



Qatar Insurance
Financial Results (FY 2025)

Gross Written Premiums (GWP)

9%
QAR 9.9B

Net Profit Before the Impact of Fair Value

19%
QAR 874M

Net Profit Profit attributable to QIC shareholders

9%
QAR 791M

Earnings Per Share

10%
QAR 0.188

qic-group.com

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BUSINESS | Page 1

Aamal Company posts QR443mn profit in 2025; recommends 5% dividend

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Amir urges collective action to protect biodiversity

● **Environmental protection deemed vital for health and quality of life**

By A Staff Reporter
Doha

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani has emphasised the importance of protecting natural resources and preserving biodiversity in Qatar to ensure a balance between the country's development plans and its sustainability goals.

His Highness the Amir also urged all members of the public to protect the environment, which, in turn, will positively impact public health and quality of life.

In a post on his official X account, HH the Amir said, "On Qatar Environment Day, we recall the great importance of pro-

tecting our natural resources and preserving our biodiversity to achieve a balance between our development plans and the desired sustainability. We urge everyone to protect our environment, as this will positively reflect on the health of society and the quality of life."

Recent initiatives across Qatar have increasingly reflected this national focus on environmental stewardship, with authorities accelerating programmes aimed at biodiversity protection, sustainable urban planning and climate resilience.

The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change (MECC) has intensified conservation efforts targeting native ecosystems, including mangrove restoration projects along Qatar's coastline and expanded wildlife monitoring programmes designed to protect endangered species and restore ecological balance. Officials have repeatedly stressed that biodiversity preservation forms a core pillar of the country's long-term environmental strategy aligned with Qatar National Vision 2030.

Qatar has also continued to advance



large-scale sustainability measures through renewable energy deployment and resource-efficiency initiatives. The expansion of solar energy capacity, led by projects such as the Al Kharsaah Solar Power Plant, has contributed to reducing carbon emissions while supporting energy diversification goals. Parallel efforts to promote water conservation and sustainable waste management have been integrated into national development planning.

Urban sustainability has emerged as another key focus area, with green build-

ing standards, environmentally conscious infrastructure, and public awareness campaigns encouraging responsible consumption and environmental protection. Also smart-city planning, sustainable transport solutions, and increased green spaces are being positioned as essential components of improving public health and enhancing quality of life.

Environmental education and community participation have likewise gained momentum, with nationwide campaigns encouraging residents to adopt sustainable practices, reduce waste, and protect

marine and desert ecosystems. Experts note that public engagement remains critical to achieving long-term sustainability outcomes, reinforcing the message underscored by His Highness the Amir that environmental responsibility is a shared national duty.

Together, these initiatives illustrate Qatar's broader strategy of balancing rapid economic development with ecological preservation – an approach aimed at safeguarding natural resources for future generations while sustaining economic growth.



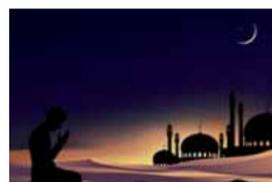
Amir condoles with Kuwait Amir

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani and His Highness the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani have sent cables of condolences to Kuwaiti Amir Sheikh Meshal al-Ahmad al-Jaber al-Sabah on the death of Sheikh Salman Humoud al-Salman al-Humoud al-Sabah. HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani also sent a similar cable to the Kuwaiti Amir. (QNA)

NMoQ achieves a global first

The National Museum of Qatar (NMoQ) has earned the Platinum rating under the Global Sustainability Assessment System (GSAS) Operations, becoming the world's first museum to achieve this distinction. Assessed by the Gulf Organisation for Research & Development (Gord), the certification highlights NMoQ's advancement from Gold to Platinum status. Qatar Museums CEO Mohammed Saad al-Rumaihi said the achievement reflects the organisation's deep commitment to environmental responsibility and Qatar National Vision 2030.

Page 3



O mankind! Verily, there has come to you a convincing proof (Prophet Muhammad PBUH) from your Lord; and We sent down to you a manifest light (this Qur'an). (Qur'an 4: 174)

Prayer times

Fajr...4.42; Zuhr...11.47; Asr...3.06; Maghrib...5.38; Isha...7.08

Fasting times

Iftar today 5.38pm
Imsak tomorrow 4.31am

COMMUNITY

See Page 5

Ramadan cannon fire a big draw



Crowds gather at Souq Waqif as the ceremonial Ramadan cannon is fired at sunset in Doha, marking the time of Iftar during the holy month – a cherished tradition that continues to attract residents and visitors alike. PICTURE: Thajudheen

Sheikha Jowaher hosts Iftar banquet

Her Highness Consort of HH the Amir Sheikha Jowaher bint Hamad bin Suhaim al-Thani hosted an Iftar banquet at the Lusail Palace yesterday to coincide with the holy month of Ramadan, in honour of a number of female teachers, school principals, and administrators at the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE), along with a number of female diplomats at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and female employees of the Ministry of Social Development and Family. HE the Minister of Social Development and Family Buthaina bint Ali al-Jabr al-Nuaimi, HE the Minister of Education and Higher Education Lolwah bint Rashid AlKhater, and HE the Minister of State for International Co-operation Maryam bint Ali bin Nasser al-Misnad attended the banquet. (QNA)

Egg is life: A QR210mn staple that unites Qatar's millions

By Joey Aguilar
Doha

Eggs have cracked their way into the top tier of Qatar's food economy.

Retail managers say they rank among the fastest-selling supermarket items, rivalling rice in value and turnover, while official trade data shows imports reaching more than QR200mn annually. Behind those numbers lies a deeper story – of affordability, survival, and a staple that cuts across income levels and nationalities.

Across major hypermarkets in the country, eggs consistently move off shelves at a pace matched only by rice and bread. A manager at a popular hypermarket told *Gulf Times* that, while rice remains a slightly larger category in terms of overall value, the difference is marginal. Both products are considered fast-moving essentials, replenished frequently to keep up with steady demand.

Bread, another dietary mainstay for Qatar's diverse population, also maintains high turnover, highlighting the dominance of basic staples in household spending.

In a country defined by diversity, the egg stands out as a rare common denominator

For many residents, eggs have become indispensable not only because of price but also because of their accessibility and nutritional value. They are widely regarded as a healthy source of protein and are easy to prepare in countless ways – boiled, fried, scrambled or folded into rice. Interviews and informal surveys with residents show a common thread: eggs are reliable, filling and adaptable to different tastes and budgets.

That reliability matters most

to low-income earners. Albert D, an Asian expatriate working in the construction sector and living at the Mukaynis Compound, said eggs are central to managing his monthly expenses. A significant portion of his salary is remitted to his family abroad, leaving him to budget carefully for daily needs.

Without eggs, he explained, stretching his income would be far more difficult. He usually looks for promotional offers, buying trays of 30 eggs priced between QR8 and QR12. One tray, he said, can last him at least 10 days. Paired with bread or rice, and occasionally tomatoes and onions for flavour, eggs provide enough variety to keep meals satisfying without exceeding his limited food allowance.

"Egg is life," he said with a smile, adding that he could eat eggs almost every day without getting bored. His hope is simple: that prices remain stable and affordable. To Page 4



For many residents, eggs have become indispensable not only because of price but also because of their accessibility and nutritional value. PICTURE: Thajudheen

Minister of labour meets Rwandan ambassador



HE the Minister of Labour Dr Ali bin Saeed bin Samikh al-Marri met on Wednesday with Rwanda's ambassador to Qatar Igor Marara. During the meeting, they reviewed bilateral co-operation between the two countries in areas related to the labour sector and discussed means of supporting and further developing this co-operation. - QNA

Environment minister meets ambassador of Mongolia



HE the Minister of Environment and Climate Change Dr Abdullah bin Abdulaziz bin Turki al-Subaie met with the ambassador of Mongolia (non-resident) to Qatar Sergelen Purev. They discussed co-operation relations between the two countries in the fields of environment and climate change, and explored ways to support and strengthen them. - QNA

OFFICIAL

Qatar condemns attacks in Pakistan provinces

Qatar expressed its condemnation and denunciation of the attacks that took place in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab provinces of Pakistan, resulting in deaths and injuries.

In a statement issued yesterday, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs reiterated Qatar's firm position rejecting violence, terrorism, and criminal acts, regardless of motives or justifications.

The ministry expressed Qatar's condolences to the families of the victims and to the government and people of Pakistan, while wishing the injured a speedy recovery. - QNA

Qatar reiterates support for Sudan's unity and territorial integrity

Qatar reiterated its firm and supportive stance on the unity and territorial integrity of Sudan, and the right of its fraternal people to live in dignity, security and stability, and rejected any form of interference in its internal affairs, voicing deep concern over the continuation of the war and the accompanying crimes and grave human rights violations, which have led to the loss of thousands of Sudanese lives and property and the displacement of millions of them, in addition to the unprecedented destruction of infrastructure.

This came in a statement by Qatar, delivered by Second Secretary at the Permanent Delegation of Qatar to the United Nations Office in Geneva Sheikh Sultan bin Khalid al-Thani, during his participation in the enhanced interactive dialogue on Sudan, within the framework of the 61st session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva.

He said that the fraternal Sudanese people can no longer bear to wait any longer for a solution, and that urgent action is necessary to put an end to this war.

There is no way to do this, Sheikh Sultan added, except by conducting a comprehensive and rational dialogue to reach an agreement that restores security and stability to Sudan and spares it further destruction and division.

He emphasised that Qatar,



since the beginning of the crisis, has been keen to provide all forms of support and humanitarian assistance to alleviate the suffering of the Sudanese people in this critical humanitarian situation.

Sheikh Sultan noted that, in continuation of these efforts, on February 9, a convoy of medical grants provided by the Qatar Fund for Development (QFFD) in co-operation with the Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS) was sent to provide urgent needs of emergency and life-saving medicines, in addition to other batches to follow, with the number of beneficiaries estimated at half a million people in 12 Sudanese states.

He urged the international community to redouble its efforts and provide more support to the Sudanese, stressing the importance of facilitating unhindered access for humanitarian aid to those affected. - QNA

Qatar reaffirms commitment to role as active global partner

Qatar has reaffirmed its commitment to playing an active international role and continuing its mediation efforts, which have contributed, through its UN-sponsored hosting of meetings of special envoys on Afghanistan and priority working groups, to strengthening international consensus on key issues by providing an inclusive platform for dialogue and coordination.

The statement, emphasising Qatar's firm belief that constructive dialogue is the best path toward achieving peace, was delivered by Acting Charge d'Affaires of the Permanent Mission of Qatar to the United Nations in Geneva, Jawhara bint Abdulaziz al-Suwaidi, during the enhanced interactive dialogue on Afghanistan as part of the 61st session of the United Nations Human Rights Council.

She said that the occasion reflects efforts to build practical and effective dialogue between the Afghan caretaker government and the international community to meet humanitarian and development needs, contribute to stability, and create conditions that enable Afghanistan to achieve internal peace, strengthen good-neighbourly relations, fully reintegrate into the international community, and fulfill its international commitments.

Al-Suwaidi noted that Afghanistan faces complex challenges that directly affect the promotion and protection of human rights, including the economic crisis, unemployment, rising humanitarian needs, recurring climate disturbances, widespread poverty, and food insecurity, in addition to the continuation of sanctions and asset freezes and the return of millions of refugees to the country.

The official stressed that Afghanistan is going through a delicate phase that requires a balanced collective approach toward the situation in the country, combining urgent humanitarian response with responsible political engagement in order to meet the Afghan people's aspirations for security, stability and development. - QNA

Qatar Foundation's ABP, University of St Andrews sign agreement

The Academic Bridge Programme (ABP), part of Qatar Foundation (QF)'s Pre-University Education (PUE), has signed an academic agreement with the UK's University of St Andrews, creating new pathways for students in Qatar to pursue higher education at leading UK universities.

The QF said in a statement that this partnership strengthens academic programs, enhances admissions pathways, and further develops student support services to ensure ABP graduates are well prepared to succeed at top universities worldwide.

Under the agreement, eligible ABP students can apply to foundation programs offered through the university's International Education and Learning Centre.

These programmes provide direct progression routes to degree studies at the



University of St Andrews.

Available pathways include the International Year One in Science, leading to second-year entry into undergraduate programmes in fields such as Computer Science, Environmental Biological Sciences,

Geography, Geology and Environmental Sciences, Mathematics and Statistics, Molecular Biological Sciences, Physics and Astronomy, and Psychology, the statement noted.

In addition, students have the opportunity to pursue a dedicated Medicine pathway leading to a joint medical degree awarded by University of St Andrews and University of Manchester.

The statement highlighted that a key feature of the agreement allows students to complete their foundation year in Qatar through the ABP before transitioning to the UK.

"This partnership reflects our commitment to empowering students academically and personally, while opening meaningful pathways that enable them to contribute to Qatar's knowledge-based economy and

represent their country with distinction globally," said ABP director Dr Saheim Khalaf al-Temimi.

The vice-principal for International Strategy and External Relations at the University of St Andrews, Professor Brad MacKay, said: "We are honoured to partner with Qatar Foundation. Their commitment to excellence in education and research aligns closely with our mission, and together we aim to create transformative opportunities for learners and communities."

Students must meet specific academic and English language requirements to qualify.

Those who successfully complete the foundation programme are guaranteed progression to undergraduate study at the University of St Andrews, subject to meeting progression criteria. - QNA

Lebanese speaker meets Qatar's envoy



Lebanese Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri met yesterday with Qatar's ambassador to Lebanon Sheikh Saud bin Abdulrahman al-Thani. They discussed co-operation relations between the two countries. - QNA

Ramadan remittances up as workers send billions home

Qatar's exchange houses are bracing for a familiar but formidable annual rush, as the arrival of Ramadan triggers a sharp spike in workers' remittances that industry insiders say could push transaction volumes up by as much as 30% above the annual norm.

The figures are striking.

Workers in Qatar transferred QR10.77bn abroad in the third quarter of 2025 alone - a rise of 10.8% year-on-year - whilst cumulative remittances for the first nine months of 2025 reached QR32.4bn, against a full-year total of QR44.6bn in 2024, according to data from the Qatar Central Bank.

Yet it is Ramadan that puts the system under its greatest strain.

Exchange company executives told the Qatar News Agency (QNA) that the final 10 days of the holy month represent the most intense



Bashar al-Wuqti

period of financial activity in the calendar, as workers race to ensure their families back home can celebrate Eid al-Fitr in comfort.

"Transfers rise by around 25% relative to the rest of the year," said Bashar al-Wuqti, the chief executive of one exchange house.

To cope, firms are bolstering liquidity reserves, extending opening hours, and deploying additional staff.

The surge is driven by a conver-



Dr Mohammad Amjad Mousa

gence of pressures: elevated living costs during Ramadan, the payment of zakat and charitable donations, and the disbursement of pre-holiday salaries and bonuses, all compressed into a matter of weeks.

Increasingly, however, the queues snaking out of traditional exchange halls are giving way to smartphone screens.

Digital remittance channels are reshaping the sector, with firms launching Ramadan-specific of-

fers - competitive exchange rates for limited windows, incentive campaigns, and enhanced app functionality - to steer clients towards faster, round-the-clock online transfers.

"Digital transformation is a strategic pillar," said Dr Mohammad Amjad Mousa, the deputy chief executive of another exchange company, who noted that transaction volumes rise annually by 20%-30% during Ramadan. "Speed, convenience, and security are driving adoption."

For Qatar's vast and diverse expatriate workforce, remittances during Ramadan are never merely a financial transaction.

They are, in the words of those who process them, an expression of solidarity - a tangible connection between those working far from home and the families awaiting their return. - QNA

QFFD, QRCS distribute vital aid to affected families in Guinea-Bissau

A joint delegation from the Qatar Fund for Development (QFFD) and Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS) visited Guinea-Bissau to supervise operations and distribute Qatari humanitarian aid to hundreds of families affected by the recent humanitarian crises and natural disasters across the country.

The visit was part of a project to strengthen the resilience of vulnerable communities to recurring disaster risks in Guinea-Bissau.

Funded by the QFFD and co-implemented by the QRCS and the Red Cross Society of Guinea-Bissau, the project aims to help vulnerable communities respond to and adapt to future natural disasters in six regions experiencing consistent extreme weather (Gabi, Bafata, Bissorã, São Do-



mingos, Biombo, and Bolama Bijagos).

Through this project, approximately 1,500 families affected by disasters that occurred between 2022 and 2025 - including fires, strong winds, floods, and drought - received assistance to reduce

their suffering and recover from the damage.

The provisions included food staples (such as rice, beans, onions, potatoes, sugar, and vegetable oil); nonfood items (such as mattresses, tents, straw mats, kitchenware, plastic buckets, solar panels, and mosquito nets); and shelter materials (such as nails, ropes, and zinc roofing sheets).

The delegation held co-ordination meetings with officials of the Red Cross Society of Guinea-Bissau and local leaders in several host cities.

They also took part in the distribution of food and nonfood aid to families affected by the recent fires, and they inspected some damaged local markets and health centres.



