



**Qatar Insurance**  
Financial Results (Q1 2026)

Gross Written Premiums (GWP)

**13%** ▲  
QAR 3.2B

Net Profit

**6%** ▲  
QAR 217M

Investment Income:

**10%** ▲  
QAR 238M

Insurance Service Results:

**70%** ▲  
QAR 130M

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# GULF TIMES



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## GCC Games declared open in Doha



Spectacular opening ceremony built around spirit of 'One Gulf, One Heart'

**By Sports Reporter**  
Doha

The opening ceremony of the 4th GCC Games Doha 2026 showcased Gulf unity through a vibrant artistic production as the regional multi-sport event was officially declared open at Al Shaqab Indoor Arena yesterday.

Held in the presence of senior officials and sports dignitaries, the ceremony saw HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, President of the Olympic Council of Asia and Qatar Olympic Committee and Chairman of the Organising Committee of the GCC Games Doha 2026, officially open the Games while wishing success to all participating athletes.

The 30-minute ceremony delivered a modern artistic spectacle that combined sport, culture and heritage in a presentation marked by simplicity, innovation and youthful energy, moving away from the traditional format often associated with such occasions.

The show relied heavily on powerful visual imagery and symbolic messages celebrating the shared identity and unity of the Gulf Cooperation Council nations. A key highlight of the ceremony was the operetta "One Gulf, One Heart", which celebrated the solidarity



HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, President of the Olympic Council of Asia and Qatar Olympic Committee and Chairman of the Organising Committee of the GCC Games Doha 2026, officially declared the Games open at Al Shaqab Indoor Arena yesterday. **Sport Page 1**

محمد بن عبدالرحمن

@MBA\_AlThani\_

"Doha opens its doors today to the sons of the Gulf in the fourth edition of the Gulf Games, presenting to its brothers in the region a comprehensive Gulf sports celebration that reflects the depth of the fraternal relations uniting the peoples of the Gulf Cooperation Council states. Wishing every success to all participants in this edition."

and common heritage of the GCC countries.

Conceived, written and composed by Faisal Ibrahim al-Tami-

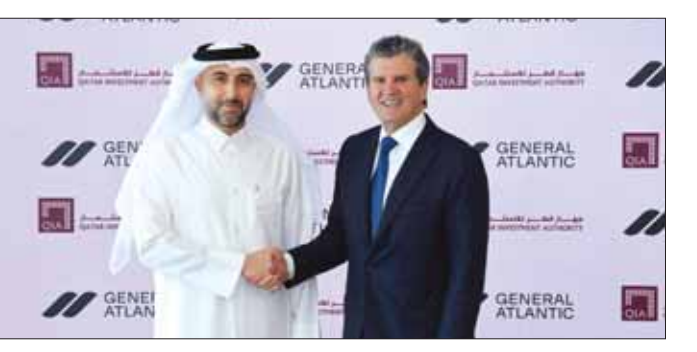
## QIA, General Atlantic seal a \$500mn growth equity deal

**By A Staff Reporter**  
Doha

Qatar Investment Authority (QIA) has announced a major expansion of its strategic partnership with global investment firm General Atlantic, including a new \$500mn commitment to the company's global growth equity investment strategies.

In a joint announcement issued in Doha and New York yesterday, QIA said the agreement deepens co-operation between the two institutions and reflects the sovereign wealth fund's strategy of strengthening long-term global partnerships and deploying capital across future growth opportunities.

The expanded partnership will also include collaboration on market research and investment analysis aimed at improving investment decision-making across multiple strategies.



According to the statement, the two organisations will additionally support portfolio companies seeking to expand into Middle East markets.

As part of the agreement, General Atlantic will provide professional development programmes for QIA employees focused on knowledge transfer, innovation and leadership development, in line with Qatar's national development objectives.

Mohammed Saif al-Sowaidi, chief executive of QIA, said the partnership went beyond co-investment and focused on "building a culture of excellence" and equipping future investment leaders with the expertise needed for long-term success. **To Page 6**

## Ministry expands pre-KG and digital services

**By A Staff Reporter**  
Doha

The Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE) is pressing ahead with an ambitious expansion of early childhood education and digital student services, aimed at widening access and easing procedures for families across Qatar.

Speaking to Qatar TV, Maryam Ali al-Nesef al-Buainain, director of the Schools and Student Affairs Department at MoEHE, outlined a series of initiatives designed to meet rising demand for educational services while improving the experience for parents and students.

She said the ministry is continuing to expand the "pre-kindergarten" stage in response to growing parental interest in enrolling children in early education programmes. The initiative, first launched last year through four kindergartens, has already seen

significant growth, with eight additional kindergartens added during the current academic year. The ministry plans to open nine more next year, reflecting Qatar's sustained investment in early childhood development.

Alongside the expansion of early education services, the ministry has stepped up efforts to modernise its digital infrastructure and simplify procedures for parents. Al-Buainain said the current academic year had seen a package of upgrades and new electronic services rolled out through the Maaref Portal, aimed at improving efficiency and the overall user experience.

Among the most notable additions is a new "Parent Information" feature, which allows parents to update residential details electronically, monitor their children's attendance records, review contact information, and access a range of school-related services without visiting schools in person. **To Page 6**

### PM, Kuwaiti FM discuss regional situation

HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani received a phone call from Kuwaiti Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Jarrah Jaber al-Ahmad al-Sabah. Discussions during call dealt with relations between the two countries and ways to support and develop them, as well as developments in the region, particularly those related to the ceasefire between the US and Iran, and efforts aimed at de-escalation in a way that contributes to strengthening security and stability in the region.

The prime minister underlined the necessity for all parties to engage in the ongoing mediation efforts, which would open the way for addressing the root causes of the crisis through peaceful means and dialogue, and lead to a sustainable agreement that prevents renewed escalation. **(QNA)**

### Qatar Airways expands network to the Americas

**By A Staff Reporter**  
Doha

Qatar Airways is pushing deeper into the Americas with the launch of new services to Caracas and Bogota from July 22, 2026, the national carrier announced yesterday.

The airline said the move is a significant milestone, making it the first Gulf carrier to serve Venezuela and the first airline to operate flights from West Asia to either Caracas or Bogota. The expansion builds on a commitment announced in 2025 to strengthen the region's global connectivity.

Two weekly flights will operate to each city, with schedules designed to feed smoothly into onward services through Hamad International Airport (HIA) to key markets including Australia, China, Japan, Lebanon, South Korea and the United Arab Emirates. The carrier said this gives passengers greater flexibility and seamless transfers across its global network.

The two cities become the 15th and 16th destinations served by Qatar Airways in the Americas, a region the airline first entered in 2010 with its inaugural service to Sao Paulo, Brazil.

## Justice Ministry rolls out digital audit platform



**By A Staff Reporter**  
Doha

The Ministry of Justice has unveiled a new electronic system to manage its internal audit operations, marking Global Internal Audit Awareness Month with a launch event held

in collaboration with the State Audit Bureau. The event was held under the patronage of HE the Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Ibrahim bin Ali bin Issa al-Mohannadi, and attended by HE the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Justice Saeed bin Abdullah al-Suwaidi.

According to the ministry, the platform is intended to bolster governance, sharpen internal oversight and feed into its broader digital transformation push by streamlining how audit observations are recorded and followed up.

Director of the Internal Audit Department Najla Fahed Dalwan said the system had been developed in response to rising governance demands and the need to shift from manual workflows to a single digital framework that improves efficiency, accuracy and risk management. **To Page 6**

### Al Sadd's Afif steals QFA thunder



Al Sadd's Akram Afif (left), Al Rayyan's Mahmoud Abunada (centre) and Al Rayyan's Roger Guedes with their trophies at the QFA Awards ceremony held at Raffles Hotel Doha yesterday. Afif won the Best Player award for the sixth time. Abunada won the Best Goalkeeper award while Guedes clinched the Mansour Mufthah Award for being the top scorer (21 goals) in the 2025-26 season. **Sport Page 4**

## Deputy Amir chairs meeting of QU Board of Regents

His Highness the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani chaired the fourth meeting of the Qatar University Board of Regents for the 2025-26 academic year, held at the Amiri Diwan yesterday morning. The board reviewed the accomplished decisions and recommendations taken in the third meeting for the 2025-26 academic year, discussed the topics listed on the agenda, and took appropriate decisions. The board also approved a proposal to amend the acceptance rate at the QU starting from Fall 2027, and approved a proposal to restructure the Bachelor of Education programme. - QNA



## Minister meets charge d'affaires of US embassy



HE the Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Ibrahim bin Ali al-Mohannadi met yesterday with the charge d'affaires at the US embassy in Qatar, Mo Barghouty. They discussed legal and judicial co-operation, relations between the two countries, and topics of mutual interest. - QNA



## Minister discusses bilateral ties with Azerbaijan envoy

HE the Minister of Municipality Abdullah bin Hamad bin Abdullah al-Attiyah met yesterday with Azerbaijan's ambassador to Qatar Adish Mammadov. They reviewed bilateral relations and ways to support and develop them in areas of common interest. - QNA

# Shura Council reviews National Health Strategy

The Shura Council reviewed the country's National Health Strategy 2024-30 during its weekly sitting in Doha, with members highlighting the need to strengthen preventative healthcare, improve patient services and expand digital transformation across the health sector.

The sitting, chaired by HE the Speaker Hassan bin Abdullah al-Ghanim, was attended by HE the Minister of Public Health Mansoor bin Ebrahim al-Mahmoud and ministry officials, who outlined the strategy's priorities and implementation plans.

At the start of proceedings, the council strongly condemned a drone attack targeting a commercial vessel in Qatar's territorial waters on Sunday, describing the incident as a threat to maritime security and regional stability.

Members warned that attacks on commercial shipping lanes could directly affect international trade and vital supply chains, while calling for respect for international law and freedom of navigation.

HE al-Ghanim praised the state's strong commitment to the healthcare sector under the directives of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, describing it as part of a broader vision aimed at improving quality of life.

He said that the National Health Strategy represented an integrated framework designed to build a health-focused society supported by a sustainable and innovative healthcare system.

HE al-Mahmoud told the Shura Council that the National Health Strategy focuses on three core priorities: improving public health and wellbeing, enhancing patient experience and healthcare services, and strengthening the efficiency and resilience of the healthcare system.

He said that the strategy also aimed to tackle non-communicable diseases, including obesity and diabetes, through greater public awareness, preventative programmes and early screening initiatives.

The minister added that the government is continuing efforts to develop the national health insurance system, improve healthcare financing and strengthen co-ordination between



public and private healthcare providers.

HE al-Mahmoud also highlighted plans to expand mental health services, improve emergency preparedness and accelerate digital transformation through integrated health data systems and the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in healthcare services.

Members of the council stressed the importance of reducing delays in medical appointments, improving access to services and reinforcing primary and preventive healthcare.

They also called for greater investment in medical research and innovation, alongside broader mental health awareness programmes, particularly for young people.

At the close of the sitting, the council referred

a draft law on the regulation of petrol stations to the Economic and the Financial Affairs Committee for further study.

HE al-Ghanim also briefed members on the participation of a council delegation in the first summit of parliamentary speakers and presidents within the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean (PAM) and the 20th PAM assembly, held in Montenegro, where discussions focused on parliamentary diplomacy and democratic resilience.

He told the members that his speech during the summit addressed the importance of enhancing dialogue and co-operation among parliaments to address regional and international challenges. - QNA

## 16,316 real estate registration, authentication transactions processed in April: ministry

By Ayman Adly  
Staff Reporter

The Ministry of Justice recorded 16,316 real estate and authentication transactions in April, with ownership list issuances and foundation contracts accounting for the most services processed.

These included 11,423 authentication transactions and 4,540 real estate registration transactions.

In addition, 353 transactions were completed through the "Absher" service, a specially equipped mobile vehicle staffed by a legal notary that enables citizens and residents to complete documentation and signature procedures without visiting ministry offices.

The top five categories in the authentication sector during the reporting period accounted for a total of 8,115 transactions.

These were 3,984 foundation contract transactions, 2,461 general powers of attorney related to legal cases, 859 special official authorisations, 427 certified true copy transactions, and 384 special official authorisations for vehicles.

In the real estate registration sector, the top five transaction categories totalled more than 2,700 transactions.

According to the ministry, these comprised 1,581 ownership list issuances, 506 sales contracts, 297 urban organisational modification transactions, 263 state grant transactions, and 221 replacement issuances for lost property documents.

Regionally, real estate registration transactions completed during April included 146 transactions in the North Sector, 1,232 in the West Sector, 193 in the East Sector, and 402 in the South Sector.

The Ministry of Justice's main building recorded the highest transaction volume during the month, with 2,566 transactions processed.

Similarly, authentication transactions completed at the ministry's main building totalled 1,125, while 3,945 were completed online through the Single Window.

Further, 607 authentication transactions were completed in the North Sector, 2,355 in the West Sector, 625 in the East Sector, and 2,766 in the South Sector.



## Supreme Judiciary Council launches 'Masar' system

By Ayman Adly  
Staff Reporter

The Planning and Quality Department at the Supreme Judiciary Council (SJC) has launched the "Masar" strategic and project management system as part of efforts to modernise institutional performance and enhance project execution.

The newly introduced digital platform is designed to support the planning, management, and implementation of institutional projects more efficiently and effectively.

This initiative reflects the SJC's ongoing commitment to enhancing the quality of ad-

ministrative work and adopting modern best practices in governance and project management.

According to the SJC, "Masar" is an integrated smart management system designed to help courts and administrative departments oversee projects more organically and transparently.

The platform offers a range of intelligent tools that support every stage of project execution, including tracking implementation progress, managing risks and challenges, generating accurate reports and analytics, and supporting informed decision-making.

By centralising these functions on a single platform, the system aims to improve co-

ordination, increase productivity, and ensure projects are completed in line with strategic objectives.

The launch of "Masar" represents a strategic move toward strengthening a culture of planning and quality within the SJC.

The system is expected to play a key role in improving project management performance while ensuring high-quality outcomes that align with the council's broader goals for institutional development and administrative excellence.

Accordingly, adopting advanced digital tools such as "Masar" demonstrates the SJC's dedication to modernisation, operational efficiency, and continuous improvement.

## Qatar Press Centre calls for urgent protection of Palestinian journalists

By Tawfik Lamari  
Staff Reporter

The Qatar Press Centre (QPC) has reaffirmed its support for Palestinian media, calling for urgent international and regional action to protect Palestinian journalists and ensure their safety amid ongoing violations.

In a statement marking the International Day of Solidarity with Palestinian Journalists, observed annually on May 11, the QPC stressed the importance of standing in solidarity with Palestinian journalists who continue to report the truth despite direct targeting, persecution, restrictions and the destruction of media institutions.

The QPC said the escalating violations against Palestinian journalists and media organisations

represent a grave breach of international laws and conventions related to press freedom and human rights.

It noted that the Palestinian territories have become among the world's most dangerous areas for journalists because of systematic attacks on media professionals.

The Qatar Press Centre urged the international community, as well as media and human rights organisations, to fulfil their legal and moral responsibilities by taking immediate action to stop violations against Palestinian journalists and uphold press freedom in line with international humanitarian conventions, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Geneva Conventions and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

The QPC stressed that a free

and professional press remains essential in uncovering the truth, defending people's rights, and objectively and professionally conveying civilians' suffering to the world.

The centre also renewed its call for the immediate release of journalist Mohammed Arab and all detained journalists, stressing the need to end arbitrary arrests and ensure protection for media professionals.

According to the QPC, 262 journalists, including 38 women, have been killed during the Israeli war on Gaza, while 45 journalists, including 22 women, remain detained by Israeli occupation authorities.

It described these actions as blatant violations of international laws that guarantee press freedom and protect journalists carrying



out their professional duties.

