



Shura Council reviews investment, economic development plans

Council underlines key role of National Sport Day

The Shura Council yesterday held its regular weekly session at its headquarters in the Tamim bin Hamad Hall, chaired by HE the Speaker of the Shura Council Hassan bin Abdullah al-Ghanem.

At the outset of the session, HE the Secretary-General of the Council Nayef bin Mohammed al-Mahmoud read out the agenda, after which the Council approved the minutes of its previous session.

During the session, the Council examined a draft law on animal health, referred to it by the esteemed government, and decided to refer it to the Health, Public Services, and Environment Committee for further study and for submission of its report to the Council.

The Council also reviewed the report of the Financial and Economic Affairs Committee, which included its opinion on the government's statement regarding the Council's proposal on "Supporting National and Foreign Investment," and took the appropriate decision thereon. In this context, the Council commended the government's statement and its responsiveness to the Council's views, as well as the measures and initiatives being implemented to support investment and economic development, which constitute one of the fundamental pillars of Qatar National Vision 2030.

The Council further reviewed a report on the participation of Council Member Issa bin Ahmed al-Nasr in the parliamentary session held as part of the World Trade Organisation's Public Forum in Geneva last September. It also reviewed a report on the participation of Council Member Khalid bin Abbas Kamal al-Emadi in the Sixth Expert Roundtable on Common Principles for Supporting Parliaments, organised by the Inter-Parliamentary Union in December of last year via videoconference.

On the occasion of National Sport Day, which falls on the second Tuesday of February each year and is today, HE the Speaker of the Shura Council Hassan bin Abdullah al-Ghanem affirmed the Council's readiness to participate in the activities of this national event, stressing its importance



in raising community awareness of the significance of sports and public health.

His Excellency commended the State's attention to sports and the provision of advanced sports facilities and infrastructure designed for various physical activities, urging the regular use of these facilities to promote a culture of physical activity within the community.

He also underscored the importance of engaging in the diverse activities accompanying National Sports Day, highlighting the vital role of sports in enhancing individual and community health, improving quality of life, and positively impacting various aspects of work and daily life.

HE the Speaker called upon citizens and residents to seize this opportunity to establish sports as a priority and a sustainable lifestyle practiced regularly throughout the year, thereby strengthening community health awareness.

The session was attended by a number of student council members from Tariq Bin Ziyad Secondary School for Boys, Hassaan Bin Thabit Secondary School for Boys, and Qatar Science and Technology School for Boys.

In remarks following the session, Council Member Mohammed bin Yousef al-Mana, member of the Shura Council and chairman of the Financial and Economic Affairs Committee, commended the government's efforts and its thorough consideration of all the Council's proposals related to supporting national and foreign investment.

These proposals included the ongoing evaluation of the Third National Development Strategy; the development of digital licensing systems; the modernisation of investment legislation; a review

of fees and services; increased support for local products; the localisation of strategic industries; expediting the resolution of stalled projects; the provision of investor databases; the regulation of industrial land allocation; and the offering of viable investment projects to the private sector.

His Excellency highlighted the joint work and co-ordination between the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and the National Planning Council in the ongoing evaluation of the Third National Development Strategy (2025-2030) through various mechanisms and frameworks. He also noted the Ministry of Commerce and Industry's efforts to develop its digital systems to enhance the business environment and streamline procedures, specifically citing the "One-Stop Shop" project, a unified digital platform for serving investors.

He further noted that the government, through various relevant entities, is currently reviewing several laws that will impact a wide range of commercial activities.

He added that fees for activities and services provided to investors are also being reconsidered, pointing out that the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, for example, has issued a decision to reduce its service fees by more than 90%.

In the same vein, he commended the State's policies to support national products, including incentivising the purchase of domestic products, supporting their exports, combating practices harmful to national products in international trade, and offering promising investment opportunities to the private sector across various sectors, including recycling. (QNA)

Court auctions generate more than QR64mn

The Department of Judicial Evictions and Auctions at the Supreme Judicial Council conducted several online auctions on February 8, 2026, generating proceeds of QR64,468,310 and a total of 3,517 bids. These proceeds were allocated for the benefit of settling 995 cases. Through these auctions, 35 real estate units were on

sale, with only eight of them sold out at a total price of QR60,717,510, used to settle 11 related cases. The vehicle auctions entailed 85 vehicles with only 63 of them sold at a total price of QR577,300 used to settle 917. Further, the equipment auction, where 25 pieces were on sale and 24 were sold out, generated a total of QR3,173,500 used for the benefit of 67 related cases.

Public Prosecution reveals working hours for National Sport Day

The Public Prosecution Office of Execution of Judgments at Hamad International Airport will continue to work round-the-clock during the National Sport Day while the headquarters of the Public Prosecution Public Services will work only during the evening shift from 6pm to 10pm. Similarly,

the Residency Affairs Prosecution at the Ministry of Interior Search and Follow-up Building will be working during the evening shift from 6pm until 10pm. However, e-services will be available through the website: www.eservices.pp.gov.qa and the Public Prosecution App.

Qatar honoured with poetry evening at Damascus book fair

The Damascus International Book Fair has celebrated Qatar's participation as guest of honour with a poetry evening.

The event featured Qatari poets Mubarak al-Khalifa and Nasser al-Wobair, who presented a variety of readings exploring themes of pride, nostalgia, and beauty.

Al-Khalifa opened with a poem dedicated to Syria, highlighting its role as the heart of Arab culture and its enduring vitality. Al-Wobair offered a symbolic poem about jasmine, evoking the fragrance of Damascus and sentiments of belonging and love for the Levant.

The poetry session included romantic, emotional, and patriotic works, receiving enthusiastic responses from the audience and reflecting strong engagement between the poets and attendees.

This year's fair includes participation from 35 countries and features over 650 cultural events, including lectures, panel discussions, literary evenings, and artistic activities. (QNA)



Culture minister inaugurates Tajik Cultural Week in Doha

HE the Minister of Culture Sheikh Abdulrahman bin Hamad al-Thani and Minister of Culture of Tajikistan Matlubakhon Sattoriyen yesterday inaugurated the Tajik Cultural Week.

The event is held as part of Qatar's vision to foster civilisational dialogue and broaden the horizons of cultural exchange with various countries of the world, as well as consolidate culture as a shared space for human convergence. The opening ceremony showcased a series of Tajik heritage performances on the main stage of the Ministry of Culture.

Running from Feb 8-11, the event provides an extraordinary experience on the platforms of Tajik culture and arts. Today a cultural event has been inaugurated to build a spiritual bridge, as long as culture is the sole lan-

guage that cannot be translated, because it emanates from hearts to hearts, a culture that brings people closer, Sattoriyen said.

Sattoriyen added that the two nations have been forging enduring pillars that underpin international dialogue for centuries, emphasising that Qatar and Tajikistan are not merely neighbours but co-authors and participants in international civilisation, whose territories have been transformed into hubs for the exchange of knowledge, arts, and judiciousness over centuries.

She elaborated that the cultures of both nations are closely interlocked and noted that Qatar has genuinely become an intellectual and cultural oasis on planet Earth.

Culture has become one of the utmost forms of diplomacy, as the relationship between the

two countries today is elevated to new heights, with Tajikistan considering Qatar as its closest and most reliable partner. The current cultural days are the joint statement for peace and reconciliation, Sattoriyen underlined.

This cultural week represents a pre-eminent milestone in the path of the Qatar-Tajikistan relationship, demonstrating the positive evolution of these ties, particularly in the cultural area, which is considered one of the key bridges of rapprochement and mutual understanding between the two friendly nations.

The agenda features a broad range of events that embody Tajikistan's bountiful and diverse culture, including traditional fashion shows, musical evenings, handicrafts exhibitions, along with visual arts presentations and other cultural events. (QNA)

Qatar, Tajikistan discuss cultural co-operation

HE the Minister of Culture Sheikh Abdulrahman bin Hamad al-Thani has held talks with Minister of Culture of Tajikistan, Matlubakhon Sattoriyon.

The talks yesterday took place on the sidelines of the launch of Tajikistan Cultural Week in Doha. The two sides discussed ways to strengthen bilateral co-operation between the countries in the cultural field. (QNA)

Ministry hosts workshop on using AI to support Arab culture



The Ministry of Culture yesterday held a specialised two-day workshop on using AI to serve Arab culture, in collaboration with the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organisation (Alecso) and the Qatar National Commission for Education, Culture and Science.

The workshop provides an interactive platform to enhance cultural professionals' understanding of advanced AI applications, equipping participants with the skills needed to use these technologies and enabling them to transform creative ideas into practical solutions that help preserve Arab cultural identity.

Director of the ministry's Department of Culture and Arts, Abdulrahman al-Dulaimi, said the initiative reflects the rapid global transformations and the need to invest in knowledge and skills to keep pace with technological advances.

He stressed that AI is a key driver for developing cultural content and expanding access

to culture in innovative ways. Meanwhile, Director of IT at Alecso, Dr Mohamed Jemni, described AI as more than a technological tool, calling it a strategic lever that reshapes production methods and safeguards human memory. He noted that this transformation presents unprecedented opportunities for Arab culture, alongside challenges that require effective governance and investment in knowledge.

The workshop explored AI's potential to digitise and protect Arab cultural heritage, enhance production and distribution of digital cultural content, support the Arabic language and endangered dialects, and develop creative and cultural industries through innovative methods.

Moza al-Hammadi, an expert on organisational affairs with the Qatar National Commission for Education, Culture and Science, highlighted that AI-driven transformations are affecting not only economic and

industrial sectors but also culture, arts, and content creation. She stressed that these shifts are changing the ways societies preserve their memory and identity for future generations.

Al-Hammadi cited international data showing that over 60% of global digital content is produced in just five languages, while Arabic accounts for only 3% of online content despite being spoken by more than 450mn people worldwide. She noted that this gap presents a significant opportunity to strengthen Arab digital presence using modern technologies, particularly AI. She added that more than 70% of leading cultural institutions worldwide have begun integrating AI applications into their archiving and content production plans.

The workshop is designed to respond to these trends and directly empower professionals in libraries, museums, heritage centres, as well as researchers, entrepreneurs, and software developers. (QNA)

Katara displays murals on sidelines of Arabian horse festival

The artworks on display on the margin of the Katara International Arabian Horse Festival (KIAHF-2026) underscore visual art as a medium to celebrate Arabian horses and Qatari heritage.

Featuring artists from Qatar and beyond, these three-dimensional murals are inspired by the beauty and spirit of horsemanship.

The public are able to follow the murals' stages of development and can interact directly with the artists, in a unique experience of its kind.

These artworks reflect a blend of Qatari heritage, Arabian horses, and contemporary art, showcasing each artist's individual creativity and contributing to advancing Qatar's cultural and artistic scenes.

Qatari artist Iman al-Haydos said that her participation in the KIAHF-2026 is a very special experience, adding that she painted a four metres long mural,



inspired by horses and spectator movement, focusing on dimensions and lighting as to highlight vitality and interaction.

Al-Haydos said that she was happy with the strong public turnout from various age groups, including children who learned about horses and enjoyed art, adding that such interactions form the essence of artworks at this event.

Qatari artist Fahad al-Maadheed said that works of art must constantly evolve whilst also preserving national identity and natural life. Al-Maadheed said that he focused on using bold, warm colours and shades of colour to convey meaning and emotions, adding that he made sure that both the public and other artists benefited from the interactive experience. (QNA)

Minister of State for Interior Affairs meets Singaporean counterpart

HE the Minister of State for Interior Affairs Sheikh Abdulaziz bin Faisal bin Mohammed al-Thani met with Co-ordinating Minister for National Security and Minister for Home Affairs of Singapore K Shanmugam. The meeting discussed a number of topics of mutual interest and ways to enhance security co-operation between the countries, in addition to developing mechanisms for co-operation in related fields. (QNA)



Health minister meets Senegalese counterpart



HE Mansoor bin Ebrahim al-Mahmoud, Minister of Public Health, met with Dr Ibrahima Sy, Minister of Health and Public Hygiene of Senegal, who is currently visiting the country. During the meeting, they discussed ways to strengthen co-operation between the countries in the health sector.

Ashghal in pact with AKCC to recycle sludge from treatment plants



The Public Works Authority 'Ashghal' signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) for a strategic partnership with Al Khalij Cement Company (AKCC), aimed at recycling 100% of the sludge generated by Ashghal's wastewater treatment plants across Qatar.

