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**EDITORIAL ¥ 02** 

VIOLATION
OF TRUCE
AGREEMENT



MONDAY 03 MARCH 2025 03 RAMADAN 1446

# Peninsula



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## Ramadan Mubarak





World's Best Airline



# Parents express concerns over private school timings after Ministry reduces public school hours in Ramadan

THE PENINSULA

**DOHA:** As the holy month of Ramadan begins, schools across Qatar are making adjustments to their schedules to accommodate the requirements during this special time of the year.

The Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE) has announced that government schools and kindergartens will operate from 8.30am to 12pm. During this period, administrative and teaching staff will be working from 8.30am to 12.30pm.

According to the Ministry, these timing adjustments are aimed at ensuring academic benefit for students and consideration of the holy month's special nature.

In contrast, private schools in Qatar seems to follow different schedules. Some private schools are maintaining the normal timings with only nominal difference in closing hours. The difference in school hours has sparked concerns and has prompted discussions among parents, particularly regarding the impact on daily routines.

Even some of the parents

**The Peninsula** online survey on the subject received overwhelming response of over 173,275 views in two days on social media platforms.

raised questions on why the Ministry is addressing only public schools.

To better understand the sentiments of parents, *The Peninsula* reached out to its readers to share their thoughts on the Ramadan school timings in private schools.

Within two days, *The Peninsula* received a

considerable number of responses through its social media platforms. The question posed to readers was: "Are you satisfied with private schools' Ramadan timings?" The feedback gathered, in turn, revealed significant concerns and frustrations from a majority of respondents.

The survey received

overwhelming response on social media platforms. It received over 173,275 views in two days and over 150 comments were reviewed for this report.

Based on the responses, the majority of responders expressed dissatisfaction with the current Ramadan timings in some private schools across Qatar. The primary

• In the survey some of the parents raised questions on why the Ministry is addressing only public schools.

 The differences in school hours has sparked common concerns and prompted discussions among parents, particularly regarding the impact on daily routines. point of concern by many parents was the disruption caused to their transportation schedules.

The issue at hand is commonly faced by working parents who are juggling work commitments with school runs. The adjustment in school hours has led to several logistical challenges. Many working parents pointed out that the mismatched timings between school hours and their work schedule are creating inconvenience, particularly when it came to drop-offs and pick-ups.

One respondent on Facebook noted: "I think that children should start as normal and finish earlier or even start earlier and finish earlier. The change in timings also messes up how people can transport their kids to school so if the morning start times of school and work doesn't change then it doesn't mess with the morning routine and we all can just adjust for the afternoon finish times instead of having to deal with both start and finish times."

Another reader expressed a similar concern: "8.30am to 1.30pm looks fair. Some amount of studies will be done. But selfpick-up and drop-off would be

an issue, as most office timings are from 8.30am to 1.30pm"

These comments highlight the challenges of balancing both work and school schedules during Ramadan, especially for parents with less flexibility in their work hours.

In addition to transportation concerns, some parents also mentioned concerns such as heavy traffic, lack of sleep, and lifestyle changes.

Despite the overwhelming dissatisfaction, a number of parents expressed satisfaction with the school hours set by some private schools in Qatar.

While the overall feedback has been mixed, it is evident that the adjustments to school hours during Ramadan have created a ripple effect on daily routines for many families. While some parents found the new schedules to be manageable, others are struggling with the logistical challenges that come with them.

The feedback provided by *The Peninsula* readers served as a valuable insight for schools as the families themselves expressed their desire for these concerns to be addressed.

## Israel halts aid to Gaza, refuses to start truce's second phase

GAZA: The Israeli occupation decided yesterday to stop the entry of humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip and close the crossings until further notice.

Palestinian news agency (WAFA) reported that the Israeli decision was taken during a meeting held last night, in the context of Israel's reneging on the ceasefire agreement, as this coincides

with the end of the first phase of the ceasefire agreement last night.

Hamas slammed the move, saying in a statement that the "decision to suspend humanitarian aid is cheap blackmail, a war crime and a blatant coup against the (ceasefire) agreement".

Hamas called on "mediators and the international

community to pressure" Israel to "put an end to these punitive, immoral measures against more than two million people in the Gaza Strip". Its spokesman Hazem Qassem later said Israel "bears responsibility for the consequences of its decision on the people of the Strip and the fate of its

prisoners".

Hamas has repeatedly

rejected an extension in the first phase of ceasefire deal, instead favouring a transition to the truce deal's second phase, which would see the release of all remaining hostages and a more permanent end to the fighting in the Gaza Strip.

President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Mirjana Spoljaric, called on Sunday for "spare no effort" to maintain the ceasefire in Gaza and prevent pushing people back into despair.

In a statement, Spoljaric emphasized that "every effort must be made to sustain the ceasefire in order to save lives from the ongoing fighting, allow humanitarian aid to enter Gaza, and reunite more families." — QNA/AGENCIES



#### Qatar condemns Israeli decision to halt entry of aid to Gaza Strip

DOHA: The State of Qatar has strongly condemned the Israeli occupation government's decision to halt the entry of humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip, calling it a blatant violation of the ceasefire agreement, international humanitarian law, the Fourth Geneva Convention, and all reli-

gious laws. In a statement issued yesterday, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) emphasised the State of Qatar's unequivocal rejection of using food as a weapon of war and starving civilians. The ministry called on the international community to compel Israel to ensure the safe, sustainable, and unobstructed entry of humanitarian aid to all areas of the Gaza Strip.

The ministry reiterated the State of Qatar's steadfast stance on the just Palestinian cause and the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, including the establishment of an independent state on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. — *QNA* 

## **Qatar preserves 2,970 heads of nine endangered species of wildlife**

SANAULLAH ATAULLAH THE PENINSULA

DOHA: To ensure biodiversity to protect the environment and address climate change, the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change (MECC) has said that it is implementing a programme for the conservation and propagation of endangered species to protect wildlife.

As many as 2,970 heads of nine endangered species of wildlife have been preserved, including the Arabian Oryx, sand gazelle, tortoise, and ostrich.

Qatar is making great efforts to protect endangered species, including the establishment and expansion of nature reserves.

These reserves enjoy their biodiversity, rare animals, and plants, in addition to coral reefs full of unique marine creatures. The expansion of nature reserves has contributed to achieving great success in preserving endangered species.

Qatar is home to 11 nature reserves, representing about 29% of the country's total area. Land reserves represent about 27% of the country's land areas, while marine reserves represent about 2% of the country's marine and coastal areas.

Al Reem Reserve was recognised as a human and biosphere reserve by Unesco in 2007, where the reserve was included in the World Network of Biosphere Reserves as the

first reserve of its kind.

The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change continues its efforts to support private project owners in captive breeding of the Houbara bustard, to enhance the conservation of endangered species.

Rawdat Al Faras Centre for the Breeding of the Endangered Houbara Bustard seeks to increase the number of projects for the production and breeding of the Houbara Bustard in Qatar.

The Center provides tremendous support and services,

including technical and advisory services, and organising training and educational courses aimed at enhancing knowledge of its production and breeding methods.

The ministry provides an integrated package of incentives and initiatives to citizens wishing to establish private projects to produce and breed the Houbara bustard.

The services include providing unified proposals, models, and designs for building and establishing breeding projects for this bird.

Qatar is home to 11 nature reserves, representing about 29% of the country's total area. Qatar is making great efforts to protect endangered species, including the establishment and expansion of nature reserves



## Qatar well-positioned for ICT market investments

JOEL JOHNSON
THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Qatar is well-established and perfectly positioned geographically enabling the country to witness 'heavy investments' in technology and telecommunications.

An official told *The Peninsula* that the country is an ideal hub for entrepreneurs for investments, focusing on growing the digital economy within Qatar itself.

Baran Yurdagul, Chief Operating Officer (COO), at Vodafone Qatar, said: "Qatar, in terms of its location, is a very advanced place because we are just in the middle of the Middle East and the GCC."

He noted that the telecommunications operator is heavily investing in the enablers and capabilities of the country.

"The whole idea is that it's an in-advance investment for us, but we believe it will pay back for us. So, we want to build the digital economy in Qatar and are focused on growing the digital economy within Qatar itself," he said.

The official mentioned that the ecosystem and entrepreneurship are significant as Vodafone Qatar helps the startups to be the next unicorn in the region and globally.

Vodafone Qatar, one of the core connectivity players in the region, is also diversifying its revenue streams and



Baran Yurdagul, Chief Operating Officer (COO), at Vodafone Qatar.

services in the ICT digital space.

"What we believe is Vodafone Qatar is built to change the game of telecommunications in Qatar, and we are actively working with entrepreneurs and our partners to take this scale of Vodafone to the next stage," Yurdagul said.

During the recently concluded Web Summit Qatar 2025, Vodafone Qatar showcased its innovations, products, and services.

He said: "The Web Summit concept is aligned with Vodafone because as a global player and connectivity provider, we help startups and entrepreneurs from the ideation stage to their ideas becoming commercial."

Additionally, Vodafone Qatar signed several memorandums of understanding with Snoonu, Samsung, and other innovation systems during the four-day Summit.

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#### **EDITORIAL**

#### Violation of truce agreement

ISRAEL stopped the entry of all humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip after the first phase of the ceasefire deal ended yesterday without agreement on continuing into a second phase and Hamas rejected a temporary truce extension plan.