Awqaf all prepped for Zakat funds during Ramadan

The Zakat Affairs Department at the Ministry of Endowments (Awqaf) and Islamic Affairs has announced that all operational and technical preparations have been fully primed to receive Zakat payments from individuals and companies via a combined collection system, either through modern digital outlets or onsite collection points.

The ministry said in a statement that these preparations ensure the highest standards of security and reliability, bolstering individuals' confidence and assurances that their payments reach the recipients through the approved regulatory tracks, stemming from Ramadan's motto: "Because your Zakat is a trust."

The head of the Collection and Zakat Accounts Section, Marwa Ahmed al-Benali, highlighted that the section has set an overall operational plan to cope with the record turnout throughout Ramadan, which includes augmenting the capacity and extending business day hours.

She said that the department operates Zakat payment channels around the clock, either through the official website or mobile application, enabling Zakat payers to accurately calculate and pay easily and securely, along with the direct banking transfer service catered to approved accounts.

The department, she said, has collection offices and points in place nationwide to streamline access to services, in addition to mobilising certified collectors in selected outlets during Ramadan.

Al-Benali further emphasised that all collection outlets are fitted with electronic systems to ensure that all operations are registered in a timely manner, followed by issuing approved transaction receipts.

Individuals can search for the location of these collection offices and outlets by visiting the department's website. - QNA

Annual Cricket Tournament 2026 by ICAI Doha Chapter: A celebration of cricket and community

The Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) Doha Chapter recently concluded its 29th Annual Cricket Fiesta, held on February 6 at the Old Ideal Indian School Grounds.

The tournament once again brought together members, families, and cricket enthusiasts for a vibrant celebration of sportsmanship, unity, and camaraderie.

This year's event was elevated by the presence of former Indian cricketer Wasim Jaffer, who graced the finals as the chief guest.

Interacting with players and attendees, he shared reflections from his cricketing journey and encouraged participants to pursue the game with passion and discipline.

The competition witnessed participation across both men's and women's categories, reflecting the Chapter's continued commitment to inclusivity and sporting excellence.

In the Women's Final, Team Brunel faced Team Care n Cure in a spirited contest marked by teamwork and determination.



Team Brunel delivered a commendable performance to emerge as the champions, lifting the trophy amidst loud cheers from supporters.

Nisha Rajpurohit was named Woman of the Match for her all-round display, making significant contributions both with the bat and the ball.

The Men's Final featured a competitive clash between Team IONIOS and Team MSP.

Both teams demonstrated strong coordination and resilience throughout the match, with Team IONIOS ultimately securing the championship title.

Rajeesh Gopinath was named "Player

of the Match" for his standout performance and honoured with the "Man of the Series" title for his consistent excellence throughout the tournament.

The event concluded with a grand prize distribution ceremony, where champions and outstanding performers were felicitated, followed by a raffle draw that added

further joy and engagement for members and their families.

The Chapter expressed sincere gratitude to all sponsors whose generous support contributed significantly to the success of the tournament - Team Sponsors: MSP Partner, Gant, IONIOS, Applebee's, Kreston SVP, Brunel, Morison Qatar, Care n Cure Group of Companies; Sports Partners: Salpido, boat; Annual Title Sponsor: BNW Developments; Annual Gold Sponsors: Aster DM Healthcare, Morison Qatar, Kreston SVP, Tilda, Monin, Anchor, Ola, Cube Innovators; Annual Silver Sponsors: Anvin Infosystems WLL, KPMG, MCA Qatar, RSM, IONIOS; Annual Support Sponsors: Alok K Saksena & Partners, Capitaire Consulting, Focus Softnet, Parker Russell, Total Environment Homes; and Technology Partner: Tally.

Chapter chairperson Arun Somanath and his executive team extended heartfelt appreciation to all players, sponsors, volunteers, organising committee members, and supporters who made the 29th Annual Cricket Tournament a grand success.



QRCS and talabat Qatar co-launch 'Hero Meals'

The Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS) has partnered with talabat Qatar to launch the "Hero Meals", a Ramadan initiative that enables customers to donate meals to riders directly through the app.

As part of the campaign, a number of participating restaurants will offer specially curated meal options available within the "Hero Meals" collection on the talabat app.

Customers can support riders by adding a Hero Meal to their order in just a few taps.

The donated meals will be distributed to riders, offering a simple and meaningful way for customers to show appreciation during the holy month of Ramadan.

QRCS managing director - secretary-general Engineer Ibrahim bin Hashem al-Sada stated: "We at the QRCS give priority to partnership with the private-sector companies that cherish corporate social responsibility (CSR) as a central component of their business model."

"For years now, talabat Qatar has been working closely with us to promote community service and welfare," he said. "This initiative is just another example, which we really appreciate."

"Ramadan is a time of reflection and generosity," talabat Qatar managing director Francisco Miguel De Sousa said. "With 'Hero Meals', we are happy to launch an initiative that allows our customers to directly support the riders who serve our community every day."

"Partnering with the QRCS ensures that this campaign is delivered with credibility and meaningful impact," he added.



Engineer Ibrahim Hashem al-Sada

NMoQ achieves 'Platinum' rating in GSAS Operations

The National Museum of Qatar (NMoQ) has received the "Platinum" rating under the Global Sustainability Assessment System (GSAS) Operations' sustainable green building certification system, further underscoring Qatar Museums (QM)'s position as a global pioneer in sustainable cultural institutions.

The certification was awarded following a rigorous assessment by the Gulf Organisation for Research & Development (GORD), with the "Platinum" rating marking a global first for a museum under the GSAS Operations framework.

"The National Museum of Qatar's advancement from 'Gold' to 'Platinum' under GSAS Operations marks a significant milestone in our sustainability journey," said QM chief executive Mohammed Saad al-Rumaihi. "This achievement reflects the QM's long-term commitment to embedding environmental responsibility across our institutions, from building and design to day-to-day operations."

"As cultural leaders, we are proud to contribute to the goals of Qatar National Vision 2030 while setting new benchmarks for sustainable museum operations globally," he said.

The museum was presented with the "Platinum" award at the NMoQ Auditorium yesterday.

The event was celebrated on Qatar Environment Day, coinciding with national efforts to protect and preserve the environment.

The recognition highlights the NMoQ's continued excellence in operational sustainability and builds on its earlier achievement of a GSAS 4-Star rating for design and build certification in 2018, awarded ahead of the museum's official opening.

It also reinforces the QM's reputation as a leader in advancing sustainable cultural infrastructure both in Qatar and internationally.

The head of Project Management Oversight and director of Project Management at the QM, Fahad Abdulla A Mana, said: "Achieving



the GSAS 'Platinum' rating for the NMoQ is a proud moment that reflects our unwavering commitment to sustainability in cultural institutions."

"This milestone is the result of dedicated efforts across our teams to embed environmental responsibility into every aspect of operations," he said. "It not only strengthens Qatar Museums' leadership in sustainable practices but also sets a benchmark for museums worldwide to follow."

"By upgrading their certification rating from 'Gold' to 'Platinum', the NMoQ has set a regional precedent for how cultural institutions can balance the preservation of heritage with the urgent demands of environmental sustainability," GORD chairman Dr Yousef Alhorr said.

"It is one thing to design a sustainable building, but it is a far greater challenge to operate it at peak efficiency over time."

"This achievement shows a higher level of institutional maturity, proving that it takes a dedicated, ongoing commitment to maintaining GSAS Operations certification for enhanced environmental performance," he said.

This year the QM celebrates Evolution Nation, a campaign honouring Qatar's cultural journey over the past 50 years since the founding of the NMoQ.

Curated by Qatar Creates, the national movement positioning Qatar as a global hub for art, culture, and creativity, Evolution Nation highlights both the nation's cultural milestones and its aspirations for the future. - QNA

Qatar advancing as a strategic launchpad for global technology expansion: official

By Shaima Sheriff
Staff Reporter

Qatar is positioning itself as a stable, digitally advanced gateway for global technology firms, offering policy certainty, strategic access and targeted incentives to accelerate regional expansion and long-term investment, according to a senior official at Invest Qatar.

Invest Qatar acting chief marketing and communications officer Reem Saad al-Kuwari told *Gulf Times* that Qatar is reinforcing its standing as a strategic base for global technology companies and high-growth startups seeking to enter the Middle East, Africa, and South Asia.

She added that the country's proposition is built on long-term certainty and ecosystem readiness.

"Qatar offers startups a compelling blend of stability, connectivity and pro-business regulation," al-Kuwari said. "As one of the world's safest countries with top-tier healthcare, infrastructure and quality of life, it provides a reliable environment for teams to thrive and innovate."

Qatar has risen 22 places in the Global Innovation Index over the past six years, ranking 48th in 2025.

It also ranks second globally for general infrastructure in the 2024 index and second worldwide for mobile internet speeds in 2025 - performance indicators that reinforce investor confidence in its digital backbone.



Reem al-Kuwari

Al-Kuwari highlighted the country's geographic and commercial positioning as a key differentiator.

"Qatar serves as an ideal entry point to the wider region," she said. "Its strategic location, world-class connectivity and digitally mature market allow startups to pilot, refine and localise their products before scaling into high-growth markets across the Middle East, Africa and South Asia."

"This reduces risk while accelerating regional expansion," al-Kuwari stated.

It is learnt that through the Startup Qatar Investment Programme, early-stage firms establishing in the country can access funding of up to \$1.1mn, while mature startups expanding into the market may receive up to \$5.5mn.

In parallel, the Invest Qatar Incentives Pro-

gramme offers up to 40% reimbursement on eligible local investment costs over five years, including setup, infrastructure, equipment, leasing and employee expenses.

Investor momentum is strongest across the technology, financial services, advanced manufacturing, and logistics sectors, aligned with diversification objectives under Qatar National Vision 2030.

"In technology, momentum continues to accelerate thanks to Qatar's rising innovation capacity and growing depth in applied R&D," al-Kuwari said, citing partnerships such as imec establishing its regional headquarters in Qatar to strengthen the semiconductor and advanced technology pipeline.

She added that financial services benefit from "a robust regulatory landscape and strong demand for fintech, asset management and digital financial innovation".

At the same time, advanced manufacturing is supported by "reliable and sustainable energy supply, sector-specific infrastructure and a national strategy that prioritises high-value production and industry 4.0 capabilities".

In an increasingly competitive global environment, al-Kuwari said that founders consistently point to three differentiators: "stability, access and speed".

"They emphasise stability as a core strength - a predictable policy framework, clear national priorities and long-horizon economic planning give them the certainty to invest, hire and scale with conviction," she said. "They also highlight the access they gain and the speed and responsiveness of our systems."

Ministry launches 'Al Razji 2026' heritage event at Darb Al Saai

The Ministry of Culture organised the "Al Razji 2026" heritage event on Wednesday at its permanent Darb Al Saai venue in the Umm Salal area.

The event is set to continue until March 3, offering a Ramadan experience that embodies the authenticity of the past and Qatar's time-honoured heritage.

The director of the ministry's Public Relations and Communication Department, Ahmed al-Yafei, affirmed to the Qatar News Agency (QNA) that the event is part of the ministry's strategy to preserve national heritage, strengthen its presence in the collective consciousness of society, and ensure the sustainability of popular traditions across generations.

The event offers, he said, a unified platform for all age groups in an enduring heritage environment, providing interactive experiences that immerse visitors in Qatari traditions and national identity.

The event features the second Al Razji quiz, with questions about Ramadan and Islamic culture, alongside art exhibitions including animation films, heritage photography, and rare collectibles reflecting Qatar's cultural roots.

A dedicated interactive area for children (ages 5-13) combines learning and entertainment with traditional activities like Garango, maritime challenges, weaving workshops, and knowledge stations to foster creativity and cultural awareness.

For visitors aged 15 and older, specialised workshops on "Grandparents' Skills in the Hands of Grandchildren" teach time-honoured crafts such as visual arts, pottery, candle-making, traditional embroidery, and heritage innovation projects.

The event runs daily from 8pm to 1am, offering a comprehensive journey to preserve Qatari traditions, strengthen cultural awareness among youth, and connect generations to the nation's history and values.



GSO adopts Gord's GSAS as Gulf green building standard

The Gulf Organisation for Research and Development (Gord) announced that the GCC Standardisation Organisation (GSO) has officially adopted Gord's Global Sustainability Assessment System (GSAS) as the regional Gulf Standard GSO 3000:2025 for sustainable buildings.

This standard applies to the construction and building sector across all GCC countries, aiming to enhance the environmental performance and efficiency of urban projects throughout the region.

The regional adoption of GSAS comes as part of GSO's efforts to develop an integrated framework guiding building and construction practices across the Gulf region, ensuring a practical methodology for applying sustainability requirements within the wider Gulf Building Code. It also contributes to catalysing the implementation of green practices across both public and private projects while supporting sustainable develop-



ment goals throughout the region.

Dr Yousef Alhorr, founding chairman of Gord, said: "The GCC Standardisation Organisation's adoption of GSAS under Standard GSO 3000:2025 marks a pivotal milestone in establishing sustainability benchmarks for the building and construction sector across the GCC."

"That said, policies and standards are only effective when they

are matched by skilled professionals who can put them into practice. This underscores the vital importance of capacity building through training programmes, ensuring that goals and standards are transformed into measurable results on the ground."

To support the effective regional implementation of the new standard, Gord, in collaboration with GSO, organised the first

specialised training workshop on the GSAS framework at the GSO headquarters in Riyadh. The intensive three-day programme focused on the GSAS Design & Build (D&B) framework. It was attended by more than 75 participants from government agencies and relevant sectors across the GCC, as part of an effort to build the professional capacity required to ensure a comprehensive and effective rollout of

the adopted Gulf standard.

The workshop was led by experts from Gord's Center of Excellence, GSAS Trust, who utilised an integrated approach that combines academic theory with practical application, ensuring full alignment with the broader Gulf Building Code. Participants engaged in hands-on sessions covering GSAS methodologies for assessing environmental per-

formance across eight key categories that include energy, water, indoor environment, cultural & economic value, site, urban connectivity, materials, and management & operations. Beyond theoretical frameworks, attendees gained practical proficiency in core system tools, including GSAS calculators and GSASgate - the online platform designed to manage sustainable building projects and track assessment and certification processes.

Beyond knowledge dissemination, the workshop serves as a critical bridge to the mandatory qualifying exam for becoming a D&B Certified Green Professional (CGP). Professionals who successfully pass the exam are authorised to lead GSAS projects. Furthermore, having accredited CGPs on staff allows organisations to qualify as GSAS service providers, enhancing their competitiveness in major projects that require documented sustainability standards.

Visit Qatar announces new activation: Al Ruwais - Maritime Heritage Festival

Visit Qatar has announced the upcoming launch of a new activation, Al Ruwais - the Maritime Heritage Festival, taking place from March 18 to April 4. Part of Qatar's northern tourism development strategy, the activation has been designed as a culturally authentic, community-driven and environmentally conscious experience celebrating the nation's maritime heritage and coastal traditions.

Curated as a living village along the northern shoreline, the Al Ruwais activation will offer residents and visitors the opportunity to engage with local fishermen, artisans, storytellers and chefs through immersive experiences that blend heritage preservation and education.

In a press statement, Ahmed al-Binali, director of Festivals and Events at Visit Qatar, said: The Al Ruwais - Maritime Heritage Festival activation, reflects Visit Qatar's commitment to showcasing Qatar's cultural heritage through experiences that are authentic, accessible and rooted in community participation.

"By bringing maritime traditions, storytelling, craftsmanship and coastal cuisine together in Al Ruwais, this activation will offer residents a meaningful opportunity to engage with the cultural foundations of coastal life while supporting the long-term positioning of the north as a distinctive tourism destination."

Al Ruwais will bring together multiple themed zones inspired by



Qatar's maritime, anchored by a central dhow installation and a traditional souq that will host artisan stalls and interactive games linked to fishing and harbour life.

A dedicated craft zone will feature live demonstrations and workshops led by skilled artisans, showcasing practices such as dhow making, fishing net knitting, pottery, palm frond weaving, pearl mining demonstrations, Arabic calligraphy and henna art.

The marine education zone will offer interactive learning experiences including the Sea Symbols Quiz Station, live marine shows and booths for participating entities. All aimed at raising awareness about marine protection, sustainable fishing and coastal conservation.

Family-friendly programming will include creative workshops, interactive learning and play-based activities, with highlights such as

the Safi the Fish environmental installation, a net playground, storytelling sessions, puppet theatre performances and a virtual reality experience inspired by Qatar's pearl diving heritage.

Cultural performances will animate the village throughout the day, with a main stage hosting Ardah processions, maritime chants, Fidjeri sea songs, poetry readings, storytelling sessions and live music, complemented by roaming performers across the site.

The culinary village will showcase Qatar's coastal cuisine through seafood offerings, live cooking demonstrations and family-friendly workshops, while evening programming will include an open-air cinema by the waterfront and firepit areas.

Al Ruwais will be open daily, operating from 2pm to 9pm on weekdays, from 1pm to 9pm on Fridays, and from 10am to 9pm on Saturdays. Tickets are available on Visit Qatar: <https://visitqatar.com/int/en/events-calendar/al-ruwais>

Through The Al Ruwais - Maritime Heritage Festival, Visit Qatar continues to advance its strategy of delivering experience-led cultural activations that support destination diversification, encourage domestic exploration and strengthen cultural and heritage tourism.