The QPC further called for serious and effective international

pressure to halt the crimes in Gaza and provide urgent protection for journalists and media workers so

they can carry out their humanitarian and professional responsibilities safely and freely.



## MoFA secretary-general meets Ireland's envoy

The secretary-general of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), Dr Ahmed bin Hassan al-Hammadi, met yesterday with Ireland's (non-resident) ambassador to Qatar Alison Milton, on the occasion of the end of her tenure. Dr al-Hammadi thanked Milton for her efforts in supporting and strengthening bilateral relations, wishing her success in her new duties. - QNA



The Ministry of Sports and Youth and QCDC have signed an MoU to strengthen institutional co-ordination between the two entities.

## Ministry of Sports and Youth, QCDC sign MoU to boost youth readiness

The Ministry of Sports and Youth has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Qatar Career Development Centre (QCDC), founded by Qatar Foundation to strengthen national partnerships that support youth empowerment and enhance young people's readiness for the evolving needs of the labour market.

The agreement supports the implementation of Qatar's National Youth Policy action plan and broadens co-operation between the two entities in career guidance and vocational readiness.

It is designed to help prepare competitive national talent and advance Qatar National Vision 2030 by supporting the country's transition toward a knowledge-based economy.

Under the MoU, the two sides will collaborate on career exploration programmes, joint capacity-building initiatives, and efforts to guide young people toward educational and career pathways that match their aspirations and the needs of the labour market.

The agreement will also support the inclusion of persons with disabilities in training programmes and promote the exchange of expertise through specialised events and workshops.

The MoU further strengthens institutional co-ordination between the two entities through specialised programmes that equip youth-sector professionals with career development skills.

It introduces a stronger focus on impact measurement, with programme outcomes assessed using indicators such as beneficiary numbers, employment placement rates after training, and participant satisfaction with the quality of the programmes delivered.

Ahmed Mohammed al-Harami, the assistant undersecretary for Youth Affairs at the Ministry of Sports and Youth, said: "This MoU reflects the Ministry of

Sports and Youth's commitment to building purposeful strategic partnerships that strengthen youth empowerment and prepare young Qataris for the evolving demands of the labour market."

"It also supports the implementation of Qatar's National Youth Policy action plan, which places youth development at the center of national progress," he said. "We believe that investing in young people's skills, capabilities, and career awareness is a fundamental pillar of sustainable development."

"Through this cooperation, we look forward to launching innovative programmes and initiatives that help young people refine their skills, strengthen their competitiveness, and access broader opportunities for their future," al-Harami added.

"The signing of this MoU marks an important step in advancing our shared efforts to embed a stronger culture of career guidance among young people," said QCDC executive director Saad Abdulla al-Kharji. "By helping youth make informed educational and career decisions, this partnership contributes to developing national human capital that is prepared, adaptable, and capable of responding to the changing needs of the future."

"At the QCDC, we believe strategic partnerships are essential to creating lasting impact," he added. "We look forward to working closely with the Ministry of Sports and Youth to deliver specialised programmes that support youth readiness and help prepare an empowered generation equipped to contribute to Qatar's continued development."

The MoU forms part of the ministry's efforts to strengthen Qatar's youth empowerment ecosystem and expand partnerships with national institutions, in a way that promotes integration and enhances the quality and impact of youth-focused outcomes.

## Environmental Summer Club 2026 open for registration

The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change has opened registration for the 3rd season of the environmental summer club 2026, dedicated for Qatari students during the period from June 21 until July 2.

Registration is available for Qatari students aged 11-17, with a target of 20 students.

Inquiries can be made via e-mail at balkulailifi@mecc.gov.qa or by phone at 50602293.

# Professional IDs proposed for skilled foreign workers

By Ayman Adly  
Staff Reporter

The Central Municipal Council (CMC) has proposed introducing specialised identification cards or badges to verify the qualifications and competence of skilled technicians recruited from abroad.

The CMC's Services and Public Utilities Committee held its 78th regular meeting yesterday.

The CMC members discussed a number of service-related and regulatory matters aimed at improving operational systems and enhancing the quality of public services provided to the community.

The meeting focused on the proposals intended to strengthen oversight mechanisms, regulate professional sectors, and support more efficient service delivery across the country.

Among the most prominent issues discussed was a proposal submitted by Dr Badr bin Sultan al-Rumaihi, representative of Constituency No 4, calling for the introduction of regulations and standards governing the recruitment of skilled workers and professionals from abroad.

The proposal seeks to improve labour market efficiency, reduce unregulated practices, and establish clearer frameworks for the practice of vocational and technical professions in Qatar in line with the well-defined professional stand-



ards and regulatory requirements.

The proposal included plans to introduce professional identification cards for vocational and skilled workers, clearly indicating each worker's profession and area of specialisation.

Under the proposed system, the cards would be issued through accredited and specialised centres after verifying workers' technical competencies, professional qualifications, and practical skills.

The committee members noted that the initiative could play a major role in regulating the vocational labour market, improving service quality, strengthening consumer protection, and facilitating inspection and monitoring processes by the relevant authorities.

The proposed framework is also expected to contribute to the creation of a comprehensive and accurate database for professional and skilled labour across various sectors.

Such a system would enhance transparency in the labour market and build greater trust between service providers and consumers.

The committee members further discussed the implementation mechanisms and practical frameworks for applying the proposal in a manner that serves the public interest and helps raise overall service standards.

The discussions were attended by officials and specialists from the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, who exchanged technical observations and views on enforcement mechanisms, regulatory procedures, and international best practices.

Accordingly, the meeting emphasised the need for co-ordination among the relevant government entities to ensure the successful implementation of the proposed measures and to develop a more organised and professional labour environment in the country.



A ceremony was held to mark National Paints Qatar's attaining the ISO 17025 certification. PICTURES: Thajudheen

## National Paints Qatar earns ISO 17025 certification

By Shaima Sheriff  
Staff Reporter

National Paints Qatar has achieved ISO 17025 certification for its laboratory, marking a significant milestone that enhances the credibility of its testing, quality standards, and customer confidence across the company's operations.

The certification, recognised globally as a benchmark for laboratory competence, positions the company among a select group of organisations in Qatar that have received this accreditation, highlighting its growing role in advancing industry standards.

Speaking on the sidelines of a special ceremony held to mark the achievement, National Paints Qatar deputy general manager Mohamed S al-Khulaifi described the certification as a critical step forward for the company's operations.

"The ISO 17025 certification

is accredited to the laboratory, where the laboratory could be a third-party certified lab," he said, explaining that the accreditation allows the company to operate at a higher level of independence and credibility, stressing that "Qatar Deserves the Best".

Al-Khulaifi emphasised that the certification strengthens trust in the company's testing processes.

"This certification will add to our business, as our laboratory will be certified and accredited as a third-party lab," he stressed. "That means our testing measures and equipment will be trusted."

According to al-Khulaifi, the accreditation enhances the company's ability to conduct testing not only for its own products but also for those of others in the industry.

"This is a trust mark for our lab, where we can act as a third-party lab," he noted. "It gives us an advantage in testing our samples

and even competitor samples." The achievement is expected to have a direct impact on quality standards and customer satisfaction.

"It will increase our quality level and give us an advantage in achieving customer satisfaction," al-Khulaifi said, adding that the laboratory's enhanced capabilities will enable the company to meet a wider range of customer requirements.

The certification reflects a broader commitment by National Paints to maintain high standards of reliability and precision in its operations, particularly in testing and calibration processes that underpin product quality.

Industry observers note that ISO 17025 certification is widely regarded as one of the most important international standards for laboratories, ensuring that testing results are accurate, consistent and globally recognised.

For National Paints, the milestone represents more than a



Mohammed S al-Khulaifi

technical achievement.

It signals a shift towards greater transparency and competitiveness in the market, as well as a stronger alignment with international best practices.

As the company looks ahead, the certification is expected to support future growth by enhancing its credibility locally and regionally and reinforcing its position as a trusted provider in Qatar's industrial sector.

With increasing emphasis on quality assurance and regulatory compliance across industries, achievements such as the ISO 17025 certification are becoming essential benchmarks for companies aiming to build trust and deliver consistent performance in a competitive marketplace.



Members of the delegation from Al Takaful General were given a tour of the Qatar Cancer Society's facilities.

## QCS, Al Takaful General strengthen partnership

The Qatar Cancer Society (QCS) has received a donation from Al Takaful General to support the QCS's awareness programmes and initiatives that promote cancer prevention, early detection, and public health awareness within the community.

The donation was presented during an official visit by a delegation from Al Takaful General to the QCS headquarters.

QCS chairman Sheikh Dr Khalid bin Jabor al-Thani received the donation from Al Takaful General chairman Jassim bin Mohammed al-Kuwari and general manager Faraj al-Omari. During the meeting, both parties emphasised

the importance of strengthening partnerships between healthcare institutions and the private sector to support humanitarian and awareness initiatives that improve public health and quality of life.

Sheikh Dr Khalid said that contributions from national institutions play a vital role in sustaining the QCS's humanitarian mission and expanding its awareness and support programmes for patients and the wider community.

He said co-operation with private-sector institutions reflects a strong commitment to corporate social responsibility and supports efforts to build a healthier, more aware society.

The visit included a tour of the QCS's facilities, during which the delegation was introduced to the society's activities, programmes, and the services offered by its Cancer Awareness Centre in education, prevention, and early detection.

The meeting also highlighted the QCS's ongoing efforts in cancer awareness, prevention, and psychosocial support for individuals living with cancer, in addition to its national initiatives aimed at promoting healthy lifestyles and reducing cancer risk factors, in line with its vision of creating "A Cancer-Aware Community and Better Life for Patients".

## Gulf Chess Federation holds first meeting for 2026-27 term, appoints QCA's al-Mudahka as vice-president



Mohammed al-Mudahka was appointed vice-president of the federation.

The Gulf Chess Federation held its first meeting for the 2026-27 term via videoconference, appointing Qatar Chess Association (QCA) president Mohammed al-Mudahka as vice-president of the federation in accordance with procedures and the resolutions of the General Assembly meeting in December.

During the meeting, the board reviewed developments related to the preparation of a unified statute for Gulf sports federations as part of efforts to strengthen institutional work and unify regulatory frameworks across GCC countries.

The federation also approved the organisation of the 2026 Gulf Individual Juniors Classic Championship for boys and girls, scheduled to take place in Ajman on July 3-9, as part of its plans to develop youth categories, with prizes allocated for winners.

The board said in a statement that the

timing of the championship coincides with the end of the academic year in GCC countries, which is expected to boost participation and raise the level of competition among players.

At the start of the meeting, Gulf Chess Federation president Ahmed al-Raisi welcomed board members and expressed his pleasure at the launch of the new term with a group of experienced and qualified officials capable of advancing chess across the Gulf region.

He stressed the importance of the coming phase, which requires intensified co-operation and teamwork, while focusing on specialised programmes and initiatives aimed at strengthening the position of Gulf chess regionally and internationally.

Following confirmation of the legal quorum, with seven members present, the secretary-general chaired the session,



during which several strategic topics related to the development of chess in GCC countries were discussed.

The meeting also reviewed a proposal to organise another Gulf championship in Oman next November, pending completion of co-ordination with the relevant authorities and the necessary organisational procedures.

At the conclusion of the meeting, the board recommended several executive measures, most notably finalising the amended statute, reviewing details of the juniors championship, and forming the federation's permanent committees for the current term to enhance institutional efficiency and achieve the federation's strategic objectives.



## Major road upgrades in Al Kharaitiyat and Izghawa completed

The Public Works Authority (Ashghal) has announced the completion of the second package of a major roads and infrastructure development project in the Al Kharaitiyat and Izghawa areas, as part of a wider plan aimed at supporting urban growth and improving services for residents.

According to Ashghal, the completed works will serve 1,514 residential plots through the construction and upgrading of internal roads designed to improve traffic movement and strengthen connections with surrounding main roads.

The authority said the project included extensive infrastructure works, such as stormwater drainage systems and utility networks, intended to enhance living standards and provide integrated services for the growing communities.

Eng. Abdullah al-Nuaimi, the head of the Northern Areas Section at Ashghal's Roads Projects Department, said that the wider development plan for Al Kharaitiyat and Izghawa is divided into four main packages that will ultimately serve 5,384 residential plots.

He said that the third package had been completed earlier in 2025, covering 1,383 plots, while work on the remaining first and fourth packages is continuing.

Project engineer Eng. Jassim Kano said that Package 2 encompassed the construction of 46km of roads fitted with traffic safety measures, including signals and road signage.

The project also delivered three signal-controlled intersections and four pedestrian crossings to improve road safety and traffic flow. Further works included the installation of 2,643 lighting poles and nearly 9,900 parking spaces, alongside landscaping and green spaces covering 37,500sq metres.

Ashghal also built approximately 85km of shared pedestrian and cycling paths, in a move the authority said was aimed at encouraging healthier lifestyles and improving the area's urban environment.

Infrastructure upgrades carried out under the project included 51km of surface and groundwater drainage networks, 21km of treated water pipelines, and 6.6km of potable water networks.

Additional works involved the installation of 24.4km of electricity lines and 7.3km of communications infrastructure.

Ashghal said that local manufacturers and materials accounted for around 70% of the supplies used in the project, including lighting equipment, drainage pipes, electrical cables and paving materials.

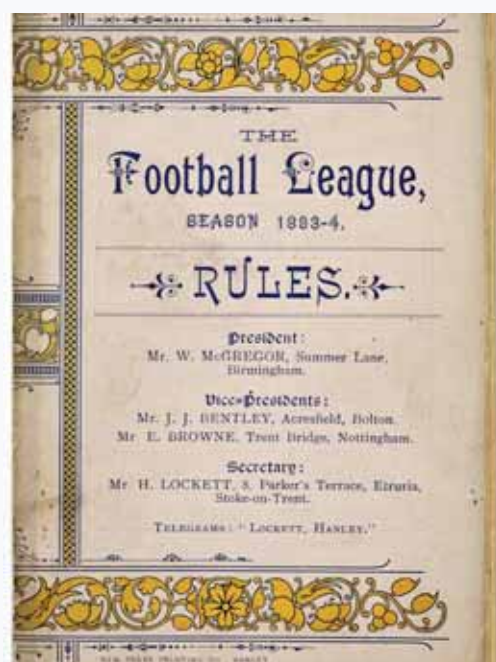
The authority said that the approach supports Qatar's local industry and aligns with Ashghal's "Taheel Initiative", launched in 2017 to promote the use of local products in public projects. - QNA



Eng. Abdullah al-Nuaimi



## Qatar's Years of Culture initiative kicks off in Mexico



Football League Rule Booklet

Qatar's Years of Culture initiative is presenting a major cultural programme in Mexico City this summer, using art, film, football history and photography to mark the official launch of the Qatar Canada and Mexico 2026 Year of Culture.

Inspired in part by the momentum created through Qatar's hosting of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, the events in Mexico City show how the legacy of global sport can continue through cultural engagement.

Presented in partnership with major Qatari (3-2-1 Qatar Olympic and Sports Museum [QOSM], Tasweer Photo Festival Qatar, and Doha Film Institute [DFI]) and Mexican institutions (Museo Jumex and Centro de Cultura Digital), the June programme reflects Qatar's long-term vision of using culture and sport together to drive national development, strengthen international partnerships, and deepen people-to-people understanding.

"The Years of Culture summer programme in Mexico reflects Qatar's belief that sport and culture can create

opportunity, strengthen ties, and build lasting connections to amplify regional voices and stories," Years of Culture adviser and Qatar's former ambassador to Mexico Mohammed al-Kuwari said in a statement.

"From football and film to art and heritage, each event creates space for dialogue, shared memories, and human connection," he said. "As Mexico prepares to welcome the world as one of the next hosts of the World Cup, we are proud to contribute to that spirit by connecting through culture."