The signing ceremony was witnessed by HE the Minister of Municipality Abdullah bin Hamad bin Abdullah al-Attiyah; Chairman of the Board of Qatari Investors Group, Abdullah bin Nasser al-Misnad; and President of the Public Works Authority 'Ashghal', Engineer Mohammed bin Abdulaziz al-Meer along with a select group of representatives from various concerned entities.

This initiative represents a significant step towards implementing the principles of the circular economy in Qatar, where

massive quantities of sludge, ranging between 744,000 and 1.29mn tonnes, will be converted into clean energy over a period of five years. Previously considered waste, the sludge will now become a value-added resource through sustainable treatment and full recycling. The agreement also contributes to solving sludge disposal challenges by avoiding its transportation and/or landfilling, thus reducing carbon emissions.

On the importance of the agreement, Engineer Mohammed bin Abdulaziz al-Meer stated: "This partnership with Al Khalij Cement Company reflects Ashghal's commitment to achieving environmental sustainability and the circular economy, through the integrated recycling of wastewater, by using treated water for irrigation and cooling and uti-

lising solid byproducts as fuel catalysts and inputs in cement products." On his part, Abdullah bin Nasser al-Misnad said: "This partnership embodies our ambitious vision to drive sustainable growth, as we focus on integrating alternative fuels and renewable materials into our operations to reduce emissions, particularly carbon emissions, while simultaneously protecting natural resources. Through enhancing our competitiveness, we aim to achieve full alignment with Qatar National Vision 2030."

This agreement comes as part of Ashghal's efforts to develop sustainable waste management solutions, where the authority recycles 98% of treated wastewater and uses it in agriculture, afforestation and strategic storage, in support of environmental sustainability in Qatar. (QNA)

Secretary-general of Ministry of Foreign Affairs meets Georgia envoy

HE the Secretary-General of Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Ahmed bin Hassan al-Hammadi met yesterday with Georgia ambassador to Qatar Varlam Avaliani. During the meeting, they discussed co-operation between the countries. (QNA)



Al Meera, Qatar Post sign strategic partnership

Al Meera Consumer Goods Company announced yesterday, the signing of a strategic partnership agreement with Qatar Postal Services Company (Qatar Post), formalising a collaboration between two national institutions to strengthen service delivery across Qatar.

The agreement was signed in the presence of Jassim Mohammed al-Ansari, CEO of Al Meera, and Hassan Jassim al-Sayed, CEO of Qatar Post, during Web Summit Qatar 2026.

Under the partnership, Qatar Post will serve as Al Meera's strategic delivery partner, providing dedicated delivery resources to support Al Meera's operational requirements and service standards. In a press statement, al-Ansari said: "This partnership reflects our commitment to working with strong national partners to deliver reliable, efficient services at scale, in a way that consistently meets the expectations of our customers and communities."

For his part, al-Sayed stated: "We are proud to serve as the strategic delivery partner for Al Meera."

This agreement reflects Qatar Post's commitment to providing reliable logistics solutions that contribute to the development of the e-commerce sector across the country.

The alliance brings together Al Meera, a leading national retailer in Qatar, and Qatar Post, the country's official postal operator, with a shared focus on operational efficiency, reliability, and serving the needs of communities across the country.

Both parties confirmed that the agreement represents a practical step towards strengthening service delivery through collaboration.



Jassim Mohammed Al-Ansari (right) and Hassan Jassim al-Sayed at the signing ceremony.



MoCI holds workshop on anti-money laundering

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI), in co-operation with the Qatar Association of Certified Public Accountants (QCPA), organised a training workshop entitled 'challenges of compliance with anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing requirements, and the mechanism for addressing them,' in the presence of Assistant Undersecretary for Commercial Affairs at the MoCI, Saleh Abdullah al-Mana, and with the participation of a number of auditors and representatives of the QCPA.

This workshop comes as part of the MoCI's ongoing efforts to enhance the compliance system and raise the efficiency of workers in the relevant sectors. It aims to lay the foundations for dialogue between the public and private sectors, through which the problems of professionals are heard and the challenges they face in fulfilling their obligations are monitored, which helps the MoCI to develop

policies and take measures to address legislative or regulatory shortcomings, which would raise the level of compliance.

The workshop addressed the key challenges facing compliance with anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing requirements, and reviewed the practical mechanisms for addressing them, based on practical experience. In addition, it explored ways to enhance communication and interaction channels between the MoCI and auditors to contribute to building a professional partnership based on transparency and co-operation.

This workshop reflects the MoCI's keenness to strengthen partnerships with specialised professional bodies and to support institutional capacity building, with the aim of raising the level of compliance in this sector to the best possible levels, in preparation for the upcoming mutual evaluation process for Qatar by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF). (QNA)

Lusail Shooting Complex gears up to host NSD events

As part of the National Sport Day (NSD) activities, the Lusail Shooting Range is preparing to welcome participants from all segments of society to enjoy the events held there and to learn firsthand about the fundamentals of this time-honoured sport, under the supervision of specialised trainers and in full adherence to the highest safety and security standards.

The Qatar Shooting and Archery Federation is also preparing to organise numerous events during National Sport Day at various locations across the country, including Al Adaam Village in Lusail, Aspire Academy, Qatar Foundation, Oxygen Park, the Olympic Museum, the Diplomatic Club, Katara Cultural Village, and Al Hazm Mall.

Participation in Qatar National Sport Day aligns with the country's vision of establishing a culture of sport as a way of life and raising awareness of the impor-

tance of physical activity and its direct positive effects on physical and mental health. The occasion also represents an annual opportunity to strengthen the community's connection to sports in all its forms. The events held during National Sport Day are not limited to entertainment; they also carry an educational and awareness-raising dimension. They offer the public the opportunity to discover the sport of shooting and to learn about its values of focus, discipline, and precision.

National Sport Day is an annual national event aimed at promoting a culture of sport, encouraging healthy lifestyles, and motivating state institutions and the private sector to contribute to building an active and vibrant society. This is exemplified by the Lusail Shooting Range through its active participation and diverse programmes during this occasion.

The Lusail Shooting Range is among the most prominent spe-



cialised sports facilities in Qatar and the region, having established itself as a leading platform for precision sports and an accredited venue for hosting major continental and international championships. It also plays a pivotal role in developing champions and fostering the local base of shooting sports.

The Lusail Shooting Range achieved a prominent continental presence by hosting all shooting competitions during the 2006

Asian Games in Doha, a pivotal milestone that solidified its position as a certified continental facility capable of organising major championships in accordance with the highest technical and organisational standards.

This role continued with the hosting of the 2011 Arab Games, several Asian Shooting Championships, and Olympic qualifying tournaments, further strengthening the confidence of continental and international federations

in its organisational capabilities. Thanks to the role played by the Lusail Shooting Range in preparing and developing shooting champions, one of the most prominent achievements in the history of Qatari sports was realised when shooter Nasser bin Saleh al-Attiyah won the bronze medal in the skeet competition at the 2012 London Olympic Games, securing Qatar's first-ever Olympic medal in shooting. This historic achievement was the culmination of years of hard work, training, and international exposure.

In recent years, the Lusail Shooting Range has further solidified its global standing by hosting the ISSF World Cup Finals and the Asian Shotgun Championships, attracting elite Olympic and world champions. This has provided Qatari shooters with valuable opportunities for direct competition against diverse shooting styles and has contributed to raising their technical and competitive levels.

The Lusail Shooting Range reaffirmed its leading role during the 2026 Asian Shotgun Championships, where Qatari shooters achieved remarkable success, most notably winning four gold and four silver medals in the skeet and trap competitions. This achievement garnered widespread praise from Asian sporting circles for the facility's readiness and meticulous organisation.

The role of the Lusail Shooting Range extends beyond hosting championships and securing victories, as it also plays a vital role in the daily development and refinement of talent through continuous training programmes. These programmes have contributed to the emergence of several Qatari shooters, including Rashid Saleh al-Athba, Saeed Abu Sharib, Mohammed al-Rumailhi, Masoud Hamad al-Athba, and Reem al-Sharshani, who have made notable contributions at the continental, international, and Olympic levels. (QNA)

SJC, QU celebrate first cohort graduation of Family Mediation diploma

The Supreme Judicial Council (SJC), in collaboration with Qatar University (QU), has celebrated the graduation of the first cohort of the Family Mediation diploma.

This is a demonstration of the advancement of restorative justice in Qatar, and enhances the corporate path intended to consolidate amicable solutions for familial

disputes, culminating in the launch of the occupational diploma in November 2025, during which 20 family mediators finalised extensive training supervised by the QU's Community Service and Continuing Education Centre.

The programme covered integrated scientific and applied content that primarily focused on imbuing participants with ad-

vanced skills in administering and settling family disputes based on the best occupational practices.

The programme represents a strategic step to build a qualified national workforce in this kind of mediation, capable of handling family disputes through modern and effective techniques, aligning with the SJC's orientations toward prioritising re-

storative justice as a primary option prior to litigation.

In previous remarks to the local press, Family Court administrative director Khamis al-Muraikhi said that the programme is a significant pillar to enhance the court's work quality, as well as the workforce responsible with the enforcement of conciliation strategies.

This, he said, helps reduce social and psychological impacts of family disputes, particularly on children.

This diploma is academically approved, al-Muraikhi outlined, and includes 60 hours of training, which is periodically laid out at each academic class to qualify new cohorts of family mediators. – **QNA**

US Chamber bullish on Qatar business growth

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He also hailed Qatar's ability to leverage sports infrastructure for broader economic growth.

"Following the 2022 FIFA World Cup, visitor numbers surged from 2.7mn in 2022 to 6mn in 2025," Choksy stressed. "They've really leveraged upon the World Cup and the presence and the infrastructure to grow."

Beyond energy and technology, he emphasised that critical minerals are becoming a new area of co-operation, citing Qatar as the eighth Pax Silica signatory.

Choksy also said that the US Chamber is strengthening institutional linkages in Doha, citing the US-Qatar Business Council Doha (USQBC Doha) as its formal partner.

"Additionally, we are really looking at third-country co-operation with the US, Qatar, and Syria, and we hope to organise a dedicated session on this during the upcoming Qatar Economic Forum," he told *Gulf Times*.

Choksy noted that partnerships are already emerging, adding: "We think that there's a perfect match between American companies, large Qatari private sector enterprises, and Syrian businesses."

QU hosts Alumni Reunion '26

Qatar University (QU)'s annual Alumni Reunion 2026 was attended by a number of distinguished guests, senior officials from within and without the university, faculty members, administrative staff, and a wide audience of QU alumni from various graduating cohorts.

During the event, the Distinguished Alumni Segment featured alumna Sabah al-Haidous, recognising her professional achievements and contributions.

The programme included a number of key segments, most notably the screening of a documentary film titled *And Say: My Lord, Increase Me in Knowledge*, in addition to honouring participating colleges and affiliated units.

As part of the reunion, the QU inaugurated the Alumni Village for the first time.

The initiative brought together a number of commercial ventures founded by QU alumni,

providing them with an opportunity to showcase their products and services to visitors, reflecting the university's commitment to supporting entrepreneurship and fostering national talent.

"This gathering has become a distinctive annual tradition that renews each year, strengthening communication and bonds between alumni and the university," said Alumni Association chairman HE Sheikh Dr Faleh bin Nasser al-Thani. "It provides an opportunity to exchange expertise and ideas, revisit precious memories within the university's halls and spaces that preserve a shared history and many aspirations, and serves as a forum that reunites one family and reflects the values of brotherhood."

He added that the QU goes beyond learning and training, forming an essential part of the graduate's identity and intellectual, cognitive, and personal development, and preparing them

to engage with life and its challenges.

Therefore, HE Sheikh Dr Faleh added, maintaining continued engagement with the university reflects loyalty and preserves this close relationship, while reinforcing cherished values.

Alumni Relations Office manager Buthaina Ibrahim Lanaqwi emphasised that the QU's Alumni Relations Office has become a fundamental pillar in supporting the university's vision and mission, driven by the firm belief that alumni are active partners in the present and a central element in shaping the future.

The Alumni Reunion is held as part of the QU's ongoing efforts to strengthen communication with its graduates and reinforce their connection to their alma mater.