By positioning Al Ruwais as a northern tourism anchor, the activation contributes to long-term destination development while inviting residents to discover Qatar's northern coast during the spring season.



QU students launch 'Made in Qatar' initiative

The Core Curriculum Programme at the Deanship of General Studies at Qatar University (QU) organised an initiative titled "Made in Qatar: National Pride and Sustainable Value" at the College of Business and Economics building, featuring 55 booths - 40 in the female section and 15 in the male section.

The initiative aimed to raise community awareness about the importance of supporting Qatari industries and products, highlighting their role in advancing sustainable development and fostering a culture of social responsibility within the university community.

The initiative was organised through the collaborative efforts of students enrolled in the Leadership, Innovation and Civic Engagement and the Community Service Learning courses, reflecting QU's commitment to linking academic outcomes with practical application and empowering students to actively contribute to national priority areas.

The organising committee an-

nounced that all profits from the initiative would be allocated to support students facing financial difficulties in paying tuition fees, in accordance with a permit issued by the Regulatory Authority for Charitable Activities. This step reflects the values of social solidarity and institutional cohesion that QU strives to cultivate within its community.

Dr Ali Fetais, director of the Core Curriculum Programme stated, "This initiative demonstrates our students' ability to develop solutions that strengthen the nation's economic identity while upholding the values of social solidarity. Their engagement in organising the 'Made in Qatar' initiative reflects a strong awareness of national sustainability priorities and translates academic learning outcomes into tangible impact that serves the university community and supports their peers' academic journeys."

Participating students emphasised that the initiative provided a practical opportunity to enhance their leadership and or-

ganisational skills while bridging theory with real-world application. Asmaa al-Sulaiti noted that the event focused on supporting Qatari businesses and directing proceeds to the student support fund, adding that the course broadened her perspective in volunteer and research engagement.

Salem al-Marri highlighted that supporting national products is fundamental to strengthening the economy and achieving self-sufficiency, emphasising that participation increased students' awareness of the role of local industry in advancing sustainability.

The accompanying activities focused on demonstrating the advancement and competitiveness of Qatari industries while also highlighting the positive economic and environmental impact of supporting local production. The initiative witnessed strong attendance from students and faculty members, who commended the level of organisation and its alignment with academic objectives and national priorities.

Remarkable turnout seen at Katara Ramadan events

QNA
Doha

The Mahaseel Festival's activities continued in the southern part of Katara Cultural Village amidst a vibrant Ramadan atmosphere and a remarkable turnout of visitors, offering a comprehensive experience that blends heritage and family-friendly elements by showcasing a diverse range of participating shops and farms displaying local products, including fresh vegetables, dates, honey, and their derivatives that reflect the richness and quality of national production.

The festival is witnessing a particularly strong family presence, with the children's play area and workshops proving popular as interactive and educational activities are available combining entertainment with skill development, making them an attractive destination for children and a fa-



vourite spot for families. As part of the diverse Ramadan activities, the traditional games tournament (carrom and dama) will take place from February 28 to March 2, aiming to revive these heritage games and strengthen their presence in the community's collective memory through a competitive atmosphere that reflects the spirit of popular traditions.

The 2026 Ramadan Chess Championship, organised in cooperation with the Qatar Chess Federation, continues and will conclude on March 1. The tour-

namment has witnessed remarkable participation and a high level of competition, reflecting the game's popularity and its intellectual and athletic value.

In a related event, Katara is organising the Ramadan Beach Soccer Championship from February 27 to March 9, adding a vibrant sporting dimension to the diverse Ramadan activities. Meanwhile, the Katara Holy Qur'an Memorisation Competition for boys and girls continues. It is held after Asr prayer at the Katara Grand Mosque and the Katara Golden Mosque. This un-

derscores Katara's commitment to supporting religious activities and instilling spiritual values during the holy month.

A series of lectures and religious lessons are being held at the Katara Grand Mosque after Taraweeh prayers. These lectures cover a range of topics, including intellectual, faith-based, and educational aspects, and are presented by a distinguished group of sheikhs and preachers, enriching the Ramadan cultural landscape and enhancing knowledge.

Katara is also hosting a Diwani calligraphy workshop led by calligrapher Nasser al-Hamawi from March 1 to 3, 2026 at the Katara art studios in building 19, from 8:30pm to 10:30pm. The three-day workshop is open to participants aged 15 and above, offering them the opportunity to explore the aesthetics and artistic styles of Diwani calligraphy in an experience that combines creative skill with aesthetic appreciation. Registration is available through Katara's official website.

Egg is life: A QR210mn staple that unites Qatar's millions

From Page 1

Anita L, also an Asian expatriate earning less than QR2,000 per month and working as a cashier at another supermarket, shares a similar experience. She and her colleagues rely heavily on eggs and vegetables for daily meals, often cooking together after work. With roommates from different countries, she said, eggs rarely taste the same twice. Each person brings their own style: spiced, sautéed, curried or mixed with rice, making the ingredient endlessly adaptable.

She expressed gratitude for what she described as a simple but sustaining food that remains within reach of people on tight salaries. For her, eggs are not merely economical; they represent comfort and shared meals in a foreign land.

Retailers are acutely aware of this dependence. An employee at another supermarket noted that eggs are among the items stores cannot afford to run out of. Shortages could quickly drive customers elsewhere, particularly small groceries, eateries and restaurants that rely on a consistent supply. Demand comes not only from households but also from a wide network of baqalas and food outlets across the country.

To maintain availability, supermarkets source eggs both locally and internationally. Imports arrive from countries such as Turkey, India, Oman, Iran and Jordan, while some organic and free-range varieties are brought in from Europe. Shelves typically offer a range of sizes - small, medium and large - alongside premium options to cater to varying preferences and purchasing power.

Trade data underscores the scale of this demand. According to the World Integrated Trade Solutions (WITS) and the Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC), Qatar imported approximately QR210mn worth of eggs in 2024, placing the product around 98th among more than 1,100 imported categories tracked nationally. In 2023 alone, official data show that over 22 million kilograms of fresh eggs entered the country.

Although eggs do not rank among Qatar's top imports alongside fuels, machinery, or vehicles, they hold a significant position within food and agricultural products. Their consistent volume and value position them firmly among the country's top 100 imported goods, underscoring their strategic importance to food supply chains.

At the same time, efforts to boost local egg production reflect a longer-term objective to reduce reliance on imports. Industry reports indicate that policy measures encouraging domestic output aim to strengthen food security and cushion against external supply disruptions. The fact that such strategies are in place signals the essential role eggs have come to play in everyday consumption.

From supermarket aisles to shared kitchens in worker accommodations, the story of eggs in Qatar is both economic and personal. They are a commodity measured in millions of riyals and tonnes, yet also a daily meal that helps residents balance remittances, rent and rising costs. In a country defined by diversity, the egg stands out as a rare common denominator: modest in form, but central to the rhythm of daily life.



MES students champion compassion through Ramadan charity initiative

In a display of generosity and social responsibility, the students of MES Indian School actively participated in the Ramadan Charity Baskets Initiative, contributing a remarkable number of food baskets as part of the Ramadan Bag Collection Campaign. This initiative was carried out in accordance with the directives of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, in collaboration with Qatar Charity.

Each thoughtfully prepared basket included essential food items of daily necessities, aimed at supporting families in need during the blessed month of Ramadan. The campaign witnessed enthusiastic participation from students of KG 1 to Grade XII, across both morning and evening shifts, reflecting a unified spirit of kindness and empathy within the school community.

The initiative to provide material support instilled in students the core values of compassion, gratitude, and community service during their formative years. The overwhelming response underscores the school's commitment to nurturing socially responsible individuals who actively contribute to society's well-being.

Expressing deep appreciation for students' efforts, the school Principal, Dr Hameeda Kadar, stated, 'It is truly inspiring to see our young learners come together in the spirit of giving during this holy month, reflecting the values we endeavour to instill in them –



empathy, generosity, and a sense of responsibility towards the community? Usman Mayyeri, HOD of Ara-

bic, Urdu and Islamic Studies, coordinated the campaign successfully. Rassia Hamza, Sumitha Nasser, Rajesh, Asadullah, Ash-

ique P, Ashique Rahman, Neema Ummukulsu, and Safwa Konnola served as the section coordinators for the campaign.



Empowering MES educators through CBSE's on-screen marking initiative

In a move towards digital transformation in assessments, the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) conducted an online orientation programme on the usage of the On-Screen Marking (OSM) system for teachers. The initiative aimed at equipping educators with the necessary skills and understanding to effectively implement digital evaluation practices.

Teachers of MES Indian School actively participated in the programme, which proved to be highly successful in familiarising them with the streamlined digital marking process. The comprehensive training session enabled participants to gain hands-on experience in evaluat-

ing answer scripts through the OSM platform, ensuring accuracy, efficiency, and consistency in assessment practices. The training session received overwhelmingly positive feedback from the participants, who appreciated the expert guidance and practical exposure provided during the online orientation.

The OSM system marks a significant step towards modernising the examination framework. Introduced by CBSE as part of its sustained commitment to enhancing efficiency and transparency in the evaluation process, the system offers multiple advantages, including reduced errors, improved transparency, secure handling of answer scripts, and faster declaration of results.

CBSE national medal winner of MES honoured by Gulf Sahodaya

A CBSE national-level participant, Master Athwif Abdullah of Class XI, was felicitated recently by the Gulf Sahodaya in recognition of outstanding achievement and exemplary performance at the national level. The honour was conferred during a special programme organised recently by the CBSE Gulf Sahodaya Qatar Chapter at the 38th Annual Principals' Conference held at Kochi, India. It was attended by all the principals of Gulf Sahodaya and distinguished guests. Dr Hameeda Kadar, the school principal, received this prestigious award on behalf of the school.



Release of Class Magazines at MES

MES Indian School (Evening Shift) organised the release of its *Class Magazines*, a creative class-wise competition designed to promote imagination, teamwork, and self-expression among students.

The initiative provided learners with a valuable platform to showcase their talents in writing, art, and presentation through collaboratively prepared handwritten magazines within their respective classes.

A total of 41 magazines were compiled and released, reflecting the enthusiasm, originality, and collective effort of students and teachers. The event was conducted with the wholehearted support and encouragement of the Senior Vice Principal, Shihabudeen Pulath, and the Headmistress, Sameena Ashfaq, whose guidance greatly contributed



to the programme's success. Each magazine featured thoughtful articles, poems, drawings, and creative layouts, highlighting the diverse talents within the school community. Winners were announced from each class under the categories of

Best Cover Page, Best Title, and Best Class Magazine, recognising excellence in creativity and presentation. The programme reflected the school's continued commitment to holistic education and nurturing confident, expressive young learners.



IIS makes historic debut in SOP Handball Championship

Ideal Indian School (IIS) has created history by participating for the first time in the SOP Handball Competition - Secondary Stage (Level 4) for Public and Private Schools under the 19th edition (2025-26) of the Schools Olympic Program.

In a remarkable debut performance, the team advanced to the finals scheduled for April 2026, demonstrating outstanding sporting excellence throughout the tournament.

Their exceptional teamwork, skill, determination and unwavering spirit brought immense pride to the entire school community. Significantly, this is the first time an Indian school has qualified for the final in the Level 4 boys' category, competing against nearly 50 leading public, private and expatriate institutions.

Under the expert guidance of coach Satender Singh, the



players displayed exemplary discipline, sportsmanship and perseverance at every stage of the competition.

Led by captain Sahal Faisal Abu Baker, the team members – Yedhu Krishna, Muad Bin Muhammed Shafeek, Harshith Reddy Devireddy, Mohammed Omar Khan, Mithraj Vinod, Mohammed

Mishal, Muzafar Puthiyaveetil Misfar, Sultan Faisal, Muhammed Hazem, Benwin Anto Biju, Hujayfa Khan and Asad Shamweel – set a high benchmark for excellence in school sports.

Their commitment and passion mark a proud milestone in the sporting journey of Ideal Indian School.

KSQ distributes Iftar food kits as part of Ramadan benevolent activities



Karnataka Sangha Qatar (KSQ) organised its annual Iftar Food Kits Distribution Initiative as part of its Ramadan benevolent activities, providing essential iftar meal kits to fasting individuals in the community. Members of the KSQ managing committee, along with dedicated volunteers, gathered at the communicated location near Rayyan Road, with all necessary preparations in place.

The team ensured that the food kits were distributed on time so beneficiaries could break their fast at sunset without delay. Children also took part in the volunteering service, actively assisting in the distribution and experiencing the value

of community service firsthand. The activity reflected the spirit of compassion, unity, and generosity that defines the holy month of Ramadan. KSQ president Ravi Shetty expressed sincere gratitude to all supporters and well-wishers who contributed to making the initiative meaningful. Beneficiaries shared heartfelt appreciation for the timely support. Organisers highlighted the importance of giving back to society, especially during Ramadan, a time that encourages kindness and service. Karnataka Sangha Qatar reaffirmed its commitment to continuing such humanitarian efforts and serving the community in the years ahead.

IIS alumna secures all-India rank in Clinical Psychology

Sahar Abdul Gafoor, a Qatar-resident originally from Kodungallur in Kerala's Thrissur district, has achieved an outstanding academic milestone by securing 96% in her Master's Degree in Clinical Psychology from Lovely Professional University, Punjab, India.

In recognition of her exceptional performance, she was awarded the Gold Medal after securing All India First Rank in the programme, marking a significant accomplishment at the national level. Sahar is an alumna of Ideal Indian School, Doha, where she consistently excelled throughout her academic journey. During her school years, she emerged as a CBSE Gulf Region Topper in Psychology, earning accolades for both her institution and the wider Indian community in Qatar.

Her latest achievement further underscores her dedication, perseverance and academic excellence. Family members and well-wishers have described her success as a moment of pride for the expatriate community in Qatar and an inspiration for aspiring students pursuing higher education.

Sahar's accomplishment highlights the growing academic contributions of Qatar-based students on the international stage, particularly in specialised fields such as clinical psychology.





Iran-US talks make 'significant progress'

AFP
Geneva

Iran and the US made "significant progress" in talks in Switzerland on Thursday, Oman's foreign minister said, at the end of the latest round of negotiations to avert a war between the longtime foes.

The Oman-mediated discussions follow repeated threats from Donald Trump to strike Iran, with the US president last Thursday giving Tehran 15 days to reach a deal.

While Iran has insisted the discussions focus solely on its nuclear programme, the US wants Tehran's missile programme and its support for militant groups in the region curtailed.

"We have finished the day after significant progress in the negotiation between the US and Iran," Badr Albusaidi said in a post on X, adding that "discussions on a technical level will take place next week in Vienna".

The talks took place as the US continued its largest military buildup in the Middle East in decades.

The US and Iranian delegations held a morning session at the Omani ambassador's residence amid tight security, before pausing to hold consultations with their respective capitals.

AFP journalists saw convoys of cars belonging to US and Iranian diplomatic missions arriving back at the residence of Oman's ambassador before 1700 GMT, following the break of several hours.

Albusaidi said after the morning session that the two sides expressed "unprecedented openness



Iranian delegation is seen during the Iran and US talks in Geneva, Switzerland. (AFP)



Protesters react during a demonstration organised by members of the Iranian diaspora outside the United Nations offices during new round of talks between the United States and Iran on Iran's nuclear programme, in Geneva yesterday. (AFP)

to new and creative ideas and solutions".

UN nuclear chief Rafael Grossi joined the negotiations, a source close to the talks told AFP, with an Iranian state TV journalist also reporting he was attending.

The Wall Street Journal reported yesterday that Trump's negotiating team would demand that Iran dismantle its three main nuclear sites and hand over all its remaining enriched uranium to the US.

Iran's President Masoud Pezesh-

kan insisted ahead of the talks that the Islamic republic was not "at all" seeking a nuclear weapon.

As part of the dramatic US build-up, the USS Gerald R. Ford, the world's largest aircraft carrier, sent to the Mediterranean this week, left a naval base in Crete yesterday, an AFP photographer said.

Washington currently has more than a dozen warships in the Middle East: one aircraft carrier — the USS Abraham Lincoln — nine destroyers and three other combat ships.

It is rare for there to be two US aircraft carriers, which carry dozens of warplanes and are crewed by thousands of sailors, in the region.

The developments follow massive protests in Iran during which, rights groups say, thousands of demonstrators were killed.

In his State of the Union address on Tuesday, Trump accused Iran of "pursuing sinister nuclear ambitions", though Tehran has always insisted its programme is for civilian purposes.

Trump also claimed Tehran had "already developed missiles that can threaten Europe and our bases overseas, and they're working to build missiles that will soon reach the US of America". Trump's State of the Union accusations in Congress were delivered in the same forum in which then-president George W Bush laid out the case for the invasion of Iraq in 2003.

Ahead of yesterday's talks, Secretary of State Marco Rubio warned that Iran must also negotiate on its missile programme, calling Tehran's refusal to discuss ballistic weapons "a big, big problem".