Running throughout June, July and August in Mexico City, the programme brings together a series of major public events across some of the capital's leading cultural venues.

"Objects of Glory: Iconic Moments in the History of Football", presented jointly by Museo Jumex and 3-2-1 QOSM, will open at Museo Jumex on June 10.

Displayed together outside Qatar for the first time, the exhibition features 16 iconic objects that shaped the game, including jerseys, balls, trophies and

memorabilia linked to legendary players and defining matches.

Among the centrepieces is Diego Maradona's 1986 World Cup jersey, worn in Mexico City.

Exploring unforgettable moments, the exhibition highlights how football history lives through the objects people remember and the memories attached to them, including moments deeply connected to Mexico.

"Journeys to Greatness: Qatar 2022 Legacy" will run from June 10 to August 2 at Centro de Cultura Digital.

The immersive exhibition examines how the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 became a defining national and regional moment, shaping cultural impact and strengthening unity through diversity.

It explores how hosting helped drive progress in infrastructure, sustainability, tourism, innovation and global perception for Qatar, leaving a legacy far beyond the final whistle.

On June 4-10, the DFI will present a programme of contemporary Arab cinema at Cineteca Nacional de México, bringing stories from across the Arab



Final of the English Cup Ball

world to Mexican audiences through the universal language of film.

The selected films explore themes of identity, resilience, belonging and everyday life.

Also on view this summer is the "Under One Sky" photography exhibition.

Resulting from an international open call by Tasweer Photo Festival Qatar, the exhibition celebrates the friendships, diversity and shared experiences that made FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 memorable.

## Qatari polo team bags special honour in Rabat



Under the high patronage of King Mohammed VI of Morocco, the sixth edition of the Mohammed VI International Polo Cup was held recently. The qualifying rounds took place at the Palmeraie Patrick Guerand-Hermès Polo Club, while the final match was hosted by the Royal Guard Polo Club in Souissi, Rabat. A delegation from the management of the Qatar Polo Club attended the event and the final match, comprising Fouad Abdulhamid al-Mudhahka, director of the Qatar Polo Club, and Ziad Nabil Abu Issa, director of Public Relations and Board Member. The official high-level delegation awarded the Qatari team a special honour, recognising the significance of this participation and Qatar's presence at this international event, and highlighting the deep sporting and cultural ties between the two brotherly nations.

# Al Faisal Foundation celebrates winners of 'Farm Your Country'

Al Faisal Without Borders Foundation's "Farm Your Country" programme concluded its 2025-2026 season after engaging around 500 students from 47 public and private schools in hands-on agricultural and sustainability projects to promote environmental awareness and food security.

The initiative is implemented in partnership with the Ministry of Municipality's Public Parks Department and in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE). The ceremony reflected the programme's success in promoting sustainability and environmental awareness among students.

The event was attended by HE Sheikh Faisal bin Qassim al-Thani, chairman of the Board of Trustees of Al Faisal Without Borders Foundation; HE Dr Ibrahim bin Saleh al-Nuaimi, Undersecretary of MoEHE; Maha al-Ruwaili, Assistant Undersecretary for Educational Affairs at MoEHE; Eng Abdullah Ahmed al-Karani, Assistant Undersecretary for Public Services Affairs at the Ministry of Municipality; Mohammed Ibrahim al-Sada, director of the Public Parks Department at the Ministry of Municipality; and Eng Abdullatif Ali al-Yafei, general manager of Al Faisal Without Borders Foundation, in addition to a number of officials, educational leaders, and executives.

This season marks the 11th edition of the programme, which continues its journey in embedding agricultural and sustainability concepts among students.

Over the past years, the programme has successfully reached more than 4,000 students through an applied educational experience that introduced them to healthy food production methods, the cultivation of vegetables and ornamental plants, and fostered initiative, self-reliance, and the practical, responsible use of available resources.

In his speech, HE Sheikh Faisal expressed his pride in the outstanding performance demonstrated by participating schools and students, affirming that the foundation continues to launch high-quality programmes that



HE Sheikh Faisal bin Qassim al-Thani with other dignitaries at the ceremony.



build the capabilities of future generations and develop their scientific, technical, and engineering skills, supporting their academic and professional futures.

He noted that agriculture has become an essential part of daily life and is no longer limited to traditional farming areas, but is now possible in various environments when knowledge, skills, and determination are available.

HE Sheikh Faisal congratulated the winning schools, lauding the effective partnership with MoEHE and the ongoing cooperation with the Ministry of Municipality, represented by the Public Parks Department, which has played a key role in the programme's success and continuity year after year.

Eng al-Yafei emphasised that

the foundation places great importance on sustainability, aiming to raise students' awareness of agriculture and its role in achieving future food security and self-sufficiency.

He highlighted that real investment begins with empowering students with knowledge and skills. He lauded the continuous support provided by the Ministry of Municipality and MoEHE throughout the programme's 11-year journey, noting its contribution to developing students' agricultural and social skills and enhancing the spirit of teamwork.

Sara Issa al-Sherim, director of Curriculum and Learning Resources at MoEHE stated that the "Farm Your Country" programme represents a practical model of

true learning based on research, inquiry, and hands-on experience.

She emphasised the importance of transforming the school environment into a space that fosters critical thinking, innovation, and teamwork, while strengthening students' connection to sustainability and social responsibility.

Mohammed Abdullah, assistant director of the Public Parks Department at the Ministry of Municipality, said the "Farm Your Country" programme represents a successful model of effective national partnership.

He noted its contribution to embedding sustainability and environmental awareness among students, highlighting that the projects and ideas presented by schools reflect a growing awareness of the importance of agriculture and afforestation in building a sustainable environment aligned with Qatar National Vision 2030.

He expressed appreciation for the joint efforts that contributed to the programme's success and continuity over eleven consecutive seasons.

To encourage innovation and excellence, the programme awards the "Excellence Award" to the best-performing school during the agricultural season. The foundation then implements a sustainable botanical garden project within the winning school, enhancing environmental sustainability concepts and creating a practical learning environment for students.

In January 2026, the sustainable greenhouse (second edition) was inaugurated at Jassim Bin Hamad Secondary School for Boys, following its win of the Excellence Award in the previous 2024-2025 academic season. The facility includes a greenhouse and educational agricultural spaces used for applied and awareness activities.

At the conclusion of the ceremony, Hind Bint Abi Sufyan Secondary School for Girls was announced as the winner of the Excellence Award for the 2025-2026 academic year, in recognition of its outstanding implementation of program requirements and agricultural sustainability projects.

## Eid 'staycation' demand bolsters local tourism

By Joey Aguilar  
Doha

As regional tensions continue to influence travel decisions across the Gulf, Qatar's hospitality sector is anticipating a rise in Eid al-Adha staycations, with many residents expected to spend the holidays in the country rather than travel abroad.

Industry stakeholders say the trend is being driven by a combination of convenience, affordability and growing interest in local tourism experiences, particularly as hotels and resorts introduce attractive Eid packages.

Speaking with the *Gulf Times*, Tawfeeq Travel Group CEO Rehan Ali Syed said many residents are reconsidering their overseas travel plans this Eid due to regional uncertainties and are instead opting for short domestic breaks.

"Staycations are emerging as an excellent alternative for residents who want to enjoy the Eid holidays without the stress of international travel. Many people prefer to remain in Qatar because of the current regional situation, while others may choose to spend a short break in their home countries," he said.

Staycations, it is learnt, offer several practical advantages, including lower costs, minimal travel time and freedom from visa applications or currency exchange concerns. It allows families and individuals to relax in a comfortable setting while discovering local attractions and experiences they might not normally visit.

Several hospitality industry sources said many hotels across the country have already recorded an increase in bookings ahead of Eid al-Adha and expect demand to remain strong throughout the summer season, particularly among families and residents seeking quick leisure escapes.

Qatar's hotel sector has increasingly focused on staycation offerings in recent years, with properties introducing packages that combine accommodation with dining, wellness and recreational experiences. Luxury beachfront resorts, desert retreats, and city hotels continue to attract residents seeking convenient holiday op-



Rehan Ali Syed

tions without leaving the country.

Many hotels are also promoting family-oriented activities, children's entertainment programmes and spa experiences as part of their Eid offerings. Industry observers noted that wellness tourism and short leisure breaks have become increasingly popular since the pandemic, with residents placing greater emphasis on relaxation and quality time close to home.

According to Visit Qatar, the country's tourism strategy continues to promote a diverse range of leisure experiences, including luxury hospitality, cultural attractions and wellness tourism, helping position Qatar as a year-round destination for both residents and international visitors.

Syed pointed out that with Visit Qatar actively promoting the "Hala Summer" campaign in coordination with hotels, Destination Management Companies, and other stakeholders within the hospitality sector, "we believe this presents a valuable opportunity to further enhance internal tourism activities while also targeting key GCC markets collaboratively".

Qatar offers a wide variety of staycation options, ranging from luxury island and beachfront resorts to urban escapes in Doha and wellness-focused retreats. Popular attractions such as beaches, museums, cultural districts and family entertainment destinations further enhance the appeal of local holidays during festive periods.

Syed said the Eid staycation trend also benefits the local economy by supporting domestic tourism and hospitality businesses. He highlighted Qatar's world-class hotels, excellent facilities and diverse attractions that make staycations appealing for couples, families and solo travellers.

# WISE Prize for Education invites next generation of learning solutions

The World Innovation Summit for Education (WISE), a global initiative of Qatar Foundation, has officially opened applications for the 2026-27 cycle of the WISE Prize for Education, a programme that funds and offers technical support to the world's most promising solutions to education's hardest challenges.

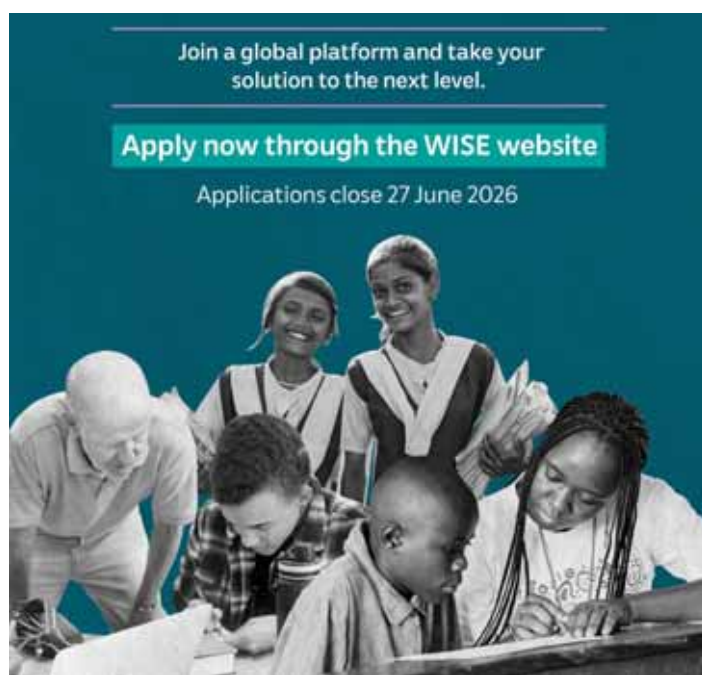
Each cycle selects a cohort of finalists through a rigorous, multi-stage evaluation process. Each finalist receives \$100,000 to \$125,000 in development funding and enters a structured 12-month programme that includes mentorship, technical support, and ongoing guidance. The cycle culminates at the WISE 13 Summit in 2027 in Doha, where an international jury awards a total prize fund of \$1 mn to the most impactful solutions.

The 2026-2027 cycle calls for practical solutions that deliver measurable improvements in learning and life outcomes. Sub-

missions should demonstrate how learners gain, retain, and apply essential knowledge and skills, leading to better opportunities for education, work, and wellbeing.

Solutions must address at least one of the identified priority areas: reaching marginalised and underserved learners, the effective and responsible use of artificial intelligence and other technologies, culture and language as a foundation for engagement in learning, strengthening core skills such as literacy and numeracy, and supporting learner wellbeing, including mental, emotional, and physical health.

Dr Asyia Kazmi, OBE, CEO of WISE, said: "Many experienced organisations working in education have the vision and expertise to create the innovations that can transform systems at scale. The WISE Prize for Education is designed to support such organisations to conceive, develop, and test



impactful solutions to the problems they see."

Aurelio Amaral, director of Innovation at WISE, added: "We focus on established reputable organisations with pilots that show promising results in their contexts. Our technical support helps them refine a development plan that is scalable, financially sustainable, and adaptable to different contexts." Applications will undergo a multi-stage process, including eligibility screening, expert evaluation, and a three-month intensive phase. This includes due diligence, an "innovation sprint" that assesses how solutions adapt under real conditions, and a final review by an external panel of experts. Selected finalists will then enter the development phase beginning in 2027.

The 2026-2027 cycle builds on the outcomes of the most recent WISE Prize, in which winning solutions were selected from a cohort

of finalists. The projects, spanning AI-powered learning tools, early childhood literacy initiatives, and alternative learning models, reflect the diversity of approaches supported by the WISE Prize and their potential to address complex education challenges across different contexts.

In addition to the winners, all finalists received development funding and participated in a year-long programme of mentorship and capacity-building, reflecting WISE's commitment towards the continued support of a broader pipeline of innovation.

Applications for the 2026-2027 WISE Prize for Education are now open at <https://www.wise-qatar.org/>. The application deadline is June 27, 2026, with finalists to be announced in late 2026. The program will culminate at WISE 13 in Doha, in late 2027, where an international jury will select the winners.

# Cinema Cinema on Alaraby 2 covers Annaba Film Fest

As part of its dedicated coverage of major Arab and international film festivals, *Cinema Cinema*, the flagship cinema programme on Alaraby 2, aired a special episode from the Annaba Mediterranean Film Festival in Algeria. The screening delivers a comprehensive report that captures the spirit of the event and highlights its most prominent cinematic moments.

The episode reflects the programme's and the channel's ongoing commitment to covering key cinematic events worldwide while spotlighting leading creative voices and emerging talents.

Broadcast on location from the festival, presenter Amine Ben Hamza conducted a series of exclusive interviews with prominent filmmakers and industry figures. Among the highlights was a conversation with internationally acclaimed director Bille August, alongside several filmmakers participating in this year's edition, which added a strong critical and artistic dimension to the episode and reinforced the program's fo-



Director Bille August (left) being interviewed by presenter Amine Ben Hamza.

cus on thoughtful, in-depth coverage.

*Cinema Cinema* producer Imadeddine Boudjenah said: "This coverage from the Annaba Festival reflects the programme's vision of serving as a bridge connecting Arab audiences with the latest developments in the art of cinema.

"Through this episode, we aimed to go beyond headline coverage and offer viewers an authentic picture of the dynamic cinematic movement taking

shape across the Arab region."

*Cinema Cinema* is considered one of the few Arab television programmes dedicated to consistently covering the world of cinema, offering film analysis, industry insights, and extensive reporting from regional and international film festivals, all in a format that combines cinematic expertise with engaging visual storytelling.

*Cinema Cinema* airs every Thursday at 8.30pm on Alaraby 2, with all episodes available on demand via the Alaraby Plus app.



Presenter Amine Ben Hamza at the festival venue.



A film director being interviewed by presenter Amine Ben Hamza.

## GCC Games declared open in Doha

From Page 1

The officials praised the ceremony for being a distinctive artistic experience among Gulf and Arab productions.

In a post on X, Sheikh Joaan said: "With the launch of the 4th GCC Games, Doha renews its commitment to organisational excellence in a ceremony that reflects the depth of its heritage and

identity, and an event that transcends the boundaries of the field to solidify the unity of purpose and destiny among the people of the Gulf and open new horizons of sporting excellence."

