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**BUSINESS | Page 3**

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# Qatar, Greece to boost ties in key sectors

Amir, Mitsotakis discuss defence, energy, regional de-escalation



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani yesterday held official talks with Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis in Athens, focusing on strengthening bilateral ties and addressing regional developments.

The meeting took place at the Maximos Mansion, where the Greek leader welcomed His Highness the Amir and the accompanying delegation, highlighting the steady growth in relations between Qatar and Greece. He expressed a desire to expand co-operation, particularly in economic and investment sectors.

Mitsotakis also voiced his country's support for Qatar following recent Iranian attacks, and praised Doha's continued efforts to promote diplomatic dialogue and de-escalation.

The Amir said he was pleased to visit Greece and noted the long-standing ties between the two countries. His Highness thanked Athens for its support and reaf-

## MoU on agriculture co-operation

As part of the working visit of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, Qatar and Greece signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on co-operation in agriculture. The MoU between Qatar's Ministry of Municipality and the Greek

Ministry of Rural Development and Food was co-signed by HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Mohammed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh al-Khulaifi, and Greek Minister of Rural Development and Food Margaritis Schoinas. (QNA)

firmed Qatar's commitment to pursuing diplomatic solutions to regional tensions.

His Highness also pointed to the success of Qatari investments in Greece, expressing interest in expanding co-operation further, including in defence and other areas of mutual interest.

Talks covered a wide range of sectors, including defence, trade, energy, information technology, culture and education. Both sides also exchanged views on regional and international developments.

On regional issues, discus-

sions focused on the situation in the Middle East, particularly in Lebanon, with both leaders stressing the importance of de-escalation and a lasting political solution.

They also reviewed developments related to relations between the US and Iran, underlining the need to safeguard freedom of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz and ensure the security of global energy supplies and trade routes.

Senior officials from both sides attended the talks, including HE the Amiri Diwan Chief Abdullah



تيم بن حمد  
@TamimBinHamad

"Had a constructive meeting in Athens today with Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis, during which we discussed prospects for developing co-operation through further bilateral partnerships in promising and diverse sectors. The distinguished level our relations have reached reflects the shared keenness of our two countries to consolidate this co-operation in a manner that serves common interests and aspirations."

bin Mohammed al-Khulaifi, HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Mohammed bin Abdulaziz al-Khulaifi and a number of the members of the official delegation. Also in attendance were Greek Minister of National Defence Nikolaos Dendias and Minister of Foreign Affairs

Georgios Gerapetritis, along with other high-profile officials.

The two leaders also held a separate bilateral meeting to further discuss co-operation and shared international concerns.

His Highness the Amir later left Athens upon concluding a working visit. (QNA)

## Cabinet okays draft laws on real estate leases

By A Staff Reporter  
Doha

HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani chaired the Cabinet's regular meeting yesterday at the Amiri Diwan.

Following the session, HE the Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Ibrahim bin Ali al-Mohannadi said the Cabinet opened its proceedings by commending the participation of His Highness the Amir

Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani in the GCC Consultative Summit, which was convened on Tuesday in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

The Cabinet further praised the outcome of talks held between the Amir and Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa during the latter's recent working visit to Doha. The two leaders reviewed avenues for advancing bilateral ties, alongside pressing regional and international issues. The Cabinet underlined that the discussions had reinforced relations between the two brotherly countries and would help carry co-operation to wider

horizons across multiple sectors, in service of the shared interests of their peoples.

Turning to its agenda, the Cabinet was briefed on the Shura Council's endorsement of a draft law amending several provisions of Law No 4 of 2008 on real estate leases. Drawn up by the Ministry of Municipality, the draft seeks to bolster the campaign against illegal subdivisions of property units, mitigate the consequences of unregistered tenancy contracts, lower the fees levied on registering such contracts, and expedite the settlement of rental disputes. **To Page 11**

## QMC to launch QBC – a 4k specialised economic channel

Qatar Media Corporation (QMC) has announced the launch of a new economic television channel called QBC, the first of its kind in Qatar.



The channel will broadcast in 4K and will be supported by accompanying digital platforms, providing in-depth economic coverage, connecting Qatar to global markets and audiences. HE Sheikh Khalid bin Abdulaziz al-Thani, chief executive officer of Qatar Media Corporation, said the launch responds to the nation's ambition to support the national economy and highlight its growing achievements across key sectors. He noted that the channel will reflect developments across the Qatari, Gulf, and global economies, stressing that investment in media is a cornerstone of sustainable development for future generations. He added that the launch marks a strategic milestone in the QMC's media plan to expand its portfolio of specialised channels. Issa Abdullah al-Hetmi, acting



HE Sheikh Khalid bin Abdulaziz al-Thani

director of QBC, said the channel's test transmission will start on May 5 at 9am. He added that QBC will feature a wide range of economic programmes and specialised news bulletins, with real-time reports and in-depth analysis spanning key sectors including energy, finance, technology, stock markets, and real estate. This will enhance its credibility among investors, decision-makers, and the wider public. Al-Hetmi said the channel marks a major milestone in strengthening business and economic journalism. **To Page 11**

## Qatar's gold run at Sanya 2026



Qatar 3x3 basketball team members celebrate after winning the gold medal at the Asian Beach Games - Sanya 2026, yesterday. Qatar beat Thailand 21-10 in the final. The Qatar beach volleyball team of Cherif Younousse and Ahmed Tijan also won the gold medal defeating Iran 2-0 in the final. Qatar's handball team also claimed silver. The Sixth Asian Beach Games - a continental multi-sport event for beach sports - end today in Sanya, China. **Sport Page 1**

### Amir sends message to Swedish monarch

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani sent a written message to King Carl XVI Gustaf of Sweden, pertaining to bilateral relations and ways to support and develop them. The message was delivered by Qatar's ambassador to Sweden Nadia bint Ahmed al-Shaibi, during her meeting with Deputy Head of Ceremonies at the Royal Court of Sweden Charlotte Dahl. (QNA)

### PM felicitates Iraqi premier-designate

HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani held a telephone conversation with Iraq's Prime Minister-designate Ali Faleh al-Zaidi. The prime minister congratulated Ali Faleh al-Zaidi on his appointment as prime minister and the formation of the new government, wishing him success and expressing his hope for further development and growth in relations between the two countries. They reviewed bilateral co-operation and ways to support and strengthen it in all fields. (QNA)

### Qatar to host FIFA U-17 World Cup from November 19

Qatar will host the FIFA Under-17 World Cup in November and December, the sport's global governing body and local organisers have announced. The tournament will take place from November 19-December 13 in the FIFA World Cup 2022 host nation and will be contested by 48 teams, a statement by the local organising committee in Qatar said yesterday. Following a landmark 2025 tournament that saw Qatar hosting the first-ever FIFA competition to feature 48 teams, this year's edition will continue the expanded format, welcoming tomorrow's stars to compete for the coveted trophy. **Sport Page 1**

### Iran war has cost US \$25bn so far

The war against Iran has cost the United States \$25bn since it was launched in late February, a senior Pentagon official said yesterday. "We're spending about \$25bn on Operation Epic Fury. Most of that is in munitions," acting Pentagon comptroller Jules Hurst told lawmakers, using the official name for US operation. (AFP)

### QCB keeps interest rates unchanged

The Qatar Central Bank (QCB) has conducted an assessment of Qatar's current monetary policy and has decided to maintain the current interest rates for the QCB Deposit Rate, QCB Lending Rate, and QCB Repo Rate. In a post on X, the QCB confirmed it will keep the QCBDR at 3.85%, the QCBLR at 4.35%, and the QCBRR at 4.10%. (QNA)



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Nugget Spicy  
750gm + 250gm



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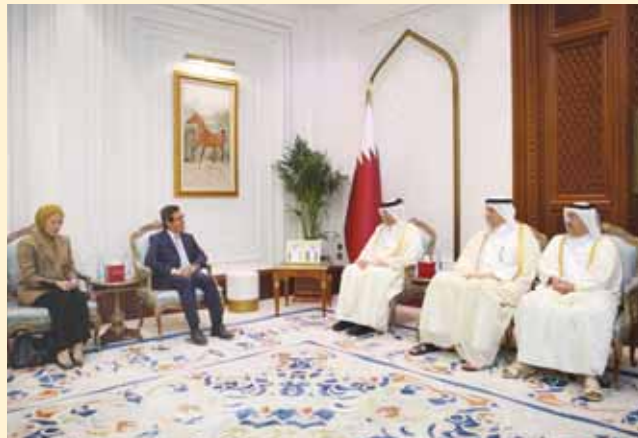
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## Shura Speaker meets Indonesian ambassador



HE Speaker of the Shura Council Hassan bin Abdullah al-Ghanem met yesterday with the ambassador of the Republic of Indonesia to the State of Qatar Syahda Guruh Langkah Samudera. During the meeting, they discussed co-operation relations between the two countries, particularly in the parliamentary field, and ways to strengthen them, through activating the role of parliamentary friendship groups, intensifying bilateral meetings, and enhancing co-ordination in international parliamentary forums, especially within the framework of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. (QNA)

## Qatar advances national human rights action plan with focus on justice reform

The State of Qatar has continued a series of high-level consultative sessions aimed at shaping its National Human Rights Action Plan (2026-2030), with a strong emphasis on judicial reform and alignment with international standards.

The sessions are being presided over by HE the Minister of State for International Co-operation Dr Maryam bint Ali bin Nasser al-Misnad. The latest session was hosted yesterday by HE the President of the Supreme Judiciary Council and President of the Court of Cassation, Dr Hassan bin Lahdan al-Mohammadi and brought together senior officials and stakeholders to review key pillars of the draft plan.

Discussions centred on strengthening co-ordination between national institutions and ensuring that legislation and public policies are consistent with global human rights frameworks.



Participants examined ways to enhance judicial procedures related to human rights, reinforcing the principles of justice and the rule of law. Improving the efficiency of the litigation system was highlighted as a priority, with the goal of safeguarding rights and freedoms more effectively. Officials also pointed to recent

progress in Qatar's judicial sector, including the introduction of clearer timelines for legal proceedings and expanded digital access to court services. These measures, they said, are designed to promote fairness, transparency and equal access to justice.

The session further explored mechanisms to strengthen guar-

antees for access to justice, in line with international best practices and the broader objectives of the national strategy.

In closing, participants underscored the importance of the National Action Plan as a comprehensive framework to advance human rights protections and guide policy development. They noted that the initiative reflects Qatar's commitment to sustainable development and to upholding principles of human dignity, equality and non-discrimination.

The consultative meetings form part of an inclusive approach adopted by the national committee responsible for drafting the plan, aiming to incorporate diverse perspectives and expertise. The development of the National Action Plan is seen as a strategic step in reinforcing Qatar's long-term commitment to human rights and institutional reform. (QNA)

## Minister of State for Interior Affairs visits Singapore's police command centre



HE the Minister of State for Interior Affairs Sheikh Abdulaziz bin Faisal bin Mohammed al-Thani visited the Police Operations Command Center and the Information Fusion Center (IFC) of the Singapore Navy, on the sidelines of his visit to the Republic of Singapore to participate in the Milipol TechX 2026 Exhibition and Summit.

During the visit, HE Sheikh Abdulaziz was briefed in detail on the mechanisms of work at the Police Operations Command Center, its role in handling reports, managing security incidents, and co-ordinating among various security units.

He also reviewed the operational system of the IFC, which is considered an advanced platform for sharing and analysing maritime information, supporting efforts to secure maritime routes, and enhance maritime safety.

HE Sheikh Abdulaziz commended Singapore's advanced expertise in the fields of security and technology, emphasising the importance of strengthening co-operation and exchanging expertise to further develop security systems between both sides. (QNA)



## QMC chief meets French envoy

HE Qatar Media Corporation (QMC) Chairman Sheikh Hamad bin Thamer al-Thani met yesterday with the ambassador of the French Republic to the State of Qatar Arnaud Pescheux. During the meeting, they discussed co-operation between the two countries in the media field and ways to strengthen and develop it. (QNA)



## Minister discusses bilateral relations with Greek officials



HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Mohammed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh has held high-level talks in Athens focused on bilateral relations and recent regional developments. Dr al-Khulaifi met separately yesterday with First Vice-President of the Hellenic Republic's Parliament, Ioannis Plakiotakis; Chair of the Parlia-

mentary Standing Committee on National Defense and Foreign Affairs, Dora Bakoyannis; and Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Alexandra Papadopoulou. The meetings discussed ways to support and strengthen bilateral co-operation between Doha and Athens as well as the latest developments in the region. (QNA)



## ICC prosecutor contacts: Qatar rejects 'false' claims

By A Staff Reporter  
Doha

Qatar has firmly rejected what it described as "categorically false" media reports alleging improper discussions with officials from the International Criminal Court (ICC), including claims linked to potential arrest warrants for Israeli officials.

In a statement issued yesterday, Qatar's International Media Office (IMO) said recent attempts to implicate Doha in such engagements were baseless and part of a broader pattern of misinformation.

The IMO asserted that the

allegations had been promoted by Israeli officials through "selective leaks" aimed at advancing their own interests, adding that such accusations had been "consistently discredited and shown to be untrue."

"It has become clear that these individuals are attempting to evade - at any cost - both domestic and international legal accountability for past and ongoing violations of international law," the statement said. It added that Qatar's name was being wrongfully invoked to divert attention from the conduct of those making the claims and to distort facts in order to avoid legal scrutiny.

The statement further alleged

that Qatar was not the sole target of such efforts, pointing to what it described as longstanding covert campaigns involving the dissemination of doctored documents, audio recordings and video clips.

Reaffirming its position, Qatar said it remained vigilant against what it termed as repeated attempts to undermine its reputation.

"The State of Qatar remains vigilant against these attacks and will continue to defend its name while pursuing peace and stability in the region," the IMO said.