Israel also resumed military strikes, in which at least four people were killed and six wounded, in complete violation of the truce agreement, The Palestinian group Hamas termed it a "coup" against a six-week old ceasefire deal and a cheap blackmail tactic. As the 42-day first phase of the ceasefire drew to a close with negotiations inconclusive, Israel approved a truce extension it said US Middle East envoy Steve Witkoff proposed. The extension would cover the Muslim holy month of Ramadan and the Jewish holiday of Passover if implemented.

However, Hamas rejected the extension, instead favouring a transition to the truce deal's second phase. As outlined by former US president Joe Biden, the second phase would bring a permanent end to the war that began on October 7, 2023.

One of the mediating partners Egypt urged the full implementation of the Gaza ceasefire deal, calling on the European Union to pressure Israel to enforce it, saying there is no alternative to the faithful and full implementation of the ceasefire deal by all parties signed last January. The United Nations humanitarian agency's head Thomas Fletcher condemned Israeli suspension of vital aid into Gaza, which he said was contrary to international law.

In related a context, Qatar recently submitted a written memorandum to the International Court of Justice (ICJ), stressing that Israel must commit to allowing the UN and other international organisations, particularly UNRWA and other humanitarian organisations to operate in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories, protecting the property of the UN and other international organisations, especially schools, medical facilities, transportation and water facilities as well as their personnel. Qatar reiterated the need for commitment to allowing and facilitating relief programmes in the occupied Palestinian territories.

It asserted the need to repeal the legislation passed by the Israeli Knesset on October 28, 2024 that bans UNRWA activities in Israel and East Jerusalem and prevents all forms of contact between the Israeli authorities and UNRWA.



Qatar, Russia discuss ways to enhance cooperation

Minister of State for International Cooperation H E Maryam bint Ali bin Nasser Al Misnad met yesterday with Deputy Minister of Industry and Trade of the Russian Federation H E Alexey Gruzdev (pictured). She also met separately with Deputy Foreign Minister of Ukraine H E Mariana Betsa. During the meetings, they discussed cooperation and ways to enhance them.

## Qatar preserves 2,970 heads of nine endangered species of wildlife

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This is in addition to providing advisory services, feed, therapeutic and preventive materials, and birds for production, under the supervision of experts specialising in this field.

The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change completed, in October last year, the first phase of the country's coral reef protection and restoration programme, through a survey and study of 17 sites in Qatari territorial waters. The survey revealed the presence of two types of soft coral for the first time in Qatar, in addition to 40 types of hard coral, and 5 other types of soft coral.

The Coral Reef Protection and Restoration Program comes within the State's efforts to implement the Third National Development Strategy 2024-2030 and the National Biodiversity Plan in line with Qatar National Vision 2030.

## **Enaya and Daam Specialised Care Centre recognised for excellence**

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Hamad Medical Corporation's (HMC) Enaya and Daam Specialised Care Centre has once again been awarded Certification for Excellence in Person-Centred Care (PCC) by Planetree, this time with gold level status.

HMC's Enaya and Daam Specialised Care Centre is one of only 116 healthcare organisations worldwide to earn this prestigious award, and this is their second certification award.

HMC's Enaya and Daam Specialized Care Centre is a support facility that works with Hamad General Hospital and Rumailah Hospital. It provides 24/7 care for long-term patients who are medically complex and chronically ill.

The Centre features 184 patient beds and is the only specialised facility of its kind in Qatar.

Gold Certification for Excellence in Person-Centred Care represents the highest level of achievement in person-centred care, based on evidence and standards. Person-centred healthcare prioritises the active participation of patients and their families throughout the healthcare process with an emphasis on partnership, compassion, transparency, inclusion, and quality.

The criteria that HMC's Enaya



Nasser Al Naimi

and Daam Specialised Care Centre satisfied to achieve Planetree Gold Certification reflect what patients, residents, family members, and healthcare professionals in hundreds of focus groups say matters most to them during a healthcare experience.

As part of the Certification process, representatives from Planetree conducted a validation assessment, engaging directly with patients, families, and staff from HMC's Enaya and Daam Specialized Care Centre.

Key person-centred policies are firmly in place, including a commitment to excellence in personcentred care, with staff actively involved at all levels in fostering a culture of compassion, collaboration, and individualised support.

HMC's Enaya and Daam Specialised Care have led transformative renovations and codesigned improvements in partnership with patients to ensure that the physical environment promotes healing and supports patient and family engagement.

A few of the many enhancements include a redesign of the dental clinic, the construction of a shaded pergola for patient comfort, the installation of dedicated patient and family rooms, and the expansion of the gym with state-of-the-art equipment.

These initiatives demonstrate a strong commitment to improving patient experience and quality of

Nasser Al Naimi, Chief of Patient Experience at HMC and director for the Hamad Healthcare Quality Institute, said, "The Gold level Planetree Certification is a truly remarkable achievement by Enaya and Daam Specialised Care Centre. The team underwent a rigorous assessment by the Planetree team to achieve Gold Certification. The certification process also included a thorough review of patient experience and quality performance metrics, demonstrating how continuous measurement and improvement translate into superior healthcare outcomes".

"We are committed to

Gold Certification for Excellence in Person-Centred Care by Planetree represents the highest level of achievement in personcentred care, based on evidence and standards.

consistently elevating the standards of care, providing excellence in all facets of our services to our patients, our community, our caregivers, and our care partners," said Dr. Hanadi Khamis Mubarak Al Hamad, HMC's Deputy Chief for Long Term Care, Rehabilitation, and Geriatric Care, Medical Director of Rumailah Hospital and Qatar Rehabilitation Institute, and PCC Executive Champion of Enaya and Daam Specialised Care Centre.

"We are deeply honoured to receive recognition for our commitment to person-centred care, and we are thrilled to continue collaborating with Planetree to provide quality and personcentred healthcare in a way that best suits our patients."

Dr. Al Hamad further stated, "The dedicated members of our Patient and Family Advisory Council (PFAC) played a key role in driving all these developments. Being our partners, we are grateful for their invaluable contribution, their feedback helped us in shaping these transformations that will ultimately benefit patients and their families in the years to come."

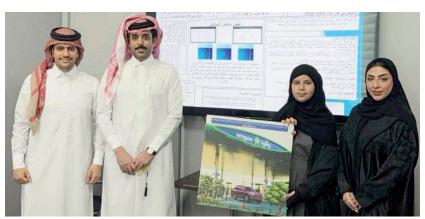
## MECC discusses scientific research on air purification in fuel stations

THE PENINSULA

**DOHA:** The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change (MECC), represented by the Environmental Monitoring and Inspection Department, received student Noura Ahmed Qasim from Al Taawun Elementary School, to present her scientific research, entitled, "The Effect of Using Polymer in Improving the Ability of Plants to Purify Air in Fuel Stations".

The research aims to study sustainable environmental solutions to improve air quality and reduce the negative effects of pollutants, as student Noura Ahmed Qasim reviewed the role of polymer in maintaining plant moisture for long periods, which increases its effectiveness in filtering air from pollutants in difficult work environments such as fuel stations. The research also addressed the effect of polymer on plant health and their ability to resist environmental pollution, in light of the environmental challenges facing such areas.

The research received wide praise



Student Noura Ahmed Qasim with MECC officials.

from specialists, as Abdullah Al Khalifi, Assistant Director of the Environmental Monitoring and Inspection Department, expressed his appreciation for this distinguished research effort, noting that this project reflects the students' environmental awareness and their keenness to find sustainable solutions to environmental challenges.

He also affirmed the Ministry's

support for such scientific initiatives that contribute to promoting a culture of sustainability within the Qatari community.

Speaking about the details of the research, Noura Ahmed Qasim explained that the research team conducted multiple experiments on different types of plants, including the mashmoum, small trees, and the sidr plant, where the results showed that

the sidr plant was the most efficient in purifying the air and withstanding harsh conditions, making it an ideal choice for use in gas stations.

Noura added, "We have proven through experiments that the polymer helps maintain soil moisture, which increases the ability of plants to purify the air, and this gives us the opportunity to use it as a practical solution in arid environments such as gas stations."

This scientific project is part of the efforts to promote environmental innovation in Qatar, as the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change looks forward to expanding the scope of the research and applying its results in other fuel stations, in order to enhance efforts to improve air quality and support environmental sustainability.

With this initiative, students from Al Taawun Primary School prove that they are capable of providing innovative scientific solutions to environmental problems, reflecting the active role of students in building a greener and more sustainable future.

## Qatar well-positioned for ICT market investments

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Yurdagul further added, "Our agreements with these companies aim to foster the business owners, tech experts, and startups helping their ideas to be realised, while we continue to enlarge our partnership ecosystem to serve the community and Qatar."

Leveraging the combined expertise of all of these organisations, the collaboration seeks to establish a growth platform, offering new opportunities for startups through initiatives such as training sessions, consultations, collaborative product offerings, and access to Vodafone Qatar's advanced digital solutions.

The Chief Operating Officer concluded by stating that the entity is optimistic about driving innovation to the tech sector and boosting the resilience economy of the country. He said that customers in Qatar will witness numerous changes and schemes this year with new portfolio elements, digital services, and initiatives in the pipeline.

## QF's university students thrive through cross-registration opportunities

THE PENINSULA

**DOHA:** Cross-registration in subjects across universities, multiple cultural events, sporting and skills competitions, and internships – just some examples of activities that students from Qatar Foundation universities can participate in to take their university experience beyond simply gaining a degree.

Ahmad Kamal Al Moslemani, a Junior at Qatar Foundation's (QF's) Hamad Bin Khalifa University (HBKU), studies Computer Engineering – a degree that divides its programme between computer science courses at HBKU and engineering courses at QF partner university Texas A&M University at Qatar (TAMUQ). This allows students of this course to engage with disciplines and professors in two universities, benefitting from the strengths of each.

