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**Amir, Pakistan
PM discuss efforts
for regional stability**

DOHA: Amir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani discussed yesterday with Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan H E Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif the latest regional and international developments of joint interest, particularly de-escalation, enhancing dialogue, empowering peaceful solutions, and supporting diplomatic efforts aiming to support security and stability in the region.

This came in a telephone call H H the Amir held with the Prime Minister of Pakistan. The phone call also dealt with discussing bilateral relations and the means to enhance them. — QNA

**Amir, Syria President
review ties, regional
developments**

DOHA: Amir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani held a phone call with President of Syria H E Ahmed Al-Sharaa yesterday, during which they reviewed the fraternal relations between the two brotherly countries and ways to support and strengthen joint cooperation across various fields.

The call, made by H H the Amir, also included an exchange of views on issues of mutual interest, including regional and international developments.

Both sides emphasised the importance of continuing coordination and consultation in a manner that serves shared interests and enhances security and stability in the region.

— QNA

IMO: Public safety top priority

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: With reference to circulating media reports regarding the departure of certain personnel from Al Udeid Air Base, the International Media Office (IMO) of the State of Qatar has stated that such "measures are being undertaken in response to the current regional tensions".

In an official statement shared yesterday, the IMO reaffirmed that Qatar continues to implement all necessary measures to safeguard the security and safety of its citizens and residents as a top priority, including actions related to the protection of critical infrastructure and military facilities.

The IMO further noted that should any developments arise, it will be communicated through the official designated channels.

Earlier some news agencies reported that some personnel have been advised to leave the Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar by Wednesday evening amid warnings from Washington that it could intervene in Iran.

**MoI reassures public
on safety measures**

DOHA: In light of recent regional developments, the Ministry of Interior has reaffirmed its commitment to ensuring the safety and security of all

citizens, residents, and visitors in the country. The Ministry, in coordination with relevant authorities, confirmed that it continuously implements necessary precautionary measures to safeguard public safety, which remain its top priority.

Authorities also assured that the public will be promptly informed about any actions or measures that need to be taken. The Ministry emphasised the importance of relying on official sources for accurate information and warned that legal action will be taken against anyone found spreading false information that could compromise public security.

Qatar, mediators welcome Gaza technocratic committee

DOHA: Qatar, Egypt and Turkiye have issued a joint statement, embracing the completion of a Palestinian technocratic committee to administer the Gaza Strip.

The statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs reads that the mediators, the State of Qatar, the Arab Republic of Egypt, and the Republic of Turkiye, welcome the formation of the Palestinian Technocratic Committee to Administer the Gaza Strip, headed by Dr. Ali Abdel Hamid Shaath, in a step that is considered an important development that will contribute to strengthening efforts aimed at consolidating stability and improving the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip.

"The mediators express their hope that the formation of the committee will pave the way for the implementation of the second phase of the ceasefire agreement in the Gaza Strip, according to the plan announced by

Joint statement by Qatar, Egypt and Turkiye says formation of the committee to administer Gaza will contribute to stability and improving humanitarian situation in the Strip.

His Excellency President Donald Trump, thereby contributing to consolidating the truce and preventing a renewed escalation," the statement said.

It added that the mediators stress the necessity for all parties to fully commit to implementing the agreement in order to achieve a sustainable peace and create the appropriate conditions for the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip, fulfilling the aspirations of the brotherly Palestinian people for security, stability, and a dignified life.

Meanwhile AFP reported that



Displaced Palestinians carry jerrycans amid tent shelters set up along the shore in Gaza City on January 13, 2026. (AFP)

United States Special Envoy to the Middle East Steve Witkoff said that a plan to end the Gaza war was now moving to Phase Two, despite a number of Israeli strikes during the ceasefire.

"We are announcing the launch of Phase Two of the President's 20-Point Plan to End the Gaza Conflict, moving from ceasefire to demilitarization, technocratic governance, and reconstruction," Witkoff wrote on X.

The second phase will also include the setup of a 15-person Palestinian technocratic committee to administer post-war Gaza. Phase Two "begins the full demilitarization and reconstruction of Gaza, primarily the disarmament of all unauthorized personnel."

"The US expects Hamas to comply fully with its obligations, including the immediate return of the final deceased hostage. Failure to do so will bring serious consequences," he said. — QNA

**UN recognises Qatar's
Digital Agenda 2030
among global best practices**

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: In a significant milestone reflecting Qatar's leadership in digital transformation, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) has included the Digital Agenda 2030 in its global compendium of best practices in digital government and digital transformation.

This recognition reflects the international appreciation of Qatar's national experience in developing a comprehensive digital ecosystem that combines long-term strategic vision with phased institutional implementation and establishes a direct link between digital transformation and long-term development.

objectives. As a result, Qatar's Digital Agenda is positioned as a global benchmark for countries seeking to align digital transformation with the Sustainable Development Goals.

The inclusion was made by the UN's Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government (DPIDG) following a systematic evaluation of the content and implementation frameworks of the Digital Agenda 2030. The agenda was recognised as an exemplary strategic framework for strategic digital transformation planning, given its clear linkage to Qatar National Vision 2030, its emphasis on ensuring the impact of technology reaches all segments of society, and its support for knowledge-based innovation. →P3

Cabinet approves updated National Qualifications Framework

DOHA: The Cabinet yesterday approved the adoption of the updated version of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF).

The proposed update comes as part of aligning the framework with Qatar National Vision 2030, the Third National Development Strategy, and the requirements of contemporary educational and technological development in line with the latest standards.

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

Following the meeting, Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs H E Ibrahim bin Ali Al Mohammadi said at the outset of the meeting, the Cabinet welcomed the outcomes of the third Qatari-Japanese Strategic Dialogue, which

The Cabinet has approved a draft decision by the Minister of State for Energy Affairs regulating district cooling service fees and licensing.

was held in Doha on Tuesday, co-chaired by Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs H E Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al-Thani and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan H E Toshimitsu Motegi.

The Cabinet affirmed that the contents of the joint statement issued at the conclusion of the dialogue reflected the distinguished historical relations between the two countries, characterised by mutual understanding and trust.

The Cabinet then reviewed the items listed on its agenda. It

was briefed on the Shura Council's approval of a draft law amending some provisions of Decree Law No. 24 of 2019 on the regulation and management of the strategic stockpile of food and consumer goods. The draft law aims to ensure the timely availability of strategic commodities in the country and to enhance the efficiency of stockpile management.

The Cabinet approved a draft decision by the Minister of State for Energy Affairs regulating district cooling service fees and licensing.

The draft decision aims to complete the regulatory framework of Law No. 19 of 2024 on the regulation of district cooling services by issuing the necessary decisions to implement its provisions. The Cabinet decided that the draft decision be posted on the "Sharek" platform of the Civil Service and Government

Development Bureau for a period of seven days to solicit public feedback, prior to referring it for legislative review in accordance with approved procedures.

Furthermore, the Cabinet decided to take the necessary measures to ratify an MoU for cooperation in the field of radio and television broadcasting between the Qatar Media Corporation and the Saudi Broadcasting Authority, as well as an agreement between Qatar and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

The International Development Association, the International Finance Corporation, the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency, and the International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes regarding the establishment and operation of offices in Qatar. — QNA →P3



Qatar International Food Festival opens at Stadium 974

People watch a drone display during the opening ceremony of the Qatar International Food Festival 2026 at Stadium 974 in Doha yesterday. PIC: RAJAN VADAKKEMURIYIL/THE PENINSULA
SEE ALSO PAGE 3

National forum on rights-based drug control solutions on January 20SANAAULLAH ATAULLAH
THE PENINSULA

DOHA: The National Human Rights Committee (NHRC) will organise the Fourth National Human Rights Forum on January 20 and 21, 2026, under the theme "Human Rights at the Heart of Drug Control: Challenges and Prospects for Sustainable Solutions." The forum will focus on addressing drug control from a comprehensive, human rights-based perspective.

The forum aims to promote an integrated approach grounded in human rights across legislation, public policies, and operational measures related to drug control, rehabilitation of drug users and addicts, and their social

The forum aims to promote an integrated approach related to drug control, rehabilitation of drug users and addicts, and their social reintegration.

The event is organised by the NHRC in partnership with the Ministry of Interior, and in cooperation with the Ministry of Social Development and Family, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, and the Ministry of Public Health.

Speaking at a press conference yesterday, NHRC Vice-Chairman Dr. Mohammed bin Saif Al Kuwari said the choice

of this theme reflects the growing global challenges posed by the rise in drug trafficking and the increasing indicators of drug use, as highlighted in international reports.

He emphasised that drug-related crimes have serious negative impacts on human rights, foremost among them the right to life, the right to the highest attainable standard of health, and the right to an adequate standard of living, in addition to posing obstacles to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

He praised the Ministry of Interior's vital role in law enforcement and preventive measures, highlighting the importance of coordinated efforts and multi-stakeholder engagement. →P4

EDITORIAL

Qatar's global energy leadership

QATAR'S bold vision for the future is anchored in its leadership of the global liquefied natural gas (LNG) market. As nations worldwide seek secure and cleaner energy, Qatar is positioning itself to be indispensable, not just as a reliable supplier but as a driver of long-term economic resilience and diversification.

A key development in Qatar's LNG sector is the North Field expansion programme. Currently, Qatar's LNG production capacity stands at around 77 million tonnes per annum (MTPA). This foundational level has made the country the world's leading LNG exporter, supplying key markets from Asia to Europe. Building on this position, Qatar's leadership has embarked on one of the largest energy infrastructure projects in history. By the mid-2020s, the North Field East and North Field South phases are expected to raise production capacity to 126 MTPA, significantly increasing export potential.

These expansions are not only about scaling production; they reflect a broader economic strategy. Revenue and investment from LNG exports have supported Qatar's ambitious National Vision 2030, which aims to diversify the economy beyond hydrocarbons. This includes growth in manufacturing, transport, tourism, finance, and sustainable energy sectors. Strengthening these areas enhances job creation, private sector participation, and technological advancement.

Moreover, Qatar's energy strategy acknowledges global shifts toward cleaner fuels. While LNG remains a key transition fuel in the move away from more carbon-intensive energy sources, Doha is also investing in renewable energy and efficiency initiatives, complementing hydrocarbon-based growth with sustainable development.

In a world of shifting energy demand and market volatility, Qatar's LNG expansion stands out as a model of strategic planning. By boosting production capacity based on solid geological foundations and forward-looking policy, the nation is securing long-term economic prosperity.

02 I

QATAR

THURSDAY 15 JANUARY 2026

Qatar participates in 49th session of Council of Arab Ministers of Youth and Sports

CAIRO: The State of Qatar participated in the 49th session of the Council of Arab Youth and Sports Ministers, which was held at the headquarters of the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States in Cairo.

The State of Qatar's delegation was headed by Minister of Sports and Youth H E Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa bin Ahmed Al-Thani.

The meeting addressed a number of topics related to strengthening joint Arab action in the youth and sports sectors, which included a set of proposals for youth and sports projects and programs planned for implementation in 2026.

The proposals included on the Council's agenda included programs, activities and dialogue sessions, such as the Fourth Arab-Chinese Cooperation Forum, the Ninth Arab-European Cooperation Forum, the Fourth Arab Youth Parliament Simulation Model, and the Third Arab Youth Salon.

The agenda also features



Minister of Sports and Youth H E Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa bin Ahmed Al-Thani heading Qatar's delegation at the session.

training courses on artificial intelligence, content creation, and youth awareness-building, as well as courses on cybersecurity and youth mental health.