The statement comes amid heightened regional tensions and increased scrutiny surrounding legal and diplomatic developments linked to the ongoing conflict, with Qatar reiterating its commitment to transparency and international law.

## Msheireb Properties, Meeza partner to launch AI Digital Companion at MDD

Msheireb Properties has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Meeza to introduce an AI Digital Companion across Msheireb Downtown Doha (MDD), marking a first-of-its-kind milestone for the city and a significant advancement in its smart city capabilities.

The signing ceremony was held at Msheireb Enrichment Center yesterday and was attended by Msheireb Properties' CEO Ali al-Kuwari and Meeza CEO Mohamed al-Ghaithani in the presence of a leadership delegation from both organisations. The AI Digital Companion's pilot phase will commence from today (Thursday), with full interactive capabilities scheduled for launch on May 24.

Developed by Hewlett Packard Enterprise, the AI Digital Companion will be deployed across 15 interactive smart kiosks throughout Msheireb Downtown Doha, serving as a 24/7 intelligent digital concierge. The solution will transform how residents, visitors, and tenants interact with city services by integrating artificial intelligence, smart city systems, and user-centric design into one unified digital interface.

Whether a visitor is looking for the nearest restaurant, a resident needs to settle a parking fee, or a family is searching for upcoming events and activities, the AI Digital Companion will serve as a single, intuitive point of contact. Users will be able to access wayfinding services, receive real-time information, book event tickets, make dining reservations, and complete



transactions, all through one seamless interaction. A companion mobile application will also be available for an extended suite of services on the go.

Al-Kuwari said: "This partnership marks an important milestone in our smart city journey. By working with Meeza, we are reinforcing the digital foundations of Msheireb Downtown Doha, ensuring that our services remain efficient, integrated, and responsive to the evolving needs of our community."

Al-Ghaithani, noted: "The AI Digital Companion illustrates how AI and digital infrastructure can enhance serv-

ices and everyday experiences in smart cities. Through our collaboration with Msheireb Properties and the integration of state-of-the-art Artificial Intelligence and holographic technology, we have created a reliable platform that supports visitors with accurate, real-time information in an intuitive and exciting user-interface manner across Msheireb Downtown Doha."

A holographic version of the AI Digital Companion will also be showcased at the Msheireb Properties showroom, highlighting the organisation's sustainability achievements, smart infrastructure, and key milestones.

### Qatar Foundation INVITATION TO TENDER

Tender Reference	Description	Tender Fee	Tender Bond	Bid Closing Date
HBKU-RFQ-1893	Deployment of Secure Web Proxy Solution for HBKU	QAR 500	QAR 8,000	31-May-26

HBKU-University Procurement Service (UPS) is inviting companies to participate in the above-

listed public tender. To receive the tender documents, please follow the following steps:

**Supplier Registration:** It is mandatory to be registered as a supplier with QF in order to participate in the above tender(s). Only QF-registered suppliers will be allowed to pay the tender fees online. Therefore, please visit QF website: <https://www.qf.org.qa/supplier-registration> to complete the Supplier Registration process.

**Tender Fee:** Interested bidders can sign in by visiting this link <https://Suppliers.qf.org.qa/abstract> and pay the respective non-refundable and non-transferable tender fee online. All Tender Fees are to be paid using credit cards only.

**Tender Fee Payment Dates:** Payment of Tender Fee online will be from 30-Apr-26 Until 14-May-26

- 1) All bidders who are registered and have paid the required tender fees online to QF, will then be granted access to download the Tender Document.
- 2) Technical and Commercial bids need to be submitted and attached online in QF Supplier portal as per the instructions provided in the "Supplier Portal" work instruction.
  - The Commercial bid must be valid for **180 Days** from the Bid Closing Date.
  - The Commercial bid must be accompanied by a Bank Guarantee (Tender Bond) issued by a local bank in Qatar and should be valid for **180 days** from the bid closing date (where applicable as per the Tender documents)
  - The successful tenderer will be required to submit a Performance Bond as prescribed in each of the above tender documents.

Note: All work instructions for Supplier registration and Supplier portal can be found in the link <https://www.qf.org.qa/supplier-registration>

## Qatar steps up global digital role at ITU Council in Geneva



**QNA**  
Geneva

The State of Qatar is taking part in the 2026 session of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) Council, underlining its growing role in shaping global digital policy and telecommunications governance.

The delegation is led by Ahmad bin Abdulla AlMuslemani, President of the Communications Regulatory Authority (CRA) and Chair-Designate of the upcoming ITU Plenipotentiary Conference 2026. The sessions, being held in Geneva from April 28-May 8, bring together member states to address key issues affecting the future of digital technologies.

Discussions at the council focus on priorities such as expanding global connectivity, internet governance, child online protection and the regulation of emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence. These efforts aim to strengthen international co-operation and support the development of secure and resilient digital infrastructure.

As part of the programme, Qatar's Permanent Committee for Organising Conferences will present preparations for hosting the ITU Plenipotentiary Confer-

ence later this year in Doha. Held every four years, the conference is the union's highest decision-making body, setting strategic priorities for the global ICT sector.

On the sidelines of the meetings, AlMuslemani is set to chair an informal inter-regional preparatory meeting on April 30, bringing together regional groups to co-ordinate positions ahead of the conference.

Qatar is also using the gathering to promote its candidacy for membership of the ITU Council for the 2027-2030 term, hosting events with member states and senior officials to strengthen dialogue and support.

AlMuslemani said the country's participation reflects its commitment to advancing an inclusive and secure digital future, adding that hosting the upcoming conference will provide an opportunity to bring together global stakeholders to shape the next phase of international connectivity.

The ITU, a United Nations specialised agency founded in 1865, includes 194 member states and a wide network of private sector and academic partners. Qatar joined the organisation in 1973 and has since played an active role in its initiatives to expand access to information and communication technologies worldwide.

## Minister emphasises role of private sector in developing world-class healthcare system

The Minister of Public Health Mansoor bin Ebrahim bin Saad al-Mahmoud, stressed the importance of the private healthcare sector as a key pillar in the provision of healthcare services in Qatar, highlighting commitment to achieving the highest standards of quality, safety, and transparency for every patient in every healthcare facility.

At the inauguration of the Second Forum on Regulating Healthcare in the Private Health Sector, HE al-Mahmoud affirmed that the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) looks forward to the private sector playing a greater role in providing healthcare services. He expressed his confidence in the private sector's ability to deliver the highest levels of quality and innovation, and to achieve the best possible value for patients and the healthcare system.

He highlighted that the ministry continues to modernise its regulatory frameworks in line with the rapid growth and development of the healthcare sector, in close collaboration with all relevant stakeholders.

He added that the ministry is working to enhance the efficiency of the healthcare system through digital solutions, artificial intelligence technologies, and the latest technological advancements, alongside secure and integrated data systems that support sector development, enable faster risk detection, and improve decision-making.

HE al-Mahmoud concluded by reaffirming the importance of strong collaboration with the pri-



private healthcare sector in realising the shared vision of developing a world-class healthcare system that fosters excellence and innovation.

The minister had inaugurated the forum, organised by the Ministry of Public Health. The forum aims to strengthen collaboration and integration between the public and private sectors, while providing a platform to discuss proposals, insights, and initiatives designed to increase private sector participation in the delivery of healthcare services in the State of Qatar.

The event was attended by senior officials from the ministries of health, commerce and industry, and labour, as well as representatives from the Qatar Chamber and the private healthcare sector.

During the event, His Excellency launched the Stakeholder Engagement Portal in the Health Sector, which enables healthcare providers and relevant stake-

holders to review draft health regulations, actively contribute to their development, and stay informed of the latest regulatory updates.

The platform supports enhanced transparency and partnership, while fostering a more inclusive and responsive regulatory environment that meets the evolving needs of the healthcare sector, ultimately strengthening the quality of care and governance in Qatar.

The forum also featured a short video presentation showcasing the progress of the private healthcare sector and its strategic partnership with the Ministry in advancing the healthcare system in Qatar.

Assistant Undersecretary for Healthcare Regulatory Affairs at the Ministry of Public Health Dr Ghanim Ali al-Mannai, delivered a presentation highlighting key initiatives and projects aimed at strengthening the role

of the private healthcare sector and increasing its contribution to service delivery. These initiatives include updates to legal frameworks, as well as operational systems and programs designed to streamline procedures, enhance partnerships, and ensure the highest standards of quality.

The forum also included a constructive discussion session with representatives from the private healthcare sector, focusing on strengthening collaboration, addressing challenges, and supporting the continued advancement of the healthcare system in Qatar.

The forum is held on a regular basis as part of the Ministry of Public Health's commitment to the continuous development of the healthcare system, in active partnership with all sectors. It aims to promote excellence, sustainability, and innovation, while improving the health and well-being of all people in the State of Qatar. (QNA)

## Central Municipal Council explores risks of electronic waste, ways to mitigate them

**By Ayman Adly**  
Staff Reporter

The growing risks associated with electronic waste (e-waste) and the potential harmful environmental and health impacts have been tackled by Central Municipal Council (CMC).

The council recently held its 53rd regular meeting of the seventh session, chaired by CMC chairman Mohamed bin Ali al-Athba, where various issues of public and municipal affairs were addressed. Accordingly, the council reviewed the report of its Services and Public Utilities Committee on the issue of electronic waste and the associated environmental implications, and potential risks on human health. The council explores the various measures to mitigate such risks and negative impacts and device practical solutions to benefit of such waste and deal with them in a safe way.

Further, the council has stressed the importance of collaborative efforts among all stakeholders to address such environmental and public health concerns. Besides, the CMC members addressed the topic food safety, stressing the need for stricter control efforts by the concerned entities on the use of preservatives and plastic pack-



aging in food products to maintain better consumer protection.

The council then turned its attention to a pressing issue in the Industrial Areas, where random parking of heavy equipment has become a nuisance, in addition to the spread of unlicensed activities. Drawing on a report by the Services and Public Utilities Committee, the discussions among the CMC members highlighted the operational and safety challenges posed by such practices, besides their broader implications for order and regulation across the various Industrial Zones of the country.

Accordingly, the council tackled a number of topics focused on public services and community concerns. The session underscored the council's ongoing com-

mitment to addressing issues that directly impact residents' daily lives while enhancing the quality of services across the country.

The meeting also welcomed representatives from RAF Foundation (Sheikh Thani bin Abdullah Foundation for Humanitarian Services), who presented their institutional strategy aimed at strengthening support for social organisations in Qatar. Their participation highlighted the importance of collaboration between the civil society and the council, reinforcing the latter's role in fostering community engagement and advancing social development initiatives.

In the meantime, CMC member Mohamed bin Abdullah al-Sada, representing Constituency 29 (Al Shamal), has praised the

extensive landscaping and afforestation efforts carried out by Ministry of Municipality along Al Shamal Road, describing them as a significant step toward enhancing both environmental sustainability and urban aesthetics.

Al-Sada noted that the greening initiatives have introduced a distinctive visual appeal to Al Shamal Road, reflecting a broader national commitment to environmental stewardship and improving the public landscape. However, he stressed that the value of such projects extends far beyond their visual impact.

He explained that tree planting serves as a natural barrier against dust and sand, helping to reduce airborne particles, which is a persistent challenge in the region. He also pointed to its role in lowering temperatures, curbing carbon emissions, and improving overall air quality. Additionally, he noted that strategic landscaping contributes to road safety by enhancing visibility along major highways.

He stressed that the success of Al Shamal Road initiative demonstrates the tangible benefits of such projects in improving quality of life and supporting Qatar's sustainability goals. He further called for expanding similar greening efforts to cover more external roads, ultimately extending all the way to Al Shamal City.

## almeera expands with new store at Al Mouj Muscat

almeera has opened a new store at Al Mouj Muscat, its sixth location in the Sultanate of Oman, marking continued momentum in the group's expansion strategy beyond Qatar.

Located at Al Mouj Marina, the new store brings almeera's retail model into one of Oman's most prominent residential and lifestyle destinations, serving residents, visitors, and the wider community with everyday essentials in a highly accessible setting.

The store offers a comprehensive range across fresh produce, grocery, dairy, frozen, and household categories, designed to meet the practical needs of daily life. The expansion reflects almeera's approach to growth: extending a proven, store-led retail system into new markets while maintaining consistency in quality, accessibility, and value.

almeera CEO Jassim Mohammed al-Ansari, who attended the opening ceremony, said: "Our expansion in Oman reflects a clear direction for almeera as we grow beyond Qatar.

"We are bringing a retail model built on consistency, accessibility, and everyday relevance into new communities. This store at Al Mouj allows us to serve both residents and visitors in a location that reflects the pace and lifestyle of modern Muscat."

Al Mouj Muscat, also known as The Wave, is one of Oman's leading integrated lifestyle developments, combining residential, hospitality, retail, and leisure in a coastal environment near Muscat International Airport. Aligned with Oman Vision 2040, the development supports economic diversification, tourism growth, and community-focused urban living.

"With this opening, almeera continues to expand its regional footprint, reinforcing its role as a retailer built around everyday needs," he added.



almeera CEO Jassim Mohammed al-Ansari, who attended the opening ceremony, said the opening allows almeera to expand its regional footprint, reinforcing the company's role as a retailer built around everyday needs.

## Qatar achieves fifth place in Kazan International Qur'an Contest 2026

The State of Qatar, represented by the Ministry of Endowments (Awqaf) and Islamic Affairs, achieved fifth place in the Kazan International Qur'an Contest in the Russian Federation. This achievement underscores the significant efforts dedicated to serving the Holy Qur'an and supporting its memorisers with exceptional voices and mastery of recitation.

Qatar participated in the competition, organised by the Religious Administration of Muslims of the Russian Federation from April 20-25, in the category of recitation with excellent performance and mastery of the maqams (melodic modes). The international competition featured a distinguished group of reciters from around the world.