There are also several competitions in this field that are open for students across Education City to participate in, such as the Qatar Collegiate Programming Contest at Carnegie Mellon University in Qatar (CMU-Q) – another QF partner university. "Our professor

asked us if we wanted to join the competition, and that he would give us bonus points in the course if we participated," said Al Moslemani, who took part with a team from HBKU. "I think it's a creative way to improve the university experience for students."

Another Computer Engineering student at HBKU, Sai Surag Lingampalli, pursued a Marketing course at CMU-Q in addition to the courses at HBKU and TAMUQ. Having this exposure to three different universities made him appreciate that each institution comes with its own experiences.

"I was able to meet different people from a plethora of backgrounds and interests. This really enlightened my understanding of the world and the people around me," Lingampalli said.

Beyond academics, Lingampalli is also the President of the Student Chapter of The Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers at TAMUQ, and has played multiple sports with and for different universities.

Emilia Pacheco De Larrea is a Senior at Georgetown University in Qatar

(GU-Q), another QF partner university, where she is pursuing a major in International Politics. She is taking advantage of having QF partner university Northwestern University in Qatar as a nextdoor neighbour by taking a Certificate in Media and Politics.

"I remember the first time taking a class there, with everything being new – it was a little bit nerve-racking," she said Luckily, through social gatherings in Education City, she already knew some Northwestern Qatar students.

"I did have a friend in that class from Northwestern, and we both bonded a lot more through studying together." Outside of coursework, she also became active in the Latin American and Caribbean Society at GU-Q, as it collaborated with other clubs around Education City for students to celebrate their shared cultures.

Shahed Al Awad is majoring in Graphic Design at QF partner university Virginia Commonwealth University School of the Arts in Qatar (VCUarts Qatar) and decided to pursue a Film and Design minor from Northwestern Qatar, where her courses have provided



An aerial view of Education City.

an extra edge in her VCUarts Qatar graphic design classes.

"For example, last semester, we did a character design project, and we needed to write a backstory," she said. "With the skills I took from Northwestern Qatar, it was a lot easier for me to write," she said.

Even outside class, she has benefitted from her joint minor while doing an internship at Doha Film Institute.

Meanwhile, Khatimat Abilova, a

sophomore at Northwestern Qatar who is majoring in Journalism and Strategic Communications — and an active content creator who covers events on social media for different universities — has been taking Arabic classes at CMU-Q. "Knowing a new language is always good, and I also want to stay in the Middle East after I graduate," she says. "I'm also applying for a language grant at Northwestern Qatar to go to

## 'National documentation and its strategic management aid sustainable development'

**DOHA:** The Assistant Secretary-General of the National Archives of Qatar (NAQ), Aisha Khalid Al Saad, said the launch of the 1st NAQ strategy 2025-2030, under the theme "Memory of the Future", works to advance the documentation system and ensure the enduring legacy of Qatar and the region.

The Assistant Secretary-General said the strategy is a cornerstone for preserving national identity and managing it strategically, which supports sustainable development.

She added that a national archives and records administration's work transcends mere documentation to being an essential player in shaping the future and maintaining collective memory, stemming from the fact that the administration functions as the institutional memory of the state, providing a reliable foundation for decision and policy-making.

Al Saad said NAQ is opening

a new chapter with the official launch of the strategy, which includes more than 24 projects.

The NAQ Assistant Secretary-General said preserving and managing national documents strategically supports sustainable development, by providing accurate data for decision-makers, enhancing transparency, enabling research, and enriching the country's cultural identity, which is why NAQ focuses on adopting the latest technologies and developing integrated policies to ensure easy access to documents, and enhancing Qatar's role as an advanced regional hub in document archiving.

She said investing in this field translates into preserving national history, supporting the present, and planning for a future based on institutional knowledge and digital innovation, adding that data governance is an integral part of ensuring the safe and effective preservation of national information.

The NAQ Assistant Secretary-General added that clear governance frameworks help define stakeholders' roles and responsibilities, improving the efficiency of document management and reducing risks associated with data loss or misuse. By adopting international best practices in documenting and managing data, institutions become better able to analyse historical data and using it for strategic planning and informed decision-making, she said. She stressed NAQ's commitment to preparing national competencies capable of leading the future of document management in Qatar and facing the sector's challenges, by offering specialised training programmes that keep pace with advancements in digital archiving and document management. — QNA



Officials during the meeting.

#### National Committee for International Humanitarian Law meets

**DOHA:** The National Committee for International Humanitarian Law held its first meeting of 2025 at its headquarters in the Ministry of Justice, under the chairmanship of Undersecretary of the Ministry of Justice and Chairperson of the Committee H E Saeed bin Abdullah Al Suwaidi.

During the meeting, the Chairman of the Committee commended the achievements of the committee members and the activities and events they organised during the committee's work programme in its previous sessions.

The committee also reviewed the agenda for the first meeting of 2025, which included the activities proposed to be organised during the current year, to enhance the Committee's role in spreading and raising awareness among society and parties concerned of the provisions and principles of international humanitarian law. -QNA

## Qataris join US govt leadership programme to drive innovation, strengthen US-Qatar ties

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: A distinguished group of young Qatari professionals participated in the US Department of State's International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP), the premier professional exchange initiative that fosters collaboration and knowledge-sharing between global leaders and their American counterparts. Covering diverse themes such as sustainability, women's leadership, ethical media, entrepreneurship, and governance transparency, the program empowers participants and strengthens US ties with emerging global changemakers.

Among this year's participants was Ghanim Al Sulaiti, an entrepreneur and advocate for sustainability, who joined the IVLP on The Climate Crisis:

Working Together for Future Generations. Reflecting on his experience, Al Sulaiti stated, "Being part of the IVLP program with the US Embassy has been an eye-opening experience. Meeting changemakers, founders, and leaders who are driving real impact reminded me why I started this journey with Enbat-to prove that plantbased food isn't just a lifestyle choice, it's one of the most powerful ways we can reduce our environmental footprint. Seeing how sustainability is being tackled globally has only strengthened my belief that businesses can and should be a force for good."

On the theme of Mentoring Women for Political and Social Leadership, Khadeja Abuhaliqa, Manager of the Aladaam Youth Ambassador Program, found the experience enriching. She



FROM LEFT: Sheikha Najla Al Thani, Rooda Al Qebaisi, and Ghanim Al Sulaiti

remarked, "The IVLP deepened my understanding of how mentorship and civic engagement empower women. While the US fosters leadership through grassroots activism, Qatar's approach is driven by policy initiatives and the semi-government sector. This experience reinforced my commitment to expanding mentorship within the Youth Ambassador Program,

equipping young leaders, especially women, with the skills and confidence for political and social leadership."

Fellow participant Rooda Al Qebaisi echoed this sentiment, emphasising the program's impact: "The 2024 IVLP has been a transformative experience, offering invaluable insights and fostering connections across cultures. It has truly

broadened my perspective."

Sheikha Najla Al Thani, a participant in the Transparency and Accountability in Government IVLP, emphasised the critical role of international collaboration in strengthening governance frameworks.

She emphasised, "The IVLP program has not only broadened our understanding of the importance

whistleblowing but has also highlighted its vital role in fostering transparency and accountability within governance systems. By encouraging individuals to come forward with information on misconduct or corruption, we can build stronger, more resilient institutions that serve the public interest and uphold ethical standards."

The IVLP serves as a vital bridge for US-Qatar relations, enabling leaders from various sectors to engage in discussions that drive innovation and positive change.

These exchanges not only support Qatar's national development but also contribute to America's global leadership by building lasting partnerships, enhancing economic ties, and promoting shared solutions to global challenges.

### **PHCC launches national bowel cancer awareness** campaign to encourage early detection

**THE PENINSULA** 

**DOHA**: The Primary Health Care Corporation (PHCC), through the Screen for Life Program, has launched a national campaign to raise awareness of the bowel cancer, which is the one of the most common cancers among women and men in Oatar.

The National Breast and Bowel Cancer Screening Program also known as 'Screen for Life' is a lifesaving, population-based program that aims to promote education, awareness, and encouragement of early detection of breast and bowel cancer in Qatar. The program is being conducted under Qatar's National Cancer Program and in accordance with the country's National Health Strategy, which represents a shift towards preventive and community-based care. Therefore, on a yearly basis, the program is responsible of launching a nationwide campaign to raise awareness about breast cancer and the importance of screening.

During the month of March, the campaign will utilise a blend of traditional and digital marketing strategies and will feature strategic partnerships

THE PENINSULA



with prominent governmental and private entities, including Qatar Museums. In addition, a series of educational social media posts will be posted over the month and awareness booths will be set at different health centres and public lectures during and after the month of Ramadan.

Bowel cancer is one of the most common cancers in Qatar among men and women, with early detection significantly increasing the chances of successful treatment. In fact, when diagnosed early, the survival rate can be as high as 90%.