The Council's agenda also included proposals from the Ministries of Youth and Sports of the Arab member states regarding several diverse youth and sports activities, including the 10th edition of the Holy Sites Journey Program for Arab and Islamic Youth in the

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Nile Ship for Arab Youth in the Arab Republic of Egypt, the Arab Youth Capital for 2026, and the Peace Marathon in the Federal Republic of Somalia. Other initiatives include the Arab School Sports Festival in Algeria, the Arab Women's Clubs Championship in Sharjah, Manama as the Arab Capital of Sports Culture, and the 2026 Sports Games for Specialized Federations. — QNA

Justice Minister issues decision regulating off-plan sales procedures

DOHA: Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs H E Ibrahim bin Ali Al Mohannadi issued a decision regulating the Preliminary Real Estate Register, defining its data and procedures, as part of the executive measures of Law No. (6) of 2014 regulating the real estate sector and its amendments.

The decision specified the components of the Preliminary Real Estate Register, which shall consist of a set of real estate title records designated for off-plan real estate units, along with the supplementary registers thereto, containing applications, contracts and their legal instruments, architectural designs, and engineering plans for the project duly approved by the competent authorities.

The decision further stipulates that the Preliminary Real Estate Register shall record, for each off-plan real estate unit, the area details, the

original property number, the approved project data, the off-plan unit number, its area, boundaries, specifications, any common parts where applicable, and the designated purpose thereof.

To mark this occasion, Assistant Undersecretary for Real Estate Registration and Authentication Affairs Amer Saeed Al Ghafri underscored the importance of issuing the ministerial decision regulating off-plan sales procedures.

These ownership interests will be registered in the Real Estate Register and granted the necessary legal protection, Al Ghafri outlined, noting that among the most significant provisions of the decision is granting holders of preliminary title deeds the right to mortgage and transfer them, whether by sale or gift, and to conclude all ownership-transferring dispositions, in accordance with the laws in force in the State of Qatar.

He also stated that, as part of

The decision specified the components of the Preliminary Real Estate Register, which shall consist of a set of real estate title records designated for off-plan real estate units

facilitating procedures, the decision allows for the electronic submission of applications for the registration or recording of off-plan real estate units in the Preliminary Real Estate Register, following approval by the Real Estate Regulatory Authority "Aqarat" and in accordance with the procedures prescribed under Law No. (5) of 2024 regulating real estate registration.

The Real Estate Registration Department at the Ministry of Justice shall issue a Preliminary Title Deed for each off-plan real estate unit, based on the data recorded in the Preliminary Real Estate Register, with an annotation made on the original title record of the project land to that effect. — QNA

Amir condoles with King of Saudi Arabia

DOHA: Amir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, Deputy Amir H H Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad Al-Thani, and Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs H E Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al-Thani sent cables of condolences to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, on the passing of HRH Princess Hind bint Saud bin Abdulaziz Al Saud. — QNA

Amir congratulates Guinea's President

DOHA: Amir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani has sent a cable of congratulations to HE Mamady Doumbouya following his election as president of the Republic of Guinea. HH the Amir wished President Doumbouya success in his duties and expressed hope for continued growth and development in relations between Qatar and Guinea.

Deputy Amir H H Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad Al-Thani also sent a cable of congratulations to HE Mamady Doumbouya following his election as president of the Republic of Guinea. — QNA

Qatar condemns attack in Pakistan

DOHA: The State of Qatar expressed its condemnation and denunciation of the attack that targeted a police vehicle in northwestern Pakistan, resulting in deaths and injuries. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs reiterated Qatar's firm stance against violence and terrorism, regardless of the motives or reasons. The Ministry expressed Qatar's condolences to the families of the victims and to the government and people of Pakistan, and its wishes for a speedy recovery for the injured. — QNA

WEEKEND DEALS

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Al Muraikhi meets Speaker of Australia's House of Representatives, reviews bilateral cooperation

Minister of State for Foreign Affairs H E Sultan bin Saad Al Muraikhi met yesterday with Speaker of the House of Representatives of Australia H E Milton Dick, who is currently visiting the country. During the meeting, the two sides reviewed cooperation relations, as well as ways to support and strengthen them.

'Second phase of Gaza ceasefire agreement will help consolidate calm'

DOHA: Advisor to the Prime Minister and Official Spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr. Majed bin Mohammed Al Ansari, expressed Qatar's hope that the announcement by H E Steve Witkoff, the US President's Special Envoy to the Middle East, regarding the start of the second phase of the ceasefire agreement in the Gaza Strip without restrictions or conditions, and the immediate commencement of the reconstruction of the Strip in a manner that alleviates the suffering of civilians and provides them with a dignified life.

In a statement to the Qatar News Agency (QNA), Dr. Al Ansari affirmed that Qatar, stemming from its role as a mediator and in coordination with its partners, will continue its intensive efforts and diplomatic endeavors within the framework of de-escalation and sparing civilians the consequences of conflicts.

He reiterated Qatar's firm and supportive stance toward the brotherly Palestinian people and their legitimate rights, stressing the need for all parties to fully implement the agreement.

This includes ensuring the entry of humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip without restrictions or conditions, and the immediate commencement of the reconstruction of the Strip in a manner that alleviates the suffering of civilians and provides them with a dignified life.

In this context, Dr. Al Ansari underscored the importance of the international community assuming its responsibilities in supporting efforts aimed at consolidating the ceasefire, thereby enhancing the prospects for achieving stability and sustainable peace in the region. — QNA

Cabinet approves updated National Qualifications Framework

FROM PAGE 1

The Cabinet also decided to approve the draft executive programme for the years 2026–2027 within the framework of the memorandum of understanding for cooperation in the field of youth between the Government of the State of Qatar and the Government of Turkmenistan, signed on March 20, 2023.

The Cabinet concluded its meeting by reviewing two reports and taking the appropriate decisions thereon. It reviewed a report on the outcomes of participation in the 27th meeting of the Ministers Responsible for Environmental Affairs in the GCC states, held in Kuwait in October 2025, and a report on the outcomes of participation in the 34th Session of the International Maritime Organization (IMO) Assembly in London in December 2025.

QIFF 2026 opens with dazzling fireworks

VICTOR BOLORUNDURO
THE PENINSULA

DOHA: The 15th edition of the Qatar International Food Festival (QIFF) was inaugurated yesterday within the precincts of Stadium 974 in Doha with fanfare and spectacular fireworks.

The event, which will run until January 24, is offering an expanded programme featuring local and international restaurants, live cooking showcases led by renowned chefs, family-friendly activities, dedicated cultural zones, and daily entertainment.

In attendance at the opening ceremony were the Chairman of Qatar Tourism and Chairman of the Board of Visit Qatar H E Saad bin Ali Al Kharji, Director of the National Museum of Qatar H E Sheikh Abdulaziz bin Hamad Al-Thani, CEO of Visit Qatar Eng. Abdulaziz Ali Al-Mawlawi and

other dignitaries.

In his address at the event, Al-Mawlawi noted that the organisers were keen to hold the festival this year at one of the iconic venues of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, in order to preserve the World Cup grounds and integrate them with the tourism strategy by enhancing Qatar's position as a global destination with an architectural infrastructure that symbolises innovation and sustainability.

"This, in itself, motivates us to host more major events to preserve this sustainable land. The Qatar International Food Festival has transcended being merely a gathering for culinary arts to become an annual icon embodying the spirit of Qatari hospitality and its openness to the world through diverse flavours under the slogan Fifteen Years of Exquisite Taste," he said.

He added that this edition of the festival comes to crown a journey full of successes and celebrates the Qatar–Canada–Mexico Year of Culture, in cooperation with Qatar Museums, as part of an ongoing institutional journey of striving to unify efforts to enrich a unified national events calendar capable of attracting visitors from all over the world to experience.

"Qatar boasts a diverse culture, and we believe that cultural exchange isn't confined to closed halls but is embodied spontaneously and authentically through sharing food and celebrating the traditions of different peoples," he said.

QIFF 2026 features a lineup of standout attractions and immersive experiences throughout the festival grounds.

Visitors can enjoy daily fireworks displays, the return of Dinner in the Sky, and the ever-



Chairman of Qatar Tourism and Chairman of the Board of Visit Qatar H E Saad bin Ali Al Kharji (fourth right) with Director of the National Museum of Qatar H E Sheikh Abdulaziz bin Hamad Al-Thani (third right) and other dignitaries during the opening ceremony of QIFF 2026.

PIC: RAJAN VADAKKEMURIYIL / THE PENINSULA

popular Market experience.

The programme will also feature captivating drone shows, interactive sessions at the Cooking Studio, evolving showcases from emerging restaurants, and engaging installations such as the QIFF Ring,

featuring exciting competitions and an enticing Padel of Minds game, ensuring an atmosphere of excitement and discovery throughout the festival.

The festival's creative direction remains focused on enhancing Qatar's global

positioning as a leading culinary destination, celebrating both home-grown talent and international excellence in gastronomy.

The festival will be open on weekdays from 4pm to 11pm and on weekends from 3pm to 1am.

Committee reviews preparations for Third Web Summit Qatar, tickets sold out

DOHA: The Permanent Web Summit Organising Committee, during its regular meeting, reviewed the latest developments related to the third Web Summit Qatar, scheduled to be held from February 1 to 4 at the Doha Exhibition and Convention Centre, where it discussed the level of readiness to host the event amid rising participation demand.

The committee confirmed that startup programme tickets are fully sold out, with more than 1,600 startups from around the world participating, alongside expectations that general attendance tickets will sell out soon, with around 30,000 participants from 124 countries, nearly 700 investors, and 600 media representatives, in addition to the summit's allocated space reaching full capacity, with the participation of several leading global companies.

Director of the Government Communications Office and Chairman of the Permanent

Web Summit Organising Committee, H E Sheikh Jassim bin Mansour bin Jabor Al-Thani, said that the sell-out of startup program tickets reflects the growing confidence in Web Summit Qatar as a global

platform bringing together entrepreneurs, investors, and decision-makers, providing an environment that fosters innovation and partnership building.

He added that the summit represents a strategic opportunity for Qatari and regional startups to showcase their ideas, build meaningful partnerships, and access a global network of investors and experts, helping transform innovative ideas into projects with sustainable economic impact.

Sheikh Jassim pointed to the remarkable growth in the number of participating Qatari startups, noting that the summit's second edition recorded an increase exceeding 90 percent compared to the 2024 edition, highlighting that this growth reflects the success of national efforts in empowering entrepreneurs and enhancing their role in building a knowledge-based economy, in line with the objectives of Qatar National Vision 2030.

The committee revealed the participation of government and commercial delegations from Germany, Switzerland, Italy, the Netherlands, Serbia, Bahrain, Pakistan, and Palestine, alongside ongoing discussions

with other international delegations, reflecting the summit's international nature and its standing as a global destination for governments, companies, and investors.

The committee also discussed the growing interest of leading global companies and institutions in participating in the summit, noting the signing of dozens of partnership agreements with prominent international organisations in the technology, media, finance, and investment sectors, including Google, Meta, Microsoft, IBM, TikTok, Snap, Cisco, and Huawei.

The committee addressed the scientific program of the summit, noting that the third edition will cover 14 main tracks, led by artificial intelligence, alongside quantum computing, financial technology, energy, government, health, and manufacturing, with a focus on achieving practical and sustainable value from these technologies.

The committee noted that hosting Web Summit in Qatar for the third consecutive year represents a strategic pillar to consolidate the country's position as a global hub for technology and innovation. — QNA

UN recognises Qatar's Digital Agenda among global best practices

FROM PAGE 1

UN further commended Qatar's Digital Agenda 2030 for its effective alignment of digital policies with development objectives and for achieving a balanced approach between the adoption of advanced technologies and the principles of inclusivity and sustainability.