Representing Qatar in the competition was Abdullah Hamad Salem Abu Sherida, who delivered a commendable performance, reflecting the advanced level achieved by Qatari participants in Qur'anic recitation and their mastery of vocal performance and maqams. This resulted in his securing fifth place

**The event enjoys the support of the Sheikh Jassim bin Mohammed bin Thani Noble Qur'an Competition, as part of its ongoing support for international Qur'anic competitions**

overall in the competition.

The Qatari delegation was headed by Assistant Director of the Mosques Department at the Ministry of Endowments (Awqaf) and Islamic Affairs Sheikh Abdulrahman bin Abdulaziz al-Thani.

Sheikh Abdulrahman bin Abdulaziz al-Thani affirmed that Qatar's participation in this contest has been consistent for years, including this edition. He noted that the event enjoys the support of the Sheikh Jassim bin Mohammed bin Thani Noble Qur'an Competition, as part of its ongoing support for international Qur'anic competitions. This support aims to encourage Muslims worldwide to engage with the Holy Qur'an through memorisation, recitation, and contemplation.

He explained that this support aligns with the mission of the Sheikh Jassim

bin Mohammed bin Thani Noble Qur'an Competition, which seeks to nurture Qur'anic talent, elevate recitation standards, and enhance Qatar's Qur'anic presence on the global stage.

He noted that the Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs, represented by the Department of Da'wah and Religious Guidance, places great importance on training reciters, refining their skills, and supporting their participation in international Qur'anic competitions. This also reflects Qatar's commitment to serving the Holy Qur'an and its people. He emphasised that these efforts align with the state's vision of caring for the Holy Qur'an and solidifying its presence in the lives of individuals and communities.

This achievement embodies the Ministry of Endowments' ongoing efforts to cultivate a distinguished generation of skilled reciters capable of representing Qatar in the best possible way at international Qur'anic events, raising its flag high in the fields of memorisation, recitation, mastery, and beautiful voice and performance.

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## Doha Historical Dictionary added to two international universities

QNA  
Doha

Cornell University and University of British Columbia have added the 'Doha Historical Dictionary of the Arabic Language' to their electronic libraries, a step welcomed by those in charge of the dictionary, as both universities rank among the world's top institutions according to major academic rankings.

In a statement, the Doha Historical Dictionary said that Cornell University included the dictionary in its electronic library. It added that the university as-

signed the dictionary a dedicated sub-heading, describing it as a tool for comparative research across dictionaries aimed at documenting the semantic evolution of each word within its corpus.

The statement noted that Cornell ranks 16th globally according to the QS World University Rankings and 18th worldwide according to the Times Higher Education World University Rankings. It also said that the University of British Columbia added the dictionary under a different hierarchical classification.

The university library described the 'Doha Historical Dictionary of the Arabic Language' as an ongoing project of

the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, noting that the first and second phases of the project cover the history of the Arabic language from its earliest written records up to the 5th century AH.

The statement highlighted that the University of British Columbia ranked third among Canadian universities according to its official website, 40th globally in the QS rankings, and 45th according to the Times Higher Education rankings. In this context, Executive Director of the Doha Historical Dictionary Mohammed al-Obaidi welcomed the move and expressed hope that more universities in the Arab world and beyond would follow suit.

He said that over more than a decade, the team had worked to refine the dictionary's scholarly content according to the highest possible academic standards, then made it available through a free online portal to support researchers across the humanities and social sciences, noting that the two universities had recognized the project's value and quickly adopted it.

He added that making the dictionary openly accessible reflects the project's identity as a collective endeavour, with one of its key priorities being to provide researchers everywhere with unique historical lexicographic material made avail-

able for the first time in the history of the Arabic language.

He also called on Arab universities and academic and research institutions to make the dictionary accessible to their students and researchers and to conduct studies that engage with or utilize its content. The Doha Historical Dictionary of the Arabic Language is one of the largest projects of the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies. More than 500 researchers from across the Arab world contributed to its development. It was officially launched on May 25, 2013, underwritten more than 12 years of development, and was completed on Dec 22, 2025.

## Sidra to expand paediatric therapy capability with new integration gym

Sidra Medicine, is developing a new Sensory Integration Gym as part of its continued expansion of specialised paediatric rehabilitation services. The gym will provide an advanced therapeutic environment for children with neurodevelopmental, behavioural, and sensory processing challenges.

The sensory integration gym will primarily support outpatient children with conditions including Autism Spectrum Disorder, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, sensory processing difficulties, anxiety, learning barriers, and other neurodevelopmental or mental health challenges.

Dr Ahsan Nazeer, division chief, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services at Sidra Medicine said: "The new sensory integration gym reflects Sidra Medicine's commitment to providing child centered, developmentally informed care for children with complex neurodevelopmental and behavioural needs. It will provide a dedicated therapeutic space where children can safely explore, regulate, and build skills with the support of trained professionals."

Dr Alia Satti, clinical lead, Developmental Paediatrics at Sidra Medicine said: "The sensory integration gym is being established to strengthen occupational therapy services through evidence-based interventions aligned with in-



ternational best practice, helping children build essential life skills while supporting families throughout their care journey."

Led by the Neurodevelopmental Occupational Therapy team, Sidra Medicine has designed the space with safety and comfort at its core. Sessions in the gym will be delivered by occupational therapists with certification in sensory integration approaches.

Monique Harris, occupational therapist at Sidra Medicine, who was instrumental in setting up the initiative said: "Designed as a safe and engaging therapeutic setting, the sensory integration gym will allow children to move, play, and explore in a structured space tailored to their developmental needs. Through guided activities, our young patients will be supported in improving balance, co-ordination, body

awareness, motor planning skills and sensory as well as emotional regulation that are fundamental to participation in learning, self-care, play, and social interaction."

The gym is currently fully matted, including the walls, and has been child-proofed with concealed switches, frosted windows, and access-controlled storage areas. It will also include specialised therapeutic equipment such as swings, climbing structures, scooter board ramps, and other movement-based resources that support children through play-focused therapy.

The gym is expected to be ready later this year. Once operational, the Sensory Integration Gym will mark another important step in Sidra Medicine's mission to advance specialised paediatric care for children in Qatar and the wider region.

## Return of Samla International Race in 2027

Visit Qatar, in partnership with Qatar Challenge Racing Club (Samla), has announced the return of the Samla International Race, set to take place on January 23, 2027. The upcoming edition will once again welcome male and female participants from around the world to compete in one of Qatar's most demanding endurance races. First launched in 2017, the Samla Race has established itself as a key fixture on Qatar's sports calendar. As the official partner of the international edition,



Visit Qatar continues to support initiatives that strengthen the

country's position as a leading destination for sports tourism and large-scale international events.

The Samla International Race is recognised for pushing athletes to their physical and mental limits. Spanning a total distance of 100km, the race is completed within a 12-hour cut-off time and features four endurance disciplines: swimming, running, cycling, and kayaking. Each stage is designed to test stamina, resilience, and versatility across varied terrain and conditions.

## QF students reflect on Education City's resilience, support, continuity

When regional tensions escalated, students across Qatar Foundation's (QF) Education City found themselves navigating uncertainty, disruption, and concern. For many students, the greatest difficulty came in the early days, when the future felt unclear and routines suddenly shifted.

During this intense period, QF ensured to safeguard its community through clear communication and swift co-ordination, while ensuring academic continuity during a challenging period. Usama Aliyu, a PhD candidate in Genomics and Precision Medicine at QF's Hamad Bin Khalifa University (HBKU), described the initial moments as "deeply unsettling". He said: "The biggest challenge was the initial panic and not knowing what might happen next and how it could affect our academic life and safety."

Beyond personal concerns, Aliyu also carried responsibilities as a student leader, acting as a link between students and administrators. "I was supporting others, answering questions, and providing reassurance, often without having complete information myself. Being the bridge between students and management during such a tense period required composure, clarity, and emotional resilience."

With families of students watching events unfold from afar, Aliyu feels that studying abroad during a time of regional tension carries additional emotional responsibility. "My main concern was reassuring my family that we were safe, despite what they were seeing on international news. Balancing their concerns while staying focused on my studies required emotional strength, but the strong support system at QF made that much easier."

For Kareem Fanous, a final-year medical student at Weill Cornell Medicine-Qatar, QF partner university, the uncertainty came at a particularly critical moment. "Being so close to graduation, there was constant concern about how the situation would evolve and impact the remainder of the semester," he said.



Ameer Shamyil Ahmed.



Aya Abdelhamid.



Usama Aliyu.



Kareem Fanous.

Fanous explains that logistical changes compounded these concerns. "Rapid transitions to online learning and multiple evacuations from student housing highlighted how unpredictable the situation was." Despite these challenges, Fanous emphasised that Qatar Foundation's response played a significant role in reducing anxiety and maintaining order, describing clear and frequent communication as "a recurring theme across student experiences".

Ameer Shamyil Ahmed, a Pakistani student completing his Master's degree in Islam and Global Affairs at HBKU's College of Islamic Studies this year, shared that the support he received went far beyond operational measures. Having lived in Qatar for two years, he noted that Student Housing at Education City demonstrated exceptional flexibility and care throughout the period. He also emphasised the value of commu-

nity building efforts. "Initiatives such as creating gaming areas and organising small gatherings, including group Suhour and Iftar during Ramadan, offered moments of comfort and normalcy during a challenging time."

A similar sense of disruption was felt by Aya Abdelhamid, an Information Systems student at Carnegie Mellon University in Qatar and a Class of 2026 graduate. Born and raised in Qatar, Abdelhamid had spent most of her life immersed in a vibrant campus and social environment. Abdelhamid echoed QF's consistent presence throughout the transition. "What I really appreciated was how responsive QF was," she said. "It never felt like we were left to figure things out on our own."

"Even beyond academics, just knowing there were support systems in place made a big difference during such an uncertain time," she added.

## QPO player wins Bravo Award

The Qatar Philharmonic Orchestra (QPO) announced that oboe player Mohammed Saleh has won the prestigious Bravo International Award. This achievement adds to his artistic repertoire and reflects the presence of Qatari musical talent on the global stage.

The Bravo Award is given to honour outstanding achievements in the performing and musical arts. This success is an indication of the growing presence of artists from the region on the global classical scene and their role in promoting cultural exchange through music.

The orchestra emphasised that this recognition highlights Mohammed Saleh's contributions to supporting the musical movement and strengthening orchestral traditions in the Gulf region, as well as his role in building bridges between different cultures through art.

For his part, Mohammed Saleh expressed his pride in receiving this award, noting that this achievement is the fruit of continuous co-operation and support from his colleagues and the management of the QPO. He affirmed that individual successes are inseparable from collective work.

He added that this recognition motivates him to continue developing his artistic performance and to work on inspiring and sup-



porting young talents in the music field, thus contributing to the advancement of the artistic scene both locally and internationally.

Saleh is considered one of the most prominent musicians in the orchestra, distinguished by his artistic style and his ability to perform diverse works that combine international classics with modern compositions, which has contributed to his widespread acclaim within international musical circles.

## Visit Qatar launches 'Hala Summer' campaign

Visit Qatar has announced the launch of its annual summer campaign under the slogan 'Hala Summer', featuring a programme of events and entertainment experiences across the country. Running from May to the end of September 2026, the campaign reinforces Qatar's positioning as a vibrant summer destination, showcasing a diverse mix of entertainment, hospitality and leisure experiences available across the country.

The season will feature a diverse lineup of experiences tailored to families, friends, couples and adventure seekers. Highlights include the Qatar Toy Festival, alongside immersive attractions such as 'Minecraft World', 'Colorverse', 'Fontana Circus', and Sneaker Con. The

programme also includes a series of concerts, including a performance by John Legend on September 10. Across the country's leading shopping malls, including Doha Festival City, Mall of Qatar, Villaggio, Place Vendôme, Landmark, Doha Mall, Al Hazm, Tawar Mall, Hyatt Plaza and City Center, visitors can enjoy live performances, activations and character appearances throughout the season.

A selection of hotels and resorts will offer curated summer experiences, from seasonal menus to stay packages and family-friendly activities. Visitors can also explore water-based attractions such as Meryal Waterpark on Qetaifan Island, alongside theme parks and a range of indoor entertainment options.

Beach clubs, dining venues and recreational experiences will further enhance the offering, complemented by seasonal promotions and booking packages for both residents and international visitors.

While summer in Qatar represents an ideal destination for families, with activities designed to suit visitors from all ages, it also offers unforgettable experiences for couples seeking luxury and relaxation in world-class resorts, as well as for groups of friends looking for exciting adventures, from vibrant beach clubs and refined, air-conditioned dining experiences to a wide range of entertainment activities such as ziplining over turquoise shores and enjoying water parks.

## QCDC presents inclusive career development model at APCDA

Qatar Career Development Center (QCDC), founded by Qatar Foundation, participated in the 2026 the Asia Pacific Career Development Association (APCDA), held in Kuala Lumpur from April 27 to 30 under the theme 'Inclusive Career Development in Global Transitions', where the centre presented QCDC's integrated approach to inclusive career development.

Saad Abdulla al-Kharji, executive director, headed QCDC's delegation at the conference, where he and Alanood Gamal, career programmes and services officer, delivered a presentation titled 'QCDC's Integrated Career Development and Readiness Initiatives for Persons with Disabilities'.

Through this participation, the centre shared with an international audience its experience in designing structured, partnership-based pathways that support persons with disabilities from early awareness and preparation through to workplace integration and continued follow-up.

APCDA 2026 convened leading researchers, practitioners, and institutional leaders from across the Asia-Pacific region and beyond to exchange knowledge and practical models for advancing more responsive and inclusive career development systems.

During the conference, QCDC highlighted how inclusive career development can be embedded within a broader ecosystem approach that brings together schools, employers, government entities, families, and practitioners to create meaningful pathways into education, training, and employment for individuals of all abilities.