He added: "Today, we celebrate the spirit of brotherhood that unites athletes in Doha under the slogan 'One Gulf, One Heart.'"

The Games will feature competitions across 10 state-of-the-

art venues and run until May 22.

More than 1,000 male and female athletes from the six GCC countries will compete in 17 sports - handball, table tennis, athletics, padel, fencing, boxing, taekwondo, karate, swimming, billiards, snooker, 3x3 basketball, shooting, archery, volleyball, equestrian and bowling. Qatar will be represented by 300 athletes.

## Ministry expands pre-KG and digital services

From Page 1

The ministry has also broadened digital inclusion measures by introducing electronic registration and transfer services for students with disabilities. Previously handled manually, these services can now be completed remotely, with parents able to finalise transfer and registration applications online and select suitable transfer dates according to approved schedules.

In addition, the school placement system used when preferred schools are unavail-

able has been enhanced. The updated system offers parents four alternative school options instead of the previous two or three, giving families greater flexibility to choose schools suited to their location and circumstances. The change is expected to ease pressure during busy registration periods and improve overall placement efficiency.

Al-Buainain also announced the launch of electronic registration services for students attending evening adult education classes. They can now use the Maaref Portal to select

suitable education centres, upload required documents and complete enrolment procedures online - a move expected to simplify access to continuing education and encourage wider participation in adult learning programmes.

She added that six registration centres will remain operational across several municipalities during the vacation season to facilitate transactions for parents and students, ensuring families can complete school registration and transfer procedures efficiently over the summer months.

## QIA, General Atlantic seal a \$500mn growth equity deal

From Page 1

General Atlantic's chairman and chief executive William Ford said the firm was proud to deepen its relationship with one of the world's leading sovereign investors, adding that Qatar had developed a dynamic economy, a growing entrepreneurial ecosystem and globally minded talent.

General Atlantic has invested more than \$3bn in the Middle East since 2012 and expanded its regional presence in 2024 with the opening of offices in Riyadh and Abu Dhabi.

The company said Gulf countries remained among the world's most attractive regions for sustainable growth, driven by economic diversification policies, evolving capital markets and rapidly developing entrepreneurship ecosystems. (QNA)

## Justice Ministry rolls out digital audit platform

From Page 1

She also underlined the importance of Internal Audit Awareness Month as a vehicle for promoting transparency, integrity and sound governance within public institutions.

Aisha Khalid al-Darwish, acting director of internal audit and risk oversight at the State Audit Bureau, delivered a lecture on how internal audit contributes to institutional performance and strengthens governance and risk management systems.

The ministry rounded off the programme with an interactive workshop examining the role of internal audit departments in government entities and the mechanisms for co-operation between them.

# Virginia Commonwealth University School of the Arts in Qatar presents the 2026 Graduation Showcase

*This year's online exhibition presents research-driven work from the Class of 2026 that defines contemporary practice and critical inquiry*

### What is an astrolabe?

Can karak tea reveal a deeper tale of cultural connection?

How has digital media affected how we remember?

These were among the questions explored by senior students at Virginia Commonwealth University School of the Arts in Qatar (VCUarts Qatar) and presented online for the VCUarts Qatar 2026 Graduation Showcase marking the culmination of their journey from foundational coursework to creative and critical execution.

Now live online, the exhibition features work by students from five programs at

pursue her passion for storytelling, and digital art and publication design. At the heart of her passions, she's keen to explore community-oriented opportunities.

Of her experience at VCUarts Qatar, she said: "Over the past four years, I have worked closely with local institutions. These experiences built my confidence and practical skills and allowed me to grow as a designer and artist.

Another project by ARTH student Nourhane Tarroun, titled *Karak Routes*, also looks back in time to find meaning in Qatar's most popular drink. Her research traces the popular beverage's origins to Indian Ocean

emerging designers navigating uncertainty.

"As a graduating design student, there's always uncertainty surrounding what you're going to do after graduation—especially now with the threat that AI has posed to the design industry in general. That shift from a structured academic environment into a professional world that feels much less accessible," she said.

In response to that gap, she adopted vernacular door geometries to design *Afkarna* as a network of pathways and used thresholds to symbolize a bridge, creating continuity between education and professional practice. "The project is designed as a transitional

symbolize feelings of anxiety and numbness.

"While I was experiencing these emotions, I couldn't exactly pinpoint what I was truly feeling at that time," she said about how the idea presented itself.

"I first sketched out the feelings. Like sparklers, they are small bursts, inconsistent in intensity," she said. "But although they are small, they linger for a long time. They may even seem insignificant on their own, but they can build up and become suffocating and overwhelming."

Fadilah drew on her own culture to bring the idea alive. She said, "The sparklers also represent the contrast between danger and

"When I accidentally zoomed out, all these pictures, literally hundreds of them, collapsed into a dense grid where I could no longer distinguish his face or the moments I had carefully documented. I began to question whether documenting everything actually weakens our ability to remember meaningfully," she explained.

This reflection led Aslem to create a physical connection to these digital moments. She used weaving to transfer images onto screw pine and palm leaves, drawing on childhood memories in India and paying homage to Qatar, where she was born and raised.



Tarishah Fadilah (PAPR)



Reema Al Mohannadi (ID)



Nourhane Tarroun (AH)



Alice Mohammed Aslem (MFA)



Khawla Al-Essa (GD)

VCUarts Qatar: Art History (ARTH), Graphic Design (GDES), Interior Design (IDES), Painting and Printmaking (PAPR), and Master of Fine Arts in Design (MFA).

GDES student Khawla Al-Essa's *The Astrolabe: Taker of the Stars* offers readers an immersive learning experience through a printed artist book. Using handcrafted production and sequential illustration, Al-Essa examines the astronomical instrument's cultural development, anatomy, and functions.

"The more I researched, the more I understood how and why astrolabes gradually fell out of use. Reflecting on that, the key goal of my thesis is to reintroduce the astrolabe, presenting its functionality in an accessible and engaging way that fits contemporary audiences," she explained.

To realize her vision, Al-Essa applied techniques from courses such as *Kitchen Comics*, which taught sequential art and storytelling, and *Book Arts*, which introduced her to bookbinding and paper engineering. Following graduation, Al-Essa plans to

spice trade routes and 20th-century South Asian migration to the Gulf. She uses small takeaway cups collected across Qatar to show how daily objects move through time, and ultimately through history, and the stories they carry.

"Karak tea is everywhere in Doha, yet I had never really questioned how it got here or why it's so popular. Looking at it through an art history lens allowed me to trace the connections between past and present that are all around us in everyday life," she added.

Tarroun's coursework helped her perceive objects not as "isolated" items, but as part of larger narratives.

"What feels local is actually shaped by movement and exchange. This project makes those connections visible and shows how everyday practices can hold layered, global histories," she said.

In her project, *Afkarna (Our Ideas)*, IDES student, Reema Al Mohannadi, reimaged space as a cohesive hub for collaboration, production, and exchange that supports

space, not just physically, but conceptually, where emerging designers can continue to grow, experiment, and connect. *Afkarna* becomes that threshold—a space that doesn't mark an end, but rather supports the beginning of a professional journey no matter what challenges we may face," she explained.

Al Mohannadi said that her VCUarts Qatar education emphasized a process of refinement and iteration, helping her rethink how individual spaces connect and support one another.

"Instead of designing separate functions, I started to see the project as a network of interactions, where making, exhibiting, learning, and socializing are all interconnected."

As the students prepare for what comes next amid challenging times, themes of mental health and emotional well-being also inspired one of the senior projects.

In *Sparklers*, PAPR student Tarishah Ramanda Fadilah uses a series of illustrations and frame-by-frame animations of sparks to

joy, especially in childhood. In Indonesia, many children grow up playing with sparklers and fireworks, finding happiness in them despite the risks. That same contradiction is reflected here: even when these sparks feel dangerous, there's still joy in those moments."

Asked what she hoped viewers would take away from her work, Fadilah said she wanted to shed light on these emotions that are often invalidated as insignificant.

"I know that a lot of people experience anxiety and numbness. To those people, I want my work to be able to relate to them, to make them feel seen, and hopefully convey to them that these emotions, like sparklers, may be intense, but they don't last forever. It is possible to find joy within these negative emotions."

Moving from emotional insight to digital memory, MFA student Alice Mohammed Aslem's, *Between the Veins*, emerged from what she describes as a "simple yet unsettling moment" while scrolling through her son's photos on her phone.

"Bringing these two materials together became a way of holding both parts of my life in one piece. It's also about my son. It reflects my identity to him. A way for him to understand where I come from, and in some way, understand his own roots through that," she said.

Aslem hopes her work can start a conversation about digital and physical memory and encourage people to question how they are documenting their lives: "Are we actually remembering these moments, or just collecting them?" she reflected. "I hope that my work inspires people to question how we think about memory."

Collectively, the projects reflect how the students' combined technical skill, thoughtful introspection and curiosity address timely themes through research, art, and design. **The 2026 VCUarts Graduation Showcase featuring the work of 67 VCUarts Qatar graduates is now available for viewing at portfolio.qatar.vcu.edu.**

# Doha Design District unveils mural by Qatari artist Yousef Ahmad

**QNA**  
Doha

**D**oha Design District in Msheireb Downtown Doha has unveiled a large-scale public mural by pioneering Qatari artist Yousef Ahmad as part of efforts to integrate art into public spaces and strengthen cultural engagement within the city.

The artwork, titled reflection of water light, draws inspiration from the artist's childhood memories of the nearby Al Jasra area and Doha's historic relationship with the sea. Speaking to Qatar News Agency, Ahmad said the mural reflected memories from around 60 years ago, when the coastline near Msheireb was known for its clear waters, coral reefs and schools of fish.

He said the movement of light across the water had long inspired him artistically, describing it as a source of visual beauty that revealed the hidden details of marine life and coral formations.

Ahmad added that his work on themes related to the sea was closely connected to his long-running artistic exploration of Qatari palm fronds, which he transformed into a distinctive artistic medium that gained international recognition.

The artist praised efforts by organizations including Qatar Museums, Doha Design District and Katara Cultural Village to make art accessible to the public rather than limiting it to galleries and exhibition spaces.

He also said Qatar's hosting of international exhibitions and cultural events, including the inaugural edition of Art Basel Qatar earlier this year, had con-



tributed to growing momentum in the country's art scene and strengthened its position as a global cultural destination. Widely regarded as one of Qatar's pioneering contemporary artists, Yousef Ahmad has played a prominent role in the development of modern and contemporary art in the country over a career spanning more than five decades.

# Recall of Honda Odyssey models

**T**he Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI), in co-operation with Doha Marketing Services co - Domasco, Qatar's Honda dealership, has announced the recall Honda Odyssey 2018 - 2022 models.

The recall is due to a possible unintended deployment of the curtain and side airbags while driving over potholes, speed bumps, or road debris, increasing the risk of accidents or in-

jury. The ministry said the recall campaign comes within the framework of its ongoing efforts to protect consumers and ensure that car dealers follow up on vehicle defects and repairs.

The ministry said that it will co-ordinate with the dealer to follow up on the maintenance and repair works and will communicate with customers to ensure that the necessary repairs are carried out. The ministry

urges all customers to report any violations to its Consumer Protection and Anti-Commercial Fraud Department, which processes complaints, inquiries and suggestions through the following channels:

Call Centre: 16001, e-mail: info@moci.gov.qa, ministry's accounts on social media: @mociqatar, ministry's Mobile App: MOCIQATAR (available on iOS and Android devices)

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# China seeks 'more stability' as it confirms Trump-Xi meet

AFP  
Beijing

Beijing said yesterday it was ready to work with the US in pursuit of "more stability" and confirmed that Donald Trump will visit China this week, the first US president to do so since 2017.

Washington and Beijing have been at loggerheads over key issues ranging from trade tariffs to the Middle East war and Taiwan, which China claims as part of its territory.

Top trade negotiators from both countries will meet in Seoul a day before Trump's summit with Chinese leader Xi Jinping to iron out details on trade and economic issues, a sign of the trip's high stakes.

The White House announced Trump's visit several weeks ago, and China's foreign ministry has now confirmed it will go ahead from Wednesday until Friday.

The US leader was originally meant to visit in late March or early April, but postponed his trip to focus on the US-Israel war with Iran.

"Top-level diplomacy plays an



US President Donald Trump shakes hands with Chinese President Xi Jinping as they hold a bilateral meeting at Gimhae International Airport, on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation (Apec) summit, in Busan, South Korea. (Reuters/File Photo)

irreplaceable strategic guiding role in China-US relations," Beijing's foreign ministry spokesman Guo Jiakun told a regular news briefing.

"China is willing to work with the US in the spirit of equality, respect, and mutual benefit, to expand co-operation, manage differences, and inject more stability and certainty into a volatile and intertwined world," he said.

This is the first visit by a US president to China since Trump's previous visit in 2017, and is expected to include a tour of the Temple of Heaven in Beijing and a lavish state banquet.

The White House has said it is of "tremendous symbolic significance", and promised that Trump will "deliver more good deals" for Americans.

US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent will set up the visit during talks with Chinese Vice-Premier He Lifeng in Seoul tomorrow.

Bessent and He have been the chief negotiators for the US and China on all trade and economic issues.

Those talks are likely to put the finishing touches on any announcements that will be made during the leaders' summit.

Bessent will arrive in Seoul after meeting Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi in Tokyo today.

Takaichi's comments in November on Taiwan triggered an ongoing diplomatic row with Beijing.

"Economic security is national security, and I look forward to a productive series of engagements as we work to advance President Trump's America First Economic Agenda," Bessent said as he announced both stops on social media.

Trump and Xi last met face-to-face in October on the sidelines of a regional summit in South Korea.

They agreed then to a one-year truce in a blistering trade war that saw tariffs on many goods exceed 100%.



Police officers guard a checkpoint at the entrance to Tiananmen Square, ahead of this week's US President Donald Trump's visit to China, in Beijing, yesterday. (Reuters)

The Middle East war is expected to dominate the agenda this time.

China is one of Iran's biggest trading partners, with Tehran's foreign minister visiting Beijing last week.

Foreign Minister Wang Yi told his Iranian counterpart that China would play a "greater role" in restoring regional peace.

Trump is expected to push Xi on Beijing's position on the war, according to US officials.

Asked about US pressure yesterday, foreign ministry spokesman Guo said only that China's position on Iran was "consistent" and that Beijing would continue to play a "positive role" in promoting a ceasefire and peace talks.

Adding to the tension, the US State Department sanctioned three China-based satellite firms on Friday for enabling Iran's military operations.

The foreign ministry said yesterday that Beijing "firmly opposes illegal unilateral sanctions".

"China has repeatedly made clear its solemn position. The most urgent task is to do everything to avoid the resumption of conflict, not to use the conflict to... maliciously smear other countries."

The US Treasury Department separately sanctioned several mainland China and Hong Kong-based firms for aiding Iran's weapons supply.

## Taiwan wary of 'surprises' despite strong US ties

Reuters  
Taipei

Taiwan is confident in the stable development of its ties with the US but hopes there are no "surprises" on Taiwan-related issues when US President Donald Trump visits China this week, Foreign Minister Lin Chia-lung said yesterday.

Trump will be in Beijing from Wednesday to Friday for a summit with Chinese President Xi Jinping where the issue of democratically governed Taiwan, which China views as its territory, is certain to come up. China has never renounced the use of force to bring Taiwan under its control, and last month China's foreign minister said Taiwan was the "biggest risk" in China-US relations. Taiwan's government rejects China's sovereignty claims. The US is bound by law to provide Taiwan with the means to defend itself, and US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said last week there needed to be stability

across the Taiwan Strait.

Speaking to reporters at parliament in Taipei, Lin said the government was closely monitoring the upcoming Trump-Xi meeting.

