



# Sidra specialist outlines guidelines for children fasting during Ramadan

QNA  
Doha

Most parents are keen to train their children to observe the obligation of fasting during the holy month of Ramadan and to accustom them to this practice. However, they sometimes overlook the medical considerations related to ensuring safe fasting, particularly in later childhood.

Consultant Pediatrician at Sidra Medicine, Dr Mohammed Sinan al-Hajjaji, cautioned that, from a medical perspective, full fasting is not recommended for children under the age of seven. At this age, children have limited glycogen stores and are more susceptible to rapid drops in blood sugar.

Moreover, they require continuous energy intake to support brain development. He noted that gradual fasting (training), such as fasting for half a day, until noon, or until the afternoon prayer, may be appropriate, provided the child is in good health, has a normal weight, does not suffer from chronic illnesses that would require medical consultation before fasting.

He also discussed the potential positive health effects of fasting in children, which may be more evident in older age groups. These include improved dietary discipline, such as reducing random snacking, regulating mealtimes, and limiting excessive sugar intake if the fast is broken healthily, and theoretically improved insulin sensitivity. While intermittent fasting has demonstrated such benefits in adult studies, fasting in healthy children may help reduce insulin resistance, particularly among those who are overweight. However, he emphasized that there are insufficient long-term studies on children to conclusively confirm these effects. Additional potential benefits include enhanced fat utilisation as an energy source, as



the body begins to rely on fat after 8 to 12 hours of fasting. This may assist in weight management among children with obesity. Fasting may also help develop tolerance to hunger, serving as a physiological training mechanism that regulates hunger and satiety signals and reduces dependence on quick sugars.

Dr al-Hajjaji also outlined possible negative effects of fasting in children, which may vary depending on age and health status. One of the most significant risks is hypoglycemia, particularly in children under 10 years old, due to lower glycogen reserves and higher metabolic rates. Symptoms of low blood sugar may include dizziness, sweating, headache, lethargy, or fainting.

Other potential risks include dehydration, especially among children in hot climates or those who are physically active, as they are more vulnerable. Signs of dehydration may include headache, reduced concentration, constipation, and low blood pressure. Academic performance may also be affected, particularly during the first days of fasting, when children may experience fatigue, distraction, and headaches, though this often improves after several days. Additionally, changes in sleep patterns are common, as many children alter

their daily routines, stay up late, and experience fragmented sleep. This disrupts the biological clock and may affect hormones, mood, and school performance.

He further identified cases in which children should not fast or should seek prior medical advice. These include children with diabetes (especially type 1), underweight children (malnutrition), severe anaemia, heart or kidney disease, chronic conditions requiring regular daytime medication, young athletes undergoing intensive daytime training, and children who suffer from recurrent headaches or fainting.

Dr al-Hajjaji offered several health recommendations to ensure safe fasting for children, including consuming a protein-rich suhoor (such as eggs, yogurt, or beans) along with complex carbohydrates, avoiding simple sugars at suhoor, drinking adequate amounts of water at night, avoiding sun exposure during fasting hours, reducing physical activity, and breaking the fast gradually (water and dates followed by a balanced meal). Finally, the pediatric consultant stressed that fasting should be stopped immediately if the child exhibits warning signs such as dizziness or fainting, severe headache, marked lethargy, pallor, cold sweating, reduced urination, or vomiting.

## Qatar's permanent representative participates in meeting of Arab Group with UN secretary-general



HE the Permanent Representative of the State of Qatar to the United Nations Sheikh Alya Ahmed bin Saif al-Thani participated in the meeting of Their Excellencies Permanent Representatives of the Extended Troika of the Arab Group with the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, regarding illegal Israeli decisions and measures aimed at imposing Israeli sovereignty in the West Bank. HE the Permanent Representative of Qatar emphasized the necessity of full implementation of the ceasefire agreement in Gaza, affirming Qatar's continued coordination with international partners to support efforts in this framework. Their Excellencies the Permanent Representatives of the Extended Troika of the Arab Group expressed the group's strong condemnation and opposition to any form of annexation in the West Bank, stressing that these measures constitute a blatant violation of international law and obstruct international efforts to safeguard the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, foremost among them the right to self-determination, the end of the occupation, and the establishment of their independent sovereign state on the June 4, 1967 lines, with East Jerusalem as its capital. (QNA)

## Qatar's envoy joins press briefing on Israeli occupation's 'illegal' West Bank measures

QNA  
New York

HE the Permanent Representative of the State of Qatar to the United Nations Sheikh Alya Ahmed bin Saif al-Thani, has participated in a press briefing held by Arab countries at the UN headquarters, highlighting Israeli occupation's illegal practices in the West Bank. The group strongly condemned Israel's recent decision to designate lands in the occupied West Bank as so-called "state lands" and to begin large-scale procedures for land registration and settlement in the occupied West Bank.

They added the move is illegal, constitutes a dangerous escalation, and aims to accelerate unlawful settlement activity, while asserting Israel's illegal sovereignty over the occupied Palestinian territories.

Arab countries called on the international community to assume its responsibilities and take clear and decisive steps to stop these violations, ensure respect for international law, and safeguard the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, foremost among them their right to self-determination, the end of the occupation, and the establishment of their independent and sovereign state on the June 4, 1967 lines, with East Jerusalem as its capital.



## Al Wakra Hospital bags Planetree gold certification

QNA  
Doha

Hamad Medical Corporation's Al Wakra Hospital (AWH) has been awarded Gold Certification for Excellence in Person-Centered Care (PCC) by Planetree International. This certification recognises the hospital's achievement and innovation in delivering person-centered care.

AWH is one of only 157 healthcare organisations worldwide to earn this prestigious award and one of just 101 Gold Certified organizations globally. Building on the foundational work led by the Center for Patient Experience and Staff Engagement (CPESE) to advance staff and patient engagement across the HMC network, the PCC certification marks a significant step forward in strengthening the organization's capacity to deliver a truly person-centered approach to care. AWH provides a comprehensive spectrum of medical services, encompassing



emergency and inpatient care, specialized outpatient clinics, day procedures, and multidisciplinary services, all dedicated to delivering high-quality, compassionate, and person-centered care to individuals and families of all ages. Gold Certification for Excellence in Person-Centered Care represents the highest level of achievement in person-centered care, based on evidence and standards. Person-centered healthcare pri-

oritizes the active participation of patients and their families throughout the healthcare process with an emphasis on partnership, compassion, transparency, inclusion, and quality.

To earn Gold Certification, AWH underwent a rigorous assessment process. Planetree representatives conducted a validation assessment that included discussions with patients, families, and staff, confirming the

effective implementation of person-centered policies such as non-restrictive visiting hours and shared medical records. The review also evaluated staff engagement at all levels, the supportive care environment, and the hospital's performance on patient experience and quality indicators that drive continuous improvement.

This Gold Certification demonstrates that AWH is a hospital where staff partner with patients and families, and where patient and family comfort, dignity, empowerment and well-being are prioritized as key elements of providing top-quality clinical care.

It affirms the hospital's commitment to embedding person-centered care into every aspect of its services and demonstrates to patients and families that their voices, needs, and experiences are central to care delivery. The certification reinforces trust and confidence in the hospital as a place where care is compassionate, personalized, and collaborative.

## Swedish Speaker meets Qatari envoy



HE the Speaker of the Swedish Parliament, Andreas Norlen, met yesterday with ambassador of the State of Qatar to Sweden, Nadia bint Ahmed al-Shaibi. The meeting discussed the two countries' co-operation relations. (QNA)

## Mada appoints board of directors to lead new phase of development

QNA  
Doha

The formation of the Board of Directors of Mada Assistive Technology Center - Qatar was announced, chaired by HE Minister of Social Development and Family, Buthaina bint Ali al-Jabr al-Nuaimi, underscoring high-level support for the centre's role in empowering persons with disabilities and older persons, and in enhancing the quality of life for all members of society.

The move reflects the State of Qatar's firm commitment to advancing universal accessibility and



promoting the principles of justice and equal opportunity.

The Board comprises: HE Dr Ibrahim bin Saleh al-Nuaimi, HE Sheikh Najwa bint Abdulrahman al-Thani, HE Eng Mohammed bin Abdulaziz al-Meer, Mashaal Ali al-Hammadi; Brigadier Jassim Abdulrahman al-Sayed, Dr Hanadi Khamis al-Hammad, Eng Omar

Ali al-Ansari, and Maha Mohammed al-Mansouri. The formation of the board comes within the context of the centre's new phase, launched by HE the Minister during the Strategic Exhibition held in December 2025, where the centre affirmed its transition toward a more comprehensive framework for advancing accessibility, one that aligns with national aspirations and promotes equal opportunities and active participation for all segments of society.

The new strategy focuses on expanding the use of assistive technology and strengthening the integration of accessibility standards within policies and institutional

systems across various sectors, in line with international best practices and standards. This approach contributes to building a more inclusive and sustainable ecosystem and supports the achievement of Qatar National Vision 2030, particularly under the pillars of Human and Social Development, by empowering individuals, fostering social inclusion, and establishing an enabling environment that guarantees the right of all to access and participate without barriers.

Mada Center was established in 2010 to promote the principles of inclusion and to build an accessible society for persons with disabilities and the elderly.

## QMC attends GCCJPPI Golden Jubilee event



Qatar Media Corporation (QMC) has taken part in the celebration marking the 50th anniversary (Golden Jubilee) of the Joint Program Production Institution for the Arab Gulf States (GCCJPPI). The QMC delegation comprised Director of the International Cooperation and Agreements Office, Abdullah Ghanem al-Binali al-Mohannadi and Director of Qatar TV, Ali Saleh al-Sada. The delegation met with Director-General of the GCCJPPI, Sheikh Mubarak Fahd al-Jaber al-Sabah. This participation underscores QMC's commitment to supporting joint Gulf media initiatives and enhancing its presence at events that contribute to developing media content in the GCC countries. (QNA)

## SHARE AN IFTAR THROUGH talabat

### Customers can 'Share an Iftar' through talabat app

With the launch of its 2026 Ramadan campaign, "Share an Iftar", talabat is making it easier for customers to support communities across the region through simple, in-app donations.

Throughout the Holy Month, customers can donate iftar meals, food parcels, and funds directly via the talabat app, in partnership with trusted, licensed charities.

Ramadan is a time of generosity, reflection, and togetherness.

By embedding giving back into the everyday ordering experience, talabat removes barriers to donation and enables customers to contribute in a way that is simple, transparent, and respectful of local traditions.

The campaign will run throughout Ramadan, with initiatives tailored to local needs and customs, and delivered in close collaboration with charity partners across the region.

Francisco Miguel De Sousa, the managing director of talabat Qatar, said: "Ramadan is a time when generosity comes naturally. Our role is to make it simple and trusted for customers to share an iftar and support communities in a meaningful way."

### Trump launches \$10bn peace initiative for rebuilding Gaza

From Page 1

Trump, who has sharply curtailed foreign aid, said the United States would contribute \$10bn to the board.

Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates each promised at least \$1bn.

The White House press secretary said more than \$6.5bn was pledged, presumably excluding Trump's offer.

The "Board of Peace" came together after the Trump administration, teaming up with Qatar and Egypt, negotiated a ceasefire in October to halt two years of devastating war in Gaza.

The plan's second phase calls for the disarmament of Hamas.

In a first for an Arab country, Morocco announced that it is ready to send police as well as officers to the nascent International Stabilisation Force.

The force's American commander, Major-General Jasper Jeffers, said that Albania, Indonesia, Kazakhstan and Kosovo are also sending troops and announced that an Indonesian officer would serve as his deputy.

Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim-majority country, earlier said it is ready to send 8,000 troops - nearly half of the 20,000 sought.

Nickolay Mladenov, a veteran Bulgarian diplomat named high representative for Gaza by the US, also announced the beginning of recruitment for a post-Hamas police force in Gaza and said 2,000 people had applied in the first hours (see story on page 6).

Despite the truce, Gaza's health ministry, which operates under Hamas authorities, says that Israeli forces have killed at least 601 people since it took effect.

## NU-Q graduate awarded platinum medal at Education Excellence Awards

Amna Essa Hilal al-Kuwari, a 2025 graduate of Northwestern University in Qatar (NU-Q), received the Platinum Medal at the 19th Qatar Education Excellence Award ceremony, earning the highest national distinction for academic and societal excellence.

Her recognition marks a historic milestone as the first NU-Q alumna to receive the Platinum Medal, the programme's most prestigious honour.

Organised annually by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE) under the patronage of His Highness the Amir, the annual Education Excellence Award celebrates outstanding individuals across the nation.

The Platinum Medal represents the award's highest category, recognising recipients whose accomplishments extend beyond sustained academic excellence to encompass innovation, international distinction, leadership, and meaningful contributions to society.



Shortlisted candidates undergo a rigorous national evaluation process by a national committee before receiving the award at the annual awards ceremony, in which awards are conferred by His Highness the Amir.

"Amna represents the intellectual curiosity, interdisciplinary courage, and public-minded leadership that define Northwestern Qatar," said NU-Q dean and chief executive Marwan M Kraidy. "To see one of our graduates earn the highest academic distinction in the country affirms the calibre of students we are proud to have

as part of our community."

A graduate with minors in Middle East Studies and Media and Politics, al-Kuwari is currently completing a master's degree and plans to pursue a PhD in the near future.

"For me, learning is a lifelong responsibility," she said. "Whether in academia or public service, I want my work to contribute to knowledge production in Qatar and beyond."

"The Platinum Medal motivates me to continue striving for impact that is both local and global," she added.

Her achievements extend well

beyond the classroom.

Internationally, she won first place at the International Invention, Innovation and Technology Exhibition (ITEX'25) in Malaysia and a gold medal, and received a special award from the National Research Council of Thailand for Best Global Innovation and Invention.

Regionally, she secured second place at the 16th Arab Robotics and Artificial Intelligence Championship in Tunisia and earned a silver medal at the 15th International Invention Fair in the Middle East in Kuwait.

She also won the Entrepreneur-

ship and Innovation for Sustainability competition at the Second Arab Camp for Gifted and Innovative Youth in the United Arab Emirates.

Al-Kuwari serves as an ambassador and media co-ordinator at the Sustainable Development Goals Ambassadors Centre and is a certified Training of Trainers (TOT) through Al Jazeera Media Institute.

A trilingual communicator fluent in Arabic, English, and French, she has delivered workshops across institutions and founded the Summer Sustainability Camp, "Together We Draw a Greener Future", integrating Qatar National Vision 2030 values in collaboration with national partners.

"I'm really grateful to Northwestern Qatar for giving me the opportunity to explore my passions and grow," al-Kuwari said. "This recognition motivates me to stay committed and to do my part in carrying forward this journey of excellence."

## Katara International Ramadan Open Classical Chess tourney starts today



Mohammed al-Mudahka at last year's competition.

The Katara International Ramadan Open Classical Chess Championship is set to begin today at Building 15, bringing together 86 male and female players from various age groups.

The tournament is organised by the Qatar Chess Association (QCA) and will continue until March 1.

The first round of the nine-round classical chess competition, played under the Swiss system (45 minutes + 30 seconds increment per move), will feature several players ranked on the International Chess Federation (FIDE) list.

QCA president Mohammed al-Mudahka expressed his pleasure at the continuation of the championship, describing it as one of the most prominent events on the federation's annual calendar.

In a statement to the Qatar News Agency (QNA), he noted that the organising committee has completed all preparations for the start of the competition.

He highlighted the tournament's importance in providing participants with valuable experience, particularly given the large number of rated players com-

peting in the international event.

Al-Mudahka thanked Katara Cultural Village for its efforts in ensuring the continuity of the tournament.

He emphasised the federation's commitment to such partnerships and its keenness to institutionalise these championships within the annual calendar to further develop the skills of national team players and strengthen their presence in upcoming competitions.