He followed up by saying "the president wants diplomatic solutions".

Vance pushes Trump's economic strategy

Reuters
Wisconsin

US Vice-President JD Vance took aim at Democrats in a partisan speech yesterday in a competitive Wisconsin district, as the White House tries to protect a narrow Republican majority in the House of Representatives ahead of the November 3 midterm elections. Vance visited Plover, part of Wisconsin's third congressional district, which lies at the heart of the region that first lifted Donald Trump to the White House in 2016.

Democrats are targeting this district in their quest to regain control of the lower house of Congress, leaning on voters' dissatisfaction with the state of the economy. The district's incumbent congressman, Derrick Van Orden, won re-election in 2024 by less than three points.

Van Orden sits in one of two Republican-held seats in Wisconsin that Democrats are targeting in the midterms. The former Navy SEAL senior chief is closely aligned with the president, whose polling on the economy has worsened since he retook office last January. Vance argued Democrats deserve blame for higher prices that started rising during the Biden administration.

"Hearing the Democrats talk about affordability is like hearing an arsonist complain about fire," said Vance, speaking at a machining plant.

Voters in the third district, located in the southwestern part of the state, delivered victories for a string of Democratic presidential candidates for decades, including Barack Obama, until Donald Trump carried the district in 2016. He also won the district by seven points in 2024, part of a sweep of battleground states that propelled him to victory over Democrat Kamala Harris.

In Wisconsin, the vice-president visited a factory, Pointe Precision, and underscored the Republican



president's economic message from Tuesday's State of the Union address. During that speech, Trump promoted his efforts on a sweep of kitchen-table economic issues from housing to healthcare and utility bills. But he stopped short of acknowledging that many Americans are still struggling with the high cost of food and housing. Just 36% of voters approve of how Trump is handling the economy, according to the most recent Reuters/Ipsos poll. Some Republican Party strategists have warned that without a more emphatic message on inflation, Republicans are at risk of losing control of Congress in November.

"JD Vance has a tough job today," said Mandela Barnes, a Democratic candidate in the state's competitive gubernatorial election, also set for November. "He's got to look Wisconsin families in the eye and tell them this economy is working for them."

The White House is set to showcase the president and top administration officials in competitive political areas to highlight Trump's economic agenda. He is expected to visit Texas on Friday for an event focused on energy and the economy. Vance's trip was his second in office to Wisconsin's third congressional district after a trip to La Crosse in August.

National Democrats said this week they are ramping up spending in the district, where Van Orden won re-election in 2024 by fewer than three percentage points.

Israel aims 'permanent demographic change' to West Bank and Gaza: UN

AFP
Geneva

Israel's actions in the occupied West Bank and the Gaza Strip seem aimed at creating "permanent demographic change", UN rights chief Volker Turk said yesterday.

"Taken together, Israel's actions appear aimed at making a permanent demographic change in Gaza and the West Bank, raising concerns about ethnic cleansing", Turk said in a speech before the UN's Human Rights Council in Geneva.

Turk pointed in particular to an ongoing, year-long Israeli military operation in the West Bank's north that has caused the displacement of 32,000 Palestinians.

Elsewhere in the West Bank, entire Bedouin herder communities have been displaced by increasing harassment and violence from Israeli settlers, including near Mikhmas to the east of Ramallah, and Ras Ein Al-Auja, in the Jordan Valley, since the start of the year.

In addition to roughly three million Palestinians, more than 500,000 Israelis live in settlements and outposts in the West



A woman walks through Nuseirat Refugee Camp, north of Dier Al-Balah in the Gaza Strip, yesterday. (AFP)

Bank, which are considered illegal under international law.

Israel has approved a series of initiatives this month backed by far-right ministers, including launching a process to register land in the West Bank as "state property" and allowing Israelis to purchase land there directly, in a move condemned by several countries.

Israel's current government has accelerated settlement expansion, approving a record 54 settlements in 2025, according to Israeli settlement watchdog NGO Peace Now. Israel has occupied the West Bank since 1967.

In the Gaza Strip, most of the territory's 2.2mn inhabitants have been displaced at least once since the start of the Hamas-Israel war.

"Intensified attacks, the methodical destruction of entire neighbourhoods and the denial of humanitarian assistance appeared to aim at a permanent demographic shift in Gaza", the UN human rights office said in a report last week.

"They want maximum land and minimum Arabs", Fathi Nimer, a researcher with Palestinian think-tank Al-Shabaka, told AFP, referring to a commonly used phrase used to describe Israeli settlement tactics.

Israel committed two-thirds of record press killings in 2025: CPJ

AFP
New York

A record 129 journalists and media workers were killed worldwide in 2025, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) said yesterday, blaming Israel for two-thirds of the deaths.

It was the second consecutive annual record for press deaths and the deadliest year since the CPJ began collecting data more than three decades ago.

"Journalists are being killed in record numbers at a time when access to information is more important than ever," CEO Jodie Ginsberg said in a statement.

"We are all at risk when journalists are killed for reporting the news."

More than 60% of the 86 members of the press killed by Israeli fire in 2025 were Palestinians reporting from Gaza, it added.

The Israeli military maintains that it never deliberately targets journalists, and said the CPJ report was "based on general allegations, data of unknown origin and pre-determined conclusions".

"Any claim of intentional harm to civilians, including family members of journalists due to their professional activity, is completely false," the spokesperson said.

The CPJ said the number of journalists killed in Ukraine and Sudan also increased in 2025 compared to a year earlier.

The CPJ highlighted a rise in drones being used, with 39 cases documented, including 28 killings by Israel in Gaza and five by

the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces in Sudan.

In Ukraine, four journalists were killed by Russian military drones, the highest annual number of journalist deaths in the war since 15 were killed in 2022.

Journalists are increasingly vulnerable due to a persistent culture of impunity, the CPJ said, noting a lack of transparent investigations into killings.

In Mexico, six journalists were killed in 2025 and all the cases remain unsolved. The Philippines saw three journalists shot dead.

Others were killed following their reporting on corruption, such as a Bangladeshi reporter hacked to death by suspects linked to a fraud ring, according to the CPJ report.

Similar organised crime-related deaths were recorded in India and Peru.

First lady to chair a meeting of the UN SC: White House

First lady Melania Trump will chair a meeting of the United Nations Security Council (UN SC) on Monday as the US takes over the monthly rotating presidency, the White House said. Melania Trump will emphasise education as a way to advance tolerance and world peace at the meeting, which will be the first time a sitting American first lady presides over the 15-member council, the first lady's office said in a statement on Wednesday. US President Donald Trump has been a vocal critic of the United Nations since his first White House term, saying the 193-member world body was ineffective and needed reforms. Trump

struck a more conciliatory tone last week at the first meeting of his Board of Peace, an initiative he said aims to resolve conflicts globally but one that many world leaders have failed to embrace amid concerns it was designed to replace the United Nations. "The board of peace is going to almost be looking over the United Nations and making sure it runs properly," Trump said on Feb 19. "We're going to strengthen up the United Nations. We're going to make sure its facilities are good... We're going to help them money-wise, and we're going to make sure the United Nations is viable." (Reuters)

Trump's White House ballroom can move ahead for now, judge rules

Reuters
Washington

A US judge yesterday declined to block President Donald Trump from proceeding with construction of a \$400mn White House ballroom to replace the demolished East Wing, finding that a challenge from preservationists did not meet the high bar for a preliminary injunction that would halt the project for now. US District Judge Richard Leon's ruling came in a lawsuit by the National Trust for Historic Preservation aiming to stop construction until the White House complies with federal law and rules including congressional authorisation. The National Trust had sought a preliminary injunction to freeze the work on the ballroom, planned to be 90,000sq ft (8,360sq m), while the private nonprofit group's lawsuit proceeds.

The Trump administration has argued that the project is consistent with established presidential renovation practices and serves the public interest.

Leon, in his ruling, said he could not issue an injunction based on the specific arguments the National Trust made, but he said the group could amend its complaint to reassert its claims that Trump is acting beyond his authority.

"Unfortunately, because both

sides initially focused on the President's constitutional authority to destruct and construct the East Wing of the White House, Plaintiff didn't bring the necessary cause of action to test the statutory authority the President claims is the basis to do this construction project without the blessing of Congress and with private funds," Leon wrote in his ruling.

Trump in a post on his Truth Social platform called the decision "Great news for America, and our wonderful White House!" He said the ballroom "will stand long into the future as a symbol to the Greatness of America!"

The National Trust did not immediately respond to a request for comment. The National Trust sued Trump and several federal agencies in December, arguing that the project moved ahead unlawfully without required approvals, environmental review or authorisation by Congress.

Trump's demolition of the East Wing building, a part of the White House complex originally built in 1902 during Theodore Roosevelt's presidency and greatly expanded in 1942 during Franklin Roosevelt's presidency, was carried out in October. Construction equipment tore down the structure, which had housed the first lady's offices, a theatre and a visitors' entrance that welcomed foreign dignitaries.

The ballroom project is one of

several major changes Trump has made to the White House since returning to office in January 2025. Trump has added gold accents throughout the Oval Office and converted the Rose Garden lawn into a paved patio resembling one at his Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida.

The National Trust argued that federal law bars construction on federal parkland in Washington without the express authority of Congress. It also argued the National Park Service violated federal law by issuing an environmental assessment instead of a full impact statement, and by releasing it after demolition had begun. "No president is legally allowed to tear down portions of the White House without any review whatsoever — not President Trump, not President Biden, and not anyone else" the lawsuit said.

The administration has defended the legality of the project, arguing it follows in a long line of presidential renovations. It said in a court filing that the ballroom is needed for state functions, its design is still evolving and above-ground construction is not planned until April, making an injunction unnecessary. Last week, the US Commission of Fine Arts approved Trump's ballroom proposal. The panel, whose commissioners were appointed by Trump in January, advanced the project on a unanimous 6-0 vote.

Israel launches air strikes on eastern Lebanon

Israeli warplanes launched yesterday a series of air strikes on eastern Lebanon. Lebanon's National News Agency (NNA) reported a series of violent explosions in the Bekaa Valley, coinciding with low-altitude flights by Israeli warplanes.

Israeli warplanes also launched a series of air strikes targeting the western Baalbek region.

On the other hand, field sources said that an Israeli drone targeted the Ali Al Taher area, on the northeastern outskirts of Nabatieh city, southern Lebanon, with a guided missile.

In a related context, the NNA said that the Lebanese army is completing its defensive measures in the Sarda area, where it installed metal wires along the earthen barrier that it had raised in a route that is usually used for incursions, after the area surrounding the point was recently subjected to gunfire from the Israeli side. This coincided with an Israeli drone flying at low altitude and issuing threats aimed at forcing the personnel to leave, while the army command issued orders to reinforce the point, remain there, and respond to the sources of fire. (QNA)

Merz says Germany, China must overcome trade gaps 'together'

AFP
Hangzhou

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz ended his two-day visit to China yesterday in the tech hub of Hangzhou, identifying "challenges that we must overcome together" after meeting President Xi Jinping and announcing an Airbus deal.

Merz's first official visit to China came as Berlin and Beijing seek to build on decades-old economic ties to weather global uncertainty sparked by US President Donald Trump's tariff blitz and erratic foreign policies.

China, the world's number two economy, overtook the US last year to become Germany's biggest trade partner. At the same time, Berlin regards the Communist Party-run state as a systemic rival to the West.

The German leader was accompanied in China by a large delegation of business leaders, including executives of auto giants Volkswagen, BMW and Mercedes. Merz visited a Mercedes plant in Beijing on Thursday morning, where he was shown a demonstration of self-driving vehicles.

He then travelled to Hangzhou, where he visited the sites of Germany's Siemens Energy and Chinese humanoid ro-

bot-maker Unitree.

The eastern city is home to several other major Chinese tech companies like AI unicorn DeepSeek and e-commerce giant Alibaba.

European business leaders, who broadly complain China is flooding the EU market with cheap goods, have urged Merz to keep a cavernous trade imbalance at the top of his agenda.

Germany's trade deficit with China hit a record 89bn euros (\$105bn) last year.

"We have good cooperation in China. However, there are also some challenges that we must overcome together," Merz said Thursday, singling out "issues relating to competition" and "high capacity in China".

Merz said consultations between his government and Beijing — interrupted by political developments in Berlin and the pandemic — would take place "at the beginning of next year at the latest, possibly even this year", with China as host.

Following talks with Xi and top Chinese leaders in the capital on Wednesday, Merz said that China had agreed to purchase up to 120 Airbus aircraft, adding that it "demonstrates how worthwhile such trips can be".

Other contracts were in the pipeline, Merz added.



German Chancellor Friedrich Merz (centre) visits the Siemens Energy plant in Hangzhou, in eastern China's Zhejiang Province, yesterday. (AFP)

The two leaders stressed their commitment to developing closer strategic relations, with Xi telling Merz he was willing to take relations to "new levels".

Merz said he had also touched on the sensitive topic of Taiwan, the self-ruled island China claims as its territory and which it has not ruled out the use of force to annex.

Any "reunification" must be done peacefully, Merz said.

He also discussed the Ukraine war with Xi, who, according to Chinese state news agency Xinhua, said diplomacy was "key to the issue".

Merz said he urged Beijing to

use its influence over Moscow, such as choking off the supply of items with potential military uses.

"I hope that in my talks I was able to foster a little understanding for the fact that the leadership of this country should also contribute to ending the war in Ukraine," Merz told reporters on Thursday before departing for Berlin.

Merz was the latest in a string of Western leaders to court Beijing recently.

He follows Britain's Keir Starmer, France's Emmanuel Macron and Canada's Mark Carney, as they recoil from the mercurial policies of Trump, who is also expected to visit from March 31.

Hong Kong tycoon Lai wins appeal in fraud case

AFP
Hong Kong

Hong Kong pro-democracy media tycoon Jimmy Lai won an appeal yesterday over a 2022 fraud conviction, days after a court jailed him on separate national security charges.

The ruling was a surprise win for Lai, the 78-year-old founder of the now-defunct Apple Daily newspaper, who was sentenced to 20 years behind bars this month on collusion charges under a Beijing-imposed national security law. The fraud case grew out of a contractual dispute and was unrelated to the charges he faced under the security law.

Lai did not appear in court and remains behind bars.

"(We) allow the appeals, quash the convictions and set aside the sentences," High Court Chief Judge Jeremy Poon said, adding that he granted Lai's application not to show up in court.

The Department of Justice will study the ruling "thoroughly in order to consider lodging an appeal", a government spokesperson said.

In 2022, Lai received a jail sentence of five years and nine months over what the trial judge called a "planned, organised and years-long" scheme. It remains unclear how yesterday's outcome affects Lai's overall prison stint.

The tycoon received 20 years in his national security case, with two of those years designed to overlap with his fraud case sentence — which has now been quashed.

Lai's two-decade penalty was by far the harshest under Hong Kong's national security law,

which Beijing imposed in 2020 after huge pro-democracy protests in the former British colony.

Critics, including the US, Britain, the European Union and advocacy groups, said that the lengthy jail term would be "effectively a death sentence" for Lai.

The mogul has been behind bars since 2020 and spent much of that time in solitary confinement, which authorities said was arranged at his own request to avoid harassment.

In the fraud case, prosecutors said at trial that a consultancy firm Lai operated for his personal use had taken up office space that Apple Daily had rented for the purposes of publication and printing.

This was in breach of the terms of the lease Apple Daily signed with a government company and amounted to fraud, prosecutors said.

In addition to his jail term, Lai was fined HK\$2mn (\$256,000) and banned from managing companies for eight years.

But the appeal judges ruled yesterday that "the prosecution has failed to prove that the applicants had made the false representation as alleged", adding that the trial judge's reasoning was "unsupportable". The Hong Kong government spokesperson yesterday insisted that "the objective fact remains that (Lai) has exploited public resources for private use" even if that fell short of fraud.

Former Apple Daily executive Wong Wai-keung was also convicted in the same case and has already finished serving a 21-month prison term.

Wong's conviction and sentence were also quashed yesterday.

Indonesia jails former chief of Pertamina unit in graft case

Reuters
Jakarta

An Indonesian court found a former chief executive and two ex-officials of a unit of state energy company Pertamina guilty yesterday in a major corruption case involving the firm's subsidiaries, which prosecutors say caused \$17bn in state losses.

The case, which centres on alleged illegal leasing of a fuel terminal and illegal imports of crude oil, among other offences, is one of the biggest launched under the administration of President Prabowo Subianto, who has vowed to eradicate corruption.

There are nine defendants altogether, with six more still to learn their fate.

In a livestreamed ruling, former Pertamina Patra Niaga chief executive Riva Siahaan was sentenced to nine years of jail time, while the two former officials received prison terms of nine and ten years, respectively.

The alleged offences took place between 2018 and 2023 and prosecutors had demanded jail sentences

ranging from 14-18 years for the defendants. The six others on trial include Yoki Firnandi, a former chief executive of Pertamina International Shipping, and Muhammad Kerry Adrianto Riza, a beneficial owner of a fuel terminal leased by Pertamina. Both had pleaded not guilty, according to local media.