"We have also maintained continuous communication with the US - whether through public statements from the US government or through non-public channels. We are confident in the stable development of Taiwan-US relations," he said.

"The US government has repeatedly expressed that its Taiwan policy will not change," Lin added.

Taking questions from lawmakers later, he said the US was clear on the issues it wanted discussed, like trade and fentanyl, but China kept raising the Taiwan issue.

"Of course we hope that the Trump-Xi summit does not produce any surprises regarding Taiwan-related issues," Lin said.

The US has pushed Taiwan, along with its major allies around the world, to spend more

**"We have also maintained continuous communication with the US - whether through public statements from the US government or through non-public channels. We are confident in the stable development of Taiwan-US relations"**

on their defence. But last week, Taiwan's opposition-controlled parliament passed a smaller special defence budget than the government had requested, and removed clauses for spending on domestically developed systems like surface-to-air missiles and drones. A senior US official said on Sunday that the US was disappointed by parliament approving defence spending short of what Washington believed was needed.

Lin said he hoped parliament could take "remedial" action so that the defence budget could support Taiwan's security policy, as maintaining peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait was a common goal shared by Taiwan

and like-minded nations.

"However, peace depends on strength - it requires demonstrating the defence capability for self-defence in order to deter aggression," he said.

Speaking at a separate event in Taipei, Premier Cho Jung-tai said the government would "certainly take action" to restore the trust of the international community in Taiwan's defence policy.

"Having it fragmented in this way is a serious blow to defence and security," he said.

China has continued its regular military activities around Taiwan in the run-up to Trump's China trip, including holding another "joint combat readiness patrol" last week.

On Saturday, China's defence ministry said such operations were "entirely justified and reasonable".

"Taiwan independence" is the root cause destabilising peace in the Taiwan Strait, and we will absolutely not tolerate or condone it," said ministry spokesperson Jiang Bin.

## Taiwan says it drove away Chinese research vessel

Reuters  
Taipei

Taiwan's coast guard said yesterday that it had disrupted "illegal" operations by a Chinese research ship in waters close to the island and driven it away, part of what Taipei sees as a provocative pattern of China's stepped up maritime activities.

The coast guard said that last Thursday it detected the Chinese ship the "Tongji", which was commissioned only last year, 29 nautical miles southeast of the southern tip of Taiwan though just outside restricted waters.

The ship was observed lowering ropes into the water, suspected to be the deployment of scientific instruments for "illegal" survey operations, and the coast guard sent its own ship in, it said in a statement.

The Taiwanese ship moved in close to create wake interference, and broadcast messages to "forcefully expel the vessel, prohibiting it from conducting related activities".

The "Tongji" then retrieved its survey instruments and altered course, departing from Taiwan's

waters, the coast guard said.

China's Taiwan Affairs Office did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Taiwan's coast guard said it continued to shadow the Chinese ship until yesterday, when it proceeded away from waters close to the island.

"Chinese research vessels, in disregard of international law, have attempted to conduct illegal survey activities in our waters," it said, calling on China to stop such practices.

Chinese state media says the "Tongji" has all-weather operational capability and can carry remotely operated vehicles, laboratories and unmanned systems.

It can be used for marine geology, oceanography, marine chemistry and marine biology research, and is capable of performing offshore engineering operations such as pipeline laying, Chinese media have reported.

As well as regular Chinese military activities around Taiwan, which views the island as its own territory, Taiwan has also complained that China regularly sends ostensibly civilian ships into its waters as part of "grey zone" harassment designed to pressure Taipei and exhaust its forces.

## Former PM Thaksin freed from prison

Reuters  
Bangkok

Thailand's billionaire former premier Thaksin Shinawatra was released from jail on parole and met by cheering crowds yesterday, eight months after a court ordered him to do the prison time he tried to dodge with a prolonged stay in hospital.

The 76-year-old tycoon remade and dominated Thai politics for a quarter-century, but his influence has waned of late following his jailing and his once formidable Pheu Thai Party's worst election performance on record earlier this year.

As he exited Bangkok's Klong Prem prison with hair closely cropped and wearing a loose white shirt, a smiling Thaksin hugged family members, including daughter and protégé, Paetongtarn Shinawatra, who a court sacked as prime minister last August, 10 days before his incarceration.

Hundreds of supporters, many wearing his party's signature red colour, who had gathered to greet him on his release chanted: "We love Thaksin".

Asked by a reporter how he felt, Thaksin raised his hands above his head and said he was "relieved".

"I went to hibernate. I can't remember anything now," he said.

After 15 years in self-exile, Thaksin came back to Thailand in 2023 to serve an eight-year sentence for conflicts of interest and abuse of power while prime minister from 2001-2006, returning on the same day a party ally was elected premier by parliament.

But without spending a single night in prison, he was transferred to the VIP wing of a hospital



Former Thai prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra reacts near his daughter, former Thai prime minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra, following his release on parole after serving eight months of his one-year sentence at Klong Prem Central Prison, in Bangkok, yesterday. (Reuters)

complaining of heart trouble and chest pains. His sentence was later commuted to one year by the king and Thaksin stayed in hospital for six months before being paroled.

The Supreme Court, however, ruled he and his doctors had dragged-out his hospital stay with minor and unnecessary surgeries, and that time be served again in prison.

Throughout his exile and for much of his time back home, the polarising tycoon loomed large over Thailand's tumultuous politics and was the driving force behind successive populist governments led or controlled by the powerful Shinawatra family.

But the removal of Paetongtarn, the sixth premier from or backed by the family to be toppled by courts or coups, was the start of a political reckoning for Thaksin, with the Pheu Thai government collapsing and ally-turned-foe Anutin Charnvirakul installed as premier just

days before Thaksin was jailed.

Thaksin's release could help revive his once dominant Pheu Thai, now a junior party in Anutin's coalition after a crushing electoral defeat in February, said Titipol Phakdeewanich, a political scientist at Ubon Ratchathani University.

"But he has to tread carefully," Titipol added. "He overplayed his hand. If he stays behind the scenes, it would be better. But one has to wonder how long he can stay behind the scenes considering his personality."

Thaksin is required to wear an electronic ankle monitor until his sentence finishes in September.

Supporter Rommanee Nakano, 76, said he should have never been jailed.

"He is a very good person," she said outside the prison. "Whatever he did, he did it for the people. He just wanted the people to be well-fed and have enough to live on."



Pieces of seized ivory are packed away after a press conference at the Central Investigation Bureau (CIB) in Bangkok yesterday. (AFP)

## Thai police arrest 9 in largest ivory seizure in decade

AFP  
Bangkok

Thai police announced the largest seizure of smuggled ivory in a decade yesterday, with nine people arrested and accused of trying to sell 250 kilograms (551 pounds) of African elephant tusks via Facebook.

Thailand is a major transit hub for wildlife smugglers who often sell highly prized endangered animals and animal parts on the lucrative black market in Asia.

The arrests and seizures of ivory, valued at around \$300,000 and smuggled by ship from Africa, occurred across seven provinces in Thailand on Thursday, anti-wildlife trafficking authorities said. "It was the biggest lot we seized in 10 years," Patompong Thongchamroon, from the national police's environmental crime division, told AFP.

An officer discovered a private Facebook group selling smuggled African ivory in Thailand, Patompong said, adding that after months of investigating police had arrested nine Thais who were group administrators tasked with posting the ivory for sale.

The group were charged with illegal possession and trade of protected wildlife parts, which carries a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison, a mn baht (\$30,800) fine, or both, according to a police statement.

The ivory haul included cut pieces and fragments, as well as prayer beads, jewellery and knife handles, police said, adding that the target buyers were Thai and Vietnamese.

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, or CITES, has officially banned the international trade of elephant ivory since 1990.

## Under-threat Starmer vows to prove 'doubters' wrong

AFP  
London

Embattled British Prime Minister Keir Starmer came out fighting yesterday, vowing to prove his "doubters" wrong as he sought to quell growing calls to step down following disastrous election results.

Starmer pledged his ruling Labour party would be "better" and bolder as he tried to convince angry and restless lawmakers to back him in a crunch speech designed to reset his flagging premiership.

"I know that people are frustrated by the state of Britain, frustrated by politics, and some people frustrated with me," Starmer said during an address in central London.

"I know I have my doubters, and I know I need to prove them wrong, and I will," added Starmer, who returned Labour to power in 2024 after 14 years of Conservative rule.

The prime minister has failed to spur economic growth as British citizens continue to feel the effects of a years-long cost-of-living pinch, but has been praised for resisting US President Donald Trump over Iran.

Voters issued a damning indictment of Starmer's 22 months in power in local elections Thursday, which saw huge gains for the hard-right Reform UK party and the left-wing populist Greens at Labour's expense.



Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer delivers a speech at a Labour Party event in London, yesterday. (Reuters)

Starmer's party lost control of the devolved Welsh parliament for the first time and failed to make up ground on the pro-independence Scottish National Party (SNP) in the devolved parliament in Edinburgh.

Starmer has signalled that he hopes to stay in power until 2034, but some 48 Labour MPs out of about 400 have said they believe it is time for him to go.

After the speech, Catherine West, who had threatened to trigger a leadership challenge yesterday, said she was instead collecting the names of Labour MPs who want Starmer to set a timetable for the election of a new leader in September.

Starmer pledged to fight any challenge and warned Labour

would "never be forgiven" by voters if it imitated the "chaos" of the previous Conservative government, which went through three prime ministers in four months in 2022.

A leadership contest would likely spark a damaging bout of infighting as MPs from the left and right of the party battled to position their preferred candidate or shore up Starmer.

Under party rules, any challenger would need the support of 81 Labour MPs – 20% of the party in parliament – to trigger a contest.

It has long been rumoured that former deputy prime minister Angela Rayner and Health Minister Wes Streeting could try to oust Starmer, but neither is universally popular within Labour.

Rayner, who has stopped short of calling for Starmer to quit, said in a speech of her own Monday that "what we are doing isn't working, and it needs to change".

Another much-touted possible contender, Andy Burnham, the mayor of Greater Manchester, is currently unable to challenge as he does not have a seat in parliament.

The absence of an obvious successor means Starmer could still hold on, particularly with the next general election not expected until 2029.

In his speech, Starmer acknowledged that "incremental change won't cut it" with an increasingly disgruntled public, promising "a bigger response" in areas such as economic growth, closer European ties and energy.

He pledged to introduce legislation to fully nationalise British Steel and said his government would be defined by putting Britain "at the heart of Europe", including through an "ambitious" youth experience scheme.

Starmer denounced Reform's anti-immigrant leader Nigel Farage as a "chancer" and a "grifter", adding: "If we don't get this right our country will go down a very dark path."

And he took aim at Farage's virulent pro-Brexit campaign, saying he had taken Britain "for a ride".

Starmer is due to lay out more detailed legislative plans in the King's Speech tomorrow.

## Britain sanctions 12 Iran-linked entities

AFP  
London

Britain yesterday slapped sanctions on a dozen Iran-linked individuals and entities accused of involvement in "hostile activities" by Tehran targeting the UK or other countries.

Updating its official sanctions list, the Foreign Office in London imposed the UK travel bans and asset freezes on nine people, two shadow banking exchange houses and the allegedly criminal Zindashti network.

The UK government had already sanctioned its alleged leader, Naji Ibrahim Sharifi-Zindashti, in 2024 alongside the US, labelling him the head of international drug and trafficking cartel.

The European Union sanctioned his network last year, with London, Washington and Brussels all claiming it is connected to Iran's Ministry of Intelligence and Security and accusing it of conducting assassination and kidnapping operations against Tehran's critics.

The latest UK curbs follow a string of attacks over recent months against the Jewish com-

munity in Britain, and repeated warnings from officials that hostile states are intent on using proxies for such purposes.

Zindashti's nephew, Turkish national Ekrem Abdulkerym Oztunc, was among the nine people sanctioned yesterday by Britain.

London also targeted five members of the Zarringalham family – Farhad, Fazlollah, Mansour, Nasser and Pouria – said to have helped finance efforts to "destabilise" the UK.

Mansour, Nasser and Fazlollah Zarringalham were sanctioned by the US last year for their involvement in Iran's "shadow banking" network.

The US Treasury said the trio had "collectively laundered billions of dollars" for Iran through a network of front companies in the United Arab Emirates and Hong Kong.

London also added Berelian Exchange and GCM Exchange, two US-sanctioned Iran-based exchange houses linked to them, to its sanctions list.

Iranians Nihat Abdul Kadir Assan and Reza Hamidivari, and Azerbaijani national Namiq Salifov, were the other three individuals hit with the British travel bans and asset freezes.

# Trump says Iran ceasefire 'on life support', rejects response

Reuters  
Washington/Dubai

President Donald Trump said yesterday that a ceasefire with Iran was "on life support" after he rejected Tehran's response to a US peace proposal, fuelling concerns of a resumption of hostilities in the 10-week-old conflict that has killed thousands and halted vital energy flows.

Days after Washington floated a proposal aimed at reopening negotiations, Iran on Sunday released a response focused on ending the war on all fronts, including Lebanon, where US ally Israel is fighting Iran-backed Hezbollah militants. The response had been swiftly rejected by Trump. Asked where the ceasefire stands, Trump told reporters yesterday.

"I would call it the weakest right now, after reading that piece of garbage they sent us. I didn't even finish reading it," he said.

In its response, Tehran also demanded compensation for war damage, emphasised its sovereignty over the Strait of Hormuz, and called on the US to end its naval blockade, guarantee no further attacks, lift sanctions and remove a ban on Iranian oil sales. The US had proposed an end to fighting before starting talks on more con-

tentious issues, including Iran's nuclear programme.

Tehran defended its stance yesterday.

"Our demand is legitimate: demanding an end to the war, lifting the (US) blockade and piracy, and releasing Iranian assets that have been unjustly frozen in banks due to US pressure," Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmaeil Baghaei said.

"Safe passage through the Strait of Hormuz and establishing security in the region and Lebanon were other demands of Iran, which are considered a generous and responsible offer." Brent crude oil futures traded 2.7% higher at around \$104 a barrel, as the deadlock left the Strait of Hormuz largely closed. Before the war began on February 28, the narrow waterway carried one-fifth of the world's oil and liquefied natural gas, and has since become a central pressure point in the conflict. Disruption caused by the near-closure of the strait has forced oil producers to cut exports, and Opec oil output dropped further in April to the lowest in more than two decades, a Reuters survey showed yesterday.

Traffic through the Strait of Hormuz is at a trickle compared with before the war. Shipping data on Kpler and LSEG showed that three tankers laden with crude ex-

ited the waterway last week, with trackers switched off to avoid Iranian attack. A second Qatari LNG tanker was attempting to transit the strait, the data showed, days after the first such cargo crossed under an arrangement involving Iran and Pakistan.

Sporadic flare-ups around the strait in recent days have tested a ceasefire that has paused all-out warfare since it took effect in early April. In the US, surveys show the war is unpopular with voters facing sharply higher gasoline prices less than six months before nationwide elections that will determine whether Trump's Republican Party retains control of Congress. Washington has also struggled to build international support, with Nato allies refusing to send ships to reopen the waterway without a full peace deal and an internationally mandated mission.

Hakan Fidan, the foreign minister of Turkey, which has been liaising closely with the US, Iran and mediator Pakistan since the start of the war, will hold talks in Qatar today on the conflict and on ensuring navigational safety in the strait, a Turkish diplomatic source said.

The next diplomatic or military steps remain unclear. Trump is expected to arrive in Beijing tomorrow, where Iran is set to be among

the topics discussed with Chinese President Xi Jinping.

Trump has been leaning on China to use its influence to push Tehran toward a deal with Washington.

Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Baghaei suggested China could instead use the visit to push back against US objectives in the Gulf. "Our Chinese friends know very well how to use these opportunities to warn about the consequences of the US' illegal and bullying actions on regional peace and security," he said.

