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Amir, German Chancellor discuss strengthening strategic relations

DOHA: Amir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani and Chancellor of Federal Republic of Germany H E Friedrich Merz held yesterday an official session of talks at the Amiri Diwan.

At the outset of the session, H H the Amir welcomed H E the Chancellor of Federal Republic of Germany and the accompanying delegation, hoping that this visit would contribute to developing relations between the two countries, pushing them to broader levels.

In turn, H E the Chancellor of Federal Republic of Germany voiced his thanks and appreciation to H H the Amir for the warm welcome, stressing Germany's keenness to strengthen cooperation relations between the two countries in various fields, especially in the economic and investment fields.

The session discussed ways to support and strengthen the strategic relations between the two countries and ways to develop them across various areas of partnership, particularly in the economy, investment, trade, energy, and military cooperation. In addition, it discussed key regional and international issues and developments.

Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs H E Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al-Thani,



We in Qatar highly value the outcomes of our fruitful strategic cooperation with our friends in Germany, and we look forward to continuously strengthening it and expanding it into new and promising areas. These were among the key topics covered in my extensive discussions today with Chancellor Friedrich Merz, whom I warmly welcome to Doha.

Chief of the Amiri Diwan H E Abdullah bin Mohammed Al Khulaifi, and a number of Their Excellencies the Ministers and senior officials attended the meeting.

On Germany's side, the session was attended by a number of Their Excellencies ranking officials, members of the official accompanying delegation.

H H the Amir and H E the Chancellor of Federal Republic of Germany held a bilateral meeting, where they exchanged views on regional and international developments of common concern.



H H the Amir held a luncheon banquet in honour of H E the Chancellor of Federal Republic of

Germany and the accompanying delegation. Earlier, H E the Chancellor of Federal Republic of

arrived at the Amir Diwan, where he was accorded an official reception ceremony. — QNA

Qatar, Germany seek to expand technology, healthcare, AI ties

DOHA: Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs H E Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al-Thani and Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, H E Friedrich Merz co-chaired the meeting of the Qatari-German Business Roundtable, held in Doha yesterday.

At the outset of the meeting, the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs welcomed the Chancellor of Germany and the accompanying delegation, affirming that the foundations of cooperation between the State of Qatar and the Federal Republic of Germany are solid.

He pointed out that over the past decades, the State of Qatar has sought to develop its relations with Germany. He noted that through the Qatar Investment Authority (QIA), Qatar has succeeded in becoming one of the largest foreign investors in Germany. He pointed out that German companies operating in Qatar have added significant value to its economy.

The Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs mentioned that cooperation between the two countries encompasses the fields of energy, infrastructure, manufacturing, and financial institutions, emphasizing that the State of Qatar

aspires to expand this cooperation to include technology, healthcare, and artificial intelligence, which, in Qatar's view, are the industries of the future.

The Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs reaffirmed the State of Qatar's strong interest in expanding

cooperation and increasing business ties between companies in both countries. He noted that Qatar is currently undergoing a transitional phase and has already begun reviewing several laws and regulations to ensure they keep pace with contemporary developments.



Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs H E Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al-Thani and Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany H E Friedrich Merz co-chairing the meeting of Qatari-German Business Roundtable, in Doha yesterday.

He further emphasized Qatar's commitment to providing a welcoming environment for all, while underscoring the importance of being viewed by Germany and other European countries as a reliable partner capable of connecting East and West. He highlighted that this approach has guided Qatar's efforts in geopolitics and should likewise be applied in the economic sphere to achieve prosperity for its people.

Later the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs wrote on X, "The Qatari-German Business Roundtable provided an opportunity to strengthen investment cooperation and commercial partnerships between the two countries, while emphasizing the expansion of collaboration in advanced technology and healthcare, in a manner that serves mutual interests and the aspirations of our two friendly peoples."

The meeting also reviewed ways to strengthen cooperation and partnership across various sectors, as well as investment opportunities available in both countries.