Siahaan's lawyer Luhut Pangaribuan said he was "sad and disappointed" by Thursday's ruling against his client, who had rejected the graft charges.



Former chief executive of state firm Pertamina Patra Niaga, Riva Siahaan, talks to journalists as he leaves the courtroom. (Reuters)

Philippine volcano eruption sends ash into sky

A volcano erupted in the central Philippines last evening, sending a billowing plume of ash about 2.5km (1.5 miles) into the nighttime sky.

The two-minute eruption began at 7:04pm (11:04 GMT), state volcanology agency director Teresito Bacolcol told AFP, saying "there might be a bigger explosive eruption in the next few days".

Kanlaon Volcano, one of 24 active volcanoes in the archipelago nation, has had several major eruptions in the past century — including a 1996 blast that killed three hikers who were near the summit at the time.

"This is the second moderate

eruption in a week," Bacolcol said in a phone interview, adding his agency would monitor the volcano for 24 hours before deciding if it should raise the alert level from two to three on its five-point scale.

"This event generated a plume that rose 2,500 meters above the crater before drifting southwest. Incandescent ballistics were observed to have rained around the crater," the volcanology centre said in a statement released minutes later. John De Asis, a rescuer in the nearby town of La Castellana, told AFP that ash had begun to descend on local neighbourhoods.

"Tonight, we heard a sudden, loud boom, then after a few minutes, people started reporting that there was ashfall in their areas," he said, noting that rescue personnel were handing out facemasks.

Bacolcol said it was possible that "gas pressure had built up at the vent" of the volcano. He said recent low sulphur dioxide emissions suggested a potential blockage that would have caused pressure to build.

The Philippines is on the seismically active region of the Pacific known as the "Ring of Fire", where more than half the world's volcanoes are located. (AFP)

Kim Jong-un shuns S Korea but could 'get along' with US

Kim promises more nuclear weapons

AFP, Reuters
Seoul

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un said he would focus on expanding his country's nuclear arsenal and that prospects for improving relations with the US rested entirely on Washington's attitude, state media KCNA reported yesterday.

North Korea's week-long Ninth Congress of the ruling Workers' Party wrapped up with a military parade in the capital Pyongyang on Wednesday, KCNA reported.

The Asian nation's "international status has risen extraordinarily" as it laid out major policy goals for the next five years, Kim said.

"It is our party's firm will to further expand and strengthen our national nuclear power, and thoroughly exercise our status as a nuclear state," Kim said, according to KCNA. "We will focus on projects to increase the number of nuclear weapons and expand nuclear operational means."

Kim also laid out North Korea's plans to develop stronger intercontinental ballistic missiles including ones that can be launched from underwater, attack systems using artificial intelligence (AI), unmanned drones, and weapons that can hit enemy satellites, KCNA said.

Kim Jong-un said North Korea could "get along" with Washington if it accepted Pyongyang's nuclear status, state media said yesterday, but has dashed any hopes of mended ties with "deceptive" neighbour Seoul.

Washington and Seoul have mounted a renewed push for high-level talks with reclusive North Korea, eyeing a potential summit between Kim and US President Donald Trump in China later this year.

Having largely ignored these overtures for months, Kim finally staked his position as thousands gathered in Pyongyang for a rare congress of the ruling Workers' Party.

If Washington "respects our country's current (nuclear) status... and withdraws its hostile policy... there is no reason why we cannot get along well with the US," Kim said, according to the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA).

The US has for decades led efforts to dismantle North Korea's



North Korean leader Kim Jong-un and his daughter Kim Ju-ae attending the military parade to commemorate the 9th Congress of the Workers' Party of Korea at Kim Il-sung Square in Pyongyang. (AFP)

Efforts to build trust with North Korea must continue: Lee Jae Myung

South Korea's President Lee Jae Myung said yesterday that efforts to build trust and find common ground with North Korea need to continue for systemic peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula. Lee made the comment in opening remarks during a meeting with his top aides, responding to reported comments by North Korea's leader Kim Jong-un who called South Korea the "most hostile enemy" and ruled out discussions. (Reuters)

nuclear programme — but summits, sanctions and diplomatic pressure have had little impact.

The last summit between Kim and Trump in 2019 unravelled as the leaders argued over sanctions relief and what nuclear concessions North Korea might make in return.

Trump is slated to travel to China — North Korea's long-time ally — in late March through early April.

Speculation is mounting he may seek to meet with Kim on the sidelines of this trip.

A Trump-Kim meeting would be a major breakthrough after years of deadlocked diplomacy.

Trump stepped up his courtship of Kim during a tour of Asia last year, saying he was "100 percent" open to a meeting.

He even bucked long-held US policy by conceding that North Korea was already "sort

of a nuclear power". North Korea's economy has for years languished under heavy Western sanctions that aim to choke off funding for its nuclear weapons programme.

Held just once every five years, the Workers' Party congress offers a rare glimpse into the workings of a nation where even mundane details are shrouded in secrecy.

Speaking as the days-long political spectacle drew to a close, Kim took a far more combative tone on South Korea.

Seoul's recent efforts to lower the temperature with North Korea were a "clumsy deceptive farce and a poor work", Kim said.

North Korea has "absolutely no business dealing with South Korea, its most hostile entity, and will permanently exclude South Korea from the category of compatriots", Kim said.

"As long as South Korea cannot escape the geopolitical conditions of having a border with us, the only way to live safely is to give up everything related to us and leave us alone."

In response, Seoul vowed to keep working for peaceful coexistence.

"To achieve this, the two Koreas must refrain from hostile and confrontational words and actions and build a foundation of mutual respect and trust," the government said in a statement.

The congress ended as thousands of soldiers marched through Pyongyang's Kim Il-sung Square in a grand military parade.

Kim and his daughter Ju-ae donned matching leather jackets as they watched the procession, fuelling speculation the teenager is being groomed for power.

Ramadan in Beijing



Chinese Muslims offer prayers during the holy month of Ramadan at a mosque in Beijing yesterday. (AFP)



UK Labour party fights hard right, leftists in stronghold

AFP
Manchester

Voters in northern England cast ballots yesterday in a local poll seen as a key test of the ruling Labour party's ability to fend off growing support for the hard right and leftists, as the country's traditional two-party system splinters.

Defeat for the government in the parliamentary by-election would add to the woes facing unpopular UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer, who endures frequent mutterings about how much longer he can stay in office.

Labour has dominated the Manchester constituency of Gorton and Denton for decades and won almost 51% of the vote there at the July 2024 general election that swept Starmer to power.

But less than two years later, it

is locked in a three-way fight for the seat with the anti-immigration Reform UK, led by Nigel Farage, and the Greens, led by left-winger Zack Polanski.

The lead-up to polling day has been fraught, with party leaders hurling insults at each other and activists accusing each other of misinformation and breaking campaign laws, highlighting the high stakes.

"I voted Reform because of immigration – I'm sick of it," retired nurse Elaine Simpson told AFP outside a polling station in Denton, a majority white working-class part of the constituency.

The 78-year-old noted she no longer trusted Britain's more establishment parties, adding: "You wouldn't be able to print what I think of Keir Starmer."

In nearby Levenshulme, home to more student and Muslim voters, the Greens appeared ascendant.

"The Green Party is offering hope to the wider society, marginalised people, and I think they're the choice for working people," writer Matt Alton, 31, told AFP after casting his ballot. "Of people that I know around my age, I don't know anyone who's said that they're not voting Green."

But local Labour councillor Basat Sheikh was confident his party could retain the seat. "Our message has been clear from day one that it is about unity and not division," the 45-year-old said, as pouring rain did little to encourage voter turnout, which is typically lacklustre at such contests.

Labour won the seat by more than 13,000 votes in 2024.

The battle suggests British people appear increasingly willing to look towards insurgent parties to tackle long-standing, hot-button issues like the high cost of living and irregular immigration at the

next general election, expected in 2029.

"It illustrates how the two main parties are losing so much support at the minute," University of Manchester politics lecturer Louise Thompson told AFP, referring to Labour and the main opposition Conservatives. "It could be a real sign that they are in a lot of danger."

The vote was triggered by the resignation of former Labour MP Andrew Gwynne on health grounds.

Matt Goodwin, a 44-year-old political scientist, is bidding to become Reform's ninth MP in the UK's 650-seat parliament.

Standing for the Greens is Hannah Spencer, a 34-year-old plumber and trainee plasterer, who is hoping her party's pro-Palestinian stance will appeal to the constituency's 28% Muslim population.

Local councillor Angeliki Stogia was chosen as Labour's candi-



Women and children walk past a signage outside a polling station at St. Agnes Primary School, on the day of the Gorton and Denton by-election, triggered by the resignation of Andrew Gwynne, in Gorton, Manchester, Britain, yesterday.

date after the party's ruling body blocked the candidacy of popular Manchester mayor Andy Burnham.

Burnham's bid to try to become an MP was widely seen as a precursor for a potential leadership challenge from the left against Starmer, who hails from the party's centre right.

Starmer faced down calls to resign earlier this month amid a row over his appointment of Peter Mandelson, an associate of sex of-

fender Jeffrey Epstein, as Britain's ambassador to Washington.

The prime minister has also taken flak for countless policy reversals and polls suggest he is the most unpopular British prime minister since surveys began.

A win would help quieten the noise around his future before he faces a bigger moment of peril in May with elections in Scotland, Wales and London that pollsters predict will be painful for Labour.

Sunset view



The newly constructed coastal road in front of the city skyline during sunset in Mumbai.

Bangladesh court orders move to seek Interpol red notice for UK MP Siddiq

Reuters
Dhaka

A court in Bangladesh ordered authorities to seek an Interpol red notice against British lawmaker and former minister Tulip Siddiq yesterday over alleged corruption linked to a private real estate project in the capital.

The court issued the order after the Anti-Corruption Commission filed a petition seeking international assistance for her arrest. The ACC alleges that Siddiq used her close family ties to former prime minister Sheikh Hasina to influence the allocation of government land to a private company.

Siddiq, who is Hasina's niece, has

repeatedly denied the allegations, describing earlier verdicts against her as "flawed and farcical". She has also said she is a British citizen, not a Bangladeshi national.

She did not immediately respond to e-mail requests for comment, and there was no immediate reaction from her following the latest court order.

Bangladesh courts have already sentenced Siddiq to a total of six years in prison in three separate corruption cases, all related to alleged abuse of influence during Hasina's time in office.

Siddiq resigned in January last year from her role as economic secretary to the Treasury under Prime Minister Keir Starmer, citing mounting political pressure over her links to Hasina, though

she insisted she had been cleared of wrongdoing.

Britain does not have an extradition treaty with Bangladesh.

Hasina was ousted in 2024 amid a student-led mass uprising that ended her 15-year rule. She fled to neighbouring India that August at the height of the protests and has remained there since. She was later sentenced to death by a Bangladeshi court over her government's violent crackdown on demonstrators.

Following Hasina's removal, Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus led an interim administration that oversaw an election on February 12, after which a new government took office under Prime Minister Tarique Rahman, the son of Hasina's arch-rival and former premier Khaleda Zia.

Australian ex-PM says 'more important than ever' to ditch British monarchy

AFP
Sydney

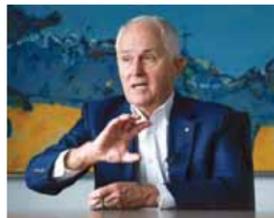
Australia ditching the British monarchy is "more important than ever" and voters would likely back a head of state elected by its parliament, former prime minister Malcolm Turnbull told AFP yesterday.

Turnbull – who served as prime minister from 2015 to 2018 – led the country's Republic Movement's unsuccessful 1999 referendum bid to replace the British monarchy with an Australian head of state.

Almost three decades on from that poll and as the British monarchy reels from the arrest of ex-prince Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor – the first of a royal in the modern era – Turnbull told AFP an elected head of state could heal Australia's "tribal" politics.

"I think a republic is more important than ever," he said. "The monarchy remains this anachronism."

Australia was a British colony for more than 100 years and gained de facto independence in 1901, but



Former Australian prime minister Malcolm Turnbull reacts as he speaks during an interview in Sydney yesterday.

has never become a fully fledged republic.

Current Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has issued a full-throated call for Andrew to be removed from the royal line of succession.

Albanese is an avowed republican but has ruled out another referendum on the issue during his tenure.

But Turnbull told AFP he believed Australians would "absolutely" back a system in which the head of state was instead elected by the parliament in Canberra.

"The virtue of having a republic

in Australia is that it emphasises the thing we have in common as Australians."

In addition to being one of Australia's most prominent republicans, Turnbull is also an outspoken opponent of the AUKUS, a multi-decade defence pact with Britain and the US.

The pact aims to arm Australia with a fleet of nuclear-powered submarines and would provide for co-operation in developing an array of warfare technologies.

But Turnbull told AFP that Australia will "almost certainly" get no nuclear submarines (SSNs) out of the deal.

"It's this vast expenditure and this vast investment which will very likely result in us having no submarines at all," he said.

"The US has made it very clear – it's set out in their legislation – that no submarines can be sold to us unless the president certifies essentially that their navy doesn't require them," he said.

"At the moment, they are producing about half as many SSNs as the American Navy needs, let alone to cater for the American and Australian needs."

Police make second arrest over Manchester mosque incident

AFP
London

Manchester police said yesterday they had arrested a second suspect after a man allegedly armed with an axe entered a mosque in the northwest English city during Ramadan prayers earlier this week.

Greater Manchester Police (GMP) first responded to reports late Tuesday of two men entering the city's Central Mosque carrying "offensive weapons".

No threats were made and there were no reported injuries, according to the force.

However, officers who responded to the scene searched one of the suspects and arrested him after seizing weapons, including an axe and a knife, and unspecified drugs.

The white man in his 50s, who police said was wearing a high-visibility jacket and had claimed to be there to do work on the building, was arrested on suspicion of carrying an offensive weapon and possession of drugs.

The second suspect sought,

a man in his 20s, was arrested yesterday morning on suspicion of conspiracy to commit assault, the force said in an update.

The first suspect remains in custody and a warrant of further detention has been obtained to allow detectives additional time to question him, according to GMP. It noted they are not looking for any further suspects.

UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer voiced "concern" Wednesday over the incident, which took place just a few months after a deadly synagogue attack shook the city.

UK immigration officers deny stealing cash from 'small boat' migrants

Reuters
London

Five British immigration officers yesterday pleaded not guilty to misconduct in public office and conspiracy to steal from migrants who had arrived in Britain on small boats, ahead of a trial in January 2028.

John Bernthal, 53, Ben Edwards, 45, Lee-Ann Evanson, 42, Besmir Matera, 36, and Jack Mitchell, 33, are charged with stealing from migrants from August 2021 to November 2022.

All five are also charged with one count of misconduct in pub-

lic office and one count of money laundering.

A sixth defendant, 43-year-old David Grundy, is charged with one count of money laundering. All six defendants entered not guilty pleas at London's Southwark Crown Court.

Matera is also charged with obtaining leave to enter or remain in Britain by deception and possession of three identity documents – a British passport and full and provisional driving licences – in a false name, which he denies.

The six all worked as immigration officers on Britain's south coast, dealing with migrants arriving on small boats.

The crossings of small boats carrying migrants from France, the most visible sign of arrivals, have become a focal point for British voters and has helped propel Nigel Farage's anti-immigration Reform UK party into an opinion poll lead.

Prosecutor Lyndon Harris said Matera was arrested in relation to the immigration offences in October 2022 and WhatsApp messages were found which showed the defendants "discussing and forming an agreement to steal from migrants".

He added that the total alleged to be stolen was unclear, but was "in the hundreds of thousands" of pounds.

Asylum seeker claims in UK drop slightly in 2025: data

AFP
London

The number of people claiming asylum in the UK in 2025 fell slightly compared to the previous record year, government figures showed yesterday, despite small boat arrivals jumping 13%.

The interior ministry data showed 100,625 people applied for asylum in Britain last year, down four % on 2024, but still more than double pre-pandemic levels.

Just over half – 52% – had arrived in the UK through illegal entry routes, typically on small boats bound for the shores of southeast England from France.

The cross-Channel journeys have become politically toxic in Britain, helping to fuel the rise of

eurosceptic Nigel Farage's anti-immigration Reform UK party, which has led in the polls for the last year.

The latest such arrivals were photographed being brought ashore Wednesday by Border Force, in a visible reminder that Prime Minister Keir Starmer's government has failed to stop the crossings.

Interior ministry figures confirmed yesterday that 605 migrants had been intercepted the previous day, the largest number in a 24-hour period so far this year. French authorities also said they had rescued 119 people attempting the crossing.

The new annual statistics showed 41,472 people arrived on small boats last year, compared to 36,816 in 2024, a 13-percent rise despite Starmer taking power in July that year vowing to "smash the gangs"

facilitating the journeys. However, arrival numbers are below the 2022 record figure of 45,774.

Meanwhile the number of asylum seekers being housed temporarily in UK hotels dropped to 30,657, its lowest level for 18 months. The issue of so-called "asylum hotels" has triggered widespread protests and Starmer's government has pledged to end their use by the end of this parliament in 2029.

