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Cabinet slams tanker attack, approves raft of new laws

By **Tawfik Lamari**
Staff Reporter

The Cabinet yesterday strongly condemned Iranian attacks on Qatari, Saudi, Bahraini and Kuwaiti interests, and warned that it reserves its full rights under international law to protect its assets, as it approved a sweeping package of legislative, judicial, educational and diplomatic measures at its weekly meeting yesterday.

The meeting was chaired by HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani.

In a statement after the meeting, HE the Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Ibrahim bin Ali al-Mohannadi said the Cabinet renewed Qatar's condemnation of the targeting of the Qatari tanker Al Rekayyat as it transited near the Strait of Hormuz.

The government rejected the attack outright, calling it a serious violation of international maritime safety, a threat to global energy security and regional stability, and a breach of international law. It demanded that Iran immediately halt these dangerous practices and affirmed that Qatar reserves its full rights to take any measures it deems appropriate to protect its interests and national assets.

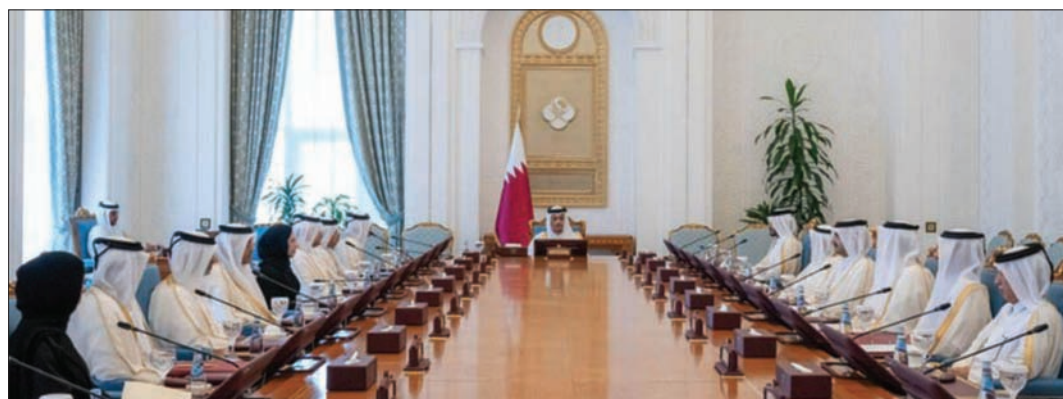
The Cabinet also reiterated its condemnation of the targeting of a Saudi oil tanker in the Strait of Hormuz, describing the incidents as dangerous escalations, and denounced repeated Iranian attacks against Bahrain and Kuwait as flagrant violations of both countries' sovereignty.

Turning to legislation, the Cabinet took note of the Shura Council's approval of a new Traffic bill, part of the Ministry of Interior's strategy to improve traffic movement and road safety in light of infrastructure growth, changing road usage and advances in vehicle technology.

Ministers also noted parliamentary approval of a new state property law, prepared by the Ministry of Municipality, which replaces Law No 10 of 1987. The legislation establishes a unified framework governing public and private state property, aimed at improving the management of government-owned assets, safeguarding public funds, preventing encroachments and linking property administration with Qatar's modern land registration system.

The Cabinet further noted approval of a draft law regulating oversight of fuel stations, prepared by QatarEnergy, which strengthens supervision of stations and defines the obligations of owners and operators on health and safety standards.

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Qatar opens scholarship track for student athletes

By **Ayman Adly**
Staff Reporter

Qatar is offering its most promising athletes a route to chase a university degree and a sporting career at the same time, after the Ministry of Education and Higher Education unveiled a dedicated sports scholarship pathway under the Government Scholarship Programme.

The ministry, through its Higher Education Affairs Sec-

tor, launched the new track at an orientation session for gifted students, held in co-ordination with the Ministry of Sports and Youth and attended by students, parents and representatives of relevant bodies.

In a statement yesterday, the ministry said the pathway is designed to spot and nurture national sporting talent while allowing student athletes to pursue higher education alongside their athletic development. The aim, it said, is to produce graduates who

are qualified both academically and athletically – able to represent Qatar on the international stage while contributing to the country's wider development goals.

During the session, officials set out the objectives of the track, which awards government scholarships on the basis of demonstrated sporting talent. Eligible students may enrol across a range of academic disciplines at higher education institutions in Qatar, within a learning environment tailored to support both study and continued competition.

The ministry also spelled out who can apply. Candidates must be nominated by the Ministry of Sports and Youth and the Qatar Olympic Committee, meet the general criteria of the Government Scholarship Programme, secure an unconditional offer from a participating university under the domestic scholarship scheme, and commit to maintaining their professional sporting pathway throughout their studies. **To Page 3**



US military launches new strikes against Iran

AFP
Tehran

Explosions were heard in multiple locations along the Iranian coast as the United States launched new strikes on Iran late last night, state media said.

Warplanes were heard over Kish Island and multiple explosions rocked the port cities of Bandar Abbas, Konarak and Chabahar,

part of which lost electricity, Iran's official news agency IRNA reported.

This happened hours after President Donald Trump said he thought a three-week-old cease-fire between the two countries was "over". The US Central Command said latest strikes were intended to undercut Iran's ability to threaten ships in the Strait of Hormuz, a critical waterway for global energy supplies that has become

a key issue in the conflict. The US military called the attacks retaliation for "recent unjustified aggression against commercial shipping and civilian crews". IRIB, Iran's state broadcaster, also reported several explosions in Jask, a strategic port east of the Strait of Hormuz, and cited an informed military source as saying that two projectiles had hit Bushehr, a Persian Gulf city that is home to Iran's only operating nuclear power plant.

In Chabahar, another strategic port city on Iran's southeastern coast, IRIB said fragments from projectiles had hit Imam Ali Hospital. It also reported damage to two docks and a maritime traffic control tower, and cited a provincial electricity official as saying three power lines had been cut, two of which were restored.

President Trump said yesterday the United States would hit Iran "hard", though he expected

the latest military flare-up to end quickly and left the door open to more talks.

The US leader had earlier said the ceasefire with Iran was over after the latest fighting, which led mediators Pakistan and Qatar and the United Nations to call for de-escalation.

Efforts to end the Middle East war took a hit following the fighting sparked by Iranian attacks on ships in the vital Strait of Hormuz.

QEF sets up UNGA special edition in NY this year

The 'Qatar Economic Forum (QEF), Powered by Bloomberg', held in collaboration with the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, will convene a special leadership gathering alongside the 81st UN General Assembly (UNGA), in New York on September 20, 2026. The gathering, titled 'QEF: UNGA Special Edition 2026', will bring together global leaders, policymakers, investors and business executives at a pivotal moment for geopolitics and the global economy. Centred on the theme 'Growth on New Terms: Capital, Risk and Resilience', the event will examine how governments, businesses, and investors are navigating an increasingly fragmented global landscape. Convened during one of the most influential weeks on the international calendar, the



event will provide a platform for high-level dialogue on the issues shaping global markets, investment flows and the international business landscape. Building on QEF's established track record of convening leaders from government, business and finance, the gathering will feature news-making interviews, keynote conversations and discussions with

some of the world's most influential decision-makers. Editorial programming will be anchored around the following areas: 'Middle East geopolitical shifts and their impact on the global economy'; 'Energy supply and demand outlook'; 'Rewired global trade flows: What is the new normal?'; 'The global capital rebalance: Where to invest right now'; and 'AI: Digital promise and physical reality'. Speakers and programme details will be announced in the coming months. The next full edition of the 'Qatar Economic Forum, Powered by Bloomberg', will take place in Doha in April 2027. Produced by Bloomberg Live and editorially programmed by Bloomberg News, the gathering will be streamed live via the Bloomberg Terminal, Bloomberg TV, and Bloomberg.com

Trump to give troops a look at 'magnificent' Qatar-gifted plane

Monitoring Report

US President Donald Trump has altered his journey home following the Nato Summit in Türkiye, adding a stop in the United Kingdom to show off his new Qatari-donated aircraft. He had been due to fly directly to Washington this evening, but announced on Truth Social that he would first head to RAF Mildenhall in Suffolk, England, aboard the old Air Force One, to give American troops stationed at the base a chance to see his new plane.

It was not immediately clear why he abruptly changed his itinerary. Asked twice, as he prepared to leave Türkiye after his news conference, why he was not travelling on the new aircraft, Trump said "it's going to go to a couple of bases, so the soldiers can see it" because it's "magnificent". Last month, Trump unveiled



the new Air Force One, a refurbished Boeing 747 donated by Qatar. This was the first international trip on which the president used the aircraft. The new plane was rapidly retrofitted and equipped with security features before making its first flight with Trump on July 1.

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Minister holds meetings at Geneva summit on AI

HE the Minister of Communications and Information Technology Mohammed bin Ali al-Mannai held a series of bilateral meetings yesterday with ministers and heads of international organisations on the sidelines of the Global Dialogue on AI Governance, currently underway in Geneva.

The minister met with Saudi Arabia's Minister of Communications and Information Technology Eng. Abdullah bin Amer al-Swaha, Germany's Minister for Digital Transformation and Government Modernisation Dr Karsten Wildberger, and Lebanon's Minister of State for Technology and Artificial Intelligence Dr Kamal Shehadeh.

The meetings focused on enhancing co-operation in digital transformation and artificial intelligence (AI), as well as exchanging expertise in digital technologies, innovation, and the modernisation of government services.

HE al-Mannai also held meetings with Estonia's Minister of Justice and Digital Affairs Liisa-Ly Pakosta, Ireland's Minister of State for Trade Promotion, Artificial Intelligence and Digital Transformation Niamh Smyth, and Singapore's Minister for Digital Development and Information Josephine Teo.

Luxembourg's PM meets al-Mannai



Luxembourg's Prime Minister Luc Frieden met yesterday with HE the Minister of Communications and Information Technology Mohammed bin Ali al-Mannai on the sidelines of the Global Dialogue on AI Governance held in Geneva. HE the Permanent Representative of Qatar to the United Nations Office in Geneva Dr Hind Abdulrahman al-Muftah also attended the meeting. - QNA

The meetings reviewed best practices in digital government and the development of e-government services, and explored opportunities for co-operation in the digital economy and AI, as well as ways to strengthen partnerships in digital infrastructure and innovation.

HE al-Mannai held meetings with International Telecommunication Union (ITU) Secretary-General Doreen

Bogdan-Martin to discuss co-operation in support of international efforts to advance the governance of digital technologies.

He also met with UN Special Envoy for Digital and Emerging Technologies Amandeep Singh Gill.

HE the Permanent Representative of Qatar to the United Nations Office at Geneva Dr Hind Abdulrahman al-Muftah attended the meetings. - QNA



4th 'Ummah Symposium' cultural season concludes

The Ministry of Endowments (Awqaf) and Islamic Affairs has wrapped up the 4th cultural season of its "Ummah Symposium", which was held under the theme *Knowledge of Revelation*.

Taking place at the Imam Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab Mosque in the presence of HE the Minister of Endowments and Islamic Affairs Ghanem bin Shaheen bin Ghanem al-Ghanem, the event brought together researchers, academics, and specialists.

The 4th cultural season examined the understanding of divine revelation and its role in cultural continuity and restoring Islamic civilisation.

In his opening remarks, the director of the ministry's Department of Islamic

Research and Studies, Sheikh Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al-Thani, said that the "Ummah Symposium" is one of the ministry's leading cultural and intellectual initiatives, part of its preaching and scholarly mission.

Through the "Ummah Symposium", he said, the ministry seeks to promote knowledge rooted in divine revelation and to discuss intellectual and cultural issues affecting individuals, society, and the Muslim nation.

Sheikh Dr Ahmed said the symposium is part of a quarterly scholarly initiative organised by the department, bringing together leading scholars to examine a broad range of intellectual and cultural issues, while exploring potential solutions to contemporary social challenges

and negative trends within the community.

Legal researcher Hassan Abdulrazzaq al-Sayed said that revitalising a civilisation cannot be achieved only by passing down material achievements such as architectural styles and arts; rather, it will require transmitting culture: including its values, ethics, knowledge, and world-views, the elements that give a nation its identity.

Professor at the College of Sharia and Islamic Studies at Qatar University, Dr Hamid Koufi, addressed the requirements and conditions for cultural continuity, noting that mere belonging to a particular nation or community does not entitle its members to their civilisation. - QNA

Al-Marri meets Tanzanian minister



HE the Minister of Labour Dr Ali bin Samikh al-Marri met yesterday Tanzania's Minister of State in the Prime Minister's Office for Labour, Employment and Relations Deus Clement Sangu, who is visiting Qatar. They reviewed bilateral co-operation between Qatar and Tanzania in the fields of labour and employment and discussed ways to strengthen and further develop it. They also discussed the possibility of Qatar hosting one of the forthcoming editions of the Dialogue. - QNA

Qatar slams Iran's repeated attacks on Bahrain, Kuwait

Qatar has strongly condemned the repeated Iranian attacks on Bahrain and Kuwait, considering them a blatant violation of the sovereignty of the two countries and a flagrant breach of the rules of international law.

In a statement issued yesterday, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) stressed the need to spare the region the consequences of unjustified attacks, to continue on the path of dialogue and diplomacy, to reduce escalation, and to build on the gains achieved within the framework of the memorandum of understanding, in a way that contributes to consolidating security and stability at

the regional and international levels.

Arab League Secretary-General Nabil Fahmy has meanwhile reiterated its categorical rejection of the Iranian attacks, most recently the targeting of the Qatari liquefied natural gas tanker Al Reyyat and the Saudi giant crude oil tanker Wadiyan, as well as the repeated attacks against Kuwait and Bahrain with missiles and drones.

Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) Secretary-General Jassem Mohamed Albudaiwi has also expressed his condemnation of the Iranian attacks targeting Bahrain and Kuwait. - QNA

Cabinet slams tanker attack, approves raft of new laws

From Page 1

Ministers also noted amendments to the Civil and Commercial Procedures Law of 1990, prepared by the Supreme Judiciary Council, which strengthen electronic litigation, standardise judicial notifications, appeals and fees, and establish case management offices within each court to balance faster procedures with due process.

Among its own decisions, the Cabinet approved amendments to the committee combat-

ing human trafficking to achieve more balanced representation among government bodies, and updated the training regulations of the Legal and Judicial Studies Centre.

It also approved a proposal to provide educational vouchers for Qatari citizens with disabilities enrolled in nurseries and specialised centres, aimed at expanding access to services, promoting inclusion and easing financial burdens on families.

On the diplomatic front, the Cabinet approved a draft memorandum of understanding

on diplomatic training between Qatar's Diplomatic Institute and the Diplomatic Academy of Mauritania, and a draft letter of intent with Uruguay on co-operation in mediation.

The Cabinet praised the constructive co-operation between the executive and legislative branches as the Shura Council concluded its first ordinary session of the second legislative term, and reviewed several reports before taking the appropriate decisions, including the annual report of the National Human Rights Committee.

Qatar opens scholarship track for student athletes

From Page 1

Officials outlined the benefits on offer.

These include payment of tuition fees for students at eligible private universities under ap-

proved regulations, co-ordination with the sporting authorities, and access to employment-linked scholarship opportunities under existing government policies.

Applications for the sports track during the second admission pe-

riod for public universities will be accepted through the Government Scholarship Platform between November 15 and December 30.

The session gave students and parents detailed guidance on how to apply and answered questions

on the programme's requirements and benefits.

The ministry said the launch reflects its commitment to investing in promising national talent and deepening the link between the education and sports sectors.

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State institutions responded well to challenges: minister

HE the Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Ibrahim bin Ali al-Mohannadi has affirmed that the country's institutions have demonstrated a high level of readiness and ability to deal efficiently with regional developments and exceptional circumstances as part of efforts to strengthen the national resilience framework.

Speaking during the Cabinet's media briefing, he said government entities continued providing their services without interruption despite the regional developments and exceptional circumstances, supported by flexible operational plans and advanced digital infrastructure.

HE al-Mohannadi reviewed the Cabinet's key achievements, decisions and government legislation during the period from October 2025 until now, and outlined future plans that the Cabinet is working on, all aimed at developing government performance for the benefit of society.

He said that the period from October until now witnessed more than 120 decisions, draft laws and qualitative initiatives covering various development sectors, including 22 draft laws approved by the Shura Council, of which nine laws have so far been issued during 2026, all in line with the Qatar National Vision 2030 and the Third National Development Strategy 2024-30.