A number of CEOs representing groups, companies, organizations, and agencies from both countries attended the roundtable. — QNA

UN welcomes Qatar-facilitated DRC Govt, AFC/M23 talks' progress

NEW YORK: Spokesperson for the UN Secretary-General H E Stephane Dujarric welcomed the progress announced by Qatar in the talks it facilitated between the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and the Alliance Fleuve Congo / March 23 Movement (AFC/M23), indicating that this includes a deal to operationalise the ceasefire monitoring mechanism that was established under the ceasefire framework.

The spokesperson reiterated the call for a cessation of hostilities at a press conference, explaining that the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) is authorised to support the implementation of a permanent ceasefire, in accordance with the Security Council resolution 2808. — QNA ➔ P3

Qatar Economic Forum set to take place from May 12-14

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Now in its sixth year, the annual "Qatar Economic Forum, Powered by Bloomberg" (the 'Forum'), held in collaboration with Qatar's Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI), will take place from May 12-14, 2026, in Doha.

Held under the guiding theme, 'The Global Rebalance: Capital, Power and the Middle East,' the Forum will explore transformative changes in capital allocation and the region's influence. Supported by deep sovereign capital, strategic energy assets, and rising AI-driven deal activity, the region's expanding economic influence is becoming a defining force in the global world order.

Editorially curated by Bloomberg News, the Forum brings together world leaders and global CEOs to examine how this rebalancing of capital and power is reshaping growth, risk and opportunity worldwide.

It will once again convene Heads of State, senior government officials, global CEOs and investors in Doha, to create an international

platform for meaningful deal-making conversations and connections. Last year's Forum drew more than 3,000 international delegates from 95 countries.

Confirmed 2026 plenary speakers include, Abdulsalam Al Murshidi, President, Oman Investment Authority; Ariel Emanuel, Executive Chair & CEO, TKO and Executive Chairman, WME Group; Chris Chen, CEO, WuXi Biologics; David H Petraeus, Partner, Chairman of the Global Institute, KKR; Dimitris Moulavasilis, Group CEO, M42; Harvey M Schwartz, CEO & Director, Carlyle; Kenneth C. Griffin, Founder, CEO & Co-Chief Investment Officer, Citadel; Raymond Sagayam, Managing Partner, The Pictet Group and Co-CEO of Pictet Asset Management, The Pictet Group; Steven T Mnuchin, Founder & Managing Partner, Liberty Strategic Capital; Strive Masiyiwa, Chairman & Founder, Econet Group; Warrick Matthews, CEO, Tokamak Energy; William E Ford, Chairman & CEO, General Atlantic; Zhang Lei, Founder & Chairman, Hillhouse Investments; with more to follow. ➔ P2

Souq Waqif exhibition offers wide variety of dates

MAHMOUD ELMAZATY
THE PENINSULA

DOHA: The fourth edition of the Souq Waqif International Dates Exhibition opened yesterday at the Eastern Square of Souq Waqif, bringing together regional exhibitors and visitors from across the world to showcase a wide range of dates and date-based products.

The exhibition features premium varieties and value-added products, including dry dates, date powder, date-seed coffee, cosmetics, diet-friendly items, and date-based spreads.

The event comes just weeks before the holy month of Ramadan, when demand for dates traditionally rises.

Mohamed Abdullah Al-Salem, Head of the Old Markets Section at Souq Waqif, said to The Peninsula, "This year's edition includes 57 companies from six countries."

He encouraged the public to visit and sample the different varieties available, noting that "prices inside the exhibition are lower than those in external markets."

Exhibitors from Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Algeria, the UAE and Kyrgyzstan are presenting high-quality products, positioning the exhibition as a convenient desti-

"Prices inside the exhibition are lower than those in external markets."

nation for Ramadan shopping.

Naama, a Qatar-based exhibitor, told The Peninsula that her stall focuses on homemade date products. "We offer healthy maamoul, dates and white (rolled) oats, and date balls. All items are made without added sugar or harmful ingredients, and we also provide gluten-free options," she said.