However, some of the alternatives, including the use of former army barracks, have themselves triggered controversy and opposition in local areas.

Eritreans accounted for nearly 20% of those arriving via small boats in 2025, with the other most common nationalities being Afghans with 12% and Iranians and Sudanese, both on 11%.

Fiji, Tuvalu to host pre-COP31 meetings

Fiji and Tuvalu, Pacific island nations at the front line of climate change, will host pivotal meetings ahead of the UN's COP31 climate summit in Türkiye, officials said yesterday.

Türkiye and Australia had agreed last year that the Pacific would host pre-COP preparatory meetings as part of a compromise to resolve their battle over where the 2026 climate conference should be held. Under the deal, Türkiye will host COP31 in the Mediterranean resort of Antalya while Australia will chair the negotiations.

The 18-member Pacific Islands Forum announced yesterday that Fiji will host the pre-COP31 meeting in October while a gathering of leaders would be held in Tuvalu.

"Pre-COP is a chance to show that when it comes to climate change, the most vulnerable nations can lead,

and the world's most powerful nations can listen," Jeremiah Manele, the prime minister of Solomon Islands and chairman of the forum, said on X. Palau will also host special climate event as part of the 55th meeting of leaders of the Pacific Islands Forum in early September.

Low-lying Pacific islands are threatened by rising seas and worsening storms fuelled by climate change. "Pre-COP will be an unprecedented opportunity for the world to listen to the Pacific and understand the existential threat climate change poses for the region," Australia's minister for Pacific Island affairs, Pat Conroy, said in a statement.

"Hosting the Pre-COP and a leaders' event in the Blue Pacific is an opportunity for the region to work together on this critical issue and bring global attention to their leadership," Conroy said. (AFP)



The excellence of generosity

Generosity is a virtuous trait that every Muslim should strive to attain. As for the believer who closely adheres to the teachings of Islam, kindness and giving from what he has become part of his good character.

Generosity is the opposite of stinginess, as stinginess is a disease of the heart. The Muslim should avoid this bad quality, for it is a source of corruption. The Muslim's faith and righteous deeds purify his heart, so his hands should be outstretched, giving to those who are in need.

A generous man will share what he has with others, thinking about other people as he thinks of himself. He benefits by helping others and solving their problems. He makes people happy and prevents them from doing wrong, which is often a direct result of poverty. This is a great service to society, and there are some people who spend their life in this service, establishing valuable foundations which remain after them such as hospitals, libraries, etc.

Whatever is given for Allah's Sake will never decrease one's wealth in the slightest; rather, it will bless, purify and increase it, as the Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "Charity does not decrease wealth." [Muslim]

Whatever is given in charity will be recorded with The One Who has full knowledge of all things. Allah, Almighty, Says (what means): "...And whatever you spend of good - it will be fully repaid to you, and you will not be wronged." [Qur'an 2: 272]

The Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, directed the Muslims' attention to this higher understanding of generosity when he asked 'Aaishah what was left of the sheep they had slaughtered. She told him: "Nothing but the shoulder." He said, "Everything except the shoulder is saved." [At-Tirmidhi]

Whatever is spent will return multiplied and Allah will increase it in this world and in the next. Allah Says (what means): "The example of those who spend their wealth in the way of Allah is like a seed [of grain] which grows seven spikes; in each spike is a hundred grains. And Allah multiplies [His reward] for whom He wills. And Allah is all-Encompassing and Knowing." [Qur'an 2: 261]



And (what means): "...But whatever thing you spend [in His cause] - He will compensate it; and He is the best of providers." [Qur'an 34: 39]

Since noble characteristics are acquired in different ways, the Muslim works to develop virtuous traits according to Islamic guidelines. Allah Says (what means): "And spend [in the way of Allah] from what We have provided you before death approaches one of you and he says, 'My Lord, if only You would delay me for a brief term so I would give charity and be among the righteous.'" [Qur'an 63: 10]

Generosity is not expressed exclusively with wealth and money, but also with our time, good deeds, actions and kindness to all people. Allah Says (what means): "Never will you attain the good [reward] until you spend [in the way of Allah] from

that which you love..." [Qur'an 3: 92]

Allah, Almighty Says (what means): "Indeed, mankind was created anxious: when evil touches him, impatient, and when good touches him, withholding [of it]..." [Qur'an 70: 19-21]

The Messenger of Allah, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "Protect yourself from the Hell-fire even by giving a piece of a date as charity." [Al-Bukhari and Muslim]

This narration shows that a person can be generous and win the pleasure of Allah even by spending a small quantity of wealth.

Jaabir reported that the Messenger of Allah never said "no" to anyone who asked him for something. [Al-Bukhari and Muslim]

This narration illustrates the gener-

osity of the Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam. If somebody asked him for something, he would never say "no" to him. He would also, on occasions, resort to borrowing to meet the want of a needy person.

The Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "Everyday two angels descend and one of them says, 'O Allah! Compensate (more) to the person who gives (in charity); while the other one says, 'O Allah! Destroy the one who withholds (charity, etc).'" [Al-Bukhari]

The Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, also said: "Allah, the Exalted, Says, 'Spend, O son of Adam, you will also be spent upon.'" [Al-Bukhari & Muslim]

According to the narration, one who spends in the way of Allah, will be duly paid. It means that Allah will enhance the

provision of such a man and grant him the best recompense.

In another narration, the Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "There are forty kinds of virtue, the highest of which is to gift a (milch) she-goat. He who practises any of these virtues, expecting its reward (from Allah) and believing in the truth of the promise made for it, will enter Jannah (Paradise)." [Al-Bukhari]

A person giving charity should not render it vain by reminders of his generosity or by injury. The giver should be cheerful when asked and when giving. He should spend without being stingy or irresponsible.

Whether giving in abundance from his riches, or a small amount of his meager means, one should give with complete satisfaction, a cheerful face and nice speech.

The Muslim who truly understands the teachings of his religion never looks down upon any charity, no matter how small it may be. He strives to do as much as he is able, while he is firm in his conviction that Allah will reward his good deeds, no matter how small, as Allah Says (what means): "On no soul does Allah place a burden greater that it can bear..." [Qur'an 2: 286]

He also responds to the words of the Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam: "Protect yourselves from the Fire even if it is with half a date." [Al-Bukhari]

Islam teaches the Muslims to be constructive, beneficial members of their societies; always helping those who are deprived and destitute to the best of their abilities. Every good deed is described as an act of charity, as the Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "Every Muslim must give charity." They said, "O Messenger of Allah, what if he cannot do that?" He said, "Then let him help one who is in desperate need." He said, "Then let him do good, and refrain from doing evil, and that will be an act of charity on his part." [Al-Bukhari & Muslim]

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



The glory to faith

Haaroon Ar-Rasheed, may Allah have mercy upon him, once stood looking at the sky when he saw a cloud passing by. He addressed it saying, "Rain wherever you wish, for your fruit will certainly come to me anyway." This means that the cloud would have rained either on an Islamic land or on a non-Islamic one. In the first case, Muslims would have benefited from this rainwater in agriculture and in drinking; in the second case, Muslims would have also benefited from this rainwater in the form of Jizyah (a tax) that would be paid to them by non-Muslims. This example shows the state of glory, which the Muslims reached in the past when they applied their religion and worked for it. Nowadays, Muslims are certainly required to pursue the means of glory.

Glory here refers to power, victory, high standing and invincibility. It is a word which denotes that a person cannot be overcome or humiliated. Ibn Al-Jawzi, may Allah have mercy upon him, said:

Some of the scholars of Tafseer (Qur'anic exegesis) said, "In the Qur'an, glory is used in three different senses.

It is used to signify might, as in the verse (which means):

* [By the might of Pharaoh, indeed it is we who are predominant.] [Qur'an 26: 44]

* [By Your might, I will surely mislead them all] [Qur'an 38: 82]

It is also used to signify honour, as in the verse (which means): {Do they seek with them honour [through power]? But indeed, honor belongs to Allah entirely.} [Qur'an 4: 139]

Finally, it is used to signify dispraised pride as in the verse (which means):

* [And when it is said to him, "Fear Allah," pride in the sin takes hold of him.] [Qur'an 2: 206]

* [But those who disbelieve are in pride and disension.] [Qur'an 38: 2]

From the above, it is noticed that there is praised glory and dispraised glory. Praised glory is that which pertains to Allah The Almighty, to His Messenger, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam (may Allah exalt his mention) and to the believers. This is real and permanent glory since it is from and with the support of Allah The Almighty who cannot be defeated or resisted. Allah The Almighty Says (what means): {And to Allah belongs [all] Honour and to His Messenger, and to the believers, but the hypocrites do not know.} [Qur'an 63: 8].

On the other hand, the glory of the disbelievers is, in fact, humiliation and disgrace. Allah The Almighty Says (what means): {And they have taken besides Allah [false] deities that they would be for them [a source of] honour. No! Those "gods" will deny their worship of them and will be against them opponents [on the Day of Judgment].} [Qur'an 19: 81-82].

Many people pursued the wrong way to glory, victory and enablement. Some of them pursued it through money and forgot that money is only a Fitnah (trial) and a loss if one does not give the right that Allah The Almighty has to it. Moreover, this money might be a means of humiliation. Al-Hasan may Allah have mercy upon him said, "By Allah, Allah The Almighty humiliates whoever glorifies money." Indeed, we have seen a many examples of that in life.

Other people seek glory through their positions and prestige. This may enable them to achieve temporary glory. However, if this is not established on justice and good reputation, then it certainly will not last. Indeed, many a leader and president were enjoying glory and then became captives in prisons, and their glory turned into humiliation.

What is even more dangerous is when a person seeks glory through the disbelievers, i.e. by allying

himself with them, even if this is against the Muslims' interests. This is no more than an illusion. In fact, it is an instant humiliation, and the first people to turn against such people would be his 'allies' from the disbelievers. Allah The Almighty Says (what means): {Give tidings to the hypocrites that there is for them a painful punishment - Those who take disbelievers as allies instead of the believers. Do they seek with them honour [through power]? But indeed, honor belongs to Allah entirely.} [Qur'an 4: 138-139] Consequently, throwing one's self in the arms of the disbelievers is the shortest way to dishonor and humiliation because these disbelievers would not accept from us anything less than disbelief. Allah The Almighty Says (what means): {And never will the Jews or the Christians approve of you until you follow their religion.} [Qur'an 2: 120].

Other people still seek glory through their ancestors and tribes, even if they were misguided. In a Hadeeth on the authority of Abu Rayhaanah, may Allah be pleased with him, the Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "If a person attributes himself to nine of his disbelieving forefathers, seeking through them glory and pride, he will be their tenth in Hell."

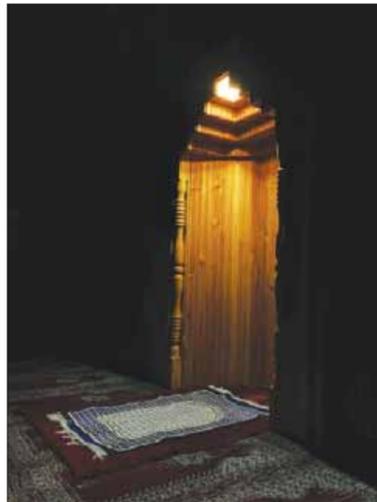
Hence, the unquestionable truth is that a person who seeks glory must demand it from Allah The Almighty through obeying Him and avoiding disobedience. 'Umar ibn Al-Khattaab, may Allah be pleased with him, summarised this wonderful meaning in a few words; He said, "We were the most humiliated people, but Allah The Almighty has honoured us with Islam. If we demand honor through any means other than Islam, Allah The Almighty will humiliate us."

Braaheem ibn Shaybaan, may Allah have mercy upon him, said: "Honour lies in modesty, glory lies in piety, and freedom lies in contentment." When a Muslim lives in obedience to Allah The Almighty, he lives in honour and dignity. He may be afflicted, but nevertheless he has a strong sense of honour. This appeared clearly in the life of the righteous predecessors, may Allah be pleased with them, even in the darkest moments and in the severest and hardest situations.

Situations which indicate the glory of the righteous predecessors

When Bilal, may Allah be pleased with him, was tortured in Makkah in its hot desert and a great heavy boulder was put on his chest, not to make him abandon his faith but only to stop blaspheming his peoples false gods or to keep silent, the honor of faith showed in his words when he repeated, "Allah The One, Allah The One." This remained as an eternal anthem which the generations have chanted throughout history. In addition, the words of Bilal, may Allah be pleased with him, poured despair into the souls of those who tortured him. So, who was honourable in this scene? Was it this weak, tortured slave or the arrogant disbelievers?

The story of 'Abdullaah ibn Huthaafah As-Sahmi, may Allah be pleased with him, when he was taken captive by the Romans is another example. The king of the Romans tried to entice 'Abdullaah to abandon his religion, but he refused. The king offered him half of his money but he refused. Then, he imprisoned him, tortured him and did not give him any food or water except some pig meat and wine. After three days, they brought him out and found that he had eaten nothing of it. When he was asked why had he not eaten any of it, he replied, "By Allah, Allah The Exalted made it lawful for me because I was under duress, but I would never let you gloat over Islam." Then, the king asked



him to kiss his head in return for releasing him but Ibn Huthaafah, may Allah be pleased with him, said that he would only do so if all the Muslim captives were released. The king accepted and Ibn Huthaafah, may Allah be pleased with him, kissed his head.

He then returned to the Commander of the Believers 'Umar ibn Al-Khattaab, may Allah be pleased with him, with all the Muslim captives. 'Umar, may Allah be pleased with him, stood up and kissed the head of 'Abdullaah ibn Huthaafah, and said: "It is a duty upon every Muslim to kiss the head of Ibn Huthaafah."

Also, Shaykhul-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah, may Allah have mercy upon him, was prosecuted and imprisoned. When he was thrown in prison, he recited the words of Allah The Almighty (which mean): {And a wall will be placed between them with a door, its interior containing mercy, but on the outside of it is torment.} [Qur'an 57: 13]. This is the glory of faith and the pride of Islam which make a person the most honorable one through the obedience of Allah The Almighty. Even if all people on earth stood against such a person, he would still derive his honor and glory from Allah The Almighty who can never be defeated. Allah The Almighty Says (what means): {Whoever desires honour [through power] - then to Allah belongs all honor.} [Qur'an 35: 10].

The state of humiliation which prevails in many aspects of our lives nowadays is the result of religious innovations, sins and remoteness from the Shari'ah of Allah The Almighty. This is supported by the Hadith of the Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, where he said: "Humiliation and disgrace are the fate of whoever disobeys my order"

A major reason behind this humiliation is the state of disagreement and disunity that the Muslims experience. Our enemies take advantage of us one by one; they strike one of us today and another tomorrow while Muslims take no action, as if what happens to our brothers does not concern us. History testifies that we were never like this in the past. When a Muslim woman, who was taken as a captive by the Romans in 'Amooriyyah, screamed for help uttering her famous scream, "Wa Islamaah" (Oh My Islam!), Al-Mu'tasim may Allah have mercy upon him answered her call with full concern, "Labbayki [at your disposal]" and prepared an army which heavily defeated 'Amooriyyah and rescued the Muslim woman from the hands of the disbelievers. We should ask ourselves here: what tie was there between Al-Mu'tasim and that woman except the tie of faith?

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

Reward for providing a fasting person with food to break fast

Zaid ibn Khalid Al-Juhani, may Allah be pleased with him, reported that the Messenger of Allah sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam (may Allah exalt his mention), said: "He who provides a fasting person with something to break his fast, will earn the same reward as the one who was observing the fast, without diminishing in any way the reward of the latter." [Reported by At-Tirmidhi, Ibn Majah, and Ibn Hibban, and classified as authentic by At-Tirmidhi and Ibn Hibban]

The wording reported by Ibn Khuzaimah and An-Nasa'i: "He who equips a Ghazi (fighter in the way of Allah or a pilgrim, looks after the dependants of a Ghazi or a pilgrim in their absence, or provides a fasting person with something to break his fast, will earn the same reward, without diminishing in any way their reward."

Overview of the Hadith:

One of the blessings which Allah, the Almighty, has bestowed on His believing servants is that He has prescribed co-operation in righteousness and piety. Allah, the Almighty, says: {And co-operate in righteousness and piety.} [Qur'an 5: 2] Allah grants rewards for inviting people to good and righteousness. Among the acts for which Allah grants rewards is providing the fasting person with something to break his fast, because the fasting person is enjoined to hasten to break his fast. Therefore, if a Muslim provides the fasting person with something to break his fast (whether voluntary or obligatory fasting), he will earn the same reward of the fasting person, without diminishing in any way the reward of the latter.

Imam Al-Manawi mentioned in his book "Fayd Al-Qadir" that the Hadith: "He who provides a fasting person with something to break his fast, will earn the same reward as the one who was observing the fast" means that the one who provides something to a fasting person to break his fast will receive the same reward as the fasting person, not that the fasting person will gain the reward earned by the person who provides him with something to break his fast. The reward here means the reward of fasting, which is a general reward that will be gained by the person who is able to provide the fasting person with something to break his fast.

