padel debuted 'Padel Pitching @ Night Summit'. The activation transformed the DECC Park padel courts into a dynamic arena where startups, investors, and mentors built trust and business relationships through the shared love of sport.



Par Helgesson, head of PSG Labs at Paris Saint-Germain, with Ayman Hariri, CEO and co-founder of Vero, during a PSG Masterclass at Web Summit Qatar.

The initiative saw hundreds of participants, including representatives from leading public and private Qatari entities, trading pitch decks for padel racquets. Participants remarked that 10 minutes of court time accomplished more than two hours of traditional meetings, successfully validating padel as the "new golf for the digital generation."

Building on its 2025 launch, PSG Labs utilised the summit to operationalise its mandate as a venture catalyst. The booth's first floor hosted a high-stakes Micro Lab pitch competition where sports-tech startups vied for the 'Golden Ticket,' a fast-track entry into the PSG Labs ecosystem.

Winners were granted immediate access to present their solutions at PSG Labs global HQ at STATION F in Paris, using the club as a "living laboratory" for performance and fan engagement

technologies. The activation embodied QSI's commitment not just to buying technology, but to actively accelerating the next generation of industry disruptors.

On the Sport Summit stage, Par Helgesson, head of PSG Labs, explored how data and innovation are reshaping modern football, while Fabien Allègre, PSG Chief Brand officer, shared a digital-first playbook for expanding into new markets through cultural insight and fan-centric storytelling.

Further bringing the 'Art in Sporting Action' theme to life, the QSI booth featured an immersive, AI-driven art installation inspired by sports. Their 'digital canvas' used generative AI to translate visitors' spoken and written inputs into evolving abstract artworks, symbolising the fusion of human creativity and machine intelligence.

Environment ministry leads inspection drive across Qatar

The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change, in co-operation with the Environmental Security Group of the Internal Security Force (Lekhwiya), has spotted a number of environmental violations in the northern, southern, and central regions alongside the country's northern and western coasts.

These violations included overgrazing, setting up camps without obtaining the necessary permits, and the hunting and breeding of wild birds for commercial purposes.

The checks took place as part of a comprehensive campaign that will continue. Accordingly, the Department of Land Protection has removed the camps, documented the violations, and taken legal action against the violators in accordance with the environmental legislation in force in Qatar, aiming at protecting the local envi-



ronmental and preservation of biodiversity.

Meanwhile, the ministry confirmed that overgrazing is one of the most prominent violations threatening natural vegetation cover, contributing to soil degradation and harming terrestrial ecosystems. Besides, erecting camps without permits constitutes an encroachment on natural areas and is associated with negative

environmental impacts, such as the distortion of natural sites and harm to wildlife.

The ministry stressed that hunting and breeding wild birds for trade is a clear violation of environmental laws, as it poses a threat to ecological balance and leads to the depletion of natural resources. It stressed the continuation of its efforts to combat these practices and

strengthen field monitoring.

The ministry called on members of the community to comply with environmental laws and regulations and to co-operate with the competent authorities to protect the terrestrial environment and natural resources, in a way that contributes to achieving environmental sustainability goals for present and future generations.