This approach reinforces Qatar's position as a regional and global hub for technological excellence in digital governance and technological development.

The Digital Agenda 2030 serves as the national roadmap for digital transformation and as an executive pillar of Qatar

National Vision 2030 and the Third National Development Strategy 2024–2030. It is built on three main technological pathways: universal connectivity to link all components of the digital society; high-performance computing (HPC) to enhance data-processing efficiency; and integrated AI-driven automation, supporting the development of a resilient and scalable digital infrastructure.

This UN recognition is grounded in the Digital Agenda 2030's comprehensive strategic framework, which is based on six interrelated pillars. These include the development of advanced and secure digital

infrastructure, enhancement of digital government efficiency, building national capabilities in digital technologies and data, stimulating digital innovation and supporting the digital economy, and empowering a digitally aware and capable society that can adapt to rapid transformations.

The integration of these pillars has transformed digital transformation into a comprehensive development pathway that strengthens governance, stimulates economic growth, and enhances national readiness for future requirements, contributing to the agenda's inclusion among global best practices.



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THE DIPLOMATIC CLUB

298th session of Executive Committee of IPU concludes

Deputy Speaker of the Shura Council H E Dr. Hamda bint Hassan Al Sulaiti emphasised that the event produced outcomes that would help advance the IPU's mechanisms and effectiveness in addressing the current challenges facing international parliamentary action.

DOHA: The 298th session of the Executive Committee of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), hosted by the Shura Council, concluded in Doha yesterday.

The two-day session deliberated on an array of subjects on the agenda, foremost of which was the evaluation of the implementation of the IPU's current strategy, the general directions of the upcoming five-year strategy, along with a wide range of organisational

and parliamentary issues related to reinforcing the IPU's role and the effectiveness of its mechanisms.

Deputy Speaker of the Shura Council H E Dr. Hamda bint Hassan Al Sulaiti, who is also a Member of the Executive Committee of the IPU and Vice-President of the Committee representing the Arab Group within the Union, affirmed that the session constituted a consequential milestone for evaluating the Union's



Deputy Speaker of Shura Council H E Dr. Hamda bint Hassan Al Sulaiti with other delegates during the meeting.

operational path. She emphasised that the event produced outcomes that would help advance the IPU's mechanisms and

effectiveness in addressing the current challenges facing international parliamentary action. The convened discussions

demonstrated the commitment of the Executive Committee's members to boosting joint parliamentary action, deepening

the multilateral parliamentary cooperation approach as an effective tool in supporting dialogue, coordinating positions, and sharing expertise among national parliaments, thereby contributing to achieving the IPU's objectives and responding to peoples' aspirations. Dr. Hamda pointed out.

Dr. Hamda underscored the Shura Council's commitment to forging ahead in positively contributing to international parliamentary cooperation pathways and fostering partnerships with regional and global parliamentary institutions and parliaments, stemming from its belief in the importance of collective work to deepen peace and development and confront common challenges on multiple levels. — QNA



Advisor to PM meets Norway's envoy to Yemen

Advisor to the Prime Minister and Official Spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr. Majid bin Mohammed Al Ansari met yesterday with Norwegian Special Envoy to Yemen, Heidi Johansen, who is visiting Doha. The meeting discussed cooperation between the two countries and ways of strengthening them as well as the latest regional and international updates.

National forum on rights-based drug control solutions on Jan 20

FROM PAGE 1

Dr. Al Kuwari stressed that despite Qatar being largely free from severe risks associated with drugs due to robust legislation, policies, and measures targeting trafficking and smuggling networks, there remains a need to further develop these measures and enhance their flexibility to keep pace with global challenges and evolving methods of drug trafficking and promotion.

Such efforts, he noted, have positioned Qatar among the safest countries globally in terms of drug prevalence indicators. Dr. Al Kuwari added that the forum will review legislation, public policies, and prevention and control plans, while examining challenges related to rehabilitation and social reintegration. It will also explore effective methods to enhance community awareness through educational curricula, media, and religious

platforms. Special sessions will be dedicated to youth and future generations, as well as to the media, recognising their crucial role in prevention, recovery, and reintegration. He expressed hope that the forum would produce practical recommendations and visions to strengthen national drug control efforts, enhance preparedness, and contribute to establishing a permanent national platform for drug awareness, while showcasing Qatar's pioneering experience in this vital field.

Brigadier Saad Salem Al Dosari, Assistant Director of the Human Rights Department at the Ministry of Interior, emphasised the depth of the constructive partnership between the Ministry and the NHRC, which has yielded numerous joint events and training programmes since the signing of a memorandum of understanding in 2018. He affirmed that

the forum supports the Ministry of Interior's Strategy (2024–2030), particularly the strategic objective of protecting society from drugs.

The forum will highlight the role of MoI through the presentation of three specialised working papers that reflect its comprehensive approach to addressing drug-related challenges. The Public Relations Department will present a paper titled "The Security Awareness Experience in Enhancing Protection from Drugs: The Ministry of Interior as a Model".

The General Directorate of Drug Control will deliver a paper entitled "Emerging Patterns of Drug Crimes: Comprehensive Response Strategies." The Department of Correctional and Rehabilitation Institutions will present a paper on "Recovery, Treatment, and Rehabilitation Programs for Drug-Related Offenders in Correctional Facilities."

Third edition of Government Communications Forum concludes

DOHA: The third edition of the Government Communications Forum concluded yesterday following two days of panel discussions and specialised workshops, reaffirming the forum's role in knowledge exchange, institutional coordination, and examining the role of strategic communications in advancing national priorities.

Organised by the Government Communications Office (GCO), the forum brought together more than 800 ministers, undersecretaries, senior officials, and decision-makers, alongside communications and media experts and representatives of leading global digital and media companies. Sessions explored communications as a strategic tool for influence, trust, and national narrative-building in a rapidly evolving context.

Director of the GCO H E Sheikh Jassim bin Mansour bin Jabor Al-Thani said: "The third edition of the Government Communications Forum reflects an ongoing effort to

strengthen Qatar's government communications ecosystem and enhance coordination across government and semi-government entities and international partners.

"This supports the effective delivery of national messages aligned with the country's vision and development priorities."

He added also added that "Government communications now serve a strategic role in building awareness, strengthening trust, and engaging with society. Through the forum, we bring together expertise, share best practices, and engage local and international partners to enhance institutional performance and support Qatar National Vision 2030."

The forum saw broad participation from international partners, including Dow Jones, Meta, Google, Snap, and Amazon Ads, alongside an exhibition featuring initiatives by government and semi-government entities, including the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Sports and



Youth, the Communications Regulatory Authority, and Qatar Rail.

The forum also featured an exhibition by the Government Communications Office highlighting its ongoing efforts to strengthen the government communications ecosystem and showcase achievements over the past year.

The third edition of the forum featured 11 panel discussions, bringing together government leaders, international experts, and representatives of global digital platforms. Discussions examined the role of government communications in strengthening the

national narrative, supporting major initiatives, and enhancing cohesion across government entities. Sessions also highlighted best practices for public engagement, institutional readiness, and transparency as a cornerstone of public trust.

Sessions addressed developments in digital communications, strategic storytelling, and sport as a unifying narrative that reinforces national identity and encourages community engagement, as well as the growing role of women in leading the communications sector and shaping more inclusive, agile, and impactful narratives.

The forum program included more than 35 specialised workshops held over two days, covering artificial intelligence, digital strategies, creative content, media monitoring, production, creative writing, and crisis communications.

The forum also highlighted the role of strategic communications in supporting key sectors, particularly tourism, underscoring the importance

of creative campaigns, effective use of digital platforms, and data-driven audience insights in delivering impactful messages.

Several entities and individuals were honoured for their role in advancing the government communications ecosystem in 2025. Awards included Media Excellence, Best Digital Campaign, and Innovation in Media Content, in addition to a Snap Award presented for the first time in the region to the most engaged entity on the platform, reflecting the forum's commitment to support impactful initiatives and develop human capital in the communications sector.

The Government Communications Forum continues to advance Qatar's communications sector and strengthen coordination across government entities. These efforts support capacity-building, strengthen communications outputs, and contribute to the nation's regional and international standing, in line with the Third National Development Strategy. — QNA

WCM-Q medical students visit Oman as part of Service Learning Programme

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: The Division of Student Affairs at Weill Cornell Medicine-Qatar (WCM-Q) recently organised a visit to the Sultanate of Oman for first-year medical students as part of the college's Medical Service Learning Programme (MSLP).

The weeklong MSLP trip offers first-year medical students a unique opportunity to develop a global perspective on healthcare issues affecting different populations, explore the curricula and clinical programmes of medical schools in the region, participate in community service projects, and experience the history and cultural heritage of another nation. Following the trip, students will give a public presentation to highlight their experiences and discuss how the program has affected their studies.

During the trip, students visited the College of Medicine and Health Sciences at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), where they met with SQU students, faculty, and staff. They also toured the Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care and Research Centre (SQCCCR), Sultan Qaboos University Hospital, and other facilities, such as the clinical skills and anatomy labs.

Another highlight of the trip included students volunteering in two prominent community service projects. At the Oman Food Bank (OFB), students helped process donations and organise food packages for



WCM-Q students and staff with counterparts from the College of Medicine and Health Sciences at Sultan Qaboos University.

families in need. Students also visited the Association of Early Intervention for Children with Disability (AEICD), where they helped centre staff engage children with various disabilities in classroom activities and learned about the centre's efforts to help children develop essential skills to improve their quality of life.

Associate dean for student affairs at WCM-Q, Dr. Sean Holroyd said, "We are committed to ensuring that our first-year medical students gain a well-rounded perspective on healthcare. As such, we are determined to create educational opportunities that encourage them to engage with global health issues and understand the needs of diverse populations around the world."

The trip also included city tours

of Muscat and visits to historical and cultural sites such as Nizwa and Muttrah forts, traditional souqs, Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque, Bait Al-Baranda Museum, the Royal Opera House, and the Oman Across Ages Museum, allowing WCM-Q students to deepen their understanding of Oman's rich history and traditions.

Director of student affairs at WCM-Q, Faten Shunnar said, "As future physicians, it is essential that our students experience different healthcare systems, medical programmes, and community service initiatives, and engage with the communities they serve. I would like to sincerely thank everyone at SQU, OFB, and AEICD for their warm hospitality and for making this experience possible."

Tender Announcement :-

Sr. #	Tender No.	Description	Temporary Tender Bond (Q.R)	Documents Fees (Non-Refundable) (Q.R)	Closing Date
1	QRC/EMS/01-2026	Purchase and supply of 10 ambulances (Type II) according to the conditions and specifications	200,000	2000	08-02-2026
2	QRC/EMS/02-2026	Purchase and supply of Mobile Clinic Vehicle according to the conditions and specifications	50,000	500	08-02-2026

The documents can be collected from Medical Affairs Division, Ain Khalid Area, Sunday to Thursday from 09:00 am to 02:00 pm till the closing date or by sending email along with the requested documents below.

Required Documents:

1. Authorization letter to receive tender documents + ID copy of the person will be receiving the documents.
2. Company's Commercial registration copy.
3. Bank deposit voucher with the value of documents not refunded & account details:
 - Account Name: Qatar Red Crescent.
 - Bank: Al Rayan.
 - Account Number: 0003-100689-200
 - IBAN Number: QA09MAFR00000000003100689200

For more information: Please call (50044554), or Email: whc.tenders@qrcs.org.qa



Amir receives message from Guinea President

Amir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani received a written message from President of the Republic of Guinea H E Mamady Doumbouya, pertaining to bilateral relations and ways to support and develop them. Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs H E Dr. Mohammed bin Abdulaziz Al Khulaifi received the message during his meeting yesterday with Ambassador of the Republic of Guinea to Qatar H E Thierno Abdoulaye Sow.