The minister added that, as part of continuing efforts to develop the legislative framework, the Cabinet approved a draft Amiri decision regulating the preparation of legislation.

Prepared by the General Secretariat of the Cabinet in co-ordination with the relevant authorities, it aims to regulate the drafting and review of legislative instruments proposed by competent entities and strengthen planning and follow-up to ensure that the government's legislative system keeps pace with the requirements of national development and government priorities.

HE al-Mohannadi noted that the Cabinet also took note of the Shura Council's approval of a draft law on

HE the Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Ibrahim bin Ali al-Mohannadi reviews the Cabinet's key achievements, decisions and government legislation

international treaties and agreements, prepared by the Ministry of Justice to establish the general framework governing international treaties and agreements.

He said that, in the field of social development, the Cabinet reviewed the Shura Council's proposal on a draft law on children's digital protection and referred it to the competent authorities for study and a report.

The minister also reviewed recommendations submitted by the Shura Council on social affairs that were considered by the Cabinet, most notably the recommendation on strengthening parental care and supporting family cohesion.

Regarding improving efficiency in the social sector, HE al-Mohannadi said the Cabinet approved a draft law regulating the practice of social professions to establish a comprehensive legislative framework governing the practice of these professions while supporting the participation of the private sector and the non-profit sector in providing social services within a framework that ensures governance and quality.

He also referred to Law No. 6 of 2026, issuing the Unified Voluntary Work Law for the Gulf Co-operation Council states, which aims to promote a culture of volunteerism and establish an appropriate institutional framework for volunteer work.

The minister also referred to the Minister of Municipality's Decision No. 108 of 2026, amending architectural requirements and technical specifications for buildings to allow changes to the planning and engineering dimensions of homes in line with the needs of Qatari families, saying the decision comes as part of efforts to provide a suitable living environment.

He noted that the Cabinet also took note of the Shura Council's approval of a draft traffic law aimed at enhancing road safety and security while taking into account

developments in the country's infrastructure.

HE al-Mohannadi also reviewed the draft law regulating private schools approved by the Cabinet, which aims to update the legal framework to ensure the quality of education.

He also noted the Cabinet's approval of a draft decision by the Minister of Education and Higher Education amending certain provisions of the decision regulating educational services, while reviewing a proposal to amend the National Qualifications Framework to better align educational outcomes with labour market needs.

HE al-Mohannadi said that, in the context of developing legislation governing the labour market, Law No. 9 of 2026, amending certain provisions of the Labour Law, was issued to update the provisions governing labour relations and employment, particularly the procedures for settling labour disputes and expediting their resolution.

The Cabinet has approved a draft decision by the Minister of State for Defence Affairs on the distribution of university and college graduates performing national service among government entities to ensure the effective use of young national talent by assigning them to sectors suited to their qualifications.

Regarding strengthening the investment environment and diversifying the national economy, the minister said the Cabinet approved a draft law amending the law regulating non-Qatari capital investment in economic activity to create a more flexible and competitive environment capable of attracting high-quality investment.

In the real estate sector, he referred to Law No. 8 of 2026, amending certain provisions of the Real Estate Lease Law, which aims to address illegal subdivision of real estate units, expedite the set-

tlement of rental disputes and reduce lease registration fees.

He added that the Cabinet also took note of the Shura Council's approval of draft laws on homeowners' associations, real estate brokerage and state property, which reorganises the management of public and private state property within a unified legislative framework that supports its protection and efficient utilisation.

The Cabinet also approved a draft law amending certain provisions of Law No. 6 of 2014 regulating real estate development.

HE al-Mohannadi said that, as part of a package of business stimulus measures, the Cabinet approved a draft decision specifying the categories of national products that government entities are required to procure and adopted the general policy for national local content prepared by the Ministry of Finance in co-ordination with the National Planning Council.

He added that, as part of continuing efforts to develop the legislative environment supporting investment and enhance the efficiency of the justice system, the Cabinet reviewed the Shura Council's decision on a draft law amending certain provisions of the civil and commercial procedures law as part of the national initiative to develop the justice system, accelerate electronic litigation procedures and unify certain procedures that directly affect litigants.

The Cabinet also approved a draft decision by the Minister of Justice on the conditions for registering arbitrators and licensing arbitration centres and branches of foreign arbitration centres, in support of alternative dispute resolution methods and to reinforce Qatar's position as an advanced regional and international arbitration centre.

HE al-Mohannadi also reviewed the most important measures related to digital transformation,

noting the announcement by the National Planning Council that Qatar ranked among the top 20 countries worldwide in the 2025 IMD World Digital Competitiveness Ranking.

He added that in the 2026 IMD World Competitiveness Yearbook, issued in June, Qatar ranked first regionally, among the world's top five countries in economic resilience and fifth globally in the effectiveness of its judicial system.

Regarding environmental protection and sustainability, the minister said the Cabinet took note of the Shura Council's approval of a draft law on oversight of fuel stations, prepared by QatarEnergy to strengthen health, safety and environmental standards at vital facilities.

The Cabinet also approved a draft Environmental Protection and Sustainability Law to update the legislative framework governing environmental protection and development, with the legislation set to proceed through the remaining legislative procedures.

As part of the periodic reports reviewed during the period, he said the Cabinet examined the annual reports of several entities, including the General Retirement and Social Insurance Authority, Hamad Medical Corporation, the Qatar Financial Centre, Qatar Development Bank and the National Cyber Security Agency.

The Cabinet also reviewed the 2025 annual report on the work of the State Cases Department and the progress report on achievements during the second half of 2025 concerning the national framework for promoting values and ethics in Qatari society.

Responding to journalists' questions, he said that the government's artificial intelligence (AI)



initiatives are numerous but not fragmented, as they all stem from a single overarching plan encompassing all government entities.

With regard to digital transformation in general and the use of AI tools and projects in particular, HE al-Mohannadi noted that these initiatives are based on the Qatar Digital Agenda 2030 and the National Artificial Intelligence Strategy.

He underscored the close attention and continuous follow-up this matter receives from HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani, in his capacity as chairman of the Smart Government and Digital Excellence Steering Committee.

The Cabinet is pursuing three main tracks with regard to AI: the first track focuses on the direct delivery of government services, exemplified by the Ministry of Municipality's use of AI in issuing building permits.

The second track concerns Decision Support Systems, such as the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers' "Smart Legislative Adviser" programme, developed in co-operation with the National Planning Council.

Responding to a question about investment in Qatar, the minister said that there are numerous relevant measures, including both individual and integrated incentive packages, designed to attract investment to Qatar.

Speaking about Qatar's real estate sector, he noted that the sector has experienced significant growth and development, adding that the decisions and legislation issued in recent years have made it necessary for the regulatory framework governing the sector to evolve accordingly. - QNA

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The second track concerns Decision Support Systems, such as the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers' "Smart Legislative Adviser" programme, developed in co-operation with the National Planning Council.

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Qatar's rapid humanitarian relief reflects longstanding policy of crisis response

Qatar has launched a large-scale humanitarian airlift to Venezuela following two earthquakes that recently struck the country's capital, Caracas, reaffirming the Gulf state's longstanding commitment to supporting friendly nations during times of crisis.

Qatar was among the first countries to respond to the disaster, rapidly mobilising relief assistance under the directives of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani.

In the immediate aftermath of the earthquakes, the Amir held a telephone conversation with Venezuela's Acting President Delcy Rodriguez, expressing Qatar's solidarity with Venezuela and its people following the earthquakes that affected several parts of the country.

During the call, the Amir reaffirmed Qatar's readiness to provide all necessary assistance to support relief and rescue operations and help mitigate the impact of the disaster.

Meanwhile, Rodriguez thanked the Amir for Qatar's support and solidarity, describing the response as a reflection of the close friendship and co-operation between the two countries.

Acting on the Amir's directives, the Qatar Fund for Development (QFFD), in co-operation with the Qatar International Search and Rescue Group of the Internal Security Force (Lekhwiya) and the Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS), launched a humanitarian air bridge consisting of six aircraft carrying emergency assistance to Venezuela.

The aid includes family tents, field hospitals and emergency shelter supplies intended to support displaced families, provide temporary accommodation and meet urgent humanitarian needs following the earthquakes.

The government said that the operation reflects Qatar's continued commitment to providing humanitarian assistance to people affected by crises and natural disasters and contributing to international emergency relief efforts.

The QRCS has also joined the



emergency operation in co-ordination with Qatari authorities and international partners within the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

Its Information Management Centre activated emergency procedures immediately after reports emerged of the two earthquakes affecting the northwestern and central Venezuela.

The organisation established communication channels with the Venezuelan Red Cross and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) to monitor humanitarian developments and co-ordinate the response.

The QRCS said humanitarian aid shipments, along with medical and relief teams deployed to Venezuela, continue to arrive as part of the Qatari humanitarian air bridge.

Qatar's ambassador to Venezuela Salman bin Nabit al-Khulaifi said the initiative demonstrates Qatar's leading humanitarian role and its continued commitment to assisting countries in need.

A team from the Syrian Civil Defence, along with a number of volunteers from the Qatar Volunteer Centre, also participated in search and rescue operations as part of the air bridge operated by Qatar.

The participation of the Syrian team came as part of the mission led by the Qatar International Search and Rescue Group, ex-

tending the existing co-operation between the two sides in the fields of search and rescue and disaster response.

The QRCS also launched an urgent humanitarian campaign to mobilise the necessary community support to assist those affected by the disaster.

Meanwhile, the Qatar International Search and Rescue Group, affiliated with the Internal Security Force Lekhwiya, successfully rescued a girl alive from beneath the rubble of a collapsed building in Venezuela, eight days after the earthquake.

President Rodriguez awarded the "Heroes of Venezuela" medal to the Qatar International Search and Rescue Group of the Internal Security Force (Lekhwiya) in recognition of their efforts during rescue and relief operations.

The honour crowns the achievements of the Qatari team in relief missions, as it demonstrated a high level of professional competence, rapid response and commitment to humanitarian duty, providing a model of international co-operation in confronting disasters, reducing their impact and alleviating the suffering of those affected.

Official reports in Caracas said the death toll from the double earthquake had risen to more than 3,600, while the number of injured exceeded 16,700.

Relief teams confirmed that 6,462 people had been rescued alive in affected areas. - QNA

Qatar strengthens state audit powers

Amendments to Qatar's State Audit Bureau Law will enter into force on July 25, introducing new enforcement powers, criminal penalties and financial disclosure requirements aimed at strengthening public-sector oversight after nearly a decade of experience under the existing legislation.

The changes, introduced under Law No. 7 of 2026, amend provisions of Law No. 11 of 2016 governing the State Audit Bureau.

According to the Bureau, the reforms are intended to support the implementation of audit work, improve the effectiveness of oversight procedures and address challenges identified during previous years of regulatory practice.

Among the most significant changes are the introduction of criminal penalties for violations of the Audit Bureau Law, judicial enforcement powers for designated officials, mandatory financial disclosure declarations for Bureau personnel and stronger protections for confidential information.

The Bureau said the amendments are designed to strengthen the confidence of entities subject to its oversight, improve the implementation of audit rules and procedures, and reinforce compliance with the law by empowering officials to detect and document offenses, enabling criminal accountability where violations are uncovered during audit activities.

In comments to the Qatar News Agency (QNA), Intisar al-Mohammed, the director of the Bureau's Legal Affairs Department, said the amendments reflect lessons learned since the 2016 law came into force almost 10 years ago.

She said practical experience had demonstrated the need to modernise oversight procedures in line with international best practices, enabling the Bureau to continue fulfilling its mandate of protecting public funds more effectively.

Al-Mohammed said one of the principal amendments concerns the Bureau's review of the state's final accounts prepared by the Ministry of Finance.

The revised Article 8 reorganises the review process by requiring the Bureau to examine the government's final accounts and prepare an annual report containing its final observations, recommendations and any unresolved differences with the Ministry of Finance or entities subject to its oversight.

Under the amended provisions, the Bureau's president must submit the report to the His Highness the Amir and send a copy to the Minister of Finance within three months of receiving the state's final accounts.

Al-Mohammed said the amendments also establish a new legal framework supporting the Bureau's oversight functions through the introduction of criminal penalties and judicial enforcement powers

under newly inserted Articles 40 bis and 40 bis (1).

Another major reform is the introduction of mandatory financial disclosure declarations under new Article 55 bis.

The declarations require the president and deputy president of the State Audit Bureau, along with all Bureau employees, to disclose their movable and immovable assets and the sources of their ownership.

The requirement extends to their minor children. According to al-Mohammed, the declarations are intended to promote integrity and transparency while preventing conflicts of interest among Bureau staff.

They must be submitted upon first appointment to the Bureau, every five years thereafter, upon leaving office, and whenever requested by the Bureau's president in cases he considers necessary.

The amendments also introduce criminal offences for violations of the State Audit Bureau Law, including providing false information, obstructing audits and breaching confidentiality requirements.

According to al-Mohammed, Article 40 bis provides that, without prejudice to any harsher penalty prescribed under another law, offenders may face imprisonment of up to one year, a fine of up to QR1mm (approximately \$275,000), or both.

The penalties apply to anyone who knowingly provides the Bureau with false data, documents or records, conceals information that obstructs audit activities, submits malicious complaints relating to matters within the Bureau's jurisdiction, or violates Article 18 of the law.

Al-Mohammed said criminal proceedings for any of these offences may only be initiated following a written request from the president of the State Audit Bureau.

She explained that Article 18 establishes the confidentiality of all Bureau activities and prohibits employees from disclosing any information or data related to its work.

The confidentiality obligation continues even after employees leave the Bureau.

Al-Mohammed added that the prohibition also applies to external specialists engaged by the Bureau under Article 22 of the law, including experts, auditors, consultants and consultancy firms contracted to support audit work.

The amendments also grant designated Bureau officials judicial enforcement authority.

Under Article 40 bis (1), employees who are granted the status of judicial officers by a decision of the Public Prosecutor, in agreement with the president of the State Audit Bureau, will be authorised to detect, document and investigate offences committed in violation of the law. - QNA

Qatar Press Centre launches series 'Journalism is the Mirror of Truth'

The Qatar Press Centre (QPC) launched a new series titled "Journalism is the Mirror of Truth" as part of its efforts to raise awareness of journalism's vital role in uncovering facts and promoting transparency and accountability.

The series will highlight key historical moments when a free press helped shape the course of global events.

According to QPC, the series sheds light on files and documents that marked turning points in the history of journalistic work and reveals precise details about policies and decisions made away from public view, highlighting the importance of professional media in documenting facts, exposing violations, and protecting communities' right to knowledge.

The centre said the first episode of the series deals with the "Pentagon Papers" issue, considered one of the most prominent in the history of investigative journalism. It reveals how documents are not limited to narrating the facts of wars, but rather expose the gap between what governments know and what



The "Pentagon Papers" first issue

they announce to their people, becoming a prominent example of journalism's power to question authority and reveal the facts.

The events of the case go back to the early 1970s, when the US witnessed an unprecedented leak of secret government documents, which caused widespread resonance within political and media circles, redrawn the relationship between the press and authority, and also sparked a deep debate about the limits of government

secret, freedom of expression, and the public's right to access information.

The centre stressed that the review of such historical models comes from the belief in the vital role of the press in protecting the truth, promoting a culture of transparency, and consolidating the professional principles that make the media an essential pillar in building societal awareness and preserving the public's right to knowledge.

Qatar News Agency director-general meets Azerbaijan's ambassador



HE the Qatar News Agency (QNA) Director-General Ahmed bin Saeed al-Rumaihi met yesterday with Azerbaijan's ambassador to Qatar Dr Adish Mammadov. The meeting discussed ways to enhance bilateral co-operation in the media sector. (QNA)

Qatar to host World Maritime Day Parallel Event in 2028

The International Maritime Organisation (IMO) Council has approved Qatar's bid to host the World Maritime Day Parallel Event in 2028.

Qatar's offer to host the event was accepted at the council's 137th regular session that began on July 6 and ends tomorrow (July 10).

Qatar's ambassador to the UK and Permanent Representative to the IMO Sheikh Abdullah bin Mohammed bin Saud al-Thani thanked IMO member states for their support.



He said that Qatar is committed to delivering a distinguished event that contributes to supporting the IMO goals, cementing international co-operation, fostering knowledge exchange, and advancing innovation and sustainability across the maritime industry.

