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MONDAY Vol. XXXXVI No. 13646

February 9, 2026

Sha'ban 21, 1447 AH

www.gulf-times.com 2 Riyals

published in
QATAR
since 1978

BUSINESS | Page 1

UDC reports QR404mn net profit on QR1.93bn revenue; proposes 5.5% dividends



Govt launches discount plan for Ramadan

Consumers to get over 1,000 items cheaper

By A Staff Reporter
Doha

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI) announced yesterday the launch of the list of discounted consumer goods for the holy month of Ramadan, comprising more than 1,000 essential and household items. The initiative comes in co-ordination with major retail outlets and consumer complexes across the country, as part of the ministry's efforts to ease the financial burden on families and ensure price stability during the holy month.

In a statement, MoCI affirmed that the move reflects its ongoing commitment to protecting consumer rights and maintaining fair market practices, particularly during Ramadan, when demand for food and other consumables tends to increase significantly. The discounted list covers a broad range of items considered essential for daily use, including flour, sugar, rice, pasta, chicken, oils, milk, and other basic foodstuffs. It also features a selection of non-food products such as detergents, washing powders and liquids, paper towels, and other household

goods that typically see higher consumption during the fasting period.

The ministry clarified that the list of discounted goods has been distributed to all major retail chains and consumer complexes across the country. It has also been made publicly available through the ministry's official website and social media accounts, enabling consumers to view the prices and plan their Ramadan shopping in advance.

MoCI stressed the importance of adhering to the listed prices throughout the duration of the holy month and emphasised that stores must display the new price tags clearly to ensure transparency for all shoppers. To this end, the ministry announced that it will intensify inspection campaigns during Ramadan to monitor compliance, detect any price manipulation, and promptly take appropriate legal action against violators in accordance with the country's consumer protection regulations.

The ministry reiterated its commitment to safeguarding consumer interests and ensuring the steady availability of all essential commodities in the local market. It also urged consumers to play an active role by reporting any instances of price violations, non-compliance, or other market irregularities through the ministry's designated communication channels, including the call centre, website, and mobile application.



Reed claims Qatar Masters



Patrick Reed of the United States celebrates with the trophy after winning the Qatar Masters 2026 at Doha Golf Club yesterday. The American's two-stroke victory in Doha is his second European Tour win in three weeks. **PICTURE:** Noushad Thekkayil **Sport Page 1**

'Eskan' app for housing services launched

By Ayman Adly
Staff Reporter

The Civil Service and Government Development Bureau (CSGDB) has launched the "Eskan" smart application, the officially approved digital platform for government housing services in Qatar. The move is part of broader efforts to advance digital transformation and upgrade government services in line with Qatar National Vision 2030.

Announcing the launch at a press conference at the Bureau's headquarters, officials said Eskan provides a unified platform through which beneficiaries and housing unit owners can complete transactions, track requests in real time and receive automated updates. The application is designed to enhance transparency, improve efficiency and speed up the delivery of housing-related services.

Director of Housing Affairs and Government Buildings, Engineer Jassim Mohammed Telfat, said the Eskan application was developed as "an integrated digital channel reflecting the objectives of the Eskan portal and unifying various housing services into a single platform accessible anytime and anywhere". He said ease of use, clarity of services and full integration with approved government systems were key design priorities, supporting data accuracy, rapid processing and a reduction in paper-based procedures.

Telfat noted that the Bureau launched the Eskan electronic portal in 2023 as "an integrated digital platform aimed at facilitating access for government employees and property owners to housing and government buildings services within a clear regulatory digital framework". **To Page 5**

PM holds talks with Kuwait Amir



The Amir of Kuwait, Sheikh Jaber al-Sabah, has held talks with HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani, in Kuwait.

During the meeting yesterday, HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs conveyed the greetings of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, along with his wishes for good health and happiness to the Amir of Kuwait, and continued progress and prosperity for the people of Kuwait.

In response, the Amir of Kuwait asked HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs to pass on his greetings to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim

bin Hamad al-Thani, expressing his wishes for HH the Amir's good health and happiness, and for further development and growth for the people of Qatar. The talks included a review of relations between Kuwait and Qatar and ways to strengthen and expand co-operation. The two sides also discussed a number of issues of mutual interest. Kuwaiti Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdulla al-Ahmad al-Sabah met with HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani. Discussions during the meeting focused on advancing bilateral co-operation between the two countries, as well as on a variety of topics of mutual interest. **(QNA) Page 2**

Qatar, Kuwait sign agreements, MoUs



Qatar and Kuwait held the seventh session of their Joint Higher Committee for Co-operation yesterday, aimed at strengthening bilateral relations and expanding collaboration across a range of sectors. The Qatari side was chaired by HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani, while Kuwait was represented by Foreign Minister Sheikh Jaber al-Sabah.

The session reviewed ways to deepen co-operation and achieve greater integration between the two nations, alongside an exchange of views on issues of mutual interest. HE Sheikh Mohammed highlighted the close fraternal

ties between Qatar and Kuwait, stressing the shared commitment to further strengthening relations in the interests of both peoples. At the conclusion of the meeting, the two sides signed the minutes of the seventh session, as well as several agreements and memoranda of understanding. These included a co-operation

and news-exchange agreement between the Qatar News Agency and the Kuwait News Agency, memoranda on consumer protection and competition protection, and a memorandum of understanding to enhance co-operation in the field of cybersecurity between the two governments. **(QNA)**

Winners of State Sports Day Award announced



Qatar's Ministry of Sports and Youth has honoured the winners of the first edition of the State Sports Day Award, recognising government bodies, private institutions and individuals for their contributions to promoting physical activity and community sport.

The award ceremony was held ahead of the National Sport Day 2026 celebrations and was attended by HE the Minister of Sports and Youth Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa bin Ahmed al-Thani. Also attending were HE the Minister of State for Interior Affairs Sheikh Abdulaziz bin Faisal al-Thani, and HE the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Sports and Youth, Yasser bin Abdullah al-Jamal, along with senior officials.

The event recognised national institutions for their sustained initiatives to promote public health and encourage physical activity within workplaces and communities, supporting Qatar's long-term vision of building a healthy and active society.

The Ministry of Interior won first place in the institutional category, followed by the University of Doha for Science and Technology

in second place, and Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development in third.

Individual awards were also presented across several categories. Yousuf al-Muftah won the over-60 category after participating in 16 running events in 2025. Hassan al-Marikhi won the men's category with participation in 27 community sports events, while Khaloud Aqeel received the women's award after taking part in 31 activities during the year.

In the children's category,

Ghanem al-Nabet was honoured for recording the highest number of participations, with 26 sports activities.

Awards were also presented for the highest number of steps recorded through the Qatar Sports for All Federation app. Hamad al-Marri won the men's category after maintaining an average of more than 10,000 steps per day throughout 2025, while Nour Mohammed won the women's category for achieving the same daily average. **To Page 5**

National Sport Day holiday tomorrow

The Amiri Diwan announced yesterday on the occasion of the National Sport Day – which falls on the second Tuesday of February annually – that Tuesday, 22 Sha'ban 1447 AH, corresponding to February 10, 2026, will be an official holiday. **(QNA)**



PM holds talks with Kuwait counterpart



Prime Minister of Kuwait Sheikh Ahmad Abdulla al-Sabah met yesterday with HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani. Discussions during the meeting focused on advancing bilateral co-operation between the countries, as well as on a variety of topics of mutual interest. (QNA)

Qatar takes part in global talks on humanitarian law, peace in Geneva

The Permanent Mission of Qatar to the United Nations Office in Geneva participated in the third consultation of the Workstream 3 of the Global Initiative to Galvanise Political Commitment to International Humanitarian Law, focusing on International Humanitarian Law and Peace, chaired jointly by Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Bangladesh, Colombia, Ethiopia, and the International Committee of the Red Cross. The Second Secretary of the Permanent Mission of Qatar in Geneva, Abdulaziz al-Mansoori, noted that the world today is experiencing rapidly evolving and escalating challenges, including growing tensions at both regional and international levels, which places the issue of disarmament at a critical juncture, requiring the international community to intensify efforts and strengthen joint action, as it is

a fundamental pillar for maintaining international peace and security, protecting civilians, and promoting respect for international humanitarian law. Al-Mansoori affirmed that Qatar believes disarmament is not merely a security issue, but rather a fundamental humanitarian tool that contributes to protecting civilians and civilian property, mitigating the effects of armed conflicts, and supporting efforts to build sustainable peace, in line with the provisions and principles of international humanitarian law. The respect for the rules of international humanitarian law cannot be separated from genuine commitment to disarmament standards, he said, pointing out that disarmament constitutes a key preventive instrument for reducing human suffering and protecting civilians. (QNA)

Diverse events to highlight National Sport Day in Qatar

The National Sport Day is set to kick off tomorrow (Tuesday), with participation from a wide range of segments of society as part of Qatar's leading initiative to dedicate a day of sports for the nation, during which diverse community groups engage with the goal of promoting sports as a lasting, healthy lifestyle. The organisation of these sporting activities comes in implementation of the Amiri Decision issued in 2011, designating the second Tuesday of February every year as a sport day for the nation, with the aim of encouraging and promoting a healthy lifestyle as an official paid holiday. On this day, public parks, sports fields, and beaches across Qatar transform into a large, open arena hosting hundreds of free sports and fitness events, including walking, running, team games, physical activity, and more, all aimed at promoting a healthy and active lifestyle for everyone. Government ministries, public agencies, and private

sector companies also organise sports activities for their employees and the general public. The events range from soccer, basketball, tennis, taekwondo, cycling, and swimming, along with numerous free physical activities and recreational competitions open to all. The Qatar Community Sports Federation revealed its 2026 calendar, featuring over 800 community sports events. During a press conference, Executive Director of the Federation, Abdullah al-Dosari, highlighted the major achievements of 2025, noting that the Federation organised numerous community sports activities involving all members of society—children, youth, women, and senior citizens—reaching a total of 215,506 participants. He added that activity locations covered the entire country, from north to south, central Doha, and westward to Dukhan and Al-Jumailiya, including public parks, youth centres, and sports clubs. (QNA)

Kuwait crown prince meets PM



Crown Prince of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah al-Khaled al-Hamad al-Sabah met yesterday with HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani. During the meeting, they discussed relations between the countries and ways to support and develop them, in addition to other topics of mutual interest. (QNA)

Justice minister launches Cabinet secretariat strategy for 2026-30

HE the Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Ibrahim bin Ali bin Issa al-Hassan al-Mohannadi has inaugurated the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers Strategy 2026-2030.

The inauguration ceremony was attended by HE Cabinet Secretary-General Hamad bin Ahmed al-Mohannadi and a host of officials, alongside staffers of the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers.

The strategy intends to translate the national priorities into effective corporate practices by reinforcing decision-making efficiency, optimising the regulatory environment, building government capacities capable of responding to future challenges, deepening principles of justice and transparency, and incorporating sustainability considerations into policies and decisions, thereby helping achieve sustainable development.

In his remarks during the inauguration, the minister affirmed that this strategy was developed to enable the General Secretariat to undertake its role in providing the Council of Ministers with essential support across wide-ranging fields, promoting and accelerating the quality of government decisions, as well as ensuring follow-up and achieving measurable outcomes on the ground.

At its core, this represents a clear call to move from the management of procedures to impact-focused leadership, from individual efforts to integrated institutional performance, and from traditional solutions to smart,



data- and evidence-based solutions, al-Mohannadi underlined.

Al-Mohannadi further noted that there has been a commitment to ensure this strategy is fully aligned with Qatar National Vision 2030 and the Third National Development Strategy (NDS3), serving as a springboard from the national legal framework, and capitalising on the best global practices in government excellence, digital transformation, and strategic coordination, thereby fostering the General Secretariat's readiness to keep up with changes and accelerate government performance.

Overall, the strategy is a clear-eyed and integrated roadmap to upgrade corporate performance, undergirded by four strategic outcomes, eight strategic initiatives, and fifteen strategic projects. It fosters governance and ensures effective follow-up in implementing the decisions of the Council of Ministers in a sustainable way, as well as achieving concrete impact at the government work level.

The strategy, in essence, contributes to accomplishing a trifecta of key national outcomes within NDS3, including building

outstanding government institutions, preparing a fully ready workforce for the future, and supporting sustainable economic growth. It also strengthens integration to support the General Secretariat's pivotal role in whole-of-government co-ordination within a national framework grounded in collaboration and shared responsibility, thereby upgrading performance efficiency and output effectiveness.

Through this novel strategy, the General Secretariat underscores its commitment to consolidating a corporate approach based on governance, integration, and proactive approach in supporting the decision-making process, ensuring alignment of legislative policies and proposals with the nation's approved regulatory frameworks.

This is in addition to its keenness to keep abreast of future realignments and enhance the readiness of the government work system, thereby contributing to strengthening Qatar's standing as a pioneering model in government excellence both on regional and global stages. (QNA)

Al-Khulaifi meets Panama FM

HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Mohammed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh al-Khulaifi met yesterday with visiting Minister of Foreign Affairs of Panama Javier Martinez-Acha.

During the meeting, the two sides discussed bilateral co-operation and ways to support and enhance them. They also exchanged views on the latest regional developments, as well as recent developments in Latin America. HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs reaffirmed Qatar's support for all efforts aimed at de-escalation and the adoption of peaceful solutions. (QNA)



Qatar to host nat'l conference on combating money laundering

The national conference on combating money laundering and terrorist financing, organised by the Qatar Association of Certified Public Accountants (QACPA) under the auspices of the Ministry of Justice and the Public Prosecution, will commence next Thursday. The conference will attract experts and specialists in combating financial crimes and terrorist financing to exchange views and experiences on the latest trends in financial crimes and discuss best practices that organisations can adopt to combat these

crimes and mitigate their risks to societies. In a statement yesterday, QACPA explained that the conference will address a range of topics, most notably money laundering and terrorist financing crimes, their patterns, and related offences, including their definition, elements, and impact on the stability of economic systems. The conference will also cover risk assessment using a risk-based approach in various sectors and highlight customer due diligence procedures. (QNA)

Ministry launches Qatar Environment Day slogan

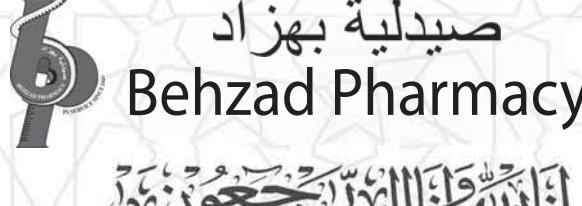
The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change (MoECC) has launched the slogan for Qatar Environment Day 2026, "Our Behaviour Is Reflected in Our Environment", which embodies the essence of the relationship between people and their environment. The slogan also emphasises that responsible environmental behaviour, no matter how simple it may seem, makes a tangible

contribution to protecting ecosystems and preserving natural resources. The slogan conveys the message that environmental responsibility is a shared commitment between individuals and relevant entities. This responsibility is reflected in daily practices such as respecting vegetation cover, maintaining the cleanliness of natural areas, protecting marine life, and complying with environmental

laws, all of which reinforce the concept of environmental sustainability. Accordingly, the ministry is organising a number of awareness activities aimed at strengthening the community's connection to the local environment, introducing its terrestrial and marine components, and instilling positive, sustainable behaviours in dealing with environmental elements.