Qatar attends consultative meeting on enhancing coordination for Sudan



CAIRO: The State of Qatar participated in the Fifth Consultative Meeting on Enhancing Coordination of Peace Initiatives and Efforts for Sudan, which took place in the Arab Republic of Egypt.

Director of the Arab Affairs Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs H E Nayef bin Abdullah Al Emadi (pictured)

represented the State of Qatar at the meeting.

This meeting comes as part of efforts to support pathways towards a peaceful solution in the Republic of Sudan and to strengthen coordination among concerned parties in a manner that contributes to achieving security and stability. — QNA

Katara celebrates Iraqi heritage with cultural tasting event

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: The Katara Cultural Village Foundation, in cooperation with the Embassy of the Republic of Iraq in Qatar, held a cultural tasting event on Tuesday evening in Hall 32 at Katara.

The event was attended by Director General of the Katara Cultural Village Foundation Professor Dr. Khalid bin Ibrahim Al-Sulaiti, and Ambassador of Iraq H E Mohammed Jaafar Al-Sadr along with a number of Their Excellencies the Ambassadors, members of the diplomatic corps, and a large audience of culture and heritage enthusiasts.

The event included tasting the traditional Iraqi dish, Dolma, a prominent symbol of Iraqi cuisine, in addition to serving tea and traditional Iraqi sweets, in an atmosphere that reflected the depth and richness of Iraqi cultural heritage.

In his speech during the event, Ambassador Al-Sadr said, "Today, we gather at the generous initiative of Katara to taste a traditional Iraqi dish, Dolma. This gathering is not merely about tasting food, but rather aims to broaden horizons for understanding between different cultures, fostering closer



Director General of the Katara Cultural Village Foundation Professor Dr. Khalid bin Ibrahim Al-Sulaiti (second left), Ambassador of Iraq H E Mohammed Jaafar Al-Sadr (right) and other dignitaries during the cultural tasting event.

ties between the diverse customs that unite the peoples of the region and bring humanity together in its shared values."

The Iraqi Ambassador expressed his gratitude and appreciation to the Katara Cultural Village Foundation for this cultural initiative, hoping for continued cooperation through the organisation of future events that showcase Iraq's heritage in various cul-

tural and artistic fields.

This event aligns with Katara's ongoing cultural approach, which includes organising numerous events in collaboration with various diplomatic missions. This contributes to strengthening bridges of understanding between peoples and reinforces Doha's position as a global destination for intercultural dialogue and cultural diversity.

GCC, AFoCO forge strategic alliance to bridge \$216bn forest finance gap

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: The Global Carbon Council (GCC) and the Asian Forest Cooperation Organisation (AFoCO) have signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to strengthen cooperation in addressing global climate change through the promotion of Nature-based Solutions (NbS) and fostering an enabling and high-integrity carbon market ecosystem across Asia.

The MoU was officially signed during a formal ceremony by Founding Chairman of the Global Carbon Council Dr. Yousef Alhorr and Executive Director of the Asian Forest Cooperation Organization Dr. Chongho Park.

carbon-based incentives in line with the Paris Agreement, particularly Article 6, as a means to mobilize private sector engagement through internationally aligned carbon market mechanisms.

According to the report, annual forest investments must more than triple from \$84bn in 2023 to \$300bn by 2030 to meet global climate and biodiversity targets. Currently, the world faces a forest finance gap of \$216bn per year, underscoring the need for scalable and credible market-based solutions. To this end, the

agreement between GCC and AFoCO establishes a cooperative framework to support sustainable, verifiable, and impactful forestry and climate initiatives across the region.

Through this MoU, the two organisations will promote collaboration on Public-Private Partnership (PPP)-based Nature-based Solutions carbon incentive programmes, aligned with the Land Use, Land-Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF) initiatives implemented by AFoCO to strengthen climate change mitigation, adaptation, and resilience.



The MoU was signed virtually by Founding Chairman of the Global Carbon Council Dr. Yousef Alhorr and Executive Director of the Asian Forest Cooperation Organization Dr. Chongho Park.

Strong winds, cooler weather forecast from today

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: The Qatar Meteorology Department has issued a forecast indicating strong northwesterly winds and a noticeable drop in temperatures beginning today (Thursday).

Over the upcoming weekend, cloud cover is expected to increase, with partly cloudy skies predicted across most areas.

Meteorologist Saqr Al-Suwaidei said that rainfall is anticipated primarily during daytime hours, from morning until around mid-afternoon, with most showers expected to be light and occasional moderate in some regions. Speaking to Qatar TV yesterday, he said

that the rainfall is not expected to reach a warning level and will likely be limited to a few hours.

He emphasised that the northwesterly winds are expected to be active to strong in speed, affecting the country from Thursday through the start of next week. These winds may raise dust and reduce horizontal visibility, particularly in open and exposed areas. Citizens are advised to exercise caution when travelling outdoors during this period.

Al-Suwaidei said that temperatures are expected to decrease significantly due to the influence of the northwesterly winds. He said that the drop is forecasted at approximately 3–5°C compared to current levels, with the wind making

the air feel even colder. In Doha, temperatures are expected to reach 12–13°C, while southern regions may experience lows of 10°C or below, particularly on Saturday and Sunday. Authorities remind the public that actual conditions may vary, and it is essential to follow the latest updates.

Al-Suwaidei said that mariners are warned of rough sea conditions during this period. Waves are expected to range between 4–7 feet, occasionally reaching up to 10 feet, prompting authorities to advise avoiding all maritime activities until conditions improve. The public is urged to monitor official weather sources for ongoing updates and precautionary guidance.

Wifaq Centre wins award for social responsibility

DOHA: Wifaq Family Consulting Centre, member of Qatar Foundation for Social Work, has won the international award for the most community giving institutions (Ataa) in recognition of its outstanding contributions to social responsibility and its active role in supporting family cohesion and promoting sustainable social development.

The centre was honoured during its participation in the fourth edition of the Private Sector Social Responsibility and Its Role in Sustainable Development Conference, held at the headquarters of the Qatar Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The event brought together a distinguished group of Arab and international institutions and organisations, and was attended by leaders, decision-makers, and experts.

This achievement reflects the Centre's extensive portfolio of specialised programmes and

initiatives in family counselling, social awareness, and preventive work, aimed at strengthening family stability and enhancing the quality of family life, in line with the Sustainable Development Goals and Qatar National Vision for building a cohesive and prosperous society.

On this occasion, Executive Director of Wifaq Centre, Engineer Jaber Rashid Al Nuaimi, affirmed that receiving this international award underscores the Centre's integrated institutional approach to delivering specialised family counselling services and awareness programmes grounded in solid professional and scientific foundations.

Al Nuaimi considered the award a significant milestone in Wifaq's journey, embodying its commitment to promoting social responsibility through professional, specialised family counselling, and through the development of preventive and

therapeutic awareness programs that respond to the needs of families at various stages of life. He added that the award reflects the Centre's dedication to achieving a sustainable social impact that supports family stability and strengthens family cohesion, with positive implications for society as a whole.

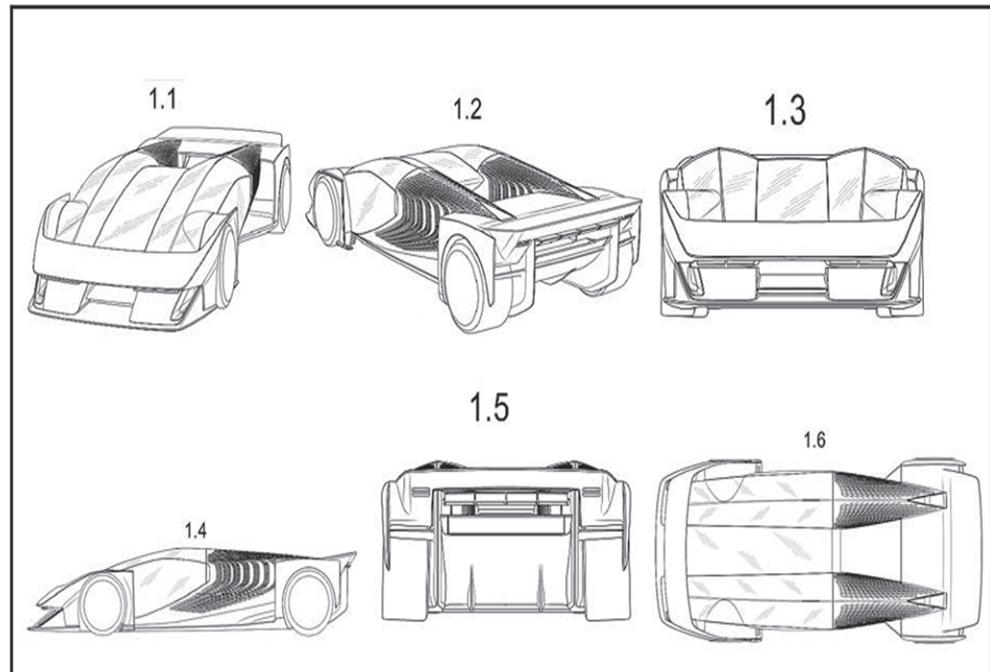
Al Nuaimi also highlighted that the Centre continues to develop its counselling service framework and expand the scope of its specialised awareness programmes, including marital relationship awareness, parental education, and life skills development.

He noted the importance Wifaq places on institutional integration and the adoption of best practices in social responsibility to ensure sustainable impact at both the family and community levels, in alignment with the state's directives and the vision of the Qatar Foundation for Social Work. — QNA

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FIG. 1.1 is a front perspective view of the car/toy car of the present design;

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Figures that show the design most sufficiently: front and rear perspective views.

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Committee unveils particulars of National Sports Day events 2026

DOHA: The National Sports Day Committee of the State of Qatar 2026 announced the particulars of the new events, set to be launched statewide in February 2026.

Under the motto "I Chose Sports", these events are intended to help community members familiarise themselves with the importance of practicing sports as a lifestyle and for enduring health.

During the press conference held yesterday at Lusail Sports Hall, the Committee discussed the events agenda, which includes a diverse bundle of sports, recreational, and cultural activities, with the engagement of both public and private agencies, in public parks and sports facilities, ensuring the distribution of activities nationwide and encouraging the participation of all segments of society.

Chairman of the National Sports Day Committee 2026 and President of the Qatar Sports for All Federation (QSFA), Abdulrahman bin Muslim Al Dosari, affirmed that the choice of this motto underscores the



National Sport Day

transformation of practicing sports into a decision and responsible societal awareness, contributing to the enhancement of quality of life and public health, and making sports an effective tool in building a productive, active, and creative society.

The Sports Day has morphed into a national platform for embracing a culture of physical activity and balance, reinforcing health values within Qatari society, after it was merely an annual event, Al Dosari highlighted.

He emphasised that sports were not a temporary activity, but a lifestyle reflecting awareness and a spirit of responsibility toward oneself

and society, suggesting that this day represents an annual opportunity to strengthen and embed this awareness, consistently with the nation's vision to build a healthy, active, and sustainable society, in addition to surmounting the challenges of life faced by all.

Al Dosari noted that the opportunity is open to all members of society to engage in sports and physical activity, making use of the numerous large sports venues and facilities the nation provides. During the conference, QSFA unveiled the 2026 calendar, comprising over 800 community sports events.