Addressing whether combat operations against Iran were over, Trump said in remarks aired on Sunday: "They are defeated, but that doesn't mean they're done."

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the war was not over because there was "more work to be done" to remove enriched uranium from Iran, dismantle enrichment facilities and address its proxy forces and ballistic missile capabilities. Netanyahu told CBS News' 60 Minutes that the preferred route was diplomacy, but he did not rule out the use of force.

Clashes have also continued in southern Lebanon between Israel and Hezbollah, despite a US-brokered ceasefire announced on April 16.



Venezuela's acting president Delcy Rodriguez speaks with journalists following a session at the International Court of Justice regarding the Essequibo region in the Hague yesterday. (AFP)

## Venezuela rules out becoming 51st US state

AFP  
The Hague

Venezuela has "never" contemplated becoming the 51st US state, as suggested by US President Donald Trump following the capture of deposed leader Nicolas Maduro, the country's acting president said yesterday.

"That would never have been considered, because if there is one thing we Venezuelan men and women have, it is that we love our independence process, we love our heroes and heroines of independence," Delcy Rodriguez told reporters as she left a hearing at the International Court of Justice in The Hague.

Since the United States captured Maduro on January 3, Trump has boasted of controlling the oil-rich Caribbean country, and reportedly told Fox News yesterday that he was "seriously" considering making Venezuela the 51st state.

In a post on his Truth Social network in March, the US leader wrote: "Good things are happening to Venezuela lately! I wonder what this magic is all about? STATEHOOD, #51, ANYONE?"

Asked about the prospect of

US statehood, Rodriguez insisted her government was working with "a diplomatic co-operation agenda" with the United States.

Since taking over from long-time strongman Maduro, Rodriguez has overseen a thawing of relations with Washington while under heavy pressure to meet Trump's demands for access to the country's vast fossil fuel reserves.

Trump has repeatedly praised Rodriguez, who has passed reforms opening Venezuela's mining and oil sectors to foreign companies, notably from the US.

Rodriguez, who served as Maduro's vice-president, has also pushed through an amnesty law that led to the release of hundreds of political prisoners, though some 500 remain behind bars.

The acting leader was in The Hague for a hearing at the United Nations' top court over a centuries-old dispute with Guyana over an oil-rich region, in her first trip outside the Caribbean since assuming power.

In March, Washington and Caracas re-established diplomatic relations broken off by Maduro seven years prior.

The Venezuelan opposition has demanded elections.

## Turkish Airlines plane evacuated after landing gear fire in Nepal

AFP  
Kathmandu

Hundreds of passengers and crew aboard a Turkish Airlines flight to Nepal were safely evacuated yesterday after the plane's landing gear caught fire while arriving at Kathmandu airport, officials said.

The right landing gear of the jet, carrying 277 passengers and 11 crew from Istanbul, caught fire during landing, according to Gyanendra Bhul, a spokesman at Nepal's civil aviation authority.

"Fire was visible during the landing. Investigations are ongoing. All passengers are safe," Bhul told AFP.

Bhul said the incident caused the closure of the airport's only runway for almost two hours in the morning but it has since been reopened.

Turkish Airlines said passengers were evacuated via emergency slides after "smoke was observed coming from the landing gear during taxi".

"A technical inspection of our aircraft has been initiated by our authorised teams," Yahya Ustun, a spokesman for Turkish Airlines, said in a post on social media.

"Initial examinations indicate that the smoke



An Airbus belonging to Turkish Airlines is parked at Tribhuvan International Airport after a minor fire broke out while landing in Kathmandu, yesterday. (Reuters)

was caused by a technical malfunction in a hydraulic pipe."

An additional flight has been scheduled for the return leg of the service.

The Himalayan nation is home to some of the world's most remote and tricky runways, flanked by snow-capped peaks and terrain that poses a challenge even for accomplished pilots.

A string of crashes as well as the European

Union's decision to blacklist all Nepalese airlines prompted government officials last year to announce plans to install new radar and weather monitoring systems.

In 2015, a Turkish Airlines aircraft with 224 passengers skidded off the Kathmandu runway.

The passengers were unhurt but the accident led to a runway closure for four days and saw scores of international flights cancelled.

## Mexico announces new aid shipment to US-blockaded Cuba

Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum said yesterday that her government was sending a new shipment of humanitarian aid to Cuba, where a US oil blockade has created a worsening economic and humanitarian crisis.

"Today a humanitarian aid boat

leaves for Cuba," Sheinbaum said in her daily press conference, stressing that the shipment does not include oil.

"We're orienting ourselves to other humanitarian support," the left-leaning leader added.

US President Donald Trump has

vowed to starve Cuba of oil after the US military ouster of former president Nicolas Maduro of Venezuela in January, formerly the nation's main supplier of the commodity.

The situation has deteriorated since the new measures were

implemented, leading to daily blackouts that last several hours and shortages of supplies in hospitals.

Tourism has also plummeted as many international flights are unable to refuel.

(AFP)

## India, Peru likely to hold talks on free trade pact

India and Peru will probably hold the next round of talks on a proposed free trade pact next month, a senior Peruvian diplomat told Reuters, adding that a deal could be signed by the end of the year.

"In principle, in June we are going to resume the negotiations," Javier Paulinich, Peru's ambassador to India, said. Peru, the world's third-largest producer of copper, is also negotiating a chapter on critical minerals with India, Paulinich said.

India's Ministry of Commerce and Industry did not immediately respond to an e-mailed request for comment.

India's Hindalco Industries was also looking to buy copper from Peru, Paulinich said.

"I think they are trying to negotiate," he said. Hindalco did not immediately respond to a Reuters e-mail seeking comments.

Peru produced about 2.7m metric tonnes of copper in 2024 and attracted \$4.96bn in foreign investment in the sector.

Anticipating a surge in demand and potential supply shortfalls, India, the world's fastest-growing major economy, has urged its mining companies to invest overseas to secure copper supply chains and manage possible disruptions, according to a government policy document published last year. India, the world's second-biggest importer of refined copper, may have to source 91% to 97% of its copper concentrate requirements from overseas by 2047, according to official estimates.

India's copper imports rose 4% to 1.2m metric tonnes in the fiscal year to March 2025. Demand is expected to climb to 3 to 3.3m tonnes by 2030 and 8.9 to 9.8m tonnes by 2047, the government has said. (Reuters)



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**GULF TIMES**

## Iran-US deadlock raises prospect of open conflict, unnerves energy markets

In the latest proposal, Iran said it had demanded the release of its frozen assets and the end of a US blockade of its ports, however, President Donald Trump angrily rejected Tehran's terms for ending the Middle East war. The sharp exchange of messages raised the spectre of a return to open conflict in the Gulf, dashed hopes of a quick negotiated deal to reopen the Strait of Hormuz to commercial shipping and sent oil prices higher.

Trump reacted with fury after Iran responded to the latest US proposed outline for peace talks with a counteroffer he deemed, in a brief social media post, "TOTALLY UNACCEPTABLE".

The impasse unnerved global energy markets, with international benchmark Brent crude prices rising 4.65% to \$99.95 a barrel during early Monday trade in Asia. The US leader did not say what had offended him in Iran's response, but Tehran's foreign ministry said it had called for an end to the US naval blockade and to the war "across the region" implying a halt to Israel's strikes targeting Hezbollah in Lebanon.

Crucially, ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei told reporters, Iran demanded the "release of assets belonging to the Iranian people, which have for years been unjustly trapped in foreign banks".

This would suggest not just a return to the status quo before the United States and Israel launched the war on February 28, but a victory for the Islamic government's long-standing campaign against economic isolation. "We did not demand any concessions. The only thing we demanded was Iran's legitimate rights," Baqaei said.

An end to international sanctions would also diminish Washington's leverage over Tehran as it tries to secure a lasting end to Iran's nuclear enrichment.

**US officials have stressed it would be "unacceptable" for Tehran to control the Strait of Hormuz the export route for a fifth of the world's oil**



The US, Israel and their allies have long accused Iran of seeking an atomic bomb, an accusation Tehran has repeatedly denied. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu insisted the conflict would not end until Iran's nuclear facilities are destroyed. "It's not over, because there's still nuclear material enriched uranium that has to be taken out of Iran," he told US broadcaster CBS's '60 Minutes'. "There's still enrichment sites that have to be dismantled," he said.

The *Wall Street Journal*, citing people familiar with the matter, said Iran's counter-proposal had included the possibility of diluting some of its highly enriched uranium, with the rest transferred to a third country. Iran had sought guarantees that the transferred uranium would be returned if negotiations failed or Washington abandoned the agreement, sources told the 'Journal'.

Trump is expected to press China's President Xi Jinping a major buyer of Iranian oil on the Iran issue when he visits Beijing on Thursday, according to a senior US official. The lack of a path to a resolution has focused concern on the Strait of Hormuz, where Iran is restricting maritime traffic and setting up a payment mechanism to charge tolls for crossing ships.

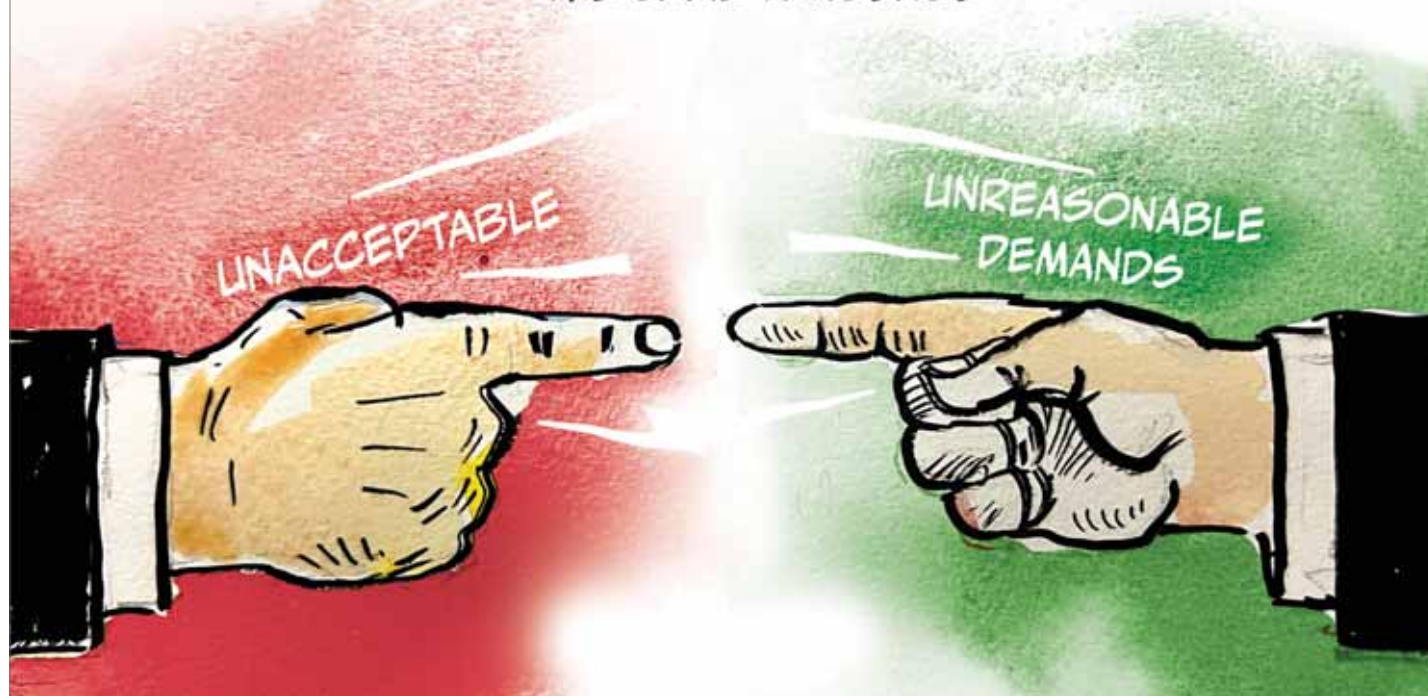
US officials have stressed it would be "unacceptable" for Tehran to control the international waterway the export route for a fifth of the world's oil. The US Navy is also blockading Iran's ports, at times disabling or diverting ships heading to and from them.

As diplomatic momentum appeared to dwindle, fresh drone attacks in the Gulf on Sunday rattled the ceasefire. The United Arab Emirates said its air defences intercepted a drone attack launched from Iran, while Kuwait reported "hostile drones" in its airspace. Qatar's defence ministry also said a freighter arriving in its waters from Abu Dhabi was hit by a drone. In a social media post on Sunday, the spokesman for the Iranian parliament's national security commission warned Washington: "Our restraint is over as of today."

"Any attack on our vessels will trigger a strong and decisive Iranian response against American ships and bases," Ebrahim Rezaei said. — AFP



## HISTORIC PROGRESS BOTH SIDES NOW SPEAKING THE SAME LANGUAGE



## Volatility, not high prices, will define Big Oil's next chapter, says analyst

By Ron Bousso  
London

Oil majors are bracing for prolonged turbulence in energy markets, which should curb any temptation to ramp up spending after the Iran war. The biggest fear now is not missing the next rally, but being on the wrong side of the inevitable retreat.

The Middle East conflict and the near-airtight closure of the Strait of Hormuz since February 28 have triggered an unprecedented oil and gas supply crunch, pushing crude prices above \$100 a barrel and sparking a global search for alternative supplies. Even if a US-Iran peace deal is reached soon, the damage is done.

The loss of more than 13% of global oil supply and roughly a fifth of LNG flows, combined with the extensive damage to energy infrastructure across the Gulf, will likely have long-lasting consequences that put a floor under prices for years. On the face of it, this should be the ideal backdrop for energy majors such as BP, Chevron, Exxon Mobil, Shell and TotalEnergies to ramp up spending, expand production, and capture market share.

All five beat first-quarter earnings expectations. Yet the industry's response has been strikingly restrained thus far. None of the majors has raised spending plans for 2026 or beyond. "You will see capital and cost discipline no matter what," Chevron CEO Mike Wirth told analysts on May 1. That caution reflects a structural shift in boardroom priorities.

After years of aggressive expansion from the early 2000s led to about \$200bn of impairments over the past decade, the industry has pivoted towards capital discipline and prioritising shareholder returns. Investors who once rewarded growth now demand high cash flow.

One might argue that today's restraint also highlights the mismatch between a short-term

**The Middle East conflict has triggered an unprecedented oil and gas supply crunch, sparking a global search for alternative supplies. Even if a US-Iran peace deal is reached soon, the damage is done**



A South Korean cargo ship in the Strait of Hormuz was struck by unidentified aircraft six days ago, the foreign ministry in Seoul said, days after the fire-damaged HMM Namu arrived in Dubai. (AFP)

supply shock and the lengthy timelines of large-scale oil and gas projects. However, if companies wanted to respond quickly, bringing barrels to market faster and at lower risk, they would have options. These include tapping into US shale projects, which operate on a shorter cycle, or connecting reservoirs close to existing offshore infrastructure. Even here, however, restraint prevails. Chevron and Exxon have resisted pressure from US President Donald Trump's administration to boost output in response to the Middle East crisis, underscoring how deeply embedded capital discipline has become.

**INTO THE UNKNOWN**

Underlying that caution is deep uncertainty over future prices. Benchmark Brent has swung violently since the start of the war, surging more than 60% to a peak of \$118 a barrel in late March before slipping back towards \$100. Daily moves of 5% or more, which historically have been relatively rare, have occurred on 16 of the 50 trading days since the conflict began.

Yet further along the curve, the

signal is far calmer. The January 2030 Brent contract trades around \$73 a barrel, only modestly above the \$67 level seen on February 27. While futures contracts should not be confused with forecasts, this muted long-term price move sends a mixed signal.