The annual event serves as an established platform to deepen alumni engagement, highlight successful alumni models, and renew a shared sense of belonging and pride in the QU.

Theme for a dream: How Plantaform won over Qatar

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"In a year, we see Plantaform's smart indoor gardens becoming a common household appliance across the GCC, whilst also scaling our fogponics technology into commercial greenhouses designed to grow food efficiently in desert environments," Aguilar said after the win.

The Nespresso of gardening

Aguilar, a confident storyteller, credits a single analogy for clinching victory.

"I believe the moment that really clicked was when we explained fogponics – how delivering nutrients through mist allows plants to grow faster whilst using dramatically less water – and then framed Plantaform as the 'Nespresso of gardening'," he said.

"That analogy made the solution immediately tangible: a powerful technology packaged into something simple, accessible, and scalable," Aguilar continued. "You could feel the shift in the room when that connection landed."

Like the coffee capsule that democratised espresso, Plantaform's compact, automated gardens promise to make cultivation effortless – even for the plant-challenged: they're clean, smart, and plug-and-grow.

However, the Doha crowd wasn't dazzled by novelty alone.

"The Qatar audience was incredibly engaged and pragmatic, with questions focused on real-world application rather than theory, which made the experience especially rewarding," Aguilar noted.

That pragmatism shaped Plantaform's Middle East playbook.

After dazzling at the CES 2025 trade show with Nasa-style futurism, Aguilar's team recalibrated for Doha, emphasising water efficiency, local production, and resilience.

"Here, we focused less on novelty and more on relevance," he explained. "Instead of positioning fogponics as a futuristic technology, we framed it as a practical solution to water scarcity and food imports."

From Ottawa to Riyadh – with Doha on the map

Winning in Qatar has had ripple effects: "We met many investors throughout Web Summit, but winning PITCH definitely brought the most attention," Aguilar said. "It's still early, but the quality of conversations has been very strong, particularly with strategic and regional investors."

What took him in wasn't the volume of funding interest – it was its acuity.

"What surprised me most was how informed and proactive local investors are when it comes to agtech and sustainability. There's a clear understanding that food security is not a future issue; it's a current one."

That insight prompted a decisive move.

"Middle East expansion is absolutely a priority for us, particularly in the GCC, where the need and the willingness to deploy solutions are aligned," Aguilar revealed. "We've been studying the market for many years, and finally took the leap to relocate to Riyadh in Q4 2025 to focus on serving the whole region."

The relocation is part of a two-pronged strategy: retail partnerships to make fogponic gardens as common as microwaves, and state collaborations to scale greenhouse systems across the Gulf's harshest terrains.

"It allows us to address food security from both ends of the system: from large-scale local production all the way to the household," Aguilar said.

When mist becomes infrastructure

Fogponics is more than a tech buzzword. It's physics in service of sustainability.

"The key difference is fogponics itself – it allows plants to absorb nutrients more efficiently whilst using 50% less water than hydroponics or 95% compared to soil-based systems," Aguilar said.

"From a user perspective, the system is fully automated, compact, and clean, designed for people with no gardening experience," he continued. "From an agricultural standpoint, it delivers faster growth, healthier roots, and consistent yields, which is why the same technology scales from homes to commercial greenhouses."



In a Gulf climate where summer heat hovers above 45C, the ability to grow indoors, sustainably, and with negligible water waste could rewire how households – and cities – feed themselves. **Supplied photos**

That scalability may be its most radical feature.

In a Gulf climate where summer heat hovers above 45° Celsius, the ability to grow indoors, sustainably, and with negligible water waste could rewire how households – and cities – feed themselves.

The PITCH trophy might just be the beginning; whether Plantaform can convert acclaim into investment remains to be seen, but

its relocation and regional partnerships hint at a long game built on grounded ambition.

"Conversations with investors and operators have been very hands-on and focused on real deployment and impact, which has been incredibly energising," Aguilar said.

In a region where talk often outpaces action, this focus on doing – not just promising – may well be Plantaform's sharpest edge.

Al Dasha Marine Sports Festival kicks off today

The 8th Al Dasha Marine Sports Festival, organised by the Doha Marine Sports Club, kicks off today at Katara Beach, coinciding with the Qatar's National Sport Day (NSD).

The festival, whose competitions will continue until next Saturday, serves as the official opening of the Doha Marine Sports Club's calendar for the 2026 season.

The festival is held annually in conjunction with the NSD and features a rich lineup of activities and programmes that cater to enthusiasts of all types of marine sports, both traditional and modern.

The festival's first activities will begin today with the official opening ceremony at Katara Beach.

The Doha Marine Sports Club chose the NSD as the launch date of the festival to encourage all marine sports participants to embark on a distinctive season filled with strong competition, starting from the opening festival and extending throughout the rest of the season.

Alongside the official opening today, the Marine Companies and Factories Exhibition will be inaugurated and held daily throughout the festival.

Free public activities accompanying the festival will also be organised, including kayaking, stand-up paddleboarding, sailing tours, and water wheel activities, running daily from 10am to 5pm.

The festival's official competitions will begin on the first day, starting with kayak fishing and swordfish fishing competitions.

The same contests will be repeated tomorrow before the festival moves into its most competitive stage with various championship rounds on Friday and Saturday.

These will be the Qatar Traditional Rowing Championship, the Qatar Jet Ski and Freestyle Championship, and the Qatar Traditional Sailing Championship.

Doha Marine Sports Club public relations officer at the Mohammed al-Mannai said that everything is in place to ensure the success of the new edition of the Al Dasha Festival, expressing satisfaction with all preparations and readiness, particularly with regards to organisational and logistical aspects.

He said in a press statement that the festival boasts a wide range of marine sports, starting with jet skis, marathons, traditional rowing for adults and youth, modern sailing in all its categories, traditional sailing, and fishing, making it a diverse festival that fulfils the ambitions and interests of marine sports enthusiasts.

Al-Mannai added that the Doha Marine Sports Club is keen for the festival to remain a fixed fixture on the club's annual calendar, alongside the season's multi-activity schedule, as it seeks to attract the largest possible number of participants of all ages to practice various modern and traditional marine sports.

The annual Al Dasha Festival is an ideal opportunity to bring together the entire marine sector under one event, creating economic, social, sporting, and maritime integration within a single championship.

This is particularly evident given the participation of numerous marine companies, as well as factories specialising in marine equipment and boat manufacturing, making it the most comprehensive sporting gathering of its kind in Qatar. – **QNA**



The 8th Al Dasha Marine Sports Festival kicks off today at Katara Beach

Qatar gets moving for National Sport Day today

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Qatar Foundation (QF)'s National Sport Day (NSD) activities will bring the whole community together to explore Education City's world-class sport programmes, venues, and facilities.

Education City Stadium will serve as the hub for women's and girls' sport, offering a wide range of female only activities in a welcoming and inclusive environment.

The major attractions at QF Sport Day celebration include Education City Run –

Colour Edition, Education City Mountain Bike Trail Race and Qatar Cyclists Tour.

All the events are scheduled to take place from 7am-3pm and be led by members of the senior leadership of QF.

In addition, it will be a car-free day at the Education City, encouraging everyone to engage in physical activities.

At Aspire Zone several leading organisations will take part in the activities.

They include the Ministry of Public Health, Ministry of Sports and Youth, Ministry of Transport, Hamad Medical Corpo-

ration, and Primary Health Care Corporation.

The day is also viewed as an opportunity to bring communities closer together through sport, based on the sporting principles of team building, inclusion and unity, participation, fitness and health.

Along with the extensive sporting events across the country, National Sport Day also focuses on Qatari culture acting as a reminder of Qatar's ancient sporting heritage and the role it has played in the country's most recent developments.

More than 20 PHCC centres to remain open on National Sport Day holiday

From Page 1

A number of facilities would be closed during the National Sport Day holiday: South Wakra, Umm Ghuwailina, Al Waab, Abu Nakhla, Umm Al Seneem, Al Ghuwayriyah, Al Daayen, and Qatar University Health Centres.

However, Al Kaaban and Al Karaana

Health Centres will remain accessible for adult emergency cases.

For urgent care needs, 13 health centres will provide around-the-clock emergency services: Gharrafat Al Rayyan, Al Sheehaniya, Abu Baker Al Siddiq, Rawdat Al Khail, Al Kaaban, Al Karaana, Al Ruwais, Umm Slal, Leabaib, Muaither, Al Mashaf, Al Sadd, and Al Wajbah.

Parents should note that seven facilities will be available to handle paediatric emergencies: Al Ruwais, Umm Slal, Leabaib, Muaither, Al Mashaf, Al Sadd, and Al Wajbah.

Specialty clinics will operate according to previously scheduled appointments during both morning and evening sessions.

Eye care, dermatology, and ear, nose, and throat services will be available at Leabaib and Rawdat Al Khail Health Centres from 7am-2pm, with evening hours from 4pm-10pm.

For premarital medical screenings, Leabaib Health Centre will offer services from 7am-2pm, while Al Mashaf Health Centre will provide the same service

during evening hours from 4pm-10pm.

Residents can also access medical consultation services by calling the Community Call Centre at 16000, which operates 24 hours daily.

Regarding the delivery of medicines, the corporation will suspend this service today and resume operations tomorrow. – **QNA**



Visit Qatar deepens trade engagement in India at OTM Mumbai 2026

Visit Qatar has concluded its participation at Outbound Travel Mart (OTM) Mumbai 2026 – India's leading travel trade exhibition held from February 5-7 at the Jio World Convention Centre in Mumbai.

Visit Qatar said in a statement that its participation reinforced Qatar's positioning as a high-quality, well-connected tourism destination for Indian travellers, with a clear focus on trade engagement and sustained destination visibility.

During the OTM, Visit Qatar signed memoranda of understanding (MoUs) with the Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI), the Outbound Tour Operators Association of India (OTOAI), and ClearTrip, aimed at enhancing destination education, product visibility and joint marketing initiatives.

These partnerships are designed to enable Indian travel trade partners to more effectively package and promote Qatar



across leisure, weddings, MICE (meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions) and premium travel categories.

"India is a priority source market for

us, with direct connectivity from over 13 Indian cities and clear momentum toward longer stays, repeat visits and celebration travel," said Visit Qatar public rela-

tions and communications director Jassim al-Mahmoud. "Our focus is on enabling the trade to convert stopovers into multi-night itineraries and position Qatar con-

fidently for leisure, MICE and destination weddings."

The Visit Qatar pavilion featured 14 partners representing leading hotels and destination management companies in Qatar, alongside strategic partner Qatar Airways.

Visit Qatar's participation enabled direct engagement with tour operators, travel agents, and industry decision-makers, solidifying the importance of India as a priority source market.

The presence at the OTM Mumbai 2026 formed part of a broader programme of market activity, following a targeted promotional roadshow held across three Indian cities in January.

Engagement with trade partners focused on positioning Qatar as a standalone destination and encouraging longer stays, supported by strong air connectivity, geographic proximity, and streamlined access for Indian travellers. – QNA

Es'hailSat inks accord with Canada's Telesat

Qatar satellite company Es'hailSat announced yesterday that it has entered into a strategic partnership framework with Telesat, a leading global satellite operator based in Canada, to co-operate on the future delivery of low earth orbit (LEO) satellite connectivity services in Qatar and across key international markets.

The partnership reflects Es'hailSat's ongoing commitment to diversify and enhance its satellite communications portfolio, ensuring customers benefit from high performance, resilient, and scalable connectivity solutions.

Through this collaboration, Es'hailSat and Telesat aim to explore joint opportunities across multiple sectors, supporting government missions, enterprise transformation initiatives, and mobility applications.

Speaking on the announcement, Es'hailSat president and chief executive Ali Ahmed al-Kuwari said: "Es'hailSat continues to advance Qatar's position as a regional leader in satellite communications. Our strategic engagement with Telesat supports our mission to bring innovative, high performance connectivity solutions to our customers while expanding our international partnerships."

"We look forward to working together to evaluate and demon-



strate next generation LEO services that complement our existing satellite and teleport infrastructure," he said.

Telesat's LEO network, currently in production, is designed to deliver high throughput, low latency connectivity to a broad range of markets.

Through this strategic alignment, the two companies will collaborate on service validation activities, market development initiatives, and the exploration of local infrastructure integration in

Qatar to support future service delivery.