Al-Kharji said: "Our participation in APCDA 2026 was an important opportunity to present a model that reflects both QCDC's practical experience and Qatar's broader commitment to inclusive human capital development. We believe that sharing national experiences on international platforms is essential to underscore Qatar's growing leadership in advancing career development as a strategic national priority."





# President Aoun calls for truce before Israel talks

AFP  
Beirut

Lebanese President Joseph Aoun yesterday said that Israel must fully implement the ceasefire between the two countries before beginning direct talks, after Israeli strikes killed more than 20 people over the past two days.

Hezbollah drew Lebanon into the Middle East war on March 2, and Israeli and Lebanese representatives have since met twice in Washington – the first such meetings in decades, for discussions that Hezbollah has categorically rejected.

After the first talks, US President Donald Trump announced a 10-day ceasefire that began on April 17, and a three-week extension after the second round.

Trump said he hoped to host Aoun and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu “over the next couple of weeks” as the two countries prepare for direct negotiations.

Israel “must first fully implement the ceasefire in order to move on to negotiations... Israeli attacks cannot continue as they are,” Aoun said in a statement shared by the presidency.

“We are now waiting for the United States to set a date to begin direct negotiations” with Israel, he added.

Israel has repeatedly bombed Lebanon, particularly the south,



An Israeli soldier stands on tank, on the Israeli side of the Israel-Lebanon border, in northern Israel yesterday. (Reuters)

despite the truce, and has carried out demolitions of border villages inside a “Yellow Line” it established in southern Lebanon.

Israel said yesterday that it struck “approximately 20 command centres and military structures used by Hezbollah”.

State-run National News Agency (NNA) reported a series of Israeli strikes on the country.

Hezbollah meanwhile claimed responsibility for attacks on Israeli troops in southern Lebanon, and drone and rocket fire on northern Israel, saying it is in response to ceasefire “violations”.

A Lebanese soldier and his brother were killed in an Israeli strike yesterday, Lebanon’s military said. The raid comes one day after 19 people including three civil defence personnel were killed in strikes in the country’s south, according to updated health ministry figures, while two army troops were also wounded.

Prime Minister Nawaf Salam called the strike that killed the civil defence workers a “war crime”.

President Aoun said yesterday that authorities were keeping up “contacts to consolidate the ceasefire and stop the demolition

of homes in occupied southern villages”, according to a statement from his office.

Under the truce, Israel reserves the right to act against “planned, imminent or ongoing attacks”.

Its troops are operating inside an Israeli-announced “yellow line”, which demarcates a ribbon of Lebanese territory around 10 kilometres (six miles) deep along the length of the border, where Lebanese have been warned not to return. Israeli strikes in Lebanon have killed more than 60 people since the ceasefire began less than two weeks ago, according to an AFP tally of health ministry and army statements.

Hezbollah lawmaker Hassan Fadlallah vowed yesterday that Israeli attempts to “establish a security belt on our land... will be brought down by the sacrifices of the resistance and the steadfastness of our people”.

He also reiterated his party’s rejection of direct talks with Israel.

Planned direct negotiations with Israel have caused a strong rift between the government and Hezbollah, which previously rejected Beirut’s commitment to disarming it.

Aoun on Monday stated that direct negotiations aimed at stopping the war, securing an Israeli withdrawal from the south, returning the displaced to their homes, demarcating the border and reaching an end to the “state of hostility” with Israel.



A view of tents sheltering displaced people in Gaza City. (Reuters)

## Attacks on hospitals and medics on the rise: WHO

The World Health Organisation (WHO) said yesterday that attacks on healthcare facilities and staff are increasing globally, with a notable uptick recorded since the recent conflict in the Middle East began.

Before the US and Israel launched airstrikes on Iran at the end of February, attacks globally on such facilities and staff averaged about 3.7 per day, but that has now increased to 4.3, the WHO said. “This is clearly showing that healthcare is the target,” Altaf Musani, the Director of Emergency Health Interventions at the WHO, told reporters in Geneva.

The attacks include airstrikes and shelling of hospitals and clinics as well as arrests and intimidation of healthcare workers.

“When healthcare is needed most, it is being attacked... These attacks are having a deep impact on functionality,” Musani said.

Since the recent conflict in the Middle East began, 50 hospitals and private healthcare centres have been closed and 16 hospitals have been damaged across the region, according to the WHO.

WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, who has repeatedly denounced the attacks and has called for accountability, highlighted the case of Lebanon where 149 attacks on healthcare have been identified. More than 2,500 people have been killed in Israeli airstrikes across Lebanon since March 2, when Iran-backed militant group Hezbollah fired on Israeli positions and triggered a retaliatory Israeli air and ground campaign.

The United Nations Human Rights office said last month that Israeli strikes on civilians including healthcare workers in Lebanon may amount to war crimes.

Israel has repeatedly denied that it targets healthcare workers and says it is targeting Hezbollah sites. There have also been 26 reported attacks on healthcare sites in Iran since the end of February, Ghebreyesus added.

Attacks on healthcare sites have also deeply impacted healthcare provision in Gaza, which currently has only one fully functioning hospital, and in Sudan, where only 54% of hospitals are fully operational, the WHO said. (Reuters)



A displaced Palestinian girl eats outside a tent at a camp sheltering displaced people in Gaza City. (Reuters)

## UN calls on Israel to allow aid flow into Gaza

The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has called on the Israeli government to lift all restrictions on basic life necessities so as to allow the entry of humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip.

The appeal came during a briefing by UN Human Rights Spokesperson Thameen Al Kheetan at the United Nations’ weekly press conference in Geneva. Al Kheetan said that Israel – as the occupying power in Gaza – is obligated to meet the basic needs of Palestinians in the enclave and ensure the

removal of all restrictions on the entry and flow of humanitarian assistance.

He added that the situation in Gaza remains very serious due to the acute shortage of clean drinking water, food, cooking gas, and other essential supplies.

Despite a ceasefire in Gaza since October 2025, the coastal strip continues to face a tight blockade by Israelis while daily Israeli attacks continue. These assaults have resulted in thousands of civilian casualties, including both fatalities and injuries. (QNA)

# Tuareg rebels vow Mali junta ‘will fall’, north will be captured

AFP  
Paris, Dakar

Mali’s Tuareg rebels told AFP yesterday the country’s ruling junta will fall and that they intend to conquer the north, just days after unprecedented attacks targeting the nation’s military government.

Over the weekend militants and the Tuareg separatists launched the largest assault on the country in nearly 15 years, attacking the military junta and its Russian paramilitary backers. A spokesman for the Tuareg separatist coalition Azawad Liberation Front (FLA) told AFP during a visit to Paris yesterday that “the regime will fall, sooner or later”.

The clashes have pitted the army not just against the FLA but also its allies within the Al-Qaeda-linked group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM). Their coordinated dawn offensive on Saturday against strategic junta positions, including areas around the capital, Bamako, killed at least 23 people, with the toll expected to rise.

The two days of fierce fighting also killed Defence Minister Sadio Camara – seen as the mastermind behind the junta’s pivot to Russia. His funeral is planned for Thursday. The separatists and jihadists were able to capture the key north-



Soldiers during a patrol following the attack on Mali’s main military base Kati, outside Bamako on Monday. (Reuters)

ern town of Kidal and also targeted Gao in the mostly desert north along with Mopti and Ségou in the centre.

Gao is the army’s second-largest military stronghold after Kati, which was targeted in the weekend attacks. FLA spokesman Mohamed Elmaouloud Ramadan told AFP yesterday that the rebels intend to take control of Gao, Timbuktu and Menaka following their success in Kidal.

The latest assaults raise questions about the junta’s ability to tackle the security crisis, despite its insistence that its strategy, foreign partnerships and increased military efforts have stemmed the jihadist threat.

Mali’s junta government, like

its military counterparts in neighbouring Niger and Burkina Faso, have severed ties with former colonial ruler France and several Western countries, moving closer politically and militarily to Russia.

Russia’s mercenary Wagner Group, which had been fighting with Malian forces against jihadists since 2021, ended their involvement in June 2025. It has since become the Africa Corps, an organisation under the direct control of the Russian defence ministry.

Although JNIM and FLA have different goals, according to experts, they are united against a common enemy – the military junta that has ruled since 2020 and the Russian paramilitary backers.

FLA spokesman Ramadan additionally told AFP yesterday that his group’s “objective is for Russia to withdraw permanently from Azawad and beyond, from all of Mali”.

The FLA is made up of mainly Tuareg groups who want independence for Azawad, a territory in northern Mali.

“We have no particular problem with Russia, nor with any other country. Our problem is with the regime that governs Bamako”, Ramadan said.

A historically nomadic people, Tuaregs, who are spread across Mali, Niger, Algeria, Libya and Burkina Faso, have waged an armed struggle for decades against marginalisation, with action centred in particular around the key city of Kidal.

The most recent attacks are reminiscent of a crisis that rocked Mali in 2012, when Tuareg rebels joined forces with jihadists to capture strategic hubs in the vast, remote north.

That offensive was repelled by forces from France, which has since left the Sahel country.

The alliance between the jihadists and Tuareg rebels eventually unravelled when they turned on each other and the jihadists drove the Tuareg separatists out.

The latest attacks are the result of a new alliance forged a year ago.

# Health summit in Africa welcomes aid cuts as chance for ‘sovereignty’

AFP  
Nairobi

US aid cuts to Africa marked the death blow of an “outdated” development system and should push the continent to take charge of its own services, the heads of the World Health Summit said yesterday.

The overriding theme of the three-day summit in Nairobi, attended by 15 African health ministers and thousands of NGO and academic delegates, was “health sovereignty” for the continent, which sees an opportunity in the loss of donor funding.

Massive aid cuts by Western donors, especially President Donald Trump’s decision to scrap the \$40bn-a-year USAID agency, have been highly controversial in the West, but have been welcomed by many Africans who say aid has fuelled corruption and lethargy in their governments for decades.

The aid system in Africa was based on the idea of “poor medi-

cine for poor people,” Lukoye Atwoli, the summit’s co-host, told reporters.

“That era is gone,” he said, pointing to countries like Kenya that have implemented comprehensive insurance and modern facilities, even if there are still plenty of teething troubles.

The cuts are a second “wake-up call” after the harsh lessons of the Covid pandemic, when Africa was last in line for vaccines, added World Health Summit president Axel Pries.

“We don’t have the virus, but we have a political virus,” he said.

“This political change completely changes the paradigm of how health systems are financed... You need more local financing. We all have to do away with this donor-recipient paradigm, which is much outdated,” he said.

So should Trump be praised for ripping off the bandage?

“Rather than congratulating Trump, I would say: never spoil a good crisis,” Pries told AFP.

Aid cuts were “something which



An internally displaced Somali child is screened for malnutrition. (Reuters)

would have happened anyhow at a certain point in time. But the way

it was done was completely unacceptable,” he added, highlighting

the “brutal” stop that left millions suddenly unable to access life-

saving treatments for HIV/AIDS and other diseases.

Pries was also damning of the new US bilateral approach to aid in which it has pulled out of global institutions like the World Health Organisation and instead sought deals with individual countries, reportedly demanding access to resources and health data in exchange for funds.

Several African nations have raised the alarm, saying their data will be harvested to create treatments that will not be shared with them.

“So I’m a little worried about individual treaties which make... data a commodity which is no longer available to the broader family of nations,” said Pries.

He took an oblique swipe at the Trump administration, saying: “It’s a little bit irritating when a group of people who are otherwise talking about ‘alternative facts’ and creating a lot of misinformation have such an interest in real data.”

“The alarm bell has to ring.”



## Families of Canadian mass shooting victims sue OpenAI, CEO Altman in US court

Family members of victims of one of Canada's deadliest mass shootings sued OpenAI and its CEO Sam Altman in US court yesterday, alleging the company identified the shooter as a credible threat eight months before the attack but did not warn police. The lawsuits, filed in federal court in San Francisco, accuse OpenAI leaders of not alerting police because it would have exposed the volume of violence-related conversations on ChatGPT and potentially jeopardised the company's path to a nearly \$1 trillion initial public offering. The February shooting in Tumbler Ridge, British Columbia left nine people dead, many of them children.

An OpenAI spokesperson called the shooting "a tragedy" and said the company has a zero-tolerance policy for using its tools to assist in committing violence. "As we shared with Canadian officials, we have already strengthened our safeguards, including improving how ChatGPT responds to signs of distress, connecting people with local support and mental health resources,

strengthening how we assess and escalate potential threats of violence, and improving detection of repeat policy violators," the spokesperson said in a statement.

The cases are part of a growing wave of lawsuits accusing artificial intelligence companies of failing to prevent chatbot interactions that plaintiffs say contribute to self-harm, mental illness and violence. They appear to be the first in the US to allege that ChatGPT played a role in facilitating a mass shooting.

Jay Edelson, who is representing the plaintiffs, said he plans to file another two dozen lawsuits in the coming weeks against the company on behalf of other people impacted by the shooting.

Jesse Van Rootselaar, whose interactions with ChatGPT are at the center of the lawsuits, shot her mother and stepbrother at home before killing an educational assistant and five students aged 12 to 13 at her former school on February 10, according to police. Van Rootselaar, who was 18, then died by suicide.

The plaintiffs include relatives of those killed at the school and a



A woman visits a makeshift memorial on the steps of the town hall in the town of Tumbler Ridge, British Columbia. (Reuters/File Photo)

12-year-old girl who survived after being shot three times but remains in intensive care.

According to one of the complaints, OpenAI's automated systems in June 2025 flagged ChatGPT conversations in which the shooter described gun violence scenarios.

Safety team members recommended contacting the police after

concluding she posed a credible and imminent threat of harm, said the complaint, which cites a Wall Street Journal article from February about the company's internal discussions.

But Altman and other OpenAI leadership overruled the safety team and police were never called, the lawsuit alleges. The shooter's account was deactivated, but she

was able to get a new account and continue using the platform to plan her attack, the lawsuit claims.