Sudanese participant Hossam El-Din highlighted innovative uses of dates, including date powder, date-seed coffee and nutritional supplements.

He added that their booth also displays cosmetic products such as date-seed powder for hair care and palm-seed powder used in soaps and skin masks.

Mohamed Shehata, manager of a Qatari dates company, said his company offers more than 10 varieties sourced from several countries. He noted that Arab consumers often prefer Ikhlās and Sukkari, while Medjool is popular among non-Arab customers. According to him, prices at the exhibition can be around 30% lower than market rates due to government support.

The opening day drew

strong attendance from residents, citizens, and tourists. A Chinese visitor, Gim, who was in Doha on a business trip, said he was invited by a friend participating in the exhibition. "It's a new experience for me. Dates are delicious and sweet but healthy," he said.

Over the years, the Souq Waqif dates exhibition has become a seasonal highlight, combining product diversity with competitive pricing in one of Doha's most visited cultural

destinations. Its timing ahead of Ramadan adds further relevance, as dates hold a central place on iftar tables.

The tradition of breaking the fast with dates is deeply rooted in Islamic practice, following the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

Beyond their religious significance, dates provide natural sugars, fibre, and essential nutrients, making them a practical source of energy after long periods of fasting.



Stalls set up as part of the dates exhibition at Souq Waqif. PIC: MAHMOUD ELMAZATY / THE PENINSULA



Prime Minister meets German Chancellor

Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs H E Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al-Thani met yesterday with Chancellor of Federal Republic of Germany H E Friedrich Merz, who is visiting the country. They discussed cooperation between the two countries and ways to support and strengthen them. Besides, they also discussed a number of topics of common interest.



PM meets Albania's Minister of Economy and Innovation

Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs H E Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al-Thani met yesterday with Minister of Economy and Innovation of the Republic of Albania H E Delina Ibrahimaj, who is visiting the country. They discussed cooperation between the two countries and ways to support and strengthen them. In addition, the meeting discussed a number of topics of common interest.

Qatar, Germany hold business roundtable

Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs H E Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al-Thani and Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany H E Friedrich Merz co-chairing the meeting of the Qatari-German Business Roundtable, held in Doha yesterday.



UN welcomes progress in Qatar-facilitated DRC Govt, AFC/M23 talks

FROM PAGE 1

Dujarric affirmed that the peacekeepers stand ready to support a credible ceasefire monitoring and verification mechanism, within the limits of its Security Council mandate and in full respect of the sovereignty of the DRC. He also welcomed the sustained engagement of the State of Qatar, the US, the African Union and its Mediator, the East African Community, the Southern African Development Community, and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR).

Minister of Awqaf discusses Ramadan preparations with Regulatory Authority for Charitable Activities

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: In the context of strengthening coordination and integration among entities concerned with charitable work in the country, Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs H E Ghanem bin Shaheen bin Ghanem Al Ghanem, held an expanded meeting with Director General of the Regu-

latory Authority for Charitable Activities Mohammed bin Ali Al Qaed, in the presence of heads and representatives of charitable societies. The meeting aimed to discuss preparations and arrangements for the holy month of Ramadan, and to unify efforts to organize charitable initiatives and programs during the blessed month.

During the meeting, mechanisms for joint coordination between the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, the Regulatory Authority for Charitable Activities, and charitable societies were reviewed. Ways to enhance institutional integration were also discussed to ensure sound planning and effective implementation of

Ramadan initiatives, and to guarantee the organization and efficient, effective direction of charitable efforts toward eligible beneficiaries inside and outside the country. The Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs emphasised the importance of joint action and the integration of roles among various charitable entities,

stressing the need to unify visions and programs during the holy month of Ramadan. This, he noted, would contribute to maximizing the humanitarian and social impact of charitable initiatives and reflect the civilized image of the State of Qatar in the field of humanitarian and charitable work. For their part, participants in

the meeting affirmed their keenness to strengthen partnership with the Ministry of Awqaf and the Regulatory Authority for Charitable Activities, and to operate within an integrated institutional framework that facilitates the smooth and transparent delivery of assistance to its beneficiaries.