The total prize fund amounts to QR25,000, with QR5,000 awarded to the first-place winner.

Prizes will also be given to the top 10 finishers, as well as special awards for the best Qatari players across several age categories, in addition to prizes designated for players from the Qatar Chess Association Training Centre.

The Katara Classical Chess Championship is considered one of the federation's most prominent annual events.

It is held each year during the Holy Month of Ramadan and has provided significant support to national teams across all age categories.

## West Lake Motors announces Ramadan offer

West Lake Motors, a subsidiary of Al Mana Holding, has announced the launch of its "Celebrate the Spirit of Ramadan - Get An iPhone 17 Pro Max with Every Car" offer.

As part of this special Holy Month offer, customers who purchase any SOUEAST S06, S07, or S09 will receive an iPhone 17 Pro Max, combining premium mobility with a valuable lifestyle upgrade.

The offer, valid until March 31, is available across the SOUEAST lineup, including the S06, S07, and S09.

It features competitive monthly payments starting from QR1,299 for the S06, QR1,499 for the S07, and QR1,899 for the S09.

Customers may also benefit from in-house financing on a four-year plan, along with a comprehensive after-sales package that includes a one-year or 20,000km (whichever comes first), a 10-year or 1,000,000km engine warranty (whichever comes first), and an iPhone 17 Pro Max in orange with every eligible purchase during the offer period.

These offers apply exclusively to retail sales of SOUEAST S06, S07, and S09 models for 2026.

"The Holy Month of Ramadan is a time

when values come to the forefront trust, generosity, and responsibility," said West Lake Motors chief operating officer Moncef Ahabchane. "At West Lake Motors, we see this season as a moment to act on those values, not just speak about them. Every decision we make is guided by one direction - Delivering something truly meaningful to our customers in Qatar."

"This offer reflects how we approach the market, customer-focused, and driven by real understanding of local needs," he continued. "Through SOUEAST, we are offering more than attractive pricing or incentives; we deliver accessible premium mobility, supported by flexible financing, strong aftersales support, and service standards our customers can depend on."

"Our ambition is clear, to build confidence from the first interaction and earn long-term trust with every journey," Ahabchane added.

The SOUEAST S06 - a C-segment SUV designed for modern urban life, offers bold exterior styling and cutting-edge tech.

It is powered by a choice of a 1.5-litre turbocharged engine delivering 156hp and 230Nm of torque, or a 1.6-litre tur-

bocharged engine producing 197hp and 290Nm of torque.

Both are paired with efficient dual-clutch transmissions.

For those seeking the ultimate in innovation, the S06 DM plug-in hybrid stands out with a combined output of 355hp and 530Nm of torque, an electric-assisted range of up to 1,000km, and acceleration from 0-100kph in just 7.2 seconds.

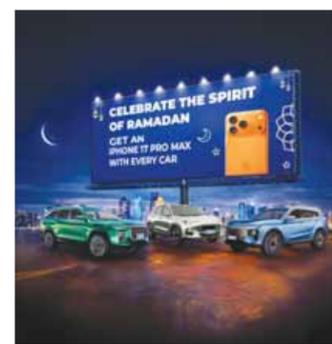
Inside, the S06 is engineered for a connected and comfortable ride, featuring a 15.6" infotainment touchscreen with wireless Apple CarPlay and Android Auto, a premium 8-speaker Sony sound system, and intelligent voice control.

Other highlights include a 540-degree panoramic, eagle-eye-view camera, 20" alloy wheels, ambient lighting, a panoramic sunroof, and an automatic tailgate.

For drivers and families needing more space and adaptability, the SOUEAST S07 delivers a refined, 7-seater experience with smart versatility.

It comes with either a 1.5-litre or 1.6-litre turbocharged engine, with front-wheel or all-wheel drive configurations.

The cabin boasts a striking 24.6" com-



bined digital display, wireless smartphone connectivity, a Sony premium audio system, ambient lighting, and a panoramic sunroof.

Leading the lineup is the SOUEAST S09 - a flagship D-segment SUV built for those who demand premium comfort, power, and innovation.

Powered by a 2.0-litre turbocharged engine producing 237hp and 375Nm of torque, the S09 is offered in both front-wheel and all-wheel-drive options, paired with either a 7-speed DCT or 8-speed automatic transmission.

## Qatar's date harvest bears fruit

From Page 1

He pointed out that the ministry contributes to marketing Qatari fresh dates through local agricultural produce markets and retail outlets, as well as through agricultural festivals, events, and exhibitions, including the Qatar International Agricultural Exhibition "AgriteQ 2026" and the Local Dates Festival, held annually in co-operation with Souq Waqif, where farm owners are able to sell products directly to consumers.

Al-Yafei added that the country's date production in 2025 reached approximately 24,000 tonnes of various main varieties, including Khalas, Shishi, Barhi, and Khunaizi. He further explained that an annual project has been implemented since 2006 to purchase locally produced dates from registered farms, with an annual budget of QR10mn to support the initiative.

Approximately 860 tonnes of dates are purchased annually from local farms and processed by two domestic factories. - QNA

## Qatar nears food self-sufficiency

From Page 1

The fisheries sector has grown in parallel, valued around QR173mn in 2025 and projected to exceed \$241mn by 2031, aligning with efforts to push fresh fish self-sufficiency from 65% in 2025 to 80% by 2030.

Complementing these achievements, Qatar hosts annual events that promote agricultural and livestock development, including the Qatar International Agri-

cultural Exhibition (AgriteQ), the Hala Qatar livestock festival, and various farmers' markets and food sector gatherings.

The country also garnered international recognition with its successful hosting of the International Horticultural Expo 2023 Doha - the first of its kind in the Middle East and North Africa - under the theme *Green Desert*, Better Environment, covering 1.7mn sq m in Al Bidda Park.

## Al Zaman Exchange expands footprint with 33rd branch inauguration



Officials and guests at the latest branch in Al Sadd area. PICTURE: Thajudheen

By Shaima Sherif  
Staff Reporter

Al Zaman Exchange has strengthened its nationwide presence with the opening of its 33rd branch, marking another milestone in its customer-driven expansion strategy across Qatar's growing financial services sector.

Founded in 1978, the company - one of Qatar's longest-standing foreign exchange and remittance providers - has grown from a modest network into one of the country's most recognisable exchange houses.

It is supported by more than 250 financial professionals and partnerships with global networks including Western Union, MoneyGram and Mastercard.

Al Zaman Exchange general manager Anwar Sadath described the new branch as part of a broader growth roadmap, shaped

largely by customer demand.

"We have a plan to open more branches, inshallah, in the future," he said, noting that additional outlets are already in the pipeline. "The next branch is coming in Lagoona Mall... and we have approved two more branches in Izghawa and Garafa."

Sadath added that the company aims to expand across Qatar with the support of what he described as "a good team".

Operations manager Zubair Abdul Rahiman Kotikulam said the newly opened branch responds directly to community requests.

"It's our beloved customers' request... we were not present in this area for a long time, and so we are opening our new branch in this area," he said.

Kotikulam highlighted that customer feedback has been central to the company's rapid expansion.

"Three or four years back, we were present in only six or eight branches," he

said. "As per the customers' wish, their survey and their request, we are expanding our network throughout Qatar."

The company now operates 33 branches and has outlined an ambitious long-term vision.

"Inshallah, 2028 is our 50th year celebration," Kotikulam said. "By then, we want to open 50 branches across Qatar. That is our vision, that is our plan."

"Customer satisfaction, customer feedback is very important. Our customers are the ones who made us stand tall in this market," he added.

With services spanning multi-currency transfers across over 27 countries, corporate solutions, travel cards and 24/7 digital remittances, Al Zaman Exchange continues to position itself as a trusted financial partner for Qatar's residents, four decades after its founding under the leadership of managing director Saleh Ahmed A al-Zaman.

# QRDI Council hosts demo day for the Industry-Led Innovation Quest

Qatar Research, Development, and Innovation (QRDI) Council hosted the Industry-Led Innovation Quest Demo Day and Awards Ceremony, bringing together academic leadership, industry partners, and key ecosystem stakeholders to spotlight innovative, industry-driven solutions developed by emerging talent.

The event featured nine teams presenting concise, impact-focused solutions in response to real-world challenge statements led by industry partners.

The half-day programme began with networking, followed by a dedicated showcasing session where judges engaged directly with the finalist teams to review their solutions.

The top three teams will receive cash prizes, and three students will be selected for an internship at the Iberdrola offices, where they will gain hands-on experience working alongside experienced AI product teams.



Aysha al-Mudahka

Opening remarks were delivered by Aysha al-Mudahka, senior director of Research, Development and Innovation pro-



The event featured nine teams presenting concise, impact-focused solutions in response to real-world challenge statements led by industry partners.

grammes at QRDI Council; Elena Barrio, Chief Product Officer at East-West Digital representing

Iberdrola; and Prashant Rizada, founder and CEO of Lumi Network, setting the context for strengthened academia-industry collaboration and cross-sector innovation.

The Industry-Led Innovation Quest Demo Day and Awards Ceremony exemplify QRDI Council's continued commitment to advancing collaboration between academia and industry, accelerating the translation of innovative ideas into practical applications, and strengthening Qatar's research, development, and innovation ecosystem.

By creating a platform for emerging talent to address industry-defined challenges, the event reinforced the critical role of cross-sector partnerships in driving sustainable economic growth and national capability development.

## Doha College celebrates double recognition at MENA school awards

Doha College was recently awarded Highly Commended in two prestigious categories at the MENA School Excellence Awards 2026, receiving "Highly Commended" for School of the Year and Principal of the Year. The College was also shortlisted for Pupil Wellbeing and Inclusion, marking a significant regional acknowledgement of its holistic educational model and sector-leading impact.

The MENA School Excellence Awards celebrate excellence and innovation across international schools in the UAE and wider Middle East and North Africa region. Being recognised in two flagship categories places Doha College among the most respected and forward-thinking schools in the region.

Founded in 1980 by the British Embassy, Doha College has grown into one of the largest not-for-profit British international schools in the world, serving nearly 3,000 pupils from almost 90 nationalities. As an independent school, all resources are reinvested to enhance the educational experience, facilities, and professional development of staff, ensuring long-term, sustainable excellence.

This recognition follows an exceptional year for the College. Pupils achieved some of the strongest GCSE and A-Level results in the region, securing an impressive 34 examination awards across Pearson Edexcel, Cambridge International and Oxford AQA qualifications, more than any school globally. Ninety per cent of graduates progressed to Russell Group universities, with 36 pupils earning places on competitive medical degree programmes. Enrolment has reached record levels, reflecting growing confidence from families across the region.

David Tongue, principal of Doha College, said: "This recognition is a testament to the extraordinary commitment of our pupils, staff and families. I am personally honoured to have received the Highly Commended,



Principal of the Year



School of the year

Principal of the Year Award, but this achievement truly reflects the collective strength, dedication and shared vision of our entire community?"

David Lish, Chief Operating Officer of Doha College, added: "There are so many elements to both of these awards, but central to both is the wonderfully aspirational and supportive community we have. What we do and achieve - who we are - is the culmination of a great deal of work throughout the year and we'll strive to keep going on our pursuit of excellence." Doha College continues to deliver a deeply holistic education. The distinctive DC Learner Profile underpins the curriculum, encouraging pupils to develop confidence,

creativity, resilience, intellectual curiosity and ethical awareness. The Positively DC initiative promotes kindness, gratitude and inclusivity, while a unified House System fosters belonging and continuity across all age groups. Over 300 co-curricular activities, alongside participation in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and regional Model United Nations conferences, ensure pupils develop leadership, collaboration and service-mindedness.

The Highly Commended recognition in both categories underscores Doha College's position as one of the leading international schools in the Middle East and a benchmark for excellence in holistic education.

## Second edition of the Ramadan Blitz Chess Championship kicks off

The second edition of the Ramadan Blitz Chess Championship, organised by the Qatar Chess Federation and the Doha Youth Centre, kicked off yesterday (Feb 19) at the Friends of the Environment Center headquarters with the participation of 70 male and female players. This internationally rated tournament aims to promote chess in Qatar and provide a strong competitive platform for players during the holy month. The championship features strong participation from internationally rated players, raising the level of competition. According to the tournament regulations, participation is open to all age groups of players who hold an international rating number (FIDE ID). The organising committee has allocated valuable prizes to the top five winners, as well as special awards for the best male and female Qatari players and the best Qatari players in the Under-16 and Under-12 categories, to encourage local talent and support their development in the game. The organisers confirmed that the tournament will apply the regulations of the International Chess Federation, with strict enforcement of a "zero-tolerance" policy regarding electronic devices to ensure fair play. This event comes as part of the joint efforts between the Doha Youth Centre and the Qatar Chess Federation to promote the game and develop players' standards in the country.



Hamad al-Tamimi, executive director of the Qatar Chess Federation, stated that the organisation of the second edition follows the success of last year's first edition and its strong turnout. He reaffirmed the federation's commitment to building partnerships with various entities and institutions in the country and organising tournaments to spread chess culture within the community.



## Qatar Charity's Alaqraboon Centre launches 'Smart Coupon' service for food aid

As part of its efforts to develop innovative digital solutions that support charitable work, Qatar Charity's (QC) Alaqraboon Centre has launched the "Smart Coupon" service - one of its first flagship initiatives designed to provide food assistance to low-income families in Qatar through a modern approach that preserves beneficiaries' privacy and ensures efficient and reliable delivery of aid.

The service has been launched, in co-operation with Taqat Trading and Business Solutions, the technical developer of the platform, and Meera Consumer Goods Company, the first service provider partner.

The launch event also witnessed the signing of two memoranda of understanding with Al Meera and Taqat.

The initiative is being implemented under Qatar Charity's Ramadan Campaign for this year, "Good Starts With You," which focuses on placing donors at the heart of the giving process while enhancing the speed and quality of development project and humani-

tarian and social assistance starting this year.

The service was launched in the presence of Mohamed al-Ghamdi, deputy CEO of Governance and Corporate Services at Qatar Charity; Faisal AlFehaida, executive director of the Alaqraboon Centre; Mohammed Rashid AlKaabi, chairman of QC Companies; and Jassim Mohammed al-Ansari, CEO of Al Meera.

The project reflects the Alaqraboon Centre's commitment to adopting modern mechanisms that meet beneficiaries' needs. A total of QR5mm has been allocated to the initiative, enabling families to choose their food needs within carefully designed categories that ensure fair distribution and comprehensive support.

The Smart Coupon service is based on direct digital link with service providers, led by Al Meera as the first partner in the project implementation, allowing beneficiaries to use the coupon directly and flexibly at retail outlets.

The Smart Coupon uses a QR code instead of paper vouchers, making it easy to use while pro-



tecting beneficiaries' privacy. It allows them to choose the food items they need and complete their purchase quickly and smoothly at stores.

Eligible families can apply through the Alaqraboon mobile application, with requests reviewed and approved within 48 hours based on verified data and thorough validation procedures to ensure assistance reaches those most in need. The service also al-

lows donors to make instant donations, which will be directly linked to the coupon system, ensuring swift and effective delivery of support.

Al-Ghamdi said that the launch of the Smart Coupon service marks a qualitative step toward facilitating access to basic needs for low income families in Qatar during Ramadan. He noted that the initiative relies on advanced digital solutions that ensure the speed

and accuracy of aid delivery while preserving beneficiaries' dignity, praising the role of the Alaqraboon Centre and the partnership with Al Meera in enhancing the quality of social services.

AlFehaida said the initiative reflects Qatar Charity's commitment to developing the social care sector in Qatar, which has become one of its largest areas of work. He explained that this is being achieved by enhancing

services that promote transparency, improve the use of resources, and respect beneficiaries' privacy through advanced, easy to use digital solutions, while supporting Qatar Charity's direction toward faster and higher quality project implementation starting this year.