The campaign aims to encourage participation in a free screening test called the Fecal Immunochemical Test (FIT). This test is offered to all men and women in Oatar aged 50 to 74, who show no

**Qatar National Library celebrates Ramadan with community** 

children's knowledge of Islamic

symptoms of bowel cancer and have not had a bowel cancer screening in the last two years or a colonoscopy in the past 10

Director of Screening Programs Dr. Shaikha Abu Shaikha (pictured) encouraged all people to get to know the main symptoms of bowel cancer, that might include: Blood in the stool or rectal bleeding, change in everyday bowel habits: diarrhea, constipation, or a combination of that lasts more than two weeks, feeling that the bowel is not empty, abdominal pain, unexplained weight loss, unexplained anemia, weakness

or fatigue. She said, "It is important to always remember that having one of these symptoms does not mean that you have cancer, it could be related to other conditions. This is why, we urge you to call 107 to consult a family physician. And then the physician will do the clinical examination and will ask for referral to Hamad Medical Cor-

poration if needed. The Breast and Bowel cancer screening suites are available in four different health centers across Qatar: Al Wakrah, Rawdat Al Khail, Muaither, Laibeib and Al Sadd.







#### **Honda** Pilot

2023 - 2024



While driving Engine MIL abnormally come on with Diagnostic Trouble code P061B (PCM Internal Malfunction).



Contact the dealer for the free required repair



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#### Library is marking the occasion heroes. To participate, simply DOHA: This Ramadan, Qatar follow @qnl\_children on National Library (QNL) is Instagram, answer the queshosting a series of interactive tions posted about Islamic

activities to bring the leaders, and submit your community together in celeanswers along with the book bration. From interactive call number from the Concompetitions to cultural events, quering Heroes series available the Library is offering families, at the Children's Library. children and art lovers a unique Exciting prizes await the opportunity to participate in winners, who will be enriching experiences announced between April 13 throughout the holy month. and 17. On March 13, the Library The activities kick off with is celebrating Garangao, which

marks the halfway point of the "Guess the Leader" competition for children aged 6 to 11. Ramadan for fasting children. Traditionally celebrated by The challenge, which runs every Monday and Wednesday children going from house to from March 3 to 26, is a test of house to collect treats, the

with a host of cultural and artistic activities for all ages. Finally, on March 15, art lovers have the opportunity to learn how to design Eid cards to share with family and friends when the Library hosts a hands-on workshop on using Canva, the popular and free

online graphic design tool.

There's also still the chance to see "From Material to Market: The Art of Book-Making in Morocco," the Qatar National Library exhibition that brings to life the centuries-old traditions and techniques of book production in Maghribi tradition.

## Aspetar supports community sports, promotes healthy lifestyles during Ramadan

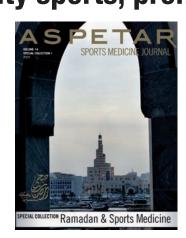
THE DENINSUL A

DOHA: Aspetar, Orthopaedic and Sports Medicine Hospital, continues to play a pivotal role in supporting community sports activities and promoting healthy lifestyles during the holy month of Ramadan.

This commitment underscores Aspetar's dedication to fostering community sports and enhancing the culture of health and fitness, becoming a vital companion for athletes and the public on a balanced, healthy Ramadan journey.

Aspetar leads the Ramadan sports scene by providing comprehensive medical support for numerous Ramadan sports events, including the Al Kass Football and Padel Tournaments and the Ramadan Festival at Aspire, along with a series of diverse sports competitions.

Aspetar's active presence reflects the hospital's vision of playing sports an integral part



Aspetar's scientific journal has released a special Ramadan issue.

of community life and encouraging everyone to adopt healthy and active lifestyles.

Aspetar offers athletes and the public its distinguished guide for physical activity during Ramadan, which is considered a reliable scientific reference.

This guide serves as a

compass, guiding individuals on how to maintain their physical fitness and enjoy safe and effective sports activities during the holy month.

For the fifteenth consecutive year, Aspetar has launched its 'Healthy Ramadan" campaign through local media and Aspetar's social media platforms, featuring a variety of television programmes, sports, and health tips and guidelines presented in an interactive and engaging

This awareness campaign reflects Aspetar's commitment to effective community engagement, providing valuable information to help individuals make the most of Ramadan in terms of health and sports.

Additionally, Aspetar's scientific journal has released a special Ramadan issue, featuring a collection of scientific research and studies conducted by Aspetar researchers on fasting and sports, as well as nutrition and mental health.

## Centrepoint introduces 'A Ramadan of Radiance' – celebrating inner glow of season

**THE PENINSULA** 

**DOHA**: Centrepoint has unveiled its newest campaign, "A Ramadan of Radiance," celebrating the special light that shines within each of us during the holy month.

Inspired by the unique beauty and energy people radiate during this season of reflection and togetherness, Centrepoint's campaign captures a blend of tradition, style, and elegance across its latest Ramadan and Eid collections.

With offerings from Babyshop, Splash, Lifestyle, and Shoemart, each brand invites families to embrace the spirit of Ramadan while looking and feeling their best.

Splash introduces a modest yet contemporary collection for those who seek to blend heritage with modern flair. The collection is crafted with sustainable materials and features a stunning palette of rich jewel tones, delicate pastels, opulent whites, and earthy textures. Women can indulge in breezy dresses, luxe maxis, intricate kaftans, and versatile co-ords, perfect for Suhoor or Iftar gatherings.

For men, Splash offers a selection of modern tailoring fused with timeless elegance, including classic thobes, tailored suits, and chic separates designed for both tradition and trend.

Babyshop's Ramadan collection

captures the magic of the season for young trendsetters and parents alike. Featuring polished designs and glamorous touches, the collection offers a wide variety of elegant options, from beautifully embroidered jackets and puffy dresses to stylish suits and coordinated sets.

Accessories like matching hats, bow ties, and hair accessories that add charm to every outfit, while thoughtfully designed options for infants and toddlers ensure even the youngest family members are dressed to impress for the gatherings and celebrations.

Lifestyle adds an extra layer of radiance to Ramadan and Eid with a range of exclusive cosmetics, skincare, and bath and body products. Designed to enhance your personal glow, the collection includes highlighters, shimmering palettes, and festive nail colours.

The jewellery range features statement necklaces, delicate earrings, and intricate bangles, while festive bags in metallics, velvets, and jewel-toned finishes complete your look.

Home essentials like fragrance sets, ornate trays, and festive décor elevate your gatherings, making every Iftar and Eid celebration unforgettable. Lifestyle's curated gift sets ensure you have the perfect presents for loved ones.

Shoemart ensures every step you take during the season is stylish and



Centrepoint's newest campaign captures a blend of tradition, style, and elegance across its latest Ramadan and Eid collections.

comfortable. Women's footwear features glittery heels, beaded sandals, and elegant handbag sets for a coordinated look. Men's offerings range from Arabicinspired slip-ons and traditional sandals to modern loafers, blending comfort with sophistication.

The children's collection stands out with metallic finishes, pastel hues, and sparkling details, making sure even the youngest family members shine.

As your go-to shopping destination, Centrepoint's Ramadan collection combines elegance, comfort, and a spirit of celebration to ensure you're prepared for every occasion.

People can discover the beauty of "A Ramadan of Radiance" at Centrepoint stores across Qatar, UAE, KSA, Kuwait, Bahrain, and Oman, or shop online.



## NOTICE

All esteemed customers of Anton Nehmeh **Establishment and Nehmeh Corporation** W.L.L. and its affiliated companies

are notified to collect their machines and devices submitted for repair from July 1, 2023 to December 31, 2023

Customers shall collect their machines within 28 days from the day of this notice. Consequently, we will not be responsible for any claim after the given period.

Service 4434 3040 | service@nehmeh.com

CAUTIONARY NOTICE IN QATAR

The General, Limited Tenders Committees and Supply Chain Department announces the following Tenders: Important Notice:

Suppliers and Contractors who are already registered with QatarEnergy via Mushtaryat Portal can "Buy Tender Online and download Tender Document" from QatarEnergy website (Mushtaryat Portal).

Effective from 1st July 2023, bids submitted by a Local company (companies incorporated in Qatar) acting as Tenderer in accordance with this Invitation to Tender, will not be accepted by QatarEnergy without any further notification, if such companies are not in possession of an ICV score in the ICV portal (https://icv.qa/en-US) by the specified Original Tender Closing Date or Original due date for submission of COMMERCIAL Package in case of two stage Tendering as per ITT. However, any Loca company that has been established within last two (2) years is exempt from this mandatory ICV certification requirement

SL.	TENDER	TENDER SALE PERIOD		TENDER	TENDER	BOND	TENDER	FEE			
NO.	NO.	START DATE	END DATE	CLOSING DATE	BOND	CURR.	FEE	CURR.			
1.	DT25/00003	03.03.2025	09.03.2025	24.03.2025	N/A		100.00	QAR			
Title of Tender: SUPPLY OF 12FT X 12FT MOORING BUOYS											
Mid-Tender Meeting Location: To be advised if required											

Mid-Tender Meeting Date & Time: Tender documents can be purchased and downloaded from QatarEnergy Website-> Supply Management -> Tenders page during the Tender Sale Period mentioned above against each Tender. Request for issuance of Tender after the specified Tender Sale Period will not be entertained.

Always refer to QatarEnergy Website (www.qatarenergy.qa) > Supply Management -> Tenders page for up to date information on QatarEnergy Tenders. Subscribe to Tender Alert to receive notification in your email on new Tenders
Changes to Tender Sale Period and Bid Closing Date will be updated in QatarEnergy website/Mushtaryat Portal only.

Brief Scopes of Work for the above lenders are posted on the QatarEnergy websiteMushtaryat Portal.

Suppliers and Contractors who are in possession of a valid SAP ID issued by QatarEnergy are instructed to maintain their Company Registration and Communication details uplo date and valid via QatarEnergy Mushtaryat Portal on urgent basis.

No queries will be entertained, or bids received, from entities who have not purchased tender documents in compliance with the above provisions.