Major General Abdulaziz Abdullah Ibrahim Al-Ansari (1957 - 2026)

May God Almighty bestow His abundant mercy upon the deceased, grant him eternal peace, and grant his family and loved ones patience and comfort during this time of loss.



صيادلة بهزاد
Behzad Pharmacy

QMC CEO meets Turkish presidential communications chief and Rwanda envoy



CEO of Qatar Media Corp HE Sheikh Khalid bin Abdulaziz bin Jassim al-Thani met with Head of Communications Directorate at the Turkish Presidency Burhanettin Duran, and his accompanying delegation. During the meeting, they discussed strengthening media relations and ways to develop co-operation and joint work between the countries. (QNA)



CEO of Qatar Media Corporation HE Sheikh Khalid bin Abdulaziz bin Jassim al-Thani met with Rwanda ambassador to Qatar Igor Marara Kayinamura. During the meeting, they discussed ways to strengthen bilateral relations between the countries in the field of media, in addition to a number of issues of common interest. (QNA)

Turkish official visits Qatar Media Corporation

Qatar Media Corporation (QMC), represented by Qatar TV and QBusiness Channel, received Burhanettin Duran, head of the Communications Directorate of the Turkish Presidency, and the accompanying delegation, as part of his official visit.

During the visit, the delegation was briefed on the latest technologies and advanced systems used in broadcasting and production. The delegation was welcomed at the Qatar TV building by Ali Saleh al-Sada, director of Qatar TV, who gave a presentation on the operational framework within the studios and introduced the delegation to the key digital solutions and modern equipment used to develop visual content and enhance its quality.



The visit also covered the headquarters of QBusiness Channel, where the delegation was received by Issa al-Hetmi, director of the channel. He provided an overview of the channel's preparations and accompanied the delegation on a tour of the modern studios and specialised technical facilities.

During the tour, the head of the Communications Directorate of the Turkish Presidency lauded the advanced technical capabilities and modern studios of QMC and its channels, stressing the importance of strengthening media co-operation and exchanging professional expertise between the two countries.



Safari to host arm wrestling, other exciting events on NSD

Safari Group is gearing up for Qatar National Sport Day with a wide array of sports competitions and celebrations. On February 10, various Safari outlets will host diverse events. The highlight of this year's celebration is the thrilling Arm Wrestling competition to be held at Safari Mall, Abu Hamour.

Titled 'Arm Wrestling Sea-

son-7' this event has already captured significant attention among sports enthusiasts in Qatar. This marks the seventh season of the arm wrestling competition organised by Safari Group at Safari Mall.

The previous six seasons were remarkably successful and received immense appreciation from customers. In the past years, hundreds of sports fans have gath-

ered to Safari Mall to participate and cheer for the competitors. The steady growth in participant numbers and public engagement with each passing season highlights the immense popularity this sport enjoys among the expatriate community in Qatar.

The arm wrestling competition at Safari Mall, Abu Hamour, offers a total cash prize of 10,000 Qatari

Riyals. The matches are organised into two categories based on body weight: Category A for those weighing under 80kg and Category B for those over 80kg. In each category, the first-place winner will receive QR2,500, the second-place winner will get QR1,500, and the third-place winner will take home QR1,000.

The competition is open for



men aged 18 years and above. Any nationality is eligible to participate. Participation is limited to those who register in person at Safari Mall, Abu Hamour, on February 10 between 4pm to 5pm. The matches will officially commence at 5pm.

In addition to arm wrestling, a 'Hang On Balance' competition is being organised across various Safari branches as part of the Sports

Day festivities. This event will take place at Safari Mall (Abu Hamour), Safari Hypermarket (Al Khor), Barakat Al Awamir, and Ezdan Mall (Al Gharafa). Running from 9am to 10pm, winners of this competition will be awarded Safari gift vouchers. Safari management has extended a warm welcome to all sports lovers in Qatar to join these events, which aims to promote a healthy and active lifestyle.

talabat enabled over QR85mn in rider tips across Mena in 2025

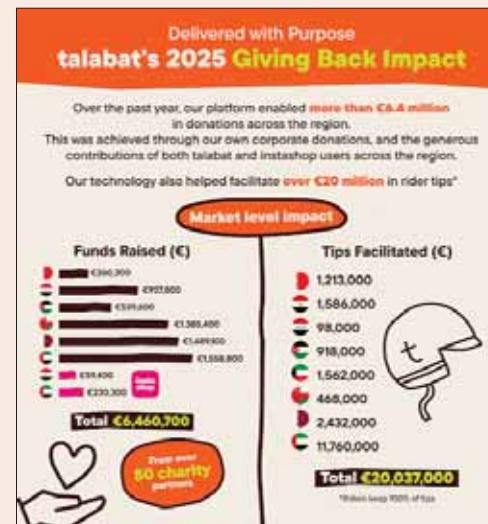
talabat announced the results of its 2025 Giving Back Impact, revealing that its platform enabled over €20mn (QR85mn) in rider tips across the Middle East and North Africa during the past year. In addition, talabat's in-app Giving Back features generated over €6.45mn (over QR27mn) in charitable contributions through partnerships with more than 50 licensed regional and international charities and NGOs, making talabat one of the region's largest digital platforms for everyday giving.

By embedding donations and tipping directly into the ordering experience, talabat enables millions of customers to support communities and frontline workers seamlessly as part of their everyday transactions.

"talabat is more than a delivery app - it is a platform that connects people to opportunity, dignity and support at scale," said May Youssef, senior director of Corporate Affairs at talabat. "Our technology allows millions of small acts of generosity to combine into real, measurable impact for families, charities and riders across the region."

In 2025, talabat users across Mena contributed: €6.45mn (over QR27mn) through accredited charity partners; €20.037,000 in tips (over QR85mn), paid 100% directly to riders.

These contributions supported food security, humanitarian relief and rider livelihoods across



talabat's markets, with donations routed exclusively through licensed and verified partners to ensure transparency and accountability. Giving Back and rider tipping are permanent features of talabat's digital platform, designed to make giving simple, traceable and scalable. Funds and in-kind contributions flow directly to partners and riders, without any platform retention. "Giving back is deeply connected to how we operate in Qatar and across the region," said Toon Gyssels, CEO of talabat. "Through our platform, everyday actions such as tipping riders or donating during checkout become meaningful contributions that support communities, strengthen social impact, and create tangible value for those who need it most." By integrating social impact into its core technology, talabat continues to demonstrate how large-scale digital platforms can support communities and workers while delivering everyday convenience.

QU reveals activities for National Sport Day

Qatar University (QU) has announced the details of its activities for National Sport Day 2026, organised by QU Sports Affairs Department in collaboration with various university departments and units, and in partnership with the Qatar Paralympic Committee.

The activities will be held under the theme "I Chose Sport," reaffirming the university's commitment to its community role in promoting a healthy and active society.

Ibrahim al-Romaihi, general supervisor of the National Sport Day activities at QU, emphasised that this national occasion reflects Qatar's dedication to embedding a culture of sports and physical activity as a way of life that enhances health and vitality across society.

Al-Romaihi explained that the National Sport Day programme will take place from 9am to 12pm at the Sports and Events Building (A07). The programme includes a wide range of sports activities for adults and children, in line with this year's theme, encouraging individuals of all ages to choose sport as a daily pathway to a healthy lifestyle.

Dr Senaid Salem al-Marri, director of the Sports Affairs Department at QU, stated that the university's participation in this national event stems from its role in promoting public health and spreading awareness



of physical activity among its members and the wider community. He noted that the Sports Affairs Department is keen to offer diverse programmes each year that address the needs of different groups and provide a safe and motivating sports environment.

Dr al-Marri added that a variety of sports stations have been allocated to suit different age groups, in addition to a dedicated space for women to participate in sports activities with comfort and privacy, reflecting the university's commitment to providing an inclusive sporting environment for all.

He further noted that the event will feature participation from the Qatar Paralympic Committee, through the presentation of the Goalball activity, underscoring QU's commitment to social inclusion, equal opportunities, and enabling everyone to engage in sports activities.

Board of Directors, Management and staff of United Cooperation General Trading WLL

extend their deepest condolences and sincere sympathies

to the family of the late



**Major General
Abdulaziz Abdullah Ibrahim
Al-Ansari
(1957 - 2026)**

May God Almighty bestow His abundant mercy upon the deceased, grant him eternal peace, and grant his family and loved ones patience and comfort during this time of loss.

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QSE launches booklet on homebuilding

QNA
Doha

Qatar Society of Engineers (QSE) yesterday launched the booklet *Your Guide to Building Your Home*, authored and prepared by Engineer Mohammed bin Hassan al-Nuaimi.

This genre-pioneering booklet serves as an instructional and informational guide, containing accurate information and easy-to-digest guidance for homeowners about to start building, especially for those who lack experience and knowledge in certain technical matters and aspects.

This release is part of QSE's efforts to enhance engineering awareness among community members and support citizens, including those about to marry, by familiarising them with reliable and practical technical knowledge. It thereby contributes to elevating the quality of residential ventures, while reducing common technical and engineering issues.

Following the inauguration, Engineer al-Nuaimi told Qatar News Agency (QNA) that this booklet is a first-of-its-kind engineering guide for non-specialists in the State of Qatar, designed to provide essential knowledge to reduce technical and



engineering problems during construction, as well as to minimise legal disputes related to this kind of project.

He noted that individuals undertaking construction for the first time in their lives need this guide, as it is simple and easy to understand, clearly explaining the steps to be followed during the building process, helping them avoid additional costs and prevent wasted time and effort.

The guide primarily focuses on residential villas and those planning to build their own homes. It emphasises simple residential construction for individual units rather than investment projects and covers all

steps required from the beginning of construction until completion, including measures to reduce risks and fire hazards, ensure efficient use of resources such as water and electricity, and manage overall building costs, he suggested.

For her part, Chairperson of the Board of Directors of QSE, Engineer Amna Mohammed al-Nuaimi, said the launch of this guide represents an important step in empowering the community with accessible engineering knowledge tools, adding that she is proud today to release a practical guide aimed at anyone considering building their home.

The guide serves as a simplified and reliable reference that accompanies homeowners from the very first step of planning through to project completion, helping them avoid many common mistakes, disputes, and financial waste, al-Nuaimi pointed out.

Al-Nuaimi also applauded QSE's partnership with the Ministry of Interior, represented by the Civil Defence Department, and its sponsorship of this guide, which promotes a culture of safety and quality construction in the community.

She highlighted the role of the Ministry of Social Development and Fam-

ily, as the supervising authority for the society's initiatives through the Department of Associations and Private Institutions, noting its ongoing support, constructive collaboration, and unwavering commitment to empowering professional associations and fostering their societal role.

Engineer al-Nuaimi further provided a detailed overview of the guide's concept and content, describing the booklet as the beginning of a journey toward a simplified Qatari construction guide addressed directly to homeowners in clear language, buoyed by practical insights, and showcasing a roadmap spanning

from the initial planning and design stages, through execution, and up to final project handover. The guide ensures practicality while addressing the most common issues homeowners may encounter, thereby providing guidance to reduce risks, disputes, and unexpected costs.

He added that the guide focuses on improving construction quality, promoting safety principles, optimising energy and water consumption, and minimising technical errors, in addition to including interactive content that links certain topics to detailed sources via QR codes, allowing readers to expand their knowledge easily.

Lieutenant Engineer Mansour Abdullah al-Nuaimi from the Civil Defence Department at the Ministry of Interior affirmed the department's support for all initiatives that enhance awareness of preventive and safety requirements in buildings, describing the guide as a valuable contribution to promoting a culture of safe and responsible construction.

Upon wrapping up the ceremony, QSE announced that the guide will be distributed free of charge to anyone who wishes to obtain it, supporting the dissemination of engineering knowledge and enabling prospective homeowners to make more informed and confident decisions.



Qatar participates in Fifth General Assembly of Digital Co-operation Organisation

QNA
Doha

The State of Qatar, represented by the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (MCIT), participated in the Fifth General Assembly of the Digital Co-operation Organisation (DCO), held recently in the State of Kuwait under the theme "Inclusive Prosperity in the Age of AI", with wide participation from ministers, digital economy leaders, policymakers, and rep-

resentatives from the public and private sectors from more than 60 countries.

The Qatari delegation was headed by Assistant Undersecretary for Digital Industry Affairs at MCIT, Reem al-Mansoori.

The MCIT stated that during the General Assembly, participants discussed a range of strategic issues related to the future of the digital economy and the expansion of digital inclusion, in addition to exploring ways to develop coordinated policies that support digital transformation pathways and strengthen

co-operation among member states in the areas of digital innovation and digital capacity building.

On the sidelines of the meeting, the second edition of the International Digital Co-operation Forum (IDCF) was held, with broad regional and international participation, featuring a comprehensive programme of panel discussions and workshops addressing key topics, including digital trade, the ethics of technology use, digital skills sharing, and sustainable digital transformation.

CRA issues updated Qatar National Frequency Allocation Plan

The Communications Regulatory Authority (CRA) announced the issuance of an updated version of the Qatar National Frequency Allocation Plan (QNFAP), which includes updates that keep pace with the rapid developments in the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) sector, particularly in the field of radio communication services. This update is based on the results of the World Radiocommunication Conference 2023 and the outcomes of the public consultation conducted by CRA with the participation of various stakeholders and concerned entities at the local, regional, and international levels, which enriched the plan's content and ensured its alignment with best practices and relevant standards. QNFAP is the approved regulatory document for managing the use of the radio spectrum in the State of Qatar, as a limited national resource owned by the State. It defines the general framework for regulating the radio spectrum and ensuring its efficient use. The Plan includes the National Frequency Allocation Table (NFAT), which outlines the frequency bands allocated to various radio communication services, enabling relevant sectors such as ICT, air and maritime navigation, security, energy, and other government entities to utilise the allocated frequency bands for services that

align with the nature of their activities, in a manner consistent with relevant international standards and agreements.

President of CRA Engineer Ahmad bin Abdulla al-Muslemani stated: "The issuance of QNFAP reflects CRA's commitment to implementing international best practices in spectrum management and keeping pace with the outcomes of world radio communication conferences, in line with CRA's strategy and Qatar's priorities in the ICT field."

"QNFAP constitutes a key regulatory reference that supports telecommunications sector growth and enables various economic and service sectors to make optimal use of the radio spectrum, thus supporting the objectives of Qatar's comprehensive digital development and Qatar National Vision 2030."

He added that the "QNFAP came as a result of integrated technical and regulatory efforts, based on an in-depth assessment of global technological developments and the rapid changes in spectrum usage, to ensure the efficient and sustainable use of this vital resource and to enhance Qatar's readiness to adopt future technologies."

The CRA indicated that a copy of the QNFAP can be accessed through the authority's website. (QNA)

Qatar opens 8th National Conference on Internal Auditing

Qatar has opened the 8th National Conference on Internal Auditing, bringing together senior officials, experts and practitioners from across the Arab world to discuss ways to enhance the value of internal audit functions.

The conference was inaugurated by HE Dr Abdulaziz bin Nasser bin Mubarak al-Khalifa, President of the Civil Service and Government Development Bureau and Secretary-General of the National Planning Council. Held under the theme "Pushing the Value Creation Boundaries", the event aims to raise awareness of the role of internal auditing in improving performance, governance and risk management.