If supply losses are structural and geopolitical risk has permanently risen, why are long-term prices barely moving? One explanation is that investors are still pricing in a relatively swift normalisation. But that looks increasingly optimistic. Nearly one billion barrels of Middle Eastern supply have already been lost, global inventories are being rapidly drawn down, and even a full reopening of Hormuz would not quickly restore output.

Rebuilding damaged infrastructure and spare capacity is likely to be a slow, uneven process. At the same time, structural uncertainty is rising on both sides of the supply/demand equation. Demand continues to grow despite expectations of an energy transition-driven plateau, while supply has become more concentrated, more exposed to geopolitical risk, and less cushioned by spare capacity.

The result is a market that is not just tight, but brittle. In that environment, price volatility itself becomes the dominant risk. "We produce a commodity that, if you look at over the last six years, has had pretty extreme price volatility. So we need to make sure that the decisions we're making on the portfolio and the business allow us to be profitable through the cycle," BP CEO Meg O'Neill told analysts on April 28.

The industry has spent years preparing for exactly this type of scenario. Costs have been cut aggressively, portfolios streamlined, and break-even levels reduced. According to RBC Capital Markets, the five largest Western majors can now sustain dividends at oil prices below \$60 a barrel. That resilience removes the urgency to chase short-term price spikes.

**VOLATILITY AHEAD**

Oil majors' investment decisions have long served as a bellwether for how the industry views the future. Today, that signal is unambiguous. To be sure, spending is still expected to rise between 2026 and 2030, but that was the case before the war, driven by concerns that supply growth would struggle to keep pace with demand after years of underinvestment.

But recent events have done nothing to ramp up these plans. If anything, they have reinforced a more conservative mindset. Rather than betting on a prolonged price boom, companies are positioning for a world defined by sharper swings, recurring disruptions, and persistent uncertainty.

The restraint on display suggests volatility, not scarcity, will define the next phase of energy markets. — Reuters

• The opinions expressed here are those of Ron Bousso, a columnist for Reuters.



A cargo ship unloads imported crude oil at the Qingdao crude oil terminal in China's eastern Shandong province. (AFP)

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# Eyeing migrant returns, EU moves to bolster Syria ties

AFP  
Brussels

The European Union yesterday revived its co-operation agreement with Syria as it looks to bolster the war-ravaged country, with an eye on prospects for Syrian migrants in Europe to one day return home.

Meeting in Brussels, EU foreign ministers agreed to fully reinstate the bloc's co-operation agreement with Syria ahead of talks with its top diplomat Asaad al-Shaibani.

Coming 18 months after the ouster of strongman leader Bashar al-Assad, the move "sends a clear political signal of the EU's commitment to re-engage with Syria and support its economic recovery," an EU statement said.

Trade provisions of the deal were suspended in 2011 when Assad ruthlessly cracked down on protests at the start of civil war in Syria.

The 27-nation bloc has launched a new chapter with Syria since Assad's fall, with EU chief Ursula von der Leyen telling President Ahmed al-Sharaa in January that Europe would "do everything it can" to support the country's recovery.

Arriving in Brussels, al-Shaibani called for bold action by the bloc. "What is required today is a political will, a readiness to move from caution to full participation into the reconstruction of Syria," he told reporters.

More than a decade of conflict sent millions of Syrians fleeing abroad, and an EU official warned ahead of yesterday's talks that "the reality on the ground is still appalling".

Around 13 mn Syrians – nearly half the population – depend on food assistance, the official said.

The EU has already pledged 620 mn euros (\$730mn) in aid for the 2026-2027 period. Syria-EU



European Commission Vice-President and High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Kaja Kallas and European Commissioner for the Mediterranean Dubravka Suica with Syrian Foreign Minister Asaad Hassan al-Shaibani, in Brussels yesterday. (Reuters)

trade peaked at more than seven bn euros (\$9.1bn at the 2010 exchange rate) in 2010.

By 2023, EU imports from the country had dwindled to 103mn euros, while European exports to Syria stood at 265 mn euros.

Looking ahead, the EU wants a more ambitious association agreement, similar to those struck with countries such as Egypt, Israel and Lebanon – but EU commissioner Dubravka Suica cautioned that it would depend on "key reforms" by the transitional government.

Conditions included "making sure all Syrians contribute to decisions on the future of the country", ensuring transparency in economic governance and a "solid commitment to the rule of law and transitional justice", Suica said.

"These are crucial steps towards trust. They are essential reforms to build long-term resili-

ence and prosperity," she added.

In the meantime, the EU said it would "continue exploring" ways to facilitate access to financing for Syrians – crucial to revive the economy – and announced 14 mn euros to rehabilitate a major hospital in the western Homs region. Syria's stability also interests many EU countries because its nationals have made up the lion's share of asylum-seekers in the bloc over a decade – and there is a push for large numbers to eventually return home.

An EU official said the focus was "working on stability, on Syria's economic recovery – because that really is the path for people to be able to go home in sustainable conditions."

The EU's largest Syrian diaspora – at more than 1 mn – is in Germany, where Chancellor Friedrich Merz has embraced tougher migration policies as he seeks to counter the far right. Merz trig-

gered a backlash by declaring during a visit by Sharaa that he hoped 80 % of Syrian refugees would return home within three years – later clarifying this was a figure put forward by Sharaa himself.

Danish authorities have likewise been outspoken in pushing for Syrians to go home.

"We are not pushing anyone" to return, Suica told reporters.

"If it's safe, if it's voluntary, and if it's dignified, they can go home," she said, adding that with regards to conditions on the ground, she could not "speak on behalf of the Syrian government".

Pressed on the matter, al-Shaibani said only that "if Syrians living abroad consider that the conditions are in place for them to return, then they will be able to return".

"We don't want this to turn into a burden for the European countries," he said.



A construction site is seen near Hungary's Paks nuclear power plant in Paks. (Reuters/File Photo)

## Hungary to review Paks nuclear plant expansion

Hungary will review the financing and implementation of the Paks nuclear power plant expansion project, the nominee for economy and energy affairs minister said yesterday, as the new government laid out its strategy after winning election.

The 12.5-billion-euro (\$14.7 bn) project to expand the 2-gigawatt Paks nuclear power plant with two Russian-made VVER reactors was awarded in 2014 without a tender to Russia's state nuclear Corp Rosatom, and has been delayed by years. Political observers often cited the project as a prime example of the close ties between Budapest and Moscow under former prime minister Viktor Orban, which the incoming government has vowed to change as part of a push to mend relations with the EU.

"We need a transparent nuclear strategy," Istvan Kapitany told a parliamentary hearing. "We have to review the financing and costs of Paks 2 (expansion project) and its implementation conditions. These are classified contracts, which we have not yet seen, we need to examine them," he said.

Centre-right leader Peter Magyar, who was sworn in as prime minister on Saturday, said last month that the cost of the project was over-inflated. Rosatom said it was ready to explain the price tag.

"Numbers are a rational thing. We can easily explain and justify them if the Hungarian customer needs it," Alexei Likhachev, director of Rosatom said in a statement.

"Ultimately, the Hungarian leadership and I have the same

goal – to implement an important project for the Hungarian economy... as quickly as possible, as efficiently as possible and at the best price." Kapitany said that nuclear power would continue to play an important role in Hungary. He also vowed to fight corruption.

The nominee for foreign minister Anita Orban told a separate committee that Hungary wanted to have an equal and transparent relationship with Russia.

"Russia will remain a partner but the relationship cannot be based on a one-sided dependency," she said. "In the current geopolitical situation it is clear that Russia's policies are posing a security challenge to Hungary and Europe."

She said her first task would be to rebuild trust in Hungary which was eroded under the previous government.

Under Orban, Hungary was in almost constant conflict with the EU over issues ranging from the rule of law to minority rights. Budapest's continued close ties to Moscow despite Russia's war in Ukraine combined with its decision to block funds for Kyiv strained relations even further.

"Laws need to be passed that will ensure that Hungary's judiciary is independent, that public tenders are transparent, that corruption can be fought, wealth declarations can be checked and the use of European Union funds can be tracked," Orban said.

She stressed that Hungary would not send soldiers or weapons to Ukraine. (Reuters)

## Pak summons Afghan diplomat after suicide attack in Bannu

## EU agrees to sanctions on Israeli settlers

AFP  
Brussels

Pakistan summoned the top Afghan diplomat in the country yesterday after concluding that a deadly suicide attack at the weekend was "masterminded by terrorists residing in Afghanistan", the foreign ministry said. A suicide attacker detonated a car bomb at a checkpoint in Pakistan's northwest and militants opened fire on police on Saturday, killing at least 15 people.

A senior administrative official in Bannu – the border area where the attack took place – said that "the militants used quadcopters along with heavy weaponry" and that more than 100 militants took part in the attack. Bannu has been gripped in recent years by militant activity. Afghanistan's Taliban government has repeatedly denied Pakistan's accusations that its territory was a safe harbour for militants. (AFP)

European Union foreign ministers yesterday agreed new sanctions on Israeli settlers over violence against Palestinians, as a change of government in Hungary ended months of blockage.

"It was high time we move from deadlock to delivery," EU top diplomat Kaja Kallas said in announcing the green light. "Extremisms and violence carry consequences."

French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot said the EU was "sanctioning the main Israeli organisations guilty of supporting the extremist and violent colonisation of the West Bank, as well as their leaders". "These most serious and intolerable acts must cease without delay," he wrote on social media.

The move in response to rising violence and settlement expansion in the Israeli-occupied West Bank had been stalled by Hungary's former prime minister Viktor Orban.

But the ouster of the nationalist

leader and Israel ally by Peter Magyar now appears to have paved the way for the veto to be lifted.

EU officials said seven settlers or settler organisations would be blacklisted. The bloc also agreed to sanction representatives from the Palestinian group Hamas.

Israel condemned the new sanctions, asserting that Jews have the right to settle in the occupied West Bank. "The European Union has chosen, in an arbitrary and political manner, to impose sanctions on Israeli citizens and entities because of their political views and without any basis," Foreign Minister Gideon Saar posted on X.

The occupied West Bank has been gripped by almost daily violence involving Israeli troops and settlers since the start of the Gaza war in October 2023.

There has been a surge in deadly West Bank attacks by Israeli settlers since the start of the Iran war on February 28, Palestinian officials and the United Nations have said.

While the EU is moving ahead

with the sanctions on Israeli settlers, there remains no consensus yet among member states to take further steps against Israel such as curbing trade ties.

Foreign ministers meeting in Brussels discussed calls to ban products from Israeli settlements in the West Bank.

Italy's Antonio Tajani said that the EU's executive would now make a proposal on the move and then the bloc would see if it had enough backing from member states.

"This is an issue that has been discussed, but no decision has been taken, pending the proposals that will come," he said.

Excluding east Jerusalem, more than 500,000 Israelis live in the occupied West Bank in settlements that are illegal under international law, among some three million Palestinians.

In 2025, the expansion of Israeli settlements reached its highest level since at least 2017, when the United Nations began tracking data, according to a UN report.

## German minister calls Putin's talk of ending war a 'deception'

AFP  
Kyiv

Germany's defence minister said yesterday he suspected Russian President Vladimir Putin's remarks about the Ukraine war winding down were "just another deception".

Putin surprised many by suggesting the war was "coming to an end" in a speech on Saturday – and then by saying that his friend, former German chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, would make a good mediator in talks with Europe.

"If he sees the end of this war approaching, couldn't he simply end it himself? Then he would have control over the timing," Boris Pistorius, the German defence minister, said in Kyiv.

"Instead, as always, he (Putin) sets conditions. It's to be feared – and I hope I'm wrong – that this is yet another deception. But it can't be ruled out, and it seems to be part of his hybrid war strategy."

Pistorius charged that Putin has a habit of "playing with a stacked deck" whenever a ceasefire has been discussed in Ukraine. The Russian president, who is facing mounting military losses in Ukraine and meagre territorial gains, "was trying to divert attention from his own weaknesses", he added.

German government spokesman Stefan Kornelius, also speaking on Monday, said that he saw no "substantial progress" towards talks despite Putin's remarks. Russia "knows who its interlocutors are in Europe if it is serious about negotiating", Kornelius said in Berlin in response to questions about Schroeder, a Social Democrat who led Germany from 1998 to 2005.

Schroeder, 82, has long faced heavy criticism in Germany, as elsewhere in Europe, for taking lucrative jobs working for Russian state-owned energy firms after leaving the chancellorship.

He has also cultivated a years-long close personal relationship with Putin.

# Hungary's race to access EU's 10.4bn euros is ambitious but possible

Reuters  
Brussels

Hungary is racing to meet an August 31 deadline to become eligible for 10.4bn euros (\$12.2bn) from the European Union's post-pandemic recovery fund and while the task is ambitious, it is still achievable, three EU officials said. Hungary's share of the EU recovery fund money – 6.5bn euros in grants and 3.9bn euros in cheap loans – was frozen by the EU because of Hungary's rule of law problems under the previous government of Viktor Orban.

Hungary also has some 7 bn euros in EU structural funds frozen for the same reason, but has several years to access this cash, so getting the recovery money has priority. The country's new Prime Minister Peter Magyar, sworn in on Saturday, and his team have been in talks with the European Commission on how to access the frozen funds since Magyar's party overwhelmingly won elections on April 12.

"Meeting the requirements for all the 10.4 bn euros before the end

of August is ambitious, but not impossible," one EU official close to the issue said.

To get the money, which would help Hungary's sagging economy and prop up the forint, Budapest will have to present to the Commission a new plan of how it wants to spend it, in line with the recovery fund's goals of making the economy greener, more digital and more resilient to shocks.

The old plan, submitted by Orban's government at the end of 2022, is no longer viable because all the timelines have changed and investment will have to be refocused with new priorities, officials said.

The new plan, which Budapest is likely to submit on May 27, after talks between Magyar and Commission head Ursula von der Leyen planned for the previous two days, will have new milestones and targets that Budapest will have to meet before August 31.

Once the targets are met, Hungary can ask for the cash linked to them and it can be paid out until December 31, 2026.

The task is ambitious because even though Magyar's party has



People attend Hungary's incoming Prime Minister Peter Magyar's swearing-in ceremony outside the Hungarian parliament in Budapest on Saturday. (AFP)

a constitutional majority that allows it to push through any law it wants, some laws require procedural steps, such as consultations, and time to process.

Since Hungary is not the only country that faces problems with

spending the large amounts of EU recovery funds, the Commission issued tips last June to all governments on how to avoid losing the cash and Budapest is likely to use all these options to secure the biggest possible payout, officials said.

The main advice is for EU governments to refocus the spending plans away from projects that are risky, slow or uncertain, and move money to safer options that can legally be completed before the end of August.

Governments can also move the recovery money to projects already under way that have been funded from different sources, like the EU's structural funds, but have the same goals as the Recovery Fund. This would allow governments to take advantage of the advanced stage of the projects to finish them by August. Similarly, countries can split some projects into what can be realistically done by the end of August and finish them later with money from different EU or national sources, the Commission said in the June document.

Governments can also move up to 4% of their recovery fund money to their compartment in the EU-sponsored InvestEU investment programme, and another 6% to their part of an EU scheme that supports the development of strategic technologies. They can similarly contribute to EU-level defence or satellite programmes.

Finally governments can put their recovery money into national promotional banks that finance the same goals as the recovery fund – an option used by Poland, which was also late to access the recovery fund, also for rule of law reasons.

# VCUarts Qatar presents the 2026 graduation showcase

What is an astrolabe? Can karak tea reveal a deeper tale of cultural connection? How has digital media affected how we remember? These were among the questions explored by senior students at Virginia Commonwealth University School of the Arts in Qatar (VCUarts Qatar) and presented online for the VCUarts Qatar 2026 Graduation Showcase, marking the culmination of their journey from foundational coursework to creative and critical execution.