Executive Director of QSFA, Abdullah Al Dosari, reviewed the milestones of 2025, stating that QSFA organises numerous community sports events in which all segments of society participate. He highlighted that the total number of participants reached 215,506 in events distributed across all the nation's regions, from the north and south to central Doha, extending to the west in Dukhan and Al

Jumailiya, in addition to public parks, youth centres, and sports clubs.

The Executive Director added that the number of participants in sports championships reached 6,984, while community running events saw participation increase to 38,696.

The number of women participants rose to 8,000 across 59 races during the year, achieving great success and growing engagement. He confirmed that these figures reflect the clear increase in participation, as the year before last saw 206,000 participants, while 2025 reached 216,000 participants, with a total of 750 targeted sports events, while 834 events were organised.

Al Dosari further explained that school sports events displayed great diversity, with 91 events involving 22,259 participants across 60 schools, a number higher than achieved previously. He also noted that sports championships drew record participation, with 74 championships involving 6,984 participants.



Chairman of the National Sports Day Committee 2026 and President of the Qatar Sports for All Federation Abdulrahman bin Muslim Al Dosari speaking during the press conference.

application this year. Al Dosari hoped that QSFA succeeded in selecting the activities organised in 2025, and that 2026 will be even better, implementing the planned activities at the same high quality, exceeding 800 sports and community events, in collaboration with all partners. — QNA

Awqaf Ministry concludes 'Knowledge Grounding' seminar for students

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: The Islamic Research and Studies Department at the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, has concluded the second edition of the annual "Knowledge Grounding" seminar, held under the theme "The Concept of Islamic Identity in a Changing World." The three-day seminar benefited approximately 400 high school students.

This year's edition marked a significant expansion, as it included the participation of female secondary schools alongside male schools. Around 800 publications issued by the Islamic Research and Studies Department were distributed to attendees, enriching the educational and intellectual content of the seminar.

The seminar was held over three days, from Monday to Wednesday, January 12–14, 2026, across three major mosques: Imam Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab Mosque, Nasser



Participants listening to a session at the seminar.

bin Abdullah Al Missned Mosque in Al Khor, and Qanbar Al Ansari Mosque in Al Wakrah.

Sheikh Dr. Ahmed Al Thani emphasised that reinforcing Islamic identity represents a fundamental pathway toward intellectual and societal advancement, particularly in light of rapid global changes that pose challenges to cultural and religious values.

Participants expressed strong appreciation for the seminar's content, noting that it broadened their perspectives

and deepened their understanding of Islamic identity amid contemporary transformations.

They highlighted the balanced academic approach and interactive discussion style, which resonated closely with youth realities and made the topics more engaging and impactful.

Students also noted that the seminar helped them connect enduring Islamic values with the demands of modern life, fostering intellectual awareness

and a sense of responsibility toward preserving religious and cultural authenticity while maintaining a conscious and positive openness to the world.

Several participants affirmed that the seminar strengthened their pride in Islamic identity and encouraged critical thinking and self-awareness. They expressed hope that similar high-quality initiatives would continue and expand to reach more students and address additional topics relevant to youth interests and intellectual challenges.

The seminar underscores the importance of knowledge grounding in building a solid intellectual foundation for young people, one that harmonises Islamic principles with contemporary realities.

This initiative reflects the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs' ongoing role in enhancing the cultural and intellectual development of society's youth and supporting informed, value-based engagement with the modern world.

Qatar plays active role in peaceful settlement of conflicts: IPU President

DOHA: President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) H E Dr. Tuli Ackson praised

the active and prominent role played by the State of Qatar in resolving conflicts through peaceful means and supporting development efforts at both the regional and international levels, which has earned it a distinguished standing and made it a global hub for dialogue and the examination of international issues of concern to humanity, in a multidimensional world facing intertwined crises and conflicts.

"Qatar constitutes an inclusive international platform that enables countries to meet and discuss issues of peace, security, development, and social development."

In an exclusive interview with Qatar News Agency (QNA) yesterday, Her Excellency noted that Doha's hosting of the 298th session of the Executive Committee of the Inter-Parliamentary Union reflects the State of Qatar's growing stature and the international confidence it enjoys as a global centre for peaceful conflict resolution, particularly amid a multidimensional world facing complex crises and conflicts.

In a related context, Dr. Ackson added that the selection of Qatar to host the 298th session of the IPU Executive Committee carries strong symbolic significance, in light of the effective role played by the State in conflict resolution and in promoting dialogue and peace in various regions of the world. She expressed her pleasure at the presence of the Union's leadership in Doha.

Regarding the State of Qatar's role in supporting

development and assisting least developed countries, the IPU President affirmed that Qatar constitutes an inclusive international platform that enables countries to meet and discuss issues of peace, security, development, and social development.

She noted that the IPU leadership, represented by the Executive Committee, is meeting in Doha to discuss a number of pressing global issues, foremost among them peace and security and human rights. She emphasised that the Doha meeting holds particular importance as it paves the way for decisions on the topics to be included on the agenda of the IPU General Assembly, scheduled to be held next April, adding that human rights issues will be among the main themes of the Union's work during the current year.

She said that the Inter-Parliamentary Union, as the global organisation of parliamentarians and representatives of peoples, addresses issues related to climate, sustainable development, and social development, in addition to peace and security. She stressed that the presence of IPU leaders in Qatar is of particular importance given the country's central position in the heart of current international issues.

In response to a question, she said that the role of parliaments and parliamentarians was not limited to advising governments, but also extended to overseeing their performance, underscoring the importance of empowering parliaments to discuss global developments and international conflicts, an opportunity for which Qatar has provided an appropriate platform. — QNA

Nomas Centre holds inaugural professional courses on 'Naqda' art



Nomas

cultural accord between heritage authenticity and contemporary craftsmanship.

Twelve female trainers from the centre's technical staff took part in these intensive two-day courses. The workshop was supervised by trainer Radhiya Al Haddad, one of the few seasoned professionals in this field, with the aim of transferring the fine-grained secrets of this delicate craft to a new generation of trainers.

This step comes as part of

Nomas's energised effort to broaden the aperture of cultural awareness regarding the aesthetics of the traditional head covering, which was historically adorned with silver or gold threads.

Through these courses, the centre intends to elevate these skills into a codified science and art, ensuring the continuity of national identity in traditional handicrafts for generations to come. The Head of the Girls' Section at the Nomas Centre, Maryam Ahmed Al Dosari, highlighted that this was a pilot course aimed at gauging the trainees' level of engagement and advancing the training curriculum in the future.

She further noted that

Naqda depends on high manual skill, with silver and gold

threads used to form precise geometric units, employing specialised needles that differ entirely from conventional ones, in addition to extremely delicate fabrics such as tulle or shayla. This process demands intense discipline, concentration, and caution to prevent damage to the fabric.

The participants underscored both the importance and the inherent difficulty of this art form.

The first day alone required maxed-out focus and sustained effort. Accordingly, the participants proposed increasing the number of days allocated for future courses and extending daily training hours to ensure proper skill refinement, adequate practice, and full mastery of this authentic heritage craft. — QNA

Essential safety guidelines for cyclists

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: The Ministry of Interior (MoI) has issued a public safety advisory emphasising that strict adherence to traffic regulations while cycling is fundamental to preventing road accidents and upholding national safety standards.

To ensure the highest level of safety on the road, the Ministry mandates that cyclists must strictly utilise designated bicycle lanes or stay on the far-right side of the roadway at all times. Furthermore, riders are required to equip themselves with protective helmets and wear reflective vests to remain visible to other motorists.

The guidelines also highlight the necessity of using fixed lighting on the bicycle to navigate safely.

QRCS, humanitarian partners discuss joint efforts to enhance Afghanistan health services

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS) and the Gates Foundation have co-organised the Afghanistan Humanitarian Partners Workshop, with over 55 in-person and virtual participants from government institutions, UN agencies, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, international NGOs, and donors.

The objectives of the workshop were (1) to share key updates from the polio programme and the broader humanitarian situation in Afghanistan, (2) to discuss the revisions made to the monthly reporting form and agree on the way forward, and (3) to discuss the planned expansion of outreach activities in polio priority areas for 2026.

Over the past two days, the participants discussed several key topics, including: Afghanistan Humanitarian Situation Update; Presentation of Polio-focused/Humanitarian Indicators Year-to-Date results; Defaulting Tracing Reporting for All Vaccines; Community Mobilisation; Zero Dose Children vs. Birth Dose; SOP for Pregnant and Lactating

Women; Reversal Strategies Used in the Community for OPV/RI refusals; Community Engagement Activities; and Publication of Humanitarian Engagement Results.

Apart from QRCS and the Gates Foundation, the list of participating organisations included the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the World Health Organisation (WHO), the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), the Afghan Ministry of Public Health (MOPH), the Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), the Afghan Red Crescent Society (ARCS), the Norwegian Red Cross, HEALTHNET TPO, Action Against Hunger (France), INTERSOS (Italy), and EMERGENCY (Italy), as well as several private-sector partners and NGOs.

In his remarks, Mohamed Bader Al-Sada, Assistant Secretary-General for Relief and International Development at QRCS, said, "For QRCS, Afghanistan is not a new engagement. It is a long-standing commitment. For more than a decade

now, QRCS has been working alongside national and international partners to support health services, strengthen community resilience, and ensure that humanitarian assistance reaches those most in need, especially women, children, and the most vulnerable populations".

"Health, in our view, is not only a humanitarian priority, it is a foundation for dignity, stability, and development," he added. "That is why QRCS continues to invest in health interventions that

bridge emergency response and longer-term recovery, aligned with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) No. 3: Good Health and Well-Being, and other SDGs related to poverty reduction, nutrition, education, and partnerships".

This is one of a series of workshops held by QRCS and the Gates Foundation, bringing together humanitarian partners to discuss ways to improve the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan and other disaster-stricken countries.



Officials during the workshop.

Awqaf Ministry launches second edition of employee football championship

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: The Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs yesterday conducted the draw for the second edition of its internal football championship for departmental employees, with the participation of 20 teams divided into four groups. The tournament is part of the ministry's community initiatives aimed at strengthening teamwork, positive competition, and camaraderie among staff members.

The draw ceremony was held in the presence of Ahmed Shaheen Al Ghanim, Director of the Public Relations and Communication Department, and Ahmed Saad Al Nuaimi, Director of the Financial and Administrative Affairs Department, alongside a number of ministry officials and employees. The event also featured the participation of former Qatar national team player Raed Yacoub, who added a distinctive sporting dimension to the occasion.

Organized by the Public Relations and Communication Department under the slogan

"With team spirit, success is achieved... one team in the office and one team on the field," the championship seeks to encourage ministry employees to engage in sports activities, promote a culture of teamwork, and instill values of fair play and positive competition. These goals align with enhancing workplace well-being and supporting both physical and mental health.

Matches will be held at the ministry's stadium in Abu Hamour during evening hours after the Isha prayer, allowing broader participation in a well-organized and safe sporting environment.

In remarks on the sidelines of the draw, Ahmed Shaheen Al Ghanim welcomed attendees and expressed his pleasure at the launch of the second edition of the championship. He emphasized that the initiative reflects the ministry's commitment to strengthening communication and cohesion among employees across different departments, while encouraging active participation in social and sporting activities.

He also noted that sports play an important role in enhancing physical and mental health and embody Islamic values that promote strength alongside ethics and discipline, highlighting the championship as a practical model for translating these values within the workplace.