Member states' approval of Doha as the host for this important event in 2028 reflects the role Qatar continues to play in the global maritime industry, he noted.

The WMDPE is an international platform held annually by the IMO in co-operation with the host country. It is hosted in a different country each year, bringing together government officials, maritime transportation and shipping industry leaders, and representatives from global organisations, academia, and the private sector to discuss the industry's challenges and opportunities.

The Doha parallel event, which will run from 2-3 days, will discuss maritime navigation safety, marine life, decarbonisation, digital transformation, supply chains, and how shipping, logistics services and ports management can benefit from artificial intelligence and new technologies, among several other key subjects of top regional and global priority.

WCM-Q hosts faculty development workshop

The Division of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) at Weill Cornell Medicine - Qatar (WCM-Q) recently held a faculty development workshop on assessment in competency-based medical education (CBME).

The two-day virtual course was designed to provide participants with a better understanding of the implications of competency-based medical education, equip them with the tools needed for effective assessment and feedback, and enable them to apply these techniques to improve direct observation. Internal medicine residents from Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC) also volunteered their time to participate as actors in a role-play exercise on giving effective feedback.

Titled "Assessment in Competency-Based Medical Education: A Faculty Development Program", the workshop was directed by Deema al-Sheikhly, lecturer of education in medicine and director of medical education and continuing professional development at WCM-Q, who also served as a course facilitator and speaker.

Other speakers and facilitators from WCM-Q in-

cluded Dr Mai Mahmoud, associate professor of teaching in medicine and assistant dean for faculty affairs; Dr Amine Rakab, assistant professor of clinical medicine and assistant dean for clinical learning; and Dr Sumeja Zahirovic, assistant professor of medicine.

Competency-based assessment is at the core of modern graduate medical education programmes and was developed in the US about two decades ago. Residents are required to achieve a series of outcomes-based milestones by demonstrating high performance in six core competency areas, namely patient care, medical knowledge, professionalism, interpersonal and communication skills, practice-based learning and improvement, and systems-based practice.

The workshop was aimed at residency and fellowship programme directors, associate programme directors and faculty members with primary responsibility for assessing residents and fellows. Participants included professionals from Qatar-based institutions such as Aspetar, HMC, the Primary Health Care Corporation and Sidra Medicine, as well as attendees from the United Arab Emirates, Lebanon, Palestine and Sudan.

Annual strategic meeting held ahead of Web Summit Qatar 2027

The Permanent Web Summit Organising Committee held its annual strategic meeting in Doha, bringing together partners to guide the next phase of Web Summit Qatar's growth as preparations continue for its fourth edition, which will take place from 31 January to 3 February 2027.

The meeting was chaired by HE Sheikh Jassim bin Mansour bin Jabor al-Thani, Director of the Government Communications Office and Chairman of the Permanent Web Summit Organising Committee. It was attended by committee members representing the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Visit Qatar and Invest Qatar. Representatives of Qatar Investment Authority and Qatar Airways also attended the meeting alongside Web Summit founder and CEO Paddy Cosgrave and senior members of the Web Summit team.

The committee reviewed the growing impact of Web Summit Qatar as a platform for entrepreneurship, investment, and innovation. Since the 2025 edition, 69 startups participating in Web Summit Qatar's Startup Programme have collectively raised more than USD 205 million in funding, re-

flecting the programme's role in connecting founders with global investors.

During Web Summit Qatar 2026, more than 300 companies registered with Qatar Financial Centre (QFC), contributing to a 57% year-on-year increase in QFC registrations during the first quarter. These outcomes have supported Qatar's continued rise as a regional innovation hub, with the country achieving its highest-ever ranking in the StartupBlink Global Startup Ecosystem Index.

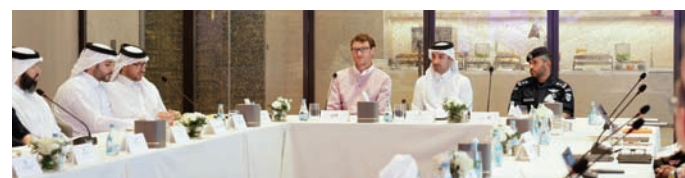
Building on these outcomes, the committee set priorities for the year ahead, with a focus on strengthening international participation, attracting leading startups, investors, and technology companies, increasing opportunities for Qatari entrepreneurs and ensuring the event continues to deliver long-term economic and ecosystem impact.

Sheikh Jassim bin Mansour bin Jabor al-Thani said: "Web Summit Qatar has become an important platform for connecting entrepreneurs, investors, and

technology leaders from around the world while supporting Qatar's digital economy. As we prepare for the fourth edition, we remain focused on building on that momentum and ensuring the partnership continues to create long-term opportunities for Qatar and the wider region."

Paddy Cosgrave, founder and CEO of Web Summit, said: "Each edition of Web Summit Qatar has demonstrated the strength of our partnership with Qatar and the growing international interest in the event. We're looking forward to building on that success and welcoming the global technology community back to Doha in 2027."

Web Summit Qatar bringing together entrepreneurs, investors, technology leaders, and policymakers from around the world. Through the continued partnership between the Permanent Web Summit Organising Committee and Web Summit, the event will build on the outcomes of previous editions while creating new opportunities for startups, investment, and international collaboration. (QNA)



Safari Hypermarket launches Fruit Festival and Juice Junction in Qatar



The ceremonial cake-cutting was jointly performed by Safari Group chairman Hamad Dhafer al-Ahbab and Safari Group deputy chairman and managing director Zainul Abideen.

Safari Hypermarket, one of Qatar's leading hypermarket chains, has officially launched its Fruit Festival and Juice Junction. The four-day festival is being held from July 8-11. The inauguration ceremony took place at Safari Mall, where the ceremonial cake cutting was jointly performed by Safari Group chairman Hamad Dhafer al-Ahbab and Safari Group deputy chairman and managing director Zainul Abideen.

Other members of the Safari management team were also present at the event. The festival aims to promote a healthy lifestyle and nutritious eating habits by showcasing a wide variety of fresh fruits and freshly prepared juices. As part of the promotion, Safari

outlets are offering an extensive selection of premium fruits sourced directly from around the world. These include fruits imported from Egypt, South Africa, Jordan, Brazil, Kenya, India, Vietnam, China, Chile, Pakistan, Thailand, and several other countries, representing nearly fifteen countries in total. By sourcing directly from these countries, Safari is able to ensure the highest standards of quality and freshness for its customers. Alongside the Fruit Festival, Safari Juice Junction has also been launched. Designed to help customers stay refreshed during the rising summer temperatures while encouraging healthier beverage choices, the Juice Junction exclusively serves fresh juices.

Customers can enjoy over 30 refreshing beverages, including fresh fruit juices, milkshakes, fresh salads, traditional sherbets, Sambaram (spiced buttermilk), as well as nutritious vegetable juices such as Indian gooseberry (Amla) juice and bitter melon juice, among many other healthy options. In addition, customers can also participate in Safari's Mega "Shop & Drive" Promotion, which offers the chance to win 30 Bestune cars. For every QR50 purchase at any Safari outlet, customers receive an e-affle coupon that enters them into the promotion. Four Bestune cars will be awarded in each raffle draw, while the final draw will award five Bestune cars. The Shop & Drive promotion is available across all Safari outlets.

Tyla Brings Qatari Luxury to the 2026 BET Awards in NOUDAR



The Grammy-winning superstar chose Noudar's signature Henna Handpiece for one of music's biggest nights, further affirming the Qatari fine jewellery house's status as a favourite among international celebrities.

International music sensation Tyla has become the latest A-list star to wear NOUDAR, choosing the luxury jewellery brand's signature Henna Handpiece for the 2026 BET Awards. The appearance adds another prestigious red carpet moment to the brand's growing portfolio of international celebrity wearers, reaffirming NOUDAR's position as one of the Arab world's leading names in fine jewellery.



craftsmanship, the brand continues to build an impressive international clientele, with each red carpet appearance further elevating the global appreciation of Arab luxury and design.

The Henna Handpiece has become one of Noudar's most iconic creations, admired for its intricate craftsmanship and modern interpretation of a timeless cultural art form. Its appearance at the 2026 BET Awards further reinforces the design's status as a signature piece within the collection, continuing its journey across some of the world's most prestigious red carpets.

As global interest in Arab fashion, design and craftsmanship continues to flourish, Noudar is proudly championing a new narrative for luxury, one that is deeply rooted in culture while resonating with an international audience. By reimagining regional traditions through contemporary fine jewellery, the brand continues to redefine perceptions of Arab luxury, proving that the region's creativity, artistry and craftsmanship belong among the world's most celebrated maisons.

Renowned for her fearless style and ability to champion exceptional design, Tyla selected the intricately crafted diamond piece as part of her BET Awards look. Inspired by the graceful artistry of traditional henna, the handpiece transforms a timeless cultural tradition into a contemporary work of fine jewellery, balancing intricate craftsmanship with modern sophistication.

Tyla's latest appearance is a testament to Noudar's enduring appeal among celebrities and stylists seeking jewellery with substance as well as beauty. Celebrated for its distinctive aesthetic and meticulous

Digital transformation grants open doors to future careers

By Tawfik Lamari
Staff Reporter

Experts hailed the launch of the Digital Transformation Programme as a strategic investment in the nation's future workforce, saying it equips young Qataris with the skills needed to lead the country's digital transformation while directly aligning education with labour market demands.

They said the programme, which is under Qatar's 2026-2027 Government Scholarship Plan, goes beyond the traditional scholarship model by offering an integrated pathway that begins in secondary school and continues through university education, practical training, employment, and ongoing professional development.

Designed through a partnership between the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, and the Civil Service and Government Development Bureau, the initiative focuses on high-demand digital disciplines including artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, data analytics, and cloud computing.

Experts told reporters that the programme responds directly



File photo of a cyber security workshop.

to Qatar's growing demand for digital specialists and supports the country's transition toward a knowledge-based, innovation-driven economy. They noted that its "employment-linked scholarship" model ensures graduates are prepared for real vacancies identified by the Civil Service and Government Development Bureau, strengthening long-term career prospects while supporting Qatar National Vision 2030.

Educational expert Khalifa al-Manai described the programme as a modern approach to government scholarships.

"It gives students a clear roadmap from secondary school to employment and prepares them for the digital skills that will define tomorrow's labour market," he said, urging students and par-

ents to seize opportunities in future-focused fields such as AI, cybersecurity, cloud computing and data science.

Educational expert Sultan al-Kuwari said the initiative represents a significant shift in scholarship policy by linking academic choices with national development priorities.

"Instead of choosing majors without direction, students can now build careers based on the country's future workforce needs," he said, adding that the combination of scholarships, practical training, career guidance and employment guarantees makes the programme a unique opportunity for young Qataris.

Technology and information security expert Engineer Mohammed al-Saqatri said the

programme reflects a long-term national strategy to build home-grown digital talent.

"The demand for qualified professionals in digital transformation and cybersecurity continues to outpace supply. Investing in national talent is essential to protecting Qatar's digital future," he said.

Al-Saqatri noted that organisations are adopting artificial intelligence more quickly than they can recruit cybersecurity specialists to manage emerging risks, making local expertise more important than ever.

Cybersecurity expert, Eng Khalid al-Amari, said prioritising cybersecurity demonstrates Qatar's recognition of digital security as a pillar of national security.

"Cybersecurity is no longer just a technical discipline. It safeguards critical infrastructure, government services and sensitive data, making it one of the most important careers of the future," he said.

He added that combining academic study with hands-on industry training will ensure graduates enter the workforce with both theoretical knowledge and practical experience, positioning them to play a leading role in Qatar's rapidly expanding digital economy.



MoEHE summer activities lure huge participation

By Ayman Adly
Staff Reporter

The Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE) has recorded strong participation in its 2026 Summer Activities Programme, with around 900 students enrolled so far and total participation expected to reach 1,000.

Khalid al-Saadi, Programmes and Activities specialist at the Ministry, said the programme is being held across five summer centres strategically located to accommodate students, including a dedicated centre for students with special needs.

He explained that while all centres deliver a unified core programme, activities are tailored to different age groups, with specialised programmes for students with disabilities, supervised by qualified special education professionals, to ensure an inclusive and supportive learning environment.

The programme targets students aged 6 to 18 years, from primary school through Grade 12, providing age-appropriate activities that help participants develop academically, socially and personally during the school break.

Al-Saadi said the initiative extends beyond simply occupying students' free time, forming part of a comprehensive educational plan designed to strengthen leadership, teamwork, volunteerism, innovation and creativity while reinforcing positive values, national identity and social responsibility.

He added that MoEHE increased the capacity of several centres in response to high demand, with only a limited number of places remaining at some locations, including Al Wakrah.

Among the highlights of this year's programme are newly introduced academic and career guidance sessions for teenagers, helping students explore university specialisations and future career paths while supporting informed educational decisions based on their interests and abilities.

The programme also features Quran memorisation and recitation classes supervised by specialist teachers, while the Qatar Scouts and Guides Association contributes activities that promote discipline, responsibility and teamwork. Additional awareness programmes focus on strengthening national identity, positive behaviour and life skills.

Technology and innovation remain central to this year's activities. Through partnerships with innovation incubators, students participate in workshops covering computer programming, engineering design and 3D printing, gaining hands-on experience in designing models and prototypes using modern technologies. The programme also includes specialised workshops in artificial intelligence and cybersecurity,

equipping students with essential digital skills and preparing them for the demands of an increasingly technology-driven future.

Further, MoEHE is collaborating with the National Cyber Security Agency to organise the Youth Cyber Camp, scheduled to begin on July 19. The camp aims to enhance students' digital awareness, strengthen cybersecurity knowledge, promote safe online practices, and provide practical training in protecting personal data and privacy while introducing participants to emerging technologies.

In addition, students take part in a comprehensive programme of weekly educational field trips, organised every Thursday to museums, scientific centres, sports facilities and recreational destinations. The visits are intended to enrich learning through practical experiences while offering students a varied and engaging summer programme under full supervision with organised transportation.

Al-Saadi noted that the initiative is implemented in partnership with more than 20 government entities, private-sector organisations and civil society institutions, which deliver workshops and lectures covering health, volunteerism, culture, digital literacy and life skills. He said the broad partnership model enriches students' experiences and diversifies the learning opportunities available throughout the programme.

The Summer Activities Programme will continue until July 30, followed by a closing ceremony on August 3 to honour participating students and recognise supporting organisations and partners.

Meanwhile, Hassan Dabsan al-Qahtani, director of the Ministry's Al Wakrah Summer Centre, said the centre has attracted 150 participants, including 100 children and 50 teenagers. He described the programme as a balanced mix of educational, sporting, cultural and recreational activities designed to develop students' physical, intellectual and social skills.

According to al-Qahtani, participants are divided into age-specific groups to maximise engagement, with younger children focusing on foundational skills and positive values, while teenagers receive programmes that emphasise personal development, responsibility and advanced digital competencies. Daily activities include sports, fitness exercises, computer training, introductory programming, creative thinking sessions, interactive competitions and awareness workshops delivered in co-operation with government and community partners.

He added that the centre maintains close communication with parents, particularly regarding external visits and activities, to ensure the highest standards of safety while providing students with a rewarding educational environment that combines learning and personal development.

Qatar participates in GCC meetings on Islamic affairs

Qatar, represented by the Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs, participated in the 42nd meeting of the Standing Committee of Experts in Islamic Affairs and Endowments in the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) countries, and the 13th meeting of the committee tasked with studying the presentation of the true image of Islam and confronting campaigns of hatred, intolerance, extremism and sectarianism, which were held via video conferencing, with the participation of representatives of ministries and bodies of Islamic affairs and endowments in the GCC countries.

Director of the Department of Islamic Affairs Mohammed Jabr al-Mannai led the delegation of the Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs at the two meetings. Assistant Director General of the General Department of



Endowments Eng. Abdullah bin Mohammed al-Meer also participated in the meetings.

The meetings discussed a number of working papers, initiatives and proposals submitted by member states, which aim to develop the Islamic and endowment work system and enhance its societal and developmental impact.

The topics discussed included the "Gulf Endowment Week" initiative as a joint awareness platform that contributes to high-

lighting the civilisational and developmental role of Endowment, in addition to the "Mafaz Competition" project aimed at spreading awareness of Endowment, charitable and voluntary work, and a proposal to create a national index to measure the impact of Endowment in society in a way that enhances governance and transparency and raises the efficiency of Endowment management.