He also thanked Taqat for developing the service and Al Meera for its longstanding partnership with Qatar Charity and its role as the project's service provider.

AlKaabi said the Smart Coupon service shows Qatar Charity's commitment to using digital solutions to improve charitable work, strengthen partnerships with local companies, and ensure aid reaches those in need quickly and efficiently.

Al-Ansari said the company is pleased to partner in the Smart Coupon initiative, describing it as an important step toward providing innovative digital solutions that serve beneficiaries, while reaffirming the company's commitment to meeting their needs and supporting the initiative's future development.



# Philippine Muslim Federation Qatar holds community activities

The Philippine Muslim Federation (PMF) Qatar successfully conducted back-to-back community activities in early February, strengthening unity and promoting Islamic values among Filipino Muslims in the country.

On February 4, PMF organised the 2nd PMF Bowling Tournament at the Qatar Bowling Centre. The event served as a fundraising activity for the upcoming Qur'an for Kids Season 5. A total of 10 teams participated and showed strong support for the noble cause.

The Philippine Muslim Association emerged as the champion of this year's tournament. The Organisation of Muslim Mindanao Overseas Workers secured second place, followed by Al Sa-

laam Inc in third. Davao Muslim Organisation Qatar in fourth place and Team Primoz in fifth. Other participating teams included the Philippine Overseas Muslim Development Association, Team Radz, Al Muttahidat, HMC-POGS, and Fazicaldo.

The tournament was marked by a spirit of sportsmanship, friendship, and brotherhood among the participants, making it a memorable evening for the community.

On February 6, PMF conducted another major activity in preparation for the blessed month of Ramadan. The PMF Istiqbal Ramadan programme was held at the Academia International Institute and Studies. The event featured three esteemed speakers: Ustadz Mohammad Bin Mohd Tayb Sa-



catan Pagayawan, Ustadz Zacaria Abbas Madale, and Ustadz Tirmidhi Musa, who shared valuable insights on spiritual and physical preparation for Ramadan.

PMF president Cary Yasir M Aragat thanked all supporters and participants who contributed to the success of the programme. He also extended special appreciation



to Annaliza Noor Diet for generously allowing the organisation to use its hall as the venue. Aragat said that PMF has lined up several meaningful activities for the month of Ramadan and beyond, including a Ramadan Lecture and Iftar on February 20, the Qur'an for Kids Season 5 on March 7, the PMF Ramadan Umrah, and the PMF Post-Eid'1 Fitr celebration. These programmes aim to further strengthen faith, unity, and active participation within the Filipino Muslim community in Qatar.

# DPS-Modern Indian School celebrates Sport Day

DPS-Modern Indian School conducted its annual Sport Day with great enthusiasm, showcasing student athleticism, discipline, and teamwork through a range of competitive and cultural sporting events.

The event was inaugurated in the presence of chief guest Abdul Nasser, noted sportsperson, and guest of honour Yasir Nainar, president of the DPS Group of Institutions, along with members of the school management and leadership team.

Proceedings commenced with a synchronised March Drill and a March Past by the school's four houses – Lily, Lotus, Rose, and Tulip – highlighting coordination and house spirit. Traditional displays including Leziem and Mallakhamb added cultural richness to the programme and were



well received by the audience. Students competed in track events such as the Relay Race and the 50-metre dash, with inter-house participation encouraging healthy competition and teamwork. Students who brought lau-

rels to the school in the CBSE and national level sports competitions were felicitated at the event. The celebration emphasised values central to sports education – discipline, resilience, and sportsmanship – aligning with

the school's focus on holistic student development. The Sport Day concluded successfully, reinforcing DPS Modern Indian School's commitment to nurturing balanced growth through academic and co-curricular excellence.



# DPS-MIS shines at Pi Day 2026 Mathematics Competition



DPS-Modern Indian School has once again demonstrated its mathematical excellence by securing a place among the top four finalists in the prestigious Pi Day Mathematics Competition 2026 (Preliminary Round), marking the school's eighth consecutive year of outstanding performance in this national-level competition.

Organised by Carnegie Mellon University in Qatar, the Pi Day Mathematics Competition was introduced in 2016 aimed at inspiring high school students to deepen their mathematical understanding and engage in healthy academic competition.

The 2026 preliminary round, held on February 14 witnessed participation from nearly 100 schools across Qatar, making the achievement even more commendable. Displaying exceptional analytical

thinking, teamwork, and problem-solving skills, the students of DPS-Modern Indian School delivered an impressive performance to secure their place in the final round. The grand finale is scheduled to be held on March 14.

Members of the finalist team are: Anish Sambara, Abhinand Sakalabhaktula, Praveen Manikandan, and Ritesh Vardhan Reddy, with Umasankar Sambara as their mentor. This remarkable achievement reflects the school's unwavering commitment to academic excellence and its continuous efforts to nurture analytical thinking and competitive spirit among students. The consistent success of DPS-Modern Indian School in this esteemed competition reaffirms its position as a leading institution in fostering mathematical talent at both national and international levels.

# Inauguration and installation of Scouts and Guides at MES



MES Indian School (evening shift) marked a proud milestone with the inauguration and installation ceremony of the Scouts and Guides Unit on February 8 at the KG Hall. The occasion signified a new chapter in strengthening leadership, discipline, and community service among students.

In his speech, the principal, Dr Hameeda Kadar, highlighted the importance of character, commitment, and teamwork in shaping responsible citizens. The presence of the senior vice principal, Shihabudheen Pulath, and the headmistress, Sameena

Ashfaq, added prestige and encouragement to the programme.

The event was followed by the distribution of uniforms, symbolising unity, responsibility, and readiness to serve. The students solemnly reaffirmed their pledge, expressing their dedication to upholding the movement's values and spirit.

The event concluded with appreciation for the dedicated in-charges and gratitude to the management for their continued support in empowering the evening shift through meaningful student initiatives.

# MES staff honoured at community sports meet

Two Physical Education faculty members of MES Indian School were recently felicitated at the 7th Edition of the Expats Sportive Community Sports Meet 2026 in recognition of their exemplary contributions to the field of sports. Steeson K Mathew and Mohamed Navas were accorded special honours during the grand inaugural ceremony, which celebrated individuals who have made significant strides in the sporting community and recognised their outstanding achievements and dedicated commitment to promoting sporting excellence.

Mathew, an International Asian Masters Athletics bronze medalist in javelin throw at the championship held in the Philippines, was honoured by First Lt Abdul Aziz al-Mohannadi in appreciation of his remarkable contributions and excellence in athletics.

Navas, an Indian handball team player and bronze medalist at the World Masters Games 2025 held in Taiwan, received his honour from Satheesh, CFO of Al Ajjaj Limited Company. The ceremony celebrated the achievements of Qatar-based international athletes and acknowledged their significant contributions to the promotion and de-



Mohamed Navas (left)

velopment of sports. The recognition of the MES Indian School staff members highlighted their dedication and commitment to sporting excellence, bringing pride to the institution.



Steeson K Mathew (left)

# IIS holds graduation ceremony for Class XII students



Ideal Indian School (IIS) recently held a graduation ceremony to honour its outgoing Class XII students. Dressed in ceremonial robes and caps, the graduating students marched to the KG Auditorium for the momentous occasion. Acting principal Mohammad Azam Khan, head of the Boys' and Girls' sections welcomed the students and extended their best wishes for success in the upcoming CBSE board exams. During his keynote address, Azam Khan reflected on the significance of this important milestone,

reminding students that it marks both the completion of their school life and the beginning of a new chapter. He urged them to embrace the future with confidence, perseverance, and a love for learning, and to follow their dreams with honesty and commitment. He also explained the recent CBSE reforms in the Class XII examinations. As part of the ceremony, the acting principal, along with the section heads, distributed the examination hall tickets to the students.





Canada has launched a new programme to attract highly skilled immigrants, including specialised military recruits, as it moves to overhaul a system the government says had become unsustainable.

Canada has for decades been a top destination for economic migrants from the developing world, but in 2024 then-

## Canada makes push to attract skilled migrants

prime minister Justin Trudeau said too many people had been let in too quickly, straining the healthcare system and housing stocks.

Prime Minister Mark Carney has echoed Trudeau's message, saying in October that his government was "getting immi-

gration under control" while promising to bring in migrants with the skills needed to boost a Canadian economy facing unprecedented threats from US tariffs.

Carney, seeking to reduce reliance on the United States, announced a new defence strategy on Tuesday that aims over

the next decade to lift government investment in defence-related research and development by 85%, boost defence industry revenues by more than 240%, increase defence exports by 50% and create up to 125,000 quality new jobs.

His immigration minister, Lena

Metlege Diab, on Wednesday unveiled a new scheme she said would help "attract the best talent to Canada".

"We're not waiting for the right people to find us. We will go out into the world to recruit the people our country needs," Diab said. "Canada's future depends on a workforce ready for a changing economy?"

- AFP/Reuters

## Dozens die in militant attacks in northwest Nigeria

Religious militants have killed dozens of people and destroyed seven villages in raids in northwestern Nigeria's Kebbi state, the police told AFP yesterday.

Members of the Lakurawa group attacked villages in the Bui district of Arewa northern region around 1.15pm (1215 GMT) on Wednesday, said Kebbi state police spokesman Bashir Usman.

A security report seen by AFP said the religious militants had killed "more than 30 villagers".

Usman told AFP: "Scores of people were killed as residents from Mamunu, Awasaka, Tungan Tsoho, Makangara, Kanzo, Gorun Naidal, and Dan Mai Ago mobilised to resist the attackers."

A resident in one of the villages told AFP that at least 35 people had been killed.

"We were in our homes, we heard gunshots," said the resident of Kanzo. "People outside began to run into their shelters, gunshots hit some people."

Police spokesman Usman said the attackers had also made off with cattle in the raids.

Police, soldiers and local militia were immediately sent to the area, he added.

The attacks came days after the state hosted the Unesco-listed Argungu fishing festival, about 60km (38 miles) from the Arewa region, where the attacks took place.

The Lakurawa group has been blamed for many of the attacks on communities in the northern part of the state and in neighbouring Sokoto state.

Its members stage raids from their forest base, rustling livestock and imposing "taxes" on locals.

The West African nation is grappling with a more than 16-year religious militant insurgency in the northeast, as well as a farmer-herder conflict in the north central region.

They also have to contend with a violent secessionist agitation in the southeast, and kidnappings for ransom plague the northwest. - AFP/Reuters

# Gaza committee starts recruiting police, draws 2,000 applicants

Reuters  
Jerusalem/Cairo

The US-backed Palestinian committee established to take control of Gaza from Hamas has opened applications for a police force for the enclave, as President Donald Trump convened the inaugural meeting of his international Board of Peace.

Trump announced billions of dollars of contributions for Gaza's reconstruction and his administration detailed plans for a UN-authorized stabilisation force for the territory at the meeting in Washington. Establishing security in Gaza is one of many formidable hurdles.

The National Committee for the Administration of Gaza (NCAG) said in a statement on X that a recruitment process "is open to qualified men and women who wish to serve in the police force".

It included a link to a website where Palestinians can apply.

Applicants must be residents of Gaza aged 18-35, have no criminal record, and be in good physical shape, it said.

Some 2,000 Palestinians signed up for the police force in the first hours after applications went live, Nikolay Mladenov, the Trump-appointed envoy overseeing post-war coordination in Gaza, told the Board of Peace meeting.

Jasper Jeffers, an Army major-general who was appointed commander of a UN-authorized multinational peacekeeping force for Gaza, told the meeting that the force's long-term plan is to train some 12,000 police officers for Gaza.

Reuters previously reported that Islamist group Hamas was seeking to incorporate its 10,000 police officers into a new US-backed Palestinian administration for Gaza.

The group ruled before the war prompted by its attack on Israel and has resumed ad-

ministration, despite Israel's vow to destroy it.

Hamas retains control of just under half of Gaza following an October ceasefire deal brokered by US President Donald Trump, with over 50% occupied by Israel.

Israel's withdrawal and Hamas's disarmament are among the major stumbling blocks as the US seeks to move forward with its peace plan for the strip.

The 20-point plan to end the war, now in its second phase, calls for the governance of Gaza to be handed to the NCAG, which is meant to exclude Hamas.

In its statement, the NCAG said it respects "the dedication of the police officers who continued to serve their people amidst the bombardment, displacement, and exceptionally difficult circumstances".

It did not say whether the future police recruits could include members of the current Gazan police force, which has served while

the strip has been under Hamas control.

The NCAG and Hamas did not immediately respond to a Reuters request for comment on the matter.

Hamas spokesperson Hazem Qassem previously told Reuters that the group was prepared to hand over governance to the 15-member NCAG and its chair, Ali Shaath, with immediate effect.

"We (have) full confidence that it will operate on the basis of benefiting from qualified personnel and not wasting the rights of anyone who worked during the previous period," Qassem said, referring to the inclusion of more than 40,000 civil servants and security personnel.

Israel has adamantly rejected any Hamas involvement in Gaza's future.

Gaza has been devastated by over two years of an Israeli onslaught on the strip, which killed more than 72,000 Palestinians according to local health authorities and left much of the strip in ruins.

## US orders curbs on new FEMA deployments

Reuters  
Washington

US President Donald Trump's administration has ordered the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to suspend the deployment of hundreds of aid workers to disaster-affected areas around the country while the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is shut down, internal messages reviewed by Reuters showed.

The DHS, which the FEMA is part of, entered a partial shutdown on Saturday, but has largely continued to operate since most of its functions are deemed essential.

The shutdown happened after Republicans and Democrats failed to reach a deal on immigration enforcement reforms.

"The DHS has issued a stop-travel order for all DHS funded travel, effecting 2/18/26, for the duration of the lapse in appropriation. Currently this DOES include disaster travel," accord-



This picture taken in December last year shows members of a FEMA California Task Force 4 search and rescue squad wading through floodwaters from the Green River, in Kent, Washington, US. - Reuters

ing to an internal e-mail sent by Kurt Weirich, a chief of staff at the FEMA.

More than 300 FEMA disaster responders were preparing for upcoming assignments but were told to stand down, including some who are currently at a training facility, CNN reported earlier.

The DHS has defended the move, saying yesterday that the FEMA was required by law to cease some activities because funding was stalled and that travel to "active disasters" had not been paused.

"Due to the lapse in federal funding caused by the congressional Democrats, the DHS

issued guidance restricting travel and certain operational activities," the department said on X. "These limitations are not a choice but are necessary to comply with federal law."

The freeze comes after Trump said on Monday that the federal government will step in to protect the Potomac River following the collapse of a major sewer pipe in the Washington, DC, region last month.

A sewer line in Montgomery County, Maryland, collapsed on January 19, causing an overflow of more than 240mn gallons (909mn litres) of wastewater into the Potomac River.

Trump said the FEMA, which has seen significant staff cuts since he took office in January 2025, will co-ordinate the response.

So far, however, the FEMA has deployed few, if any, resources to assist with the sewage spill, CNN reported, citing three agency officials.

The FEMA's mission is to help people before, during and after disasters.

## ICE authority to detain refugees gets expanded

The Trump administration has given immigration officers broader powers to detain legal refugees awaiting a green card to ensure they are "re-vetted", an apparent expansion of the president's wide-ranging crackdown on legal and illegal immigration, according to a government memo.

The US Department of Homeland Security (DHS), in a memo dated February 18 and submitted in a federal court filing, said refugees must return to government custody for "inspection and examination" a year after their admission into the United States.

"This detain-and-inspect requirement ensures that refugees are re-vetted after one year, aligns post-admission vetting with that applied to other applicants for admission, and promotes public safety," the department said in the memo.

Under US law, refugees must apply for lawful permanent resident status one year after their arrival in the country.