In his opening address, HE Dr al-Khalifa said the government was committed to strengthening administrative modernisation and improving institutional performance through more efficient human resources and effective organisational structures. He stressed that internal auditing plays a vital role in institutional development and represents a key source of added value within government entities. Dr al-Khalifa highlighted Qatar's Government Excellence Program as a comprehensive framework focused on good governance, integration between human capital and technology, and the creation of a balanced work environment that promotes efficiency and innovation.

Dr al-Khalifa noted that the growing expectations placed on internal auditors require advanced professional skills and the ability to adapt to rapidly changing work environments. He added that developing and retaining national talent remains a major challenge, particularly in the internal audit profession.

As part of efforts to address this, he said the bureau had launched a professional certification initiative to support Qatari employees in acquiring advanced skills, pointing to the Certified Internal Auditor qualification as one of the most prominent internationally recognised credentials. For his part, President of the Institute of Internal Auditors in Qatar, Adel al-Hashimi, said the conference aims to position internal auditing as a value-adding function within Arab institutions. He said more than 30 local and international speakers are taking part in over 19 sessions and workshops over two days. Discussions will focus on topics including artificial intelligence applications, governance, risk management, digital forensics, cybercrime and the impact of global uncertainty on the role of internal auditors. (QNA)

100 participants qualify for 9th Katara Prize for Qur'an Recitation

The Cultural Village Foundation (Katara) announced that 100 participants have qualified for the final round of 9th Katara Prize for Qur'an Recitation.

Katara stated that those qualified are from 9 Arab countries and eleven non-Arab countries. 53 participants qualified from Arab countries, while 47 qualified from non-Arab countries, including 18 from Egypt, 17 from Morocco, nine from Iraq, two each from Libya, Lebanon, and Syria, and one each from Saudi Arabia, Algeria, and Yemen. Those qualified will participate in the competition over 20 televised episodes. In each episode, five contestants will compete, with one advancing to the semi-final round. The semi-finals will feature 20 contestants, along with five reserve contestants selected from a further five episodes. In each of these five episodes, five contestants will compete, with one advancing to the final round.

In the final episode, the winners from first to fifth place will be announced, and the episodes will be shown in a special programme in co-operation with Qatar TV during the holy month of Ramadan.

The total prize pool for the Katara Prize for Qur'an Recitation is QR1.5mn, with the first-place winner receiving QR500,000; the second-place winner, QR400,000; the third-place winner, QR300,000; the fourth-place winner, QR200,000; and the fifth-place winner, QR100,000.

The prize aims to encourage and discover exceptional talents in Qur'an recitation, to identify the most beautiful and melodious voices. It also seeks to honour excellence and creativity in reciting the Holy Qur'an while inspiring younger generations to remain committed to their faith and recognise their responsibilities toward their Islamic beliefs and message. (QNA)

QatarEnergy

The General, Limited Tenders Committees and Supply Chain Department announces the following Tenders:

Important Notice:

Suppliers and Contractors who are already registered with QatarEnergy via Mushtaryat Portal can "Buy Tender Online and download Tender Document" from QatarEnergy website (Mushtaryat Portal).

Effective from 1st July 2023, bids submitted by a Local company (companies incorporated in Qatar) acting as Tenderer in accordance with this Invitation to Tender, will not be accepted by QatarEnergy without any further notification, if such companies are not in possession of an ICV score in the ICV portal (<https://icv.qa/en-US>) by the specified Original Tender Closing Date or Original due date for submission of COMMERCIAL Package in case of two stage Tendering as per IITT. However, any Local company that has been established within last two (2) years is exempt from this mandatory ICV certification requirement.

Sl. No.	Tender Number	Tender Sale Period	Tender Closing Date	Tender Bond	Bond Curr.	Tender Fee	Fee Curr.
1	LT26101100	09.02.2026	16.02.2026	165,000.00	QAR	200.00	QAR

Title of Tender: UPGRADATION OF UNLOADING/LOADING SEQUENCE OF RECYCLE AND MAKEUP GAS COMPRESSOR AT QatarEnergy REFINERY, MESAIEED

Mid-Tender Meeting Location : To be advised if required

Mid-Tender Meeting Date & Time : To be advised if required

2	LT26101200	09.02.2026	16.02.2026	09.03.2026	110,000.00	QAR	200.00	QAR

Title of Tender: PROVISION OF VEHICLE MAINTENANCE SUPPORT SERVICES AT HALUL

Mid-Tender Meeting Location : To be advised if required

Mid-Tender Meeting Date & Time : To be advised if required

- Tender documents can be purchased and downloaded from QatarEnergy Website-> Supply Management -> Tenders page during the Tender Sale Period mentioned above against each Tender. Request for issuance of Tender after the specified Tender Sale Period will not be entertained.
- Always refer to QatarEnergy Website (www.qatarenenergy.qa) -> Supply Management -> Tenders page for up to date information on QatarEnergy Tenders. Subscribe to Tender Alert to receive notification in your email on newTenders.
- Changes to Tender Sale Period and Bid Closing Date will be updated in QatarEnergy website/Mushtaryat Portal only.
- Brief Scopes of Work for the above tenders are posted on the QatarEnergy website/Mushtaryat Portal.
- Suppliers and Contractors who are in possession of a valid SAP ID issued by QatarEnergy are instructed to maintain their Company Registration and Communication details upto date and valid via QatarEnergy Mushtaryat Portal on urgent basis.
- No queries will be entertained, or bids received, from entities who have not purchased tender documents in compliance with the above provisions.
- QatarEnergy invites all prospective Suppliers and Contractors interested to participate in QatarEnergy Tenders to register online and obtain a QatarEnergy SAP Vendor Code, a mandatory requirement for the issue of Tender Documents by QatarEnergy.
- Prospective Qatar based Suppliers and Contractors interested to participate in future QatarEnergy Tenders shall obtain an ICV score. Relevant information pertaining to ICV, ICV Scorecard, ICV Certification, and ICV Guidelines are available on the ICV Digital Portal - <https://icv.qa/en-US>

QAPCO
QATAR PETROCHEMICAL COMPANY

Invites qualified bidders to participate in the following tender:

Effective from 01st July 2023, Bids from Local Suppliers and Contractors (companies established under the Law of State of Qatar) who are not in possession of an ICV score in the ICV portal (<https://icv.qa/en-US>) by Tender closing date (or commercial bid submission date if separately mentioned / notified) will not be accepted. Local companies that have been established for less than 2 years are exempted from this requirement.

For further details, please visit ICV portal (<https://icv.qa/en-US>).

SI No.	Tender Reference and Description	(i) Deadline for Submission of Information & Interest for Bidding	(ii) Tender fee (non-refundable); Date	(iii) Tender Publication on ARIBA	(iv) Tender Bond	Bid Closing Date
1	<u>RFQ: P06-01-241</u> 5 Years Contract for Provision of Service Vehicles without Drivers & Fuel effective from 01-Jan-2027 (Pickups, Saloons, Crossovers and SUVs) to support QAPCO Plant Operations	12 February 2026	QAR 750.00 12 February 2026	15 February 2026	QAR 100,000.00	01 March 2026, 12:00 Noon

i. Interested bidders to communicate their willingness to bid and contact details to QAPCO Procurement (procurement@qapco.com.qa) indicating company name, address, telephone, official E-mail, etc. latest by the deadline for Submission of Information & Interest for Bidding indicated above. Reference Number and Description of the tender must be mentioned in the email.

ii. Non-refundable tender fee as indicated above is payable to QAPCO through QNB account # 0013-001688-060 only at any QNB branch latest by 12 February 2026. (Tender Number, Subject and bidder name are to be stated in the payment receipt)

iii. Tender link will be sent via email notification from ARIBA system to the confirmed bidders. Tender Document will be accessible only after attaching the evidence of the tender fee payment in ARIBA by the bidder followed by Qapco approval.

QAPCO Registration: Bidders who are not registered in QAPCO are requested to complete the registration process during the tendering period (Details on ARIBA registration can be accessed via QAPCO website www.qapco.com)

iv. Tender Bond (Bank Guarantee): Original tender bond must be submitted by hand to the following address latest by the Bid closing date & time:
Qatar Petrochemical Company (QAPCO) Q.P.J.S.C.
QAPCO HEADQUARTERS, P.O. Box 756,
Building: 12, Zone No. 92, Street No. 556, Muither Leafawiyat Street
Mesaieed, Qatar
Tel: 4033 8109

Attention: Procurement Group Manager

'Eskan' app launched for housing services

From Page 1

The portal, he added, laid the groundwork for "a modern housing system that unified service channels, simplified procedures, enhanced transparency and improved institutional performance", with the smart application now extending this framework to mobile devices.

Allocation and Follow-up Department director Nasser al-Nuaimi said the application targets two main categories.

"The first includes government employees benefiting from housing and government buildings services, enabling them to apply for housing units, follow up on maintenance requests, and receive government housing in a transparent and efficient manner," he said.

"The second category comprises owners of housing units seeking to benefit from government housing services, as the application allows them to list their properties, manage property data, and follow up on requests electronically without the need for repeated in-person visits," al-Nuaimi said.

He stressed that the application offers "a unified digital interface for both categories, ensuring clarity, ease of use, and efficient management of daily requests".

Housing Planning Department director Abdulla Issa al-Hamad said that the launch of the Eskan smart application, alongside updates to the electronic portal, marks "a qualitative step in the digital transformation of the government housing sector", particularly in refining user interfaces, improving application and follow-up mechanisms, and strengthening tools for enquiry and transparency.

Housing Systems Infrastructure Section head Ghada Ahmed al-Souq said the app delivers "an advanced digital user experience supported by technical features that enhance service efficiency".

These include automated notifications to property owners on maintenance requests, the ability to print maintenance letters electronically, confirmation of maintenance completion by both owners and beneficiaries, and real-time tracking of request status "from anywhere at any time".

She noted that such features reduce the need for physical visits and accelerate procedures.

Information Systems Department expert Khalid Suhail al-Saeed said the Eskan application was developed as "a standalone smart application" built to high technical standards, ensuring information security, protection of personal data, full integration with approved government systems, and service continuity.

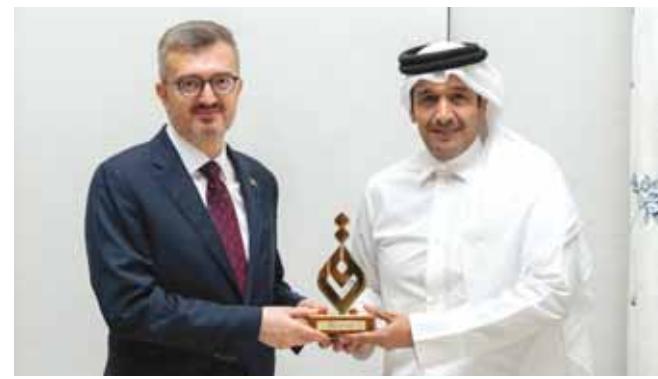
He added that the launch coincides with comprehensive updates to the Eskan portal, which now offers 15 clearly categorised electronic services tailored to different user groups.

Winners of inaugural State Sports Day Award announced

From Page 1

Speaking at the event, Abdulrahman bin Muzzallam al-Dosari, chairman of the National Sport Day Committee and president of the Qatar Sports for All Federation, said the awards reflected growing institutional and community commitment to making sport a daily habit rather than a once-a-year activity.

He added that National Sport Day has evolved into a national platform for promoting healthy lifestyles, in line with Qatar National Vision 2030. - QNA



Prof Dr Duran with al-Qahtani.

QPC chairman, communications head at Turkish Presidency hold meeting

Qatar Press Centre (QPC) chairman Abdulrahman Majid al-Qahtani met with Prof Dr Burhanettin Duran, the director of communications at the Turkish Presidency, to discuss ways to develop the professional partnership between the two sides and enhance joint media co-ordination.

The meeting was attended by Turkish ambassador to Qatar Dr

Mustafa Goksu, Arrayah editor-in-chief and QPC board member Abdullah Talib al-Marri, and Faisal Abdullah, director of Media Development at the Qatar Media Corporation and a member of the QPC board of directors.

The meeting addressed a range of topics of mutual interest, including mechanisms for expanding co-operation between media

institutions in both countries.

The two sides also discussed the importance of investing in high-quality media content and of strengthening joint initiatives to develop communication tools and support a media environment better able to engage with societal and humanitarian issues through balanced, professional discourse grounded in accurate information and analysis.

Souq Waqif Dates exhibition brings regional flavours ahead of Ramadan

By Shaima Sheriff
Staff Reporter

The Souq Waqif International Dates Exhibition 2026 has returned to Eastern Square, uniting 57 companies from six Arab countries in a pre-Ramadan showcase of premium dates and heritage products.

Running from February 5-16 at Eastern Square in Souq Waqif, the annual exhibition offers residents and visitors free access to high-quality dates and date-based products at competitive prices, just weeks before the holy month of Ramadan.

According to Souq Waqif supervisor Mohammed Abdullah al-Saleem, the exhibition features 57 companies from Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Algeria, Oman, Qatar, the UAE and Sudan.

The event highlights both traditional dates and innovative date products.

For many visitors, the timing is ideal.

"It has been an amazing experience," said Sarah, a visitor at the exhibition. "Especially with Ramadan happening in the next one or two weeks, [there is] a huge collection of dates - Majdoul, Ajwa, a lot of varieties, syrups, vinegar."

She added that the venue enhances the experience.

"I think this is a very good venue for such kind of events... it gives a lot of exposure," Sarah said. "We tell all the guests to come to Souq Waqif, look at the culture and heritage of Qatar."

Vendors echoed the sentiment, highlighting both commercial and cultural benefits.

Rahma Hassini, a Tunisian exhibitor whose products originate from Sudan, said: "Sudan is special. They make from date many, many products for skincare routine and for the eating."

Hassini's stand features a range of items, including "moisturiser,



The annual exhibition offers residents and visitors free access to high-quality dates and date-based products at competitive prices.

PICTURE: Shaji Kayamkulam

face soaps, creams for hair with honey and date, lip balm, bokhoor with date", alongside edible varieties such as Simsims, Mamoul and coconut dates.

"In 2025, in the previous exhibition, we took the second best product - date and honey products," she noted.

Reflecting on the exhibition's impact, Hassini said: "The ex-

hibition encourages us to create more things with the date and the honey and encourages people to know our traditions and to know more about our culture."

As Ramadan approaches, the exhibition once again positions Souq Waqif not only as a marketplace, but as a space where heritage, commerce and community meet.



Mohammed Abdullah al-Saleem



Rahma Hassini at the event.

PICTURE: Shaima Sheriff

Difi honoured with global recognition

An international award recognising those at the forefront of promoting, protecting, and strengthening the role of the family has been presented to Dr Sharifa Noaman al-Emadi, the executive director of Doha International Family Institute (Difi), a member of Qatar Foundation.

She received the "Stand with the Family Award" from Family Watch International in recognition of her leadership and international advocacy efforts, and those of the Difi, in placing the family at the heart of societal development, advocating for family-centred policies, and promoting family wellbeing and cohesion.

The award reflects the Difi's leading national and international role in integrating scientific evidence into policymaking and advocacy concerning fami-



lies, its success in forging collaborations that support families across the Arab-Islamic world, and its contribution to positioning Qatar as an exemplar of how governmental and non-governmental organisations can intertwine on the development of family policy.

It was presented to Dr al-Emadi during Family Watch International's 15th Global Family Policy Forum, held under the theme *Protecting Women and Children by Strengthening the Family* in Phoenix, US.