Participants also discussed the

developed concept for a mechanism to present and exchange experiences and expertise in the field of Islamic affairs among member states. In addition, they discussed the proposal for the architectural identity of mosque minarets between authenticity and renewal, and the Arab cultural dialogue between East and West, which reflects the civilisational role of Islamic institutions in promoting cultural communication and civilisational openness.

The ministry also participated in the 13th meeting of the committee tasked with studying the presentation of the true image of Islam and confronting campaigns of hatred, intolerance, extremism and sectarianism, which comes within the framework of joint Gulf efforts aimed at consolidating the values of moderation, tolerance and coexistence, and promoting moderate Islamic discourse.

Katara hosts forum on AI in Islamic jurisprudence

Katara Cultural Village, in co-operation with the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs and IslamOnline, organised the 30th Katara Tech Forum to discuss the role of artificial intelligence (AI) in Islamic Sharia rulings.

The forum brought together specialists in Islamic jurisprudence, technology and media as part of Katara's ongoing efforts to foster dialogue on technological developments and their impact on knowledge and culture.

The session was moderated by Moaz Yousuf al-Qasimi, head of the Religious Guidance Department. Speakers included Jassim Abdullah al-Ali, director of the Department of Da'wah and Religious Guidance; Sheikh Abdulrahman bin Abdulaziz al-Thani, director of the Mosques Department at the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, Eng Ashraf



Sharif, head of the Information Technology Department at IslamOnline; and Dr Idris Ahmed Tijani, a Sharia researcher and specialist in Islamic jurisprudence.

Dr Tijani highlighted practical applications of AI in Islamic sciences, citing examples of its use in supporting religious guidance and enhancing academic research. He stressed that these technologies operate within scientific and Sharia frameworks to

ensure reliability and are intended to assist, not replace, qualified scholars.

He also demonstrated how AI can be used to analyse Friday sermons by converting them into digital text, identifying key themes, Quranic verses and Hadith references, and generating evaluation reports based on scientific criteria. He emphasised that all results require human review before they are validated.

The presentation also outlined IslamOnline's digital transformation, including the development of semantic search tools to improve access to reliable Islamic content. It highlighted the platform's performance and audience growth this year.

During the discussion, participants examined the role of AI in religious rulings, sermon analysis, Islamic content development and visual media. They also explored the opportunities and challenges related to accuracy, reliability and the need for appropriate Sharia frameworks.

Participants agreed that AI can help accelerate research, organise knowledge and improve access to information. However, they underscored that it cannot replace scholars or independent Islamic legal reasoning, stressing that human oversight remains essential.

ANNOUNCEMENT

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Msheireb Museums announces exciting summer workshops

Msheireb Museums has announced the launch of its 2026 Summer Programme, "Reflections of Creativity and Art," offering a diverse programme of workshops and activities for children and adults. The programme will run from July 6 to August 13, 2026, at Bin Jelmood House, while the Inclusive Discovery Camp will take place at Company House from July 5 to August 27. Together, the two programmes are expected to welcome more than 300 participants and 600 visitors throughout the summer season. The programme is delivered in partnership with VCUarts Qatar and CamelCode, featuring 12 interactive workshops, alongside the four-week Inclusive Discovery Camp, organised in collaboration with Life Skills Hub. Designed for those aged 4-16 and above, the programme offers hands-on learning experiences. Fatima al-Mansoori, Education Manager at Msheireb Museums, said: "Msheireb Museums continues to strengthen its position as a leading platform for learning, dialogue and cultural exchange. "This year's summer programme reflects that vision by offering high-quality educational experiences that combine creativity with knowledge, inspiring young people while deepening their connection to Qatar's heritage and culture."

Trump's Board of Peace plans pilot 'humanitarian zone' in south Gaza

AFP
Jerusalem

US President Donald Trump's Board of Peace is planning a pilot "humanitarian zone" in southern Gaza which would aim to accommodate tens of thousands of vetted Palestinian civilians, a board official told AFP.

The official said the zone could act as a "starting point" for the Palestinian technocratic committee meant to assume day-to-day governance during Gaza's transitional phase out of war under Trump's 20-point plan.

The pilot zone, which the board is eyeing for Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip, would be secured by multinational troops from the International Stabilisation Force (ISF), a fledgling body which operates under the Board of Peace.

The National Committee for the Administration of Gaza (NCAG), the group of Palestinian technocrats established by the board, would carry out screening and access control, supported by the ISF.

Movement in and out "will remain free for all unarmed civilians", the board official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

The concept of closed humanitarian zones, which has been dis-



A girl fills containers with water drawn from underground pipes left intact at a camp in the Sheikh Radwan in Gaza City. (AFP)

cussed in various forms for several months, has raised serious reservations, with diplomats and NGO officials working in Gaza telling AFP on condition of anonymity that such a mechanism seems to be incompatible with international humanitarian law.

Efforts to advance the US-backed ceasefire plan for Gaza have been stalled for months, with the NCAG stuck in Cairo and yet to enter the territory.

Since the truce between Israel and Hamas came into effect last

October, Israeli forces have expanded their presence in Gaza, controlling more than 60% of the territory.

"There's one pilot project we're looking at particularly, that may be you can get the NCAG a starting point, you can enable tens of thousands to come if they wish voluntarily to this area, and you start giving them a space where they exercise effective governance and they're the administration," the board official said.

The board was "looking at Rafah" as a location for the project but remained vague on its exact positioning, he said, adding that no building work had begun.

Rafah was effectively razed by fighting and Israeli bombing during the war and the area is now largely under Israeli military control.

The ISF would act as a "kind of buffer" separating the Palestinians from the Israeli military, the official said.

"A screening mechanism will ensure that armed individuals and fighters cannot enter these safe humanitarian zones," he added.

"This function will not be performed by the IDF (Israeli military), which will have no contact with the civilian population and no role in separating these areas from the rest of Gaza."

When asked by AFP about the project, the Israeli military said: "The matter is known and is currently under review."

The Board of Peace was formally established earlier this year as part of the US-backed ceasefire plan for Gaza endorsed by the UN Security Council.

It aims to facilitate a transition away from Hamas rule while supporting the restoration of civilian administration and basic services.

Hamas announced this week on Monday the dissolution of the body that has governed Gaza for

nearly two decades, clearing the way for the technocratic committee.

Under the terms of the Trump plan, the ISF is to deploy in Gaza to ensure security as the Israeli military withdraws.

The Board of Peace official said four countries were "really engaged" with the ISF, namely Morocco, Kosovo, Albania, and Kazakhstan.

He said an ISF support site near Kerem Shalom on the Israeli side of the Gaza border was "close to complete".

Diplomats and NGO officials working in Gaza say that grouping civilians into demarcated areas subject to access controls could amount to forced displacement of the population, restrict Palestinians' freedom of movement and undermine the principle of impartiality.

Muhammad Shehada, a visiting fellow with the European Council on Foreign Relations, said he feared such a plan would "accommodate a minuscule symbolic amount of Palestinians" in temporary structures to give "a facade of progress" in parts of Gaza.

He argued the plan could give the Israeli military greater freedom to operate elsewhere in the territory and risked turning the NCAG into an administration governing fragmented territory.

ATROCITIES Israeli fire kills nine people, including children, in Gaza

Israeli fire killed at least nine Palestinians, including two children, aged 10 and 6, in the Gaza Strip yesterday, health officials said. An Israeli airstrike killed one person near a school in Gaza City. Twelve people were wounded in the two incidents. Another airstrike hit displaced people in the Mawasi area in Khan Younis, killing four people including a 10-year-old child. Later yesterday, Medics said a 6-year-old boy was killed by Israeli gunfire in the Zeitoun neighbourhood. Two other separate strikes in other parts of Gaza killed three people and wounded several others, medics said, taking yesterday's death toll to at least nine. (Reuters)

CARNAGE Israeli strike on south kills two: Lebanese media

An Israeli strike on southern Lebanon killed two people yesterday, Lebanese state media reported, the latest attack despite a ceasefire in the Israel-Hezbollah war. "Two young men were martyred after being targeted by an enemy drone... while they were walking in the vicinity of Ghandour Hospital in Nabatieh al-Fawqa," Lebanon's state-run National News Agency said, two days after a strike on the same town killed four civilians including a school principal. (AFP)

DIPLOMACY Lebanese minister praises Qatar's stabilising role

Lebanese Minister of Information Dr Paul Morcos praised Qatar's efforts to reduce tension and its pivotal role in achieving the desired stability. The Lebanese Minister of Information also commended Qatar's role in promoting stability in Lebanon, alongside other Arab states. The minister said the objective of the framework arrangement between Lebanon and Israel is to secure the liberation of Lebanese territory, the return of prisoners and displaced residents, the reconstruction of villages and towns, and the restoration of stability to the south through resolving all outstanding issues. He said these objectives are reflected in the negotiating initiative put forward by Lebanese President Joseph Aoun. (QNA)

DESIGNATION CHANGE Trump considering removing Syria from blacklist

US President Donald Trump yesterday said he thought he would remove Syria from the United States' list of designated state sponsors of terrorism. "I think I will," Trump told reporters during a meeting with Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa in Turkey. The US has previously said it is reviewing Syria's designation as a state sponsor of terrorism, which carries restrictions on US foreign assistance, defence exports and certain financial transactions. Last month Trump signed an executive order terminating a US sanctions program on Syria, allowing an end to the country's isolation from the international financial system and building on Washington's pledge to help it rebuild after a devastating civil war. (Reuters)

Israeli jails a 'graveyard,' says freed Palestinian journalist

AFP
Jenin, Palestinian Territories

A Palestinian journalist said Israeli prisons have become a "graveyard" for the living, following a dramatic decline in his health after being released earlier this year.

Mujahed Bani Mufleh, 37, spent six months in jail after being accused of inciting violence against Israel through his journalistic work.

Two days after his release in January, he suffered a severe brain hemorrhage and was admitted to hospital in critical condition, according to the Palestinian Prisoners' Club advocacy group.

Now frail and barely recognisable, Bani Mufleh is recovering at a hospital in Jenin, in the occupied West Bank, after undergoing a series of surgeries during which doctors removed part of his skull.

"The prison was like a graveyard," Bani Mufleh told AFP, as he undergoes rehabilitation to regain his ability to talk and move.

"I was assaulted inside my home in front of my children," he said of his 2025 arrest during a raid on his home.

"I was beaten inside the military jeep in the first minutes after my arrest, and on the first day I was taken to hospital because I could no longer breathe as a result of the beating."

Israeli military and prison authorities did not immediately respond to AFP's request for comment on Bani Mufleh's allegations. Israel's prison service has previously said that all prisoners are detained according to the law with their basic rights fully upheld.



Palestinians inspect the site of an Israeli strike on a vehicle in Gaza City yesterday. (Reuters)

Soon after his release he posted a video online saying that in jail he "came to understand what real hunger means".

Israeli, Palestinian and international NGOs have warned of alleged mistreatment, torture and a deterioration in conditions inside Israeli prisons since the outbreak of the Gaza war.

Bani Mufleh, editor of news website Ultra Palestine, part of the media network Ultra Sawt, said he had been "placed in administrative detention without any complete or substantiated charge. They claimed that I incited violence but had no proof".

Israel has significantly increased its use of administrative detention since the start of the Gaza war, detaining activists, students, academics and journalists, rights groups say.

The measure allows Israeli authorities to hold individuals without charge for up to six months, renewable indefinitely.

In late April, Israel released 60-year-old journalist Ali al-Samoudi from Jenin after a year in detention. AFP photographs taken following his release showed him emaciated, having lost around half his body weight.

As of June 3, 2026, the Committee to Protect Journalists has documented 108 arrests of journalists and media workers in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories since October 7, 2023. Israeli authorities carried out 102 of these arrests; and Palestinian authorities arrested six.

Seventy two of these journalists and one media worker - including six held by the Palestinian authorities - have since been released, while 36 remain under arrest.

Bani Mufleh "is not an exception, but one of thousands of cases involving systematic crimes inside the Israeli prison system," the Palestinian Prisoners' Club said.

Lebanese diplomat puts conditions for Rome talks

Lebanon demands Israel's withdrawal from two "pilot zones" in the south before participating in the next round of direct negotiations in Rome on July 15 and 16, a diplomatic source familiar with the talks told AFP yesterday.

The two sides had previously met for five rounds of US-sponsored talks in Washington aimed at ending the war between Israel and Iran-backed Hezbollah and paving the way for peace.

They recently reached a framework agreement that calls for Hezbollah's disarmament and a gradual Israeli withdrawal from occupied Lebanese territory while Lebanon's army deploys into "pilot zones".

However, the agreement - rejected by Hezbollah - does not set a timetable for Israel's withdrawal, and Israeli officials have also vowed that their forces will remain in a "security zone" 10 km deep as long as Hezbollah remains armed.

The source, requesting anonymity, explained "Lebanon is stipulating Israel's withdrawal from two pilot zones in order to participate in the round of negotiations".

The Lebanese diplomatic source said the US State Department told the negotiating delegations that "reaching a framework agreement is the end of one phase and the beginning of a new one". The next round - aiming for a permanent agreement - required the negotiators to be close to their countries "for consultation".

The source added that Israel was quick to accept Rome as the

location for talks as an opportunity to "reduce the pressure" imposed on it by Washington during negotiations to reach the ceasefire agreement.

Lebanon's contacts with the US meanwhile received guarantees that Washington would maintain "the same level of engagement in the negotiations and the same policy in managing the talks" in Rome.

The talks precede Lebanese President Joseph Aoun's expected visit to Washington later this month, at the invitation of his US counterpart Donald Trump.

Aoun said on Wednesday that the visit reflects "the United States' support for the path to finding a lasting solution to the series of Israeli wars and attacks on our country".

The Lebanese presidency has not announced the date of the visit, but media reports suggest it will take place on July 21.

Israel, in its large-scale bombing campaign and a ground offensive, has killed more than 4,300 people in Lebanon and near the border.

The framework agreement followed an earlier deal between Tehran and Washington aimed at ending the wider regional war, which also established a ceasefire in Lebanon.

Israel, however, still carries out occasional strikes on southern Lebanon.

The diplomatic source said Beirut wants to "affirm its right and ability to negotiate on its own behalf" after Iran insisted on including Lebanon in its agreement with Washington. (AFP)

Settling cheque cases through reconciliation could reduce load on courts

By Ayman Adly
Staff Reporter

Qatar's legislation provides various ways for resolving criminal cases involving bounced cheques through reconciliation, legal experts have affirmed.

This reflects the country's broader approach of prioritising financial settlements, protecting commercial transactions, and reducing pressure on the judicial system. Accordingly, several lawyers explained that reconciliation serves as a legal alternative to criminal punishment for cheque-related offences and may be pursued at various stages of the legal proceedings, provided specific legal conditions are met. These include a genuine financial settlement between the parties, an explicit written waiver by the beneficiary, and the approval of either the Public Prosecution or the court, depending on the stage of the case.

The lawyers stressed that while reconciliation cannot nullify a final court judgment, it may still have legal consequences, including serving as grounds for seeking a retrial or applying for a special pardon under certain circumstances.

They also noted that the Judicial Enforcement Law No. (4) of 2024 has introduced a significant shift in the handling of cheque disputes by granting bounced cheques executive instrument status in specified cases. This enables beneficiaries to initiate enforcement proceedings directly to recover the value of a cheque or any outstanding balance without first filing a lawsuit. The new legislation has significantly reduced the number of lawsuits previously filed solely to obtain judgments requiring issuers to pay cheque values, thereby accelerating the resolution of commercial disputes and strengthening confidence in cheques as a reliable payment instrument, while preserving debtors' right to challenge en-

forcement when legitimate legal grounds exist.

Lawyer Fatima Thani al-Maadeh explained that Qatari law allows criminal proceedings in cheque cases to be terminated at the stage reached, pursuant to the Criminal Procedures Law and Penal Code No. (11) of 2004.

She said that before a case is referred to court, the beneficiary may submit a formal waiver to the Public Prosecution, which can then dismiss the case without recording a criminal conviction against the accused. The waiver must be written, explicit, signed by the beneficiary, and accompanied by proof that the cheque has been paid or that a financial settlement has been reached.

She described this as the stage with the fewest legal consequences. If the case has already reached the courts, reconciliation remains possible by submitting a waiver or settlement agreement. If reached before a judgment is issued, the court may terminate the proceedings. If reconciliation occurs after

a first-instance judgment that has not become final, the Court of Appeal may overturn the ruling where the legal requirements are satisfied.