The new memo authorises immigration authorities to detain individuals for the duration of the re-inspection process. - Reuters

## Palestinian journalists cite 'systematic abuse' in Israeli prisons: CPJ

AFP  
New York

Palestinian journalists held in Israeli prisons from October 2023 to January 2026 have suffered "systematic abuse", according to a Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) report published yesterday.

Of 59 correspondents interviewed, "all but one reported being subjected to what they described as torture, abuse, or other forms of violence", the New York-based watchdog said in a statement.

CPJ director Jodie Ginsberg urged the international community to "take action" over the reports of abuse.

"The scale and consistency of these tes-

timonies point to something far beyond isolated misconduct," she said.

The CPJ said journalists spoke of beatings, prolonged restraint in painful positions, and exposure to loud music, barking and bomb noises.

They also described unsanitary living conditions, medical neglect and food deprivation.

The CPJ said the interviewees lost 23.5kg (52 pounds) on average while in detention.

Yousef Sharaf, one of the journalists, testified that abscesses formed on his infected wounds due to beatings and that another detainee, a surgeon, carried out improvised operations due to a lack of proper medical care.

Another prisoner, Mohammed al-At-rash, claimed that before his release he

was ordered to cease all journalistic activity: "They told me if you write as much as 'good morning' on your socials, we will find out."

Most of the prisoners were placed in administrative detention, a system that allows them to be held without charge for a potentially unlimited period. None were prosecuted.

Most were prevented from communicating with their lawyers, according to the CPJ.

The nonprofit said Israel's military did not comment on the specific allegations.

However, a spokesperson said detainees "are treated in accordance with international law".

The spokesperson added that Israeli armed forces "have never, and will never,

deliberately target journalists" and that any violations of protocol "will be looked into".

Israel's prison service, also contacted by the CPJ on the allegations, said that to its knowledge "no such events have occurred".

It also said all prisoners are detained according to the law with basic rights fully upheld, and that they can file complaints as needed.

Israel has jailed an increasing number of journalists since 2023, the year Israel responded to the events of October 7 with a devastating war in the Gaza Strip.

The CPJ has recorded at least 94 journalists and one Palestinian media worker detained between October 2023 and January 2026.

As of February 19, 30 were still behind bars.

## Former judge picked as Peru's eighth president since 2016

Peruvian lawmakers picked Jose Maria Balcasar as the country's new interim president on Wednesday, after previous leader Jose Jeri was impeached on graft allegations.

The left-wing lawmaker was elected head of Peru's Congress after a vote broadcast live on TV, meaning the 83-year-old lawyer and former judge will become the country's eighth head of state since 2016.

The vote brought to an end a power vacuum of more than 24 hours, unprecedented in the country's recent history.

Balcasar will lead the country until his successor takes office on July 28, after the presidential election on April 12.

"In these few months that remain, we will guarantee the people of Peru a peaceful and transparent democratic and electoral transition, leaving no room for doubt in the elections," Balcasar said in a speech to parliament.

Jeri, 39, became the latest leader to fall victim to a cycle of institutional turmoil as Congress battles a weakened executive against a backdrop of chronic corruption and rising violence.

On Tuesday, he was ousted by lawmakers for suspected involvement in the irregular hiring of several women in his government and alleged graft involving a Chinese businessman.

Jeri maintains his innocence, but for ordinary Peruvians, the political upheaval is just a sideshow to their own daily lives becoming increasingly precarious. "We live in uncertainty," Erick Solorzano, a 29-year-old Peruvian doctor, told AFP, with just two months to go to new presidential elections.

In ten years, four presidents have been impeached, two stepped down to avoid the same fate and only one managed to complete his intended term. - AFP

## 8 skiers missing in California avalanche found dead

AFP/Reuters  
Los Angeles

Eight of the nine skiers missing in California after an avalanche have been found dead and one remains missing in horrific blizzard conditions, police said on Wednesday. Rescuers have been desperately searching for the group, which was caught in the avalanche early on Tuesday on Castle Peak in the Tahoe area.

Earlier, six skiers were found alive, two of them being taken to hospital.

"We are still looking for one of the members at this time," Nevada County Sheriff Shannan Moon said, cautioning that the storm is hampering any movement. "Extreme weather conditions I would say is an understatement: lots of snow, gale-force winds, winds making it impossible to see."

Sugar Bowl Academy said multiple victims were linked to the private, ski-focused school, without identifying the people.

"We are an incredibly close and connected community. This tragedy has affected each and every one of us," Stephen McMahon, the

school's executive director, said in a statement. "The best thing we can do is surround our athletes and families with care and support while providing the necessary space and time for grief and healing."

Blackbird Mountain Guides, the company leading the doomed backcountry trip, said the 11 clients and four guides had been staying at the Frog Lake huts since Sunday and were "in the process of returning" back to base.

More than 40 first responders launched the search, according to officials, including "highly skilled rescue ski teams" from both Boreal Mountain Ski Resort and Tahoe Donner's Alder Creek Adventure Centre.

However, after quickly finding the six known survivors, the teams came up empty handed.

Experts had warned of severe avalanche risk. And Placer County Sheriff Wayne Woo pleaded with the public to stay away until the weather clears. "Please avoid the Sierras during this current storm and in the upcoming days, avoid mountain travel. It's treacherous."

California Governor Gavin Newsom has been briefed on the operation.

In a typical winter, the mountain receives more than 400" (10.16m) of snow, making it

one of the snowiest places in the Western Hemisphere.

Moon said the storm and avalanche danger were predicted and her office was talking with the guide company about its decision to take people out.

A powerful storm packing several feet of snow has continued to pummel the Sierra Nevada mountain range.

Sugar Bowl Resort, in the immediate area, is reporting 67" (1.7m) of snowfall there in the past week, including 30 inches from Tuesday to mid-day on Wednesday.

The National Weather Service (NWS) said parts of the Sierra Nevadas above 3,500' could see up to eight feet of snow, with wind gusts as strong as 55mph (90kph).

Sheriff's office Captain Russell Green also told local station KCRA that backcountry skiing is inherently dangerous.

"People go out and use the backcountry at all times," Green said. "We advise against it, obviously, but I wouldn't say that it's uncommon. Not that it was a wise choice."

The Colorado Avalanche Information Centre has tallied six US avalanche fatalities so far this season, including one in Castle Peak in January.

# South Korea ex-president gets life in prison for insurrection

AFP  
Seoul

A South Korean court declared former president Yoon Suk-yeol's martial law bid in 2024 an insurrection, sentencing the disgraced leader to life in prison yesterday.

Yoon abruptly declared martial law in a televised address in December 2024, saying drastic measures were needed to root out "anti-state forces".

Although Yoon's bid to impose military rule lasted just six hours, it triggered widespread panic in a nation seen as a beacon of democracy in Asia.

The Seoul Central District Court found Yoon guilty of leading an insurrection, designed to "paralyse" his many critics in the National Assembly.

"The declaration of martial law resulted in enormous social costs, and it is difficult to find any indication that the defendant has expressed remorse for that," presiding judge Ji Gwi-yeon said.

Prosecutors had sought the harshest penalty for Yoon's insurrection charges, urging the court

to sentence him to death.

South Korea has an unofficial moratorium on capital punishment, with the last death row prisoners executed in 1997.

Yoon was a deeply unpopular president at the time of the martial law crisis.

His party was vastly outmuscled in parliament, which had voted to block budget measures and impeach key figures in his administration.

With support from senior military figures, Yoon dispatched troops to seize control of the assembly building and arrest critics.

The judge said that Yoon "became fixated" on his belief that the opposition "could effectively neutralise the president".

Yoon will be jailed in South Korea's chronically over-crowded prison system.

It is a far cry from the lavish life he enjoyed during his rapid ascent from star prosecutor to president.

It was not clear when 65-year-old Yoon would be eligible for parole, although most inmates serving life terms can typically apply after 20 years.

The former president's lawyer Yoon Gap-geun argued that the



South Korea's former president Yoon Suk Yeol (2nd row, L) attending a sentencing trial on his insurrection charges at the Seoul Central District Court in Seoul yesterday. (AFP)

verdict appeared to be a "pre-determined conclusion set by the prosecutors", telling reports an appeal may not be worth pursuing.

To be able to appeal, Yoon must submit a notice within seven days.

Under South Korean law, only two sentences are fit for insurrection: life imprisonment or death.

Five other ex-officials were also sentenced yesterday for crimes linked to the martial law crisis.

# Bangladesh's new PM pledges price stability

Reuters  
Dhaka

Bangladesh's new Prime Minister Tarique Rahman has pledged to stabilise prices during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, restore the rule of law and advance economic and infrastructure reforms following his party's landslide victory in parliamentary elections.

Rahman, 60, the son of former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and assassinated President Ziaur Rahman, was sworn in on Tuesday and assumes office at a pivotal time for the nation. He faces urgent challenges, including restoring political stability, rebuilding investor confidence and reviving key industries such as the garments sector after the 2024 uprising that brought down the government of Sheikh Hasina.

In a televised address late on Wednesday, Rahman extended Ramadan greetings at the start of the holy month and warned traders against profiteering. The prices of staples such as rice, edible oil, sugar and lentils typically surge during Ramadan due to increased demand.

"Ramadan is a month of self-purification. This period should not increase public hardship," Rahman said. "Do not treat Ramadan as a month for profit. Ensure essential goods remain affordable."

His remarks come as inflation remains elevated. Bangladesh's annual inflation stood at 8.58% in January 2026 - the highest since May 2025 - with food prices continuing to strain household budgets.

Rahman said his government would dismantle market syndicates that exploit consumers and strengthen mechanisms to protect both buyers and sellers.

Improving law and order and enforcing strict anti-corruption measures will be the administration's foremost priority, he added. "The rule of law will be the final word in governing the state - not party influence, political power or coercion."

The prime minister also outlined plans to overhaul and expand the national railway network and improve coordination among the rail, road, waterways and bridge ministries to create an integrated transport system aimed at easing urban pressure and boosting connectivity.

## Pollution woes



People commute past Khan Sunni Jamah Mosque amid high levels of air pollution in Yangon, Myanmar, yesterday. (AFP)

## Indonesia floods force a deforestation reckoning

AFP  
Bangkok

Deadly flooding in Indonesia has prompted unprecedented government action against companies accused of environmental destruction that worsened the disaster.

But environmentalists who have long warned about the risks of rampant deforestation fear the current response will not solve the problem, and could even make it worse.

Officials from President Prabowo Subianto down have acknowledged the role of deforestation and overdevelopment in last year's flooding and landslides, which killed over 1,000 people in Sumatra.

Mining, plantations, and fires have caused the clearance of large tracts of lush Indonesian rainforest, removing trees that absorbed rain and helped stabilise soil.

Now, Indonesia is prioritising "protecting the environment, protecting nature", Prabowo told attendees at this year's World Economic Forum.

Several dozen companies have had their permits revoked, and the government will reportedly hand management of around a million hectares of land to a state enterprise.

Initially, the government said that would include the Martabe gold mine, which conservationists have regularly accused of environmental damage.

More recently, officials said they were still reviewing potential violations by the site.

But there has been no suggestion of halting development in the worst-affected and most ecologically sensitive areas, like Batang Toru, where Martabe is located.

The area is home to the world's rarest great ape, the tapanuli orangutan, just 800 of which were believed to exist in the wild before the disaster.

"Revoking permits is not immediately a win," said Panut Hadisiswoyo, a conservationist and orangutan specialist.

"The idea of revoking should be to stop the devastation, but by continuing these operations, this means industry will continue in this vulnerable area."

Conservationists have lobbied for a moratorium on development in Batang Toru, where tapanuli orangutans suffered first habitat loss and then the flood disaster.

Using satellite data and information on the pre-existing tapanuli orangutan population, experts have calculated nearly 60 animals may have been killed in what they called an "extinction-level event" for the species.

Between 2001 and 2024, Sumatra lost 4.4mn hectares of forest, an area larger than Switzerland, "making the hilly forest landscapes more vulnerable to landslides and flooding", said Amanda Hurowitz, senior director at conservation group Mighty Earth.

Much of that deforestation happened in areas with government permits, and it is not clear that transferring operations to the state will improve matters.

"It's a concern that the state-

backed takeover may not guarantee better environmental practices, and that production may be prioritised over conservation," Hurowitz told AFP.

"We have yet to see any plans."

Indonesia's environment and forestry ministries did not respond to AFP's request for comment.

Other experts have warned that revoking permits and seizing operations has disrupted plans to audit and investigate companies and determine their precise responsibility for the disaster.

And so far, the government has not outlined plans for forest recovery and environmental remediation, said Timer Manurung, executive director of Indonesian environmental group Auriga Nusantara.

"It's not only revocation but it also has to include remediation, taking responsibility for the destruction," he told AFP.

The government's lawsuits are seeking close to \$300mn from six companies, some of which will be set aside for environmental recovery.

But much more money would be needed for real remediation, and other companies are likely to be culpable too, experts said.

And there is no sign yet that other projects linked to large-scale deforestation, including a food and energy plantation plan in South Papua, will be halted in this drive.

The one saving grace, said Timer, has been the public's "very significant rising awareness" of deforestation in Indonesia since the disaster.

## Nepal mulls stricter safety rules for Everest climbers

Nepalese authorities are weighing proposals to improve safety on the world's highest mountain, including requiring aspiring Everest climbers to first scale another peak in the country, officials said yesterday.

Mount Everest's 8,849m tall (29,000-foot) peak attracts hundreds of climbers every year, but industry insiders say some foreign mountaineers are ill-prepared for what remains a major test of endurance and resilience.

The proposed rules, which call for completing a 7,000m climb in Nepal, "are intended to make climbers on Everest more experienced and hopefully decrease accidents," tourism official Himal Gautam told AFP.

He said the measure would also help "diversify the peaks that attract climbers" and boost local economies beyond the Everest region.

It is part of a bill that already passed the National Assembly last week and now awaits a vote at the House of Representatives, which will be formed only after March 5 elections.

Even if endorsed, the proposed measures will not apply to this year's spring climbing season.

Some of Nepal's leading expedition operators have expressed their support.

"It is a positive move that will promote more experienced climbers on Everest and help make it safer," said Mingma Sherpa of Seven Summit Treks, one of the biggest expedition organisers in the country.

Lukas Furtenbach, of Austria-based Furtenbach Adventures, said he supported the proposal but questioned the requirement to climb a mountain in Nepal.

"Why does only a 7,000m peak in Nepal qualify you for Everest? If you have climbed all seven 8,000m peaks and countless 7,000m outside Nepal, that would not qualify a climber more?"

The proposed legislation would also require climbers to present health certificates and would eliminate the current \$4,000 refundable garbage deposit.

The Himalayan nation is home to eight of the world's 10 highest peaks. (AFP)

# Australia rejects foreign threats after claim of China interference

AFP  
Sydney

Australia condemned foreign harassment of its residents yesterday after a media report alleged Chinese police had pressured food delivery riders in the country.

Public broadcaster ABC said some Chinese riders with food delivery service HungryPanda in Australia were in a dispute over their pay and conditions.

They discussed protest plans in a group chat on Chinese messaging app WeChat, the ABC said.

Some riders reportedly said police in China then called them directly or warned them through

their families not to get involved in protests.

HungryPanda, an Asian food delivery firm founded by a Chinese international student in Britain in 2017, did not immediately reply to a request for comment.

"The Australian Government does not tolerate surveillance, harassment, or threats towards any Australian citizens or individuals lawfully in Australia," said a spokesperson for the Department of Home Affairs.

Australia's counter foreign interference taskforce was "aware" of the ABC report on HungryPanda riders, the spokesperson said, declining, however, to comment on individual cases.

An unnamed government source told the ABC that the Chi-

nese police may have been trying to prevent Chinese nationals getting involved in protests abroad, or to help the company for some reason.