"We are honoured that Es'hailSat has selected the advanced Telesat Lightspeed network to complement and expand their connectivity offerings," stated Telesat president and chief executive Dan Goldberg. "Es'hailSat is a leading regional satellite operator and we look forward to our continued collaboration in the fast-growing market for high throughput, secure and resilient broadband connectivity." – QNA

QNA holds workshop on national strategy

The Qatar News Agency (QNA) has organised a training workshop aimed at strengthening the role of development-focused media in supporting Qatar's Third National Development Strategy.

Held yesterday as part of the QNA's 2026 training plan, the workshop brought together media professionals from the agency and several government bodies.

It was led by QU professor of media Dr Abdulrahman al-Shami.

The session focused on enhancing participants' skills in field reporting and producing development-oriented journalism, with an emphasis on aligning media coverage with national priorities and presenting them in a professional and engaging manner.

Discussions covered both theoretical and practical aspects of development media, including its key functions, analysis of written and visual development reports, and techniques for transforming strategic policy documents into compelling media stories.

Particular attention was given to Qatar's Third National Development Strategy (2024-30).

Participants also took part in practical activities designed to build fieldwork skills and strengthen journalistic storytelling and digital content creation.

These included developing concepts for digital stories addressing various pillars of the national strategy, followed by group presentations and feedback sessions.



The workshop forms part of the QNA's broader efforts, through its QNA training programme, to develop national media talent and keep pace with rapid changes in the media landscape, reinforcing the media's role in supporting sustainable development and communicating national messages effectively.

In 2023, the QNA launched its dedicated training halls equipped with advanced technologies, providing a comprehensive platform for media capacity-building and engagement with global developments in modern journalism. – QNA

QNL recommends eight books to mark National Sport Day

The Qatar National Library (QNL) has invited its visitors to explore the world of sports through its book collections as part of its celebration of National Sport Day (NSD) 2026, taking place today.

To mark the occasion, the QNL has nominated eight books for reading, drawing from its collection of valuable titles and references that cater to sports enthusiasts, researchers in related fields, and those interested in the relationship between sport, culture, and societal development.

The selected works address topics ranging from Qatar's traditional sporting activities to global perspectives on health and physical fitness.

This initiative comes as part of the library's commitment to engaging with the annual event in a way that reflects the fundamental role of physical activity in building healthy and thriving communities, while also underscoring Qatar's commitment to promoting a culture of fitness and sporting excellence.

Among the Arabic-language titles is *Traditional Sports in the State of Qatar: Camels – Equestrianism – Archery – Falconry*, which highlights four traditional sports deeply rooted in Qatar's cultural identity: camel racing, equestrianism, shooting, and falconry.

Authored by Abu Bakr al-Hassan, the book describes these sports as living links between Qatar's present and its past and traditions, documenting their continued cultural symbolism in contemporary Qatari society and their ability to adapt to the demands of the modern era.

The selections include *Qatari Insights into the Sports Scene*, in which author Ali Mohammed Youssef al-Mahmoud presents Qatar's vision of the contemporary sports landscape and offers a national perspective on the country's relationship with sport, making it a valuable reference for those seeking to understand sports culture and its development in the State.

Another recommended title is *Healthy Sports for Achieving Public Health (Physical and Psychological)* by Dr Muayyad Abd Ali al-Tai, which examines the close link between sport and public health, its impact on physical and mental well-being, and how regular participation in sporting activities represents a cornerstone of public health and improved lifestyles.

This perspective aligns with the objectives of the NSD in emphasising the importance of physical activity for building healthier, more prosperous communities.

The list also features *Sports for People with Dis-*



abilities by Prof Nahid Abd Zaid al-Dulaimi of the University of Babylon's College of Physical Education and Sports Sciences.

The book focuses on disability sports, addressing mechanisms for designing sporting activities that ensure inclusion, integration, and accessibility, embodying the principle that everyone has the right to engage in physical activity regardless of skills or abilities.

These insights enrich public dialogue on equality, equal opportunity, and inclusion in sport.

Also recommended is *Sport* by Mike Cronin and translated by Hazem Ali.

The book offers Arab readers an opportunity to explore the author's research on sport as a social and cultural phenomenon, reviewing its multiple impacts on contemporary society.

Sports for All in the Context of Contemporary Changes and Crises by Dr Mohammed Asem Mohammed Ghazi discusses the concept of "sport for all" amid modern transformations, explores ways to sustain and enhance available physical activity programmes despite contemporary challenges, and emphasises the importance of ensuring that inclusive sports initiatives reach all members of society regardless of circumstances.

Among the English-language books recommended for the occasion is *Modern Sports Around the World: History, Geography, and Sociology* by David Asa Schwartz.

The book adopts a multidisciplinary approach to the study of sport worldwide, analysing it from historical, geographical, and social perspectives.

The book examines how different societies create their own unique sporting activities and how these activities reflect cultural values, economic systems, and broader social frameworks.

In *World of Sports: A Book for Sports Fans All Over the Globe*, author Ben Groundwater collaborates with illustrator Paul Reid to take readers on an illustrated journey through diverse sporting cultures around the world, celebrating athletic activities across continents while highlighting major global competitions and traditions that embody local popular passion in each region. – QNA



Ministry of Awqaf takes part in NSD activities

The Ministry of Endowments (Awqaf) and Islamic Affairs is participating in the activities of the National Sport Day (NSD), with a variety of sports programmes and activities to be held at the ministry's sports fields in Abu Hamour area.

This participation affirms the

ministry's interest in raising awareness of the importance of sports and their role in building a healthy and balanced society, both physically and spiritually.

The ministry stressed that its participation in the NSD is rooted in the teachings of Islam, which place great importance on the

preservation of life as one of the five essential objectives of Sharia.

On Sunday the ministry concluded the second football tournament for departmental staff.

The tournament, which began on January 20, featured 20 teams from the ministry's various departments.

From Gaza to Doha, a journey of healing through volunteering

Many years ago, young university student Azza Abu Shar approached the Red Crescent team in Gaza.

With hesitation in her voice, she asked them a simple yet profound question: "How can I help you?"

In that moment, Abu Shar was taking her first step towards volunteering – a path that she has been on through years of illness, war and alienation.

Abu Shar, a volunteer in many initiatives with Qatar Foundation (QF), said: "I began my journey as a volunteer at a very young age. I worked during wars, accompanied ambulances, and learned what commitment truly means in the most difficult times."

"Volunteering gave me strength and completely changed how I see life, work, and community service," she added.

In Gaza, Abu Shar became a

fitness trainer and later a sport teacher, and even after earning her master's degree, volunteering remained a constant in her life, eventually becoming a core part of her identity.

Alongside her volunteering work, Abu Shar faced a major health challenge.

"I was diagnosed with a pituitary gland tumour and had surgery in Jerusalem before the war," she recalled. "The tumour returned, and when the war started, border restrictions made treatment nearly impossible. My condition worsened, forcing me to resume treatment with higher doses."

Despite her illness, Abu Shar spoke with faith and sees it as a hidden blessing, it allowed her to visit Jerusalem, pray at Al-Aqsa Mosque, and have deep spiritual experiences.

When the Gaza war began in October 2023, she arrived in Qatar



to receive medical treatment, and she immediately found ways to give back by helping wounded individuals and families evacuated to Qatar from Gaza, who the QF has been involved in supporting.

"I heard that the QF volunteering team was looking for a female fitness trainer," she said. "So, I volunteered right away."

Abu Shar also volunteered at the QF's Education City in areas

of sports to disability support – all of which profoundly reshaped her worldview.

At the QF's Ability Friendly Programme – designed to empower persons with disabilities through sports and community engagement – she had a transformative experience where volunteers, like her, participated in activities that simulated the challenges faced by persons with disabilities.

"We used wheelchairs, covered our eyes, and relied only on hearing," Abu Shar explained. "That's when I truly understood how difficult it is, and that we can never fully grasp another person's struggle unless we put ourselves in their place."

She later applied for a position as a physical education teacher at a school in Qatar and was accepted.

Abu Shar sees this as one of the natural outcomes of her vol-

unteering journey.

"Volunteering strengthened my relationships," she said. "In a new country and a different culture, it turns you into an active member of society rather than a spectator."

Yet Abu Shar's memory remains heavy with scenes from the war in Gaza – families wiped out; children pulled from beneath the rubble.

"In those moments I realised that people standing with each other is not a choice, it's a necessity for survival," she said. "Volunteering became my way of resisting collapse."

Today, Abu Shar dreams of earning a PhD to widen her impact.

As a teacher, she aims to educate with compassion.

And most importantly, volunteering is central to her life, it's not just what she does, but who she is.


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Arab states slam Israel as it expands powers in occupied West Bank

Reuters
Ramallah/Jerusalem

Saudi Arabia, Jordan and the United Arab Emirates led regional states yesterday in condemning Israel's move to ease settlement expansion and widen its powers in the West Bank, a step critics said went in the direction of annexing occupied land.

Sunday's decisions by Israel's security cabinet will make it easier for Jewish settlers to buy land in the West Bank and give Israeli authorities more power to act in areas supposedly under full Palestinian control, two senior Israeli ministers said.

One of them, Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, said in announcing the decisions that the government would not allow the idea of a Palestinian state.

A joint statement by foreign ministers of Middle Eastern and some other Muslim countries,

including Egypt and Türkiye, denounced the decisions as a violation of international law that would undermine the vision of a two-state solution as well as stability in the region.

They said the moves meant to entrench Israeli settlement of the West Bank, displacing Palestinians and imposing unlawful Israeli sovereignty there. Annexing the territory has long been a priority of far-right parties in Netanyahu's coalition.

Most nations have long backed the creation of a Palestinian state alongside Israel as the best way to resolve the generations-old conflict and see the West Bank, which Israel has occupied since 1967, as the largest part of that future state.

Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz and Smotrich issued a joint statement explaining the decisions of the five-member security cabinet, which were not published in full.

The security cabinet decided to repeal a law dating from Jordan's control of the West Bank before 1967 to make land registries public rather than confidential, and to remove a requirement for a permit from a civil administration office.

They said these moves would make it easier for Jews to purchase land in the West Bank.

Hagit Ofra from the Israeli settlement watchdog group Peace Now said the decision was barred by international law and represented a step towards annexation of the West Bank.

"The decision to allow every Israeli the right to buy land in the West Bank without government approval, without inspection, is also another way of saying it's normal life. It's not occupied territories, it's like part of Israel," she said. Annexation is opposed by US President Donald Trump, who last year said he would not allow Israel to carry out such a step.

"It's not going to happen,"



Palestinians protest after Israeli soldiers blocked the entrance of the Nur Shams Palestinian refugee camp in the occupied West Bank, yesterday, demanding to be allowed to return to their homes from where they were expelled last year during an ongoing Israeli army operation.

Trump, who is expecting Netanyahu at the White House for a meeting tomorrow, said in September.

Katz and Smotrich also said the

A and B of the West Bank. Under the Oslo interim peace accords of 1993, Area A was designated as under security control of the Palestinian Authority and Area B as under joint control with Israel. Most of the West Bank became Area C under full Israeli security control.

Those changes could allow the Israeli military to carry out demolitions of Palestinian property and prevent Palestinian development not only in Area C but throughout the West Bank, Peace Now said in a statement.

In Hebron, a West Bank city with extensive archaeological remains and a significant Israeli settler community, Palestinians voiced dismay at the decisions.

"It becomes easier to confiscate land, easier and faster to expand settlements and easier to demolish Palestinian homes," said Issa Amr, who heads an organisation in Hebron called Youth Against Settlements.

Israeli troops kill four fighters, farmer in Gaza

Reuters
Cairo

Israeli forces killed four fighters in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday after they emerged from an underground tunnel and opened fire on troops, Israel's military said.

It described the attack on Israeli troops as a violation of the US-brokered ceasefire with the Palestinian Hamas group that went into force in Gaza last October and said it views it with the "utmost gravity."

Israel has responded to similar incidents in recent months by carrying out air strikes across the enclave in which dozens of people have been killed.

There was no immediate comment from Hamas, but some sources close to the group identified one of those killed as Anas Annashar, the son of a former senior Hamas politician.

Dozens of Hamas fighters have been trapped in tunnels under Rafah since the ceasefire, and some have since been killed in clashes with Israeli forces.