Following an overview of the tournament format and the participating teams, the draw allocated the 20 teams into four groups. Group One includes the Legal Affairs Department, the Financial and Administrative Affairs Department – Security Section, the Information Systems Department, the Mosques Department (B), and the Da'wah and Religious Guidance Department (A).

Group Two comprises the Da'wah and Religious Guidance Department (B), the Islamic Affairs Department, the Engineering Affairs Department (B), the Sheikh Abdullah bin Zaid Al Mahmood Islamic Cultural Center, and the General Directorate of Awqaf.

Group Three brings together the Zakat Affairs Department,



Director of the Public Relations and Communication Department Ahmed Shaheen Al Ghanim with other officials during the draw to launch the football championship.

the Engineering Affairs Department (A), the Da'wah and Religious Guidance Department – Scholarships Section, the Islamic Research and Studies Department, and the Financial Affairs Department (B). Group Four includes the Planning, Quality and Innovation Department, the Da'wah and Religious Guidance Department – Islamic Network, the Mosques Department (A), the Financial

and Administrative Affairs Department (A), and the Public Relations and Communication Department.

Teams will compete in the group stage followed by knockout rounds, culminating in the final match. The championship kicks off on Tuesday, January 20, 2026, and concludes with the final on Sunday, February 8, 2026.

The Ministry of Awqaf and

Islamic Affairs affirmed that the championship represents a valuable addition to its programs promoting health and fitness among employees. It reflects the ministry's commitment to supporting sports as a way of life, in line with Qatar National Vision 2030, by fostering a positive competitive environment that enhances sportsmanship, discipline, and institutional belonging.

City of London says ready to support EU's rearmament push

BRUSSELS: The City of London could play a larger role in financing Europe's rearmament plans, the financial district's policy chief said yesterday, welcoming Britain's push to foster closer ties with the EU.

Six years after Brexit, Britain and the EU face "the same challenges" and would benefit from working closer together in areas of common interest, Chris Hayward, policy chairman at the City of London Corporation, which represents the UK's financial services sector, told AFP.

Among them is defence, where Britain needed to invest more in its "European allies," Hayward said.

Facing an aggressive Russia and to reduce dependence on the US, the European Union has launched a raft of initiatives aimed at raising up to 800bn euros (\$930bn) to help member countries bolster their military apparatus.

British banks could participate in the effort, Hayward said. — AFP

US suspends immigrant visa processing for 75 countries

WASHINGTON: The United States said yesterday it was suspending the processing of immigrant visas from 75 countries, President Donald Trump's (pictured) latest move against foreigners seeking to come to America.

The United States has long rejected visas from people who appear likely to end up needing government welfare, but the State Department said it would now use the same authority for a blanket suspension of immigrant visas based on nationality.

"The Trump administration is bringing an end to the abuse of America's immigration system by those who would extract wealth from the American people," State Department spokesman Tommy Pigott said.

"Immigrant visa processing from these 75 countries will be paused while the State Department reassesses immigration processing procedures to prevent the entry of foreign nationals who would take welfare and public benefits," he said.

White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt posted on X that the countries affected would include Somalia — whose people Trump has attacked in heated terms after immigrants were involved in a funding scandal in Minnesota — as well as Russia and Iran.

A US official said that the other countries affected would include a number of countries with friendly relations with the United States, including Brazil, Egypt and Thailand.

Other countries to face the pause include Nigeria — Africa's most populous country — as well as Iraq and Yemen, the official said.

The State Department did not immediately release a full list of countries.



The freeze will begin on January 21 with no set time for it to end, the US official, who was not authorized to speak to the press, said on condition of anonymity.

Trump has made no secret of his desire to reduce immigration by people who are not of European descent. He has described Somalis as "garbage" who should "go back to where they came from" and instead said he was open to Scandinavians moving to the United States.

The State Department said Monday that it has revoked more than 100,000 visas since Trump's return, a one-year record.

The Department of Homeland Security last month said that the Trump administration has deported more than 605,000 people, and that 2.5 million others left on their own. The latest move does not affect tourist, business or other visas, including for soccer fans seeking to visit for this year's World Cup, although the Trump administration has vowed to vet all applicants' social media histories. — AFP

Saudi Arabia will invest \$500m in Yemen development projects

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia is to invest over \$500m in development projects in Yemen, the country's defence minister said yesterday, after Riyadh-backed forces in recent weeks repelled an offensive by separatists.

The Saudi defence minister, HRH Prince Khalid bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, wrote on X of the launch of "development projects and initiatives in vital sectors at a cost of 1.9bn riyals

(\$506m) across 10 Yemeni governorates. The projects, to be delivered by the Saudi Development and Reconstruction Program for Yemen, include the construction of Yemen's first desalination plant, the restoration of the airport in southern city Aden, the opening of a hospital on the island of Socotra and the construction and equipping of 30 schools, he said. — AFP

French government survives two no-confidence votes over trade deal

PARIS: President Emmanuel Macron's government yesterday survived two no-confidence votes in parliament linked to criticism of an EU trade deal that has upset farmers.

Neither move from the far right or hard left garnered enough votes to topple Prime Minister Sébastien Lecornu's cabinet but they acted as a reminder of strong opposition from within the legislature that ousted his two predecessors.

Lecornu accused the far-right National Rally (RN) and hard-left France Unbowed (LF) of "shooting the executive branch in the back" and "further stalling budget" talks for the year that has already started.

Both motions from the RN and LFI criticised Macron over his handling of a planned trade accord between the European Union and the Mercosur bloc comprising Brazil, Paraguay, Argentina and Uruguay. — AFP

Egypt says all parties agree on Gaza technocratic committee members

CAIRO: Egypt said yesterday that all the members of a 15-person Palestinian technocratic committee meant to administer post-war Gaza had been agreed upon by all Palestinian factions, who swiftly offered their support.

Under a 20-point Gaza truce plan brokered by US President Donald Trump in October, the Palestinian territory would be governed by the committee operating under

the supervision of a "Board of Peace", to be chaired by Trump himself.

Hamas officials said earlier in the day that the group had opened talks with Egyptian mediators in Cairo on the committee, which forms part of Trump's truce plan for Gaza.

"We hope that following this agreement, the committee will be announced soon... and will then be deployed to the Gaza Strip to manage daily life and

The Ramallah-based Palestinian presidency also announced its support in official media.

essential services," Egyptian Foreign Minister Badr Abdellaty said.

The majority of the Palestinian factions offered their support to the committee after Abdellaty's announcement.

In a statement, the factions

including Hamas and Islamic Jihad said they had agreed "to support the mediators' efforts in forming the Palestinian National Transitional Committee to administer the Gaza Strip, while providing the appropriate environment" for it to begin its work.

The Ramallah-based Palestinian presidency also announced its support in official media, with a source from the office telling AFP the statement

"reflects the position of the Fatah movement because President (Mahmud) Abbas is also the head of Fatah".

The Cairo meeting aimed to address the formation of the committee and its operational mechanisms, a senior Hamas official had previously told AFP on condition of anonymity.

Separately, the Hamas delegation was also to hold talks in Cairo with leaders of other Palestinian factions on "political,

national and field developments" and the state of the Gaza ceasefire, the official added.

Talks with Egyptian mediators were also focused on the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza, the reopening of the Rafah crossing, the entry of aid currently stockpiled on the Egyptian side of the border, and preparations for launching the second phase of the ceasefire plan, the official said.

— AFP

Gaza death toll rises to 71,439

GAZA: The death toll from the Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip since October 7, 2023, has risen to 71,439, in addition to 171,324 wounded.

The Palestinian Ministry of Health in Gaza stated in a press release that the Gaza Strip hospitals received a total of 15 martyrs in the past 24 hours, including 13 whose bodies were recovered from under the rubble. A number of victims remain under the rubble and in the streets, as ambulance and rescue teams have been unable to reach them.

The Ministry said the total number of martyrs since the ceasefire on Oct. 10 has risen to 449, while the total number of injuries has reached 1,246, and 710 bodies have been recovered. It also reported the death of one citizen as a result of a building collapse, bringing the number of victims of building collapses since the beginning of winter to 25. Three Palestinians were injured by Israeli fire east of Gaza City and Khan Younis, yesterday. According to local sources, the three Palestinians were shot by Israeli occupation forces inside and outside their deployment areas east of both cities.

— QNA

Thailand crane collapses onto train, killing 32

NAKHON RATCHASIMA, THAILAND: A crane at a high-speed rail project in Thailand collapsed onto a passenger train yesterday and caused it to derail, killing at least 32 people, authorities said.

The massive crane was left resting on giant concrete pillars while dozens of rescuers worked to search for missing people in mangled train carriages in Nakhon Ratchasima province, northeast of the capital Bangkok.

The company contracted to build the section of the high-speed rail where the crane fell, Italian-Thai Development — one of Thailand's biggest construction firms — has seen several deadly accidents at its sites in recent years.

The firm expressed condolences for those killed and the dozens injured, saying in a statement it would "take responsibility for compensating the victims' families and

covering medical expenses". From a hospital bed in Nakhon Ratchasima, survivor Taew Eimertenbrink, 63, said her German husband "was killed instantly" in the derailment.

"I was sleeping. He was sleeping. A metal bar was on him," she told reporters.

The couple was visiting from Germany and travelling to Taew's hometown in Surin province, she said. "I thought travel by train was the best way, but... this happened." The Thai health ministry said 32 people were confirmed dead, three were missing and 64 were hospitalised including seven in serious condition. Resident Mitr Intrpanya said he went to the scene after hearing two loud explosions and found the fallen crane sitting on a train with three carriages. "The metal from the crane appeared to strike the middle of the second carriage, slicing it in half," the 54-year-old said. — AFP



Recovery workers gather around the wreckage of the crashed train in Thailand's Nakhon Ratchasima province yesterday. (AFP)

Japan PM to dissolve parliament for snap election

TOKYO: Japan's Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi intends to dissolve the lower house for a snap election soon after a parliamentary session begins next week, her ruling party and a coalition partner said yesterday.

Takaichi was appointed Japan's first woman prime minister in October and her cabinet is enjoying an approval rating of around 70 percent.

But her ruling bloc only has a slim majority in the powerful lower house of parliament,

hindering its ability to push through her ambitious policy agenda.

"I was notified by Prime Minister Takaichi that she will dissolve" the lower house "at an early stage of the ordinary parliamentary session", Hirofumi Yoshimura, one of the leaders of the Japan Innovation Party (JIP), told reporters.

Yoshimura added that Takaichi told him she planned to hold a news conference on Monday to explain more about her decision.

The Tokyo stock market closed 1.5 percent higher and the yen slumped to its lowest value since mid-2024 on media reports that the election could take place as soon as February 8. The prime minister also conveyed her intention to dissolve the chamber to Shunichi Suzuki, secretary-general of her ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), he said.

Suzuki told reporters in Tokyo that the election would in part be about seeking a public mandate on the current LDP-JIP

partnership, which materialised only recently after the ruling party's former partner exited the coalition.

The junior Komeito party ended its 26-year relationship with the LDP last year, citing the LDP's failure to tighten party funding rules following a damaging slush fund scandal.

If Takaichi dissolves the lower house on January 23, which is the start of a regular parliament session, the most likely election date would be February 8. — AFP

Egypt voices support for Sudan's unity

CAIRO: Egyptian Foreign Minister Badr Abdellaty said yesterday that Cairo would take all necessary measures to preserve Sudan's unity, as the neighbouring country approaches its fourth year of war between the army and its paramilitary rivals.