The Difi - which has special consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council - conducts family research, policy, outreach, and advocacy nationally, regionally, and globally, with the goal of being an international knowledge leader on issues facing the Arab family.

Art Basel Qatar closes inaugural edition

Art Basel concluded the first edition of Art Basel Qatar, successfully establishing a new long-term platform for artistic exchange, institutional engagement, and market development in the MENAS (Middle East, North Africa and South Asia) region.

Presented in partnership with Qatar Sports Investments (QSI) and QC+, the inaugural edition was met with an exceptional response from Doha, the wider region, and the international art community, reflecting the strength, relevance, and ambition of Art Basel's presence in Qatar.

Representatives from more than 85 museums and foundations worldwide attended Art Basel Qatar, reflecting strong institutional engagement from Qatar, the wider MENAS region, and across Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Americas.

Bringing together 87 galleries from 31 countries and territories, including 16 first-time Art Basel exhibitors, Art Basel



Qatar presented a tightly curated programme that placed regional artists and narratives at the centre of its inaugural edition.

Art Basel's flagship talks programme, Conversations, launched its first Qatar edition in collaboration with Qatar Creates Talks, opening with a panel featuring Qatar Museums Chairperson HE Sheikha Al Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, Maja Hoffmann, and Hans Ulrich Obrist.

QF concludes participation in 64th CSocD session

The Qatar Foundation for Social Work has concluded its participation in the work of the 64th session of the United Nations Commission for Social Development (CSocD), affiliated with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), held at the UN headquarters in New York.

This participation follows up on the outcomes of the Second World Summit for Social Development, implementing the Doha Political Declaration, and strengthening international efforts aimed at consolidating social development and social justice through co-ordinated, fair and inclusive policies.

The delegation was headed by Qatar Foundation for Social Work chief executive Rashid Mohammed al-Hamda al-Naimi.

The foundation, in its capacity as a consultant to the ECOSOC, participated in a number of official sessions, forums and specialised events, in addition to organising a side event in co-operation with Qatar's Permanent Mission to the UN, and in partnership with Unicef and Unesco.

In his speech at the 64th session of the Social Development Committee, al-Naimi stressed that the most prominent challenge facing social development paths today is ensuring effective consistency between public policies and successful field experiences in order to ensure that

policies reflect the real and diverse needs of different groups, and are based on practical models that have proven their ability to create a sustainable impact.

He said that the foundation, as a civil society organisation comprising eight specialised social centres, has worked on developing applied models that demonstrate how social policies can move from a care logic to an empowerment logic, and from responding to needs to promoting effective community participation.

The foundation organised a side event entitled "Empowering Social Workers for a Changing World: New Competencies and Partnerships for Inclusive Social Development", which highlighted the pivotal role of social workers as frontline workers, and the importance of investing in developing their professional competencies, enhancing their job well-being, and providing them with the necessary tools to deal with rapidly evolving social challenges.

At the event, Orphan Care Center (Dreema) executive director Sheikha Najla bint Ahmed al-Thani affirmed that development of the alternative care system is based on investing in professional competencies, enhancing the quality of services provided to children, and building effective partnerships that contribute to achieving stability and comprehensive support. - QNA

QCDC, QFBA forge strategic collaboration

The Qatar Career Development Centre (QCDC), founded by Qatar Foundation (QF), and Qatar Finance and Business Academy (QFBA) have signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to launch a three-year strategic collaboration to synchronise training and development initiatives to advance career development and professional learning.

Under the MoU, signed by QCDC executive director Saad Abdullah al-Kharji and QFBA chief executive Dr Khalifa al-Salabi al-Yafei, the QCDC and QFBA will work to expand their open-calendar programme offerings in career development.

A cornerstone of this work is the joint delivery of a specialised career development certification programme licensed by the National Career Development Association.

The QFBA will also consult on and deliver customised programmes tailored to the QCDC's needs in Qatar, while both parties will continue to explore additional areas of mutual interest as opportunities arise.

To support the implementation of this collaboration, the QCDC and QFBA will co-ordinate operational delivery plans, align responsibilities and jointly track the outcomes of each co-developed initiative.

Competitions within KIAHF 2026 come to a close

The contests of the Arabian Purebred Championship, the first tournaments of the 6th Katara International Arabian Horse Festival (KIAHF) 2026, concluded in Doha on Saturday.

The event will run until February 12, 2026.

The tournament wound up its finals across multiple age categories.

Yearling fillies and colts, as well as two- to three-year-old horses, competed fiercely, producing top performances in both female and male divisions.

The adult mares and stallion categories also showcased strong

competition, with winners emerging from prominent Qatari and regional stables.

The event highlighted the ongoing tradition of excellence in horse breeding and racing across Qatar and the Gulf region.

Overall, the championship re-

inforced Qatar's role in promoting and preserving the heritage of purebred Arabian horses while celebrating skill, strategy, and competitive spirit.

Katara Cultural Village general manager Prof Dr Khalid bin Ibrahim al-Sulaiti honoured the members of the judging panel participating in the tournament that showcased 232 horses representing Qatar, Bahrain, France, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and the US.

Katara marketing director and KIAHF organising committee secretary (Public Relations and Communication) Malika Mohammed al-Shraim said the festival positions itself as a global cultural hub projecting Arabian Purebred horses as a civilisational symbol that manifests the depth of the Arab legacy and its ability to communicate with wide-ranging global cultures. - QNA

Long-time Doha resident passes away

Long-time Doha resident Ummar K died yesterday at his native place, Thachampovil, Thamarassery, in Kerala, India. He was 54. He was a patron of the Qatar Thachampovil Welfare Association. Ummar was a businessman and a resident of Qatar for over 30 years. He is survived by his wife Fathima, sons Zakariya and Yahiya (both Doha residents), and daughter Dr Samariya and son-in-law Junaid Poonoor (both Doha residents). He was buried at Othayoth Juma Masjid yesterday. A special prayer for the departed soul will be held in Doha today.





The new AZF strategy unveiled yesterday.



AZF launches new strategy

By Joey Aguilar

Doha

The Aspire Zone Foundation (AZF) has unveiled its new long-term strategy, "Elevate 2030", aimed at strengthening its position as a leading global sports institution while driving sustainable growth and advancing Qatar's sports ecosystem.

The launch event, held at U Venue, brought together senior AZF officials and executives, along with a select group of sports leaders and strategic partners.

The strategy reflects the foun-

dation's emphasis on collaboration and shared responsibility in shaping the future of sport in Qatar and beyond.

During the ceremony, acting AZF chief executive Abdulla Nasser al-Naemi outlined the core framework and ambitions of the new strategy, describing it as a pivotal milestone in the organisation's evolution.

The strategy introduces an impact-driven architecture that aligns all of the AZF's Strategic Business Units – Aspetar, Aspire Academy, Aspire Logistics, and Aspire's Sports Facilities Management – under a unified, out-

come-focused approach.

This structure is intended to ensure coherence across operations while maximising value creation and measurable impact.

He said that "Elevate 2030" builds on the AZF's strong institutional legacy while setting a clear course toward a more ambitious, integrated, and impactful future.

Al-Naemi stressed that the new strategy is the product of collective effort and a shared vision, and that sustainable development can only be achieved through sound planning, effective governance, and sustained investment in people, particularly national talent.

"A strategy is not merely a document to be archived but a roadmap that guides decision-making, unifies our efforts, and ensures alignment with national priorities," he said.

According to the AZF, the strategy is designed to underpin AZF's role as a leading sports institution, with a sustainable, long-term impact at both the local and international levels.

It aligns closely with Qatar National Vision 2030, particularly in promoting human development, economic diversification, and institutional excellence through sport.

A focus of "Elevate 2030" is diversifying revenue streams and developing sustainable commercial returns to support continuous growth.

The strategy also aims to bolster the Aspire brand, expand impactful strategic partnerships, and increase the sports sector's overall economic contribution.

By integrating advanced technologies and sports performance sciences, the AZF aims to position itself as a global hub for sports innovation capable of shaping a more advanced and sustainable future for sport.

Al-Naemi noted the foundation's contributions in hosting and supporting major sporting events, developing institutional capabilities, and promoting high standards of performance and excellence.

He said the next phase requires intensified efforts, broader co-op-

eration, and optimal use of available capabilities to generate lasting benefits for Qatar and its society.

Al-Naemi expressed confidence in the foundation's workforce and partners, thanking those involved in developing the strategy and those responsible for implementing it.

From clearly identified priorities, AZF noted that the strategy defines a set of strategic pillars that serve as guiding paths toward institutional value and impact.

These pillars are supported by long-term corporate objectives that act as a blueprint for the entire organisation, helping each unit identify how it contributes to shared goals.

Short- to mid-term key results have also been established as critical preconditions for achieving these objectives and translating ambition into tangible outcomes.



QIB announces the first millionaires of Misk Account 2026

Qatar Islamic Bank (QIB) has announced the first two millionaires of the ninth Misk Account edition.

Hamad Jaber al-Kuwari and Roaa Abdo Alrefae received the grand prize of QR1mn each, following a draw held under the supervision of representatives from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI) and QIB representatives.

The draw marks the beginning of a new cycle of millionaire announcements, with 10 more grand winners to be named throughout the year.

To celebrate the milestone, the winners were welcomed at the QIB Head Office at QIB Towers.

During this edition, Misk Account will offer the opportunity to a total of 1,124 QIB customers to win a total prize pool of QR26mn.

Most notably, the number of the QR1mn grand prize winners has doubled to 12.

The millionaire draw will now take place every two months to announce two new millionaires.

In addition, six customers will win QR50,000 each on monthly basis, while 20 customers will win QR10,000 each on a weekly basis.

To qualify for the QR1mn grand prize draw, customers are required to open a Misk Account at least three months before the upcoming grand draw month and maintain a minimum monthly balance of QR10,000.

For every additional QR10,000 saved, customers earn an extra chance to win.

"We are pleased to announce the first two millionaires of the ninth Misk Account edition for this year," said QIB general manager (Personal Banking Group) D Anand. "The excitement and impact these prizes bring reflect the success in encouraging customers to build a sustainable savings habit."

"With double the number of millionaires this year, we are happy to continue offering our customers greater value and more life-changing opportunities," he added.

Existing and new QIB customers can open a Misk Account easily through the QIB Mobile App.

For more information, visit www.qib.com.qa/en-miskaccount

Heritage book launched at Katara International Arabian Horse Festival

The cultural events accompanying Katara International Arabian Horse Festival 2026 have attracted more visitors to the event.

Katara Cultural Village general manager Prof Dr Khalid bin Ibrahim al-Sulaiti sponsored the launch of the book *Horses, Horsemanship, and Veterinary Science* by Abu Abdullah Muhamad bin Yaqub, the nephew of Hizam al-Khatli, the horse master of the Abbasid Caliph Al-Mutasm Billah.

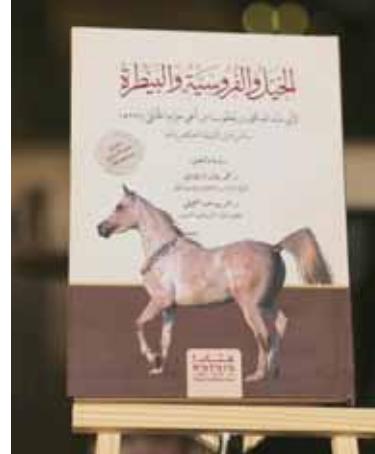
The book is considered one of the seminal heritage works specialising in equine science.

The publication has been edited by Associate Professor Dr Mohamed Khaled al-Rahawi of Qatar University (QU)'s College of Arts and Sciences and Dr Omar bin Maan al-Ajli, a member of the Arab Historians Union.

Prof Dr al-Sulaiti said that Katara places special emphasis on editing and publishing valuable heritage books that have not previously received adequate attention and have remained confined to manuscript form for many years.

He expressed appreciation to Katara Publishing House and the academic team responsible for editing the book.

Prof Dr al-Sulaiti also revealed that



a new manuscript is currently undergoing verification, expressing the hope that it will be ready for launch in conjunction with the Katara International Arabian Horse Festival 2027.

Dr Al-Ajli said that *Horses, Horsemanship, and Veterinary Science* is among the earliest verified books concerned with equine science and veterinary medicine in the Abbasid era, dating back to 251 AH, during the reign of Caliph Al-Mutasm Billah.

He added that the book represents an early scientific document in the fields of veterinary medicine and pharmacology, containing more than 480 descriptions of equine diseases and ailments along with their treatments.



This makes it a comprehensive encyclopaedia that preceded many later works and contributed to shaping a foundational reference for prominent scholars such as al-Razi and Ibn al-Mundhir al-Baytar.

The cultural and artistic events accompanying the Katara Arabian Horse Festival 2026 are set to continue until February 12.

Vodafone Qatar celebrates National Sport Day 2026 with AI and 5G-powered sport village

Vodafone Qatar will mark National Sport Day 2026 with its "Vodafone Sport Village" at Baraha, Msheireb, bringing the community together for a full day of sport, movement, and digital-powered experiences.

Running from 8am-8pm, the 2026 edition of Vodafone Sport Village will continue to deliver a future-focused sports experience, featuring artificial intelligence (AI)-enabled activities, 5G-powered activations, and interactive digital challenges tailored for the wider community.

The activation will include multisport stations such as football, basketball, volleyball, golf, and archery.

Visitors will also be able to explore a range of dedicated zones, including a Digital Activation Area showcasing Vodafone Qatar's latest technologies, a kids' zone with interactive activities, and an open games area designed to encourage participation and movement throughout the day.

"Sports play a vital role in bringing people together, encouraging healthier lifestyles, and strengthening communities," said Vodafone Qatar chief operating officer Baran Yurdagul. "Guided by Qatar's vision for National Sport Day, which aims to embed sport as a way of life and promote sustained community participation, Vodafone Qatar

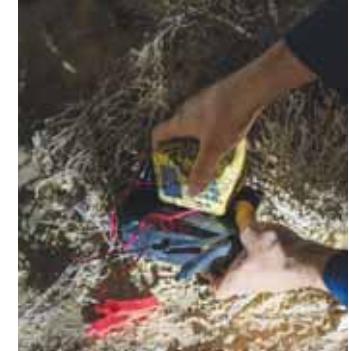


remains committed to supporting sporting activities and empowering the community to participate in a motivating and safe environment."

"The Vodafone Sport Village reflects our focus on creating experiences that bring families and communities together and on promoting an active, connected society," he added.

To find out more about Vodafone Qatar, visit <https://www.vodafone.qa/en/home>

Join this summer at Vodafone Sports Village Baraha Msheireb - National Sport Day Tuesday, 13 February 2024 - 8:00 AM - 8:00 PM



Bird calling devices used for illegal hunting seized

The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change (MoECC), in co-operation with the Environmental Security Group of the Internal Security Force (Lekhwiya), has carried out a comprehensive nighttime inspection campaign covering several inland and coastal areas across the country.

The campaign, which will continue in the coming period, is part of the MoECC's Land Protection Department's plans to monitor compliance with environmental legislation.

It covered the northern, southern, and the central regions, as well as the northern and western coastlines, and resulted in the detection of a number of environmental violations.

The violations spotted included the discovery of a number of prohibited electronic bird-calling devices ("sound lures"), used in illegal hunting by imitating bird calls to attract them.