Following the publication of the Wall Street Journal article, the company said the account was flagged by systems that identify "misuses of our models in furtherance of violent activities" but the issues did not meet its internal criteria for reporting to law enforcement.

Last week, a local Tumbler Ridge newspaper published an open letter in which Altman said he was "deeply sorry" the account was not flagged to law enforcement.

In a blog published Tuesday, OpenAI said it trains its models to refuse requests that could "meaningfully enable violence," and notifies law enforcement when conversations suggest "an imminent and credible risk of harm to others," with mental health experts helping assess borderline cases. The company said it continually refines its models and detection methods based on usage.

The lawsuits seek an unspecified amount of damages and a court order requiring OpenAI to over-

haul its safety practices, including mandatory law enforcement referral protocols. One of the victims originally filed her lawsuit in Canadian court but dismissed it to pursue her claims in California, Edelson said. The lawsuits over the Tumbler Ridge shooting come after multiple lawsuits against OpenAI have been filed in US state and federal court in recent months over claims ChatGPT facilitated harmful behavior, suicide, and, in at least one case, a murder-suicide.

The lawsuits, which are still in early phases, will force courts to grapple with what role an AI platform can play in promoting violence and whether the company can be held liable for its actions or the actions of its users.

OpenAI has denied the claims in the lawsuits, arguing in the murder-suicide case that the perpetrator had a long history of mental illness.

Florida Attorney General James Uthmeier announced earlier this month a criminal investigation into ChatGPT's role in a 2025 shooting at Florida State University. (Reuters)

## US Supreme Court leans towards Trump's move targeting immigrants

Reuters  
Washington

The US Supreme Court appeared sympathetic yesterday towards moves by President Donald Trump's administration to strip humanitarian protections from hundreds of thousands of Haitian and Syrian immigrants, part of his signature immigration crackdown.

The justices heard arguments in the administration's appeal of rulings by federal judges in New York and Washington, DC, halting its actions to terminate Temporary Protected Status, or TPS, previously provided by the US government to more than 350,000 people from Haiti and 6,100 from Syria.

The legal dispute presents a test of Trump's executive power and the Supreme Court's traditional deference to presidents on matters of immigration, national security and foreign policy. The court last year let the administration end TPS for hundreds of thousands of Venezuelans. US Solicitor General D John Sauer, arguing for the Trump administration, said the lawsuits challenging the TPS revocation are meritless and barred by federal law.

The lawsuits before the Supreme Court "challenge the very kind of foreign policy-laden judgments that are traditionally entrusted to the political branches," Sauer said.

Revoking TPS and other humanitarian protections is part of Trump's broader rollback of legal and illegal immigration since he returned to office in January 2025. In defending its actions on TPS, the administration has said such protections were always meant to be temporary. The United States first provided these protections to Haitians after a major earthquake in 2010 and to Syrians after their country descended into civil war in 2012.

Under US law, TPS is a desig-

nation that allows migrants from countries stricken by war, natural disaster or other catastrophes to live and work in the United States while it is unsafe for them to return to their home countries.

Ahilan Arulanantham, the lawyer representing the Syrian immigrants, said the administration's position "contravenes the text, bedrock administrative law and common sense," adding that "the government reads the statute like a blank check."

The administration has said it followed proper procedures, and has made the broader argument that courts cannot second-guess its TPS decisions in the first place, an assertion that if accepted by the court could doom challenges going forward.

The law governing TPS "bars judicial review of both the (Department of Homeland Security) secretary's ultimate decision, whether to designate, extend or terminate and of each antecedent step along the way to that determination," Sauer told the justices.

"That provision means what it says," Sauer said, adding that "attempts to carve out exceptions to the review bar would eviscerate it."

The Trump administration has drawn parallels between the revocation of TPS and Trump's travel ban targeting several Muslim-majority countries during his first term, which the Supreme Court declined to block in a 2018 decision known as *Trump v. Hawaii*.

Justice Sonia Sotomayor, one of the three liberal justices, said the administration's position is at odds with the relevant federal statute and the US Constitution. "Congress could have said any termination of TPS status is unreviewable, but it didn't," Sotomayor said.

The relevant statute may not allow a challenge to the "substantive conclusions" of whether TPS should be terminated, but it does seem to allow challenges to the procedural steps undertaken to get



Immigrant rights activists and demonstrators attend a rally outside the US Supreme Court, in Washington, DC, yesterday. (Reuters)

### US Supreme Court curbs race-based voting maps

The US Supreme Court yesterday sharply limited the use of race in drawing electoral districts, in a decision that could reshape congressional maps nationwide and boost Republican prospects ahead of midterm elections. In a 6-3 ruling split along ideological lines, the conservative-dominated court struck down a map that creates a second majority-Black district in Louisiana, finding it amounted to an unconstitutional racial gerrymander despite being drawn to comply with the 1965

Voting Rights Act (VRA). The decision leaves the core of the VRA intact but narrows how it can be applied, and will be seen by civil rights activists as a blow to a landmark law that has already been weakened by previous rulings over the past decade. Democracy Docket — a voting rights platform — said the ruling could help secure 27 extra Republican seats, cementing the party's control in the US House of Representatives "for at least a generation." (AFP)

there, Sotomayor said. "What you are basically saying is Congress wrote a statute for no purpose," Sotomayor said.

Federal law, Sotomayor said, clearly "set forth procedural steps that had to be followed."

TPS recipients, until the termination, "are here lawfully with permission," Sotomayor added.

"They are entitled to due process, and now Congress has given them a process — it may not be a

court process, but that's okay, it's a process — and you are saying it is unreviewable whether the president has followed that process."

The Supreme Court has granted the Republican president's requests to immediately implement various hardline immigration policies while legal challenges continue to play out in courts. For instance, it let Trump deport immigrants to countries where they have no ties and let federal agents

target people for deportation based in part on their race or language.

The legal dispute could have wide implications, affecting 1.3 million immigrants from all 17 countries currently designated for TPS, according to the plaintiffs. Trump's administration has sought to rescind the protections for 13 of those countries so far.

Conservative Justice Brett Kavanaugh asked Sauer why Congress would have wanted to prohibit judicial review of TPS determinations.

Sauer responded that revoking a TPS determination is "the sort of foreign policy-freighted decision that lies at the heartland" of the executive branch's competence.

"Those sort of determinations being second-guessed at the district courts — it's almost like these district court judges (are) appointing themselves junior varsity secretaries of state," Sauer said.

Lower courts ruled against the TPS terminations, finding that administration officials failed to follow mandatory protocols to assess conditions in a country before revoking its designation.

The Trump administration has argued that courts should not be second-guessing whether government agencies engaged in sufficient consultation with each other before terminating TPS.

Conservative Justice Samuel Alito seemed to endorse that argument, saying "it is always going to be possible to raise procedural objections to what's been done."

When TPS for Syrians was terminated, "there was some consultation," Alito said. "It was very brief, and maybe it was not what one would hope for, but still."

At issue are actions taken last year by Kristi Noem, Trump's former Department of Homeland Security secretary, to revoke the TPS designations for Syria and Haiti, stating that providing this status to them was contrary to US national interests.

## US can extend Iran blockade for months: White House official

AFP  
Washington

The United States could extend its naval blockade of Iran for months more, oil executives were told in a meeting with President Donald Trump, a White House official yesterday.

Participants at a White House meeting, which took place Tuesday, discussed "the steps President Trump has taken to alleviate global oil markets and steps we could take to continue the current blockade for months if needed and minimise impact on American consumers," said the official, speaking on condition of anonymity. "The President meets with energy executives frequently to get their feedback on domestic and international energy markets," the official said, listing topics discussed as including "domestic production, progress in Venezuela, oil futures, natural gas, and shipping."

Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent was host of the meeting, the official said, adding that Vice President JD Vance and Chief of Staff Susie Wiles also joined.

Trump, speaking to Axios, said the "blockade is somewhat more effective than the bombing." "They are choking like a stuffed pig. And it is going to be worse for them. They can't have a nuclear weapon," he told the digital news outlet.

US oil giant Chevron confirmed to AFP that its CEO, Mike Wirth, participated in the Tuesday meeting. Global crude prices soared yesterday following reports that Trump was considering an extended blockade of Iran, with Brent jumping above \$119 a barrel to its highest level since 2022 and US benchmark WTI above \$105.

## Abrolhos corals decline as climate warms

Coral cover of Brazil's Abrolhos reefs, the most biodiverse coral ecosystem in the South Atlantic, has fallen by around 15% over 18 years due to climate change and human activity, researchers in Rio de Janeiro told Reuters. Marine heatwaves linked to climate change have intensified so-called bleaching events where corals expel the algae that call them home, which permanently undermines coral health, said Rodrigo Leao de Moura, a marine biologist at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro.

"With the increasing frequency of heatwaves, corals may regain their color, but they develop necrosis and diseases and continue to die because their health has been compromised," Moura said.

Coral reefs around the world sustain about a quarter of marine life but are now in an almost irreversible die-off.

For reefs to recover, scientists say the world would need to drastically ramp up climate action to bring temperatures down to just



1 degree celsius above the pre-industrial average.

Researchers in Brazil studied the Abrolhos reefs from 2006 until 2023. The results, published in The Royal Society's Proceedings B journal, show "insidious shifts in coral assemblages, including the collapse of branching corals."

Larger branching corals support reef structure but are being replaced by faster-growing spe-

cies that provide fewer ecological benefits, the study found.

The reefs support fishing, tourism, jobs, and coastal livelihoods, said Ricardo Gomes, a biologist from the Instituto Mar Urbano, adding that the risks extending far beyond marine life.

"Putting Abrolhos at risk means putting the entire biodiversity of the Brazilian coast at risk," Gomes said. (Reuters)

## Exiting fossil fuels key to energy security: nations at Santa Marta climate conference

The first global talks on phasing out fossil fuels kicked off in Colombia on Tuesday with nations casting an exit from oil and gas as not just a climate priority but vital for energy independence. Ministers are seeking to reignite the shift away from planet-heating fossil fuels at the conference in Santa Marta amid a deepening global energy crisis triggered by the Iran war.

"We in Europe...are losing half a billion euros each day this war continues," the EU's climate envoy Wopke Hoekstra told delegates in the coastal city.

"We already had a very good reason to move on (from fossil fuels) for climate action...We now also have it for commercial reasons, and reasons of independence."

The conference was announced last year after nations failed to include an explicit reference to fossil fuels in the final deal reached at the UN COP30 climate summit in Brazil.

But organisers say the Middle East war — which has throttled

Gulf energy exports — had underscored the urgency of breaking fossil fuel dependence.

In a speech to delegates, Colombia's leftist President Gustavo Petro delivered a blunt message: fossil fuels "lead to death," he said. Some import-reliant nations in Santa Marta spoke of fuel rationing and soaring prices at home as energy supplies dried up.

"Some people use independence, some people use sovereignty, but basically they need energy security," the UK's climate envoy Rachel Kyte told AFP. "Increasingly, the world is concluding that fossil fuels are a source of instability."

On the list of attendees are major fossil fuel producers Canada, Norway and Australia, and developing oil giants Nigeria, Angola and Brazil. They join coal-reliant emerging markets Turkey and Vietnam, and small island nations extremely vulnerable to climate shocks, among others.

But the world's biggest emitters of greenhouse gases — including the United States, China and India

— are not attending, nor are oil-rich Gulf states.

The conference bypasses the United Nations climate talks and reflects a growing impatience with its failure to tackle fossil fuels, the main driver of global warming.

Nearly 200 countries agreed at COP28 in 2023 to transition away from fossil fuels, but efforts to turn that pledge into action have stalled. "We all know that this convening arose out of our collective frustration at the continuing failure of the UNFCCC process to address the root cause of the problem," Vanuatu's Climate Minister Ralph Regenvanu said.

Analysis by the International Institute for Sustainable Development showed that governments still spent five times more public money on fossil fuels than renewable alternatives. The conference is not expected to produce binding commitments but a set of proposals for countries wanting to gradually swap out fossil fuel production and consumption for cleaner forms of energy. (AFP)

# Committee ruling sets stage for V-P Duterte impeachment vote

AFP  
Manila

A Philippine congressional committee said yesterday it had found probable cause to impeach Vice-President Sara Duterte, setting the stage for a House of Representatives vote with major 2028 presidential race implications.

The justice committee voted unanimously that evidence in a pair of complaints alleging Duterte misused public funds in office and made a death threat against President Ferdinand Marcos had successfully established probable cause to pursue impeachment.

The two complaints will now be consolidated into one before being sent to the plenary for a vote.

Under the Philippine constitution, an impeachment by the



Protesters call for the impeachment of Philippine Vice-President Sara Duterte outside the House of Representatives in Quezon City, Metro Manila, yesterday. (AFP)

House of Representatives triggers a Senate trial, where a guilty verdict would ban former president Rodrigo Duterte's eldest daughter

from elected office for life. Lawmaker Leila De Lima, one of the complaints' endorsers, said the evidence showed an "alarming

pattern of amassing unexplained wealth" as well as threats that struck "at the very heart of our constitutional order".

"There's no question we have enough and valid reason for this process to move forward and impeach the vice-president," De Lima told the committee before the vote.

The threat against Marcos stemmed from a late-night press briefing in which Duterte claimed to have hired an assassin to kill the president should he have her cut down first.

She later said her comments had been misinterpreted.

Yesterday, the National Bureau of Investigation told the committee the vice-president's alleged death threat qualified as sedition.

Bank records presented by the committee in previous hearings, meanwhile, suggested large discrepancies between the vice-pres-



Lawmakers conduct a committee hearing on the impeachment complaints against Philippine Vice-President Sara Duterte at the House of Representatives in Quezon City, Metro Manila, yesterday. (AFP)

ident's publicly declared net worth — 88mn pesos (\$1.4mn) as of 2024 — and hundreds of transactions involving 6.8bn pesos.