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NO	SENDER NAME	REF NO.	QR	NO	SENDER NAME	REF NO.	QR	NO	SENDER NAME	REF NO.	QR	NO	SENDER NAME	REF NO.	QR
196	SURANJI SIVALINGAM PERUMAL	3236241	95	259	ADONISBOY CASTILLO ESTOPIN	3346876	25	319	IRENEO JR BANGOT MAMUCOD	3319317	518	575	EMILYN REBUSTILLO LORAYAN	2985042	280
197	SURANJI SIVALINGAM PERUMAL	3236228	95	260	REYNALDO CALUMPAG BACULINAO	3383350	25	322	ANDREW S RIVERA	3264061	407	576	ALBERTO E BORBANO	2986841	135
199	PRIYANTHA HABARADUWA PADI GAMAGE	3210140	700	261	BENSON NDIRANGU NDERITU	3095787	182	323	JEFFREDO PULEDO	3401327	172	577	MD BABUL H	3021280	794
200	HIMANTHA DILSHAN DE A WICKRAMANAYAKA	3202967	95	262	SULEIMAN YUSUF NASIM	3247131	1,002	324	MELINDA LAMINERO VEGIGA	2975848	1,018	578	ABUL HASAN	3021214	759
204	MABNUVAR SAI JALISAI	3233913	100	263	RASHID KEKE SALIM	3385598	382	325	KAZI SHAHNOOR A K A	3089621	1,000	579	NERIO C BONIAO	3062177	256
205	BASHEER AYYAPPANKANDY	3239975	2,255	264	MOHD SAEED G SALEEM	4001710	585	326	MOHAMMED IQBAL HOSSAIN	3086344	1,000	580	RENEBOY NACILLA TEJIDAR	3121852	308
219	WELMER M DAYA	1775547	15	266	SOMASUNTHARAM THAYAN	3242088	45	327	NURUL ISLAM SHAJAHNA PATWARY	3101669	280	581	RPLANDO A MASALLO	3154023	254
220	ROTILO SIMAGALA SANTILLANA	1793711	35	267	VELUPILLAI SURESHKUMAR	3287670	1,495	328	SOMIKUDDIN ASADUDDIN	2850876	952	582	KASHIF ALI JAN ALAM	3172243	121
221	CRISTOPHER ADARLO BATRONEL	1807525	35	268	SUBASH BISHWARARMA	3289149	190	329	SOMIKUDDIN ASADUDDIN	2850878	952	583	ANGELO C BANAYOS	3182063	172
228	RAMANAN KUNARATNAM RAVINDRAN	3220121	205	269	PRAGALATHAN KONESARASAH	3372617	90	330	ABUL KASHEM ZAFAR ALI	2879600	1,914	584	JOVEN EGOC ABELGAS	3221782	403
229	MANOHAR JAIRAM DABHALE	3356129	10,000	270	NEELARATHAN Y L MUDIYANSELAGE	3393402	90	331	MD MILAD MIAH	2955215	630	585	ABUBAKKAR ROUSHAN ALI PATWARY	3269527	343
230	PATIRAM JAIRAM	3318874	302	271	MOHAMED NASIR MOHAMED NAZEER	3419628	90	332	MARCELO MALVIN L PATIGA	3045989	59	586	EMERITO C DELA TONGA	3321254	168
231	SURENDRAN KOTTOTHUMMAL	3349024	200	272	PRABAKARAN KANNAGARATNAM	3525567	390	333	MD NAIM BHUYAN MA JOYNUL	3064816	150	587	MOHAMMED JAHIR ALI TAYUBULLAH	3357455	563
232	SAYED ALTAF HUSSAIN	3458880	2,875	273	KAMALADASAN PARANJOTHI	3527448	90	335	JOSEPH ANGELO TOLENTINO AQUINO	3101859	180	588	RABIN MIAH	3382953	493
233	ASHWANI KUMAR OMKAR	3503613	490	274	NAZAR AHAMED MOHIDEEN	3571922	1,098	336	JOSEPH ANGELO TOLENTINO AQUINO	3101863	180	589	ELMA B BANGA	3384423	119
234	PATIRAM JAIRAM	3527088	90	275	MOHAMED ROSHAN HUSSain fawmy	3661537	200	342	AHMED ABDELKADR AMR	3045989	1,483	590	JOEL PACLE SALAZAR	4000397	194
235	IM RAN KHAN	3550920	990	276	INDULA KUMARASIRI WISHNU DEWALAGE	4000229	1,390	344	Al-Saeed Abdel Rahman Abdel Hadi	3367006	192	592	IKHTIAR KHAN BANHMAL	2828502	3,293
236	ASHVANI SINGH	3556272	552	277	PRANITH CHITHAKA B S MUDIYASELAGE	3401875	95	345	Mohamed El-Sayed Seif Amer Abdel Gawad	3411110	930	595	WILLIAM A CUTAMORA	4016492	206