QatarEnergy invites all prospective Suppliers and Contractors interested to participate in QatarEnergy Tenders to register online and obtain a QatarEnergy SAP Vendor Code, a mandatory requirement for the issue of Tender Documents by QatarEnergy.

Prospective Qatar based Suppliers and Contractors interested to participate in future QatarEnergy Tenders shall obtain an ICV score. Relevant information pertaining to ICV, ICV Scorecard, ICV Certification, and ICV Guidelines are available on the ICV Digital Portal - https://icv.qa/en-US



#### QatarEnergy LNG **Tender Invitation**

**Qatar**Energy LNG

No.	TENDER NUMBER / DESCRIPTION	TENDER ISSUE PERIOD	TENDER FEE (QAR)	TENDER BOND (QAR)	TENDER CLOSING DATE
1	SUP/C/ITD/6967/25 PROVISION OF ADOBE SOFTWARE LICENSE SUBSCRIPTIONS AND MAINTENANCE SUPPORT	02/03/2025 to 27/03/2025	0	0	27/03/2025

Tenderer shall provide subscription services of Adobe license and annual maintenance support including provision for future Adobe license requirements on call-off basis.

Tentative award date: Q4 2025

Contract duration: Three (3) years

Bid Validity: Bid Offer should be valid for 180 calendar days from the Tender Closing Date.

Place for Tender Collection and Bid Submission:

ITT document for this tender will be available in QatarEnergy LNG website under Suppliers tab >Current Open Tenders. The bids shall be submitted through the QatarEnergy LNG online

Note: Effective from 1st July 2023, bids received from Local Companies (established under the Laws of State of Qatar with local Commercial Registration) who are not in possession of an ICV score in the ICV portal by Bid Closing Date (or commercial bid submission date if separately mentioned/notified) will not be accepted. Local Company that has been established for less than 2 years and insurance companies are exempted from this requirement. For further details please visit ICV Digital Portal:- https://icv.qa/en-US/

Notice is hereby given that Hermes Sellier (société par actions simplifée) and located at 24, Rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré, F-75008 Paris, France is the sole owner and proprietor of the design entitled:

#### **Design A Pair of Sandals**



The present design relates to a pair of sandals, of which the following is a specification, reference being made to the accompanying drawing, showing the front perspective view of the new design.

The ornamental design for the above PAIR OF SANDALS as shown and described is claimed.

The above owner claims all rights in respect of the above design and will take all legal steps against any person, firm or corporation, counterfeiting, imitating, violating or otherwise infringing upon the above design in Qatar.

#### **Qatari Forum for Authors holding** literary, religious events in Ramadan

DOHA: The Qatari Forum for Authors has announced a diverse lineup of events for Ramadan 2025, aimed at enriching knowledge and deepening cultural and religious awareness within society

This year's Ramadan programme features a range of literary, intellectual, and religious activities that highlight various aspects of literature and culture while aligning with the spiritual essence of the holy month.

Dr. Aisha Jassim Al Kuwari, General Manager of the forum, emphasised that Ramadan presents an opportunity to strengthen religious and cultural ties. She affirmed the forum's commitment to organising events that resonate with the spirit of the month and contribute to fostering literary and intellectual engagement, thereby enhancing cultural and religious enrichment within the community.

Among the key events is the "Qotouf" Initiative, led by renowned media figure Muhammad Shabrawi. This initiative explores various facets of literature and culture, covering topics such as the relationship between classical poets Abu Al Ala Al Ma'arri and Al Mutanabbi, the historical rivalry between Basran and Kufian scholars in Arabic grammar and its impact on contemporary Arab culture, as well as a selection of cultural discussions relevant to the modern

Additionally, the forum will host a weekly religious and cultural programme presented by author Dr. Sultan bin Awad Durai, focusing on the significance of the Holy Quran in the lives of Muslims. The programme will encourage Quranic memorisation and reflection while addressing various religious and cultural themes.

Another highlight of the programme is a special cultural event featuring Dr. Turabah Ammar, which will delve into Qatar's scientific and cultural renaissance and its pivotal role in advancing Arab and Islamic culture.

Through these initiatives, the Qatari Forum for Authors seeks to promote intellectual discourse, celebrate cultural heritage, and provide a meaningful Ramadan experience that inspires both spiritual and literary engagement. -QNA

MOCI announces recall of Mercedes S-Class, **2021 model** 

#### THE PENINSULA

DOHA: The Ministry of Commerce and Industry, in cooperation with Nasser Bin Khaled and Sons Automobiles, Qatar's Mercedes dealership, has announced the recall of Mercedes S-Class, 2021 model, as the vehicle's electrical system battery software is not compatible with the current serial production configuration, and it is possible that different versions of the software may have been downloaded by mistake that are not supported within this configuration leading to malfunctions. The Ministry said it will coordinate with the dealer to follow up on the maintenance and repair works.

# Carnegie Mellon University in Qatar students offer Al solutions to manage crises and enhance education

The Hackathon was held in collaboration between Carnegie Mellon University and the Hamad Bin Jassim Centre for Computing Science Education.

**DOHA:** The winning teams of the Lifeline Hackathon 2025 presented innovative solutions that employ artificial intelligence (AI) technologies to address challenges in crisis-affected areas around the world.

Organised by Carnegie Mellon University in Qatar, a Qatar Foundation partner university, the competition brought together 264 students from 44 educational institutions in Qatar, representing a variety of academic disciplines.

Over three weeks, the participating students collaborated to develop practical and effective solutions that combined multiple disciplines.

The Hackathon was held in collaboration between Carnegie Mellon University and the Hamad Bin Jassim Centre for Computing Science Education, which was an initiative launched in partnership between Carnegie Mellon University in Qatar and the Jassim and Hamad Bin Jassim Charitable Foundation.

Managing Director of Jassim and Hamad Bin Jassim Charitable Foundation Saeed Muthkar Al Hajri, expressed his pride in this competition, saying: "We are proud to support the



Saeed Muthkar Al Hajri

"Lifeline Hackathon 2025" competition, which allows students to apply their knowledge in creating technical solutions that have a tangible and fundamental impact on the lives of people around the world."

Regarding the Life Line initiative, he stressed that this initiative, which is based on linking the elements of technology and innovation with humanitarian work, represents a qualitative turning point in the importance of charitable work as an effective element in encouraging the educational process based on innovation and employing it in various fields, especially humanitarian ones.

For his part, Michael Trick, Dean of Carnegie Mellon University in Qatar, stressed that the university adopts an approach that focuses on addressing the humanitarian challenges facing affected groups through research and innovation.

He said at the award ceremony, "At





Dr. Khaled Harras



Carnegie Mellon University, we believe that true innovation is what makes a tangible difference. We dedicate our knowledge and skills to presenting ideas that have a positive impact on the world, and this is what the Lifeline Hackathon embodies, as students use their technological creativity to serve the communities most in need."

Dr. Khaled Harras, Director of the Hamad Bin Jassim Center for Computer Science Education, Professor of Computer Science and Senior Associate Dean at Carnegie Mellon University in Qatar, praised the competing teams, saying: "I am very happy with the achievement of the first-year students who demonstrated exceptional ability to innovate and achieved advanced positions in the competition."

"Carnegie Mellon University laid the foundation for AI technologies more than 50 years ago, and today we see

the continuation of these efforts through our students' solutions that contribute to alleviating suffering and improving people's lives," added Harras, the academic advisor to the competition organising team.

#### WINNING PROJECTS

First place went to a team of firstyear students from Carnegie Mellon University in Qatar for a project that combines artificial intelligence and solar energy to support teachers in areas with poor infrastructure and connectivity.

The team, consisting of Davide Prato, Marco Casagrande, Madina Mirzatieva and Billard Rotaisser, developed a prototype of a smart learning platform to enhance education in disadvantaged environments. The project outperformed 25 other qualified teams, as judged by a jury of 22 experts.

Second place went to a team from Qatar University for an innovative project that improves the efficiency of emergency response. Students Fatima Ahmed, Shada Ibrahim, Rania Marabet, and Hala Sobeih created an interactive platform based on artificial intelligence that connects patients, paramedics, and emergency medical teams, integrating a smart ChatBot to collect health data and provide first aid instructions accurately and effectively.

The third place went to another team of first-year students from Carnegie Mellon University in Qatar, including Sherkhan Pakdolt, Soon Choi, Enkhmonkh Enkhbayar and Furqan Saeed, who presented a model for a crisis-resistant communications network that provides flexible and reliable solutions in areas with traditional communications outages, in addition to providing AI-powered medical support.

The winning teams received prizes worth QR75,000 provided by the Qatar Research, Development and Innovation Council, while the WISE Innovation Summit for Education, Education Above All Foundation, and Qatar Red Crescent provided significant support by providing expertise in crisis management and education, in addition to mentoring, arbitration, and workshops.

Carnegie Mellon University in Qatar has collaborated with the Qatar Computing Research Institute, the Ministry of Information and Communications Technology in Qatar, and Deen Developers to organise a series of preparatory workshops prior to the final round that focused on core topics such as computing in crises and risk management.

The hackathon reflected a spirit of collaboration and innovation, with all students forming multidisciplinary teams to address issues in education and crisis management. The awards ceremony concluded with a panel discussion featuring representatives from WISE and Education Above All on how to harness innovation to achieve a sustainable positive impact.







## Sheikh Jassim Bin Jabor Al Thani Primary Health Care Centre provides quality services in Azraq camp in Jordan

- 4,543 patients visited specialised medical clinics in January.
- 2,917 women patients benefited from the centre's services.
- The centre organises visits for several doctors from abroad.
- Several awareness events on training in treating babies with developmental dislocation.

heikh Jassim Bin Jabor Al Thani Primary Health Care Centre provides free primary health care services to Syrian refugees in Azraq camp in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan at a high level of quality to meet the essential needs of the camp residents.