The vice-president declined to appear at any of the hearings, saying she would answer questions if the process reached the Senate.

Duterte and Marcos have been engaged in a high-stakes political brawl that erupted within weeks of their 2022 win in the presidential election, when the vice-president was denied her favoured cabinet portfolios and instead named education secretary.

The vice-president, who in February formally announced plans to run for president, was impeached by the House last year only to see the Supreme Court toss the case over procedural issues.

The 2025 impeachment bypassed the committee process entirely when the necessary one-third of House members signed an impeachment complaint and sent it directly to the Senate.

The House is currently in recess, meaning any new impeachment vote must wait until they return on May 4.

# S Korean court hikes ex-president's sentence

AFP  
Seoul

A South Korean appeals court increased the sentence of jailed former president Yoon Suk-yeol yesterday to seven years for obstructing justice, up from five years.

A lower court had handed Yoon the initial sentence in January after he was found to have used presidential security agents to block his own arrest.

Both Yoon and the prosecution lodged appeals — he argued that the arrest warrants against him were based on an "unlawful investigation", while special prosecutors said his punishment should be 10 years given his "egregious" crimes.

"The court sentences the defendant to seven years in prison," a judge at the Seoul High Court said yesterday, calling Yoon's actions "highly reprehensible".

"The defendant not only sought to obstruct the lawful execution of warrants by prosecutors and oth-

ers," he said in his verdict.

"(He) also issued unlawful instructions to public officials of the presidential security service, who are national civil servants, attempting to use them as if they were private guards for his personal protection."

Yoon, who appeared in court wearing a black suit and white shirt, showed little emotion as he listened to the verdict.

The appeals court also upheld his conviction for abuse of power for excluding cabinet members from a meeting to plan the imposition of martial law.

It overturned his acquittal by a lower court of abuse of power for ordering his defence of the martial law declaration to be distributed to foreign media.

And it upheld the lower court's conclusion that Yoon had prepared falsified documents, but had not actually used them.

Yoon's lawyers told AFP they would appeal to the Supreme Court.

Yoon is also serving a life sentence for the much more serious

crime of leading an insurrection, a result of his failed attempt to impose martial law in 2024.

In December that year, he made a shock late-night national televised address, raising the spectre of North Korean influence and "anti-state forces" to declare the suspension of civilian rule.

But martial law lasted only about six hours as lawmakers raced to the assembly building and voted it down in an emergency session.

Yoon's declaration triggered protests, panicked the stock market and caught key allies like the US off-guard.

It also revived troubling memories of military coups from decades ago, in a country now viewed as a beacon of peaceful democracy in Asia.

In subsequent months, Yoon was impeached, removed from power and put on trial over a litany of allegations connected to his proclamation.

He has also appealed against his insurrection conviction, saying he acted "solely for the sake of the nation".

In addition, Yoon faces a separate trial on charges of aiding the enemy over allegations that he sent military drones into North Korea earlier in 2024.

Special prosecutors are seeking a 30-year sentence in that case, arguing that Yoon ordered the incursion to provoke a response from Pyongyang that would strengthen his pretext for declaring martial law.

Yoon's legal team have denied the charge, saying he gave "no prior order or subsequent approval" for the operation cited by prosecutors.

Yoon's wife, former first lady Kim Keon-hee, is also languishing in prison for unrelated corruption crimes.

Initially sentenced in January to 20 months for bribery, her penalty was increased to four years on Tuesday after an appeals court reversed her acquittal for stock price manipulation.

Lawyers for Kim also told AFP they would appeal the verdict to the Supreme Court.

# UK expelling diplomat in latest tit-for-tat move

AFP  
London

Britain said yesterday it was expelling a Russian diplomat after Moscow kicked out a UK envoy last month, in the latest tit-for-tat response over espionage claims.

"We strongly condemn Russia's unjustified decision last month to expel another British diplomat and the malicious public smear campaign that followed," a British government spokesperson said in a statement.

"This behaviour is wholly unacceptable, and we will not tolerate harassment or intimidation of our diplomatic staff. We have therefore summoned the Russian ambassador to announce we are taking reciprocal action, revoking the accreditation of a Russian diplomat."

The UK government did not say when exactly Andrei Kellin, Russia's top envoy in Britain since 2019, was summoned.

Moscow and London have

each expelled multiple embassy staff over the last decade, trading accusations of espionage.

Expulsions from one side have typically been followed by a tit-for-tat response from the other.

Russia last kicked out a British diplomat on March 30, over allegations he was working as a spy — charges swiftly rejected by London as "complete nonsense".

Previous tit-for-tat actions occurred in February and January, as relations between the two countries remain at a historic low point over the Ukraine war and longstanding spying allegations.

Yesterday's statement, issued by the Foreign Office, accused Moscow of "repeated unprovoked and unjustified" actions which it said were "designed to disrupt our diplomatic work".

They "form part of a wider campaign of aggressive behaviour towards the UK", it added, noting "any further action by Russia will be treated as an escalation and met with a firm and proportionate response".

# Taiwan minister visits islet in disputed South China Sea

Reuters  
Taipei

The Taiwanese minister in charge of the Coast Guard visited a second Taiwan-controlled islet deep in the South China Sea, she said yesterday, adding that complaints by Vietnam about her trip would not cause any regional tensions.

Taiwan and China claim sovereignty over most of the South China Sea and Taiwan has control of Itu Aba in the contested Spratly Islands in the southern part of the sea.

Writing on her Facebook page, Ocean Affairs Council Minister Kuan Bi-ling, whose department runs the Coast Guard, said that in addition to visiting Itu Aba she had also gone to the nearby and uninhabited Zhongzhou Reef to carry out a beach cleanup.

"There, I personally witnessed marine debris that had drifted in from surrounding countries and gained a deeper appreciation for the day-to-day life of our Coast Guard personnel stationed in the Nansha islands," she added, using



Taiwan's Ocean Affairs Council Minister Kuan Bi-ling and staff members work near a Taiwan flag as they conduct a beach clean-up in a location given as the South China Sea in this handout image released yesterday. (Reuters)

the name both Taiwan and China call the Spratlys.

Kuan posted two pictures of herself and her team on Zhongzhou; one staffer carried a large Taiwan flag.

Speaking to reporters in parliament

later yesterday about her South China Sea visit, Kuan said that "in the defence of sovereignty of course there is absolutely no backing down".

Kuan was in the Spratly Islands to carry out what the Coast Guard

said were environmental and humanitarian drills.

Zhongzhou and Itu Aba are also claimed by China and Vietnam.

Kuan said Vietnam had complained about her trip, the first time in seven years a Taiwanese minister has visited Taiwan's holdings in the Spratly Islands, but that its protest "has not been notably more forceful than usual."

"Our exercise has not caused, nor will it cause, any regional tension," she said in her Facebook post.

Vietnam's foreign ministry told Reuters that any foreign activities in the Spratly or Paracel Islands without the country's consent "constitute an infringement of Vietnam's sovereignty and are invalid".

Itu Aba has a runway long enough to take military re-supply flights from Taiwan and Taiwan opened a new wharf there in 2023 that is able to accommodate a 4,000-tonne patrol ship.

But the island is lightly defended compared to nearby Chinese-controlled islands. Chinese forces generally leave Itu Aba and Zhongzhou alone.

# BJP set for surprise gains in state elections, exit polls show

Reuters  
New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party and its allies were projected to win two of four state elections, exit polls showed yesterday, projecting a surprise gain that would strengthen the party's dominance across the country.

Modi's BJP has won most state elections since a shocking performance in the 2024 general election when it lost its outright majority and had to rely on alliance partners to form a government.

The eastern states of Assam and West Bengal, the southern states of Kerala and Tamil Nadu, along with the federally administered territory of Puducherry, are all electing new governments.

Voting ended yesterday. Ballots will be counted on May 4 and results announced the same day.

A BJP-led alliance has ruled Assam for the last 10 years. It is

projected to easily win a majority and return to power for a third straight term.

In West Bengal, where BJP fought a pitched battle against the ruling Trinamool Congress party, most pollsters predicted an upset win for BJP.

Top BJP leaders, including Modi, campaigned for weeks in West Bengal, focusing on who they say are illegal immigrants from neighbouring Bangladesh and the weak economy as key issues.

In Tamil Nadu, a major industrial hub for electronics and automobiles, the ruling regional DMK party's alliance was projected to win a second straight term.

In Kerala, the only state ruled by communists, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and its allies are likely to lose to an opposition alliance led by the Congress party in a tight race, exit polls showed.

Exit polls in India have a mixed record and can be inaccurate, given the country's vast and diverse electorate.

# Over 220 children killed in Bangladesh measles outbreak since March: report

AFP  
Dhaka

Bangladesh has recorded 227 child deaths since March in one of its worst outbreaks of measles in decades, with the number of suspected cases reaching nearly 35,000, government data showed yesterday.

One of the hardest hit areas is Kurukpata in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, home to indigenous communities, which border war-torn Myanmar.

Children in these rural areas are often left out of vaccination coverage, and some families avoid vaccination programmes due to fear.

"The most affected area of Chit-

tagong Hill tracts is Kurukpata, one of the remotest parts of Bangladesh," district health chief Sheikh Fazle Rabbi told AFP, saying more than 80 children had been treated for measles.

Local Kurukpata council head Kratpung Mro said the cases were unusually high.

"Communication from Kurukpata is difficult," he said. "People, mostly farmers, are among the poorest and cannot afford even boat or motorcycle fares to reach the hospital." Kratpung Mro said the government should "launch awareness programmes and bring indigenous communities under vaccination coverage".

Ngangoi Mro, 30, a farmer, brought his two-year-old son,

Rengle Mro, who was suffering from high fever, cough and diarrhoea, to the clinic.

"We walked four kilometres (2.5 miles) and then took a vehicle to the hospital from our village, as my boy became very weak," he told AFP. It can affect people of any age but is most common among children, and can cause complications that include brain swelling and severe respiratory problems.

Since March 15, the number of suspected cases nationwide has reached 34,980, mostly among children aged between six months and five years.

Bangladesh health officials, aid by the UN children's agency, WHO and the security forces are working to vaccinate children.

# Minister urges keeping 'fuel flowing' on China visit

AFP  
Beijing

Australia's foreign minister urged yesterday on a visit to Beijing the need to keep fuel and goods moving despite the bottlenecks caused by war in the Middle East.

The war and closure of the Strait of Hormuz, through which a fifth of the world's crude oil transits, has caused fuel prices to soar and left many Asia-Pacific nations facing an energy crisis.

China, a major exporter of jet fuel and diesel to Australia among others, has avoided the worst of the war's energy impacts thanks to its vast oil stocks, but paused exports at the start of the conflict to protect its domestic supplies.

Asian refineries in the Indo-Pacific region have been disproportionately affected, Foreign Minister Penny Wong told Chinese Vice-President Han Zheng, according to an Australian foreign ministry readout.

"It is more important than ever that we continue to engage and find ways to work together, to keep fuel and goods flowing," Wong told Han, according to an Australian foreign ministry readout.

China is set to resume exports from May with major state-owned companies applying for licenses to do so,



Australia's Foreign Minister Penny Wong addresses journalists during a press conference in Beijing yesterday. (AFP)

the *Financial Times* reported Tuesday, citing industry sources.

Chinese authorities have not commented publicly on the matter.

Wong added that "with China, Australia will continue to co-operate where we can, disagree where we must and engage in the national interest".



**CHAIRMAN**

Abdullah bin Khalifa al-Attiyah

**EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**

Faisal Abdulhameed al-Mudahka

**Deputy Managing Editor**

Kamran Rehmat

- ✉ P.O.Box 2888, Doha, Qatar
- ✉ editor@gulf-times.com
- ☎ 44350478 (News),
- ☎ 44466404 (Sport),
- ☎ 44466636 (Home delivery)
- ☎ 44350474
- 📘 facebook.com/gulftimes
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## Europe's energy crisis response avoids curbs on consumption, for now

As the energy shock from the Iran war deepens, countries around the world from Australia to Egypt are looking to conserve fuel, be it through encouraging more remote work, limiting air travel, or promoting public transport. But not – with a very few timid exceptions – in Europe.

One reason is that the impact on the continent so far is not as severe as back in 2022, when Russia invaded Ukraine and slashed gas supplies to Europe, triggering record-high prices and fears of shortages. Another factor is how the cost of living and energy serve as political battlegrounds in a region which saw the 2018 “yellow vests” protests in France over a planned hike in diesel taxes, and where hard-right UK politicians have rallied against local schemes to reduce emissions as “anti-car crusades”.

For now, say analysts, governments are much keener to dish out money to shield households from rising fuel bills than to urge – or even require – them to use less energy. “Demand-reduction measures are kind of unpopular by essence, and policy-makers might not want to dedicate too much political clout to promoting this,” Phuc-Vinh Nguyen, head of the Paris-based Jacques Delors Energy Centre, told Reuters.

Of the more than 180 policy measures pursued by European governments to address the energy shock, fewer than 10 largely voluntary ones are geared towards cutting energy consumption, Nguyen said of his centre's findings. EU recommendations to governments published last week omitted measures to curb consumption – from organising car-free days to encouraging businesses to enforce more remote working – that were in an earlier draft seen by Reuters. A European Commission spokesperson did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the change.

### Europeans bristle at being told to save energy rather than doing it voluntarily



In total, European governments have so far committed nearly €14bn (\$16.38bn) to measures responding to the energy crunch – a fraction of the roughly €500bn they offered back in 2022 but still adding strain to overstretched public budgets. Moreover, the focus has been on blanket measures such as the fuel tax cuts seen in Germany, Spain, Poland and elsewhere, rather than targeting support to vulnerable households.