Australia's spy service said it would not comment on the case. In its annual threat assessment last year, the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation said "multiple foreign regimes" attempt to monitor, harass and intimidate Australians and Australian residents.

This month, Australia's federal police charged two Chinese nationals with foreign interference, accusing them of spying on a Buddhist group at the behest of police in China.

The Chinese embassy in Canberra was also asked for its reaction to the HungryPanda report.

## 12 killed in fireworks shop explosion in China

Five children were among the 12 people killed in an explosion at a general store selling fireworks in China during the Lunar New Year holiday, state media said yesterday.

Setting off fireworks and crackers is common during holiday celebrations in China, especially around Lunar New Year.

The explosion occurred on Wednesday afternoon in Jinpu village, in the central province of Hubei.

"Following thorough search and rescue operations, the incident was confirmed to have resulted in 12 fatalities: seven adults and five minors," state broadcaster CCTV said yesterday, citing authorities. The identities of all victims have been verified, it added. "Aside from one individual, identified as the

proprietor Mr Lin, the remaining 11 were customers purchasing fireworks," the report said.

Three of the customers who died had travelled from Chengdu, roughly 780km (485 miles) away, to visit their relatives, it added.

A police investigation is underway to determine the cause of the explosion.

Several major Chinese cities have banned the use of fireworks and firecrackers in recent years for safety and pollution control reasons, but the practice remains very popular in rural areas.

Fatal explosions regularly occur around the holidays. On Sunday, an explosion at a fireworks shop in eastern China's Jiangsu province killed eight and injured two. (AFP)

## Mount Kanlaon volcano erupts



A view of Mount Kanlaon volcano erupting as seen from Canlaon, Negros Oriental province, central Philippines, yesterday. (AFP)

## Japan panel approves stem cell medical products: media

AFP  
Tokyo

Japanese government experts endorsed yesterday groundbreaking projects to manufacture regenerative medicine products to treat heart diseases and Parkinson's, media reports said.

Approved by the expert panel, the products now await a final green light from the health ministry.

National broadcaster NHK and other major media said that if approved, these could be the world's first commercially available medical products that use induced Pluripotent Stem (iPS) cells.

Japanese scientist Shinya Yamanaka won the Nobel Prize in 2012 for his research into iPS, which have the potential to develop into any cell in the body.

He celebrated the reported approval, and said more has to be done to help patients in need.

The proposals include ReHeart, heart muscle sheets developed by medical startup Cuorip that can help form new blood vessels and restore heart function, Kyodo News said.

Sumitomo Pharma and Racthera's Amchepry would help patients with Parkinson's disease, Kyodo added.

Health ministry officials could not be reached immediately for comment.

iPS cells are created by stimulating mature, already specialised, cells back into a juvenile state – basically cloning without the need for an embryo.

The cells can be transformed into a range of different types of cells, and their use is a key sector of medical research.

## Ramadan in Narathiwat



People buy Iftar meals to break their fast on the first day of the holy month of Ramadan at a market in the southern Thai province of Narathiwat, yesterday.

## UK appoints first woman to lead the civil service

Reuters  
London

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer yesterday appointed Antonia Romeo as Cabinet Secretary, making her the first woman to take on the most senior civil service position and charging her with the task of driving the government's reform agenda.

She will succeed Chris Wormald, who last week became the third member of Starmer's team to leave government after a row over the appointment of Peter Mandelson as British ambassador to the US.

Romeo has worked in several government departments, most recently per-

manent secretary at the interior ministry.

Starmer said Romeo was an "outstanding public servant" and he had been "impressed by her professionalism and determination to get things done".

"Antonia has shown she is the right person to drive the government to reform," he said.

Her appointment, effective immediately, comes after the BBC earlier this week reported that she had faced allegations of bullying behaviour from several people from the time when she was a senior diplomat in New York.

Prior to her appointment, the prime minister's spokesperson said there had been one formal complaint raised nine years ago, "and the allegations were

dismissed on the basis there was no case to answer."

Romeo, who joined the civil service in 2000 as a professional economist, has previously served as consul general in New York and as special envoy to US technology companies, also based in New York. She has also served as permanent secretary at the justice ministry and held the same role at the department for international trade.

Romeo said it was a "huge privilege" to lead the civil service, which she said was "a great and remarkable institution, which I love."

"We should be known for delivery, efficiency and innovation, working to implement the Government's agenda and meet the challenges the country faces," she said in a statement.

## Police arrest ex-prince Andrew in historic blow to royal family

AFP  
Sandringham

Britain's royal family was in crisis yesterday as former prince Andrew was in police custody after being arrested on suspicion of misconduct for his links to Jeffrey Epstein.

The arrest of a royal family member is unprecedented in Britain's modern era, and within hours King Charles III issued a rare personally signed statement insisting "the law must take its course".

It was a humiliating new blow for the ousted prince – who was marking his 66th birthday yesterday, and was last year stripped of his titles.

But the news was welcomed on London's streets.

"It's good he's been arrested," data analyst Jennifer Tiso, 39, told AFP. "I don't think that just because you're related to

the royal family, you should be above the law."

Police said they were also searching two properties, with the BBC reporting one was Andrew's former home, Royal Lodge, on the monarchy's Windsor estate west of London.

The other was his residence since this month on the king's private Sandringham estate in Norfolk, eastern England, where his arrest occurred, according to British media.

Widely-published images showed several unmarked cars, believed to be police vehicles, arriving there early Thursday.

Thames Valley police said in a statement it had arrested "a man in his sixties from Norfolk on suspicion of misconduct in public office" without naming the suspect, as is common practice in Britain. "The man remains in police custody at this time," it added.

## India to make Rafale jets with France



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and French President Emmanuel Macron during their meeting at AI Impact Summit, in New Delhi, yesterday.

Reuters  
New Delhi

France and India are entering a new era of defence co-operation with plans to jointly produce Rafale fighter jets as well as helicopters, French President Emmanuel Macron said yesterday, adding France also hopes to sell more submarines to India.

India's expected order for another 114 Rafales is a "new step forward" in defence ties between the two countries and France hopes to see this replicated with submarines as well, Macron told reporters at the end of a three-day visit to India.

"On Rafale, what we want to do is expand. India confirmed that up to 90 of the 114 jets could be produced in India with a joint venture partner who is yet to be identified."

"Rafale is absolutely key," Macron said. "I hope we will do it

of India's defence ministry last week gave initial clearance to acquire 114 more Rafale jets for the air force, besides other planes and missiles, months after the worst fighting in decades between India and Pakistan. So far, India has purchased 36 Rafales for its air force and ordered another 26 marine versions of the jet for the navy.

Details of the Rafale deal including plans for co-production, expected to be sealed after technical and commercial negotiations, are yet to be made public.

Indian media reports have said that the 114 jets manufactured by Dassault Aviation are expected to cost 3.25tn rupees (\$35.65bn).

They have also reported that up to 90 of the 114 jets could be produced in India with a joint venture partner who is yet to be identified.

"Rafale is absolutely key," Macron said. "I hope we will do it

on submarines. We offered additional capacities."

The Indian navy operates six French Scorpene submarines and local media reports say there are plans to order more.

On Tuesday, Macron and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the first H125 helicopter assembly line, made in India by a joint venture between Airbus and Tata Advanced Systems, as well as a plan to jointly produce HAMMER missiles in India, by Safran and India's state-owned Bharat Electronics.

Rafale jets flown by the Indian Air Force were in the spotlight during India's conflict with Pakistan last May.

Reuters reported that Pakistan's Chinese-made J-10C jets shot down at least one Rafale, citing US officials.

New Delhi has confirmed losses in the air but has not acknowledged a Rafale being shot down.

## World urgently needs AI regulation: Sam Altman

AFP  
New Delhi

The world urgently needs to regulate artificial intelligence, OpenAI head Sam Altman said yesterday at a summit in New Delhi on the risks and opportunities posed by the fast-evolving technology.

Frenzied demand for generative AI has turbocharged profits for companies while fuelling anxiety about the impact on society and the planet. "Centralisation of this technology in one company or country could lead to ruin," Altman said. "This is not to suggest that we won't need any regulation or safeguards. We obviously do, urgently, like we have for other powerful technologies."

The AI Impact Summit is the fourth annual gathering to discuss how to handle advanced computing power.

It is the largest yet and the first in a developing country, with India taking the opportunity to push its ambitions to catch up with the United States and China in the AI race. "We must democratise AI. It must become a medium for inclusion and empowerment," Prime Minister Narendra Modi told the gathering yesterday.

"We are entering an era where humans and intelligence systems co-create, co-work and co-evolve," he said. "We must resolve that AI is used for the global common good."

Modi's comments were echoed by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, who called on tech tycoons to support a \$3 billion global fund to ensure open access to AI.

"AI must belong to everyone," Guterres said. "The future of AI cannot be decided by a handful of countries – or left to the whims of a few billionaires," he said.

Researchers and campaign-

ers say stronger action is needed to combat emerging issues, from job disruption to online abuse and the huge electricity demands from data centres.

But the broad focus of the New Delhi event, and vague promises made at previous summits, could make concrete commitments unlikely. Google's Sundar Pichai and Anthropic's Dario Amodei were among the other tech CEOs to speak, but Microsoft founder Bill Gates cancelled just hours before his appearance.

Gates, facing questions over his ties to Jeffrey Epstein, withdrew to "ensure the focus remains on the AI Summit's key priorities," the Gates Foundation said.

The billionaire said this month he regrets "every minute" he spent with Epstein. The mere mention of someone's name in the Epstein files does not in itself imply any wrongdoing by that person.

## Plum Festival



Visitors take photos of the plum blossoms blooming at Yushima Tenjin Shrine in Tokyo yesterday during its Plum Festival, a springtime sight in Tokyo where around 300 white and red plum trees are in bloom at the shrine.



# Fasting and purification of soul

**O** you who believe! Observing As-Saum (the fasting) is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you, that you may become the pious. (Surah Al-Baqarah 2:183)

The goal of fasting is to attain Taqwa or God-consciousness and fear of Allah. The ability to tame the unruly tendencies of one's inner self on one hand, and the cultivation of one's will power, on the other, are very important in the process of purification of the soul. This is because during fasting in Ramadan, there are many opportunities, blessings and means that one can avail and utilise so that one's soul is purified.

First, forgiveness of sins has a very positive result in purifying the soul. The accumulation of sins for the whole year produces in the conscience a sense of endless guilt and the feeling of one's sins are being forgiven is a relief in one's weary heart. Have you ever wondered how people cannot sleep at night because they have wronged someone or quarrelled with someone? This heavy burden upon a believer's soul is relieved once reconciliation takes place. Similarly, Allah subhanahu wa ta'ala, in His mercy forgives the fasting people whereby relieving him of the guilt of his past sins against Allah. The Prophet Muhammad, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said:

Whoever fasts in Ramadan having Iman and Ihtisab, his past sins will be forgiven for him. (Agreed upon by Bukhari and Muslim)

This hadith stipulates two conditions in order for the sins to be forgiven. The fasting person must of course be a Mu'min. Al Ihtisab carries with it three meanings: having firm resolve, hoping for the reward, and being pleased with the act not considering it a heavy burden.

Secondly, one should feel that he is doing a deed that is very dear and special to Allah. Every deed of son of Aadam has an equivalent reward of 10 to 700 times, except fasting which will be rewarded by Allah Al Kareem, the Most Generous.

Third, fasting purifies the soul by cultivating the much needed virtue of patience. There are three categories or facets of patience: Being patient in performing the obligations, being patient in avoiding the prohibitions and being patient in times of calamity. All of these three are trained in the fasting person by performing the obligatory act of fasting, avoiding vile, filthy, senseless, sinful actions and being patient in difficulties that might happen while fasting.



Fourth, fasting reminds him the true purpose of his creation and the meaning of Islam. That to worship Allah, one must inevitably submit to His will first; that Allah comes first before one's own desires. Especially for those who are living in non-Muslim countries experience the temptation where everyone is eating and drinking while you are holding yourself because you want to follow what Allah wants.

Fifth, everything seems to slow down during Ramadan (especially in Muslim countries), and one doesn't have the usual energy to do the fruitless things. Hence one is left with more free time to think and ponder. This leaves a person with more time to ponder over his life and possibly the wrong things he have done.

Sixth, feeling and doing the act yields more certainty that witnessing it. How many times we have seen pictures of malnourished children in Africa and felt pity for them, yet one still cannot feel how is it to starved and taste the pangs of hunger in one's stomach. This in turn should turn on the switch of gratefulness in us for the blessings of Allah.

Seventh, fasting makes us realise our potential as human beings. Some of us think that the obligations and prohibitions of Islam are overwhelming or inapplicable especially in non-Muslim societies so we involve ourselves in haram activities thinking that we cannot do anything about it. But in Ramadan, we only haven't abstained from the haram but from the halal as well. If we have the strength to abstain from the halal then all the more so we have the will power to abstain from the haram? Allah is not unjust that He would prohibit things from us that we cannot avoid. This is especially true for the smokers! In fact fasting is a sort of training for the gradual weaning from the addictive effects of smoking.

Eighth, turning to Allah and realising one's need for Him. If Allah takes away our most fundamental needs as human beings then who is there to help us. Imagine if Allah takes away our sense of taste or sense of satiety. Having been born with all the complete senses and limbs makes us forget that ultimately these are not really

ours. This reality is vividly demonstrated in people with illness such as stroke patients with hemiplegia or paralysis of one's side of the body. His left hand is there still connected to his body, he can see it, yet he cannot move it on his own and sometimes might not even feel that it is there. Subhanallah!

Ninth, we have heard the hadith of the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam: Whoever guarantees me what is between his jaws/beard [the tongue] and what is between his legs [sexual organs] I guarantee him Paradise [Bukhari]. Don't you see? Being fasting makes us more conscious of what we say and more careful in our interactions with the opposite sex.

Tenth, fasting again makes us remember that we are not here just to eat and drink; that our existence is not just mere fulfilment and gratification of our basic desires; that we are here for a more sublime purpose, which is to worship Allah. In other words we eat not just to live but to worship the Creator. This is what separates us from the modern, secular materialistic people where they eat to live

or even worst, some of them actually live to eat. For the first time in human history, there are more obese people in the world than those who are starving.

Eleventh, fasting is a chance to demonstrate sincerity to Allah. All types of worship are visible to others even giving charity secretly whereby the receiver knew that somebody gave him secretly. However in fasting nobody knows if you really fasted or secretly ingested food to your mouth except Allah. Sincerity in actions is a fundamental prerequisite in the acceptance of deeds and consequently success.

Twelfth, fasting helps to cure the disease of the "desire for more". When one thinks that he is able to survive with only one and half meal a day and this is his real needs. Some of us has this self-made needs, a make believe that we ourselves concocted. How many of us say things like "I can't live without smart phone or a V8 engine powered vehicle or a three-storey villa"? We misallocate our resources at the expense of other more important things.

Ultimately, Taqwa have a big role in all of this. This will power to do the things that Allah has ordered us to do, this self-restraint that bridle us to avoid what Allah has prohibited for us, and this love for Allah, doing what is beyond the obligatory. Fasting in Ramadan and its Taraweeh incorporates all of these aspects, purifying our souls and making us closer and closer to Allah. "Allah the Almighty has said: For whoever has mutual animosity with a friend (wali) of Mine, I declare war upon him. My servant does not draw near to Me with anything more beloved more to Me than the religious duties that I have imposed upon him; and My servant continues to draw near to Me with supererogatory works such that I love him. And when I love him, I am his hearing with which he hears, his seeing with which he sees, his hand with which strikes, and his leg with which he walks. Were he to ask of me, I would surely give him; and were he to ask Me for refuge, I would surely grant him it. (Bukhari).

[This article is adapted from Jamaluddin Zarabozo's book "Purification of the Soul".]