This is in addition to organising many awareness events and added services to improve the health status of the camp residents, most notably organising visits by several doctors from abroad from various specialities.

Medical services are also provided for heart diseases such as installing heart batteries for children and doctors specialising in ophthalmology and dermatology.

The centre organised several events on training in treating babies





that they would continue implementing pioneering initiatives in parallel with improving its medical services constantly.

### STATISTICS

In a statistic provided by the centre on the medical services provided during January 2025 and the number of beneficiaries, the report indicated that the total number of visitors to various specialized medical clinics reached 4,543 patients.



The children's clinic received 758 children while the number of women benefiting from the centre's services reached 2,917 patients, the number of adult men benefiting from the centre's services reached 868 patients.

As many as 3,020 prescriptions were dispensed to patients through the pharmacy during the same period of the current year.

#### MEDICAL SPECIALITIES

The centre provides many medical services through specialized clinics in paediatrics, gynaecology, general medicine, and dentistry, in addition to an emergency and first aid department, as well as a unit for providing vaccinations and inoculations and a pharmacy for free medicines to visitors and patients.

Jassim and Hamad Bin Jassim Charitable Foundation is continuously working to improve these services, which ensures that various health complaints they suffer from are dealt with quickly and effectively, which will contribute to them obtaining these services according to the highest health standards.

This is what the Foundation is keen on through these periodic visits aimed at identifying the increasing needs of the centre and providing the most important medical specialities that cover most health conditions that require specialised medical intervention

## Israel suspends aid to Gaza as first phase of truce ends

GAZA STRIP: Israel said yesterday that it was suspending the entry of supplies into Gaza, with deadly attacks reported in the territory after it and Hamas hit an impasse over how to proceed with their fragile ceasefire.

As the 42-day first phase of the ceasefire drew to a close, Israel gave its backing to an extension it said was put forward by US Middle East envoy Steve Witkoff, which would cover the holy month of Ramadan and the Jewish holiday of Passover.

Hamas has repeatedly rejected an extension, instead favouring a transition to the truce deal's second phase, which would see the release of all remaining hostages and a more permanent end to the fighting in the war-ravaged Gaza

"Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu decided that, from this morning, all entry of goods and supplies into the Gaza Strip will be suspended," his office said in a

"If Hamas persists with its refusal, there will be other consequences," it added.

Hamas slammed the move, saying in a statement that the "decision to suspend humanitarian aid is cheap blackmail, a war crime and a blatant coup against the (ceasefire) agreement".

Gaza's civil defence agency, meanwhile, reported "artillery shelling and gunfire from Israeli tanks" east of Khan Yunis city, in the southern Gaza Strip.

The Palestine Red Crescent, however, reported one person killed in an Israeli drone strike in the area, and one more killed in another town nearby.

Gaza's health ministry later reported at least four killed and six wounded in Israeli attacks yesterday.

Hamas called on "mediators and the international community to pressure" Israel to "put an end to these punitive, immoral measures against more than two million people in the Gaza Strip".

Its spokesman Hazem Qassem later said Israel "bears responsibility for the consequences of its decision on the people of the Strip and the fate of its prisoners".

A senior Hamas official had earlier told AFP the Palestinian group was prepared to release all remaining hostages in a single swap during the second phase.

At a demonstration in Tel Aviv on Saturday evening, supporters and family members of the hostages demanded the government secure their freedom.

"The current crisis in the negotiations is a deliberate crisis, orchestrated and manipulated by Netanyahu," said Einav Zangauker, whose son Matan is still in

Under the first phase, Hamas returned 25 living hostages and the bodies of eight others, in exchange for the release of about 1,800 Palestinian

More than 15 months of war created



Trucks carrying humanitarian aid line up on the Egyptian side of the Rafah border crossing with the Gaza Strip yesterday, ahead of Israel suspending the entry of supplies into the Palestinian enclave. (AFP)

a humanitarian crisis in Gaza, with the UN repeatedly warning the territory was on the brink of famine before the ceasefire allowed a surge of aid to

The suspension of aid comes as Palestinians in Gaza, alongside much of the Muslim world, mark the second day of the holy month of Ramadan, during which the faithful observe a dawn-to-

On Saturday evening, Gazans gathered amid destroyed buildings for a fast-breaking iftar meal as they entered their second Ramadan under the shadow of war. "We are here in the midst of destruction and rubble, and we are steadfast despite the pain and our wounds," said Beit Lahia resident Mohammed Abu Al Jidyan.

"Here we are eating iftar on our land and we will not leave this place."

The war has left much of Gaza in ruins, displaced the vast majority of its residents and killed more than 48,388 people, mostly civilians, according to the territory's health ministry, figures the UN has deemed reliable. -AFP

#### **Over 540 settlers** storm Al Aqsa Mosque under police protection

**OCCUPIED JERUSALEM:** At least 548 colonists stormed the blessed Al-Aqsa Mosque from the Mughrabi Gate today, under the protection of the occupation police.

Local sources said that the colonists carried out provocative tours and performed Talmudic rituals in the courtyards of Al Aqsa, especially in the eastern part of it.

Since the start of the genocide and aggression that the Israeli occupation has been committing against the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank in October 2023, more than 68,000 settlers have stormed Al Aqsa under the protection of the occupation police, amid tightening entry procedures to Al Agsa Mosque and the entrances to the Old City.

Two Palestinians were killed and others were injured as a result of the Israeli occupation army's shelling today on the cities of Rafah and Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip. — *QNA* 

## Iran lawmakers sack minister over economic woes

TEHRAN: Iran's parliament sacked the country's finance minister yesterday after impeaching him over soaring inflation and a plunging currency, state television

Economy and Finance Minister Abdolnaser Hemmati lost a vote of confidence, with 182 of 273 parliamentarians present backing his removal.

On the black market on Sunday, the Iranian rial was trading at more than 920,000 to the US dollar, compared with less than 600,000 in mid-2024.

Earlier, President Masoud Pezeshkian defended Hemmati, a former central bank governor, telling lawmakers: "We are in a full-scale (economic) war with the enemy... we must take a war formation".

The economic problems of today's society are not related to one person and we cannot blame it all on one person." Lawmakers took turns angrily censuring Hemmati, blaming him for Iran's economic

"People cannot tolerate the new wave of inflation; the rise in the price of foreign currency and other goods must be controlled," said one parliamentarian, Ruhollah Motefakker-Azad.

Eight dead in India

operation ends

ation in sub-zero temperatures.

Authorities had revised down the number

Multiple drones and a rescue dog were also

Working on a project by the Border Roads Organisation, the workers were living on site

Ugandan army deploys to town

KAMPALA: The Ugandan army confirmed

yesterday it has sent troops to another town in

northeastern Democratic Republic of Congo to

fight local armed groups, amid fears a raging

we are in control," Uganda's defence and mil-

itary affairs spokesman Felix Kulayigye told AFP

golese army following alleged massacres of

civilians carried out by a militia known as the

"Our troops have entered Mahagi town and

The deployment was requested by the Con-

conflict could spiral into a wider war.

in northeast DR Congo

of workers on site at the time of the avalanche from 55 to 54 after one worker, previously

system to assist in its search operations.

of Uttarakhand.

employed.



Iran's Finance Minister Abdolnaser Hemmati delivers a speech to members of parliament in Tehran yesterday, during impeachment proceedings against him. (AFP)

"People cannot afford to buy medicine and medical equipment," said another, Fatemeh Mohammadbeigi.

Pezeshkian took office in July with the ambition of reviving the economy and ending some Western-imposed sanctions.

But the depreciation of the rial has only intensified, especially since the fall in December of Iran ally Bashar al-Assad of

"The most important problem of the country's economy is inflation, and that is chronic inflation, which has plagued our economy for years," the economy minister added.

Decades of US-led sanctions have battered Iran's economy, with double-digit inflation causing an increase in consumer prices since Washington pulled out of a landmark 2015 nuclear deal in 2018.

"I personally believe in dialogue, and I will continue to do so," said Pezeshkian during the impeachment session.

"However, we will stand by the position the supreme leader has taken regarding America until the end, and we will not do anything else."

The Iranian economy has since 2018 been under pressure from high inflation, serious unemployment and the depreciation of its currency, which weighs heavily on everyday Iranians.

In that year, then Economy Minister Masoud Karbasian lost a vote of confidence during an impeachment session over the dire economic conditions.

According to the Iranian constitution, a dismissal of the minister would be effective immediately, with a caretaker appointed until the government chooses a replacement. - AFP



### World in brief

#### Philippine clash kills one suspected rebel

MANILA: A suspected rebel has been killed in a clash with government troops in Sultan Kudarat province in the southern Philippines, the military said yesterday.

In a report, the military said the fighting broke out around 11am local time on Saturday when government troops on combat patrol ran into some 20 New People's Army (NPA) insurgents in Palimbang town, resulting in the death of one rebel and the recovery of two firearms.

NPA rebels have been fighting government troops since 1969. Military data showed that the NPA's personnel strength has declined since its peak of around 25,000 armed members in the 1980s. Despite its dwindling fighters, the NPA continues to launch small-scale attacks in the countryside. - XINHUA

#### Police arrest 71 smugglers in Afghan capital

KABUL: Afghan counter-narcotic police have detained 71 suspected drug smugglers and seized more than 11 kg of illicit drugs in the capital city of Kabul, an official statement said

The contraband, which included 3.2 kg of methamphetamine, 4 kg of heroin and 4.4 kg of hashish, was seized during separate routine operations carried out by the police on the outskirts of Kabul city, the office of Deputy Minister of Interior for Counter-Narcotics said in the statement. According to the source, the police have also seized two Kalashnikov rifles, one M4 machine gun, and two pistols from the apprehended smugglers.