"Once a final judgment has been issued, reconciliation does not invalidate the judgment itself," she said, adding, "However, it may constitute legal grounds for requesting a retrial if the applicable conditions are met, or for submitting an application for a special pardon supported by the beneficiary's waiver and evidence of settlement."

Lawyer Sheikh Ahmed bin Mohamed al-Thani said the introduction of Judicial Enforcement Law No. (4) of 2024 does not eliminate cheque litigation or replace substantive judicial proceedings. Instead, it establishes a faster enforcement mechanism designed to facilitate commercial transactions and ease the burden on the courts. He explained that Article (23) of the law recognises bounced cheques resulting from insufficient funds, no available balance,

or partial payment as enforceable instruments, allowing beneficiaries to proceed directly before the Enforcement Court without filing a separate substantive claim.

He added that the law has already reduced the volume of lawsuits filed solely to obtain payment orders, helping shorten litigation and accelerate the recovery of financial rights.

Lawyer Abdullah al-Muttawa said the Qatari legislature permits reconciliation in cheque-related offences because the beneficiary's primary interest lies in recovering the cheque's value rather than punishing the issuer. "When the issuer settles the debt or reaches an agreement with the beneficiary, the rationale for continuing criminal proceedings is substantially diminished," he said.

Al-Muttawa explained that reconciliation before a final judgment results in the termination of criminal proceedings, while reconciliation after a final judgment may lead to suspension of the sentence's execution, subject to the

legal conditions prescribed by law.

Lawyer Dr Rashid Abu Diya said Judicial Enforcement Law No. (4) of 2024 has significantly enhanced Qatar's judicial framework by establishing an independent Enforcement Court with jurisdiction over enforcement applications and related disputes. He noted that Article (24) requires beneficiaries seeking enforcement of a cheque to submit the original cheque or a copy together with a bank statement confirming insufficient funds, the absence of funds, or partial payment. The law also stipulates that the cheque must not have been endorsed or assigned, meaning some holders may still need to pursue substantive legal action.

He said that reconciliation in cheque cases remains permissible under the law, provided the settlement record is authenticated by the court or another competent authority and clearly specifies the financial obligation or amount subject to enforcement without ambiguity.



Russian attack kills two in Ukraine port of Odesa: Official

A Russian attack on Ukraine's Black Sea port of Odesa yesterday killed two people and injured two, a senior official said. Serhiy Lysak, head of the city's military administration, said on Telegram that the attack damaged infrastructure in the port, one of Ukraine's key export centres. Russia also introduced a ban on diesel exports yesterday as part of a raft of measures to support the domestic fuel market after systematic Ukrainian drone attacks on oil refineries triggered gasoline shortages and price spikes. Drivers in many regions of the country are facing hours-long lines to refuel. (Reuters)

Trump grants Ukraine right to make Patriot missiles

US President Donald Trump said yesterday that Washington would grant Kyiv "the right to make" prized Patriot air-defence systems to repel deadly Russian strikes, without providing a timeline for the pledge. Ukraine has been struggling to down Russian ballistic missiles since this year's US-Israeli war against Iran hit supplies of the crucial US-made Patriot interceptors. "So one of the things we're going to be talking about is we're going to give a licence to you to make Patriots. That's pretty cool, right," Trump told Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on the sidelines of the Nato summit in Ankara. (AFP)

Mediator Pakistan urges Iran and US to exercise restraint

Mediator Pakistan urged the United States and Iran yesterday to exercise restraint and uphold the memorandum of understanding (MoU) to halt the Middle East war after renewed fighting broke out. "Pakistan urges all sides to uphold their respective commitments under the Islamabad Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)," the foreign office said in a statement which also called on "all parties to exercise restraint." President Donald Trump said an interim agreement to end the war with Iran was "over" and that the US was likely to launch new strikes following Iranian attacks on US bases in the Gulf. (AFP)

Nigeria probes fictitious 'presidential' agency

Nigeria's president has ordered an investigation into how a fictitious agency established offices in his backyard and was earmarked to receive nearly a million dollars. Named the Presidential Foreign Intervention Promotion Council, it was to receive about 1.3 bn naira (\$944,300) in this year's budget, despite not being recognised under Nigerian law. Its offices were reportedly based at the federal government secretariat in Abuja. President Bola Tinubu's office said on Tuesday night that the country's anti-graft agency has been directed to launch an investigation and conclude its findings within 30 days. (AFP)

Trump tempers fury to end Nato summit on a high note

AFP
Ankara

US President Donald Trump offered Nato allies an unexpected warm embrace as they wrapped up a key summit yesterday after earlier lashing out at them over their response to his war on Iran.

It was an abrupt swing from antagonism to affection within the space of a few short hours, illustrating the wide range of emotions exhibited by the mercurial US leader.

"It was a great meeting, there was a lot of love in that room, a lot of unity," Trump told reporters after the closed-door meeting of 32 heads of state at the Nato summit in the Turkish capital Ankara.

Behind closed doors, Trump had reassured them he wanted the US to stay in the military alliance, saying: "We want to remain with you", a source inside the session told AFP.

And that was reflected in the final declaration in which Nato leaders reaffirmed their "ironclad commitment" to the mutual assistance clause enshrined in Article 5 of the alliance treaty.

"An attack on one is an attack on all," it said, in wording that sought to ease concerns about Washington's commitment to the alliance.

But the day had not begun well with Trump lashing out over Nato allies' failure to back his Iran campaign just before the session, threatening to cut trade with Spain, and insisting he still wants Nato member Denmark's territory of Greenland.

"I'm very upset with Nato... because of what they did with Greenland, and... because of the fact that



US President Donald Trump, next to US Secretary of State Marco Rubio (R) and US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth, speaks to the press during a Nato Summit at Bestepe Presidential Compound in Ankara. (AFP)

they didn't want to help us with the number one state sponsor of terror, that's Iran," he said.

But once he came face-to-face with the leaders behind closed doors, his tone changed markedly, according to the source who attended the talks.

"There is a strong contrast between what Trump says in public and what he actually says inside," he told AFP.

He also dialled down his earlier rhetoric on Iran — in which he described them as "scum" and "vicious, violent people" — with his remarks on the matter "not as harsh", the source said.

And he made no further mention of Spain or Greenland.

Estonian Prime Minister Kristen Michal agreed that Trump's tone in the session was more moderated. He added that the US president had given a "kind of constructive message... that Europe must step

up, invest more in defence".

"So it was kind of a good mood with sort of constructive messages," he said.

Lithuanian Foreign Minister Kestutis Budrys said Trump's outbursts should not necessarily be read as a sign of the alliance fragmenting.

"I wouldn't see in it an indicator that we are somehow weakening Nato, and that the transatlantic bond is not there," he told AFP.

"I think we should dramatise things less."

Stalled efforts to halt the Ukraine war were also back on the agenda, with Trump pledging to give Kyiv "the right to make" Patriot air-defence missiles as he went into talks with Ukraine's Volodymyr Zelensky on the sidelines of the summit.

"We're going to give a licence to you to make Patriots. That's pretty cool, right," Trump told Zelensky, whose forces have been struggling

to shoot down Russian ballistic missiles as supplies of crucial US-made Patriot interceptors run low.

Despite Moscow's heavy bombardments in recent days, Kyiv appears to be turning the tide by stabilising the front line and conducting strikes deep into Russia — strikes that Trump said could help end the war.

"It's an escalation, but it's also an escalation that can help lead to an end," he added, repeating his belief that both Zelensky and Russia's Vladimir Putin wanted to strike a deal to halt the fighting.

Also in the final Nato declaration, Europe and Canada pledged to keep military support flowing to Ukraine to the tune of €70bn (\$80bn) a year in both 2026 and 2027.

Before leaving Ankara, Trump was also set to hold talks with Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa as he seeks to rebuild the country's international image as it emerges from years of civil war.

The summit comes at a fraught time for the 77-year-old transatlantic alliance, with Trump demanding members make good on a pledge to ramp up defence spending as Washington takes a step back from Europe.

Keen to avoid a new confrontation with Trump, Nato allies unveiled tens of billions in new arms contracts on Tuesday in a bid to prove they were making good on a pledge to hike defence spending.

Nato chief Mark Rutte insisted the alliance was emerging stronger from the summit in Turkey — despite the disagreements.

"I always felt that families where sometimes you have a heart to heart and sometimes you fight each other a bit are much stronger," he said.



Nato Secretary-General Mark Rutte. (Reuters)

Nato to invest in fuel system upgrade: Rutte

Reuters
Ankara/Warsaw

Nato will invest billions of euros to ready its fuel supply system for a conflict, Secretary General Mark Rutte said yesterday, including by extending its existing pipeline system towards the alliance's eastern flank.

"Allies are taking a historic step to enhance Nato's fuel supply chain, to ensure our forces have the energy supplies they need for war-fighting readiness," Rutte told reporters after a Nato summit in Ankara.

"While allies continue to finalise the details, we know that this €27bn investment will modernise our existing fuel storage and distribution infrastructure and support new facilities including pipelines towards the eastern part of the alliance."

Rutte did not specify from where the funding amount would come from or what exactly it would be spent on.

Senior Nato military officials have long called for an extension of the alliance's Cold War-era fuel pipeline network hundreds of kilometres eastward towards Poland and the three Baltic states, with further extensions towards Finland in the north and Romania in the southeast.

The 10,000-kilometre pipeline, buried 31 inches underground, currently spans 12 countries but ends in western Germany, where it serves military bases such as the US Ramstein Air Base, but also major civilian hubs such as Germany's biggest airport in Frankfurt.

It was originally built to serve primarily Western air forces in a conflict with the then-Soviet Union.

In wartime, air forces are ex-

pected to account for as much as 85% of total military fuel consumption, according to a study by the Polish Centre for Eastern Studies think tank.

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz said Nato had been talking for quite some time about how a sufficient fuel supply of the alliance's forces can be organised.

"This has played a role on the sidelines of this summit but there is no final decision yet, the discussions are ongoing," he told reporters.

Poland's President Karol Nawrocki pushed for the pipeline network to be extended as he arrived at the summit.

"The dual-use nature of pipelines... provides the opportunity to build security for NATO's entire eastern flank, so this is also an opportunity for me and all of central Europe to raise this issue once again," he said.

Senior military officials describe fuel and ammunition as the two supply items most critical to running an operation, citing Nato estimates that a full-scale conflict would require hundreds of thousands of cubic metres of fuel per day.

According to the Polish think tank study, Nato's fuel consumption in the event of a conflict would likely exceed the capacity of the existing infrastructure even before full-scale hostilities, due to the movement of land forces, airlift operations and fighter jet sorties.

The jet fuel running through the Nato pipelines can also be used by ground vehicles, as mixing it with additives makes it suitable for trucks and tanks that normally run on diesel.

Extending the network would also help address shortfalls in storage capacity, as the fuel inside the pipeline is additional to fuel held in storage tanks.

UN launches appeal to raise \$296mn for Venezuela

The UN launched an urgent appeal yesterday to raise \$296 mn for Venezuela earthquake relief operations after the death toll from the disaster rose to more than 3,600 people.

There is huge humanitarian need after one of Latin America's worst earthquake disasters left thousands of people homeless and thousands more still missing, especially in badly damaged La Guaira, where families are still digging in the rubble.

"Donors are already stepping up, and I pay tribute to them, and I thank them," UN humanitarian chief Tom Fletcher said during a meeting on the disaster.

"Already, based on the tracking system, the Venezuela response has received \$300mn and I appreciate every single dollar of that support, including \$115mn received before the earthquake. This leaves us now with a \$627mn funding gap to address those urgent needs. We do have a clear plan. \$296mn needed to reach 1.3mn in socioeconomic need right now over six months. It's a time-bound plan."

Caracas also called yesterday for the release of frozen assets to help raise funds for the country's recovery. "We call upon all countries currently holding blocked funds belonging to Venezuela to initiate a plan to release these funds so that they can be used for recovery efforts," Foreign Minister Yvan Gil Pinto told the UN meeting.

"There are accounts belonging to the Venezuelan state in various parts of the world that have been frozen as a result of illegal sanctions," Gil referenced gold held by the United Kingdom and finances frozen by the US.

The US government has already lifted a number of economic sanctions against Venezuela for four months to facilitate relief operations. Washington had imposed sweeping economic sanctions on Venezuela, to squeeze the leftist government. (AFP)

Pakistan finds wreckage of cargo plane in sea, search for crew ongoing

AFP
Karachi

Pakistan located the wreckage of a Boeing cargo plane yesterday, the country's airports authority said, adding that rescuers were searching for five crew on board when the aircraft had gone missing.

The plane was approaching Karachi from Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates when radar showed it "rapidly descending" Tuesday evening after reporting a "navigational system issue", according to the Pakistan Airports Authority (PAA).

Pakistan's navy and maritime rescue agency, after searching for 12 hours, "successfully located and identified wreckage of K2 Airways Cargo B737 which was declared missing last night", the PAA said in a statement posted on X. The wreckage was found in the Arabian Sea, off Ormara town on Pakistan's southern coast, it said.

"Efforts are underway to find the missing crew members," the



The wreckage of the K2 Airways Cargo Boeing 737 recovered during a search and rescue operation in the Arabian Sea. (AFP)

PAA added. The authority published images of personnel lifting pieces of the fuselage from a small boat onto a larger vessel and the red and white debris with the words "K2 Air" laid out on the ship's deck.

In a statement issued before the plane wreckage was found, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif expressed "deep sorrow, grief, and regret over the tragic incident".

A source familiar with the matter told AFP that both navy and merchant vessels were taking

part in the search efforts, supported by military aircraft.

The aircraft was observed on radar at 21:21 pm (1621 GMT) on Tuesday "rapidly descending and with rapid heading change", and communication contact was lost about 155 nautical miles west of Karachi, the PAA said.

Preliminary data sent from the plane "indicated a loss of altitude, followed by a climb, and then a second, sudden and dramatic loss of altitude", according to Flightradar24.com, a global flight-tracking service.

Fourth group of US deportees reach Eswatini

The US deported about a dozen people to Eswatini yesterday, an American immigration lawyer and local sources told AFP, the latest expulsion to the repressive southern African country.

The deportees were not from Eswatini, in line with the unprecedented "third-country" deportation deal struck by Washington that has seen people from around the world sent there.

An AFP investigation found that the United States has offered multimillion-dollar deals and threatened visa restrictions in a bid to get countries to take deportees — part of President Donald Trump's wide-ranging

immigration crackdown.

Alma David, a US immigration attorney familiar with some of the deportees' cases, said 11 people were sent to Eswatini, including at least two who have legal protection that advocates say should shield them from deportation.

A local source put the number at nine. Their nationalities were unclear but another source said those details would emerge when they are processed tomorrow morning.

Eswatini has already received 19 deportees since July 2025. Two of them — a Jamaican and Cambodian — have been repatriated, but 17 remain in a high-security

prison, held without charge.

A government source, speaking on condition of anonymity, said an official convoy had travelled to the main international airport "to process and receive new US deportees".

US Immigration and Customs Enforcement did not respond to a request for comment.

Eswatini, Africa's last absolute monarchy, confirmed last year it had received around \$5.1 mn from the US to accept the deportees.

According to a document revealed by Human Rights Watch and seen by AFP, Eswatini agreed to take 160 deportees in exchange for funds to strengthen its border and migration capacity. (AFP)

Zimbabwe opposition vows to stand against new amendments

Mary Taruvinga Leading Zimbabwe opposition figures vowed yesterday to challenge at home and internationally constitutional changes that allow President Emmerson Mnangagwa to extend his term by two years and scrap direct presidential polls.

Mnangagwa, 83, signed the amendments into law on Tuesday after they sailed through parliament, which is dominated by his Zanu-PF party that has held power since independence.

The newly formed People's Coalition — made up of prominent opposition figures — called on Zimbabweans to demonstrate while lawyers prepared to challenge the constitutionality of the new law. "The Constitutional Court will hear the challenge," they said at a media briefing. "The government has guns, money, and media. But the people have numbers."

The group said international organisations such as the UN and African Union (AU) "know the Constitution was violated" and would respond.

The changes include a provision that would extend the presidential and parliamentary terms from five to seven years.

This would effectively allow Mnangagwa to stay in office for two years beyond the end of his constitutionally limited two five-year terms due to end in 2028.

Another amendment gives parliament the power to appoint the president, doing away with direct presidential elections that were introduced in 1987, seven years after independence.