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



## Generosity during Ramadan

**S**pending charity removes sins as water extinguishes fire ... charity extinguishes the wrath of Allah... charity shades the person on the Day of Resurrection. There are many other great virtues for spending in charity, and since Ramadan is the month of generosity.

Ramadan is the month of obedience and the performance of good deeds, and the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, was the best of mankind and the most obedient to his Lord, yet he used to increase his acts of worship during this blessed month. Imam Ibn al-Qayyim, may Allah have mercy upon him, said: "The Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, was the most generous of all people, but the time he spent the most was during the month of Ramadan, and he used to increase his recitation of the Qur'an, prayers, mentioning Allah and P'tikaaf (i.e. residing in the mosque with the intention of worship)".

The companions were distinctly generous during the month of Ramadan. Ibn al-Qayyim said: "There is a difference between being generous in charity and being wasteful: a generous person spends his charity in proper channels, whilst the wasteful person might spend extravagantly in places where it is not needed, and be very poorly in places where spending is direly needed."

Anas, may Allah be pleased with him, said: "The Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, was the bravest person and the most generous." [Al-Bukhaari & Muslim]

Ibn 'Abbas, may Allah be pleased with him, stated:

"The Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, was the most generous of all the people, and he used to reach the peak in generosity in the month of Ramadan when Jibreel met him. Jibreel used to meet him every night of Ramadan to teach him the Qur'an, and when he met him, he, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, would be more generous than the strong uncontrollable wind (i.e. in readiness and haste to do charitable deeds)." [Al-Bukhari & Muslim] Ibn Hajar, may Allah have mercy upon him, said commenting on this narration: "This added generosity resulted from the virtue of the month, the one with whom he reviewed the Qur'an and the thing being reviewed (i.e. the Words of Allah)."

**Ibn al-Qayyim counted ten levels of generosity, and they are as follows:**

**Sacrificing ones soul:** Getting killed for the sake of Allah is the most paramount rank.

**Utilising ones position:** This is the second best rank as in this case generosity makes a person favor fulfilling the needs of others over his personal interest and status.

**Sacrificing comfort:** A generous person exhausts himself and sacrifices his comfort and sleep for others.

**Offering one's knowledge:** This is one of the noblest ranks of generosity, and it is better than sacrificing ones wealth because knowledge is more honorable than wealth. Never will a stingy person be able to benefit from any knowledge if he possessed any, and it is from the wisdom of Allah that He only grants this knowledge to generous people who will be willing to offer it to others and benefit them with it. Generosity in this field is to teach the one who asks you what you know and to answer people's queries.

**Utilising ones prestige:** This is by interceding to people and facilitating their affairs with those in charge.

**Sacrificing physically:** Abu Tharr, may Allah be pleased with him, reported that the Messenger of Allah, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "When you get up in the morning, charity is due from every one of your joints. There is charity in every ascription of glory to Allah (i.e. by uttering SubhaanAllah); there is charity in every declaration of His Greatness (i.e. by uttering Allahu Akbar);



there is charity in every utterance of praise of Him (i.e. by uttering Al-Hamdulillaah); there is charity in every declaration that none is worthy of worship except Allah (i.e. by uttering Laa ilaaha Illallah); there is charity in enjoining good; there is charity in forbidding evil. Two Rak'ah of Dhuhaa (Forenoon prayer) is equal to all this (in reward)." [Muslim]

**Sacrificing one's honour:** This is by forgiving someone for badmouthing and backbiting you. This reflects ones purity in the heart and grants peace of mind and serenity.

**Being patient:** This is another honourable rank that benefits the person more than sacrificing his wealth. This rank grants the person support from Allah and leads to others holding him in high esteem, as only selected people are able to endure patiently when others harm them.

**Being cheerful with others:** Abu Tharr, may Allah be pleased with him, reported that the Messenger of Allah, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "Do not belittle any good deed, even meeting your Muslim brother with a cheerful face." [Muslim] This is one of the heaviest deeds on the scale.

**Not longing to possess what others have:** This is the best type that reflects ones contentment with the decrees of Allah and imposes ones respect on others.

### Delaying Zakat until Ramadan:

Allah has prescribed Zakat on those whose wealth reaches a certain amount and made paying Zakat one of the pillars of Islam. When a full lunar year elapses whilst one possesses such wealth, then he is obliged to pay Zakat. In case of agriculture, it is due when plants yield fruits. It is not permissible to give it in payments, nor is one allowed to delay Zakat until the month of Ramadan unless there is a dire need. Ibn Qudaamah and Ash-Shaafi'ee, may Allah have mercy upon them, are of the opinion that: "Zakat must be paid immediately when it becomes due and one is not permitted to delay it whilst able to unless he fears a certain harm to afflict him due to paying it"

When asked about delaying the payment of Zakat until the month of Ramadan, Shaykh al-Uthaymeen, may Allah have mercy upon him, said: "Zakat, like any other good deed, is preferred in virtuous times unless it becomes due, then a person must pay it immediately. If one's full lunar year elapses on the month of Rajab, for example, then he should not delay it until Ramadan and must pay it in Rajab."

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

## Spiritual and physical well-being via fasting

**A**l-Bukhari, may Allah have mercy upon him, has reported that the Messenger of Allah (sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam) said: "Paradise has eight gates and one of them is Ar-Rayyaan through which none will enter but those who observe fasting." As-Suyooti, may Allah have mercy upon him, has reported that Al-Haarith Ibn Kalda, may Allah have mercy upon him, stated that: "Imposing abstinence from food" was the essence of medicine. Fasting, in medical terms, may mean a variety of things.

Some healthcare practitioners might recommend juice fasting. This type of fast eliminates all solid foods and the person consumes only fruit and vegetable juices. Others might recommend elimination of all foods except fruits and water for a specified time. Some might even recommend eliminating all foods and drinks for specific periods. The reported purpose for these forms of fasting is to cleanse toxins and poisons form the body and the digestive tract. Islamically speaking, fasting both voluntary and obligatory is an act of worship. Although there may be health benefits, its primary purpose must always be to please Allah.

Alternative medicine views fasting as a detoxification method. This simply means that it is used to purify the body by eliminating "toxins." This process enhances the healing processes of the body. Fasting generally is perceived to spare any harm to vital organs but uses fatty tissue, etc for energy production. Naturopathic healthcare practitioners generally proscribe short fasts. Because body temperature may drop during a fast, as does blood pressure, pulse, and respiration, it is considered important to stay warm. Fasting is seen as possible treatment for a variety of disorders and diseases including: obesity, chemical poisoning, arthritis, allergies, psoriasis, eczema, leg ulcers, irritable bowel syndrome, bronchial asthma and even depression.

Fasting is a protection for the body and the mind. At-Tirmithi, may Allah have mercy upon him, has reported that the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "Fasting and the Qur'an intercede for a man. Fasting says, 'O my Lord I have kept him away from his food and his passions by day, so accept my intercession for him.' The Qur'an says, 'I have kept him away from sleep by night so accept my intercession for him.' Then their intercession is accepted." Research has shown that fasting can improve the control of diabetes. Another study has shown that fasting improved the health of persons with irritable bowel syndrome and constipation. Another study suggests that fasting may improve cholesterol levels.

Al-Bukhari, may Allah have mercy upon him, has reported that the Messenger of Allah, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said that Allah said: "All the deeds of the children of Aadam are for them, except fasting, which is for Me and I will give the reward for it." Al-Bukhari, may Allah

have mercy upon him, has also reported that the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, narrated that Allah said: "The fast is for Me and I will give the reward for it, as he (who observes the fast) leaves his (sexual) desire, food and drink for My Sake. Fasting is a shield (from Hell) and there are two pleasures for a fasting person, one at the time of breaking his fast and the other at the time when he will meet his Lord. The smell of the mouth of a fasting person is better in Allah's Sight than the smell of musk."

There are specific requirements for the Muslim to consider when fasting. First is the intention to worship Allah and obey His commandments. Second, is that the fasting must take place between dawn to dusk. Muslims are prohibited from fasting for more than two continuous days without breaking the fast. This is based on the narration reported in Al-Muwatta, which states that the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, forbade fasting for two days or more without breaking the fast in between. Likewise, fasting is prohibited on certain days: 'Eid Al-Fitr, 'Eid Al-Adha, and on Jumu'ah (Fridays unless the person has fasted the day before or will fast the day after). Married women are admonished not to fast (voluntary) without the permission of their husbands, as the husbands have a right over their wives.

Breaking the fast with dates or sips of water is better. Again, this is based on the Prophet's Sunnah, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, and the narration reported by Abu Daawood, may Allah have mercy upon him: "When one of you is fasting, he should break his fast with dates, but if he cannot get any, then (he should break his fast) with water, for water is purifying." Muslim, may Allah have mercy upon him, has reported that the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "The Ajwah date is an excellent remedy." The best days for fasting are Mondays and Thursdays. At-Tirmithi, may Allah have mercy upon him, also reported that the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "The deeds of men are presented to Allah on Mondays and Thursdays, and I like mine to be presented when I am fasting." The 13th, 14th, and 15th of each lunar month are also recommended for fasting.

While both the obligatory fasting during Ramadan and the voluntary fasting during the remainder of the year are acts of worship, they may provide healing to the body. Whatever healing may occur because of fasting is a blessing from Allah, however this should not be the intention or the goal of fasting. Fasting gives us a greater ability to control our desires and emotions. It should not be considered a "cure-all" or a diet programme. Those who fast will receive their reward from Allah as long as their intentions are pure and their fasting is not harmed or nullified by lying, backbiting, or evil deeds.

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## What is in the EU's draft 'made in Europe' law?

The European Commission will propose a law next week requiring that when public money is used to support key strategic technologies, a minimum share of those products is "made in Europe". Here is what you need to know.

'Made in Europe' is currently a major EU initiative aimed at boosting the continent's manufacturing independence and competitiveness. It serves as both a strategic partnership and a proposed legal framework to protect local industries. The "made in Europe" plan is part of broader EU efforts to help local industries compete with manufacturers in China and other countries where they do not face Europe's strict regulations and higher energy prices. By prioritising European-made goods in public contracts, the EU will aim to harness the huge financial firepower of its members' public procurement - which totals more than 2tn euros (\$2.37tn) or 14% of EU economic output - to support domestic industries.

The "Industrial Accelerator Act" due to be published on February 26, will set EU-made content and low-carbon requirements for products bought through public procurement or subject to manufacturing subsidies, according to a draft seen by Reuters. The proposed rules cover "key strategic sectors", including batteries, solar and wind energy, hydrogen manufacturing, and nuclear power plants.

Each technology has a specific Europe-made requirement. For example, for solar panels, the inverter and two other main components must be Europe-made after one year - increasing to three main components after two more years.

Makers of electric vehicles bought or leased through public procurement would have to ensure their vehicles are assembled in the union, and that 70% of their components - measured by value and excluding the battery - are made in Europe. Aluminium manufacturers that benefit from subsidies would face a 25% minimum for Europe-made and low-carbon products, with a 5% Europe-made minimum set for concrete.

### The draft goes with the European Economic Area, which comprises the 27 EU member states, Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Norway, but excludes Britain

The draft also proposes a voluntary label for the greenhouse gas emissions intensity of steel to make lower-carbon products more visible.

The draft proposal would also set conditions for foreign investments of more than 100mn euros in strategic sectors, and where the investor is from a country that controls at least 40% of that sector's global manufacturing capacity. The criteria include the requirement that the foreign investor cannot hold a majority stake in an EU company, and that the investor must license its intellectual property to benefit the EU investment.

The fiercely debated proposal has already been delayed twice and could change before the European Commission publishes it, and later when EU countries and the European Parliament will negotiate the final law. A key question is how it will define "made in Europe". The draft goes with the European Economic Area, which comprises the 27 EU member states, Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Norway, but excludes Britain.

But it also said the Commission could add other "trusted partners" in future, including those that have reciprocal international commitments, such as the World Trade Organization's Government Procurement Agreement, or which contribute to EU competitiveness and security aims. The draft provides some exceptions - for example, it could lift the "Europe-made" requirement if a product is only made by one company worldwide, or if switching to Europe-made would be at least 30% more expensive.

The plans have strong backing from France, whose EU Commissioner Stéphane Sejourne is responsible for developing the law. Much of European industry also supports the plan, with more than 1,100 business leaders co-signing his article published this month. Carmakers were absent, however, reflecting concerns that a "made-in-Europe" definition would exclude their sprawling global supply chains.

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz has also struck a cautious tone, telling an industry event last week that European preference rules should be a "last resort" and suggesting a "made-with-Europe" approach that could include other trade partners. Some governments are more critical. Sweden and the Czech Republic have warned that the plans could deter investment and raise prices in Europe. - Reuters

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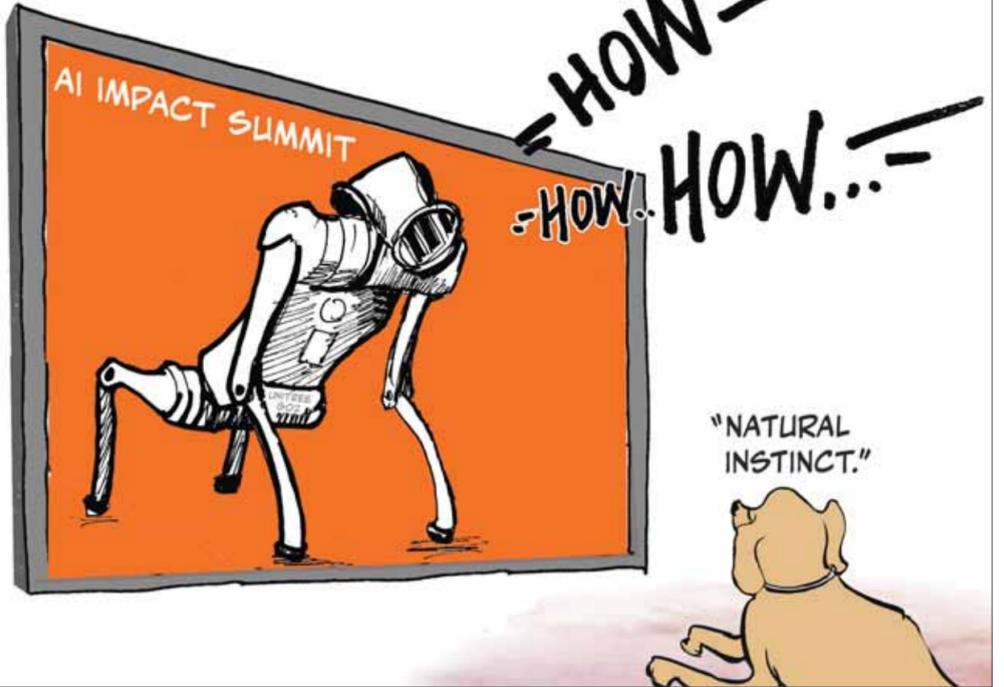
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# How China plans to dominate global trade long after Trump

**Beijing pursues 20 free-trade agreements amid US tariffs; China aims to embed more deeply in global trade to counter US pressure**

By Joe Cash  
Reuters

China sees an opening to turn President Donald Trump's tariffs to its advantage by reshaping global trade in ways that would insulate its \$19tn economy from US pressure far into the future. Beijing is exploiting the uncertainty created by Trump to try to stitch China's vast manufacturing base into the world's biggest economic blocs, including the European Union, Gulf States and a trans-Pacific trade pact, a Reuters examination found. The push involves accelerating efforts to clinch some 20 trade deals in total, many years in the making, despite widespread concerns about China's overproduction, uneven market access and soft domestic demand.