Speaking at a press conference with the UN secretary-general's special envoy for Sudan, Ramtane Lamamra, Abdellaty said Egypt "will not stand idly by and will not hesitate to take the necessary measures in a way that preserves Sudan, its unity and territorial integrity".

Abdellaty said that Egypt "will not accept and will not allow under any circumstances the collapse of Sudan, the collapse of Sudanese national institutions or harming the unity of Sudan".

"These are red lines," he continued, adding that "a violation to Sudan's national security is a violation of Egypt's national security".

The foreign minister's comments echoed remarks made by President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi during a meeting last month with Sudan's army chief, Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan.

At the meeting, Sisi had also described any threat to Sudanese state institutions as a "red line for Egypt".

A statement from his office added that Cairo reserved the "full right to take all necessary measures under international law", including potentially activating a joint defence agreement. — AFP

Lebanon says France to host conference to support army

BEIRUT: Lebanon said yesterday that a conference in support of the country's army would take place in Paris on March 5.

The announcement follows recent promises of support to the military, which lacks funds, equipment and technical expertise.

Presidency spokeswoman Najat Charafeddine said President Joseph Aoun met French envoy Jean-Yves Le Drian, Saudi envoy Yazid bin Farhan and ambassadors including from the US, Egypt and Qatar, discussing preparations for a conference to support the Lebanese army and internal security forces".

"It was decided to hold the conference in Paris on March 5, to be opened by French President Emmanuel Macron," she said at the presidential palace.

Lebanon's army has dismantled tunnels and other military infrastructure near the Israeli border in recent months. — AFP

Separatists kill 14 people in Cameroon

YAOUNDÉ: A separatist armed group killed 14 people, half of them children, in an attack in Cameroon's English-speaking Northwest region yesterday, state media reported.

The killings in the village of Guidado come in the wake of a resurgence of violence in a nearly decade-long separatist struggle by the anglophone minority in the central African country, which is majority French-speaking.

"This morning... an attack carried out by a terrorist group against civilians resulted in the deaths of 14 people, among them one man, six women, and seven children aged two to 11," Northwest Regional Governor Adolphe Lele Lai-

rique told public broadcaster CRTV. — AFP

Canadian Prime Minister arrives in China for state visit

BEIJING: Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney arrived in Beijing yesterday for a state visit, Chinese state broadcaster CCTV said.

Carney, who is expected to meet President Xi Jinping for talks on Friday, is the first Canadian leader to visit China in eight years.

The two leaders met on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in South Korea in October, which Carney described as a "turning point" in the two nations' strained relationship.

Carney's predecessor Justin Trudeau visited China in December 2017.

But ties withered in 2018 after the arrest of a senior executive from Chinese tech giant Huawei on a US warrant in Vancouver and China's retaliatory detention of two Canadians on espionage charges.

Aside from Xi, Carney will meet with Premier Li Qiang and business leaders for trade negotiations.

Beijing said this week it "attaches high importance" to the visit. — AFP

ICJ genocide case 'flawed and unfounded': Myanmar govt

YANGON: An international court case alleging Myanmar committed genocide against the mostly Muslim Rohingya minority is "flawed and unfounded", Yangon's foreign ministry said yesterday.

In a statement published in a state newspaper, the government called on the International Court of Justice to "reach its judgement based on fact and settled law strictly within the framework of the Genocide Convention".

ICJ judges are hearing three weeks of testimony, which began in The Hague on Monday, as they weigh accusations by The Gambia that Myanmar committed genocide against the Rohingya in a 2017 crackdown. Hundreds of thousands of Rohingya Muslims fled violence by the Myanmar army and Buddhist militias, escaping to neighbouring Bangladesh and bringing harrowing accounts of mass rape, arson and murder.

On the first day of the hearings Gambia's Justice Minister Dawda Jallow told the court the Rohingya "have been targeted for destruction".

Lawyers for military-ruled Myanmar will begin their court

response on Friday.

"The allegations made by The Gambia are flawed and unfounded in fact and law," said the Yangon foreign ministry statement, printed in the Global New Light of Myanmar newspaper.

"Biased reports, based on unreliable evidence, cannot make up for truth," it added.

The country was co-operating with the ICJ "in good faith" in a sign of its respect for international law, it said.

The statement did not use the word Rohingya, referring instead to "persons from Rakhine state", adding it was committed to their repatriation.

The Rohingya are not recognised as an official minority by the Myanmar government, which denies them citizenship and considers them Bengali interlopers, despite many having roots in the country stretching back centuries.

Today, 1.17 million Rohingya live crammed into dilapidated camps in Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh. Myanmar has always maintained the crackdown by its armed forces was justified to root out Rohingya insurgents. — AFP

Syrian government moves military reinforcements east of Aleppo

ALEPO: Syria's army was moving reinforcements east of Aleppo city yesterday, a day after it told Kurdish forces to withdraw from the area following deadly clashes last week.

The United States, which for years has supported Kurdish fighters but also backs Syria's new authorities, urged all parties to "avoid actions that could further escalate tensions" in a statement by the US military's Central Command chief Admiral Brad Cooper.

On Tuesday, Syrian state television published an army statement with a map declaring a large area east of Aleppo city a "closed military zone" and said "all armed groups in this area must withdraw to east of the Euphrates" River.

The area, controlled by Kurdish forces, extends from near Deir Hafer, around 50km from Aleppo, to the Euphrates about 30 kilometres further east, as well as towards the south.

State news agency SANA published images yesterday showing military reinforcements en route from the coastal province of Latakia, while a military source on the ground, requesting anonymity, said reinforcements were arriving from both Latakia and the Damascus region.

Both sides reported limited skirmishes overnight. An AFP correspondent on the outskirts of Deir Hafer reported hearing intermittent artillery shelling yesterday, which the military source said was due to government targeting of positions belonging to Syrian Democratic Forces.

On Monday, Syria accused the SDF of sending reinforcements to Deir Hafer and said it would send its own personnel there in response. Cooper urged "a durable diplomatic resolution through dialogue".

Syria's government took full control of Aleppo city over the weekend after capturing its Kurdish-majority Sheikh Maqsud and Ashrafiyah neighbourhoods. — AFP



Syrian government military reinforcements arrive via the international M4 highway to the Dayr al-Hafir area, east of Aleppo city, yesterday. (AFP)

Denmark, Greenland wrap up crunch White House talks

WASHINGTON: Denmark and Greenland's top diplomats held high-stakes talks yesterday at the White House, with no immediate signs of a breakthrough on President Donald Trump's threats to take control of the Arctic island.

An AFP photographer saw Danish Foreign Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen and his Greenlandic counterpart Vivian Motzfeldt leaving less than 90 minutes after the start of their meeting with US Vice President JD Vance and Secretary of State Marco Rubio.

Neither side commented after the meeting.

Hours before the talks, Denmark said it was boosting its military presence in Greenland in a bid to head off Trump's escalating threats over the vast, sparsely populated territory controlled by Copenhagen.

But Trump insisted earlier yesterday that NATO should support the US effort to take control of Greenland, saying it was "vital" for his planned Golden Dome air and missile defence system.

"Anything less than that is unacceptable," he wrote on his Truth Social network. "If we don't, Russia or China will,



US Vice President JD Vance and Secretary of State Marco Rubio depart the Eisenhower Executive Office Building on the White House campus after a meeting with Danish Foreign Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen and Greenland's Foreign Minister Vivian Motzfeldt in Washington, DC, yesterday. (AFP)

and that is not going to happen!"

Trump has derided recent Danish efforts to increase security for Greenland as amounting to "two dogsleds." Denmark says it has invested almost \$14 billion in Arctic security.

The row over Greenland has deeply shaken transatlantic relations. Both Denmark and Greenland insist only Greenlanders should decide the autonomous island's fate.

In the quiet streets of the capital

Nuuk, red and white Greenlandic flags were flying in shop windows, on apartment balconies, and on cars and buses, in a show of national unity as the talks got underway.

"We are standing together in these times when we might feel vulnerable," the Nuuk municipality wrote on Facebook.

Greenland's leader said Tuesday that the island prefers to remain part of Denmark, prompting Trump to say "that's going to be a big problem for him." While there were no immediate details, the relatively short talks at the White House had always promised to be tough.

Denmark had however taken steps to ease US concerns in the run-up to the meeting. Danish Defence Minister Troels Lund Poulsen told AFP his country was boosting its military presence in Greenland and was in talks with NATO allies. The Danish defence ministry then announced that it would do so "from today," hosting a military exercise and sending in "aircraft, vessels and soldiers." Swedish officers were joining the exercise at Denmark's request, Stockholm said.

Mexican president offers to mediate between US, Cuba

MEXICO CITY: Mexico's President Claudia Sheinbaum said yesterday her government stood ready to mediate between the United States and Cuba, under growing pressure from Washington after the ouster of key ally Nicolas Maduro.

Sheinbaum told reporters Mexico was "fully prepared to be a vehicle for fostering dialogue" between the United States and communist-run Cuba.

Trump on Sunday warned Cuba to "make a deal" the nature of which he did not reveal or face consequences.

Sheinbaum told reporters both Washington and Havana would have to agree to mediation and the conditions under which talks would occur. Cubans, she added, had the right to "decide their own destiny." — AFP

Greek aviation chief quits over Jan 4 airspace blackout

ATHENS: Greece's transport ministry said yesterday that its civil aviation chief had quit over the embarrassing January 4 airspace blackout that snarled flights for hours.

"The governor of the Civil Aviation Authority (YPA), George Saounatos, submitted his resignation to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transport, Christos Dimas," the ministry said in a statement.

The move came hours after an official report into the incident blamed the glitch on "obsolete technology" at Athens International Airport, one of the world's top travel destinations.

Hundreds of flights had to be diverted to neighbouring countries, with thousands of travellers hit. YPA said at the time that the problem was "unprecedented". The report issued later classified the incident as low-risk. — AFP

EU says Ukraine to spend bulk of \$90bn loan on military needs

BRUSSELS: Two-thirds of a vital \$90bn (\$105bn) EU loan for Ukraine will go to cover Kyiv's military apparatus with the rest earmarked for general budget support, Brussels said yesterday.

Agreed by EU member states in December after months of diplomatic wrangling, the loan offers cash-strapped Ukraine a desperately needed lifeline as Russia's invasion of its neighbour grinds towards its fifth year.

The European Commission said it was pushing for Kyiv to receive the first disbursement in April.

"With this support, we make sure that Ukraine can on one hand bolster its defence on the battlefield and strengthen its defence capabilities so, its military needs and on the other hand keep the state and basic services running," EU chief Ursula von

der Leyen told reporters.

"For us it is a lot of money. These are billions and billions that are being invested. And these investments should have a return on investment in creating jobs, in creating research and development," said von der Leyen.

The loan, which is to cover two-thirds of Ukraine's financial needs for the next two years, has to be approved by the European Parliament and member states before the money can start to be paid out.

It was agreed last month by European Union leaders who settled on a loan backed by the bloc's common budget, after plans to tap frozen Russian central bank assets fell by the wayside.

The EU has said Ukraine would only need to pay back the money once Moscow coughs up for the damages it has wrought. — AFP

UK govt retreats on mandatory digital ID to work

LONDON: UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer yesterday defended his decision to shelve plans to make a digital ID mandatory to work in Britain.

The latest U-turn in his Labour government's policies follows an intense backlash against plans to introduce a free digital ID for UK nationals and those residing in the country in a bid to curb illegal migration.

Officials briefed British media late Tuesday that the new ID which had been proposed by the government in September would no longer be mandatory for employment.

"I'm determined to make it harder for people to work illegally in this country, and that is why there will be checks," Starmer told parliament.