Zimbabwe's opposition is weakened by years of repression and tainted elections, and accuses authorities of repressing efforts to mobilise against the law before it was passed.

Mnangagwa came to power in 2017 in a military-backed coup that ousted Robert Mugabe at the age of 93 and after 37 years in power. He was elected for two five-year terms, in 2018 and 2023.

His camp says the new law will bring "political stability and policy continuity" but critics say it only entrenches the Zanu-PF's long grip on power.

Nelson Chamisa, an opposition leader who lost to Mnangagwa in 2023 in what he described as a fraudulent election, said opposition voices must unite.

"Today, we face a common challenge: oppression," he said in a social media post. "We are organising... Be and get ready."

The opposition Movement for Democratic Change party also called for mass mobilisation and said it would ask the AU and regional grouping SADC to intervene.

"Zimbabwe cannot be allowed to slide into constitutional dictatorship in silence," it said. (AFP)

India police probe officer named in US crime sting

AFP
New Delhi

Indian police opened an inquiry yesterday after an officer was linked by US authorities to an alleged extortion scheme run by an India-based transnational organised crime group. The operation involved law enforcement officials in the US, Canada and Europe who had together been probing crime syndicates that engage in racketeering, targeted killings, shootings, extortion and drug trafficking. Police in India's Punjab state said that an inspector, who it identified as Gurinderjit Singh Nagra, had been linked "in con-

nection with an extortion-related investigation" by US authorities. It said Nagra had been taken off active duty pending investigations. The international operation on Tuesday arrested 24 people and charged dozens, including two men in India who US officials say ran global criminal syndicates from inside prison. It identified one of them as Lawrence Bishnoi, 33, who is jailed in India and has been convicted in several criminal cases while facing murder and extortion charges. Among the crimes alleged in indictments unveiled on Tuesday is the 2023 killing of Canadian citizen Hardeep Singh Nijjar, a prominent Punjabi-born campaigner for "Khalistan" — a sepa-

ratist movement that seeks an independent homeland for Sikhs. Bishnoi, whose organisation is designated a terrorist enterprise in Canada, is charged with ordering the killing from his cell. It identified the other as Jaggu Bhagwanpuria, 38, who is in custody facing multiple criminal cases and who the US statement called an "associate-turned-rival" of Bishnoi. The US says Bhagwanpuria runs a crime gang with more than 1,000 members across North America, Britain, Europe, Australia and New Zealand. "To expand its power, this group corrupted law enforcement officers in India," the US Attorney's Office statement said.

Britain's king symbolically commutes death sentence for last woman to be hanged

Reuters
London

The last British woman to be hanged, executed in 1955 for murdering her partner, yesterday had her sentence symbolically commuted to life imprisonment by King Charles, on advice from the government that she had suffered an "historical injustice". The government said the move reflected evidence that Ruth Ellis had been subject to "domestic abuse and coercive and controlling behaviour that may have been understood differently today". "We cannot change what happened 70 years ago. But we can recognise that this was an exceptional case," justice minister

David Lammy said in a statement. "Today's conditional pardon is an act of mercy. We hope it brings some measure of peace to Ruth's family." The application for a pardon was made by four of Ellis's grandchildren, although her sister, Muriel Jakubait, attempted more than 20 years ago to have the murder verdict posthumously reduced to manslaughter on the grounds of provocation. The monarch has a prerogative power to grant pardons or commute sentences, which in practice is used only when the government requests it. The death penalty remained in British law until 1998, but was abolished as the punishment for murder in 1965. The last executions took place in 1964, when two men were hanged for murder.

Sri Lanka to convert hospital into prison after deadly riot

Sri Lanka plans to open a new prison in a disused hospital building, the justice ministry announced yesterday after a riot killed 20 inmates and eight guards at an overcrowded jail. The deadly violence has intensified scrutiny of Sri Lanka's chronically overcrowded jails, with official figures showing prisons were operating at roughly four times their intended capacity. Justice Minister Harshana Nanayakkara issued an order to take over a section of the disused hospital in the island's south to accommodate inmates from other facilities. "We need to set up security measures and other essentials to start the new prison at Mahamadara in Galle District," a ministry official told AFP, without providing a specific timeline. The decision comes days after Sri Lanka's deadliest prison riot in years, which saw clashes break out Sunday between rival gangs at Negombo Prison, north of the capital Colombo. The violence killed 28 people and wounded more than 100 others, some of whom remain in critical condition. The coffins of slain guards, draped in the national flag, were brought to the prison department headquarters in Colombo on Wednesday for colleagues to pay their final respects. A UN statement issued in Colombo following the deadly riot said that "overcrowding, outdated practices and poor conditions in places of detention have long been recognised as critical challenges across prison systems in Sri Lanka." Rioting at another prison in December 2020 killed 11 inmates and wounded 117 during the Covid-19 pandemic, leading the government to release hundreds of inmates from overcrowded jails. (AFP)

Modi visits Australia for minerals talks

AFP
Melbourne

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi lands in Australia yesterday ahead of talks tipped to focus on defence ties, critical minerals and securing prized uranium. Modi is set to receive a rockstar welcome at a community rally held inside a Melbourne stadium on Thursday, with organisers anticipating more than 20,000 people could flock to the event. India and Australia have grown considerably closer in recent years, a relationship partly driven by a joint desire to keep Beijing's military ambitions in check while cultivating trading partners outside China. "It's historically been quite a difficult relationship, given India and Australia's differing positions during the Cold War," said Teesta Prakash from the Australia India Institute. "But now we are in a starkly different strategic environment." Securing a reliable uranium pipeline is expected to be a key topic of discussion when Modi sits down with his Australian counterpart Anthony Albanese today. Energy-hungry India — the world's most populous country with 1.4bn people — has plans to drastically expand its nuclear power capacity. And mining giant Australia is estimated to hold as much as 28% of the world's uranium resource, according to the World Nuclear Association. India and Australia entered a nuclear co-operation agreement in 2015 that paved the way for



Australian Minister for Housing, Homelessness and Cities Clare O'Neil welcomes Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi as he disembarks from his aircraft at Melbourne International Airport yesterday. (AFP)

uranium exports, but legal hurdles remain and trade today is largely non-existent. "Uranium has always been a hot topic between Australia and India," said Prakash. "Historically, India has been asking to have Australia ship it to India. But is Australia willing to do that?" With ambitions of cornering the electric vehicle market, India is also on the lookout for critical minerals such as lithium — another resource Australia has in abundance. Australia, India, the US and Japan are members of the Quad, a group seen as a counterweight to China in the Asia-Pacific region. But with the US seemingly less interested in the alliance, New Delhi and Canberra have shown an increasing willingness to work one-to-one on matters of defence. Modi drew 20,000 people to a

community rally during his last trip to Sydney in 2023. Albanese took to the stage at that event to declare "Modi is the Boss", quipping that his crowd-pulling power eclipsed even that of US rock icon Bruce Springsteen. Organisers have said that even bigger crowds are expected at the "Melbourne meets Modi" event hosted at the city's Marvel Stadium. Modi's visit is also expected to stir up opposition. Australia's Alliance Against Islamophobia said it would protest outside the stadium event, drawing attention to what it said was the persecution of minority groups in India. A separate protest against Indian migration to Australia is also planned. Modi is scheduled to fly to New Zealand after Australia.

Landslide kills eight at refugee school in Bangladesh

AFP
Cox's Bazar

Heavy rain in Bangladesh triggered a landslide at the world's largest refugee camp on Wednesday, killing seven children and a teacher during a school class and doubling the death toll from rain-related disasters this week. Rescuers clawed through liquid earth to drag out the bodies of the children, who drowned in the mud that swamped their school hut as they studied. More than 1.2 mn Rohingya refugees, many who fled Myanmar during a brutal military crackdown in 2017, live in crowd-

ed refugee camps in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar. Many refugees live in crowded, basic shelters on hillsides cleared of forests — making the land unstable when monsoon rains pour down. Bangladesh Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner Mohammed Mizanur Rahman said seven children and their teacher had died. "Unfortunately, four died at the scene, while four others died in hospital," Rahman told AFP. Landslides also killed at least eight people as they slept in three different camps on Monday night. Bangladesh's Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre said tor-

rental rain is likely to continue for four days. Refugee representative Sayed Ullah, president of the United Council of Rohingya, said that people needed new land in safer locations. "We don't see proper co-ordination... over the accommodation of the Rohingya, and that is reflected in these accidents," he said. The UN calls it "one of the world's largest and most protracted refugee situations". The 2017 Myanmar crackdown, when Rohingya villages were burned and civilians killed, is the subject of a genocide case at the UN's top court in The Hague.

Rescuers search for survivors as super typhoon nears China

AFP
Liulan, China

Rescuers scoured flooded parts of China for survivors yesterday as residents began cleaning up their devastated homes, after storms killed 17 people and caused dozens of rivers to overflow and a reservoir dam to burst. Extreme weather has wreaked havoc on southern and central China this week, with a super typhoon heading towards eastern provinces this weekend.

In the southern region of Guangxi, six people died and at least 130,000 people were evacuated to safety after torrential rain and severe flooding from Typhoon Maysak, officials said.

Fast-flowing muddy water burst the banks of 40 rivers and waterways in the region, damaging nearly 13,000 acres of agricultural land, state media reported.

In the village of Liulan, where a reservoir dam collapsed, floodwaters had receded when AFP reporters arrived yesterday but the streets and houses were swamped with thick mud.

Reporters saw multiple vehicles that had been washed into fields nearby, buried in silt.

"When faced with these natural disasters, we really feel powerless," said resident Wu Yuhao. "But now people from all walks of life and the army are helping us, so we can really feel that sense of unity and strength."

Water from the reservoir was still rushing high and fast through the river, as a rescue team sent large drones carrying food and supplies to people trapped on the other side.

Chinese authorities were sending additional disaster relief like food, raincoats and rubber boats to



Children sit next to houses which were damaged when the Liulan reservoir collapsed on July 6, in Hengzhou city's Liulan village, in China's southwest Guangxi region yesterday. (AFP)

the region, state news agency Xinhua reported.

Earlier, videos published by state broadcaster CCTV showed torrents of water rushing past the crumbled concrete walls of the reservoir dam, while rescue workers wearing life vests were deployed on inflatable boats.

Volunteers from nearby towns and villages had joined official rescue forces to help with relief efforts.

"Coming to the front line feels pretty heavy, emotionally speaking," volunteer Qin Qiuyu told AFP. "In the worst-hit areas, people are still calling out for help non-stop, and they need our support."

A restaurant worker named Huang in nearby Hengzhou told AFP that "some houses collapsed... and were washed away" by the floods.

AFP correspondents in Liulan saw residents begin the long process of cleaning up their wrecked homes, some using excavators to scoop all their damaged household items out in one go.

Around 375,000 people in Guangxi have been affected by the disaster, CCTV said.

Guangxi officials have maintained the second-highest level for flood-control emergency response, according to the State Flood Control and Drought Relief Headquarters.

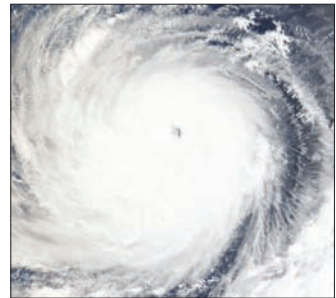
Flood peaks "exceeding the warning water level" by more than six metres (20 feet) are expected at the Wuzhou Hydrological Station in Guangxi early Thursday, Minister of Water Resources Li Guoying said.

"Due to the impact of persistent heavy rainfall and the prolonged passage of floodwaters at high levels, the safety of reservoirs and embankments in the affected areas faces a severe test," he added.

In the central province of Hubei, thunderstorms and gale-force winds have killed 11 people and injured 331, and tornadoes were reported elsewhere late on Monday, Xinhua said.

One person is missing in Hubei, 4,800 houses were damaged and 22 more had collapsed, it added.

Eastern provinces are meanwhile preparing for the impact of Super Typhoon Bavi, which could make landfall "near the Zhejiang-Fujian



A satellite image shows Super Typhoon Bavi over the Philippine Sea yesterday. (Reuters)

border area" between Saturday and Sunday, CCTV said, citing the National Meteorological Centre.

The typhoon could also move northwards over waters east of Taiwan and make landfall directly on the coast of Zhejiang, CCTV added.

Bavi tore through US Pacific territories earlier this week, leaving tens of thousands of people without power on Guam and the Northern Marianas.

Natural disasters are common across China, particularly in the summer when some regions experience intense rainfall while others bake in scorching heat.

But scientists warn the intensity and frequency of global extreme weather events will increase as the planet continues to heat up because of fossil fuel emissions.

Separately in northwestern China's Gansu province, the death toll from a Tuesday landslide rose to 21, state media reported, as search and rescue operations had concluded.

The cause of the landslide was still under investigation, according to local media.

Authorities set aside 70mn yuan (\$10mn) in disaster relief funds to help resettle those displaced in Hubei, and another 60mn yuan in reconstruction funds for Gansu.

Thai parliament approves amnesty for activists

AFP
Bangkok

Thailand's parliament passed an amnesty bill yesterday benefiting hundreds of activists found guilty over the last 20 years — but not those sentenced for corruption or violating the royal insult law.

The bill covers members of both the conservative, royalist "Yellow Shirts" and the "Red Shirts" who backed populist former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra, rival groups who clashed over two decades.

While most have served their sentences, the amnesty lifts the bar on them holding political office, according to Yutthaporn Issarachai, an analyst from Sukhothai university.

It also covers youth protesters involved in the pro-democracy movement in 2020 and 2021.

Yutthaporn told AFP between 1,000 and 2,000 people could

benefit, but there were some important exemptions.

"It is the country's largest amnesty because it covers 20 years" from January 1, 2005-July 10, 2025, he said.

Yet it does not cover anyone convicted of breaching Thailand's extremely strict lese majeste law, which shields the king and his family from criticism.

This means it will not benefit many leaders of the 2020-2021 youth-driven demonstrations calling for monarchy reform.

It will also not cover anyone convicted of corruption and therefore would not benefit Thaksin, who was released from prison in June following a royal pardon after serving eight months of a one-year sentence for corruption and abuse of power.

In addition, "this bill will not cover civil lawsuits, for example Yellow Shirts who were found guilty of closing the airports will still have to pay compensation for their actions", Yutthaporn said.

The bill, which must still be approved by the king, will end trials of political activists not related to the excluded offences. However, Yutthaporn said most of them had already served their sentences.

"The bill does not mean to erase their guilt but will return their political rights," he said.

Tech billionaire Thaksin was elected prime minister in 2001 and again in 2005, before going into exile after a 2006 military coup.

His Pheu Thai party, and its earlier iterations, was Thailand's most successful political party of the 21st century, with the Shinawatra family producing four prime ministers and drawing widespread support from the rural masses.

The party, however, had its worst election result ever in February, slipping to third place, but was still included in the ruling coalition of conservative Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul.

Nepal court convicts ex-ministers

A Nepali court has convicted two former government ministers for taking money from citizens with the false promise of international resettlement as refugees, officials said yesterday. Former deputy prime minister Top Bahadur Rayamajhi was convicted of offences against the state, fraud and organised crime, according to the Kathmandu District Court, which issued to the verdict on Tuesday. Former interior minister Bal Krishna Khand was convicted of being an accomplice in the case, in which at least 15 people in total were convicted. More than 100,000 ethnic Nepalis fled Bhutan in the early 1990s — around a sixth of the population — when the Buddhist kingdom made national dress compulsory and restricted the use of the Nepali language. The Nepali-speaking Lhotshampa were called immigrants and stripped of citizenship rights when Bhutan's then-king introduced a "One Na-

tion, One People" policy in 1985. Many were then based in refugee camps in Nepal. A third-country resettlement programme began following the failure of years of negotiations to secure their return to Bhutan, and ran from 2007-2018. The majority were resettled in the US. Thousands more found new homes in Europe, Australia, Canada and New Zealand. The racket involving the senior officials began only after that resettlement programme closed, taking large sums from Nepali citizens and promising to portray them as refugees so they could still qualify to go abroad. "The district court on Tuesday convicted former deputy prime minister Top Bahadur Rayamajhi and former home minister Bal Krishna Khand, as well as several other people guilty in fake Bhutanese refugee scam," Shiva Khatiwada, information officer at the Kathmandu District Court, told AFP.