The field teams found the calling devices carefully hidden beneath grass and vegetation at several inland locations, in an attempt to conceal them and avoid detection.

The teams have taken the necessary legal measures against violators.



Music Affairs Centre honours participants of Music Museum 2025 events at Darb Al Saai

The Music Affairs Centre honoured participants in the Music Museum 2025 events at Darb Al Saai, as part of the country's National Day celebrations.

The Music Affairs Centre held a ceremony on Saturday to honour the participants.

The programme included a performance by traditional pearl diver Ali al-Haddad and a speech by the centre's director, Khalid al-Salem.

In his speech, al-Salem discussed adding new musicians to the centre as part of its preparations to launch a comprehensive musical programme.

He noted that several violinists, cellists, and other musicians had recently joined the centre.

Al-Salem also spoke about last year's Music Museum, including the Al Sidra Choir, and the performances of Ziryab by artist Hisham al-Meliji and The Melody of Tales, featuring storytelling by Mariam al-Holi and pianist Hala al-Emadi.

He further highlighted the role of the Music Museum and its collection of artefacts, contributed by various entities, most notably the Qatar News Agency with a collection of rare photographs, as well as items from



Khalid al-Salem

the collection of artist Hamad Abdul Redha, the Khalid al-Ajmi Museum, Al Badi Studios, the Mahmoud Hilal Museum, and others.

The ceremony included a film about the centre's goals and activities, a film about the Music Museum for 2024 and 2025, and a performance by the Sidra Children's Choir.

Several participating organisations, staff members, the choir, volunteers, and media outlets were also honoured.

The centre aims to discover and train a number of young teachers over the coming period, a task to be overseen by Al-Nahham Ali al-Haddad.

Alfardan Jewellery partners with Qatar Airways Privilege Club

Exclusive collaboration introduces seamless Avios collecting and spending at Alfardan Jewellery boutiques

Alfardan Jewellery, Qatar's leading luxury jewellery house, has announced an exclusive partnership with Qatar Airways Privilege Club through its innovative Card-Linked Offers (CLO) programme.

This collaboration introduces a seamless way for clients to collect and spend Avios while indulging in the exceptional craftsmanship and elegance of Alfardan Jewellery boutiques across Qatar.

Under this programme, Visa and Himyan payment card linked to member's Privilege Club account can now collect one Avios for every QR4 spent at Alfardan Jewellery, with a minimum spend of QR3,000.

Alfardan Jewellery boutiques are lo-



cated at prestigious destinations including Doha Festival City, Landmark, Mall of Qatar, Marsa Malaz Kempinski, Place

Vendôme, Printemps Department Store, The Pearl-Qatar, The St Regis Doha, and Villaggio, along with stand-alone bou-



iques for Chaumet, Chopard, Marl, Tiffany & Co, and Vacheron Constantin.

"For decades, Alfardan Jewellery has embraced a vision of quiet elegance, where artistry, heritage, and personal sentiment meet," said Alfardan Jewellery chief operating officer Antoine Berberi. "Through our partnership with Qatar Airways Privilege Club, we are proud to offer our clients a seamless and rewarding experience that enhances the joy of every meaningful occasion."

Privilege Club members can now simply link their payment cards to their ac-

count and start collecting Avios with Alfardan Jewellery.

Avios collected can be spent across a wide range of retail, dining, and lifestyle experiences, making every purchase even more rewarding.

"This partnership underscores Alfardan Jewellery's commitment to enhancing client experiences by combining luxury with exceptional value," Berberi added. "Together with Qatar Airways Privilege Club, we are redefining how our clients engage with Privilege Club benefits in the world of fine jewellery."



HBKU workshop explores authentication of data in digital storytelling for education

By Joseph Varghese

Staff Reporter

The role of generative AI in data storytelling is developing very quickly but the authenticity of the data has to be validated, Hamad Bin Khalifa University (HBKU) provost Dr Prabhat Hajela has said.

"Artificial intelligence (AI) is used for digital story telling in a big way," he said. "But you have to verify the validity of that data as there is a huge volume of it."

"Generative AI can actually have access to several models and produce new concepts, new ideas, but the role of the faculty members and the university is to make sure that there is some validity in what is coming across," Dr Hajela told the media on the sidelines of the conference on "The Role of Data Storytelling and Generative AI in Progressive Education", organised by the HBKU.

The three-day workshop organised by the HBKU's College of Public Policy has brought together international and local experts to explore the potential of AI and data storytelling in building adaptive learning environments.

"There is foundational groundwork knowledge that is being developed at the university, but at the same time the application is in digital storytelling," Dr Hajela said.

"And I think these are exciting areas for the university to be involved in," he said. "Games can be used for storytelling and to assess the state of a society. It is an exciting new area that HBKU could be involved in."

Speaking at the opening session of the event, associate vice-president for research Dr Adnan Abu-Dayya noted that the theme



Dr Adnan Abu-Dayya



Dr Evren Tok. PICTURES: Shaji Kayamkulam

of the conference aligns very well with the education and research agenda of the university.

"Having the students at the centre of everything that we do at the HBKU, it helps us to emphasise that our education is more personalised," he said. "We focus on impactful research and the intersection of data and education is going to impact the outcomes of education experience as well as the research that we are doing."

"Interdisciplinary interaction is the core and the conference is going to explore several key themes which are extremely important for education," Dr Abu-Dayya added.

"Progressive education and generative AI in general are directly related to the Hamad Bin Khalifa University's thematic research areas," said Dr Evren Tok, the associate dean for Community Engagement at the HBKU's College of Public Policy. "The idea here is to bring together experts, professionals, both international and local, to create engagement and interaction and also productive discussions around the idea of generative AI and data storytelling and how these two are critically important in cultivating better educational experiences."

The interactive programme enables participants to collaboratively develop actionable recommendations for the benefit of education in Qatar and the region.

The programme aims to produce tangible outcomes, including a data-informed policy brief and an implementation roadmap specifically for the education sector.

Zakat Affairs Department's operational plans put in place ahead of Ramadan

The Zakat Affairs Department of the Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs (Awqaf) has unveiled its operational plan for the holy month of Ramadan under the motto "Because your Zakat is a trust," aiming to foster trust among Zakat performers, streamline this Islamic prescribed pillar, and ensure funds are funnelled to those in need in a more trusted and transparent manner.

Zakat Services Section head Ahmed Jaber al-Jarboeui stated the motto reflects the department's commitment to bearing Zakat responsibility based on Islamic Sharia provisions, to be organised by the highest standards of governance and efficiency.

He noted that the department has expanded the network of permanent collection offices across key areas of the nation, particularly in commercial markets, large shopping centres, and near mosques.

Additional collection points have also been set up in malls, markets, and some mosques after Taraweeh prayers, ensuring easy access and providing services to donors with the highest levels of organisation and efficiency.

The department begins accepting Zakat al-Fitr

from the first day of Ramadan, al-Jarboeui said, emphasising that the amount will be announced at the start of the holy month, enabling donors to give early.

This approach, he added, ensures that contributions reach eligible recipients before the Eid al-Fitr prayers.

As part of keeping up with digital transformation and facilitating the services, al-Jarboeui said that the department has provided multiple channels for individuals to safely perform Zakat, including its application on smart phones, as well as the official website, in addition to the possibility of direct transfer through the department's bank accounts.

The department offers a Rapid Zakat Collection Service, which allows individuals to connect with authorised collectors who can reach them at their locations during both morning and evening hours.

Al-Jarboeui said that should the public have any inquiries or suggestions, the department's Sharia specialists would be on standby to receive them regarding the calculation of Zakat for individuals, companies, and economic enterprises. - QNA



QC supports 500,000 individuals in Kenya

Qatar Charity (QC) achieved a series of notable humanitarian and development accomplishments in Kenya throughout 2025, despite ongoing challenges facing the country.

The total number of beneficiaries from its various interventions reached around 500,000 vulnerable individuals within Kenyan communities.

By the end of 2025, the QC had registered 8,430 sponsorship cases across various categories, including orphans and persons with disabilities.

A wide range of charitable initiatives were

carried out during holy month of Ramadan and Eid al-Adha, such as distributing Eid clothing, food parcels, and sacrificial meat.

The seasonal programme reached 71,356 beneficiaries.

The QC continued to implement emergency humanitarian projects to mitigate the effects of drought and floods, supporting 1,670 affected families with urgent food and relief assistance.

In co-operation with Kenya's health ministry, Qatar Charity conducted health campaigns that benefited 2,000 uninsured families. The QC implemented 65 water and sanitation projects, benefiting 180,000 people.



QLC organises second padel championship 2026 for NSD

The Qatar Leadership Centre (QLC) organised the second edition of its padel championship in line with the state's policy of establishing sports as a way of life, and coinciding with the National Sport Day (NSD) 2026, themed "I Chose Sport this year".

The event saw the participation of a number of QLC's graduates and staff in an initiative aimed at promoting physical health, fostering a culture of sports activity, and encouraging community engagement within a stimulating leadership environment.

The timing of the championship was chosen to provide the largest possible number of graduates with the opportunity to interact and participate, strengthen communication across different cohorts, and diversify and distribute community events nationwide, thereby encouraging broad participation.

The tournament included accompanying events designed to introduce beginners to padel sports, under the supervision of professional coaches.

The Ministry of Transport (MoT) will host the second edition of the Autonomous e-Mobility Forum on April 7-9 at the Qatar National Convention Centre (QNCC).

Organised by Just Us & Otto Marketing Services, the 2026 forum will serve as a platform for the exchange of expertise and insight, as well as for discussions on the future of e-mobility and latest developments.

This edition of the forum will assemble local, regional and international speakers, government officials, industry experts, innovators and academia. The three-day forum will examine key industry topics, including how electrification of vehicle fleets and logistics networks is reshaping transportation and daily life in the region.



Thailand PM's party takes wide lead in three-way election race

Reuters
Bangkok

Thai Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul's party was far ahead in yesterday's general election, leading a three-way race with a commanding margin that could make it easier to form a coalition and reduce the risk of further political instability.

Anutin set the stage for the snap

election in mid-December during a border conflict between Thailand and Cambodia, a move political analysts said appeared to be timed by the conservative leader to cash in on surging nationalism.

At that point, he had been in power for less than 100 days, taking over after the ouster of premier Paetongtarn Shinawatra of the populist Pheu Thai Party over the Cambodian crisis.

With nearly 80% of polling

stations reporting, preliminary results released by the election commission showed Anutin's Bhumjaithai Party with a sizeable lead over the progressive People's Party in second place, followed by the Pheu Thai Party.

People's Party leader Natthaphong Rueangpanyawut said that while votes remained to be counted, his party did not look likely to win.

Natthaphong said the party

would not join a Bhumjaithai-led government, but would also not form a competing coalition.

"If Bhumjaithai can form a government, then we have to be the opposition," Natthaphong told a press conference.

With a message of structural change and reforms to Southeast Asia's second-largest economy, the People's Party had led most opinion polls during the campaign season.

But in a survey conducted dur-

ing the campaign's final week and released yesterday, the National Institute for Development Administration projected that Bhumjaithai would be the winner with between 140 and 150 seats in the 500-member House of Representatives, ahead of 125-135 for the People's Party.

"We have done everything that we can," Anutin told reporters, after casting his vote in Bhumjaithai's stronghold of Buriram city,

northeast of the capital, Bangkok. "We hope the people will have confidence in us."

Thai voters were also asked during the vote to decide if a new constitution should replace a 2017 charter, a military-backed document that critics say concentrated power in undemocratic institutions, including a powerful senate that is chosen through an indirect selection process with limited public participation.

Japan's 'Iron Lady' Takaichi forges stunning poll win

Reuters
Tokyo

Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's coalition swept to a historic election win yesterday, paving the way for promised tax cuts that have spooked financial markets and military spending aimed at countering China.

The conservative Takaichi, Japan's first female leader, who says she is inspired by Britain's "Iron Lady" Margaret Thatcher, was projected to deliver as many as 328 of the 465 seats in parliament's lower house for her Liberal Democratic Party.

The LDP alone sailed past the 233 seats needed for a majority less than two hours after polls closed, on track for one of its best ever election results.

With her coalition partner, the Japan Innovation Party, known as Ishin, Takaichi now has a supermajority of two-thirds of seats, easing her legislative agenda as she can override the upper chamber, which she does not control.

"This election involved major policy shifts - particularly a major shift in economic and fiscal policy, as well as strengthening security policy," Takaichi said in a television interview as the results rolled in.

"These are policies that have drawn a great deal of opposition ... If we have received the public's support, then we truly must tackle these issues with all our strength."

Takaichi, 64, called the rare win-

ter snap election to capitalise on her buoyant personal approval ratings since she was elevated to lead the long-ruling LDP late last year.

Voters have been drawn to her straight-talking, hardworking image, but her nationalistic leanings and emphasis on security have strained ties with Japan's powerful neighbour China, while her promises of tax cuts have rattled financial markets.

Residents trudged through snow to cast their ballots with record snowfall in some parts snarling traffic and requiring some polling stations to close early. It was only the third postwar election held in February, with elections typically called during milder months.

Outside a polling station in the town of Uonuma in the mountainous Niigata prefecture, teacher Kazushige Cho, 54, braved below-freezing temperatures and deep snow to cast his vote for Takaichi's Liberal Democratic Party.

"It feels like she's creating a sense of direction - like the whole country is pulling together and moving forward," Cho said.

But Takaichi's election promise to suspend an 8% sales tax on food to help households cope with rising prices has rattled investors concerned about how the nation with the heaviest debt burden among advanced economies will fund the plan.

Takaichi yesterday said she would speed up consideration of the sales tax cut while focusing on fiscal sustainability.

"Her plans for the cut in the consumption tax leave open big question marks about funding and how she's going to go about making the arithmetic add up," said Chris Sciama, head of research at Daiwa Capital Markets Europe in London.

The head of Japan's top business lobby Keidanren, Yoshinobu Tsutsui, welcomed Takaichi's win as restoring political stability. "Japan's economy is now at a critical juncture for achieving sustainable and strong growth," he said.

The LDP, which has ruled for almost all of Japan's postwar history, had lost control of both houses in elections over the past 15 months under Takaichi's predecessor, Shigeru Ishiba.

Takaichi has managed to turn around the party's fortunes by striking a chord with younger voters.

She has even sparked a "sana-katsu" craze, roughly translated as "Sanae-mania". Her handbag and the pink pen she scribbles notes with in parliament have been in high demand.

US President Donald Trump last week gave Takaichi his "total endorsement" and said he would host her at the White House next month.

China will also be parsing the result.

Weeks after taking office, Takaichi touched off the biggest dispute with Beijing in over a decade by publicly outlining how Tokyo might respond to a Chinese attack on Taiwan, the democratic island claimed by China.

Heavy snowfall in Japan



Youths throw snowballs at Kinshi Park as snow falls in Tokyo, Japan, yesterday. Heavy snowfall hit a wide swathe of Japan yesterday, particularly in the west and along the Sea of Japan coast, while central Tokyo was lightly blanketed.

N Korea to hold party congress in February

AFP
Seoul

North Korea's leadership will hold a party congress later this month, state media announced yesterday, in what will be the first such major gathering since 2021.

The decision was made on Saturday in a meeting of top leaders of the country's ruling Workers Party of Korea (WPK), including Kim Jong-un, the state-run Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) reported.