In a separate incident, Israeli forces shot and killed a Palestinian farmer in Deir Al-Balah in the central Gaza Strip, according to local health authorities.

Israel did not immediately comment on the incident.



Palestinians displaced during the two-year Israeli offensive, shelter at a tent camp in Gaza City, yesterday.

Violence has repeatedly shaken the ceasefire and the two sides have traded blame over truce violations as Washington presses them to proceed to the next phases of the ceasefire deal, meant to end the conflict for good.

The next phase of President Donald Trump's Gaza plan calls for resolving complex issues such as Hamas disarmament, which the group has long rejected, a further Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and the deployment of an international

peacekeeping force.

The Gaza health ministry said at least 580 Palestinians had been killed by Israeli fire since the October ceasefire deal was agreed. Israel says four soldiers had been killed by fighters in Gaza over the same period.

The Gaza war started with the October 2023 Hamas storming of southern Israel. The death toll in Gaza now stands at over 71,000, according to Palestinian health ministry data.

GCC secretary-general condemns Israel for law violations in West Bank

Secretary-General of the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC), Jassem Mohamed Albudaiwi, affirmed that the illegal and unilateral measures being carried out by Israeli occupation forces to impose sovereignty over the occupied West Bank constitute a clear violation of international law, relevant UN resolutions, and existing agreements, QNA reported from Riyadh.

In a statement yesterday, the GCC secretary-general strongly condemned the illegal decisions and actions announced by Israeli occupation forces in occupied West Bank, noting that they include attempts to impose unilateral facts that

contradict the principles of international law and relevant international legitimacy resolutions. Albudaiwi called on the international community to assume its legal responsibilities and take firm positions to halt these violations and ensure respect for international humanitarian law. He also reiterated the GCC's steadfast position regarding the Palestinian people's right to establish an independent state on the borders of June 4, 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with UN resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative, and to achieve their aspirations to live with dignity and peace.

Lebanon's Tripoli building collapse death toll reaches 15

Reuters
Tripoli

The death toll from the collapse of residential buildings in the Lebanese city of Tripoli rose to 15 after search and rescue operations ended, Lebanon's National News Agency said yesterday citing the civil defence chief.

Civil defence director general Imad Khreiss said rescue teams rescued eight people from the rubble of the collapsed buildings in the northern city's Bab al-Tabbaneh neighbourhood.

Officials said on Sunday that two adjoining buildings had collapsed.

Abdel Hamid Karimeh, head of Tripoli's municipal council, said he could not confirm how many

people remained missing. Earlier, the head of Lebanon's civil defence rescue service said the two buildings were home to 22 residents.

A number of ageing residential buildings have collapsed in Tripoli, Lebanon's second-largest city, in recent weeks, highlighting deteriorating infrastructure and years of neglect, state media reported, citing municipal officials.

Karimeh said the issue of unsafe buildings in Tripoli was longstanding and driven by multiple factors, including construction violations, years of disorder, weak oversight and a lack of regular maintenance, partly linked to restrictive rent control laws that discourage owners from investing in repairs.

He said many buildings in the

city were between 60 and 70 years old and had exceeded their structural lifespan without undergoing essential maintenance, increasing the risk of collapse.

The problem, he added, exceeded the capacity of the municipality and residents alone, calling for direct state intervention.

Authorities have begun providing temporary shelter to displaced families, while Lebanon's Higher Relief Committee is offering housing allowances for up to three months, Karimeh said.

He added that charities, the Ministry of Social Affairs and international organisations were co-ordinating to provide assistance, saying the aim was to secure a minimum acceptable level of support for affected households.

Iran says it could dilute enriched uranium if all sanctions are lifted

Reuters
Dubai

Iran could agree to dilute its most highly enriched uranium in exchange for the UN nuclear sanctions being lifted, its atomic chief said yesterday, one of the most direct indications so far of its position at talks with Washington.

US and Iranian diplomats held talks through Omani mediators in Oman last week in an effort to revive diplomacy, after US President Donald Trump positioned a naval flotilla in the region raising fears of new military action.

The talks follow a crackdown on anti-government demonstrations in Iran last month when thousands of people were killed, the biggest domestic unrest since the 1979 Revolution.

Trump joined an Israeli bombing campaign last year and hit Iranian nuclear sites. He also threatened last month to intervene militarily during the protests but ultimately held off.

Washington has demanded Iran relinquish its stockpile — estimated last year by the UN nuclear agency at more than 440kg — of uranium enriched to up to 60% fissile purity, a small step away from the 90% that is considered weapons grade.

The head of Iran's Atomic Energy Organisation, Mohammad



A man cycles past a mural and a giant billboard in Palestine Square, in Tehran, yesterday.

Eslami, said yesterday: "The possibility of diluting 60% enriched uranium... depends on whether, in return, all sanctions are lifted or not". Eslami, whose remarks were reported by Iran's ISNA news agency, said however that another proposal, sending Iran's highly enriched uranium abroad to another country, had not been discussed at the talks with US officials.

Ali Larijani, a close adviser to Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and secretary of its national security council, will visit Oman today following the US-Iranian talks there, the semi-official Tasnim news agency reported.

"During this trip, (Larijani) will meet with high-ranking officials

of the Sultanate of Oman and discuss the latest regional and international developments and bilateral cooperation at various levels," Tasnim said.

The date and venue of the next round of talks have yet to be announced. Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian said yesterday that a new round of talks would be "an appropriate opportunity for a fair and balanced resolution of this case," and that a desired outcome could be reached if the US avoids maximalist positions and respects its commitments.

Iran would continue to demand the lifting of sanctions and insist on its nuclear rights including enrichment, he said.

AFP
Mogadishu

Somalia yesterday signed a defence agreement with Saudi Arabia.

The region, strategically located between the Indian Ocean and the Suez Canal on one of the world's busiest trade routes, has increasingly attracted the interest of the Gulf states.

The agreement comes a month and a half after Israel recognised so-called Somaliland, a self-proclaimed republic that seceded from Somalia in 1991 but which Mogadishu still considers to be under its control.

Somali Defence Minister Ahmed Moallim Fiqi and his Saudi counterpart, Prince Khalid bin Salman, signed a "military co-operation agreement" yesterday, according to a message on X from the Somali defence ministry.

"This agreement further strengthens defence and military co-operation between the two nations, while covering various areas of mutual interest for both countries," it said.

In a separate post on X, Salman added he had "signed and witnessed the signing" of "several" agreements on the sidelines of a military exhibition in Riyadh. He did not provide further details.

Uganda minister condemns military raid on opposition leader's home

Reuters
Nairobi

Uganda's Information Minister Chris Baryomunsi condemned a military raid on opposition leader Bobi Wine's home last month, telling Reuters that the popstar-turned-politician had not committed any crime and was free to return there.

Wine has been in hiding for weeks after fleeing his home in the capital, Kampala, hours before he was announced the runner-up to President Yoweri Museveni in the January 15 presidential election.

On January 24, Wine said his wife had been taken to hospital after soldiers invaded their residence, alleging that they partially undressed and choked her.

Uganda's military chief, Muhoozi Kainerugaba, who is also Museveni's son, denied soldiers assaulted Wine's wife, but later said on X that they had "captured and then released" her. Baryomunsi, who is also a spokesperson for the government, said the authorities would investigate the incident.

"We do not condone any acts of indiscipline on the side of the army and security forces," he said in an interview. "So invading his (Wine's) home, causing damage, assaulting his wife, or anybody, is wrong."

He declined to say if security personnel would face any penalties if they were found to have violated the law.

A spokesperson for Wine's National Unity Platform party did not respond to calls or messages requesting comment.

Kainerugaba has stated in social media posts that the military is looking for Wine, who has rejected the election results, alleging fraud. The army chief has not said why they are looking for Wine or what crime he may be charged with.

Rights groups and the opposition have long accused the government of Museveni, who has been in power for four decades, of using the military to suppress dissent, accusations the government denies.

Baryomunsi also said that Uganda had no plans to withdraw its military contingent from an African Union mission to fight militants in Somalia, contradicting recent comments from Kainerugaba, who last week threatened in a post on X to pull troops out of Somalia over financing issues.

COMMENT

China rejects US claims of secret nuclear tests

China yesterday denied US allegations it had conducted secret nuclear explosive tests, calling them "outright lies" and accusing Washington of making excuses to start up its own trials. At the UN Conference on Disarmament in Geneva on Friday, Thomas DiNanno, US under secretary of state for arms control accused China of conducting the tests, including one on June 22, 2020, and of preparing for more tests with massive yields. "The US allegations are completely groundless and are outright lies. China firmly opposes the US attempt to fabricate excuses for its own restarting of nuclear tests," China's ministry of foreign affairs said. - **AFP**

PEOPLE

Third impeachment case filed against Sara Duterte

Members of the Philippine clergy yesterday filed an impeachment complaint against Sara Duterte, the third to hit the country's vice-president in just over a week. The daughter of former president Rodrigo Duterte was impeached by the House of Representatives last year only to see the country's Supreme Court throw the case out over procedural issues. Yesterday's filing accuses Duterte of bilking taxpayers of at least \$10mn while serving as vice-president and as secretary of education. "This is not political, we are not politicians," Reverend Joselito Sarabia, a Catholic friar and one of the complainants, said. - **Reuters**

CRIME

New Zealand's Christchurch killer appeals conviction

A white supremacist who shot and killed 51 people at two New Zealand mosques in 2019 yesterday launched an appeal seeking to overturn his conviction. Brenton Tarrant, an Australian former gym instructor, admitted carrying out New Zealand's deadliest modern-day mass shooting before being sentenced to life in jail in August 2020. But the convicted killer now argues "torturous and inhumane" detention conditions during his trial made him incapable of making rational decisions when he pleaded guilty. Tarrant is being held in a specialist unit for prisoners of extreme risk at Auckland Prison, seldom interacting with inmates or other people. - **AFP**

CONTROVERSY

Pressure on UK govt to name agent who worked inside IRA

The UK government was under growing pressure yesterday to reveal the identity of a British army agent who carried out killings and torture while undercover with the Irish Republican Army. A parliamentary committee yesterday called on the government to name the agent, known only as "Stakeknife", who led an IRA death squad known as a "nutting squad". The agent operated inside the IRA in Northern Ireland in the 1970s during "The Troubles", the decades-long conflict in Northern Ireland in which more than 3,500 people were killed. The team Stakeknife led was tasked with interrogating and killing suspected traitors and informers. - **AFP**

Starmer refuses to heed calls to quit over fallout from Epstein scandal

Reuters
London

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer yesterday refused to heed calls to quit, even by the leader of his party in Scotland, after a second aide resigned from a team in crisis over the appointment of Peter Mandelson as ambassador to Washington. Under pressure over the appointment of a man whose close ties to the late US sex offender Jeffrey Epstein have come into full focus, Starmer has attempted to change the narrative. But a demand from Anas Sarwar, leader of the Scottish Labour Party, for him to quit and the departure of a second senior aide in as many days did little to stop the questions over his judgment and ability to govern. The resignation of communications chief Tim Allan followed the exit of Starmer's closest aide, Morgan McSweeney, who said he took responsibility for advising on the appointment of Mandelson to Britain's top diplomatic role in the US. Earlier yesterday, the British leader sought to raise spirits and encourage unity when he addressed staff at his Downing Street office, and he later received messages of support from his top ministers and some potential leadership rivals.

"We must prove that politics can be a force for good," he told them, praising McSweeney as "a friend" who helped change the Labour Party and win the 2024 national election with one of the largest parliamentary majorities in modern British history.

"I believe it can. I believe it is. We go forward from here. We go with confidence as we continue changing the country."

But Sarwar, speaking in Scotland where Labour has seen its support slump since the 2024 election, said it was with a heavy heart that he had to defend Scotland and call for a change of leader in the UK capital London.

"The distraction needs to end and the leadership in Downing Street has to change," he told a press conference.

In response, a Downing Street spokesperson said Starmer had "a clear five-year mandate from the British people to deliver change, and that is what he will do".

With his statement, Sarwar became the most senior Labour figure to call for Starmer's resignation, and did little to quell a febrile mood in parliament in London's Westminster.

Government borrowing costs rose, reflecting investors' concerns that a more left-wing Labour lead-

er, who was willing to borrow and spend more, could take over. The climb in yields, along with the value of the pound against the euro, later eased after the potential successors came out in Starmer's support.