Now live online, the exhibition features work by students from five programmes at VCUarts Qatar: Art History (ARTH), Graphic Design (GDES), Interior Design (IDES), Painting and Printmaking (PAPR), and Master of Fine Arts in Design (MEA).

GDES student Khawla al-Essa's *The Astrolabe: Taker of the Stars* offers readers an immersive learning experience through a printed artist book. Using handcrafted production and sequential illustration, al-Essa examines the astronomical instrument's cultural development, anatomy, and functions.

"The more I researched, the more I understood how and why astrolabes gradually fell out of use. Reflecting on that, the key goal of my thesis is to reintroduce the astrolabe, presenting its functionality in an accessible and engaging way that fits contemporary audiences," she explained.

To realise her vision, al-Essa applied techniques from courses such as Kitchen Comics, which taught sequential art and storytelling, and Book Arts, which introduced her to bookbinding and paper engineering.

Following graduation, al-Essa plans to pursue her passion for storytelling, and digital art and publication design. At the heart of her

passions, she's keen to explore community-oriented opportunities.

Of her experience at VCUarts Qatar, she said: "Over the past four years, I have worked closely with local institutions. These experiences built my confidence and practical skills and allowed me to grow as a designer and artist."

Another project by ARTH student Nourhane Tarroun, titled *Karak Routes*, also looks back in time to find meaning in Qatar's most popular drink. Her research traces the popular beverage's origins to Indian Ocean spice trade routes and 20th-century South Asian migration to the Gulf. She uses small takeaway cups collected across Qatar to show how daily objects move through time, and ultimately through history, and the stories they carry.

"Karak tea is everywhere in Doha, yet I had never really questioned how it got here or why it's so popular. Looking at it through an art history lens allowed me to trace the connections between past and present that are all around us in everyday life," she added.

Tarroun's coursework helped her perceive objects not as "isolated" items, but as part of larger narratives.

"What feels local is actually shaped by movement and exchange. This project makes those connections visible and shows how everyday practices can hold layered, global histories," she said.

In her project, Afkarna (Our Ideas), IDEs student Reema al-Mohannadi reimagined space as a cohesive hub for collaboration, production, and exchange that supports emerging designers navigating uncertainty.

"As a graduating design student, there's always uncertainty surrounding what you're going to do



Khawla al-Essa



Reema al-Mohannadi



Alice Mohammed Aslem



Nourhane Tarroun



Tarishah Fadilah

after graduation – especially now with the threat that AI has posed to the design industry in general. That shift from a structured academic environment into a professional world that feels much less accessible," she said.

In response to that gap, she adopted vernacular door geometries to design Afkarna as a network of pathways and used thresholds to symbolise a bridge, creating continuity between education and professional practice.

"The project is designed as a transitional space, not just physically, but conceptually, where emerging designers can continue to grow, experiment, and connect. Afkarna becomes that threshold – a space that doesn't mark an end, but rather supports the beginning of a professional journey no matter what challenges we may face," she explained.

Al-Mohannadi said that her VCUarts Qatar education emphasised refinement and iteration, helping her rethink how individual spaces connect and support one another.

"Instead of designing separate functions, I started to see the project as a network of interactions, where making, exhibiting, learning, and socialising are all interconnected."

As the students prepare for what

comes next amid challenging times, themes of mental health and emotional well-being also inspired one of the senior projects.

In Sparklers, PAPR student Tarishah Ramanda Fadilah uses a series of illustrations and frame-by-frame animations of sparks to symbolise feelings of anxiety and numbness.

"While I was experiencing these emotions, I couldn't exactly pinpoint what I was truly feeling at that time," she said about how the idea presented itself.

"I first sketched out the feelings. Like sparklers, they are small bursts, inconsistent in intensity," she said. "But although they are small, they linger for a long time. They may even seem insignificant on their own, but they can build up and become suffocating and overwhelming."

Fadilah drew on her own culture to bring the idea alive. She said: "The sparklers also represent the contrast between danger and joy, especially in childhood. In Indonesia, many children grow up playing with sparklers and fireworks, finding happiness in them despite the risks. That same contradiction is reflected here: even when these sparks feel dangerous, there's still joy in those moments."

Asked what she hoped viewers

would take away from her work, Fadilah said she wanted to shed light on these emotions that are often invalidated as insignificant.

"I know that a lot of people experience anxiety and numbness. To those people, I want my work to be able to relate to them, to make them feel seen, and hopefully convey to them that these emotions, like sparklers, may be intense, but they don't last forever. It is possible to find joy within these negative emotions."

Moving from emotional insight to digital memory, MFA student Alice Mohammed Aslem's, *Between the Veins*, emerged from what she describes as a "simple yet unsettling moment" while scrolling through her son's photos on her phone.

"When I accidentally zoomed out, all these pictures, literally hundreds of them, collapsed into a dense grid where I could no longer distinguish his face or the moments I had carefully documented. I began to question whether documenting everything actually weakens our ability to remember meaningfully," she explained.

This reflection led Aslem to create a physical connection to these digital moments. She used weaving to transfer images onto screw pine and

palm leaves, drawing on childhood memories in India and paying homage to Qatar, where she was born and raised.

"Bringing these two materials together became a way of holding both parts of my life in one piece. It's also about my son. It reflects my identity to him. A way for him to understand where I come from, and in some way, understand his own roots through that," she said.

Aslem hopes her work can start a conversation about digital and physical memory and encourage people to question how they are documenting their lives: "Are we actually remembering these moments, or just collecting them?" she reflected. "I hope that my work inspires people to question how we think about memory."

Collectively, the projects reflect how the students' combined technical skill, thoughtful introspection and curiosity address timely themes through research, art, and design. The 2026 VCUarts Graduation Showcase, featuring the work of 67 VCUarts Qatar graduates, is now available to view at [portfolio.qatar.vcu.edu](http://portfolio.qatar.vcu.edu)

## #IAS\_NUQ Global Undergraduate Fellowship 2026 fellows announced

Fifteen undergraduate student researchers from Northwestern University in Qatar have been selected to join the Institute for Advanced Study in the Global South (#IAS\_NUQ) as part of the 2026 cohort of its flagship Global Undergraduate Fellowship programme. The year-long fellowship is designed to cultivate advanced, independent scholarship focused on the Global South. Throughout the programme, fellows receive intensive mentorship from faculty and #IAS\_NUQ staff, participate in specialised training and workshops, and engage in #IAS\_NUQ programmes and events while developing original research projects on topics of their choosing. The fellowship supports a wide range of outputs, including academic research papers, creative multimodal projects, and short documentaries. Their final projects will be published by #IAS\_NUQ\_Press and showcased to the Northwestern Qatar and Education City community at the annual #IAS\_NUQ Global Undergraduate Fellow Presentations held each year at the end of January.

"Year after year, the Global Undergraduate Fellowship continues to offer our students the opportunity to advance new or ongoing research and creative projects to develop them into an original contribution to evidence-based storytelling and hence to knowledge," said Marwan M Kraidy, dean and CEO of Northwestern Qatar.

"What stands out is the scholarly excellence of each cohort and the collaborative spirit that defines the fellowship: students working closely with faculty, mentors, and communities to ask difficult questions and produce work that matters. We continue to see graduates carry this experience forward into research, creative practice, and public engagement across the region and beyond," Kraidy also said.

The 2026 cohort was selected through a highly competitive application process. In close collaboration with faculty mentors,

### 2026 #IAS\_NUQ Global Undergraduate Fellows



fellows will examine complex political, cultural, and social dynamics across the Middle East, Africa, and Central, South, and Southeast Asia.

This year's projects address a wide range of critical themes, including digital protest cultures in Nepal, the relationship between church and state in Armenia, the effects of political incarceration on families in the West Bank, the preservation of minority languages and identities across Mongolia, China, and Kazakhstan, and a sound-driven documentary in Qatar that examines Islamic life through sensory and sonic practices. Several projects in the 2026 cohort are rooted in deeply personal, place-based inquiries that combine lived experience with rigorous research. Third-year journalism student Alexandr Khalatyan is developing an interactive website that examines the mediated memory of Artsakh following the forced displacement of its population.

Drawing on his firsthand experience, the project explores how collective memory is shaped in the aftermath of territorial rupture.

"Witnessing the exodus myself, I can't help but wonder how this major rupture will affect the memory of a suddenly lost country, particularly through various media practices," said Khalatyan.

Another fellow selected for the fellowship is Nomin Erdenetsogt, who is producing a video-based project that explores Mongolian script and language politics across the Mongolia-Inner Mongolia border.

"I grew up going back and forth between Mongolia and Inner Mongolia, and from a young age, I noticed how a shared language and culture can take on very different meanings once borders intervene. As someone who practiced Mongolian script calligraphy, I've always felt closely connected to the script," Erdenetsogt said. Erdenetsogt added: "Seeing it ineffectively

revived in Mongolia while being restricted in Inner Mongolia made me want to understand what it means to the people who live with these realities every day."

"Through this project, I want to introduce audiences to this 800-year-old script while bringing together voices from both sides of the border to reflect on identity, memory, and what it means to fight for a language."

Third-year student Tayama Rai is pursuing a research paper analysing the role of instant messaging and VoIP social platform Discord in Nepal's 2025 Gen Z protest movement. Her project investigates how a platform commonly associated with gaming became a key space for political deliberation, consensus-building, and youth-led mobilisation.

"This project began when I realised that young people in Nepal were debating the country's political future on Discord, a platform widely known as a gaming space, during the 2025 Gen Z protest. Long excluded from formal politics, Nepali Gen Z used this space to deliberate, build consensus, and influence real political outcomes. "My research looks at what this moment reveals about youth agency and digital activism in the Global South, all while connecting lived experience to broader questions about digital politics," said Rai.

The projects developed by the 2026 cohort speak to the Institute's commitment to evidence-based storytelling that is multilingual, multimodal, and grounded in place. By supporting research that spans languages, formats, and geographies, the Global Undergraduate Fellowship programme positions undergraduate scholars as critical producers of knowledge at the intersection of research, media, and public engagement.

"The Global Undergraduate Fellowship is a central pillar of knowledge production at #IAS\_NUQ. With projects that include research papers on meme cultures in Kazakhstan, Amharic epistemologies,

multimodal projects on humour in contemporary Lebanon, literary cultures in colonial Vietnam, or documentary films on a forgotten nuclear city in Kazakhstan, a radio station in East Timor, or Arabic education in Northwest China, to name just a few, the 2026 cohort, our fifth cohort, demonstrates the breadth, depth, and multiplicity of forms evidence-based storytelling from the Global South can take. We look forward to working with the new fellows and their faculty mentors over the next year," said Clovis Bergere, director of #IAS\_NUQ.

The following are the 2026 #IAS\_NUQ Global Undergraduate Fellows and their research topics: Alexandr Khalatyan, *Memory of Artsakh*; Aruzhan Muratbek, "It's Just a Meme"; Digital Humor as Soft Political Critique in Kazakhstan; Bayan Kobenova, *Umytylgan Qala: A Journey Through Semye*; Falasteen Mansour, *Stolen Time and Family Ties: How Political Imprisonment Affects West Bank Society*; Julia Nasser, *Laughter as Practice: Humor and Coping in Lebanon*; Lilit Hovsepian, *Between Faith and Power: The Armenian Church, the State, and Public Trust*; Linh Tran, *Writings on Vietnamese Freedom under French Colonial Rule: Class and Ideology*; Maryam Kafoud, *Hayya Alal Falah*; Mensur Feleke – *The Amharic Epistemology*; Nomin Erdenetsogt, *Surviving in Script: Voices of Mongolian Language, Identity, and Culture Across Borders*; Shugyula Karshygyakzy, *Foreign Yet Fluent: Oral Histories of Kazakh Returnees in a Russian-Dominated Homeland*; Symbat Tussupbekova, *The Glass Button: A Visual Oral History of Religion and Repression in Soviet Kazakhstan*; Tayama Rai, *Chat, Poll, Revolt: The Role of Discord in Nepal's 2025 Gen Z Protest*; Thales de Albuquerque Lima, *A Distant Echo of Portuguese: Timorese Journalists Educate a Nation*; and Yui Huang, *Reciting, Remembering: Elderly Hui Women Pursuing Arabism in Northwest China*.

## 2 Qatari GU-Q graduates leave mark on global stage

Two Qatari graduates of Georgetown University in Qatar (GU-Q) are closing their undergraduate years with records that span international forums, bilingual literary publishing, and high-profile diplomatic moderation, reflecting the university's growing influence on Qatari student development.

Noor Mohamed al-Thani, who majored in Culture and Politics with an Arabic minor and a Certificate in Culture, Media and Politics, co-founded *Aswatna*, the campus's first bilingual Arabic-English literary anthology, during her four years at GU-Q.

Al-Thani also led the Al Liwan Qatari Society as president, launching community mentorship and storytelling initiatives, and served on the Student Government Association. She graduated cum laude and earned membership in two honour societies, alongside receiving the Qatar Foundation Excellence Award.

Her undergraduate research pushed back against Western anthropological frameworks, and her capstone analysed documentary film as an alternative form of diplomatic infrastructure.

She also represented Qatar internationally, serving as a Qatar Youth Delegate and QatarDebate Head Envoy, with engagements in New York, Geneva, and Davos.

Internships at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Qatar Fund for Development, Mathaf, and BCG further shaped her professional profile.

Reflecting on her identity and academic formation, al-Thani said: "I am Qatari, and that is not something latent in me – it actively shapes how I think."

She noted that each leadership role demanded a clear sense of self. "Each of these roles asked something different of me, but they all required the same thing at their core: knowing what you stand for and being able to articulate it clearly in rooms that are not always built for your voice," she stated.

On choosing GU-Q over studying abroad, al-Thani noted: "Being close to my family while pursuing a rigorous education felt important – not as a compromise but as a choice I was proud to make."

Her message to prospective students was direct. "Find your voice. Don't let your own story be crowded out by the tales of others tell," she stated.

The second Qatari graduate highlighted by the university, Moza al-Hajri, majored in International Economics with minors in Arabic and History, graduating magna cum laude and earning membership in Phi Beta Kappa, Alpha Sigma Nu, and the History

and Economics honour societies.

Al-Hajri moderated high-profile events including a session at the Doha Forum and the World Innovation Summit for Education, and hosted a dialogue with the President of the World Bank, the Former President of Lithuania, and UN General Assembly President Annalena Baerbock during the UN Second World Summit for Social Development.

That last event drew international attention when participants walked out in protest, yet al-Hajri maintained the integrity of the discussion throughout.

"My responsibility was to hold a common ground where a very difficult conversation could happen without collapsing," she stated.

Beyond moderation, al-Hajri chaired the Georgetown Leadership Ambassadors Society, co-hosted TEDx-GeorgetownUQatar, delivered a TEDinArabic Summit keynote on behalf of Qatar Foundation in both Morocco and Doha, and hosted more than 20 episodes of the *Ajyal Show* podcast with the Doha Film Institute.

She also represented GU-Q at Arabic debate championships, earning Best Speaker at the International University Debating Championship.

Her personal discipline, she noted, was instilled early.



"I was always encouraged by both my parents to put out my best performance in all tasks, big or small. Showing up consistently with care and effort has become a core value," she stated.

Al-Hajri offered a candid perspective on ambition and effort. "Trust that hard work is always rewarded – if not in ways we expect, then in ways we come to understand later," she stated, adding: "I've never regretted pushing beyond what was required or testing my limits."

Established in 2005, GU-Q offers a Bachelor of Science in Foreign Service with majors in International Politics, International Economics, Culture and Politics, and International History, as well as an Executive Master's programme in Diplomacy and International Affairs.