It was said that providing the fasting person with something to break his fast means providing the least amount of food with which the fasting person breaks his fast, such as one date. It was also said that it means providing the fasting person with food that makes him sated, because this will benefit the fasting person throughout the night and may make him in no need of the pre-dawn meal. However, the apparent meaning of the Hadith is that if one provides a fasting person with even one date to break his fast, he will receive the same reward of the fasting person. This is not difficult for Allah.

While explaining the wording of Ibn Khuzaimah and An-Nasa'i, Imam At-Taibi said: "The fasting person was mentioned along with the fighter in the cause of Allah because both of them are engaged in Jihad against Allah's enemies, and the greater Jihad was given precedence." The fasting person strives against his own self when he abstains from food, drink, and sexual desire, out of obedience to Allah's command.

Ibn Battal reported that Imam At-Tabari said: "This Hadith indicates that whoever helps a believer with any good act, will gain the same reward of the person he helps." Therefore, how happy the people who help others do pious and good acts will be! Accordingly, we should be keen to provide the fasting person with something to break their fast, especially if they are poor or do not have anyone to prepare food for them to break their fast.

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Why Druzhba oil pipeline has held up EU sanctions on Russia?

The stoppage of the last Russian oil flows to Europe, via the Soviet-era Druzhba pipeline, has triggered a geopolitical clash that has blocked new EU sanctions on Russia and vital funding for Ukraine. Druzhba, which translates as “friendship” in English, is a pipeline that carries crude oil from Russia to Eastern Europe, via Ukraine.

The Soviet-era link was one of the most important Russian oil arteries, delivering crude from West Siberia to the industrial heartland in Europe including Belarus, Germany, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Ukraine. At its peak, Druzhba pumped over 1mn barrels per day, over 1% of global oil supply, according to Russian oil pipeline monopoly Transneft.

Most EU countries halted their Russian oil imports following Moscow’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, and by the start of this year Druzhba was carrying around 200,000 bpd to Hungary and Slovakia, according to Reuters calculations based on official data from the two countries.

The leaders of Hungary and Slovakia are outliers in the EU for maintaining close ties with Russia. They say buying oil elsewhere is more expensive and would endanger their energy security. On February 12, the government of Ukraine said flows have been suspended for over two weeks, since January 27. Oil flows via Druzhba have been disrupted in the past and were usually reported by the countries involved within hours.

Ukraine has accused Russia of damaging the pipeline with drones. Russia, as well as Hungary and Slovakia, have accused Kyiv of stalling the repairs for political reasons.

Ukraine has not publicly disclosed details of the damage, nor a date for when it expects to resume deliveries via Druzhba. Kyiv says repairs are ongoing, but shelling by Russia poses security risks to these efforts. A note submitted by Ukraine to a technical meeting of EU governments on oil supplies on February 25, seen by Reuters, said Russian attacks on January 27 had damaged an oil pumping station near the city of Brody and “technological and auxiliary equipment” of the Druzhba pipeline.

Reuters could not independently verify the extent of damage because it could not access the sites. Hungary retaliated against the stoppage of flows by vetoing new EU sanctions on Russia this week and blocked a new EU loan for Kyiv, straining Europe’s pro-Ukrainian consensus on the eve of the fourth anniversary of the Ukraine war. Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban, whose party is trailing behind the opposition in polls ahead of an April 12 election, on Wednesday accused Ukraine of an “oil blockade”.

Orban has cast the election as a choice between “war or peace”, saying his opponents would drag Hungary into the Ukraine conflict. Slovakia has stopped providing emergency electricity supplies to Ukraine in response to the Druzhba dispute. Kyiv relies on emergency electricity from EU countries because of extensive damage to its power infrastructure from Russian drone and missile attacks. The EU has not said how it plans to break the deadlock on its new Russia sanctions, after talks between ministers on Monday failed to do so.

Croatia has offered to replace oil from Druzhba by supplies via its Adria pipeline with non-Russian supplies shipped in by tankers. Pipeline operator Janaf says Adria could deliver as much as 280,000 bpd of oil to Hungary and Slovakia, more than enough to replace the 200,000 bpd coming from Russia.

Hungary’s MOL has previously said Adria cannot deliver those volumes and that maintaining supplies via Druzhba is crucial to its operations. MOL and Janaf said on Wednesday they would start tests to confirm Adria’s capacity, with international observers present. The halt of supplies via Druzhba has not triggered an immediate oil shortage in Hungary or Slovakia. Both countries have ordered an emergency release of stocks.

The cut in Druzhba flows has added to Russian oil production and export problems, according to traders and analysts. Russian oil flows to India and Turkey are set to drop in March-April due to US sanctions, leaving China as the main buyer of crude.

Ukrainian drone attacks have also damaged several refineries inside Russia, reducing its ability to process crude, which together with export problems may ultimately lead to production cuts, according to analysts.

Market jitters over supply disruptions from Russia alongside U.S.-Iran tensions have supported benchmark crude oil prices above \$70 per barrel, well above analysts’ predictions of \$60 per barrel this year. — Reuters

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“THE DARK REVEALS EVERYTHING.”



“THE LIGHT CHANGES EVERYTHING.”



AND... THEY CALLED IT PROGRESS IN DIALOGUE.

Israel’s looming ban on 37 global NGOs a test case

The ban is the latest phase of a broader squeeze on the international presence in Palestinian areas



By Mohamed Suleiman al-Shazly

In the hierarchy of threats to humanitarian relief, administrative fiat rarely ranks first. War, blockade, and bombardment do the obvious damage. Yet bureaucracy, when turned into an instrument of policy, can be dangerously efficient. That is the danger unfolding in the occupied Palestinian territory, where Israeli authorities have set a deadline at the end of February or 1 March 2026 for 37 international nongovernmental organisations to cease operations unless they submit to onerous new registration rules. The stated aim, protecting national security, masks a choice with perverse consequences: to curtail independent relief at a moment when it is most needed.

The legal vehicle for this policy, Government Resolution No. 2542, is sweeping. Adopted in December 2024, it compels all foreign groups providing aid to “Palestinian residents” to register with the Ministry of Diaspora Affairs and Combating Antisemitism by the end of 2025 or forfeit their licences. The law vests the state with broad discretion to deny or revoke registration on vaguely defined “public safety or state security” grounds. It conspicuously exempts organisations serving Israeli citizens, including residents of East Jerusalem. The result is a rule that is at once selective and instrumental: humanitarian work that benefits Palestinians is singled out for conditionality; humanitarian work that benefits Israelis is left untouched.

Destructive by design

From the humanitarian perspective, the new demands are destructive by design. At the heart of the dispute is a requirement that many organisations refuse to meet: the transfer of personal data lists of staff, including local

employees and their biodata — to an authority that is a party to the conflict. For organisations that insist on neutrality and the protection of their teams, this is not a bureaucratic hurdle but an ethical and security red line.

The disclosure of names, addresses and other personal details risks exposing staff to harassment, arrest or worse. For European NGOs it also raises legal alarms under EU data-protection regimes. In short, compliance would endanger people and expose organisations to legal liability; non-compliance invites deregistration and closure.

Many of the 37 organisations have proposed reasonable alternatives: independent sanctions screening, donor audited vetting and third party compliance mechanisms that filter potential security risks without handing over raw personal data to authorities. According to the petitioners, these offers have been largely ignored. Instead, Israel has proceeded with enforcement measures that have real-world consequences — denial of visas for foreign staff, stockpiling of essential goods at crossings and warehouses, and, for the minority that have complied, a process that appears selective rather than universal.

Those consequences are not theoretical. International and Palestinian actors together deliver a very large share of vital services in Gaza and the West Bank. United Nations and aid agency data show that international NGOs run or support roughly 60% of Gaza’s field hospitals, operate all stabilisation centres for children with severe acute malnutrition, and deliver substantial shares of water, sanitation, and hygiene services.

OCHA warns that the closure of these 37 groups could shutter one in three health facilities in Gaza immediately, cut off monthly specialised care for roughly 20,000 patients and leave severe gaps in malnutrition treatment and sanitation — outcomes that would translate quickly into excess mortality and morbidity.

The ban is also the latest phase of a broader squeeze on the international presence in Palestinian areas. Restrictions on UNRWA, the suspension of

aid consignments deemed “dual use”, and curbs on civil society actors point to a strategy that uses administrative levers to shrink independent relief and oversight. That is significant for two reasons. First, independent organisations do more than deliver goods; they monitor abuse, advocate for civilian protection and provide a protective visibility that deters some excesses of violence. Second, substituting state controlled or politically vetted aid for an independent humanitarian architecture risk politicising relief and eroding the impartiality that underpins international assistance.

The government’s legal argument rests on domestic security prerogatives and a claim that it has authority to regulate foreign actors operating on territory under its control. The petitioners counter that Israeli bodies have exceeded their authority under arrangements deriving from the Oslo Accords, under which the Palestinian Authority retains competency over NGO registration in parts of the territory, and that, as an occupying power, Israel has positive obligations under international humanitarian law to facilitate relief for civilians. They also stress proportionality: the imposition of blanket data sharing requirements is, they argue, arbitrary and disproportionate to any legitimate security aim.

Whatever the merits of the competing legal claims, the practical arithmetic is stark. Only 27 organisations have apparently satisfied the registration demands, leaving gaping holes in service provision. At the same time, aid consignments, food, medicines, shelter materials worth tens of millions of dollars, remain stockpiled at crossings and in warehouses. Humanitarian work in Gaza and the West Bank is already being performed under extreme strain: infrastructure damage is vast (the UN estimated that as of mid-October 2025 some 81% of structures in Gaza had been damaged), health facilities and schools are largely destroyed or impaired, and food insecurity afflicts a large fraction of the

population. Removing independent actors from that scene will not stop suffering; it will intensify it.

Strategic irony

There is also a strategic irony. If the declared aim of the policy is to safeguard Israeli security, the likely outcome is the opposite. A rapid withdrawal of international NGOs will create governance and service vacuums that aggravate instability, fuel grievances, and increase reliance on non-transparent networks for basic needs — conditions that tend not to make a conflict easier to manage. Moreover, the reputational and diplomatic costs are immediate. Donors, European governments, and the United Nations are being asked, in effect, to accept a diminished role for institutions they finance and in which they place considerable trust. Many of those governments will find that domestic pressure and legal obligations do not allow them to countenance acquiescence.

What should be done? Short of a reversal of the policy, the immediate imperative is to prevent an abrupt collapse of services. Israel’s courts should consider, and could sensibly grant, an interim injunction to pause enforcement while the matter is examined. That is what the petitioners have asked for. Parallel diplomatic channels should press for practical compromises: credible, independent vetting mechanisms that address security concerns without wholesale transfer of personal data; guarantees that registration decisions will be transparent and subject to appeal; and, crucially, assurances that lifesaving supply chains will not be blocked.

Beyond these crisis management steps, the episode raises a larger question about the role of humanitarian actors in contexts where state security narratives are mobilised to curtail independent action. Democracies have a legitimate interest in protecting themselves; they do not, however, win security by undermining institutions, domestic or international, that stabilise fragile environments. When politics, law and administration combine to shrink neutral humanitarian space, the people who suffer most are civilians who have no part in those machinations.

The 37 organisations facing closure have framed their appeal in stark terms: allowing the closures to proceed will cause immediate and irreversible harm. That is at once a legal plea and a moral one. Judges, diplomats, and ministers should weigh that claim not only against abstract security rationales but against the practical consequences of a humanitarian squeeze in a territory already ravaged by conflict. Administrative power can be precise and bureaucratically clean; its effects on people are messy and lethal. This is not the occasion for neatness. It is a moment to choose relief over regulation.

• A prolific writer and senior TV producer, the British-Sudanese author has won several awards for his work.



A displaced Palestinian family prepares Iftar amidst the destruction in Bureij refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip. (AFP)

Afghan military launches attack on Pakistan forces

Afghanistan attacked Pakistani forces at the border yesterday in response to deadly air strikes, and claimed it had captured Pakistani outposts, military and government officials said.

"In response to repeated violations by the Pakistani military, large-scale offensive operations were launched against Pakistani military bases and military installations," Taliban government spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid said on X.

A military spokesman said Afghan forces in the eastern provinces of Nangarhar and Kunar had started "heavy attacks on Pakistani outposts".

"So far, there are no casualties on Afghan side," said Wahidullah Mohammadi, spokesman for the military in eastern Afghanistan.

The governor's office and residents in Kunar province also told AFP that military action was underway.

Hamdullah Fitrat, the Taliban government's deputy spokesman, said that "15 outposts have been captured" by Afghan forces.

There was no immediate official Pakistani reaction to the Afghan claim.

The military operation follows Pakistani strikes on Nangarhar and Pakтика provinces overnight into Sunday, which the UN mission in Afghanistan said killed at least 13 civilians.

The Taliban government said at least 18 people were killed and denied Pakistan's announcement that the military operation left more than 80 militants dead.

Both sides also reported cross-border fire on Tuesday, but without casualties.

Relations between the neighbours have plunged in recent months, with land border crossings largely shut since deadly fighting in October that killed more than 70 people on both sides.

Islamabad accuses Afghanistan of failing to act against militant groups that carry out attacks in Pakistan, which the Taliban government denies.

Pakistan's military launched its latest round of air strikes on Afghanistan following a series of deadly suicide blasts. - AFP

Danish PM calls general election for March 24

AFP/Reuters
Copenhagen

Denmark's Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen said yesterday that she had scheduled this year's general election for March 24, against a backdrop of tensions with both the United States and Russia.

The vote comes at a time when Denmark's relationship with the US - which Copenhagen considers its closest ally - has been strained over US President Donald Trump's desire to acquire Greenland.

"Dear Danes, today I have asked His Majesty the King to call an election for the Folketing," Denmark's parliament, Frederiksen told the house. "Whether I will continue to be your prime minister

depends on how strong a mandate you give the Social Democrats in the parliamentary election to be held on March 24, 2026."

Under the Danish system, Frederiksen had to call an election within four years of the last, which was held on November 1, 2022.

Frederiksen took the opportunity to present the outlines of her election platform, which included a reform of the retirement age and the introduction of a wealth tax.

She also stressed that Denmark must continue to rearm and help protect Europe from Russia, as Europe grapples with the new geopolitical realities in the wake of Trump's return to the White House.

"Security policy is and will remain the very foundation of Danish politics for many, many years to

come," Frederiksen said.

Copenhagen is among Ukraine's most ardent military and civilian backers.

The Nordic country would also need to face "threats from the west and the risk of terror from the south", Frederiksen said.

"We must stand united in Europe," she insisted.

Over the next four years, Denmark will also have to "stand on our own feet", she declared, adding that relations with Washington would have to be redefined.

Denmark and Greenland are currently holding talks with the US about the future of Greenland, an autonomous Arctic territory which Trump has argued is crucial for US "national security".

The election will test whether voters reward Frederiksen's inter-

national leadership and defence of Danish sovereignty or punish her government for what critics say has been an inattention to problems at home.

"The trust in Mette Frederiksen as a leader and her ability to navigate the Greenland and Ukraine crises will be central to the campaign," political commentator Joachim B Olsen said.

"Her weakness is that, having been prime minister for two terms, it becomes more difficult to talk about solutions to the problems," he added. "She wants to talk about inequality, but then voters will ask why she hasn't addressed those problems until now?"

Political scientist Rune Stubager said voter concerns include food prices, welfare, inequality and immigration.

France names four new ministers

The French presidency has named four new ministers, including Catherine Pegard as the new culture minister in a mini-reshuffle.

Pegard, a former magazine editor and head of Versailles palace, takes over from Rachida Dati, a conservative who left the post to campaign to become mayor of Paris in an election in March.

The presidency said that former minister Sabrina Roubache would return to the government as a deputy education and training minister, government spokeswoman Maud Bregeon becomes a deputy energy minister and lawmaker Camille Galliard-Minière will be a deputy minister for people with disabilities. - AFP

'No deadlines to end Ukraine war'

AFP/Reuters
Moscow/Kyiv

Moscow is in no hurry to reach a deal to end the war in Ukraine, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov suggested in comments to state media yesterday.

Negotiators from both countries were in Geneva yesterday for separate talks with US officials, part of a fraught negotiation process being pushed by President Donald Trump in a bid to end the fighting.

Several rounds of discussions have failed to clinch a deal, with Moscow insisting on hardline territorial and political demands that Kyiv has ruled out as

tantamount to capitulation.

Top officials in Russia again pushed back yesterday on the idea a deal was close.

"Have you heard anything from us about deadlines? We have no deadlines, we have tasks. We are getting them done," state news agencies quoted Lavrov as saying.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov also said it was too early to make "forecasts" or say at what stage the peace process was at.

"It would be a big mistake to try right now to define some kind of stage or make some kind of forecasts. I don't want to make those mistakes," he told state media.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has repeatedly said that a meeting with Russia's Vladimir Putin is needed to agree

on the key sticking points, like the fate of territory in eastern Ukraine that Russia is fighting to seize control of.

Peskov repeated yesterday that Russia will not agree to a summit until the very end of talks, and only to sign off on a deal thrashed out between the negotiating teams.