With Starmer losing his fourth director of communications, his record in government is under scrutiny, including the gaffes and policy U-turns that have tainted his almost two years in power.

"It's painful," said one Labour lawmaker on condition of anonymity. "It's like watching a fatal car crash in slow motion."

But Starmer received a show of support from his deputy, David Lammy, Finance Minister Rachel Reeves and Foreign Minister Yvette Cooper, among others. Angela Rayner, his former deputy who is seen as a leading leadership candidate, offered him her "full support".

"I urge all my colleagues to come together, remember our values and put them into practice as a team. The prime minister has my full support in leading us to that end," she said on X.

With McSweeney's departure on Sunday, Starmer had hoped to reset the narrative and attempt to return to an agenda he has so far failed to keep any focus on - tackling the cost-of-living crisis and boosting the British economy.

Prince William in Saudi Arabia



Britain's Prince William, Prince of Wales, takes part in a tour with the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, Mohammed bin Salman al-Saud, on day one of his first official visit to Saudi Arabia at the Unesco World Heritage site At-Turaif, in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, yesterday.

China critic Jimmy Lai sentenced to 20 years jail

Reuters
Hong Kong

Hong Kong's most vocal China critic, media tycoon Jimmy Lai, was yesterday sentenced to 20 years in jail, ending the city's biggest national security case that has fuelled global concerns about Beijing's clampdown on freedoms in the ex-British colony.

Lai's sentence on two counts of conspiracy to collude with foreign forces and one for publishing seditious materials ends a legal

saga that has lasted nearly five years. The 78-year-old British citizen had denied all the charges against him, telling the court he was a "political prisoner" facing persecution from Beijing.

Lai, founder of the feisty and now shuttered Apple Daily newspaper, was first arrested in August 2020 and was convicted last year.

His sentence was within the harshest penalty tier for offences of a "grave nature", reflecting the fact that he was the driving force behind "persistent" foreign collusion conspiracies, the three judges said in announcing their

verdict. They cited prosecution evidence that the conspiracies had sought sanctions, blockades and other hostile acts from the US and other countries while involving a web of individuals including Apple Daily staff, activists and foreigners.

Six former senior Apple Daily staffers, an activist and a paralegal were also sentenced to jail terms ranging from six to 10 years.

"In the present case, Lai was no doubt the mastermind of all three conspiracies charged and therefore he warrants a heavier sentence," the judges said.

India to maintain multiple sources of energy supply

India plans to maintain multiple sources of energy supply and diversify them when needed as New Delhi looks to ensure consumers receive "adequate energy at the right price through reliable and secure supplies", Indian Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri said yesterday. Misri was responding to a question seeking clarity on India's position on the purchase of Russian oil after US President Donald Trump said New Delhi had "committed to stop directly or indirectly" importing it. India's priority is to safeguard the interests of its consumers through an energy policy driven by adequate availability, fair pricing, and reliability of supply, Misri said. India is neither dependent on any single source for crude oil nor does it "intend to be", importing from a "mix of sources" depending on "objective market conditions", he said, adding "national interests" guide both the government and energy companies. - **Reuters**

Nepal readies for elections



Election officials inspect ballot boxes before they are dispatched from the Election Commission office in Kathmandu yesterday ahead of Nepal's general elections.

Farm unions vow to fight India-US trade pact

Reuters
New Delhi

Indian farm unions and opposition parties have called for nationwide protests against the new India-US trade framework, saying it risks hurting the farm sector by allowing more US imports, although the government says key staples are protected.

The agreement has become a political flashpoint, reviving memories of the 2020-21 farm law protests, when the government was forced to repeal three laws aimed at deregulating agricultural markets.

The government has defended the pact, saying farmers' interests are protected by excluding imports of grains such as rice, wheat, corn and dairy products, while growers of basmati

rice, fruits, spices, coffee and tea would gain duty-free access to the US market.

Farm groups say the pact puts Indian farmers at a disadvantage.

"We are worried about the India-US trade deal, as it would hurt Indian farmers, who are far more vulnerable than their American counterparts," said Rakesh Tikait, a farmers' leader.

He said US farmers have larger landholdings and receive higher subsidies, while Indian farmers also face crop losses from weak processing infrastructure and rising cultivation costs.

The Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM), a coalition of more than 100 farm groups, has called for protests on February 12, saying the deal would allow imports of subsidised US farm products that could depress domestic prices and hurt rural incomes.

Bangladesh poll rivals rally on final day of campaign

AFP
Dhaka

Bangladesh's election campaign ended yesterday ahead of this week's vote, with rival parties invoking the 2024 uprising that ended the autocratic rule of Sheikh Hasina.

Tens of thousands of flag-waving supporters attended a succession of rival rallies across the sprawling capital Dhaka, as parties sought to harness the legacy of the mass uprising and pitch competing visions of change for the country of 170mn in Thursday's election. The nation will elect a 350-seat

parliament, with the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) - led by Tarique Rahman, who returned in December after 17 years in exile - widely tipped as a frontrunner.

The BNP's key rival is Jamaat-e-Islami, Bangladesh's largest Islamist party that is led by Shafiqur Rahman and has allied with the National Citizen Party (NCP) that was formed by student leaders who spearheaded the uprising.

Prime ministerial hopeful Tarique Rahman appeared confident as he bounced on stage to address a crowd of thousands of BNP loyalists who waved flags and the party symbol, a sheaf of rice, and greeted their leader as if at a rock concert.

"The BNP alone has a plan to run the country and the experience to do so," he said, referring to his late parents, Ziaur Rahman and Khaleda Zia, who both led the nation.

"No other parties have that." Tarique Rahman, 60, better known in Bangladesh as Tarique Zia, assumed leadership of the BNP from his mother, Khaleda Zia, who died in December at the age of 80.

Police ringed the stage as he spoke and watched from the tops of tower blocks surveying the crowd.

In his closing speech for the campaign, broadcast on state television, he also reached out to the

10% of Bangladeshis who are not Muslim - the majority of which who are Hindus.

"Bangladesh is a land of Muslims, non-Muslims, agnostics, and people from both the plains and the hills," he said.

Hasina was overthrown on August 5, 2024, after 15 years in power and her Awami League party was banned by the interim government from running in the elections, a move criticised by rights groups.

The 78-year-old, known for her iron-fisted rule, was sentenced to death in absentia in November for crimes against humanity for the deadly crackdown on protesters in her failed bid to cling to power and

remains in hiding in India.

Jamaat-e-Islami chief Shafiqur Rahman, 67, leading a coalition of Islamist parties - under the symbol of weighing scales - also headed packed rallies.

"If Jamaat comes to power, extortion and violence will reduce," said Ashikuzzaman Shaon, a 21-year-old student. "They'll establish justice."

The Jamaat chief has accused the former ruling party of widespread repression, but also warned that new forms of abuse had quickly followed its fall, alleging extortion and corruption by returning political figures.

"We want to build a country of

unity with everyone on board," he said yesterday, in a speech broadcast on state television. "It will be a country where nobody gets the driving seat because of their family background."

If successful, the former political prisoner could form the first Islamist-led government in constitutionally secular Bangladesh.

Jamaat's ally, NCP leader Nahid Islam, has also accused major parties of quietly sharing the "businesses of extortion and crime" for decades.

"If you elect me, I will dedicate myself to the betterment of the area," Islam said, thanking women supporters.

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GULF TIMES

Will Thailand’s general election deliver a stable government?

The ruling Bhumjaithai Party scored a decisive victory in Thailand’s general election, routing progressive and populist parties to put leader Anutin Charnvirakul in the running to become the first premier voted back to office in 20 years.

Bhumjaithai grabbed and retained a sizeable lead in early vote counting, despite opinion polls that favoured the liberal People’s Party, whose leaders, along with those of the Pheu Thai party, had conceded early.

It expanded in the south and grabbed seats in the vote-rich northeast held for nearly two decades by the billionaire Shinawatra family’s once dominant Pheu Thai. Bhumjaithai had about 193 of 500 parliamentary seats from 94% of polling stations, Reuters calculations based on election commission data show, well over its tallies of 51 and 71 in 2019 and 2023 elections respectively.

Despite a clean sweep of the capital Bangkok, People’s Party was a distant second with 118 seats, and Pheu Thai at 74, in its worst electoral performance.

Although Bhumjaithai lacks an outright majority, its 193 seats give Anutin plenty of bargaining power. Clearing away one obstacle, the People’s Party said on Sunday it would not form a competing alliance.

Although Bhumjaithai Party lacks an outright majority, its 193 seats give leader Anutin Charnvirakul plenty of bargaining power

Apart from the big three parties, about a dozen smaller ones are set to win 117 seats, from Kla Tham, with 58, to Palang Pracharat, with 5. As part of Anutin’s minority government, those two alone would yield him a slender majority.

A Pheu Thai- Bhumjaithai alliance is possible, even though Anutin manoeuvred against it after abandoning the coalition of the former ruling party last year, to become premier following a court’s sacking of predecessor Paetongtarn Shinawatra.

With his party on the rise and his credentials as an astute but wily dealmaker wielding clout among conservatives and royalists, Anutin is set to draw defectors and many smaller parties. The size of Bhumjaithai’s win consolidates power to enable better governance if

Anutin can manage Thailand’s stuttering economy and balance the interests of big business groups and powerful institutions.

Anutin would probably be backed by Thailand’s influential establishment and military, the key protagonists in a lengthy power struggle that thwarted two progressive forerunners of the People’s Party and toppled in coups and court rulings six populist prime ministers from, or backed by, the Shinawatra family.

Anutin’s gamble on dissolving parliament amid a fierce conflict with Cambodia seems to have paid off as he rode a wave of months-long nationalism and campaigned heavily on defending national sovereignty while portraying rivals as unpatriotic.

Though premier for fewer than 100 days, his recruitment of technocrats and poaching of respected politicians from other parties let him project his party as a capable steward of the economy, against an untested People’s Party and a Pheu Thai that had failed to deliver.

Parliament must gather to elect a speaker and choose the new prime minister 15 days after the result is certified by the election commission, which it has 60 days to do. Any party with more than 25 seats can nominate a prime ministerial candidate for the vote in parliament, but such a contestant would have to gain the support of more than half of the 500 lawmakers before forming a cabinet.

If the vote is unsuccessful, the house must convene again and repeat the procedure until a premier is chosen. A spokesperson for the Bhumjaithai-led government said he expected a new administration would be in place by the end of April.

Voters in Thailand’s general election on Sunday overwhelmingly voted for a referendum calling for a new constitution to replace a 2017 charter. The referendum is the outcome of a decades-long struggle between the pro-military royalist establishment and popular democratic political movements. Those backing change say the current military-backed charter entrenches unelected power, weakening democratic checks and civil liberties.

The referendum drew 60% support and 32% against, the election commission reported, with 94% of polling stations counted. — Reuters

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Chasing winds, command, and the sailor’s calling

Pakistan Navy captain’s memoir sails from cricket to the Black Sea

By Malik Waqas Farooq
Karachi

About a year ago, I was part of a conversation with a few sailing enthusiasts who spoke with evident pride about a book then being written in Pakistan. It chronicled the story of a sailing ship operated by the Pakistan Navy — PNS Rah Naward, the Navy’s tall ship — and its remarkable 2014 voyage from Pakistan to the Black Sea.

Their anecdotes were rich with the romance of the sea: high-seas challenges, the discipline of life under sail, and the rare blend of maritime tradition and modern naval diplomacy. The discussion was captivating.

I thoroughly enjoyed those fragments. They carried an inspiring rhythm, moving between the thrill of wind-powered adventure and the deeper lessons of leadership and command. There was a strong old-school naval ethos running through them, accompanied by reflections on perseverance and teamwork. I remember thinking then that such an epic voyage deserved more than to remain oral lore among sailors. It needed to be captured in a proper book.

After reflecting on those conversations, I found myself hoping for the complete narrative. The officer behind the voyage had clearly lived something extraordinary, and while the casual stories were engaging, they hinted at a much richer account waiting to be told.

It was therefore a genuine pleasure when, recently, the finished book — *In Quest of the Winds* — finally appeared. The title itself was evocative. I assumed it referred to the sailor’s eternal pursuit of favourable winds, both literal and metaphorical: the breezes that move a ship and the forces that propel a career forward.