"The Political Bureau of the WPK Central Committee adopted with unanimous approval a decision on opening the Ninth Congress of the WPK in Pyongyang, the capital of the revolution, in late February 2026," KCNA said.

The last party congress - the reclusive nuclear-armed nation's eighth - was held in January 2021.

At that gathering, Kim was named the party's general secretary, a title previously reserved for his father and predecessor Kim Jong Il, in what analysts said was a move to reinforce his authority.

The congress is the ruling par-

ty's top gathering, a grand political set-piece that reinforces the regime's authority and can serve as a platform for announcements of policy shifts or elite personnel changes. The 2021 meeting came just days before the inauguration of US president Joe Biden and at the height of North Korea's strict border closures during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Analysts described the choreographed messaging from the party congress as one of defiance toward the United States, after the breakdown in negotiations with Biden's predecessor, Donald Trump.

One dead from Nipah in Bangladesh: WHO

Reuters
Dhaka

The World Health Organisation (WHO) said a woman had died in northern Bangladesh in January after contracting the deadly Nipah virus infection.

The case in Bangladesh, where Nipah cases are reported almost every year, follows two Nipah virus cases identified in neighbouring India, which has already prompted stepped-up airport screenings across Asia.

The patient in Bangladesh, aged between 40-50 years, developed symptoms consistent with Nipah virus on January 21, including fever and headache followed by hypersalivation, disorientation and convulsion, the WHO added.

She died a week later and was confirmed to be infected with

the virus a day later. The person had no travel history but had a history of consuming raw date palm sap. All 35 people who had contact with the patient are being monitored and have tested negative for the virus, and no further cases have been detected to date, the WHO said.

Nipah is an infection that spreads mainly through products contaminated by infected bats, such as fruit. It can be fatal in up to 75% of cases, but it does not spread easily between people.

Countries including Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, and Pakistan implemented temperature screenings at airports after India said cases of the virus had been found in West Bengal.

The WHO said on Friday that the risk of international disease spread is considered low and that it does not recommend any travel or trade restrictions based on current information.

BNP leader campaigns



Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) chairman Tarique Rahman speaks during an election campaign rally, ahead of the national election at Pallabi, in Dhaka, Bangladesh, yesterday.

Rare earth found in sediment retrieved on deep-sea mission: Japan

AFP
Tokyo

Sediment containing rare earths was retrieved from ocean depths of 6,000 metres (about 20,000 feet) on a Japanese test mission, the government said, as it seeks to curb dependence on China for the valuable minerals.

Japan says the mission was the world's first bid to tap deep sea rare earths at such a depth.

"Details will be analysed, including exactly how much rare earth is contained" in the sam-

ple, government spokesman Kei Sato said, calling it "a meaningful achievement both in terms of economic security and comprehensive maritime development".

The sample was collected by a deep-sea scientific drilling boat called the Chikyu that set sail last month for the remote island of Minami Torishima in the Pacific, where surrounding waters are believed to contain a rich trove of valuable minerals.

It comes as China - by far the world's biggest supplier of rare earths - ramps up pressure on its neighbour after Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi suggested in

November that Tokyo may react militarily to an attack on Taiwan, which Beijing has vowed to seize control of by force if necessary.

Beijing has blocked exports to Japan of "dual-use" items with potential military uses, fuelling worries in Japan that it could choke supplies of rare earths, some of which are included in China's list of such goods.

Rare earths - 17 metals difficult to extract from the Earth's crust - are used in everything from electric vehicles to hard drives, wind turbines and missiles.

The area around Minami Torishima, which is in Japan's eco-

nomic waters, is estimated to contain more than 16mn tons of rare earths, which the Nikkei business daily says is the third-largest reserve globally.

These rich deposits contain an estimated 730 years' worth of dysprosium, used in high-strength magnets in phones and electric cars, and 780 years' worth of yttrium, used in lasers, the Nikkei said.

Environmental campaigners warn deep-sea mining threatens marine ecosystems and will disrupt the sea floor.

The issue has become a geo-political flashpoint, with anxiety

growing over a push by US President Donald Trump to fast-track the practice in international waters.

The International Seabed Authority (ISA), which has jurisdiction over the ocean floor outside national waters, is pushing for the adoption of a global code to regulate mining in the ocean depths.

But the Japanese test mission was carried out within its own territorial waters.

"If Japan could successfully extract rare earths around Minami Torishima constantly, it will secure domestic supply chain for key industries," Takahiro Kamis-

una, research associate at The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), said.

"Likewise, it will be a key strategic asset for Takaichi's government to significantly reduce the supply chain dependence on China."

Beijing has long used its dominance in rare earths for geopolitical leverage, including in its trade war with US President Donald Trump's administration.

China accounts for almost two-thirds of rare earth mining production and 92% of global refined output, according to the International Energy Agency.

India 'drops small car concession in planned fuel emission norms'

Reuters
New Delhi

India has scrapped a planned concession for small cars in upcoming fuel-efficiency rules after automakers including Tata Motors and Mahindra & Mahindra argued it would benefit only one

company, a government document shows.

A September draft had proposed leniency for petrol cars weighing 909kg (2,004lb) or less – a carve-out widely seen as favouring Maruti Suzuki, which controls 95% of India's small-car market.

India's power ministry has

now removed that exemption and tightened other parameters, increasing pressure on all automakers to ramp up electric and hybrid car sales, according to the latest 41-page draft.

The new rules curb over-compensation for vehicle weight, aim to level the field between light and heavy fleet manufacturers, and are

designed to deliver real-world efficiency gains, the document said.

They introduce "a substantially steeper reduction pathway" for emissions, it added.

The power ministry did not respond to a request for comment.

Transport accounts for about 12% of India's energy use and is a major driver of petroleum imports

and carbon emissions. Passenger vehicles make up nearly 90% of transport-related emissions, the document says.

Corporate Average Fuel Efficiency norms dictate permissible CO2 emissions across a manufacturer's fleet of passenger cars weighing less than 3,500kg (7,716lb). Updated every five years,

they push automakers towards cleaner technologies including electrification, compressed natural gas and flex-fuel.

The new rules will apply from April 2027 for five years and are central to automakers' product and powertrain investment plans. It was not immediately clear when the rules will be finalised.

Indian refiners avoid Russian oil in push for US trade deal

Reuters
New Delhi

Indian refiners are avoiding Russian oil purchases for delivery in April and are expected to stay away from such trades for longer, refining and trade sources said, a move that could help New Delhi seal a trade pact with Washington.

The US and India moved closer to a trade pact on Friday, announcing a framework for a deal they hope to conclude by March that would lower tariffs and deepen economic co-operation.

Indian Oil, Bharat Petroleum and Reliance Industries are not accepting offers from traders for Russian oil loading in March and April, said a trader who approached the refiners.

These refiners, however, had already scheduled some deliveries of Russian oil in March, refining sources said. Most other refiners have stopped buying Russian crude.

The three refiners and the oil ministry did not respond to requests for comment. The trade minister on Saturday referred questions about Russian oil to the foreign ministry.

A foreign ministry spokesperson said: "Diversifying our energy sourcing in keeping with objective market conditions and evolving international dynamics is at the core of our strategy" to ensure energy

security for the world's most populous nation.

Although a US-India statement on the trade framework did not mention Russian oil, President Donald Trump rescinded his 25% tariffs on Indian goods, imposed over Russian oil purchases, because, he said, New Delhi had "committed to stop directly or indirectly" importing Russian oil.

New Delhi has not announced plans to halt Russian oil imports.

India became the top buyer of discounted Russian seaborne crude after Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, spurring a backlash from Western nations that had targeted Russia's energy sector with sanctions aimed at curtailing Moscow's revenue and making it harder to fund the war.

One regular Indian buyer is Russia-backed private refiner Nayara, which relies solely on Russian oil for its 400,000-barrel-per-day refinery. Sources said Nayara may be allowed to keep buying Russian oil because other crude sellers pulled back after the European Union sanctioned the refiner in July.

Nayara also does not plan to import Russian crude in April due to a month-long refinery maintenance shutdown, a source familiar with its operations said. Nayara did not respond to an e-mail seeking comment. Indian refiners may change their plan and place orders for Russian oil only if advised by the government, sources said.

AFP
Putrajaya, Malaysia

India and Malaysia yesterday pledged to deepen their semiconductor partnership as the Indian Ocean neighbours ramp up trade and security links during a visit by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Modi touched down in Malaysia on Saturday, his first visit in more than a decade, where he inked a number of agreements with Malaysian counterpart Anwar Ibrahim, including deals on renewable energy, health-care and artificial intelligence.

"Along with AI and digital technologies, we will advance our partnership in semiconductors, health, and food security," Modi said.

"This meeting and these exchanges are very vital, very strategic and critical to advance and enhance relations between India and Malaysia," Anwar added at a news conference in Malaysia's administrative capital Putrajaya.

Malaysia ranks sixth in worldwide exports of semiconductors, while the sector contributes around 25% of gross domestic product, according to Malaysian government figures.

India's foreign ministry said the Southeast Asian nation had a "very strong semiconductor ecosystem". "They have almost 30 to 40 years of experience in those areas," the ministry added in a statement ahead of Modi's arrival. "Our companies are... interested in collaborating with Malaysia," it said, including in research and development and building manufacturing and testing plants.

For instance, Tata Electronics was in talks last June with global semiconductor companies to buy a fabrication or outsourced semiconductor assembly or test plant in Malaysia, Indian and Malaysian news reports said at the time.

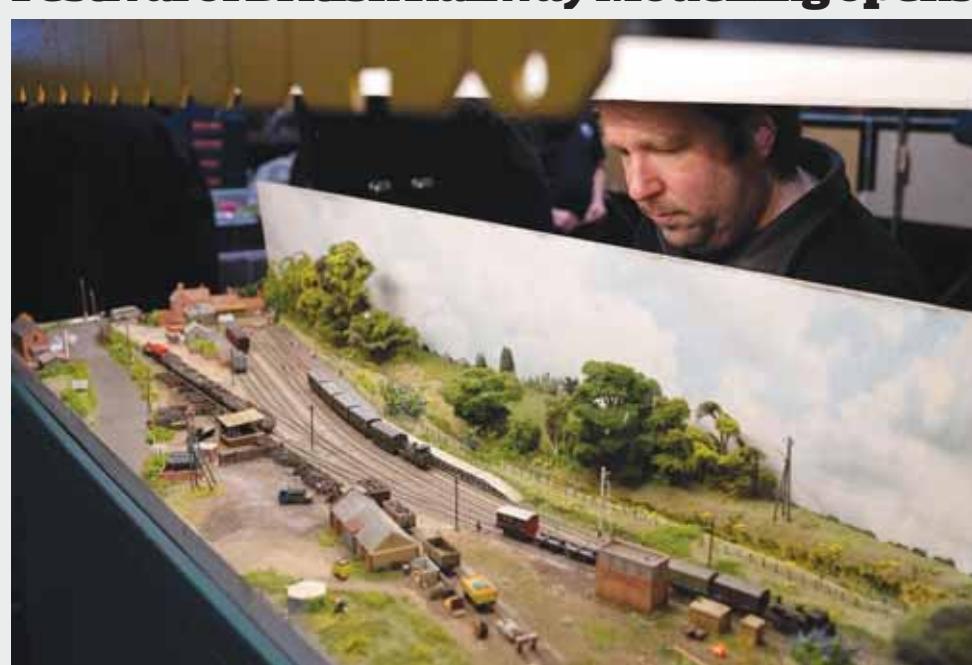
Last year India exported \$7.32bn in goods, mainly in engineering and petroleum products, said the India Brand Equity Foundation.

Imports from Malaysia amounted to \$12.54bn, mainly minerals, vegetable oil and electrical machinery and equipment.

Malaysia also has a large Indian-origin population, around 6.8%, or almost 3mn people, official statistics said.

"This living bridge... of diaspora is a great strength for us. The steps taken for their welfare lend a human foundation to our relationship," Modi said.

Festival of British Railway Modelling opens



A model railway exhibitor manoeuvres model locomotives and carriages on a layout entitled 'Freshwater' at the annual Festival of British Railway Modelling, held at Doncaster Racecourse, in Doncaster northern England. The show features over 30 intricately detailed model railway layouts of varying scales, eras and gauges alongside trade stands, clubs, and societies from across the country.

UK PM's top aide quits in scandal over Mandelson links to Epstein

AFP
London

Embattled British Prime Minister Keir Starmer's chief of staff resigned yesterday over the appointment of Peter Mandelson as ambassador to Washington despite links to US convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein.

"After careful reflection, I have decided to resign from the government. The decision to appoint Peter Mandelson was wrong. He has damaged our party, our country and trust in politics itself," Morgan McSweeney, Downing Street's chief of staff, said in a statement.

"I advised the prime minister to make that appointment and I take

full responsibility for that advice," he added.

The 48-year-old Irishman always maintained a low profile but was dubbed by some as the "most powerful man in politics" having played a key role in Starmer's emphatic election victory in July 2024.

He is credited with helping to move the Labour Party towards a more centrist policy agenda following leftist ex-leader Jeremy Corbyn's ill-fated tenure.

He was also said to have been close to Mandelson who previously helped ex-prime minister Tony Blair transform the party and its fortunes in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

The revelation has placed intense pressure on Starmer and triggered

an exit payment to Mandelson, who was sacked by the Starmer last September over his friendship with the late Epstein.

Mandelson, a pivotal figure in British politics and the Labour Party for decades, received an estimated pay-out of between £38,750 and £55,000 (\$52,000 to \$74,000) after only seven months in the job, according to a report in the *Sunday Times*.

Documents released on January 30 by the US justice department appear to show that Mandelson allegedly leaked confidential UK government information to financier Epstein when he was a British minister, including during the 2008 financial crisis.

The revelation has placed intense pressure on Starmer and triggered

a police investigation into Mandelson, 72, for alleged misconduct in a public office.

The foreign office said in a statement it had launched a review into Mandelson's severance payment "in light of further information that has now been revealed and the ongoing police investigation".

Cabinet Minister Pat McFadden earlier insisted Starmer should remain in office despite his "terrible mistake" in appointing Mandelson.

He said the real blame lay "squarely" with Mandelson for putting himself forward for the job despite knowing the extent of his relationship with Epstein.

Starmer's deputy, David Lammy, became the first cabinet minister to appear to distance himself from the premier, according to a report in the *Sunday Telegraph*.

The *Sunday Telegraph* reported that the deputy prime minister had not been in favour of appointing Mandelson due to his known links to Epstein, the report quoted friends of Lammy as saying.

Starmer's Labour Party took power just over 18 months ago in a landslide election victory.

But it has been trailing Nigel Farage's anti-immigrant Reform UK as the government has come under fire over immigration, economic growth and the cost of living crisis.

Reform UK has led by double-digit figures in the polls for the past year.

Mandelson, also a former European Union trade commissioner, stood down from parliament's unelected upper chamber, the House

of Lords, earlier this week. The envoy was one of numerous prominent figures further embarrassed by last week's latest revelations of ties to financier Epstein, who died in jail in 2019 while facing charges of alleged sex trafficking.

US officials ruled Epstein's death a suicide.

A spokesperson for law firm Mishcon de Reya, representing Mandelson, said he "regrets" and will regret until his dying day, that he believed Epstein's lies about his criminality.

"Lord Mandelson did not discover the truth about Epstein until after his death in 2019. He is profoundly sorry that powerless and vulnerable women and girls were not given the protection they deserved," the law firm said.