A Reuters review of 100 Chinese-language articles by state-backed trade scholars written since 2017 reveals a systematic push by China's policy advisers to reverse-engineer US trade policy and neutralize Washington's containment strategy. China is now putting that blueprint into action. The deal reached with Canada during Prime Minister Mark Carney's January visit to Beijing - which slashes tariffs on Chinese electric vehicles - was the first of many aimed at breaking US leverage, according to interviews with 10 people, including Chinese officials and trade diplomats. "Don't interrupt your opponent when he is making a mistake," said one Chinese official of Trump's disruptive trade agenda.

The review, drawn from over 2,000 trade-strategy papers endorsed by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) and Peking University, which advise top leaders, shows policy insiders broadly accept that painful structural change is a price worth paying for China's long-term dominance of global commerce. The papers' contents are reported here for the first time.

If successful, Beijing could upend more than a decade of US trade policy by placing itself at the heart of a new, China-shaped multilateral order, two Western diplomats said. "The Chinese have a golden opportunity now," said Alicia Garcia Herrero, senior fellow at the Bruegel think tank. China's commerce ministry didn't respond to a request for comment about Beijing's strategy. Asked about China's approach, a US official told Reuters it was no surprise that countries with large trade surpluses sought to maintain globalization. "President Trump is fixing the problems globalisation caused for the United States while other countries are trying to double down on globalisation as free market access to the United States goes away," the official said.

**BUILDING BLOCS**

The shift in China's tone reflects its calculations. A year ago, Beijing was invoking Mao

Zedong and its ability to fend off the West in the Korean War with martial propaganda. Now, as China prepares to welcome Trump in April, its diplomats are touring the world urging trading partners to join it in defending multilateralism and open trade. In January, China dispatched its top diplomat to tiny Lesotho - which Trump initially hit with a 50% tariff - to pledge development co-operation. On Saturday, state media said China would implement zero tariffs on imports from 53 African countries. Meanwhile, China is pitching AI-powered customs systems to neighbours and working to retool digital infrastructure that underpin commerce.

The moves underline a goal identified in the policy papers: to embed China so deeply in global trade that partners can't afford to decouple under US pressure. "In countering US strategic competition with China, 'anti-decoupling' should become China's primary focus," wrote Ni Feng, fellow at CASS's Institute of American Studies, in 2024.

Chinese officials are now working to fast-track stalled trade talks. Since 2017, China has been negotiating with countries including Honduras, Panama, Peru, South Korea and Switzerland. "We are willing to negotiate bilateral and regional trade and investment agreements with interested countries and regions," commerce ministry spokesperson He Yongqian told Reuters during Carney's visit, without elaborating.

China's foreign minister Wang Yi surprised European negotiators in November by raising the prospect of a free-trade agreement with Brussels during talks with his Estonian counterpart. A month later, Wang pressed the Gulf Cooperation Council to conclude long-running talks on a free-trade agreement. In January, British Prime Minister Keir Starmer agreed with Chinese leader Xi Jinping to launch a feasibility study into a trade-in-services agreement that could reduce barriers for British

firms. German Chancellor Friedrich Merz has said he will seek "strategic partnerships" with China during a trip next week.

China's commerce minister Wang Wentao has made joining the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) a priority. The pact has its roots in the US-backed Trans-Pacific Partnership, developed in part to counter China before Washington withdrew in 2017. But China's huge trade surplus complicates the pitch. Some member countries worry Chinese manufacturers may use improved market access to funnel excess low-cost goods abroad, while China's domestic demand remains sluggish.

Wendy Cutler, chief negotiator during the Obama administration for the Trans-Pacific Partnership, acknowledged the window for Beijing to champion trade and multilateralism but said China needed to go beyond talk.

"And with its huge trade imbalances, as well as some of the coercive measures it's now taking against countries like Japan, it's hard to see how they're walking the walk," Cutler told Reuters. A senior European trade diplomat dismissed Beijing's overtures as "pure Chinese propaganda," saying Brussels had no plans for a trade deal. Chinese advisers are undeterred. Speaking to Reuters, one noted the EU and China had negotiated a landmark 2020 investment deal during Trump's first term. The deal, however, was frozen in 2021 before it could take effect amid a dispute over human-rights sanctions.

**LESSONS LEARNED**

Some Chinese advisers contend in the papers that Beijing should study how Washington has "weaponized" global institutions to contain China, and exploit openings created by Trump's willingness to abandon or sideline multilateral bodies such as the World Trade Organization. Others argue Beijing should focus on influencing global standards in fields such as intellectual property through

initiatives like Xi's Belt and Road program and China's membership of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, which covers about 30% of global GDP.

China is now applying those insights. Its recently upgraded deal with Southeast Asian states, for example, focuses on AI-driven and digital trade, where China hopes to secure a first-mover advantage.

Indeed, China's vision for customs processing is evident at its "Friendship Port" on the Vietnamese border, where state media says home-grown AI solutions have slashed waiting times by 20%, enabling faster deliveries. Reuters couldn't independently verify the claim.

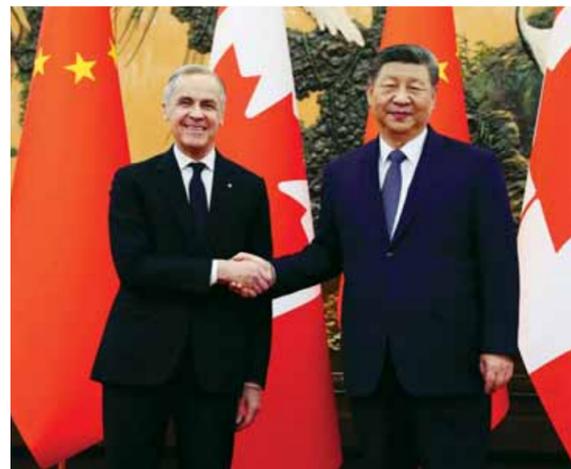
**TRILLION-DOLLAR SURPLUS**

The risks that China's \$1.2tn trade surplus poses to trading partners' manufacturing sectors are hard to overlook, however. Pascal Lamy, former WTO director-general and EU trade commissioner, said Chinese firms are sending more goods to Europe than the bloc can absorb. "It's a mystery how, given the nature of the regime, given the sort of collective cleverness, how is it that they have not succeeded in rebalancing their economic model?" he said. Not everyone sees closer ties with China as the easiest way to curb reliance on the US.

Stephen Nagy, China project lead at the Macdonald-Laurier Institute in Ottawa, said Carney's tariff-cutting agreement with Xi appears designed to build leverage before talks over the US-Mexico-Canada (USMCA) trade deal. "I think his bet is wrong," he added, predicting that Trump wouldn't be swayed. Carney has said Canada respects its USMCA commitment not to pursue free-trade deals with non-market economies. His office didn't respond to a request for comment. Mexico, for its part, is wary of endangering US market access by moving too close to China.

"We see no need for a free-trade agreement with China right now," said a Mexican trade official. "We are already in the CPTPP and have 60% of world GDP covered." Beijing's trade partners really need China to revive its consumption, said Fred Neumann, chief economist for Asia Pacific at HSBC. Wang, China's commerce minister, has said growing imports is a priority as Beijing prepares to launch its next five-year plan in March, in line with a commitment to raise consumption's share of GDP. But rebalancing is a long-term project. Trump has three years left in office, and the next administration could revert to building coalitions to contain China.

China must "study in depth the logic of US actions within international institutions and the possible next steps it may take to better respond to increasingly fierce strategic offensives in the future," Zhao Pu, then at Renmin University and now a researcher at CASS's Institute of American Studies, wrote in 2023.



Canadian PM Mark Carney with Chinese President Xi Jinping at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing. (Reuters/File Photo)

# Pakistan, US sign pact to redevelop New York's Roosevelt Hotel

By Ariba Shahid  
Reuters

Pakistan has agreed with the US government to jointly redevelop New York's Roosevelt Hotel, the government in Islamabad said yesterday, allowing Islamabad to unlock value from its major overseas investment. Restructuring and privatisation of state assets are central to Pakistan's \$7bn programme agreed with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the century-old hotel in Midtown Manhattan owned by Pakistan's national air-

line plays a key role in those plans. The hotel, which the cash-strapped south Asian nation has estimated could be worth more than \$1bn, has been closed since 2020 and is considered for redevelopment rather than outright sale. The two countries signed a memorandum that outlines plans to cooperate on the operation, maintenance, renovation, and redevelopment of the hotel, a statement from Pakistan's finance division said yesterday. "The objective remains to secure maximum value for this property in alignment with the

government's privatisation strategy while strengthening Pakistan-United States economic ties," it said. The ministry said the agreement was negotiated by US Special Envoy Steve Witkoff under the leadership of President Donald Trump. The White House did not immediately respond to a request for comment. The memorandum, seen by Reuters, does not specify any financial terms and says the project "shall be facilitated by the United States General Services Administration and by the

Pakistan Ministry of Defence". The US General Services Administration primarily manages federal property and procurement for US government agencies. Islamabad has been deepening its economic ties with Washington, including US financing support for the Reko Diq copper and gold mining project in Pakistan's Balochistan, and Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif is currently in Washington to attend the inaugural meeting of Trump's Board of Peace. Deal allows Islamabad to unlock value of one of its most prized overseas investments.



File photo of Roosevelt Hotel in New York. (Reuters)

## Iftar preparation in Lahore



A volunteer prepares the plates of Iftar food on the first day of the Islamic holy month of Ramadan at the Data Darbar shrine in Lahore yesterday. (AFP)

## Pakistan compensates families of victims in mosque suicide attack

Pakistan is paying compensation totalling more than \$700,000 to the families of 40 people killed in a suicide bombing at a Shia mosque in Islamabad this month, the prime minister's office said yesterday. The February 6 attack claimed by the Islamic State (IS) group on the outskirts of the capital was the deadliest in Islamabad since a 2008 truck bombing that killed 60 people at the Marriott Hotel. "Relief cheques have been delivered to the heirs of 36 martyrs belonging to Islamabad," Prime Minister

Shehbaz Sharif's office said in a statement, adding each victim's family received five million rupees (around \$17,800). Cheques will also be delivered to four families of victims living outside Islamabad, the statement said. The suicide attack occurred during Friday prayers, when mosques around the country are packed with worshippers. The bombings come as Pakistan's security forces battle intensifying insurgencies in southern and northern provinces that border Afghanistan. (AFP)

## 16 killed after building collapses in Pakistan

A building collapse caused by an explosion in Pakistan's southern megacity of Karachi killed at least 16 people yesterday, including children, officials said. More than a dozen people were injured in the incident in the Soldier Bazaar neighbourhood of

Karachi at around 4:00am, when Muslim families start preparing sehri, the pre-sunrise meal eaten during Ramadan. "Sixteen people, including women and children, have been killed and 13 others injured," the provincial rescue agency's spokesman Hassan Khan told AFP.

The three-storey building located in the crowded neighbourhood collapsed after an "unknown" explosion, he said. "Apparently it was a gas explosion, but the investigation will reveal the actual cause of the incident," senior city official Nasrullah Abbasi told. (AFP)

# Putin meets with president of Madagascar at Kremlin

AFP  
Moscow

Russian President Vladimir Putin gave his blessing to Madagascar's new leader in a Kremlin meeting yesterday, as Russia seeks to expand its influence in Africa. Colonel Michael Randrianirina - Madagascar's interim leader since the former president fled in October following demonstrations - said he was counting on

Russian support as his country goes through a "difficult period." He travelled to Moscow on a plane chartered by Russia, weeks after the Kremlin sent military equipment to the island. Putin told Randrianirina that Madagascar was an "important partner" in Africa. Moscow has sought to extend its outreach in Africa - where its Wagner paramilitary forces have been active for years and where it rivals European powers, especially France.

"I would like to note that we have many interesting areas of co-operation. These include agriculture, geological exploration, energy, medicine, healthcare and education," Putin said. "We are ready to develop these ties in the humanitarian sphere and others," he added. Under massive Western sanctions since its Ukraine offensive started in 2022, Russia has sought to pivot to Asia and the so-called "Global South".



Russian President Vladimir Putin and Madagascar's President Michael Randrianirina shake hands during their meeting at the Grand Kremlin Palace in Moscow yesterday. (AFP)

Randrianirina called Russia a "country whose support we hope will accompany Madagascar, which is currently going through a difficult period, both politically and economically." "We are happy to be here," he said, adding that the visit shows the island's "will to reinforce co-operation with the Russian Federation." He said that on top of co-operating in the "social, health and education sectors", Madagascar is "ready to fully co-operate" in the military sphere. Last month, Russian military instructors visited Madagascar to train their counterparts in military equipment supplied by Moscow, including drones. Putin also expressed condolences to the army colonel over a recent cyclone on the island, that killed at least 40 people this month.

## Sweden pledges \$1.4bn for Ukraine air defence

AFP  
Stockholm

Sweden yesterday announced 12.9bn kronor (\$1.4bn) in military aid for Ukraine, focused primarily on air defence capabilities. Defence Minister Pal Jonson told AFP that the military aid package was "the third largest so far that Sweden has delivered to Ukraine." It had been focused on needs communicated by Ukraine. "That is to say, air defence and sustaining the platforms we have delivered with ammunition," Jonson said.

Some 4.3bn kronor would go to delivering to Ukraine an "advanced short-range air defence capability," according to the government. This would include additional units of the TRIDON Mk2 mobile anti-aircraft artillery system, which Sweden announced in early February it was supplying to Ukraine. Jonson said the aim was to have the systems delivered to Ukraine within 24 months. The remainder of the funds would go towards large quantities of ammunition, including long-range artillery shells, as well as training and the expansion of a cooperation project

with Ukraine on long-range drones. The funds are part of Sweden's yearly allocated 40bn-kronor budget for Ukraine aid. Jonson said that the remaining 27bn kronor of this year's budget would be announced in the spring and summer. With the latest military aid package, which is Sweden's 21st to Ukraine since Russia's invasion in 2022, the Nordic country has donated 103 billion kronor in military support. Past contributions have included the CV90 infantry fighting vehicle, the Archer mobile artillery system as well as tanks and naval assault crafts.

## Belarus frees opposition politician Statkevich: wife

Belarus has released opposition politician Mikola Statkevich from prison, five months after he refused to leave the country in a US-brokered prisoner release, his wife said yesterday. He suffered a stroke behind bars and is having difficulty speaking, she added. "Dear friends! Mikola is home! He had a stroke. He is now recovering. For now, he is having problems with speech. Otherwise, everything is fine. Everything will be okay," Marina Adamovich said on Facebook. Statkevich, 69, had been an active member of Belarus's opposition since the 1990s and ran against the country's longtime leader Alexander Lukashenko in a 2010 presidential election.