The author’s interpretation, however, goes deeper. Commodore Humayun explains that the “winds” represent the unpredictable elements encountered during the ocean-crossing voyage — forces that test a sailor’s skill, judgment, and resolve. Throughout the book, winds symbolise challenge itself: sought after, respected, and sometimes feared, as calm seas can turn hostile without warning. In this sense, *In Quest of the Winds* reads almost as a meditation on the pursuit of excellence.

The subtitle immediately draws the reader in: The story of a Pakistan Navy Captain rising from a middle-order batsman to lead a Tall (Sail) Ship into the Black Sea Regatta. The dedication is equally telling, paying tribute to a mother whose determination shaped the author’s course and a father whose optimism and versatility guided his voyage.

The book delivers a winning formula. It is robust and engaging, composed of episodes drawn from the author’s life and career, narrated with clarity, restraint, and quiet determination.



Author: Commodore Azfar Humayun

Strategy, reflection, and tenacity are balanced naturally, offering a panoramic view of naval life from youth to senior command.

Humayun begins with childhood memories — street cricket rivalries in Malir, a chance encounter with an “extra form” that redirected him from a career in engineering to the Pakistan Naval Academy,

and the demanding realities of cadet training. As a young officer, he recounts the tension of early days aboard destroyers and the challenges of leadership under pressure.

The heart of the narrative lies in the voyage undertaken to participate in the Black Sea Regatta 2014; a 138-day Odyssey. Here, the reader sails through piracy-threatened waters off Somalia, gale-force winds in the Red & Aegean Seas, and the nuanced world of naval diplomacy in ports ranging from Salalah to Novorossiysk. As Captain, Humayun leads his crew through Mediterranean storms and competitive racing in the Black Sea. Each episode carries a lesson — sometimes hard-earned — on command, teamwork, and decision-making.

The supporting cast is vividly drawn: a steadfast navigator detecting cyclones and shallow waters, a resourceful Marine Engineer Officer keeping vital systems running mid-voyage, and eager trainees climbing masts for the first time. There is an overconfident pilot in Izmir, a borrowed barber from an escorting destroyer, and the ever-present forces of weather that shadow the ship like silent adversaries. Above all, the collective spirit of the crew emerges as a central strength.

The narrative shifts smoothly between tactical details and reflective insights. Near-disaster looms during a close call in Izmir, where overconfidence nearly leads

to grounding. Elsewhere, the sea reveals its indifference, reminding the reader that mastery is always temporary.

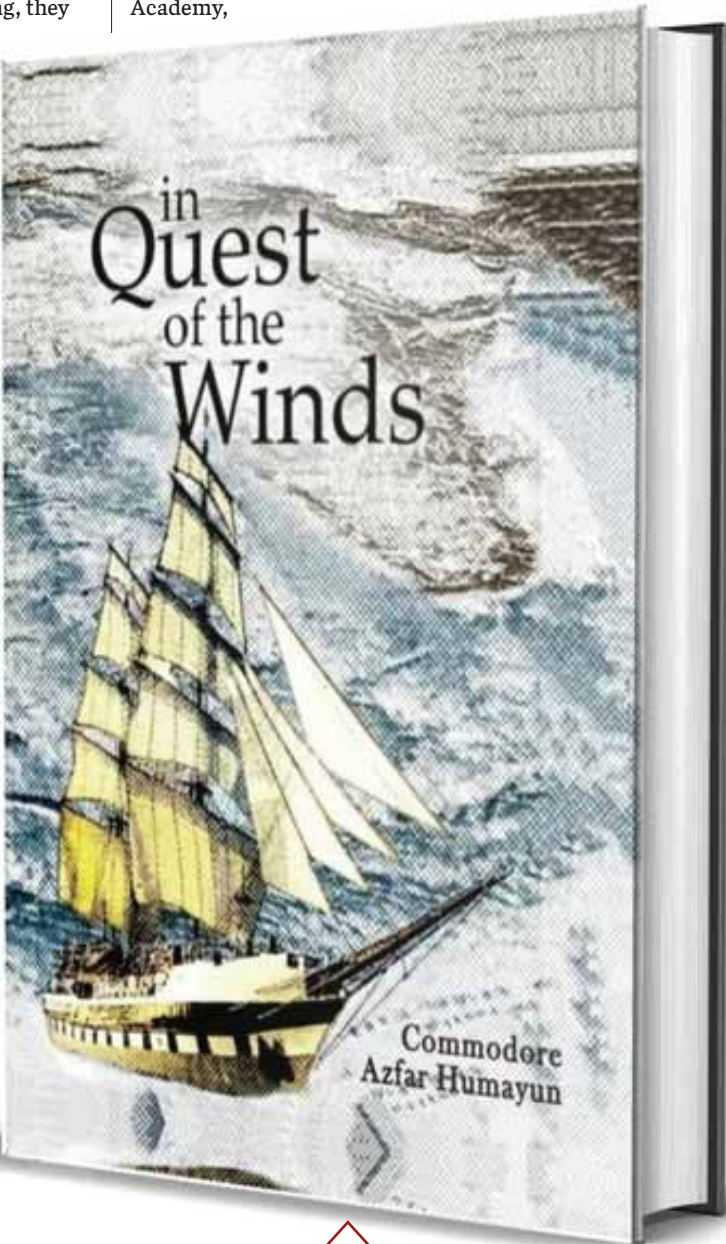
Throughout the book, we glimpse a Pakistan Navy that is professional, adaptable, and quietly inspiring. The episodes feel like moments frozen in time — snapshots from a voyage that remains epic even as it feels distant. Even in action-packed chapters, Humayun’s contemplative voice surfaces, hinting at deeper truths about resilience, purpose, and maritime diplomacy.

Reading between the lines, the sea’s unforgiving nature is ever present: rising winds, mounting risks, and persistent uncertainty. The chapters on foreign ports, particularly Türkiye and Russia, describe cultural exchange, hospitality, bureaucratic challenges, and shared maritime heritage. Though drawn from a decade-old voyage, these encounters feel strikingly current and familiar.

In Quest of the Winds is, ultimately, a quintessential naval memoir — a story of pursuit in every sense. It fulfils precisely what those early conversations had promised. Commodore Humayun mines a rich seam of adventure with confidence and restraint.

The natural conclusion is to hope for a sequel — another volume that carries the story forward, charting the later chapters of a career well navigated and generously shared.

• The writer is a HR consultant by profession and an avid sportsman/reader by passion.



Book title: *In Quest of the Winds*

Author: Commodore Azfar Humayun

Publisher: Papercraft Publishers Pvt. Ltd.

Machado ally ‘kidnapped’ after calling for Venezuela elections

Venezuelan Nobel peace laureate Maria Corina Machado said yesterday that armed government agents had “kidnapped” a close ally – hours after he was released from prison and demanded democratic elections. Machado said a group of heavily armed men in civilian clothes seized Juan Pablo Guanipa, 61, in the Los Chorros district of Caracas. The former National Assembly vice-president had walked out of jail Sunday as part of a slow-moving wave of releases of political prisoners. The Public Prosecutor’s Office later

confirmed Guanipa had been detained for violating the terms of his release and would be placed under house arrest, without providing more details. “They haven’t told us where my father is or where he will be transferred,” his son Ramon Guanipa said. “I demand proof of life for my father immediately. He didn’t violate any of the conditions of his release, and we don’t know where he is.” Guanipa’s arrest sent a chilling message to those pushing for democratic reforms, and for Machado, who is pondering a return to her homeland from exile in the

United States. “We demand his immediate release,” Machado said, alleging that his detention undermined promises to end decades of repression and one-party rule, but still asserting her determination to return to Venezuela. “This does not affect my return in the slightest. Quite the opposite,” she insisted. During a few hours of freedom, Guanipa met relatives of political detainees and challenged authorities to respect the results of a 2024 election. The opposition is widely believed to have won that vote, but then-president Nicolas

Maduro claimed victory and remained in power. “You don’t want to respect it? Then let’s go to a (new) electoral process,” Guanipa told AFP. Guanipa was first arrested in May 2025 on charges of “terrorism”, money laundering and inciting violence, accusations rights groups say were widely used to silence critics under the Maduro administration. His renewed detention came on the eve of a landmark vote in Venezuela’s National Assembly that would grant amnesty to political dissidents and others. Maduro was captured in a US special

forces raid in Caracas on January 3, and spirited to the United States where he now faces trial. His replacement, former vice-president Delcy Rodriguez, has tentatively co-operated with the United States: promising a slice of Venezuela’s vast oil reserves and a major political opening. Rights group Foro Penal said there have been nearly 400 prisoner releases since Rodriguez took charge, including 35 on Sunday. But reforms have been slow, and much of the military-backed government remains unchanged. **(AFP)**

French central bank chief Villeroy to leave early, Macron to pick successor

Reuters
Paris

Bank of France Governor Francois Villeroy de Galhau will stand down in June, more than a year before the end of his term, allowing President Emmanuel Macron to name his replacement before a 2027 presidential election that the far-right could win. Villeroy, 66, has been a consistent voice for lower interest rates in the European Central Bank’s governing council, although analysts expect his successor to adopt a similar stance. Villeroy announced his departure in a letter to the central bank’s staff, saying he was leaving to lead a Catholic foundation supporting vulnerable youth and families. He had been due to stand down in October 2027. A source familiar with the matter said the timing of his departure was deliberate, aimed at ensuring continuity at the central bank and heading off any market jitters that could arise if a successor had to be chosen under a far-right presidency.

Polls show either eurosceptic far-right leader Marine Le Pen or her protege Jordan Bardella could win the next presidential election in spring 2027. “I made this important decision naturally and independently,” Villeroy told central bank staff. “The time between now and the beginning of June is sufficient to organise my succession in peace.” And he told Les Echos that nobody had told him to do anything. “If I had been asked, I would have refused. It’s a strictly personal decision.” Macron’s office did not immediately reply to a request for

comment. Villeroy’s successor would have a six-year term, renewable once, and must be approved by the finance commissions of the National Assembly and Senate.

Their term of office may be terminated early only if they become incapable of performing their duties or are guilty of serious misconduct, according to French law.

Lawmaker Jean-Philippe Tanguy from the far-right Rassemblement National told Reuters the move was aimed at putting in place anti-RN allies in case there is a change of power and said it was “another step towards illiberalism under Macron’s regime.” With Villeroy’s departure, the ECB will lose one of its most outspoken policy doves. Villeroy has been consistently warning for months about the downside risks to inflation, most recently due to the euro’s strength. “The victory over inflation has been won, and even though international uncertainties remain high, of course, monetary policy is in a good position with the ECB,” he told staff.

French Finance Minister Roland Lescure said Villeroy’s actions “have always been guided by rigour, independence and concern for the public interest.”

Governors of the Bank of France usually have previously spent time at the Treasury, which deals with many of the most sensitive issues within the French Finance Ministry. Two sources said that its current director Bertrand Dumont or past head Emmanuel Moulin would be good candidates, as well as Bank of France deputy governor Agnes Benassy-Quere or former ECB policymaker Benoit Coeure, both of whom have had positions in the Treasury.

Sweden plans to tighten rules for gaining citizenship

Sweden said yesterday it planned to tighten rules to acquire citizenship, introducing “honest living” and financial requirements, a language and general knowledge test and raising the residency requirement from five to eight years. If approved by parliament, the new rules would enter into force on June 6, Sweden’s national holiday, and would apply even to applications already being processed. Under the new rules, those who have criminal records – in their home country or in Sweden – and who have served their sentence would have to wait up to 17 years before being allowed to apply for citizenship, up from the current 10 years. Following a large influx of migrants to Sweden during the 2015 migrant crisis, successive left- and right-wing governments have tightened asylum and migration rules. The country has for years struggled to integrate migrants, with many not learning the language and living in disadvantaged areas with higher crime and jobless rates. **(AFP)**

Spanish rail workers’ unions end strike



Spain’s main unions for rail workers called off a three-day nationwide strike, which was scheduled to start Monday, after authorities agreed to boost investments and reinforce staffing following a string of high-profile train accidents. In a statement, train drivers’ union SEMAF said it had achieved all of its demands with a deal that addressed day-to-day safety concerns raised by drivers across all railway companies, including steps on infrastructure investment, working groups and safety procedures. **(Reuters)**

as others recently, have prompted many carriers to refuel in nearby third countries, including Panama, the Bahamas, the Dominican Republic and the United States.