Confidence, quietly compounding

Numbers rarely tell the whole story, but occasionally they distill it. The 3,295 non-Qatari companies that registered in the country during the first quarter of 2026 are one such figure – not because the total is dramatic in isolation, but because of the conditions under which it was achieved.

Global markets spent those months buffeted by uncertainty and geopolitical strain, much of it uncomfortably close to home. That international capital chose this moment, and this address, says something no promotional brochure could.

The more interesting truth lies beneath the tally. Qatar is being rewarded not for a single incentive but for the patient, unglamorous work of making itself easy to invest in: reforms that streamline company formation, regulations that keep pace with the market, and the decision to let foreign investors own up to 100% of businesses in many sectors. Their power is cumulative. Confidence, like compound interest, builds quietly and then all at once.

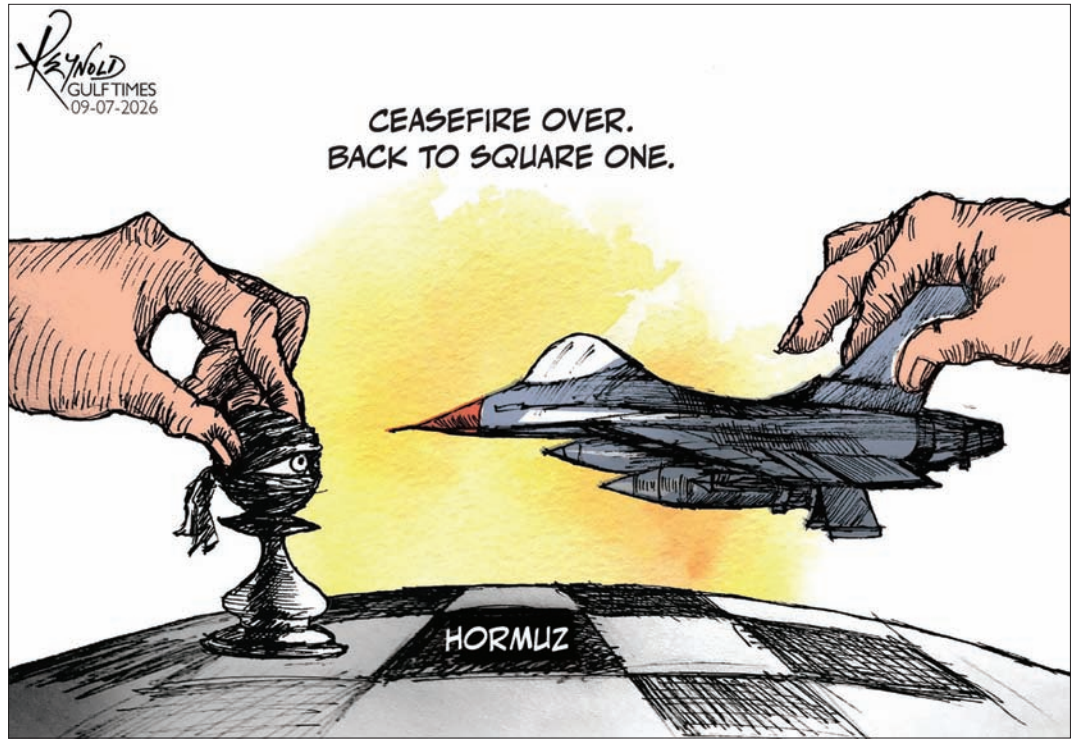
The Qatar Financial Centre, which added more than 800 firms for growth of around 57% year-on-year, is the clearest signal of that shift. Firms of this kind do not relocate on a whim.

They come because they have concluded that Qatar offers a stable base from which to serve a wider region – a judgement worth more than any single mega-deal.

Just as telling is the changing texture of what arrives. For decades the story here was about energy, and liquefied natural gas remains the cornerstone. But the capital now flowing into financial services, technology, artificial intelligence and the wider knowledge economy points to something more durable than a commodity cycle – diversification not as slogan but as observable fact, precisely the outcome Qatar National Vision 2030 was written to produce.

A note of realism is warranted. Registrations are an opening, not an outcome, as competition for capital intensifies. Complacency is the one luxury a diversifying economy cannot afford.

Yet the direction of travel is unmistakable. What these figures ultimately measure is trust – the considered verdict of businesses that could have gone anywhere and chose here. Trust is slow to earn and quick to lose, which is why the quiet, methodical manner of Qatar's progress matters as much as its pace. This quarter, the world answered in kind.



The Gulf's widening Asian security web

By Rory Miller



The recent US-Iran conflict has focused more attention than ever on the Arab Gulf's long-anticipated pivot to China. An April headline in the Hong Kong based *Asia Times* summed up what is now an increasingly common view: "Gulf poised to move closer to China after the war."

This is understandable. China is the number one trading partner of the six GCC states, including their top oil and gas customer. Economic ties go far beyond energy. As a recent World Economic Forum paper put it, this is a "full-stack economic relationship spanning capital, technology, manufacturing, logistics, clean energy and industrial development". This also has an important strategic dimension as it has led to a deep interdependence that allows Beijing to challenge US primacy in the Gulf region.

When it comes to the GCC, China may be the biggest pebble on the Asian beach but it is not the only one. Other north-east, south and south-east Asian states have been active across the Gulf for many years. These include Japan, South Korea, India, Pakistan, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia and Taiwan. Relations between the GCC states and these other Asian actors are less known than those with China, but in many ways they are built on more common interests and shared realities.

China is America's main strategic competitor and a first rank military and economic player with Great Power interests all over the world. These other Asian actors, like their GCC counterparts, are small states and middle powers primarily focused on consolidating security in their home region using soft power. Many are enthusiastic members of ASEAN, and all value multilateralism and international institutions as frameworks for stability and order. For example, they are all much more preoccupied with maintaining order at sea through international law than China (and the US).

These relationships often include a significant energy component. Japan, South Korea and India are the GCC's most important oil and gas customers after China. Pakistan, Thailand, Taiwan and Singapore also rely heavily on GCC energy imports. As in the Chinese case, these actors are increasingly important players in several strategic sectors beyond energy. This matters greatly since the closure of Hormuz led many Asian states, at least temporarily, to look to energy suppliers outside the GCC.

Japan is accelerating joint R&D in AI supply chains, space tech, and robotics. Singapore is more involved than ever in the digital technology and fintech sectors. Taiwan has a growing, albeit discreet, footprint in smart healthcare, EV



production, and sustainable technology. South Korea has been involved in ship building, nuclear power and mega-infrastructure projects in the Gulf for decades. Now it is becoming a notable player in AI, clean energy and desalination. India is established in regional IT, banking, logistics and digital services.

Asian and GCC actors share the same developmental state model as China. This enables them to use state-owned or state-linked enterprises to carry out high-cost, long-term projects that only offer medium-to-long term benefits. But partnering with Asian countries over China has an added political bonus: it avoids tensions with the US over co-operation with China in sensitive areas like tech. Much more than China, these Asian actors also share with GCC states a belief in the power of nurturing interdependence with countries across the globe not only to increase trade and influence but to promote global norms in the interests of regional security in a contested geopolitical environment.

There is also a more explicit security component to these relations. Alongside China, these Asian actors first deployed naval vessels to the Gulf of Aden to counter Somali piracy in 2008-09. Since then, they have increased their cooperation with the GCC states on a range of maritime security threats. In 2020, Japan, which has a naval base in Djibouti, deployed a destroyer and a surveillance plane to the region. The following year, South Korea deployed its anti-piracy unit to the Strait of Hormuz after Iran seized one of its oil tankers.

Japan and South Korea are also among eight Asian members of the 47-strong US-led Combined Maritime Force (CMF), the world's largest multinational maritime coalition. The other Asian members are Malaysia, The Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Pakistan and India. They work alongside all the GCC states except the UAE, which withdrew in 2023, to police the Strait of Hormuz, the Red Sea, the Bab-al-Mandeb Strait and the Gulf of Aden. This mandate, in waterways of vital importance to GCC and Asian countries, will be even more important going forward.

On the bilateral level, India has the most developed maritime security partnership with the GCC. It holds regular naval exercises, and has upgraded naval interoperability and strategic port access across the Gulf. Beyond naval co-operation, South Korea has a special forces contingent based in the UAE that provides counter-terror and emergency response training.

In February 2026, on the eve of the war, Saudi Arabia signed a defence agreement with Malaysia for military training. In mid-June, Qatar and Indonesia signed a similar agreement for military training and army and navy collaborations.

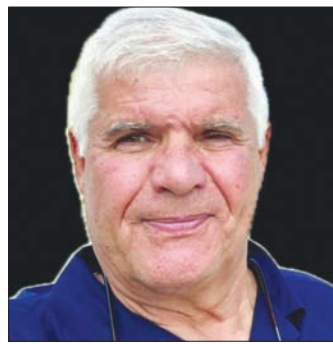
These Asian states are still very much secondary security players in the Gulf compared to US Central Command (CENTCOM). But it would be a mistake to underestimate the mutual benefits of enhanced security cooperation for both the GCC and their Asian partners in the future. Like the GCC states, many of these Asian actors have long relied, and will continue to rely, on the US for security. But in today's uncertain geopolitical environment, they have a common interest in working together to diversify their security partnerships.

From the GCC perspective, these Asian actors are obvious partners in any future homegrown defensive security frameworks. Their pro-US credentials would also raise few red flags in Washington if they played a bigger role in the GCC build-up of sovereign defence-industrial capabilities.

As relations develop, these opportunities may appeal to Asian states not only as revenue generators but as ways to protect their rising non-energy interests in the Gulf and to partially check Chinese strategic ambitions in the wider region.

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Shepherds or gladiators: Israel's October ballot



By Jamil K Mroue

On the morning of October 7, 2023, the Israeli state failed twice. It was caught off guard – the founding promise of the Jewish state, never again undefended, broken in a single dawn. And then, for weeks, it was simply absent. Civil society ran the rescue: volunteers organised evacuations, equipped reservists, housed the displaced, identified the dead. Ministers who ventured into public were met not with grief shared but with fury unconcealed. The government could not even perform sympathy. That double failure – of protection and of presence – is the wound at the origin of everything that followed.

What followed was not strategy. It was compensation. A government that had failed as defender set out to overperform as avenger, rechanneling society's outrage at it into outrage through it – outward, onto Gaza, then Lebanon, then Syria, with the prime minister and his ministers as active inciters rather than restrainers.

The scale of devastation exceeded any security logic; it exceeded even the old Revisionist doctrine of the Iron Wall, which Jabotinsky conceived as pedagogy – force applied until the neighbor concedes your permanence, then negotiation. This was something else: the concentrated tragedy of centuries of pogroms, inverted and discharged upon others. Call it the reverse pogrom syndrome – a society formed by the memory of collective victimhood enacting collective ruin and cheering it on. That cheering is on the universal record now, alongside the record of the acts themselves: warrants from the International Criminal Court against the prime minister and his former defense minister, a UN commission's finding of genocide, proceedings at the ICJ, recognition of Palestinian statehood by London and Paris, and the steady inversion of American opinion polls. Netanyahu coined the "ring of fire" to rally his public against encircling enemies; what closed around Israel is a wider ring – of rejection and damnation, forged by Israel's own conduct. The afflicted man whose house was attacked turned and burned the neighbourhood, and the neighbourhood has rendered its verdict: this is a danger, not a security-seeker.

Now Israel votes, in October – a month that will forever carry the weight of the failure. And here is the disquieting finding of the campaign so far: the ring of damnation is on the ballot only as a competence question, never as a moral one. The election's declared central issue is the state commission of inquiry into October 7 – the accountability instrument Netanyahu has spent three years evading, lately by legislating a politically appointed substitute whose passage he purchased from the Haredi parties with draft exemptions. Three-quarters of Israelis want him gone; more than 90% believe Iran came out ahead of the last war. Yet listen to the opposition's indictment of the isolation: Lapid warns that Israel's foreign relations will be "wiped out"; Eisenkot – the bereaved general now running neck-and-neck with Likud – protests that Netanyahu drove Washington to negotiate with Iran alone and finds it "inconceivable" that Israel needs American approval to strike in Lebanon. These are grievances of squandered assets and lost sovereignty, from men who backed the wars that produced the damnation.

The contest, as Palestinian analysts have observed, is not between two projects but within one – a dispute over the management of the siege, not its cause. Netanyahu, for his part, has stopped disputing the isolation and enshrined it: his "Super-Sparta" is the garrison state as destination, permanent mobilisation as national identity, the world's condemnation recast as proof of righteousness.

Whoever wins inherits the harder question, the one no party is asking aloud: how does a society step back from the reverse pogrom? Not diplomatically – a change of prime minister will be accepted at face value by fatigued chancelleries and by Gulf capitals eager to resume normalisation. That transaction is cheap, and it is a trap.

The monumental task is different: to give the region evidence of a new phase – evidence weighty enough that the victims, whose tragedy is now registered in the world's courts and archives, are not left to harbour historical revenge as their inheritance, as Jewish memory itself harboured the pogroms. Peace that does not reckon with what was done will

merely schedule the next eruption; the decades-long simmer that October 7 brought to violent boil will simmer on.

Two temptations must be named, because both are already visible. The first is the manufacture of the next bogeyman. With Iran decapitated and half-broken, the machinery of perpetual mobilisation is turning toward Türkiye and Erdogan as the successor threat. This is pressure-cooker politics: it does not release the accumulated force in the region; it seals the lid tighter – and the pressure is already registering. The second temptation is restoration nostalgia – the belief, common to most of Netanyahu's challengers, that returning to pre-October "conflict management" constitutes an answer. October 7 was conflict management's verdict.

There exists, and has existed for a quarter-century, a pressure-release valve of an entirely different order: the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002 – full normalisation with the entire Arab and Islamic world, including a settlement of relations that would encompass even a post-theocratic Iran's reintegration, in exchange for a sovereign Palestinian state and an agreed resolution of the refugee question. It remains on the table, unwidened through four wars. Israeli society has never been asked by its leaders to look at it squarely; it must be made aware that the choice is not between Sparta and surrender, but between the standing regional offer and endless war. Ending the Palestinian hemorrhage is not a concession to the ring of rejection – it is the sole path out of it.

That is what this ballot decides, whatever its stated question. The arithmetic itself carries the message: the Jewish opposition cannot reach a majority without the ten seats of the Arab parties – the very citizens half the political map refuses to count. An electorate, not a court, will determine whether Israel's next leaders are shepherds of peace or gladiators in an arena where the contest ends only when one side perishes. Societies do not often get to see the precipice before the fall. Israel's, this October, will be looking straight at it.

• The Lebanese writer is former editor of *Al-Hayat* in London and *The Daily Star* in Beirut.



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and US President Donald Trump at the White House in Washington. (Reuters/File photo)

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QF's Creating Pathways volleyball programme builds confidence among next gen girls

As the world celebrates World Volleyball Day, Qatar Foundation (QF)'s Creating Pathways programme is using volleyball to help empower the next generation of girls in Qatar, building confidence, leadership and lifelong skills both on and off the court.

Volleyball is one of five sports offered through Qatar Foundation's (QF) Creating Pathways programme, an initiative that empowers women and girls through sport. Today, 36 girls are part of the volleyball programme, with 19 players in the U-12 squad and 17 in the U-14 group, building their skills, confidence, and love for the game.

Alongside track and field, fencing, tennis, and basketball, the Creating Pathways programme aims to encourage physical activity and wellbeing while helping participants build confidence and develop new skills. Created to increase participation in sport and provide pathways for girls to grow both personally and athletically, the initiative reflects the growing role of sport as a platform for empowerment, connection, and personal growth.

For 12-year-old participant, Misk Arafath Majeed, who joined the volleyball programme just over a month ago, the experience has already had a meaningful impact. "It has made me more confident and more active," she said. "It's my safe space because I can be myself here."

Training three times a week, Majeed says she enjoys learning new techniques, including spiking, and looks forward to the matches played at the end of each session. "My favourite thing is that it keeps me active," she explains. "My coaches are really nice, and the girls are really encouraging. I've made lots of friends on the team."

Another young athlete, 11-year-

old participant Aisha Faesal N M al-Sultan, says joining the initiative has helped her build on the skills she first developed at school.

"I joined the Creating Pathways programme after playing on my school's volleyball team," she said. "I took part in the training sessions, and later a number of students were selected to continue in the programme, and I was one of them."

Having played volleyball for two years, she says the sport continues to challenge and inspire her. "I love volleyball because it keeps me active and helps me learn new skills."