237	ANISH AHMAD	3560399	110	278	SUPUN CHANDANA J A APPUHAMI	3520591	1,190	346	Hamada Fathi Hassan Marzouk	3448892	93	596	ROMMEL SANTOS	4061682	212
238	ANISH AHMAD	3598646	113	279	MOHAMED ZAHID FAZUL MOHAMED	3531456	50	350	Hossam Ahmed Ali Mahmoud	3587554	1,170	597	ROMMEL SANTOS	4061684	612
239	SANJAYA KUMAR DAS	3621080	112	280	MOHAMED IQBAL SARAFUR RAHMAN	3571112	250	351	Mahmoud Ali Hassan Abdel Samad	3661603	2,479	611	JEFFREY ENRIQUEZ DE JESUS	4053142	96
240	KULDEEP RAJBHAR	3651708	190	281	NUWAN JANATH B B LEKAMALGE	3597542	790	353	ALEX MUTVI MIRANGI	4009770	400	616	RONDIMEL LANJAN	3521555	90
241	RAJKAMAL RAJAPPA	3677562	140	282	NASEERUL IFAM MOHAMMED HOWSOON	3602220	240	356	RAMESH VISHWAKRMA TULSI	4005133	111	636	INDRA KUMAR SUNAR	3021549	382
242	NIDHIN KUMAR NAKULAN	3590091	300	283	SUPUN RANGANA S HITHAMILLAGE	3612667	132	357	SURESH PRASAD SAH	4027170	290	637	KRISHNA SAHNI	3162742	61
243	NISSAR CHATOTHANTE P UTHIYOTTIL	3688949	630	284	HUJAS AHMED ZAINUDEEN MOHAMED	3618144	90	359	AMIT KUMAR GUPTA	4013200	300	639	ARJUN LAMA	4015997	112
244	THAJUDDIN ALAYULLATHIL	3688640	400	285	NUWAN JANATH BALASURIYA BALASURIYA LE	3643151	490	360	RAJU THAKUR	4057258	50	659	GURPREET SINGH	3339511	1,314
245	HAFIZ IMADUDDAH	4002291	110	286	NUWAN JANATH BALASURIYA BALASURIYA LE	3678012	140	365	RAJENTHARAN ARUMUGAM EMINESON	3198903	55	660	LOKESH GAUTAM	3357806	1,945
247	PANDIT KAMALESH	3506943	115	287	KAJENTHIRAN THURAIRAJAH	3678061	690	366	PUYALARSAN KANDIAH	3224080	590	661	RAJU MAGRATI	3360527	191
248	SHRIRAM PRASAD JHAGARU PRASAD	3299706	1,240	289	THARINDU KASUN SANKALPA PILAPITIYA	3397517	490	367	SERAHIDEEN SHIRAS KHAN	3332787	136	664	GYANU GIRI	3265667	358
249	MOIDUNNIKUTTY MOOKKATHAYIL	3325471	293	290	SAMEEM AHAMED LEBBE	3315544	295	368	NIHAL RANJITH SANDANAYAKA	3517443	640	665	YAM BAHADUR SHRESTHA	3272140	392
250	MD SAIYAD ANSARI	3391053	287	291	NISARDEEN SHAHUL HAMEED	3471289	290	369	NIMAL DOLAMULLAKANAMAGE	3686017	40	666	ASHOK SHARMA	3207697	1,205
251	MUBARAK MIYA	3394362	100	292	WASANTHA ROHANA LIYANA GAMAGE	3551966	1,190	376	AL KAWTHER STEEL AND BUILDING FACTORY	4087936	2,704	688	ERWIN CASPILLO CAYUMO	2839133	18
252	SHARMA SATISH	3447863	300	297	MARK PUGAY LAYSON	3360952	217	381	Karam Muhammad Riyad Muhammad	3630377	2,185	880	WILLIAM FYNN	3381740	400
254	MADAKKAYIL AHAMED ABDUL MANAF	3672346	1,810	298	JOEL MAGRAMO GASPADO	3452179	131	399	SANEESH PADIVYATH KUMARAN	4071331	1,062	883	JAMAL HOSAIN ABDUL MANNAN	4074383	232
255	RAMESH KONNAYIL NAIR	2981994	59	299	RENEBOY NACILLA TEJIDAR	3459808	253	571	JAY SAN JUAN SACIL	2785107	52	891	JESUS JR ANTOLIN QUIRABO	3317155	313
256	RAFEK SHAHUL HAMEED	2999619	87	300	ERWIN SALCEDO REYNO	3507871	490	572	FRANKLIN E BUAN	2876102	95	900	PETER AL DEJOLDE CANANGGAAN	4063090	76
257	BALDOMERO NERA MANGACO	3332969	25	301	JEFFERSON LOPEZ NUGUID	3521748	73	573	RICARDO N MANAGO JR	2884537	112	901	JORIE EWAYAN TANILON	3379964	82
258	FERNANDO JR RABAGO RAMOS	3346106	25	318	JEFFREDO PULEDO	3350544	173	574	ALLAN O VOCALAN	2937545	1,806				