Meanwhile, Russia fired a barrage of drones and missiles at Ukraine's energy sector and railway infrastructure overnight, injuring dozens of people, damaging residential buildings and triggering fires, officials said.

They were the latest of Russia's missile and drone strikes on Ukraine's energy sector in recent months, focused on destroying

power plants and substations and plunging entire regions into prolonged blackouts.

Zelensky said that Russia launched 420 drones and 39 missiles, including 11 ballistic ones, to target Ukraine's energy sector and other critical infrastructure.

"Last night, Russia once again waged war on critical infrastructure and ordinary residential buildings," he said on the Telegram messaging app. "The cold has not yet fully receded, and air defence missiles are needed every single day, while Russia continues its attempts to destroy our energy system."

Ukrainian air defence units shot down 374 drones and 32 missiles, the air force said, but five Russian ballistic missiles and 46 drones hit 32 sites.

Italy's ruling parties agree on electoral law overhaul

Italy's ruling parties have agreed on a sweeping overhaul of the electoral law, two sources said yesterday, a move that opposition parties say is designed to keep Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni in power after elections due in 2027.

Under the current system, most lawmakers in both the upper and lower houses are chosen by pure proportional representation via party lists, but 36% of them are elected in first-past-the-post constituencies.

The proposal by the right-wing coalition - which includes Meloni's Brothers of Italy, the League and Forza Italia - would move to a fully proportional system and offer a guaranteed majority for any coalition winning more than 40% of the vote.

"The centre-right is working on an electoral law that will bring stability to the country, clearly reflect the citizens' vote and ensure that Italy has a strong and credible government," said Forza Italia deputy head Stefano Benigni.

At the last election in 2022, the main opposition Democratic Party (PD) and 5-Star Movement failed to form an electoral alliance, making it easier for Meloni's right-wing bloc to sweep to power by winning most of the first-past-the-post seats.

However, a broad left-wing bloc now looks set to coalesce and, even if latest polls suggest it will win fewer votes than the right, it could still deny the ruling coalition a working majority by grabbing more seats in the poorer south of Italy.

"The idea behind this proposal is simple: whoever gets the most votes should govern, and right now the centre-right is slightly ahead. Under the current electoral law, that may not happen," said polling expert Fabrizio Masia.

The new plan, which would need parliamentary approval, also includes a run-off ballot, which would only take place if coalitions win between 35 and 40% of the vote, the sources said.

Governing parties have repeatedly sought to rewrite voting rules while in office, often with an eye to gaining an advantage in the next election.

"Their priority today, their only concern, is to protect themselves by changing the electoral law in an unacceptable manner," the PD said.

The move comes amid a campaign for a referendum due in March on a justice reform, seen as a test for Meloni ahead of the next general election. - Reuters



This photograph taken on December 29 shows sculptor Ehtisham Jadoon next to his creation made from scrap metal, a lion with a mane of twisted steel, at his studio on the outskirts of Islamabad. - AFP

Left: This photograph taken on February 12 shows Jadoon working on a model of Autobot leader Optimus Prime. - AFP

Pakistani sculptor turns scrap into colossal metal artworks

By Zain Zaman Janjua
AFP

Sparks fly and metal groans in a cavernous workshop on the outskirts of Islamabad, where Pakistani artist Ehtisham Jadoon fuses discarded car parts into colossal pieces inspired by Transformers movies and dinosaurs.

The 35-year-old sculptor's studio brims with cogs, chains, hubcaps and engine parts as his hulking creations - a lion with a mane of twisted steel, a giant Tyrannosaurus rex and a towering Optimus Prime - take shape.

"I have always been fascinated by metal objects," Jadoon told AFP after assembling

the 14' (4m) Transformers character, his biggest creation yet. "When I see metals in scrap, I imagine forms in which it could be utilised."

It took Jadoon and his team months of welding and warping to fashion his Optimus Prime, with over 90% of its parts sourced from discarded vehicle pieces.

The arms are forged from motorbike springs and gears, its shoulders are curve from car rims, the spine is moulded from a fuel tank and its knees are pieced together with chains and suspension parts.

Even its piercing eyes are crafted from vehicle bearings, completing a sculpture that is both intricate and awesome.

"Whenever I see an object, I visualise a form," Jadoon said. "I could imagine a block

transforming into a shape, so I simply solve the puzzle and bring it to life."

Jadoon, a former martial artist who once worked in the steel fabrication business, has never formally studied art.

He designs his gargantuan models spontaneously while working.

He told AFP that he has to visit a doctor almost every week due to sparks affecting his eyes and burns on his hands and arms, yet he insists this is the only work in which he can channel the energy of his training as a fighter.

Jadoon's work primarily focuses on crafting giants, beasts and powerful forms, which he describes as a reflection of aggression.

"Setting the anatomy and proportions requires visualisation from multiple angles and repeated adjustments," he said.

Every week, Jadoon tours scrapyards in Islamabad, sifting through tons of discarded metal in search of pieces that fit into his imagination and then become sculptures.

"What is waste to us became something valuable in his hands," scrapyard owner Bostan Khan told AFP. "It's incredible to witness."

Athens court convicts four over Greece spyware saga

AFP/Reuters
Athens

A Greek court convicted four people yesterday over a long-running wiretapping scandal that rocked the government in 2022, prompting resignations and a vote of no confidence in parliament.

The Athens court handed down prison sentences of 126 years and eight months to each of the four defendants, who include two Israelis, but the actual time to be served behind bars is capped at eight years.

They remain free pending an appeal trial.

The court also referred the case back to prosecutors for further investigation of other crimes and more serious offences potentially committed, including espionage.

In an affair local media dubbed the "Greek Watergate", the men used Predator software to tap the phones of more 90 politicians, journalists, business leaders and senior military officials between 2020 and 2022.

The defendants include Tal Dillian, a former Israeli soldier and founder of Intellexa, a company specialising in the supply of spy-

ware, which marketed the Predator software in Greece.

His partner and two former Greek executives of the company were also convicted.

The defendants, who were not present in court, were convicted of "breaching the confidentiality of telephone communications", said the judge.

They were also found guilty of "tampering with a personal-data filing system... on a repeated basis" as well as of "illegal access to an information system or data", he added.

Predator is sophisticated software that makes it possible to

infiltrate mobile phones, access messages and photos, and even remotely activate the microphone and camera.

The affair broke in early 2022 when a Greek investigative journalist, Thanassis Koukakis, discovered he had been wiretapped by the intelligence services (EYP) and that his phone had also been infected with the Predator spyware.

Koukakis said yesterday that he was "extremely satisfied" with the ruling, which he termed "fair".

"It was a good day for democracy and the rule of law in Greece," he told AFP outside the courthouse, adding that the verdict

"opened the way" for additional prosecutions of suspects in the same case.

"Half of the cabinet and high ranking generals were under surveillance by the national security agency and Predator spyware," said Koukakis.

He insisted there was a "link" between the Greek intelligence agency and the Predator operation, which the government has always denied.

According to the Greek Authority for Communication Security and Privacy watchdog (ADAE), it was used against more than 90 people.

Nearly 8,000 died or vanished on migrant routes last year: UN

At least 7,667 people died or went missing last year on migration routes around the world, but the true death toll is likely higher, the UN's migration agency reported yesterday.

The figure was down on 2024 when almost 9,200 deaths were recorded, but the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) said numbers nonetheless reflected the "global scale" of the crisis faced by migrants.

"The continued loss of life on migration routes is a global failure we cannot accept as normal," said IOM Director-General Amy Pope.

She argued for safer legal routes, adding: "These deaths are not inevitable."

Funding cuts for aid groups, crackdowns on humanitarian non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and limited access to data are making it more difficult to accurately track deaths, the UN agency said.

The Geneva-based organisation is among several aid groups hit by major US funding cuts, forcing it to scale back or close programmes in ways it says will severely impact migrants.

Sea crossings such as the perilous journey across the Mediterranean Sea from Africa to Europe remain among the deadliest routes for migrants, the report said.

At least 2,108 people went missing while trying to cross the Mediterranean last year, and another 1,047 died or vanished while trying to cross to Spain's Canary Islands, according to the IOM.

The actual figures are "likely higher", it said.

The first two months of 2026 have already seen "an unprecedented number of migrant deaths" in the Mediterranean, the agency warned, with 606 people recorded dead on the crossing as of Tuesday - even as arrivals in Italy decline sharply.

"There are reports of hundreds more missing at sea that cannot yet be verified," the IOM said.

The organisation said the remains of 23 people had been washed up on southern Italian and Libyan coasts in the past two weeks.

Globally, the decline in the number of dead and missing last year was partly due to fewer people attempting dangerous migration routes, particularly in the Americas, according to the agency.

Lower numbers were trying to get through the US-Mexico border or cross the Darien jungle between Colombia and Panama, the organisation said.

The IOM recorded the fewest deaths - 409 - since the reports began in 2014 in the Americas last year, although final numbers will come later in the year. - AFP/Reuters

Citizens show record turnout at Sheikh Jassim Holy Qur'an Contest in Doha

QNA
Doha

Record turnout has been strikingly noticed from male and female Qatari children at the 31st Sheikh Jassim bin Mohammed bin Thani Holy Qur'an Competition, marked by a terrific performance that underlined the overriding interest of family and society to have a well-aware generation that memorises the Holy Qur'an.

A total of 369 boys and 384 girls have registered to participate in the Juniors category this year, totaling 753 participants. They will compete in memorizing one part of the last five sec-

tions of the Holy Qur'an, within age requirements designed to encourage early memorisation and strengthen proper recitation skills from a young age.

The males have been tested at Imam Muhammad ibn Abd Al Wahhab Mosque, with the Department of Da'wah and Religious Guidance - Women's Activity Center in Al Waab being allocated for females, amid meticulous organization and a spiritually prepared atmosphere that fosters reassurance and focus.

The organising panel endorses the online judging system to ensure accuracy and transparency in grade monitoring, with qualified judging panels of national talents from Qatari males and females



assuming the calibration mission based on the highest objective criteria and perfection.

The performance levels showcased by these Qatari young people have been a vindication

of unwavering productive educational efforts in homes and schools, as well as in the Holy Qur'an education classes at Awqaf centers.

As such, promising models have been eminent, combining good memorization and recitation in a scene that confirms the deep-rooted educational milestone this contest has attained in the path of Qur'anic teachings in the nation.

The branch of young learners is an early platform dedicated to exploring their abilities to memorize and carefully reflect on the Holy Qur'an, as its role isn't merely confined to inculcating faith values but rather deepening discipline, perseverance, and

the spirit of decent competition in children. This is in addition to reinforcing their links to religious and cultural identity, endowing them with self-confidence through engagement in a phenomenal national forum for the Holy Qur'an.

The ministry emphasizes its commitment to taking care of memorisers through this contest, in pursuit of building a generation that cherishes the Holy Qur'an and touts its value to be able to ideally recite, as part of the efforts to uphold the care path of the Holy Qur'an in the State of Qatar, reflecting its mission to serve the Book of Allah and consolidating its presence in the life of individuals and the community.

QM celebrates Ramadan with a month of reflection, creativity and community



Qatar Museums (QM) is marking the holy month of Ramadan with a wide-ranging programme designed to inspire reflection, creativity and community engagement across its museums, creative spaces and heritage sites. Bringing together culture, well-being and shared experiences, this year's line-up invites audiences of all ages to connect with the spirit of the month through meaningful activities that blend tradition with contemporary expression.

At the 3-2-1 Qatar Olympic and Sports Museum, visitors can take part in an interactive Ramadan Wellness Activation Zone on March 2 and 4 from 8.30pm to 10pm. The sessions focus on balanced nutrition, gentle movement and live cooking demon-



strations, offering practical guidance for maintaining healthy routines during Ramadan in a family-friendly setting. No registration is required.

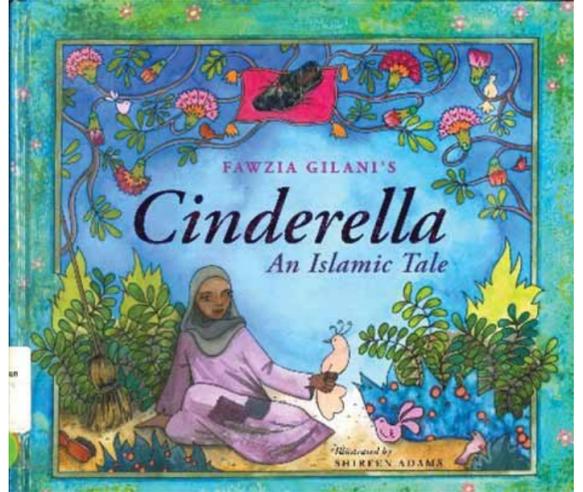
Dadu Children's Museum of Qatar presents a weekend Ramadan series built around the themes of health and wellness, community and the environment. Held every Thursday, Friday and Saturday throughout the month, the programme encourages children and parents to explore Ramadan through interactive play, creativity and re-

lection in a thoughtfully curated garden environment. Thursday and Friday sessions run from 7pm to 9pm and 8pm to 10pm, while Saturday activities take place from 3pm to 5pm, 7pm to 9pm and 8pm to 10pm.

Tasweer Photo Festival invites photography enthusiasts to capture the atmosphere of Ramadan through immersive photowalks. The Colours of Garangao Photowalk on March 3, from 8pm to 10pm at Bayt Al Wakrah, offers participants the chance to document children in traditional attire,

festive decorations, and the lively spirit of Garangao. On March 13, from 3.30pm to 5.30pm, a Ramadan Car Parade Photowalk led by photographer Hamad al-Mohannadi will follow the Mawater parade along Lusail Boulevard, concluding with the traditional cannon firing at sunset.

The Countryside exhibition at Qatar Preparatory School hosts "A Night at Countryside" on March 6 from 3.30pm to 11pm. Families can enjoy a community harvesting experience, hands-on workshops including mangrove



ink-making, children's painting and Tatreez embroidery, as well as a film screening by the Doha Film Institute and on-site food offerings. Fire Station will present Ramadan Night on March 5 from 7.30pm to 12.30am, featuring a creative marketplace, workshops and live music in a vibrant community setting.

Archaeology and Heritage opens excavation sites at Ain Mohammed and Mesaika to the public on March 14 from 8.30pm to 10.15pm, offering visitors a rare opportunity to meet archae-

ologists and explore active fieldwork. The Museum of Islamic Art rounds out the month with a film screening at the MIA Majlis Film Club on March 29, a hands-on Arabic calligraphy workshop on March 30, and Planet Kids Club on March 31, combining art, sustainability and storytelling.

This year's Ramadan programme unfolds under the banner of Evolution Nation, a campaign celebrating Qatar's cultural journey over the past 50 years and its vision for the future as a global centre for art and creativity.

Aspire Ramadan sports fest fetes community champs

Aspire Zone Foundation (AZF) crowned winners in the Family Fun Run and the Women's 3x3 Basketball Tournament as part of the 12th edition of the Ramadan Sports Festival 2026, transforming Aspire Park into a lively hub of community sport under the evening lights.

Organised in partnership with the Qatar Sports for All Federation, the Family Fun Run took place from 9pm to 11pm and drew participants from across the community in an atmosphere that reflected the spirit of Ramadan while promoting physical activity as a year-round lifestyle.

The free event, open to all through the QSFA application, featured 1km and 3km races and concluded with an awards ceremony honouring standout performances and strong displays of sportsmanship. In the men's 3km



race for participants aged 18 and above, Zakaria Graham claimed first place, followed by Faisal Yousef and Nayef al-Shammari.

Ajioi Khabibulina led the women's 3km category, with Rancy

Iyaga finishing second and Zain Othman third. In the boys' 13+ race, Arjan Rakesh secured first place ahead of Yousef Jamal and Nasser al-Khaja. The ceremony was attended by AZF and Qatar

Sports for All Federation officials, underscoring the collaborative effort behind the event.

The festival continues to strengthen its standing as one of Qatar's leading Ramadan community initiatives, blending sport and entertainment in a setting that encourages participation and social connection. Beach volleyball competitions begin today at 9pm on the sand court at Aspire Academy and will run until February 28.

The Women's 3x3 Basketball Tournament, held at the Ladies Sports Hall on February 24 and 25, concluded with Al Gharafa 1 taking the title after a 21-12 victory over Al Mohariboon in the final. Eman Jalali of Al Gharafa was named Best Player of the Tournament. Al Mohariboon had reached the final after defeating Al Wahda Third 17-9, while Al Gharafa advanced with a dominant 16-2 win



over Al Ghorban A. The awards ceremony was attended by senior AZF representatives.

Competition remains intense in the Embassies Football Tournament, staged at Pitch No. 4 from February 22 to March 6, featuring 24 teams divided into eight groups. On the fourth matchday, Oman defeated South Africa 6-1, Chad edged Mali 6-5, and India

recorded a 12-3 win over Finland. The preliminary round continues until March 1, followed by knockout stages leading to the final on March 6.

Meanwhile, the Aspire Sponsors Football Championship 2025 is underway at Pitch No. 5, with Al Waha and Ashghal 1 opening their campaigns with convincing victories as the group stage progresses.