India, Malaysia pledge deeper semiconductor ties on Modi visit

AFP
Putrajaya, Malaysia

"This meeting and these exchanges are very vital, very strategic and critical to advance and enhance relations between India and Malaysia," Anwar added at a news conference in Malaysia's administrative capital Putrajaya.

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"This living bridge... of diaspora is a great strength for us. The steps taken for their welfare lend a human foundation to our relationship," Modi said.

King Charles to host state visit for Nigeria president in March

Britain's monarch King Charles III will play host to Nigerian President Bola Tinubu when the African leader makes a state visit to Britain on March 18-19, Buckingham Palace said. President Tinubu and his wife, Olumide Tinubu, will be received at Windsor Castle, west of London, by Charles and Queen Camilla, the palace said. London and Abuja concluded a strategic partnership in November 2024 to strengthen their co-operation on economic, immigration, and security matters. On Friday, the Nigerian ministry of defence said the two countries intended to strengthen their defence co-operation. The two capitals had also signed an economic co-operation agreement in early 2024. A former British colony and member of the Commonwealth, Nigeria was the first African state visited by the British Foreign Secretary (then David Lammy), shortly after the Labour government came to power in July 2024. - Reuters

**CHAIRMAN**

Abdullah bin Khalifa al-Attiyah

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Faisal Abdulhameed al-Mudahka

Deputy Managing Editor

Kamran Rehmat

- P.O.Box 2888, Doha, Qatar
- editor@gulf-times.com
- 44350478 (News),
- 44466404 (Sport),
- 44466636 (Home delivery)
- 44350474
- facebook.com/gulftimes
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GULF TIMES

Malaysia data centres face scrutiny over water, pollution risks

The rapid increase in data centres in Malaysia came under the microscope on Saturday, with the AI-driven buildout drawing its first public protest in the Southeast Asian country.

More than 50 people gathered in front of a data centre construction site close to a residential area in the southern state of Johor, demanding an end to dust pollution and compensation for any negative impact that the project might have on their health. The protesters also expressed concern the facility will impact their water supply.

Those gathered say they represent nearly 1,000 residents strewn across four housing estates in the Gelang Patah district. The project is being developed for China's Zdata Technologies Co. The protesters dispersed after 90 minutes under the watch of dozens of police personnel.

Malaysia has emerged as Southeast Asia's main data centre hub, attracting companies from Oracle Corp and Amazon.com Inc to Alibaba Group Holding Ltd and ByteDance Ltd. Tech giants are targeting the country for its relatively low cost and reliable infrastructure, as well as its close proximity to business centres such as Singapore.

Zdata and the project's local developer Tropicana Firstwide Sdn, a unit of Tropicana Corp, didn't respond to requests for a comment.

The Gelang Patah project is unusually close to a residential area. By contrast, a majority of completed facilities and ongoing data centre constructions are taking place in former plantations or dedicated industrial land, far from residential dwellings.

Johor has been the biggest beneficiary of Malaysia's data centre boom since 2022, approving 164.45bn ringgit (\$41.7bn) in data centre investments as of mid-2025. That's made it Southeast Asia's fastest-growing data centre hub.

Tech giants are targeting the country for its relatively low cost and reliable infrastructure, as well as its close proximity to business centres such as Singapore

project. Johor last year stopped approving Tier 1 and 2 data centres due to their high usage of water — up to 50mn litres of water a day. Its approval was granted before the new ban was instituted.

Residents such as Venu are also concerned about what's yet to come. Zdata is building its site on 38 acres of land it bought from Tropicana in 2024. Next to it sits a 68-acre parcel that the same company sold to Japan's NTT Data Group Corp. for another data centre. That construction hasn't started.

Malaysia is emblematic of growing social unease with data centres worldwide, despite their crucial role in powering the Internet and ChatGPT searches. In Michigan, residents are protesting a data centre campus for the Stargate Project — backed by OpenAI Inc and Softbank Group Corp. among other tech giants — that spans more than 500 acres of farmland.

Zdata is a cloud and IT infrastructure provider headquartered in Beijing, serving an array of Chinese tech giants from Alibaba to Huawei Technologies Co and Tencent Holdings Ltd, according to the company's website. "In response to global environmental issues, Malaysian data centres are committed to sustainable development," according to its website.

Equinix Inc, a Zdata peer and one of the world's largest data centre providers, engages with local communities — sometimes up to a year before construction begins — to avoid backlash, Raouf Abdel, the company's executive vice president of global operations, said.

Equinix already has data centres in Johor and Kuala Lumpur, and Abdel said an upcoming Johor facility will use air cooling "because of the water stress and the water constraints." — Bloomberg

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World's central banks increasingly look to Fed for top hires

Global central banks are increasingly recruiting senior officials who built their careers inside the US Federal Reserve system, treating it as a premier training ground

By Craig Stirling, Beril Akman and Mark Schroers
New York

From Istanbul to Rome, central banks with senior vacancies are embracing the pedigree that comes with a career spent in US policymaking.

A spate of top hires at major monetary institutions since the pandemic have stood out for one thing in particular: they're all officials returning from years of working stateside predominantly within the Federal Reserve system.

Most recent was the announcement on Monday of a new deputy governor at Turkey's central bank, Gazi Ishak Kara, just weeks after the recruitment of its chief economist, Murat Tasci. That followed David Lopez-Salido, who started in the same position at the Bank of Spain in October. Switzerland and Italy have seen other recent standout examples.

All of those officials worked within the US network of reserve banks, either at regional branches of the Fed or its headquarters in Washington, shortly before taking up senior policy jobs in their home country.

The concept of repatriating staffers with the right nationality was previously more sporadic. The recent vogue underscores at the very least how governments and central banks are as susceptible to following trends as anyone, but also points to the cachet associated with steering the world's biggest economy — even at a time when President Donald Trump is testing policymakers there.

"The Federal Reserve is an exceptional place for any central banker to gain first-hand experience," said Selva Demiralp, a professor of economics at Istanbul's Koc University and a former Fed economist. "When I graduated, my PhD adviser told me that there is no better way to learn central banking."

Decision-makers hiring for monetary institutions outside the US have long treasured an education in America, and even time spent in academia there — witness governors appointed over the years ranging from former European Central Bank chief Mario Draghi to Mervyn King, and then Mark Carney, at the Bank of England.

But the concept of tapping nationals within the Fed system was less common. Most notably, Turkey's government hired Fatih Karahan, an economist at the New York Fed, as a policymaker in 2023 before he then succeeded Governor Hafiz Gaye Erkan when she was removed by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in early 2024.

Turkiye has led the way, appointing ex-Fed economists including Governor Fatih Karahan, deputy governor Gazi Ishak Kara, and chief economist Murat Tasci as part of a broader credibility-rebuilding push



Fatih Karahan PICTURE: Lina Selig/Bloomberg



Antoine Martin PICTURE: Stefan Wermuth/Bloomberg

Karahan's appointment marked the dawn of a broad economic overhaul after Erdogan's re-election, drawing a line under years of populist policies that stoked runaway inflation. The central bank since raised interest rates to as high as 50%, while holding dozens of foreign investor meetings to reestablish credibility.

Of the two other former US officials, Tasci spent nearly 17 years at the Cleveland Fed before a short stint at JPMorgan in New York, while Kara has been focusing on financial stability at the Fed's Board of Governors in Washington.

The appointments reflect a push by Finance Minister Mehmet Simsek — himself a former strategist at Merrill Lynch — to present candidates with strong economics backgrounds and experience for Erdogan's approval.

"Considering the period before 2023, when several senior appointments lacked strong academic or practical central banking backgrounds, these recent hires suggest a clear intention to rebuild expertise and restore confidence," said Demiralp.

At the Swiss National Bank meanwhile, Vice-President Antoine Martin joined as a policymaker at the start of 2024, and took on the No 2 job nine

months later. The appointment answered Switzerland's need for someone with expertise, the gravitas to help manage a still-pivotal reserve currency, and a fairly uncommon nationality.

Practically his whole career has been spent stateside, starting at the Kansas City Fed early this century before he shifted to its New York counterpart.

At the Bank of Italy, the hiring of Chiara Scotti, an official at the Dallas Fed, was announced in December 2023. She began as deputy director general a few months later.

"My experience at the Fed was very formative," she said in an interview in November. "I'm proud to have experienced the best of both worlds."

Lopez-Salido worked for almost two decades in monetary affairs at the Fed in Washington before moving to Madrid to run the Bank of Spain's forecasting.

In addition to the "pull" factor for such officials going home to a senior job, the Trump administration has effectively also offered a "push." The president's allies have regularly blasted the Fed for its large staff of economists.

The issue even came up during Trump's vetting of candidates for its next chair. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said in December that the president asked one of them why the Fed needed

hundreds of PhD economists. "There wasn't a good answer," Bessent said.

For global central banks meanwhile, some sort of American pedigree has long been treasured. At the ECB, Chief Economist Philip Lane's doctorate at Harvard University helped bolster his candidacy. Former Vice President Lucas Papademos spent time early in his career at the Boston Fed.

But it was previously rarer for governments or central banks to look at the Fed system as an actual recruiting ground for senior officials.

Among prior examples in Europe, Athanasios Orphanides left the Fed in Washington in 2007 to serve a term as governor of the Cypriot central bank, while Emanuel Moench, a former head of research at Germany's Bundesbank, joined from the New York Fed in 2015.

"The Fed is definitely an excellent training ground for central bankers," said Moench, who is now a professor at the Frankfurt School of Finance. "There's a great deal to learn there. The New York Fed, in particular, has the added benefit of a strong focus on financial markets and close ties to market participants."

In contrast to peers, the UK stands out more than most as looking on the US central bank as a source of expertise without bothering too much about nationality.

At the Bank of England, current Financial Policy Committee member Randall Kroszner is a former Fed governor, and former Fed Vice-Chair Donald Kohn served on the same panel. Former Fed Chair Ben Bernanke and Kevin Warsh, Trump's nominee to become Fed chief, each produced reports on the UK central bank's way of functioning.

In common with other institutions, the BoE also sends staff to Fed institutions for secondments. One example was former chief economist Spencer Dale. Another was the current governor, Andrew Bailey, who spent time at the New York Fed in 1987. — Bloomberg



The Turkish central bank building in Istanbul.

Trump praises new Honduras leader after talks in US

AFP
Washington

US President Donald Trump praised conservative Honduran counterpart Nasry Asfura after a meeting at his Mar-a-Lago resort, with Asfura vowing yesterday to be Washington's "most reliable strategic partner."

Asfura, a businessman and former mayor of the Honduran capital Tegucigalpa, was sworn in last week after winning November elections with Trump's backing.

Trump had threatened to cut aid to Central America's poorest country if his "friend" was defeated.

"I had a very important meeting with my friend, and the President of Honduras, Nasry 'Tito' Asfura," Trump wrote on his Truth Social platform.

"Once I gave him my strong endorsement, he won his Election! Tito and I share many of the same America First Values. We have a close partnership on Security."

For his part, Asfura described his meeting at Mar-a-Lago as "productive" and said the two leaders agreed to boost investment and trade.

"Honduras is ready to grow, attract investment, and establish itself as the most reliable strategic partner of the United States in the region, with stability, security, and a clear vision of prosperity," Asfura said in a post on X early on Sunday.

The Honduran presidency released a photo of the two leaders smiling and giving a thumbs up.

Asfura also told reporters in Florida on Sunday that they discussed Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Hondurans, which the Department of Homeland Security revoked last year only for a federal judge to vacate the order.

Some 60,000 Hondurans, who



US President Donald Trump poses with Honduras' President Nasry Asfura at Trump's Mar-a-Lago residence in Palm Beach, Florida.

came to the United States after Hurricane Mitch devastated the Central American nation in 1998, benefit from TPS that allows them to live and work there.

"We were talking about TPS, you know that TPS is still pending," Asfura said. "As for the rest of the migration issue, I would prefer not to comment, I reserve my comments, but we did agree to review all the laws and the work we need to do for Honduras."

Asfura had already met with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio on January 12, after which the two countries announced plans for a free trade deal.

His win gave Trump another ally in Latin America after conservatives campaigning heavily on crime and corruption replaced leftists in Chile, Bolivia, Peru and Argentina.

Trump has been pressuring

countries in Washington's backyard to choose between close ties with Washington or Beijing.

Asfura, who succeeded left-wing leader Xiomara Castro, has said he is considering switching diplomatic ties from China to the self-ruled island of Taiwan.

Trump pardoned former Honduras president Juan Orlando Hernandez in a surprise move on the eve of the Honduran election.

Hernandez, from Asfura's party, was serving a 45-year prison sentence in the United States for drug trafficking. He was convicted of helping to smuggle 400 tonnes of cocaine into the United States.

Trump's decision to pardon him, even as US forces were blowing up alleged drug boats in the Caribbean and tightening the noose on Venezuela's Nicolas Maduro, whom Washington accuses of drug trafficking, drew heavy criticism.

American astronaut to take her 3-year-old's cuddly rabbit into space

When the next mission to the International Space Station blasts off from Florida next week, a special keepsake will be hitching a ride: a small stuffed rabbit.

American astronaut and mother, Jessica Meir, one of the four-member crew, revealed yesterday that she'll take with her the cuddly toy that belongs to her three-year-old daughter.

It's customary for astronauts to go to the ISS, which orbits 250 miles (400 kilometres) above Earth, to take small personal items to keep close during their months-long stint in space.

"I do have a small stuffed rabbit that belongs to my three-year-old daughter, and she actually has two of these because one was given as a gift," Meir, 48, told an online news conference.

"So one will stay down here with her, and one will be there with us, having adventures all the time, so that we'll keep sending those photos back and forth to my family," she said. US space agency Nasa says SpaceX Crew-12 will lift off on a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket from Cape Canaveral in Florida to the orbiting scientific laboratory early Wednesday.

The mission will be replacing Crew-11, which returned to Earth in January, a month earlier than planned, during the first medical evacuation in the space station's history.

Meir, a marine biologist and physiologist, served as flight engineer on a 2019-2020 expedition to the space station and participated in the first all-female spacewalks. Since then, she's given birth to her daughter. She reflected yesterday on the challenges of being a parent and what is due to be an eight-month separation from her child.

"It does make it a lot difficult in preparing to leave and thinking about being away from her for that long, especially when she's so young, it's really a large chunk of her life," Meir said.

"But I hope that one day, she will really realise that this absence was a meaningful one, because it was an adventure that she got to share into and that she'll have memories about, and hopefully it will inspire her and other people around the world," Meir added.

When the astronauts finally get on board the ISS, they will be one of the last crews to live on board the football field-sized space station.

Continuously inhabited for the last quarter century, the ageing ISS is scheduled to be pushed into Earth's orbit before crashing into an isolated spot in the Pacific Ocean in 2030.

The other Crew-12 astronauts are Jack Hetherington of Nasa, European Space Agency astronaut Sophie Adenot, and Russian cosmonaut Andrey Fedyaev.

(AFP)



Provincial Minister of Punjab for Information and Culture Azma Bukhari (centre) attends the kite-flying Basant festival in Lahore.

motorcyclists, prompting the crackdown.

But this year authorities relaxed, allowing the festival for three days but with ramped up safety measures in place in a move welcomed by many Lahoris and thousands who travelled to the city from across the country to take part.

"People had lost businesses

when the ban happened. After the ban lifted I sold 20,000 to 25,000 kites," said Tariq, a kite maker.