According to Tijana Avramovi, head coach of the Creating Pathways volleyball programme, the initiative is helping girls grow both as athletes and as individuals.

"Sport is really important for girls - and for everyone," she said. "Through sport, you learn valuable life skills that stay with you long after the game. You develop discipline, empathy, teamwork, and many other qualities that help you in everyday life. Through this programme, we're not only helping the girls become better players - we're also helping them grow as people."

While identifying talented players is one of the programme's objectives, Avramovi says one of the biggest successes has been watching the girls become more comfortable and confident with one another.

She explains that celebrating World Volleyball Day gave participants the opportunity to feel connected to something much larger than their own training sessions. "The tournament helps the players feel like they're part of something bigger. They're celebrating World Volleyball Day alongside people all over the world, which creates a real sense of belonging and connection to the global volleyball community."

QF's Ability Friendly Programme's summer camps empower kids

By Joseph Varghese
Staff Reporter

Qatar Foundation (QF)'s Ability Friendly Programme, through its summer camps, is empowering participants with the confidence and skills needed to thrive in day-to-day life. Meant for children with special needs, the summer camps running from July 5-16 and July 19-30 welcome those aged 5 to 18 years.

"This year, we are welcoming children and young people aged 5-18 years. We expect approximately 15 participants in each camp, allowing us to provide more personalised experience and ensure every child receives the attention and support they need," Noof al-Taweel, co-curricular activities specialist, Ability Friendly programme, told *Gulf Times*.

Al-Taweel noted that the participants have a range of different abilities and support needs, and the activities are designed to allow everyone to participate at their own pace while enjoying shared experiences with their peers.

"We welcome the participants to the two-week camps running in

July. Participants enjoy a wide variety of activities, including horse riding, STEM activities, educational field trips, and community outings, in addition to sports, arts and crafts, music, sensory activities, life skills, and group games," explained al-Taweel.

According to al-Taweel, every activity is thoughtfully adapted to meet individual needs, allowing each participant to engage with confidence and enjoy the experience in their own way. The programme is delivered by trained inclusive coaches and facilitators who provide the support needed to help every child succeed.

"For us, empowerment begins with belonging. Every child deserves to feel valued, capable, and included. Whether it is trying a new activity, making a new friend, or simply feeling confident enough to participate in a group setting, these moments have a lasting impact," continued the official.

Beyond developing communication, teamwork, and confidence, al-Taweel said that the programme encourages participants to become more independent in their daily routines, make decisions with confidence, and build meaningful friendships in a

supportive and inclusive environment.

She noted: "Every participant comes to us with unique strengths and individual support needs. Some may require additional support with communication, social interaction, sensory regulation, or adapting to new environments, while others may have physical support needs."

Al-Taweel said that the programme focuses on each child's abilities rather than the challenges.

The official highlighted that one of the most rewarding aspects of the programme is witnessing the growth in the participants.

She stated: "Children who may begin the programme feeling shy or hesitant often leave with great-



Noof al-Taweel

er confidence, stronger communication skills, and new friendships. We see them taking more initiative, participating more actively in group activities, and becoming increasingly willing to try new experiences."

"Parents frequently tell us they notice these positive changes at home as well. Some have shared that their children's mood is more positive throughout the day and that they are more focused and engaged in other programs and activities after leaving camp.

Knowing that the impact continues beyond our program is incredibly meaningful to us," added al-Taweel.



Doha Debates town hall asks: Is football fandom for sale?

While billions of eyes are on the football pitch, Qatar Foundation (QF)'s Doha Debates is turning its gaze to the stands this summer.

In partnership with the Qatar-Canada and Mexico 2026 Year of Culture, Doha Debates hosted a signature town hall in Toronto, Canada yesterday on what happens to football fandom when big money gets involved in the "beautiful game".

"Football Fandom: Community or Commodity?" brings global experts and young people together for a debate about whether the soul of the world's most-watched sport has been corrupted or invigorated by an influx of wealthy club owners.

Senior contributor at CBC Sports Shireen Ahmed; writer, historian, and sociologist of football David Goldblatt; and president of the Nascimento Foundation Kely Nascimento join a group of students and recent graduates from Qatar, Canada, and Mexico for this timely dis-

ussion, moderated by international journalist Imran Garda.

Qatar's ambassador to Canada Tariq Ali Faraj al-Ansari said: "Football is ultimately about people, which is why this conversation matters. As a universal language, football has long served as a bridge across cultures, empowering communities and reinforcing the recognised nexus between sport and development. Our Year of Culture with Canada reflects the values our two nations share - values that united Qatar during the 2022 FIFA World Cup and now connect the tournament's journey to Canada and its fellow 2026 hosts."

"This continuity speaks to the enduring role of football in projecting culture, strengthening international co-operation, and advancing human values. Through this Doha Debates town hall, diverse voices will come together to explore the game's evolution while keeping fans and communities at its heart."

Amjad Atallah, managing director of Doha

Debates, said: "Football is one of the few forces left that can make a billion people feel something at exactly the same moment. But as the game grows bigger, richer and more global, the question of what it means to truly belong to a club - or to a national team - becomes harder to answer."

"That is the truth-seeking conversation we are bringing to Toronto, and there is no better partner for it than the Years of Culture initiative, which reflects the same spirit of exchange, connection and cross-cultural understanding at the heart of this town hall," he added.

Established in 2012, the Years of Culture initiative uses cultural exchange to build lasting relationships between Qatar and countries around the world through partnerships in the arts, education, heritage, sport and innovation. The 2026 edition celebrates Qatar's relationships with Canada and Mexico through a year-long programme of exhibitions, educational initiatives and community exchanges.



NCSA receives EFQM Recognised for Excellence award

The National Cyber Security Agency (NCSA) received the Recognised for Excellence - 4 Stars award from the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM).

The official ceremony was attended by HE Engineer Abdulrahman bin Ali al-Farahid al-Malki, president of NCSA and Russell Longmuir, CEO of EFQM, alongside a number of senior officials, executives, and agency personnel.

This achievement marks a significant milestone in the agency's journey towards embedding a culture of institutional excellence. It reflects the successful implementation of the EFQM Excellence Model in accordance with international best practices, enhancing organisational performance and sustainability while supporting the continuous advancement of the agency's institutional framework and the achievement of its strategic objectives.

NCSA affirmed that this achievement reflects its steadfast



commitment to institutional excellence as a strategic approach founded on quality, innovation, and continuous improvement. It noted that the recognition is the result of a clear strategic vision and the collective efforts of all agency personnel, and serves as a catalyst for the continued advancement of institutional performance in support of the agency's strategic objectives and Qatar's aspirations for leadership in cybersecurity.

Longmuir commended NCSA for the progress it has achieved in implementing the EFQM Excellence Model. He noted that

the agency's receipt of the Recognised for Excellence award reflects the maturity of its institutional framework and its continued commitment to adopting best practices and driving sustainable improvement.

The ceremony included the official presentation of the Recognised for Excellence award to NCSA, followed by the recognition of the organisations and individuals who contributed to the successful delivery of the institutional excellence project.

The consultancy firm OISSG Consultancy, together with a



number of agency leaders, departments, and employees who played a key role in achieving this milestone, were honoured during the ceremony.

NCSA's receipt of the EFQM Recognised for Excellence award reaffirms its commitment to continuously enhancing its institutional performance framework, strengthening a culture of quality and innovation, and adopting international best practices to improve organisational performance and institutional sustainability, while contributing to the State of Qatar's vision for leadership and excellence.

QC completes 60 paediatric heart procedures in Sudan

In a new and impactful humanitarian initiative, Qatar Charity's medical team completed a series of cardiac catheterisations and open-heart surgeries for children in Sudan, successfully performing 60 operations in Wad Madani. Dr Abdulmajeed al-Hamidi, Qatar Charity's expert in Programmes and International Development, said that the specialised medical camp for treating congenital heart defects in children at the Heart Hospital in Wad Madani successfully carried out corrective procedures through cardiac catheterisation and open-heart surgery, with the support of benefactors in Qatar.

Prof Salah al-Basha, director general of the National Heart Centre and Senior Consultant Cardiologist at the Ministry of Health, confirmed that the camp implemented by Qatar Charity was the first of its kind since the war. He noted the urgent need for such interventions, given the growing number of patients who have been awaiting treatment in recent years

because of the conflict.

Dr Mostafa al-Mahya, Consultant in Interventional Cardiac Catheterisation, explained that catheterisation procedures were performed on many children and that their conditions are now stable, by the grace of God. Dr Mohamed al-Assar, a paediatric specialist and member of Qatar Charity's visiting medical team in Sudan, said that most of the cases were life-threatening, with recovery rates ranging from 90-100%.

Sudanese Minister of Health Dr Haitham Mohamed Ibrahim, Governor of Al Jazirah State Al-Tahir Ibrahim al-Khair, and acting chargé d'affaires of the embassy of the State of Qatar, Abdullah Rashid al-Khater, inaugurated the launch of surgical operations at the Madani Heart Centre.

The initiative aims to alleviate children's suffering by providing free surgeries and treatment, making a significant difference for families whose living conditions have been affected by war and displacement.

Qatar Charity's medical interventions in Sudan are part of an integrated health programme that includes a cochlear implant programme for children at Doha Hospital in Khartoum, as well as a blindness prevention programme benefiting more than 6,000 patients. These efforts are being carried out alongside Qatar Charity's continued support for Sudan's health sector through the equipping and furnishing of hospitals and the provision of life-saving medical devices, equipment, and medicines.



QRCS launches medical convoy for surgeries in Sudan

Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS) launched a week-long medical convoy in Sudan to provide free urology and gastrointestinal (GI) endoscopy services, benefiting 500 underprivileged patients, performing 250 surgeries for critical cases, and training local healthcare professionals.

This initiative is implemented in partnership with Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC), Kuwait's Patients Helping Fund Society (PHF), the Sudanese Doctors Association in Qatar (SUDAQ), and Sudan's Federal Ministry of Health (FMOH).

With the assistance of the medical staff at Omdurman Teaching Hospital in Khartoum, the medical convoy is being carried out by a volunteer team of nine urologists, GI endoscopy surgeons, and anaesthetists, headed by Dr Abdullah al-Nuaimi, senior consultant urologist and deputy chief medical officer for Medical Education at HMC.

The launching ceremony was attended by a representative of FMOH, head of the Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC) in Khartoum, head of QRCS' representation office in Sudan, executive director of PHF - Sudan, representative of SUDAQ, director-general of Omdurman Teaching Hospital, representative of the World Health Organisation (WHO), director-

general of Hospitals at FMOH, health leaders, and participating doctors.

On day one of the medical convoy, 21 diverse surgeries were performed, including 13 diagnostic/therapeutic GI endoscopy procedures and 12 renal bladder and prostate procedures. These successful surgeries are expected to alleviate the suffering of patients, reduce waiting lists, and provide in-service training for Sudanese medical professionals.

In preparation for the project, QRCS supported the host hospital with all the necessary endoscopes, surgical kits, and sterilisation equipment, thus ensuring top-quality medical services for the patients.

Other long-term objectives include strengthening the hospital's infrastructure, increasing its capacity, ensuring sustainable specialised health care services, enabling patients to regain their health, and reducing mortality rates and health complications resulting from delayed treatment.

As the Sudanese health sector struggles with recurrent conflicts and economic challenges, the country is a top priority for QRCS's medical convoys. Over the past few years, many medical convoys have been deployed, covering vital medical specialisations such as ophthalmology, general surgery, and urology.

This year, there are plans to launch QR9.3mn worth of humanitarian projects to provide medical care for patients and capacity-building for hospitals, with a total of 210 beneficiaries, mainly poor, displaced, injured, and disabled people.

The list includes medical convoys for ophthalmology, general surgery, and cardiac surgery/catheterisation for children. Mobile clinics and pharmacies will also be deployed to provide free medical services and medications in remote areas. Moreover, two health centres will be furnished, and cancer drugs, dialysis machines and accessories, and other medical aids will be procured.

To support the people of Sudan, QRCS welcomes donations via its website (<https://qrsc.org.qa>), mobile app (QRCS), donor service (6666364), home donation collection service (33998898), and donation agents/desks at malls and shopping centres.





Young visitors at Qatar Toy Festival 2026 participate in activities designed to develop creativity, teamwork and problem-solving skills. **PICTURES:** Shaji Kayamkulam



Qatar Toy Festival highlights rise of 'edutainment' in summer tourism

By Joey Aguilar
Doha

The Qatar Toy Festival 2026 is showcasing the growing appeal of "edutainment", drawing large numbers of families with immersive experiences that combine entertainment, creativity and hands-on learning.

Running until July 31 at the Doha Exhibition and Convention Centre (DECC), the month-long event also reflects Qatar's efforts to expand its portfolio of year-round family attractions.

Apart from colourful mascots, giant inflatables and live performances, the festival transforms the venue into an interactive playground where children meet their favourite characters while taking part in activities designed to develop creativity, teamwork and problem-solving skills.

The festival also illustrates why large-scale indoor events have become an important feature of Qatar's summer tourism calendar.

Offering respite from the intense heat,



they allow families to spend entire days enjoying themed attractions, live entertainment and interactive learning experiences under one roof during the school holidays.

Across the exhibition halls, children take part in arts and crafts, construction-themed activities, obstacle courses and role-playing experiences that encourage creativity, communication and collaboration.

One of the festival's most popular attractions recreates an emergency response scenario where children wear firefighter gear and work with instructors to extinguish a simulated building fire, introducing basic fire safety concepts while building confidence and teamwork.

Elsewhere, creative workshops invite youngsters to build, design and experiment, while themed play zones and interactive games keep them physically active and socially engaged.

Daily stage productions featuring storytelling, music, dance, and puppetry promote values such as friendship, kindness, co-operation, and perseverance, while character meet-and-greet sessions enhance the immersive atmosphere.

Watching her two children enjoy the activities, Doha resident Rochelle S said that the festival offers far more than entertainment.

"Children learn best when they're enjoying themselves," she said. "My son loved putting on the firefighter uniform and working with the other children."

"He's having fun, but I think he's also

learning teamwork, responsibility and basic safety," she added. "It's much better than simply sitting in front of a screen."

She said that the festival provides families with a meaningful indoor option during the summer months.

"When it's too hot outside, parents are always looking for worthwhile activities," she pointed out. "Here we can spend several hours together while the children stay active, make friends and learn something new."

"That's what makes it worthwhile."

The growing popularity of experience-based entertainment echoes a wider trend across the region.

According to UN Tourism, the Middle East is the world's fastest-growing tourism region, with Gulf countries investing in year-round attractions and family-friendly events to attract more visitors and diversify their tourism sectors.

The educational value of play is supported by decades of child development research.

Unicef describes play as fundamental to children's cognitive, emotional, social and physical development, while developmental psychologists have found that guided play strengthens creativity, collaboration, communication and problem-solving skills.

This trend is becoming increasingly common across the Gulf, where indoor entertainment centres, interactive museums, and themed festivals continue to expand alongside tourism developments.

Qatar to be guest of honour at 40th Jerash Festival

Qatar, represented by the Ministry of Culture, will be the guest of honour at the 40th Jerash Festival for Culture and Arts in Jordan.

Held under the theme of *A Legacy That Endures... Generations Meet*, the 40th Jerash Festival for Culture and Arts will run from July 22 to August 2.

Qatar will participate with a diverse cultural and artistic programme that reflects its cultural identity and national heritage, and presents to the festival's visitors a comprehensive image of Qatar's cultural landscape.

Officials said the participation comes as part of efforts to strengthen cultural co-operation and partnership between Qatar and Jordan.

It also reflects the Ministry of Culture's commitment to expanding the presence of Qatari culture at Arab cultural events, showcasing Qatar's literary, artistic, and heritage achievements.

Qatar will set up an official pavilion at the festival, which will offer an immersive cultural experience to visitors, showcasing key aspects of the country's cultural identity through a collection of exhibits.

There will be poetry evenings organised by the Qatar Poetry Centre, with a select group of poets from the Mathayel Nabati Poetry Competition.

There will also be traditional folk performances by the Qatari folkloric band "Al Jubailat", featuring artiste Omar Bou Saqr.

Qatar's participation will conclude with a musical concert starring artists Ali Abdul Sattar and Mansoor al-Muhammadi. - QNA

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Puck Cheese Triangles 120 gm x 5 pcs x 1 Set



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