In 2022 as gas prices hit record highs, EU and International Energy Agency (IEA) guidelines to curb energy use included home-working and reducing driving speed. Britain launched a public campaign on how to keep warm

while saving energy in winter. But with European natural gas prices still far below 2022 levels and no fuel shortages so far, governments are holding back compared with Asian countries more dependent on Middle Eastern energy. “Hard measures and restrictions could lead to panic,” Poland's Energy Minister Milosz Motyka said this month of concerns such calls could spark hoarding and so add to supply disruption. “We are making gentle suggestions and hope drivers will adapt to the current situation,” he said.

That approach speaks both to how some Europeans bristle at being told to save energy rather than doing it voluntarily, and the need for well-crafted messages that resonate with people. In France, opinion polls taken before the current energy shock showed French drivers accept the rationale for driving slower to save fuel. But, noted Nguyen, enforced lower speed limits have tended to prove unpopular. “Unless you've got the public understanding the scale of some of the issues that we face as a nation ... you're not really going to be able to land these messages about ‘now it's the time to be frugal in the way we use fuel,’” Toby Harris, chair of Britain's National Preparedness Commission, an independent advisory body, said.

None of this means Europeans oppose energy conservation. An Irish energy curbs campaign in 2022 was associated with a 12% reduction in residential electricity use, the IEA says. In the winter after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, one poll found that 90% of Germans were consciously saving heating energy. While governments may argue that the shock is not severe enough to go down the route of energy usage curbs, some say it would be prudent to do so anyway because it would lower prices now and help fill gas storage over the summer. – Reuters

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## You have got mail



Deutsche Post delivery staff member Andrea Bunar (right) stands on her barge as she is greeted by a local resident and her dog as she makes the season opening delivery tour of the Spreewald barge postal delivery service yesterday. Mail delivery by barge has a 129-year-old tradition in the Spreewald region. Every week, more than 600 letters, registered mail and postcards as well as around 80 parcels are delivered across the river, as many of the 65 households in Lehde do not have a direct road connection, according to German postal service Deutsche Post. (AFP)

## Qatar's Islamic banking expertise a valuable pathway for Uzbekistan



By Nur Mukhammad Sultonaliyev

The Islamic financial system began its development in the early 1970s, and by 2026 the value of global Islamic financial market assets reached \$6tn. According to the Annual State of the Global Islamic Economy (SGIE) Report, the average growth rate of assets in Islamic finance has been increasing at 5.5% per annum.

For decades, Qatar has built one of the world's most sophisticated Islamic financial ecosystems. With \$190bn in assets and a compound annual growth rate of 6.4%, the country is positioning itself as a global hub for Islamic banking, underpinned by a strong regulatory framework and the authorities' sustained commitment to sectoral development.

Under the visionary leadership of HH the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, Qatar has been playing a significant role in regional and global Islamic finance industries, leveraging its strong financial infrastructure and strategic initiatives to promote development and innovation. Qatar's prosperous Islamic finance industry makes up 27% of total financial system assets, hosting two of the region's largest Islamic banks. Economic growth and diversification have been strong drivers of expansion. With a boost from hosting the FIFA World Cup in 2022, Qatar's diversification efforts have significantly shifted its economic structure, with non-oil sectors contributing 64% to real GDP by Q3 2024, a rapid rise from 39% in 2013. The financial sector's contribution also rose, from 5% to 8% of real GDP, according to the Qatar Islamic Finance Report 2025.

The Third Financial Sector Strategic Plan, launched by the Qatar Central Bank in 2023, places strong emphasis on Islamic finance across four central pillars: banking, insurance, digital finance, and capital markets. Qatar ranks sixth globally in Islamic fintech by market size, with projections of \$4.8bn by 2029. Recent recognition of Qatar Islamic Bank as a regional leader in SME banking further underscores the quality of its institutions.

These achievements are underpinned by the strategic role of the Qatar Financial Centre (QFC) in shaping a supportive environment for Islamic finance. QFC's business-friendly environment and common-law legal framework have attracted leading Islamic banks and fintechs. Thanks to these advantages and proactive initiatives such as fintech

incubators and regulatory sandboxes, Qatar has been ranked among the top global hubs for Islamic finance, while QFC is among the top 10 global fintech hubs for Islamic finance.

This environment of sustained achievement forms a compelling backdrop for the historic development now unfolding in Uzbekistan – one that warrants Qatar's close attention.

### Uzbekistan opens a new chapter

By the initiative of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, Uzbekistan reached a milestone by officially adopting a comprehensive Islamic banking law in March 2026 (No LRU-1126, dated 27.03.2026), establishing its first legal framework for Shariah-compliant finance. Developed by the Central Bank of Uzbekistan with the participation of domestic and international experts, the law incorporates international standards and best practices.

The reform unlocks a large, untapped segment of Muslim household savings while positioning Uzbekistan to attract significant capital flows from Islamic financial markets across the GCC and Southeast Asia. As an Islamic Development Bank report notes, Uzbekistan's young, digitally native population makes it a natural market for Islamic fintech – and a dual-track strategy of regulatory reform and digital infrastructure could enable it to leapfrog more mature markets.

Uzbekistan Strategy 2030 provides a robust foundation for these aspirations. At least one Islamic commercial bank will be established in 2026, with two more planned for 2026–2030. The strategy is expected to attract an additional \$1bn in investments and deposits by 2030. The Tashkent International Financial Centre (TIFC), now under establishment, is projected to attract \$20bn–\$25bn by 2030, add up to 1% to annual GDP growth, create 15,000 skilled jobs, and train 10,000 professionals. According to Islamic Development Bank reports, introducing Islamic finance in Uzbekistan will attract about \$10bn in investment and create more than 100,000 jobs.

Islamic banking in Uzbekistan now encompasses various financial instruments adhering to Shariah principles, including sukuk, which offer an alternative investment option emphasising

asset-backed financing and profit-and-loss sharing arrangements. A key driver behind adoption is the aim to promote financial inclusion, catering to individuals and businesses with religious or ethical preferences for interest-free banking.

The legislation amends the Tax Code, Civil Code, and seven other laws, while formally introducing concepts including Islamic banking activities, Islamic financial operations, financial standards, and investment deposits. It introduces the full suite of core Islamic instruments – from mudarabah (profit-sharing partnerships) to murabaha (deferred-sale financing) – giving Uzbekistan a complete toolkit from day one. New instruments including sukuk, Islamic PPP financing, and musharaka joint venture structures align Uzbekistan with centres such as Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Malaysia, and Indonesia.

### Prospects for Qatar-Uzbekistan initiatives

By merging Qatar's robust financial resources and international networks with Uzbekistan's expanding digital market and youthful, skilled workforce, the two countries can create fertile ground for collaboration. Potential areas include:

**1. Uzbek-Qatari Islamic Digital Bank.** Licensed under Uzbekistan's new Islamic banking law and built with modern fintech tools – mobile apps, AI-driven credit scoring, blockchain-based sukuk issuance, and embedded finance. Qatar's Islamic banking sector is led by world-class institutions like Qatar Islamic Bank and Qatar International Islamic Bank, and its fintech ecosystem is highly advanced.

The Qatar Investment Authority and banks could provide funding and digital infrastructure, while Uzbek regulators offer incentives including VAT and tax exemptions on Islamic products, plus access to Uzbekistan's 38mn-plus largely Muslim population. The venture would mobilise dormant domestic savings and attract at least \$1bn in foreign Islamic investment as envisioned by Uzbekistan's roadmap.

The joint bank might use a turnkey digital core and fast licensing via the TIFC, launching with basic Shariah products

and quickly adding fintech-enabled services such as Islamic digital wallets, online takaful, and robo-advisors for halal portfolios. Qatar's fintech hub and QFC Innovation Dome, with experience incubating Islamic fintechs, could help integrate these technologies.

**2. Strategic Partnership between TIFC and QFC.** Under this agreement, the centres would exchange expertise, harmonise regulations, and jointly promote Islamic fintech. QFC offers 100% foreign ownership, fast licensing, fintech sandboxes and common-law regulations that have attracted global fintechs; TIFC could adapt these frameworks. Conversely, TIFC offers QFC a foothold into Central Asia. The partnership might create a joint Islamic Fintech Innovation Lab or co-host an annual GCC-Central Asia Islamic finance forum.

The centres could cooperate on regulatory capacity-building, with Qatar's regulators sharing experience in setting up Shariah governance and digital banking rules; cross-listing of firms, with QFC-based Islamic fintechs fast-tracked into TIFC markets and Uzbek fintechs setting up in QFC to raise Gulf capital; and joint training programmes for Uzbek bankers in Islamic finance and Qatari experts in Central Asian markets.

**3. Qatar-Uzbekistan Islamic Investment Platform.** A dedicated platform focused on channelling Qatari capital into high-impact sectors of Uzbekistan's economy through Shariah-compliant instruments. Jointly managed by sovereign or semi-sovereign entities, it would utilise Qatar's vast financial resources to fund infrastructure, agriculture, energy, and SME development projects. Structured through sukuk, private equity, and Islamic venture capital funds, the platform would ensure profitability and adherence to ethical investment principles.

Central Asia can become a promising destination for Qatari capital within Doha's policy of diversifying its investment portfolio. Inspired by successful cross-border initiatives in Southeast Asia and the Gulf, the platform would symbolise Qatar's role as a catalyst for inclusive growth, serving as a long-term financial bridge between the two nations and deepening strategic ties across the Islamic world.

### Conclusion

Qatar's remarkable expertise in Islamic finance and Uzbekistan's forward-looking reforms form a powerful synergy that promises to redefine regional financial collaboration. As Uzbekistan opens its doors to Shariah-compliant innovation, Qatar stands as an exemplary partner – offering visionary leadership, capital strength, and global networks. Together, the two nations can build a dynamic bridge of shared prosperity, driving inclusive growth and advancing the Islamic banking frontier across Central Asia and beyond.

• The writer is a Legal Specialist.



A view of the capital Tashkent.

# Putin, Trump discuss Iran, Ukraine in phone call: Kremlin

AFP  
Moscow

Russian President Vladimir Putin spoke by phone with US counterpart Donald Trump, Kremlin aide Yuri Ushakov said yesterday, adding the two leaders discussed the Middle East war and Ukraine.

The call lasted more than 90 minutes and was "frank and businesslike", Ushakov told reporters, including from AFP, during a phone briefing.

The presidents "paid particular attention to the situation regarding Iran and in the Persian Gulf", Ushakov said.

"Vladimir Putin considers Donald Trump's decision to extend the ceasefire with Iran to be the right one, as this should give negotiations a chance and, overall, help to stabilise the situation."

But Putin also "highlighted the inevitable and extremely damaging consequences not only for Iran and its neighbours, but also for the entire international community, should the US and Israel resort to military action once again," Ushakov said.

He added Russia was "firmly committed to providing every possible assistance to diplomatic efforts" on the Middle East war, and said the call was held at Moscow's initiative.

The leaders also discussed the war in Ukraine, now in its fifth year following Russia's invasion of its neighbour in 2022.

"At Trump's request, Vladimir Putin described the current situation along the line of contact, where our troops are holding the strategic initiative and pushing back the enemy's positions," Ushakov told reporters.

"Both Vladimir Putin and Donald Trump expressed essentially similar assessments of

the behaviour of the Kyiv regime led by (Volodymyr) Zelensky, which, incited and with the support of the Europeans, is pursuing a policy of prolonging the conflict."

Russia's assault on Ukraine has devastated swathes of Ukrainian territory, killed thousands of civilians and forced millions to flee their homes.

Putin said he was ready "to declare a ceasefire for the duration of Victory Day celebrations. Trump actively supported this initiative, noting that the holiday marks our shared victory," Ushakov said.

Russia marks Victory Day on May 9 to commemorate the Soviet victory over Nazi Germany in World War II, celebrated each year with a military parade in central Moscow.

This year's event will be slimmed-down as a precautionary measure given the threat of Ukrainian retaliatory strikes, the Kremlin said earlier yesterday.

## QMC to launch QBC – a 4k specialised economic channel

From Page 1

He noted that QBC has brought in a hand-picked team of specialists, built a network of correspondents across leading global financial centres, and deployed the latest broadcast technologies to deliver accurate, exclusive content. He added that the channel has secured strategic partnerships with leading global economic agencies to provide direct market updates, further strengthening its standing as a pioneering platform that empowers audiences and opens up new horizons for future economic opportunities. Qatar Media Corporation said it remains committed to growing



Issa Abdullah al-Hetmi

its portfolio of specialised media platforms to reflect national priorities and strengthen its professional presence across the media landscape, guided by a vision that responds to today's needs while anticipating future opportunities.

## Cabinet approves draft laws on real estate leases

From Page 1

The Cabinet also gave its approval to a draft law exempting spare parts for civil aircraft used within airport premises from customs duties. Prepared by the Ministry of Finance in co-ordination with the General Authority of Customs, the measure is designed to fulfil relevant international and regional commitments and to support the civil aviation sector, in keeping with the Authority's wider strategy to modernise the customs framework and streamline procedures.

In addition, the Cabinet sanctioned a draft co-operation programme between the

Ministry of Justice of Qatar and the Ministry of Justice of the Kingdom of Morocco covering the period 2026-2027, a draft master agreement between the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology and the Qatar Research, Development, and Innovation Council, and a draft Memorandum of Understanding on judicial assistance for victims of human trafficking between the National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking and the Qatar Lawyers Association.

The session closed with a review of the two annual reports submitted by the Standing Population Committee, on which the Cabinet took the appropriate decision.

## Violence-for-hire taskforce nets nearly 300 arrests

AFP  
Stockholm

An international police taskforce led by Sweden has resulted in the arrest of nearly 300 people linked to organised crime, Swedish police and Europol announced yesterday.

Dubbed "Grimm" and launched in April 2025, the taskforce is a collaboration between Sweden, Europol and 10 European countries aimed at countering the surge of "violence as a service". Swedish police said in a statement, referring to the online recruitment of individuals – often minors – to carry out violent acts.