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Environment Minister inspects meadows, nature reserves

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Minister of Environment and Climate Change H E Dr. Abdullah bin Abdulaziz bin Turki Al Subaie conducted an inspection visit to a number of meadows within Al Reem Reserve, including Rawdat Al Nu'man, Al Ham, Al Haime, and the Umm Al Maa area, in addition to Ashirij Nature Reserve.

The visit comes as part of efforts to monitor the conditions of the meadows and assess their environmental status.

During the tour, His Excellency reviewed the level of vegetation growth in the meadows and its response to the recent rainfall season.

He also followed up on environmental rehabilitation works and the efforts being made to preserve soil quality and wild plants.

In addition, he listened to briefings from specialists on the



measures in place to protect the meadows, as well as environmental awareness programmes aimed at ensuring their sustainability and safeguarding their biodiversity.

During the visit, the Minister of Environment and Climate Change directed that field patrols in these areas be intensified to monitor compliance with approved

environmental regulations, particularly during weekends, in order to curb environmental violations and ensure the protection of meadows and nature reserves.

MCIT signs collaboration deal with PwC Middle East

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: The Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (MCIT) has signed a collaboration agreement with PwC Middle East on the sidelines of Web Summit Qatar 2026, aimed at supporting a selected group of startups through the provision of specialised advisory services that enhance their technological and operational readiness.

The agreement was signed by Faraj Abdullah, Director of the Digital Economy Department at MCIT, and Yazen Al Safi, Partner at PwC Middle East.

The collaboration focuses on delivering structured and practical assessments that enable startups to strengthen their technology foundations, improve go-to-market execution, enhance customer

experience, and develop scalable operating models.