In a related operation, police in the eastern Nangarhar province arrested eight individuals linked to the illicit purchase and trafficking of drugs, confiscating 20,500 stimulate tablets from their possession. -XINHUA

#### Maldives shuts govt offices due to flooding

**COLOMBO:** Maldivian President Mohamed Muizzu ordered the closure of government offices and institutions yesterday in response to severe flooding caused by the highest daily accumulated rainfall in the country's history, PSM News, the official state media of the Maldives, reported. The Maldives Meteorological Service in a post on X said it recorded 296 millimeters of rainfall in the 24 hours ended at 8am yesterday morning.

The president's decision follows continuous rainfall, which has resulted in significant hardship to the people, PSM News said.

PSM News said heavy rains on Saturday led to extensive flooding in Male City, including Male, Hulhumale, and Hulhule, which is home to Velana International Airport, and several outer islands. The Maldives National Defence Force (MNDF) and other agencies have been mobilized to mitigate the impact of floodwaters on households and properties in the capital, it said.

A total of 17 pumps were deployed by the MNDF across six locations to remove floodwater, with an estimated 17,000 tonnes of water already pumped out, PSM News said. - XINHUA

#### avalanche as rescue **DEHRADUN:** Rescuers recovered the eighth and final body from the site of an avalanche in a remote area of northern India, the army said Sunday, marking the end of a marathon oper-More than 50 workers were submerged under snow and debris after the avalanche hit a construction camp on Friday near Mana village on the border with Tibet in the Himalayan state

believed to be buried, was found to have safely made his way home before the avalanche hit. The army used drone-based detection

Devotees wait to break their fast with Iftar meals on the first day of holy month of Ramadan, at the Badshahi mosque in Lahore yesterday. (AFP)

#### Iftar in Lahore

#### **Egypt rejects attempts** in steel containers considered stronger than tents and capable of withstanding harsh to form parallel Sudanese weather. At an altitude of more than 3,200m, government: Statement minimum temperatures in the area were down to minus 12 degrees Celsius. -AFP

CAIRO: Egypt rejected yesterday attempts aimed at establishing a rival government in Sudan, warning that such moves jeopardised the "unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity" of the war-torn country.

Sudan has been locked in a war between the army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) for nearly two years, plunging the country into what the United Nations describes as one of the worst humanitarian disasters in recent memory.

A week ago, the RSF and its allies signed a charter in Kenya declaring the formation of a "government of peace and unity" in areas under their control.

"Egypt expresses its rejection of any attempts that threaten the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of brotherly Sudan, including the pursuit of forming a parallel Sudanese government," a statement from Cairo's foreign ministry said Sunday.

It added that such actions "complicate the situation in Sudan, hinder ongoing efforts to unify political visions and exacerbate the humanitarian crisis". - AFP

## 10 killed in Benin clashes

**COTONOU**: Clashes in Benin over the last week between armed groups and the military left ten dead, including one soldier, as the West African country faces an uptick in attacks on army positions.

While the country's economic capital Cotonou, in the south, continues to draw in international tourists, Benin's poorer north has for years now seen such attacks, often blamed by the government on groups seeking to extend their reach from neighbouring Burkina Faso and Niger.

Overnight Thursday into Friday, the army launched "an offensive operation" that led to "the neutralisation of nine terrorists," a source close to the military high command told AFP on Saturday.

The operation — which a local source said took place in the commune of Karimama came after an improvised explosive device left one soldier dead and two others injured in nearby Kantoro.

Both communities are near the border with Niger. While the border near Burkina Faso remains the epicentre of such attacks, communities near the Niger border have seen an uptick in violence recently.

"Offensive aerial operations aided by those on the ground resulted in the destruction of an important logistics hub" belonging to unnamed "terrorists," an officer told AFP, speaking on the condition of anonymity.

Long-running insurgencies in Burkina Faso and Niger have seen Islamic State and Al Qaeda-linked groups seize swathes of rural territory, often capitalising on long-simmering ethnic or local political disputes as well as weak state presence.

Attacks in Benin's north have led observers to worry of a spillover of violence in the country. - AFP

#### China's top political advisory body concludes session

**BEIJING:** The 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), China's national political advisory body, closed the tenth session of its standing committee yesterday in Beijing.

Wang Huning, a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and chairman of the CPPCC National Committee, presided over the closing meeting and delivered a speech.

He called on the political advisory body to make contributions in 2025 to advance Chinese modernization and to achieve the objectives and tasks set in the 14th Five-Year Plan with high quality. - XINHUA

Cooperative for the Development of Congo (Codeco), he said, without providing further Mahagi is in Ituri province, which borders

Uganda, where at least 51 people were killed on February 10 by armed men affiliated with Codeco, according to humanitarian and local sources. - AFP

#### Trump orders tariff probe on lumber, calls for supply boost

**WASHINGTON:** US President Donald Trump ordered a probe Saturday into potential tariffs on lumber imports — in his latest move threatening to stoke trade tensions — while also pushing for a domestic supply boost.

Trump signed an executive order instructing Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick to start an investigation "to determine the effects on the national security of imports of timber, lumber, and their derivative products.'

The study may result in new tariffs being imposed, which would pile on top of existing levies. The investigation takes aim at exporters like Canada, Germany and Brazil, with White House officials earlier accusing these economies of "dumping lumber into our markets at the expense of both our economic prosperity and national security." -AFP

#### Orsi takes office, returning **Uruguay to leftist rule**

MONTEVIDEO: Yamandu Orsi was sworn in Saturday as president of Uruguay, returning the South American country of 3.4 million to leftist governance after five years of predecessor Luis Lacalle Pou's center-right leadership.

Uruguay, one of Latin America's most prosperous and stable countries, on Saturday celebrated four decades of uninterrupted democracy. "The good health of democracy is closely associated with the achievement of certain standards of well-being," Orsi, 57, said in a speech after his inauguration in Montevideo's Legislative Palace.

He also paid a warm tribute to his 89-yearold mentor, the beloved former president Jose "Pepe" Mujica, who campaigned for Orsi while battling esophageal cancer.

Elected to a five-year term, Orsi promised to protect Uruguay's economy, to address drugrelated crime, and to pursue "sustainable and humane" development. -AFP

## Kyiv's allies embrace Zelensky at crisis talks

LONDON: UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer yesterday warned that European security faces a once-ina-generation moment at the start of Ukraine crisis talks in London, just days after a Kyiv-Washington clash.

Eighteen allies were gathered on the key question of security guarantees for Ukraine, especially after US President Donald Trump berated his Ukrainian counterpart Volodvmyr Zelensky in an unprecedented White House blow-up.

Summit host Starmer, sitting next to Zelensky and in front of the flags of Ukraine and European nations, said it was "a once-in-a-generation moment for the security of Europe and we all need to step up".

"I hope you know that we are all with you and the people of Ukraine for as long as it takes. Everyone around this table," he told the Ukrainian leader.

Zelensky was embraced by some of the 18 other top leaders, including Starmer, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and NATO



Western and NATO leaders pose for a family photograph during a summit held at Lancaster House in central London yesterday. (AFP)

chief Mark Rutte.

It was a stark contrast to Zelensky's unusually heated Friday meeting with Trump in Washington, where he was berated by the American leader and accused of not being "ready" for peace with Russia.

Speaking ahead of the summit in

London, Starmer said "nobody wants to see" scenes like Zelensky and Trump's Oval Office clash.

"We have to find a way that we can all work together. Because, in the end, we've had three years of bloody conflict. Now we need to get to that lasting peace," Starmer told the BBC.

Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni echoed the sentiment, saying as she met Starmer in his Downing Street home that it was "very, very important that we avoid the risk that the West divides".

Ukraine's allies have been underscoring their steadfast commitment to counter growing concerns that Trump is about to sell Kyiv short in

negotiations with Russia. Starmer warmly welcomed Zelensky to the British capital on Saturday, the day after the Ukrainian leader was kicked out of the White House, extending a loan to strengthen Ukraine's depleted defences.

The London meeting brings together leaders from around continental Europe, including France, Germany, Denmark and Italy as well as Turkey, NATO and the European Union. With fears growing over whether the United States will continue to support NATO, the meeting will also address the need for Europe to increase defence cooperation. -AFP

## Pentagon orders up to 3,000 troops, Stryker combat vehicles to border

**WASHINGTON:** Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth has ordered about 3,000 active-duty troops to the southern US border, including soldiers from a motorized brigade equipped with 20-ton armoured Stryker combat vehicles, defence officials familiar with the effort said.

The defence secretary approved the orders Friday, said two officials. who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss internal Defence Department planning. The soldiers are primarily from the 4th Infantry Division's 2nd Stryker Brigade at Fort Carson, Colorado, and will be joined by soldiers specializing in engineering, intelligence and public affairs, the officials said.

The Pentagon announced the deployment in a statement on Saturday afternoon after the news was first reported by The Washington Post. Hegseth has ordered the deployment

of a Stryker brigade combat team and a helicopter unit to "reinforce and expand current border security operations to seal the border and protect the territorial integrity of the United States," the statement said.