The phenomenon is a top concern in Sweden, where gangs have increasingly recruited children under the age of criminal responsibility.

Under Swedish law, children under the age of 15 cannot be prosecuted and fall under the responsibility of social services, making them valuable assets to the gangs.

"During the first year of the police operation, 280 individuals were arrested around the world while co-operation with tech

companies deepened," Swedish police said in a statement.

Public broadcaster SVT reported that more than half of those arrested were connected to Swedish criminal networks.

A handful of children aged 10 to 12 were among those detained, it added.

Criminal gangs in Sweden rely on a loosely structured system of recruitment on social media and encrypted apps to entice children to join.

Police have held meetings with Google, Meta, TikTok and Snapchat in an effort to curb recruitment.

"It's a positive development. At the same time, there are platforms that still won't come to the table. More needs to happen," Smedius said.

In a separate statement, Europol said that its EU Most Wanted website played a central role in tracking down fugitives and noted that there were three suspects linked to violence-as-a-service crime featured on the platform – two from Sweden and one from Germany.

Besides Sweden, the Grimm taskforce brings together Belgium, Denmark, France, Finland, Germany, Iceland, the Netherlands, Norway and Spain.

## Italy says filed to be civil party in Swiss fire probe

AFP  
Rome

Italy's government said yesterday it had filed to be a civil party in the criminal proceedings surrounding Switzerland's Crans-Montana fire disaster, which killed 41 people including six Italians.

The civil claim was prompted by "the substantial resources" used for "medical, psychological and logistical assistance to the Italian nationals involved," the government said in a statement.

Prosecutors believe the New Year's Eve fire started when beverage bottles with sparklers attached were raised too close to the ceiling in the basement level, igniting the sound-insulation foam.

The owners, Jacques and Jessica Moretti, face charges in Switzerland of manslaughter by

negligence, bodily harm by negligence and arson.

Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni has vowed justice for Italian victims while Italy has opened its own investigation into the fire even as the Swiss probe continues.

The Swiss investigation has revealed that no annual safety check had been carried out at the venue since 2019.

In its statement, the Italian government said that "the involvement of local authorities in the genesis of the event is considered highly probable."

That, it said, justified "the firm demand for compensation against all parties held civilly liable."

It said Italy would continue to monitor the Swiss legal proceedings, while confirming the government's "full and uninterrupted support" for the victims' families.

## Italy recovers looted antiquities from US

Reuters  
Rome

The US has handed back 337 antiquities looted from Italy in one of the largest recent returns of stolen cultural property, officials said yesterday, highlighting deepened co-operation between Rome and Washington.

The artefacts, ranging from ancient Roman sculptures to Greek, Etruscan and Egyptian pieces, were presented at the headquarters of Italy's Carabinieri cultural protection unit following an array of investigations, many centred on New York.

Italy has spent decades trying to curb a rampant trade in illicitly excavated antiquities, securing the repatriation of thousands of artefacts worth tens of millions of euros.

The campaign has gained momentum in recent years, aided by online databases, advances in technology and closer co-operation with US authorities, particularly the Manhattan district attorney's office, which found 221 objects of this latest haul.



Artefacts recovered from the US following a repatriation operation are displayed during a presentation at the Carabinieri Command for the Protection of Cultural Heritage, in Rome, yesterday. (Reuters)

"There's no country in the world that has history and culture like Italy, and the US will always do whatever it takes to help bring these wonderful artefacts back to your very special country," the US ambassador to Italy Tilman J. Ferritta told reporters.

Among the most significant items unveiled yesterday were a marble head of Alexander the Great dating to the first century AD, which was stolen from a Rome museum in 1960.

Also recovered were a bronze sculpture looted from the Roman town of Herculaneum, two Egyptian basalt statues, Roman coins, jewellery, ceramics and architectural fragments spanning from the fifth century BC to the third century AD.

Italian authorities said many of the objects were taken from clandestine excavations or stolen from cultural institutions before being funnelled into the international art market.

"Protecting cultural heritage means defending memory, strengthening identity and passing on to future generations the value of culture as a universal public good," said Italian Culture Minister Alessandro Giuli.

Italy and the US last year renewed a memorandum of understanding tightening US import restrictions on Italian archaeological material, strengthening customs controls and expanding information-sharing.

The US is one of the main markets for global antiquities, with an array of auction houses, private collectors and museums interested in acquiring rare artefacts.

"Sometimes they do not pay enough attention as to why these antiques are up for sale. That can be a very costly mistake," said an official from the Culture Ministry, who was not authorised to talk to the press.

"We know what is missing and are getting much better at finding it," she added, predicting more returns in the future.

The recovered objects will now be studied and, where possible, returned to their places of origin across Italy.

## Austria to sign deal with Uzbekistan on Afghan deportations

AFP  
Vienna

Austria will sign an agreement with Uzbekistan next month to facilitate deportations, including to Afghanistan via the central Asian country, the interior ministry said yesterday.

EU nations are scouting potential partner nations outside the bloc to host so-called "return hubs" for failed asylum-seekers and other initiatives to curb migration.

While EU lawmakers and member states iron

out details, Denmark, Austria, Greece, Germany and the Netherlands said in March they were moving ahead with planning and co-ordinating.

Austria's interior and foreign ministers will travel to Uzbekistan on May 7 for the signing of an agreement to facilitate deportations, said a government statement.

"It is an important agreement for the transit of people facing deportation to their home country – especially Afghanistan," interior ministry spokesman Markus Haindl told AFP.

Since last year, Austria has deported several Afghans, a first for the Alpine nation since the Taliban returned to power in 2021.

It has also sent back several Syrians to Syria, where long-time strongman Bashar al-Assad was ousted in 2024.

Last week, Richard Bennett, the UN special rapporteur on human rights in Afghanistan, said he was deeply concerned the European Union was set for talks with Taliban officials on deporting Afghans.

He warned that returns to Afghanistan "risk breaching the principle of non-refoulement due to widespread human rights violations".

The principle of non-refoulement holds that migrants should not be returned to a country where they face harm or persecution.

## Kazakh man accused of spying for Russia arrested in Berlin

AFP  
Berlin

A Kazakh man has been arrested in Berlin on suspicion of spying for Russia, German prosecutors said yesterday, the latest alleged Moscow-linked espionage plot uncovered in the country.

Prosecutors said the suspect gave his Russian intelligence handler information about German military aid for Ukraine and photos of Nato military convoys moving along motorways, and also identified possible targets for sabotage.

Authorities in Germany, one of Kyiv's key military backers, have uncovered scores of sus-

pected espionage, sabotage and disinformation plots tied to Russia since Moscow's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

The suspect in the latest case, partially identified as Sergej K, had been "in continuous contact from Germany with a Russian intelligence service" since at least May last year, the Federal Prosecutor's Office said in a statement.

He is also accused of passing information to Russian intelligence on German defence contractors developing drone and robotics technology, and of supplying his handler with numerous photos of public buildings around Berlin, it said.

He volunteered to help find other possible sabotage and espionage agents in Germany, ac-

ording to the statement, which however did not specify if he had managed to recruit any.

Police arrested the man on Tuesday and prosecutors said he would be brought before a judge on Wednesday.

Moscow has repeatedly denied being behind any such plots.

Berlin at the weekend blamed Russia for repeated phishing attacks targeting lawmakers and senior administration officials using the Signal messaging app.

German police have also arrested a number of alleged so-called "disposable" agents, recruited to carry out sabotage and espionage without any formal training for Russia, often in exchange for small payments.

## Boat carrying stranded whale 'Timmy' reaches Denmark

AFP  
Berlin

A special barge carrying a humpback whale that was stranded in Germany had entered Danish waters by yesterday afternoon and is expected to reach the North Sea in two days, local officials said.

The whale, dubbed "Timmy" by German media, was coaxed into the vessel in a last-ditch rescue attempt on Tuesday after a weeks-long struggle for survival on the Baltic Sea coast.

The ship Fortuna B, which is towing the barge, was located between the islands of Langeland and Lolland in southeastern Denmark at around 1400 GMT, according to the VesselFinder website.



Aerial photo taken yesterday shows the rescued humpback whale in a special barge along the Danish coastline enroute back to the North Sea after it beached on a sandbank near the city of Luebeck, in late March. (AFP)

"If everything goes well, he'll be in the North Sea in two days. The very worst is already behind him now," Till Backhaus, environment

minister for the state of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, told the *Bild* daily.

Speaking to reporters on the is-

land of Poel, where the whale was most recently stranded, Backhaus said the animal was "doing well" and had made sounds during the night.

Backhaus thanked rescuers for their "wonderful" effort in "an exceptional situation that is hardly comparable anywhere in the world in this form".

The whale had been struggling for more than a month around the German coast, getting stuck on sandbanks and then managing to free itself again several times.

At the start of April, officials gave up on trying to rescue the animal, saying they believed it could not be saved. But this triggered an outcry and authorities were persuaded to approve a privately financed rescue plan proposed by two wealthy entrepreneurs.

## Interior Minister crowns winners of camel races at the Amir's festival



HE Minister of Interior and Commander of the Internal Security Force (Lekhwiya) Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani crowned the winners of the concluding Al Hail and Al Zamoul open rounds of the Annual Purebred Arabian Camel Racing Festival for the Sword of HH the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, held yesterday at Al Shahaniya Camel Racetrack. His Excellency honoured the winners of five main tribal competitions for silver symbols, presenting two silver Shalfa trophies to Nasser Abdullah Ahmed al-Misnad, owner of "Tarsana," winner of the fifth Al Hail Omani round, and Fahid Mohammed Fahid al-Ajami, owner of "Ghazeza," winner of the fourth Al Hail Production round. He also awarded three silver khanjars to Salem Ahmed Sultan al-Suwaidi, owner of "Akrash," winner of the first Al Zamoul Production round; Ali Rashid Hamad al-Kutbi, owner of "Dasman," winner of the second Al Zamoul Omani round; and Mohammed Abdullah Saeed Busla'a, owner of "Ghassab," winner of the third Al Zamoul Open round. HE the Minister also honoured the companies sponsoring the festival. (QNA)

## UDST makes use of applied research for sustainability goals

By Joseph Varghese  
Staff Reporter

The University of Doha for Science and Technology (UDST) is implementing the vision of the country for a sustainable future making use of applied research in several areas, the president of the university, Dr Salem Al-Naemi, told *Gulf Times*. "Our focus is on sustainability and it is part of our strategy. With our research focus, our aim is to make sure that we are economically sustainable as a university and thereby we are actually implementing the vision of our nation," said Dr Al-Naemi.

The UDST president was interacting with *Gulf Times* on the sidelines of press conference to announce the uni-



Dr Salem Al-Naemi.  
PICTURE: Thajudheen

versity's strategy to achieve carbon neutrality by 2030. He said that UDST is making use of solar energy in a big way and three of the facilities of the university are running on solar energy.

"We have three facilities that are making use of solar energy completely. We have one building, and a metro station that works totally on solar. We have also a recycle unit which works totally on solar.

These were developed by our students and faculty. We have done these things within the last three years. With the Qatar Vision 2030, we are really pushing to be sustainable and scalable," he noted.


The UDST president said that the university has taken this initiative to transform the idea of sustainability into a bigger scale and therefore the initiative to transform the whole campus to be carbon neutral. "So we are actually going to implement this project. It will be a great model, not only for our students, our researchers, our faculty but for our community and beyond," he pointed out.

The official said that there will be great involvement of students and the faculty in the entire phases of the project. He stated: "I think this one

is an excellent opportunity for our students and our researchers to really make use the campus at large as a site of research. So they will have the opportunity to research the challenges that we are facing today. Whatever technology you are using, there is always scope for improvement and the students and the faculty will benefit out of that. So they will be hopefully doing some research and will be innovators for the future."




Dr Al-Naemi said that the project for the implementation of carbon neutral strategy has already begun and will be completed on time. "We are applying for the licence from Kahramaa. The first phase will be implemented in one of the parking lots as a proof concept to really scale it up for the whole campus," he added.

VACANCY



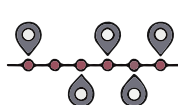

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 <b>8 QR.00</b> عنب ابيض هندي ١ كجم Grape White India 1 kg	 <b>8 QR.50</b> لونجان فيتنام ٥٠٠ جم ١ عبوة Longan Vietnam (Approximate 500 gm) 1 pkt	 <b>4 QR.50</b> خوخ مصري ١ كجم ١ عبوة Peach Egypt (Approximate 1 kg) 1 Box	 <b>5 QR.00</b> موز اخودار ١ كجم Banana Ecuador 1 kg	 <b>25 QR.00</b> جورمية ستريپس دجاج حار / عادي ٢٥٠ جم + ٢٥٠ جم ١ عبوة Gourmet Chicken Strips Spicy/ Regular 1 kg + 250 gm x 1 pc

  
**21 QR.00**  
لوتس ارز الياسمين ٥ كجم ١ عبوة  
Lotus Jasmine Rice 5 kg x 1 pc


  
**18 QR.75**  
عافية زيت دوار الشمس ١.٥ لتر ١ عبوة  
Afia Sunflower Oil 1.5 Ltr x 1 pc

  
**6 QR.50**  
مسحوق غسيل تايد ١ كجم ١ عبوة  
Tide Detergent Powder Hs 1 kg x 1 pc

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# 30

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SAFARI HYPERMARKET  
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Tel: +974 400 01 004

SAFARI HYPERMARKET  
Al Khor  
Tel: +974 400 01 050

SAFARI HYPERMARKET  
Barwa Village  
Tel: +974 441 18 704

SAFARI HYPERMARKET  
Industrial Area  
Tel: +974 446 89 058

SAFARI HYPERMARKET  
Birkat Al Awamer  
Tel: +974 441 88 699

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Ezdan Mall, Al Gharaffa  
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