"They will be digital, and they will be mandatory." Earlier, finance minister Rachel Reeves insisted the right to work would still be contingent on providing a form of digital verification.



Britain's PM Keir Starmer speaks in the UK Parliament's House of Commons yesterday. (AFP)

plans to impose a mandatory ID, and the latest proposals from Starmer's government had sparked fierce opposition from rival political parties as well as public concern. Some criticism, including from far-right figures, promoted unproven claims that it would be used to boost government control over people's lives. They included fearmongering that digital ID will be used to store data on vaccinations and carbon footprint and limit access to flying and food, which the government has vehemently denied.

Starmer had said in September that the ID card would be introduced by 2029 and while it would not be mandatory, it would be required to prove the right to work.

Opposition politicians seized on the latest government reversal, which follows around a dozen other U-turns on various policies since centre-left Labour won power in July 2024. — AFP

Bulgaria nears new elections as second largest parliamentary group refuses govt mandate

SOFIA: Bulgaria moved closer to another round of early parliamentary elections yesterday after the second-largest parliamentary group refused to attempt to form a government.

The decision was announced during a ceremony at which Bulgarian President Rumen Radev handed an exploratory mandate to Nadejda Jordanova, co-chairperson of the parliamentary group "We Continue the Change - Democratic Bulgaria" (PP-DB).

Jordanova immediately returned the mandate unfulfilled, saying that within the current parliament "there is no possibility of forming a reformist majority." The PP-DB group holds 36 seats in the 240-member National Assembly.

Under the Bulgarian

Constitution, the president first entrusted the mandate to the largest parliamentary force, the 66-seat GERB-UDF coalition, which declined the task on Monday. The refusal by the second-largest group has now sharply narrowed the options for forming a government.

President Radev is expected to assign the mandate to another parliamentary group in the coming days. If no agreement is reached, he must appoint a caretaker prime minister and cabinet and schedule new elections within two months.

"With this refusal, the possibilities for forming a government within this parliament have been greatly reduced," President Radev said, adding that the key issue now is ensuring the quality and fairness of the next elections. — XINHUA

Russia arrests hospital staff after nine newborns die in one week

MOSCOW: Russian police have arrested the chief physician and the acting head of intensive care at a Siberian hospital where nine babies died this month, prosecutors said yesterday.

The case, which has shone a spotlight at chronic staff shortages and funding gaps in the country's medical system, has provoked anger and bewilderment from Russian politicians and online commentators.

Prosecutors have charged the pair with negligence and causing death through negligence, Russia's Investigative Committee said in a statement.

The exact causes of the deaths at Novokuznetsk Maternity Hospital No. 1 are not yet known.

But regional health authorities said the babies were all suffering from a range of diseases passed on during childbirth or pregnancy.

The hospital announced on Tuesday that it had stopped accepting patients due to a high rate of respiratory infection.

Between January 4 and January 12, 2026, nine newborns died at Novokuznetsk Maternity Hospital No. 1 as a consequence of the suspects performing their official and professional medical duties in a substandard way," Russia's Investigative Committee said in a statement.

A forensic probe into each baby's death was under way, it added.

Russia's Komsomolskaya Pravda tabloid reported on Tuesday that the hospital was short of dozens of staff, though the hospital has denied this.

The speaker of Russia's upper house of parliament called the incident a tragedy.

"It must never be repeated," Valentina Matvienko said in a statement. — AFP

Louvre and other French museums fare hikes for non-European visitors



Visitors queue in front of the Louvre Museum in Paris (AFP)

PARIS: France began charging non-EU visitors to the Louvre Museum 45 percent more than Europeans yesterday, in a controversial bid to raise money for renovations at the beleaguered Paris landmark.

The move is one of the boldest adoptions in Europe of so-called "dual pricing" at museums charging visitors different prices depending on their origins.

The practice is common in many developing countries, but until now was largely absent in Europe and has been criticised for being discriminatory and reducing access for some low-income foreign visitors to the home of the Mona Lisa.

Kevin Flynn, an Australian in his 60s in Paris for a week with his wife, said the new 32-euro (37-dollar) tariff for non-Europeans was "acceptable".

"It's the same price for many things in Italy, many things in

Malta of such magnitude," he said.

But others, such as Joohwan Tak from South Korea, thought it was "unfair." "We're all human beings. It's a big difference," he added.

"If I go to India, people from India pay less than people from abroad it's fair because they

have less money," added Marcia Branco from Brazil. "But because I'm in Paris and it's supposed to be a rich country I think it's not fair." Other state-owned French cultural tourist hotspots are also hiking their fees for non-EU visitors, including the Versailles Palace, Chambord Palace in the Loire

region and the national opera house in Paris.

The government has justified the increases on financial grounds, saying the change at the Louvre would raise 20-30 million euros annually for the museum which needs repairs and suffered a major robbery last October.

Trade unions at the Louvre have denounced the policy as "shocking philosophically, socially and on a human level" and have cited the change among complaints that have sparked recent strike action.

They argue that the museum's vast collection of around 500,000 items, including many from Egypt, the Middle East or Africa, hold universal human value.

While rejecting discriminatory pricing on principle, they are also worried for practical reasons, as staff will now need to check visitors' identity papers.

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World in brief

Interim Leader: New political era for Venezuela

CARACAS: Venezuela's interim president Delcy Rodriguez said Wednesday her country was looking to "a new political era" after the January 3 ouster of leader Nicolas Maduro in a US military strike. "The message is, a Venezuela that is opening up to a new political era, one that allows for understanding amid differences and across ideological political diversity," she told reporters at the Miraflores presidential palace.

Rodriguez, who US President Donald Trump has agreed to work with as long as she toes Washington's line, also announced that Caracas had freed 406 political prisoners since December in a process she said was initiated by Maduro. — AFP

Russia foils terror attack in St Petersburg

ST. PETERSBURG: Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) said yesterday it had foiled a planned terror attack in St Petersburg targeting an employee of a defence industry enterprise.

A Russian citizen born in 1966 was detained for preparing the attack under the direction of Ukrainian intelligence agencies, said the FSB's Public Relations Centre.

The woman entered Russia through third countries and attempted to retrieve a stash of firearms and an improvised explosive device in Russia's Smolensk Oblast.

During the operation, security officers seized a Makarov pistol, an improvised explosive device made with foreign-produced plastic explosives, as well as communication equipment containing correspondence with coordinators located in Ukraine, it said. — XINHUA

Exodus of immigrants a hit for the US economy

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump's hardline immigration policies have produced a sharp slowdown in net migration that looks set to continue in 2026, a new study says.

The number of immigrants who left the United States in 2025 very likely exceeded the number who entered, the Brookings Institution report said, warning of negative implications for the economy.

"Net migration was likely close to zero or negative over calendar year 2025 for the first time in at least half a century," said the report, published Tuesday.

The trend is likely to continue in 2026, the authors predict, adding: "the slowdown implies weaker employment, GDP, and consumer spending growth." Net migration to the United States in 2025 is expected to be between -10,000 and -295,000, the study said. — AFP

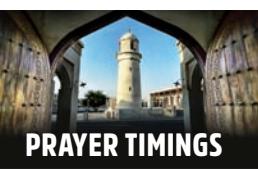
US expedites visas for Ghana World Cup supporters

ACCRA: Ghana Foreign Minister Samuel Okudzeto Ablakwa said yesterday that the United States will expedite visa processing for the football fans travelling to the United States for the 2026 FIFA World Cup.

In a post on social media, Ablakwa said the decision was announced after a high-level bilateral meeting between Ghanaian officials and a US delegation in Accra.

Ghana is among the African teams to have qualified for the 2026 FIFA World Cup, which will be co-hosted by the United States, Canada and Mexico. — XINHUA

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The last 11 years have now been the warmest ever recorded, with 2024 topping the podium and 2023 in second place, according to the EU's Copernicus Climate Change Service and Berkeley Earth.



Serene start of the day

Families enjoy a tranquil sunrise at Al Wakrah Old Souq beach. Picture taken by The Peninsula reader Shiraz Sithara.

2025 was third hottest year on record, say climate monitors

BRUSSELS: The planet logged its third hottest year on record in 2025, extending a run of unprecedented heat, with no relief expected in 2026, global climate monitors said Wednesday.

The last 11 years have now been the warmest ever recorded, with 2024 topping the podium and 2023 in second place, according to the EU's Copernicus Climate Change Service and Berkeley Earth, a California-based non-profit research organisation.

For the first time, global temperatures exceeded 1.5C relative to pre-industrial times on average over the last three years, Copernicus said in its annual report.

"The warming spike observed from 2023-2025 has been extreme, and suggests an acceleration in the rate of the Earth's warming," Berkeley Earth said in a separate report.

The landmark 2015 Paris Agreement commits the world to limiting warming to well below 2C and pursuing efforts to hold it at 1.5C — a long-term target scientists say would help avoid the worst consequences of climate change.

UN chief Antonio Guterres warned in October that breaching 1.5C was "inevitable" but the world could limit this period of overshoot by cutting greenhouse gas emissions as quickly as possible.

Copernicus said the 1.5C limit "could be reached by the end of this decade — over a decade earlier than predicted".

But efforts to contain global warming were dealt another setback last week as President Donald Trump said he would pull the United States — the world's second-biggest polluter after China — out of the bedrock UN climate treaty. — AFP

K-pop stars BTS to kick off world tour in April

SEOUL: K-pop megastars BTS will kick off their first world tour in four years in April, their label said yesterday, part of a hotly-anticipated comeback following a hiatus for the South Koreans whose music has become a global phenomenon.

BTS — known for funky and fun hits like "Dynamite" and "Butter" — hold the record as the most-streamed group on Spotify and are the first K-pop act to have topped both the Billboard 200 and the Billboard Artist 100 charts in the United States.

But the Bulletproof Boy Scouts — as their name means in Korean — haven't toured or released music since 2022 as they underwent the national military service required of all South Korean men under the age of 30.

Now that all seven members have completed their military service the band's label announced on New Year's Day they would release a new album in March before heading on tour the following month.

Spanning 34 cities with 79 performances, it will be the largest-ever single tour by a K-pop group in terms of total shows

and the "widest regional reach for a South Korean artist," according to the band's agency, HYBE.

The world tour will kick off in South Korea's Goyang on April 9, with two additional concerts in the city before moving on to neighbouring Japan. They will then head to the United States and Europe, with the tour ending in March 2027 in Manila.

The band's label said that more cities will be announced, including additional stops in Japan and the Middle East.

Their new album — as yet unnamed — will be their first since the anthology "Proof", which became South Korea's best-selling record of 2022.

BTS's famously loyal fanbase — known as ARMY — reacted with elation at news of the world tour. One fan wrote in response to the news on Facebook that to buy a ticket their "Right kidney is waving".

"Army hunger games are about to start," another wrote, drawing a comparison between fans trying to get tickets and a series of popular young adult novels in which contestants fight to the death. — AFP

Apple launches creator studio

WASHINGTON: Apple launched its new bundle, Apple Creator Studio, featuring creative apps in one service. The bundle includes notable apps in photo and video editing, such as Final Cut Pro, Logic Pro, and Pixelmator Pro, available in Mac and iPad, in addition to a special content and AI-supported features for Keynote, Pages and Numbers. Freeform will also get new updates during the next phase.

Final Cut Pro will present advanced tools that include text and visual search and the ability to speed up video editing. Logic Pro will offer new AI-focused features such as Synth Player and Chord ID to support music creation. Pixelmator Pro, a substitute for Photoshop, will be available for the first time on iPad with Apple Pencil. New subscription will be officially available on January 28. — QNA

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