Rights groups and cultural activists have long criticised the ban, arguing that poor enforcement rather than the festival itself was to blame for past tragedies. Some official events planned to take place during the festival were cancelled af-

Machado's close ally released in Venezuela

AFP
Caracas

Venezuelan opposition politician Juan Pablo Guanipa has been freed from jail, his family said in a statement yesterday, the latest high-profile release by the government in Caracas, which is under pressure from the US to free political prisoners.

Rights group Foro Penal says it has verified 383 liberations of political prisoners since the government announced a new series of releases on January 8. Guanipa, a well-known politician in Venezuela and a close ally of Nobel Peace Prize winner and opposition leader Maria Corina Machado, was arrested in May 2025 after months in hiding for allegedly leading a terrorist plot. His family and political movement have strenuously denied the allegations. Earlier this month, Guanipa's family said they had been able to see him in person for the first time in months, and that he was in good physical health.

"Ten months in hiding and almost nine months detained here," Guanipa said yesterday after being released. "There's a lot to talk about regarding the present and future of Venezuela, always with the truth front and centre."

Machado yesterday celebrated Guanipa's release in a statement on X, calling for all political prisoners to be released. Venezuela's opposition and human rights groups have said for years that the country's socialist govern-



File photo shows former Deputy of the National Assembly of Venezuela, Juan Pablo Guanipa (right) gesturing next to Venezuelan opposition leader Maria Corina Machado during a protest called by the opposition on the eve of the presidential inauguration in Caracas.

ment uses detentions to stamp out dissent.

The government denies holding political prisoners and says those jailed have committed crimes. Officials have given a much higher figure of releases, of nearly 900, but have not been clear about the timeline and appear to be including releases from previous years in their count.

The government has never provided an official list of how many prisoners will be released nor who they are. Venezuela's interim President Delcy Rodriguez has also announced a proposed "amnesty law" for hundreds of prisoners in the country, and said the infamous Helicoide detention centre in Caracas, which rights groups have long denounced as

the site of prisoner abuse, will be converted into a centre for sport and social services in the capital.

The legislation, which would grant immediate clemency to people jailed for participating in political protests or critiquing public figures, return assets of those detained and cancel Interpol and other international measures previously issued by the government – passed in an initial vote at the National Assembly this week. It will need to be approved a second time to become law.

Rodriguez, who took office after the US captured and deposed Venezuelan leader Nicolas Maduro last month, has been releasing the political prisoners and complying with US demands on oil deals.

French authorities arrest six over crypto-linked magistrate kidnapping

AFP
Lyon

French authorities have arrested six suspects, including a minor, after a magistrate and her mother were held captive last week for around 30 hours in a cryptocurrency ransom plot, prosecutors said yesterday.

Four men and one woman were detained, three overnight and two yesterday morning, Lyon prosecutor Thierry Dran told AFP. He later confirmed a minor had been arrested yesterday afternoon.

The individuals were taken into custody following the discovery of the 35-year-old magistrate and her 67-year-old mother on Friday morning, found injured in a garage in the southeastern

Drome region. Two of those arrested overnight were detained as they attempted to take a bus to Spain, according to a source close to the case speaking on condition of anonymity.

Authorities continue to actively search for further suspects, a second source close to the case said, adding that the woman in custody is the partner of one of the four male suspects.

During a press conference Friday after the pair's escape, prosecutor Dran said the magistrate's partner – who was not home when the two victims were abducted overnight Wednesday to Thursday – has a leading position in a cryptocurrency start-up.

A massive police search involving 160 officers was launched after the magistrate's partner had

received a message and a photo of her from the kidnappers demanding a ransom to be paid in cryptocurrency.

The captors threatened to mutilate the victims if the transfer was not made quickly, Dran told reporters, declining to specify the amount demanded. But the two women managed to free themselves and call for help without any ransom being paid, by banging on the garage door in Bourg-lès-Valence.

"Alerted by the noise, a neighbour intervened. He was able to open the door and allow our two victims to escape," Dran said. French authorities have beenloat with a string of kidnappings and extortion attempts targeting the families of wealthy individuals dealing in cryptocurrencies.

Storm-battered Portugal votes in presidential election run-off

Portugal, which is reeling from fatal storms, voted yesterday in the second round of a presidential election in which the moderate favourite is expected to trounce his far-right rival. Since the first-round vote in January, the election campaign has been upended by two weeks of storms and fierce gales that have killed at least seven people and created an estimated four billion euros (\$4.7bn) in damage.

The storm disruption forced around 20 of the worst-hit constituencies to postpone the vote by a week, but the election went ahead for nearly all the

11mn eligible voters in Portugal and abroad, starting at 8:00am (0800 GMT). First exit polls were due at around 8:00pm, after the last polling stations in the Azores archipelago close.

Voters were being asked to choose between veteran Socialist Antonio Jose Seguro, who won most votes in the first round of the election in January, and extreme-right candidate Andre Ventura, who came second. Ventura – who trailed Seguro in opinion polls – alleged the government's response to the fierce gales and floods had been "useless" and called for the entire election to be postponed.

Colour and caution as banned kite-flying festival returns to Pakistan

AFP
Islamabad

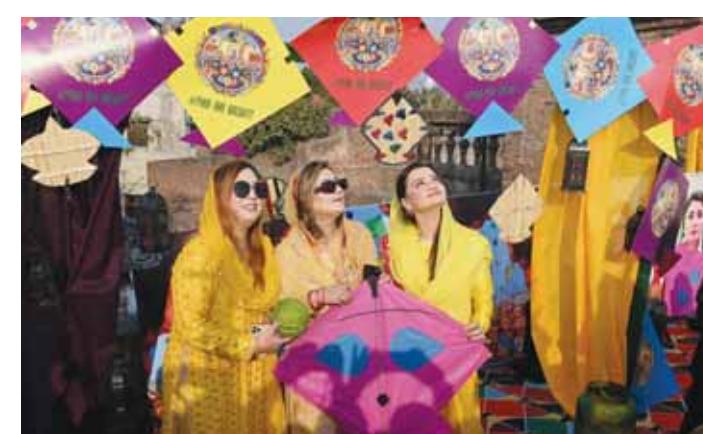
Brightly coloured kites soared through the skies over Pakistan's eastern city of Lahore this weekend, marking the return of a festival after a 19-year ban that had been imposed over safety concerns.

Families and groups of friends gathered on rooftops and in parks and streets for the three-day kite-flying festival in Punjab province, known as 'Basant', the Urdu language word for the spring season it traditionally marks the arrival of.

"Everyone is excited – all of Punjab, all of Pakistan. It has become hard to find kites and strings because they sold out," said Shahzaib, a kite flyer, with drums playing in the background.

Punjab authorities banned the festival in 2007 due to a series of fatal accidents caused by glass powdered-coated kite strings and celebratory aerial gunfire.

The exceptionally sharp strings, known as manjha, had badly injured and killed pedestrians and



Provincial Minister of Punjab for Information and Culture Azma Bukhari (centre) attends the kite-flying Basant festival in Lahore.

motorcyclists, prompting the crackdown.

But this year authorities relaxed, allowing the festival for three days but with ramped up safety measures in place in a move welcomed by many Lahoris and thousands who travelled to the city from across the country to take part.

"People had lost businesses

when the ban happened. After the ban lifted I sold 20,000 to 25,000 kites," said Tariq, a kite maker.

Rights groups and cultural activists have long criticised the ban, arguing that poor enforcement rather than the festival itself was to blame for past tragedies. Some official events planned to take place during the festival were cancelled af-



Sky filled with kites during the setting sun hours, marking the last day of Basant, a kite-flying festival, in Lahore, yesterday.

ter a suicide blast at a mosque in Pakistan's capital Islamabad on Friday killed 31 people. Police were deployed across the city to enforce safety rules, while hospitals were placed on alert to deal with potential injuries.

Authorities also monitored kite sales – including using QR codes to track kites – and confis-

cated banned materials, including glass-coated strings. Motorcycle riders placed protective rods on their bikes to intercept kite strings before they could cut riders.

Kite fighting was the main attraction of the festival with participants manoeuvring their kites to sever the strings of their oppo-

nents; often drawing cheers from neighbouring rooftops. Workshops that once lay dormant were operating again to meet demand.

"Buying and flying kites should not be a one-time thing," said Chand Ustad, 51, string maker. "Keep buying them, keep flying them, this helps our business as well," added Ustad.



Old Souq Al Wakrah hosts Maqadi Ramadan expo along waterfront

By Ayman Adly

Staff Reporter



Hamad Rashid al-Kaabi at the event.

PICTURES: Shaji Kayamkulam

Old Souq Al Wakrah kicked off its Maqadi Ramadan Exhibition yesterday afternoon along the waterfront, featuring participation from 30 companies and suppliers, the majority of them local.

The exhibition, organised in anticipation of the holy month of Ramadan, brings together essential food items in a single location, set within a heritage-inspired atmosphere. Visitors can find a wide range of products, including dates, cookies, dairy items such as sour milk, ghee, and yogurt, as well as coffee, tea, nuts, and spices.

The exhibition will run for 20 days, starting 10 days before Ramadan and continuing for the first 10 days of the month. Operating hours are from 3pm-9pm before holy month of Ramadan and from 6pm-10pm during the holy month.

Hamad Rashid al-Kaabi, director of Old Souq Al Wakrah, said the waterfront location is intended to pro-

Visit Qatar announces Shakira Live in Doha at Stadium 974



Visit Qatar has announced that global music icon Shakira will perform in Doha as part of her *Las Mujeres Ya No Lloran* World Tour, with a one-night-only concert taking place on April 1 at Stadium 974. The record-breaking stadium tour follows the global success of Shakira's 12th studio album, *Las Mujeres Ya No Lloran* that marked one of the most talked about cultural moments in international pop music, receiving rave reviews and

a Grammy win for Best Latin Album. The album is a dazzling testament to her resilience and strength, as well as music's power to transform the most trying experiences into precious moments. The Doha show will deliver a large-scale production, featuring the songs that defined her career across decades, from Latin pop anthems to global crossover hits, alongside standout tracks from her latest album.

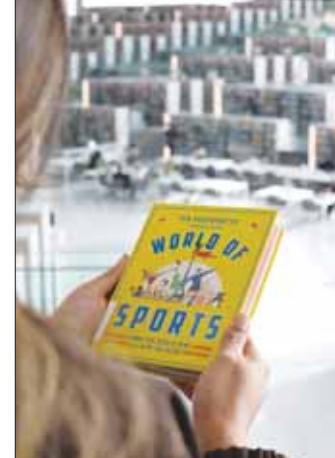
QNL offers eight works to celebrate Qatar National Sport Day

As Qatar prepares to celebrate National Sport Day, the Qatar National Library (QNL) invites residents and visitors to explore the world of sports through literature.

The annual celebration highlights the vital role of physical activity in building healthy communities and reflects Qatar's commitment to wellness and athletic excellence.

QNL's collection offers resources that span Qatar's traditional sporting heritage, contemporary health and fitness perspectives, and global sporting practices, making it a rich destination for enthusiasts, researchers, and anyone interested in the intersection of sports, culture, and wellbeing.

Traditional Sports in Qatar, Author: Abu Bakr al-Hassan (Arabic): This work explores camel racing, equestrianism, archery,



and falconry, showing how these disciplines remain living connections to Qatar's past. It highlights how traditional practices continue



to hold cultural significance while adapting to modern society.

Qatari Insights into the Sports Scene, Author: Ali Mohammed Youssef al-Mahmoud (Arabic):

Al-Mahmoud offers a local perspective on Qatar's contemporary sports landscape, providing insights into the nation's sporting culture and development.

Healthy Sports for Achieving Public Health, Author: Professor Muayyad Abd Ali al-Tai (Arabic): Professor al-Tai examines the physical and psychological benefits of regular sports participation, reinforcing the message of National Sport Day about building healthier communities through active lifestyles.

Sports for People with Disabilities, Author: Professor Nahid Abd Zaid al-Dulaimi (Arabic): This work focuses on designing inclusive sports programmes for people with disabilities, emphasising accessibility and equity in athletic participation.

Sport, Author: Mike Cronin, translated by Hazem Ali (Arabic): Cronin's work, available in Arabic, explores sport as a social and cultural phenomenon, shedding light on its role in contemporary society.

Sports for All in the Context of Contemporary Changes and Crises, Author: Dr Mohammed Asem Mohammed Ghazi (Arabic):

Dr Ghazi examines inclusive sports initiatives amid modern societal challenges, underscoring the importance of accessible physical activity for all.

Modern Sports Around the World: History, Geography, and Sociology, Author: David Asa Schwartz: Schwartz provides a multidisciplinary analysis of global sports traditions, connecting athletic practices to cultural, economic, and social contexts.

World of Sports: A Book for Sports Fans All Over the Globe, Author: Ben Groundwater; Illustrated by Paul Reid: This illustrated journey celebrates athletic cultures worldwide, highlighting both international competitions and local sporting traditions.

AI to transform design but not replace human creativity: VCUarts president

By Joey Aguilar
Doha

As artificial intelligence (AI) reshapes creative industries worldwide, Qatar must nurture design leaders who can turn innovation and research into global value, according to Virginia Commonwealth University School of the Arts (VCUarts) Qatar president Dr Michael Rao.

Speaking to *Gulf Times*, Dr Rao highlighted the need for human-centred creativity that connects local ideas to international audiences, stressing that while AI is transforming how designers work, it cannot replace the distinctly human qualities that drive meaningful design.

He said the rapid rise of AI is placing pressure on all fields of learning and research, including creative design. However, Dr Rao views the technology as an opportunity rather than a threat. "The people who learn how to use and master AI will be the most successful," he said, adding that while AI may replace some jobs that can be automated, it will not replace people themselves.

According to Dr Rao, the challenge lies in understanding how to use AI effectively and respon-



Dr Michael Rao. PICTURE: Thajudheen

sibly. "We can use AI and learn how to make it valuable," he said.

He noted that the technology still requires clear parameters.

"It's not as accurate yet as it

could be, and it has many ele-

ments that require human judg-

ment about its value."

He emphasised that human senses, empathy, and the ability to understand complex social and cultural needs remain ir-

replaceable. While technologi-

cal advances continue to push

boundaries, Dr Rao said there are limits to what machines can replicate. "We will never quite be able to develop the empathy and the importance of understanding the complexities of people around the world and their needs without human beings," he said.

Dr Rao said Qatar needs creative leaders who can translate research, innovation, and entrepreneurship into outcomes that resonate globally. He described Qatar as a country with a small

population but an outsized capacity for innovation, and said the challenge is to ensure that ideas developed locally create value beyond national borders.

Drawing on his long-standing engagement with Qatar Foundation (QF) Chairperson Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, Dr Rao said this global outlook has been central to Qatar's vision for years. "Ultimately, what we want to do is create value out of the work that we do here for the rest of the world," he said.

He pointed to Qatar's non-traditional approach to education and creativity as a model for others to follow, citing the decision to embed a university within a design district. "How often do you see universities setting up shop in a design district?" he said.

Dr Rao was speaking in the context of the growing partnership between Doha Design District and VCUarts Qatar, a QF-partner university. As part of this collaboration, VCUarts Qatar is launching a multifunctional design hub in Msheireb Downtown Doha to bring together academic expertise and the city's vibrant design community and showcase the value of design in enhancing lives locally and globally.