The troops will arrive in coming weeks, underscoring the Defence Department's "unwavering dedication to working alongside the Department of Homeland Security to secure our southern border and maintain the

sovereignty, territory integrity, and security of the United States under President Trump's leadership," the statement added. About 2,400 soldiers will deploy with the Stryker brigade and an additional 550 will go will with the aviation unit, said another defence official, who also spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the issue. A handful of others will join them. - **THE WASHINGTON POST** 

## US judge rules against Trump in watchdog dismissal case

WASHINGTON: A federal judge ruled on Saturday that limits on President Donald Trump's power to fire the head of an independent watchdog agency are constitutional, teeing up a likely Supreme Court showdown.

The case revolves around the White House's February 7 dismissal of Hampton Dellinger, chief of the Office of Special Counsel.

His small agency investigates whistleblower complaints and protects federal workers' rights, among various other roles, and could possibly be a significant player in pushing back against Trump and Elon Musk's efforts to fire swaths of federal employees.

District Judge Amy Berman Jackson had previously ordered Dellinger temporarily reinstated while she considered the case, but on Saturday issued a ruling that his dismissal had been "unlawful."

She said there were specific

legal reasons for which the agency head could be fired by the president, but "the curt email from the White House informing the Special Counsel that he was terminated contained no reasons whatsoever.

She further rejected the White House's argument that the unique restrictions blocking the president from firing the special counsel were unconstitutional.

"The elimination of the restrictions... would be fatal to the defining and essential feature of the Office of Special Counsel as it was conceived by Congress and signed into law by the President: its independence," said Jackson.

The case is almost certain to be appealed and eventually end up in the Supreme Court.

The conservative-dominated bench, which includes three Trump-nominated justices, previously declined to block Jackson's temporary reinstatement, saying it would wait for her final ruling. -AFP

### World in brief

#### NY ex-governor Cuomo announces mayorship bid

**NEW YORK**: Former New York Governor Andrew Cuomo launched his electoral campaign for New York City mayorship on Saturday. "Our city is in crisis. That's why I am running to be mayor of New York City. We need government to work. We need effective leadership," Cuomo said on social media platform X.

New York City is scheduled to hold its mayoral election on November 4, 2025. Cuomo would run against embattled incumbent mayor Eric Adams and other candidates from the Democratic Party in the crowded race. He also posted a 17-minute video explaining his positions and his mayoral campaign website also went online. "Did I make mistakes, some painfully? Definitely. And I believe I learned from them and I am a better person for it," said Cuomo in the video. -XINHUA

#### Russia's cargo spacecraft docks with ISS

MOSCOW: Russia's Progress MS-30 cargo spacecraft, launched from the Baikonur Cosmodrome on Friday, successfully docked with the International Space Station yesterday, Russia's state space corporation Roscosmos said.

Carrying a total of 2,599 kg of supplies, the Progress MS-30 delivered 1,179 kg of equipment, clothing, food supplies, and medical and hygiene products. Additionally, the spacecraft transported 950 kg of fuel for station refueling, 420 liters of drinking water, and 50 kg of nitrogen to replenish the station's atmosphere. A key delivery of this mission is the new Orlan-MKS No. 6 spacesuit, designed for spacewalks. This model features an advanced internal hermetic shell made from high-tech fabric for enhanced durability, an automated water-cooling system to ensure optimal comfort, and an upgraded display system. -XINHUA

#### US, Guyana denounce Venezuelan naval incursion

GEORGETOWN: The United States on Saturday denounced what it said were Venezuelan naval vessels "threatening" an Exxon-Mobil unit in maritime territory claimed by Guyana.

The statement, which warned of "consequences" if there were further provocation from Caracas, came hours after Guyanese President Irfaan Ali said a Venezuelan patrol boat had "approached various assets in our exclusive waters" around 7am (1100 GMT). Guyana had "put its international partners on alert," he said on Facebook. The US State Department warned against any further encroachment. "Venezuelan naval vessels threatening ExxonMobil's floating production, storage and offloading (FPSO) unit is unacceptable and a clear violation of Guyana's internationally recognized maritime territory," said the statement from the department's US Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs. -AFP

#### Swiss to host Palestinian conference on March 7

GENEVA: Switzerland said it will host an international conference on March 7 on the protection of Palestinian civilians in the occupied territories, as called for in a United Nations

The 196 signatories to the Geneva Convention will be invited to the meeting, which will be attended by ambassadors, a spokesperson for the Swiss foreign ministry said. On September 18, the UN General Assembly mandated Switzerland to organise the conference, given that the country is the depository of the international treaties setting out the rules of war and humanitarian law. -AFP

#### US foreign policy shift aligns with our vision, says Kremlin

MOSCOW: The Kremlin said in remarks aired yesterday that the United States's dramatic shift in foreign policy largely aligns with its own vision.

US President Donald Trump has sought to build ties with Moscow since taking office in January, reaching out to President Vladimir Putin and siding with Russia at the United Nations.

"The new administration is rapidly changing all foreign policy configurations. This largely coincides with our vision," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told a reporter from state television.

"There is a long way to go, because there is huge damage to the whole complex of bilateral relations. But if the political will of the two leaders, President Putin and President Trump, is maintained, this path can be quite quick and successful," Peskov added. - AFP

## Private US company aces lunar landing on first mission

**WASHINGTON**: A US company successfully landed its spacecraft on the Moon yesterday, marking only the second private mission to achieve the milestone - and the first to do so upright.

Firefly Aerospace's Blue Ghost Mission 1 touched down at 3:34 am US Eastern Time (0834 GMT) near Mons Latreille, a volcanic formation in Mare Crisium on the Moon's northeastern near side. The mission control team in Austin, Texas, erupted in cheers as CEO Jason Kim confirmed that the spacecraft was "stable and upright."

That stood in stark contrast to the first private lunar landing



The Firefly's Blue Ghost lander's shadow on the Moon's surface during its lunar landing as part of the Ghost Mission 1 yesterday. (AFP)

last February, which toppled over upon arrival, dulling the achievement of being the first

US Moon touchdown since the crewed Apollo 17 mission of 1972. − *AFP* 

### Argentina's Milei says 'chainsaw' cuts to last years

**BUENOS AIRES:** Argentine President Javier Milei told lawmakers on Saturday he planned to make more "chainsaw" cuts to public spending, adding that his government's austerity program would "last for years."

The libertarian leader has held a chainsaw at public events as a symbol of his push to restore fiscal discipline in the South American nation where he has been president since December 2023. Milei's measures, which have

plunged Argentina into recession, are blamed for tipping millions more people into poverty in the first half of 2024, and bringing tens of thousands of people onto the streets in protest. Milei has swatted away criticism, insisting

that what he presents as shortterm pain will lead to long-term gains for the economy. "The chainsaw today is the symbol of a change of era, the beginning of a new golden age for humanity, but this time, instead of going against the world, Argentina is at the forefront," he said Saturday in his annual address to congress. -AFP

#### Poland can help overcome 'dilemma' of US position on Ukraine, says PM

**WARSAW:** Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk yesterday said Poland could use its friendly ties with Washington to persuade the United States to be more supportive of Ukraine, ahead of talks with European allies.

Tusk called the US position

on Ukraine a "dilemma" and said "we have to transcend this dilemma", adding that Poland "will be more heard" because of its high defence spending and "very good relations with the Americans". Speaking ahead of the summit in London where

European powers will be joined by President Volodymyr Zelensky, Tusk said Poland was in "a unique situation". Tusk was speaking after a heated clash in the White House on Friday between Zelensky and US President Trump that has cast doubt

on continued US support for Ukraine.

The new US administration has initiated a rapprochement with Russia and Trump and Vice President JD Vance have often echoed Kremlin talking points on the conflict. -AFP

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### **INTERNATIONAL**

#### **Pro-Russian candidate** declared winner in Abkhazia vote

MOSCOW: Pro-Russian politician Badra Gunba has been declared winner of runoff presidential elections in the breakaway Georgian region of Abkhazia, officials said yesterday, amid tensions over Moscow's influence.

Abkhazia is recognised by most of the world as Georgian territory, but has been under de-facto Russian control since a brief 2008 war between Moscow and Tbilisi. Gunba won 54.73% of the vote in the second round, while opposition leader Adgur Ardzinba garnered 41.54%, Dmitry Marshan, chair of the separatist region's election commission, said. President Vladimir Putin congratulated Gunba in a message, saying the Abkhazian people had expressed their "free popular will". – **AFP** 

#### **Tanker suspected of damaging Baltic** cables allowed to leave Finland

HELSINKI: An oil tanker believed to belong to Russia's "shadow fleet" and suspected of sabotaging undersea Baltic cables has been allowed to leave Finland's waters, where it has been held since December, Finnish police said yesterday.

The Eagle S, which is registered in the Cook Islands, is suspected of intentionally dragging its anchor dozens of kilometres along the Baltic seabed, damaging an electrical cable and four telecommunications cables on December 25.

"As the criminal investigation conducted by the National Bureau of Investigation, including the forensic investigation on board Eagle S, has progressed, there are no longer grounds for continuing the seizure of the tanker," police said in a statement.

The anchor was found by the Swedish navy in January.

Finnish police suspect eight of the tanker's crew of involvement, and three of them are still barred from leaving Finland. The investigation will continue, the police said, adding they expect it to be completed by the end of April.

Security analysts say Russia is operating a large "shadow fleet" of hundreds of vessels, seeking to dodge the sanctions Western nations imposed on its oil exports over the war in Ukraine. Several undersea Baltic cables were damaged last year, with many experts calling it part of a "hybrid war" carried out by Russia against Western countries. -AFP

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