He was due to be freed and deported alongside dozens of other political prisoners last September but refused to leave the country, prompting Belarus to put him back in jail. He had been in jail for five years prior to that. More than 1,000 political prisoners remain behind bars in Belarus, according to the Viasna human rights group. Many were detained during a brutal crackdown on opposition in the wake of Lukashenko's disputed 2020 re-election and prosecuted on what rights groups have described as politically motivated charges. Belarusian opposition leader Svetlana Tikhanovskaya welcomed Statkevich's release, saying in a post on X that she was "relieved". (AFP)

## Floods as France hit by record rain



A man sweeps flood water out of a house following heavy rain and flooding of the Garonne river in Langoiran, western France, yesterday, as the region braces with the risk of further flooding as Storm Pedro approaches. Four departments in western France were placed under red alert over the risk of flooding, with officials expecting the situation to worsen with the arrival of Storm Pedro, which is poised to batter swathes of western Europe. (AFP)

# Starlink loss a blow to Russian forces in Ukraine: experts

AFP  
Paris

US tech titan Elon Musk's move to cut Russian access to his Starlink satellites over Ukraine has probably disrupted Russian forces' tactical command and restricted their offensive capacity, but the war goes on. Here is what we know about the importance of Starlink to Russia and in the Ukraine conflict:

**Critical command, control role** Linking Russian drones to the Starlink satellites operated by Musk's SpaceX company makes them more accurate, extends their range and makes them more difficult to block. The satellites are also important for Russia's command and

control, "the organisation of the operational chain that allows the military at the top to give orders to all levels of responsibility, down to the combatants," said a western military source. "All armies that have a little money and need bandwidth use Starlink. It's flexible, it's not expensive, and it complements military systems that do not allow for increased bandwidth," the source added. In the Ukraine conflict, the US satellites "gave Russian units real-time control over their forces and drones, to have an overview of the line of contact" so they could make better decisions, Yuriy Fedorenko, commander of the Ukrainian 429th Achilles Drone Brigade told Freedom TV. The satellites are even more important as there is no real front

line where the Russia and Ukrainian armies are in contact, according to a high-ranking European officer. "It is a 'kill zone' several kilometres wide, patrolled by drones, where small mobile squads operate, trying to strike here and there," the officer told AFP. "Many Russian soldiers constantly move through the area. These are critical points," Serhii Beskrestnov, a technology advisor to the Ukrainian defence ministry, told AFP. **Blackout fallout** Ukraine says that blocking Starlink has an enormous impact on Russian forces. AFP has not been able to independently assess the fallout. "For the Russians, this is not just a problem, it is a catastro-

phic," said Beskrestnov. "We knew that they used Starlink on the front," but "we did not believe that it was this crucial." The Russian side played down the consequences. Valery Tishkov, a communications official for the Russian military, said that Starlink was only used marginally and that the army "has all modern, domestically-produced communication services. The operations control system functions reliably and ensures the command and control of troops at the front." **How will Russia adapt?** According to several Ukrainian sources, Russia has sought to pay Ukrainians to organise legitimate Starlink accounts that it can use for its drones at the front. Ukraine's SBU security service

has warned that this is a crime punishable by a sentence jail of life. Russia has deployed alternative solutions, according to the Ukrainian sources, but these are not as reliable as Starlink's low orbiting network. Russia has instead used its Yamal and Express geo-stationary satellites that are higher up and there are fewer of them. "They need a satellite receiver equipped with a large parabolic antenna," said Beskrestnov. These are now a prime target for Ukrainian forces and Russia has had to move back the antennae by 10-15 kilometres (6-9 miles) and deploy reinforced Wi-Fi from the receivers to the front lines. "We are trying to locate these terminals," said the adviser.

**Decisive in conflict?** Ukrainian forces regained territory from Russia in February, a rare occurrence during the four years of war when they have gradually lost terrain amidst bitter battles that have cost thousands of lives. On February 5, Russian military observers reported disruption of the Starlink internet terminals used by Moscow on the front lines after Musk took measures following a request from Kyiv. A senior Ukrainian military official said that counter-attacks had been launched all along the front line in a single day, but gave no further details. The US-based Institute for the Study of War says that Ukrainian forces are probably taking advantage of Russia's loss of Starlink.



Egyptian ambassador to Qatar Walid Fahmy al-Faqui.

## Qatar and Egypt enjoy common values and traditions during Ramadan, says envoy

The Holy Month of Ramadan is deeply rooted in family values, strengthening bonds of kinship and nurturing the soul through patience and gratitude, said Egyptian ambassador to Doha Walid Fahmy al-Faqui.

He highlighted that Ramadan inspires acts of charity and goodness, with generosity manifesting most beautifully in the tradition of helping those in need.

The custom of providing free iftar meals, the envoy noted, is a powerful expression of human solidarity.

In Egypt, similar traditions thrive: "Mawaeed Al-Rahman" (Banquets of the Merciful) line the streets, offering the finest foods at iftar to the less fortunate.

Al-Faqui said that most Arab traditions during Ramadan are largely similar, marked by prayer, fasting, worship, and especially the night prayers of the last 10 days, blending deep spirituality with festive popular customs.

Distinctions are found mainly in specific practices, such as how the Holy Month is welcomed, the organisation of iftar gatherings, the sharing of food, and the performance of Taraweeh prayers.

The envoy said that Ramadan in Qatar is characterised by an atmosphere overflowing with warmth and affection, reflecting the country's authentic hospitality and renowned Arab generosity.

It is a special time, he said, for reflection, illuminated by festive lights, decorations, and artistic ornaments that enliven the country.

This distinctive spiritual ambience is evident in mosques filled with worshippers and in the widespread charitable activities throughout Qatar.

Al-Faqui also observed that Qatar hosts numerous charitable initiatives and communal iftar banquets accessible to all residents, ensuring that everyone benefits.

Additionally, free iftar meal boxes are distributed across the country before sunset, embodying the spirit and values of Ramadan.

On Qatari-Egyptian relations, al-Faqui noted that ties between the two countries are steadily growing, with both leaderships working diligently to foster stability in the region, including on the situation in Gaza.

He added that Qatar and Egypt play a pivotal role in promoting security and peace across the region, with closely aligned positions on many key issues in the Arab and Islamic worlds.

# MoI issues public safety advisories, urging vigilance during Ramadan

By Joey Aguilar  
Doha

The Ministry of Interior (MoI) has urged residents to prioritise safety during the Holy Month of Ramadan by adhering to official guidelines on home precautions, fire prevention, traffic discipline and emergency response.

In awareness messages issued by its Public Relations Department, the ministry called on the public to follow safety instructions carefully and to share them widely to enhance community awareness throughout the month.

Highlighting that the home is a place of stability and security for families, the MoI noted that accidents often occur due to negligence, lack of knowledge, or failure to follow preventative measures – risks that may increase during Ramadan, with busy kitchens, gatherings, and altered daily routines.

Among the key fire safety measures, residents are advised to ensure that a suitable fire extinguisher is available at home and to keep children away from kitchens, hot surfaces and electrical sources.

The ministry cautioned against wearing loose or nylon-blended clothing while cooking to reduce the risk of flames catching.

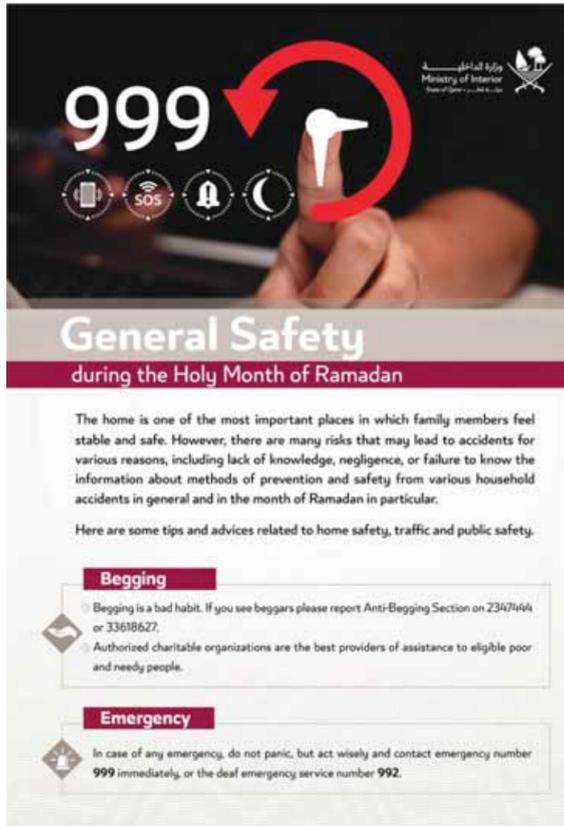
In the event of an oil pan fire, residents are warned not to pour water on the flames, as this may intensify the blaze.

Instead, they should cover the pan with a thick lid or a fire blanket.

If a fire breaks out in a trash bin, it should be covered immediately with a damp cloth to cut off oxygen.

The ministry also stressed proper handling of gas cylinders, advising residents to place them in cool, well-ventilated areas away from direct sunlight.

If a gas leak is suspected, doors and windows should be opened immediately, while avoiding matches or electrical switches that could trigger an ignition.



**General Safety during the Holy Month of Ramadan**

The home is one of the most important places in which family members feel stable and safe. However, there are many risks that may lead to accidents for various reasons, including lack of knowledge, negligence, or failure to know the information about methods of prevention and safety from various household accidents in general and in the month of Ramadan in particular.

Here are some tips and advices related to home safety, traffic and public safety.

**Begging**

Begging is a bad habit. If you see beggars please report Anti-Begging Section on 2347444 or 33618627.

Authorized charitable organizations are the best providers of assistance to eligible poor and needy people.

**Emergency**

In case of any emergency, do not panic, but act wisely and contact emergency number 999 immediately, or the deaf emergency service number 992.

## A tale from a bygone era: Ramadan drummers and their famous chant

By Tawfik Lamari  
Staff Reporter

In Qatar, as in many Gulf countries, the Ramadan drummer (*musahar* in Arabic) was one of its most prominent figures.

This man – who began his work in the last third of the night, about two hours before dawn – was the link between the community's customs and the rhythm of Ramadan.

The *musahar* is the person who roams the streets and alleys of Qatari neighbourhoods during Ramadan to wake those fasting for their pre-dawn meal (Suhoor) before the start of the fast.

He uses a drum or tambourine, beating it rhythmically, and chants short religious calls in a melodious voice to remind people of the time.

According to researchers of folklore, the most famous phrase the drummer would chant on his rounds was: "There is no God but God, Muhammad is the Messenger of God... There is no God but God, it's time for suhoor, O servants of God."

Each neighbourhood had its own Ramadan drummer, who would walk through the alleys, beating his drum and walking amid the houses.

Families relied on this voice to wake them for Suhoor (the pre-dawn meal), as modern commu-



Modern file photo of two drummers in traditional garb.

nication methods such as electric alarm clocks were unavailable at the time.

Among the names of those famous for their role as *musahar* in Doha in the past were Salim Bu Haloum, Karam bin Awad, Saad bin Awad, Saad bin Nayem, Rashid al-Mas, and Idris Khairi; their legacy will keep on for generations.

With the development of Qatari society, improved living standards, and the introduction of modern communication technologies, the role of the *musahar* gradually diminished.

centration increases the risk of accidents.

In case of emergencies, the public is reminded to remain calm and contact 999 immediately, or 992 for the deaf emergency service.

Addressing public order, the ministry urged residents to report beggars to the Anti-Begging Section on 2347444 or 33618627, stressing that authorised charitable organisations are the appropriate channels for assisting those in need.

The ministry stressed that prevention and community co-operation remain essential to ensuring a safe and peaceful Ramadan for all.



**Traffic Safety during the Holy Month of Ramadan**

- Refrain from speeding and engaging in reckless driving prior to iftar. Follow the posted speed limits while driving to guarantee your safety and that of others.
- Make sure the roadway is entirely clear on both sides prior to crossing, particularly during busy hours, and cross only at marked crossing zones.
- If it's close to iftar or Suhoor, refrain from any distractions while driving, including eating or drinking. It is advisable to pull over to a designated waiting area to consume food and beverages, and then continue your journey safely.
- Refrain from allowing children to play on the internal roads of residential neighborhoods, particularly at night, to protect them from traffic accidents. Instead, let them play only in designated play areas.
- Refrain from driving if you feel fatigued, tired, or dizzy, as these conditions can result in diminished focus and attention while driving. If you have health issues that necessitate rest, medication, or stimulants impacting your concentration or inducing relaxation, please avoid driving to ensure your safety and the safety of those around you.

**Fire Safety during the Holy Month of Ramadan**

- Make sure that there is a proper fire extinguisher in your house.
- Do not leave the match until it is completely extinguished.
- Do not leave the children in the kitchen or nearby hot and burning materials or electrical power sources.
- Do not wear flowing dresses or nylon mixed weaves in the kitchen in order to avoid catching fire.
- When a fire breaks out in the oil pan, avoid pouring water into the pan as it ignites the fire and cover the burning pan by placing the nearest thick lid on the pan or cover it with fire blanket.
- When a fire breaks out in the trash bin, cover the burning trash bin immediately with a damp cloth in order to prevent oxygen from igniting the fire.
- When you smell gas odor, immediately open all doors and windows to reduce concentration of leaked gas. Do not use a burning matchstick near a gas cylinder to locate the place of leakage and avoid switching on the lights and exhaust fan for ventilation as they may serve as points of ignition to the highly inflammable gas and an electric spark from the switches of a light or a fan is sufficient to ignite the leaked gas.
- Make sure to put the gas cylinders in a cool and open place to get it under control easily when necessary and do not expose it to the sun.

## QNB appoints Achraf Hakimi as global brand ambassador

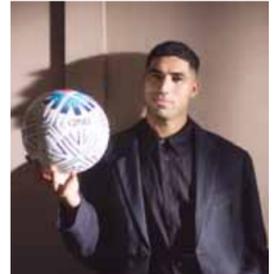
QNB Group has appointed international football star Achraf Hakimi as its new global brand ambassador.

His appointment marks the start of the partnership with the release of QNB's Ramadan "No matter how big we grow, those who matter most to us remain bigger" TV commercial.

The appointment of Hakimi as QNB Group's new global brand ambassador also marks a partnership between a leading bank in the Middle East and Africa with a strong global footprint and a globally recognised athlete, united by excellence, resilience, and cross-border progress.

The collaboration reinforces the QNB Group's role as a trusted long-term financial partner, empowering individuals, families, and businesses to create meaningful value and achieve their financial goals at every stage of life.

Born in Getafe, Spain, Hakimi rose to prominence at Real Madrid, where he made his professional breakthrough before building an impressive career across Europe's top leagues. He has since represented leading clubs including Borussia Dortmund, Inter Milan, and Paris Saint-Germain, while playing a key role for the Moroccan national team.



His journey from humble beginnings to global success mirrors QNB Group's evolution from a national financial institution into a leading banking group across the Middle East and Africa, with a growing international presence driven by consistent support, innovation, and a commitment to empowering progress. The newly released Ramadan TV commercial tells a heartfelt story of Hakimi's personal football journey and shows his strong bond with his mother, his biggest supporter, who is always by his side. This is depicted within the spirit of the holy month, reinforcing the bank's position as a trusted financial partner whose success is built on its customers, underscoring the depth of the relationship that spans generations.



## From traditional ways of life to modern prosperity, Ramadan remained a month of gatherings and piety

By Ayman Adly  
Staff Reporter

During the 1970s, the Holy Month of Ramadan saw a quiet social transformation in Qatar.

Society was transitioning from a simple maritime and desert lifestyle into the early stages of a modern state, and with this shift, Ramadan evenings began to evolve.

Before the introduction of local television broadcasting, traditional gatherings (majlis) were the main form of evening entertainment.

After Taraweeh prayers, men would gather in popular majlis, where traditional Arabic coffee and dates were served, and talks were mostly centred on the topics

related to the sea, daily life transactions, and regional news.

Children filled the narrow alleys of old neighbourhoods such as Msheireb and Al Bidda, playing late into the night, while the voice of the mesaharaty (a man who used to alert people to get up for Suhoor late at night during Ramadan) remained a constant part of the scene, waking people before dawn with his familiar call, without loudspeakers or sound effects.

In 1970, official broadcasting of Qatar Television began, and the rhythm of Ramadan nights started to change.

Iftar time became linked to watching the news bulletin, followed by religious programmes and the popular Arabic TV series aired in the evenings.

The introduction of television did not eliminate the majlis; it reorganised it.

Some homes became gathering places for neighbours to watch a programme or TV series, especially in the early years when television sets were not yet common in households.

Consequently, Ramadan after the oil boom took on different turns as living standards considerably improved, and iftar banquets became more diverse.

Yet the core traditions remained unchanged: exchanging dishes between homes, performing Taraweeh prayers in congregation, and giving zakat and charity.

There was a general sense that modernity was entering homes, but Ramadan maintained the stable traditions that continued to link the new generation with the old generation of the seafaring and pearl diving.