Most airline flights into Havana appeared on time and on schedule on Monday morning.

An early morning COPA airlines flight to Panama departed on time Monday, and several American Airlines flights were slated to arrive later in the day, airport officials confirmed.

None of the major carriers servicing Cuba have yet commented on the situation.

Meanwhile the Kremlin accused the United States on Monday of using “suffocating measures”

against Cuba, a traditional Russian ally, as an energy crisis on the socialist Caribbean island worsened under US sanctions.

Cuba is reeling from a US-ordered halt in oil shipments from Caracas after American troops captured Venezuelan leader Nicolas Maduro last month.

The Cuban government on Friday announced emergency measures to address the island’s energy crisis, including a four-day work week for state-owned companies and fuel sale restrictions.

“The situation is really critical in Cuba,” Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters, including AFP.

“The suffocating measures im-

posed by the United States are causing many difficulties for the country. We are discussing possible solutions with our Cuban friends, at least to provide whatever assistance we can.”

President Donald Trump also signed an executive order allowing his country to impose tariffs on countries selling oil to Havana.

Trump said that Mexico, which has been supplying Cuba with oil since 2023, would stop doing so – under threat of US tariffs.

The oil shortages have threatened to plunge Cuba into complete darkness, with power plants struggling to keep the lights on.

Russia has railed against the US campaign against Havana for

weeks, calling it “unacceptable” and warning of a possible humanitarian crisis in the country.

Cuba has warned airlines it is suspending jet fuel supplies for a month, an official at a European carrier said Sunday.

Washington has long sought to overthrow or weaken the communist-led Cuban government.

Havana accuses Trump of wanting to “strangle” the island’s economy, where power cuts and fuel shortages, already recurrent in recent years, have become even more acute.

Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel said his country was willing to hold talks with the United States, but not under pressure.

Cuba warns airlines it will run out of jet fuel after Trump threats

AFP/Reuters
Havana

Cuba warned international airlines that jet fuel will no longer be available on the island beginning on Tuesday in the latest sign of fast-worsening conditions as the United States moves to cut off the communist-run nation’s oil supply. The short-fall is set to last from February 10 through March 11, according to a Notice to Aviation (NOTAM) published late on Sunday, and comes just two days after top officials said air travel would not be impacted by a fuel rationing plan announced on Friday.

Cuba has historically relied on Venezuela to provide much of its jet fuel, but the Caribbean island nation has not received any crude or refined products from its top ally since mid-December, when the US moved to block the South American nation’s exports.

US President Donald Trump has since vowed Cuba would receive no more oil from Venezuela and has threatened to slap tariffs on any nation sending fuel to Cuba, effectively cutting off the island’s supply of aviation gas.

Such shortfalls are not new to Cuba and many airlines already have plans in place to deal with them.

A similar crisis last year, as well



US Vice-President JD Vance and Armenia’s Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan shake hands, as they attend a joint press conference, in Yerevan, Armenia, yesterday.

Pashinyan called the visit “truly historic” and said he had “great hope” that President Donald Trump would “rightfully” receive the Nobel Peace Prize for mediating the Armenian-Azerbaijani peace process.

The two also signed a civil nuclear energy agreement, which Pashinyan said “will open a new chapter in the deepening energy partnership between Armenia and the United States”.

The US State Department said the visit would “advance President Donald Trump’s peace efforts and promote the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP)”.

The TRIPP is a proposed road-and-rail corridor designed to link Azerbaijan with its Nakh-

chivan exclave, cut off from the mainland by Armenian territory, while integrating the region into a wider east-west trade route connecting Central Asia and the Caspian basin to Europe.

Washington has presented the project as a confidence-building measure following decades of conflict between the two countries.

Azerbaijan sees the opening of regional communications as the main precondition for signing a comprehensive peace treaty with its rival.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan announced in January an implementation framework for TRIPP, building on commitments made at the White House summit last year.

Russia says gunman who shot general recruited by Kyiv

AFP
Moscow

Russia said yesterday that a gunman who shot and wounded a top Russian military intelligence officer in Moscow last week before fleeing to Dubai was acting on Kyiv’s orders.

High-ranking general Vladimir Alekseyev was shot several times in his apartment block in Moscow and was hospitalised. There have been a string of assassinations of Russian army officials on Russian soil during Moscow’s almost four-year Ukraine offensive.

Russia’s FSB security service said that Russian citizen Lyubomir Korba, born in 1960, shot Alekseyev “on the orders of Ukraine’s SBU” security services after being recruited and trained in Ukraine.

The FSB alleged that Korba’s son, who lives in Poland, was involved in his recruitment process. Moscow said over the weekend that

a Russian man in his 60s was arrested in Dubai and handed over to Russia over the attempted killing.

“On the day of the assassination, Korba got into the building where the military man lived, waited until he appeared in the lift lobby and shot four times,” the FSB said in a statement.

The FSB said Korba was recruited in Ukraine’s Ternopil last year and sent into Russia through Moldova and Georgia. It claimed that he was promised \$30,000 for the killing. It said he acted with two accomplices – naming them as Viktor Vasin and Zinaida Serebrikskaya.

According to the FSB, Serebrikskaya rented a flat in Alekseyev’s building and gave Korba an entry pass into the block of flats.

Vasin, the FSB said, had rented a flat for Korba in Moscow and helped plan his movements. It accused Vasin of being a supporter of the late Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny.

Japan National Day celebrated in Doha



Qatar and Japan's deepening strategic partnership took centre stage yesterday as Japanese ambassador Naoto Hisajima highlighted growing diplomatic, energy, defence, and cultural ties during a speech at a reception in Doha marking the 66th birthday of Japan's Emperor, Naruhito. (From left) Japanese ambassador Naoto Hisajima; HE Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulla bin Mohammed al-Thani, Minister of Transport; Mohamed al-Jaida, assistant director of the protocol Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, during the cake-cutting ceremony yesterday at Ritz Carlton Doha. **PICTURES:** Shaji Kayamkulam



A view of fog-enveloped Corniche yesterday morning. **PICTURES:** Shaji Kayamkulam



West Bay blanketed by fog.

The day fog blanketed Doha, surroundings

By Kamran Rehmat
Doha

Doha and its surrounding regions woke up yesterday to a scene straight out of a dream: a thick blanket of fog and mist rolling across the landscape in the early morning hours.

The phenomenon, observed across much of Qatar, was the result of overnight meteorological conditions that included high relative humidity, light winds, and a drop in surface temperatures beneath mostly clear skies. These factors created the ideal environment for moisture near the ground to condense into countless suspended droplets, producing the hazy veil that transformed familiar cityscapes into soft silhouettes.

According to the Qatar Meteorology Department (QMD), horizontal visibility fell markedly across the country, with readings plunging below one kilometre in places and generally ranging between one and two kilometres during the period of peak fog intensity. The fog was widespread – enveloping both inland and coastal zones – signaling a broad-scale formation rather than localized pockets of mist.

Eyewitness accounts and photographs from early commuters depicted a surreal start to the day. Doha's iconic skyline became a subdued outline against the pale dawn, its towers softened by the low-lying fog. Along the Corniche

and other waterfront stretches, the mist mingled with a faint haze, blurring the boundary between sea and sky. The ethereal atmosphere persisted until just after sunrise, when the day's warmth gradually dissolved the fog layer to reveal the crisp blue of a new morning.

Meteorologists explained that the event was a classic case of radiation fog: a type that develops when the ground cools faster than the air above it after sunset, allowing trapped surface moisture to condense. Such conditions tend to appear during Qatar's cooler months, particularly in late winter and early spring, when calm nocturnal winds limit air mixing. The QMD noted that a gradual warming trend expected through mid-February would likely shorten future fog episodes as rising temperatures reduce overnight condensation.

Authorities issued standard road safety reminders, urging motorists to proceed with caution during the hours of reduced visibility. Drivers were advised to lower speed, use dipped headlights instead of high beams, and maintain greater distances between vehicles to adapt to shortened sightlines on highways and arterial routes.

While fog of this nature is a familiar winter occurrence in Qatar, the spectacle never fails to transform the capital's rhythm – slowing commutes, softening the city's edges, and offering a fleeting glimpse of natural wonder amid the morning quiet.



A view of the Old Airport area. **PICTURES:** Kamran Rehmat



D-Ring Road late Sunday night.

Qatari group completes CultuHike expedition across the Andes

QNA
Santiago

A group of Qatari trekkers has completed a historic high-altitude traverse across the Andes, travelling from Argentina into Chile and concluding on the Pacific coast as part of CultuHike, a flagship people-to-people initiative delivered through Years of Culture.

The programme forms part of the legacy of the Qatar Argentina and Chile 2025 Year of Culture and reflects Qatar's commitment to international engagement under the framework of Qatar National Vision 2030. CultuHike is designed to foster cultural understanding through shared experience, bringing participants together on long-distance treks that encourage dialogue, reflection and meaningful exchange. Alongside its sister initiative CultuRide, the programme has become a central component of Years of Culture's experiential approach to cultural engagement, supporting the Vision's emphasis on human, social and cultural development.

HE Years of Culture Advisor on Latin American Affairs and Qatar's former Ambassador to Mexico Mohammed al-Kuwari, added: "CultuHike reflects the long-term vision of the initiative, which is to create lasting relationships between communities through collaboration and exploration. The legacy of each partnership is not measured only in events delivered,



but in the connections that continue well beyond the programme year."

Following a trans-Andean route historically used by traders and local communities, participants spend several days navigating rugged terrain, remote valleys and high mountain passes. The physical demands of the journey create conditions that encourage co-operation and trust, allowing relationships to develop organically.

Commenting on the unique experience, Years of Culture Sports Lead and CultuHike and CultuRide Creator Ali bin Towar al-Kuwari, said: "Programmes like CultuHike are designed to bring people together in environ-

ments where connection happens naturally. Shared physical challenges create space for open dialogue, mutual curiosity and genuine understanding. By stepping beyond familiar settings and engaging through collective effort, participants build relationships that go beyond the trail itself. This is how cultural exchange becomes meaningful and lasting."

During the opening stages of the trek, participants and local Argentine and Chilean guides exchanged knowledge spanning environmental practices, traditions and social customs. Discussions included Qatar's desert ecosystems and wildlife, medicinal plant traditions in South America, and the role of family structures in sustaining social cohesion.

Conversations around the role of women in community life prompted particularly meaningful dialogue, revealing shared values across cultures separated by geography yet connected through lived experience. Furthermore, linguistic connections also emerged along the trail.

Everyday words such as "sugar", "gato", "rice" and "olive" prompted conversation as similarities across Spanish, English and Arabic are recognised, highlighting centuries of cultural interaction and exchange. The evenings of the expedition concluded with communal reflection around campfires, allowing participants to share insights from the day's journey. These moments became a defining feature of the experience, encouraging reflection on resilience, personal growth and collective iden-

Ministry to host Russian Cultural Week at Darb Al Saai tomorrow

The Ministry of Culture will host the Russian Cultural Week at Darb Al Saai on Wednesday. The hosting of the Russian Cultural Week, which will run until February 14, comes within the framework of Qatar's vision to promote civilisational dialogue, broaden cultural exchange with countries around the world, and reinforce culture as a shared space for human interaction. The Russian Cultural Week represents a significant milestone in the course of bilateral relations between Qatar and the Russian Federation, reflecting the positive development witnessed in these relations, particularly in the cultural field, which serves as one of the most prominent bridges of rapprochement and mutual understanding between peoples. The programme of the Russian Cultural Week includes a diverse range of activities showcasing the richness and diversity of Russian culture. Russian artistic and folk troupes will present heritage and musical performances, alongside exhibitions of artworks and handicrafts, workshops in drawing and visual arts, as well as live culinary experiences



highlighting the uniqueness and diversity of Russian cuisine. These events provide the public in Qatar with an opportunity to closely engage with Russian cultural heritage and explore aspects of Russia's artistic and social identity, in an atmosphere that fosters cultural exchange and deepens dialogue between people. The Ministry of Culture affirmed its keenness for the Cultural Weeks season to serve as an effective platform for cultural openness and to reinforce Qatar's position as a hub for international cultural dialogue, contributing to the strengthening of bilateral relations with friendly and partner countries, and employing culture as a tool of cultural diplomacy to build bridges of communication and understanding among different cultures. **(QNA)**