Under the agreement, MCIT and PwC Middle East will jointly identify participating startups and enable them to benefit from comprehensive assessments across key areas, including technology, customer experience, market strategy, and operating models, in addition to end-to-end customer journey evaluations.

Participating startups will receive prioritised recommendations and actionable roadmaps, supported by tailored reports and mentoring sessions focused on short-term improvements and medium-term growth plans.

This approach aims to strengthen operational readiness, support sustainable scaling, and enable the delivery of high-quality digital services in the State of Qatar.

Sir Mo Farah highlights sports-tech synergy at Web Summit Qatar

VICTOR BOLORUNDURO
THE PENINSULA

DOHA: British athletics legend Sir Mo Farah, now a resident of Qatar, took centre stage for the closing session at Web Summit Qatar 2026 to discuss his transition from Olympic champion to entrepreneur, emphasising the powerful intersection of sports and business innovation.

In an engaging discussion session with *Al Jazeera's* Samantha Johnson, Farah praised the event as a vital platform for blending athletic discipline with technological advancement, particularly in promoting wellness and fitness in the region.

Farah, who has called Doha home for a year, expressed enthusiasm for Qatar's growing role as a global hub for sports and technology. "It's nice to be here in Doha, Qatar," he said, noting how the city's facilities and safety impressed his family during the 2022 World Cup, prompting their move.

He highlighted the "huge running community" in Doha, aligning it with Web Summit's focus on innovation.

Farah views the summit as an ideal venue to advocate for physical activity amid technological distractions, stating, "Particularly with the younger generation now, it's so hard with AI technology. So more kids just want to be on their phones."

Central to Farah's message was the nexus between sports and entrepreneurship. Retiring after a storied career with four Olympic golds and weekly 120-mile training regimens, he described his pivot as a natural extension of athletic principles. "I've always had a goal," he explained, "and in life, if you don't have a goal, it's hard to be motivated." This discipline now fuels his ventures, including the AI-powered YouRun app, which draws from his championship experience to provide personalised training programmes. "The running app is really what I've learned along my career, what it takes to be a champion," Farah said.

Farah's "Run with Mo" platform exemplifies this fusion, where he runs with celebrities to share personal stories, humanising fame while promoting fitness. Interviews with idols like Arsene



British athletics legend Sir Mo Farah with *Al Jazeera's* Samantha Johnson during a session at the Web Summit Qatar 2026.

Wenger and Thierry Henry revealed shared struggles, reinforcing mental health discussions. "Collaboration is so important to all of us, whether you're in tech, whether you're in business, sports," he noted, praising partnerships with the Olympics, IOC, Arsenal, and PSG. At Web Summit, Farah positioned these efforts as a bridge between athletic

achievement and entrepreneurial impact, urging governments to enhance physical education to combat health issues like those straining the UK's NHS.

He lauded Qatar's infrastructure for enabling such initiatives. "This place is incredible. The facilities, the stuff that's out there, it's amazing," Farah said, expressing desire to give back to Doha's

youth through sports-tech projects. His legacy, he insisted, extends beyond medals: "I want to be remembered as someone who always gives back, to change the attitude in sports and get more people active."

He challenged non-runners to start small, 1km, building to marathons, mirroring entrepreneurial gradualism. "If we break it down... you will be able to run a marathon and enjoy it because you're prepared," he advised.

In a nod to mental health, Farah shared his protective strategies: exercise, open communication, and supportive check-ins. "It's okay for someone to tell you it's okay," he said, creating a safe space at the summit for such dialogues.

Farah's family-centric life in Doha complements his entrepreneurial drive. With four children now active in local sports, he prioritises presence post-retirement. "Now I'm not away as much. Dad's actually here," he reflected.

Farah's insights highlight Qatar's emergence as a leader in sports-tech integration, inspiring attendees to blend passion with purpose.

'Middle East could emerge as major AI hub'

JOEL JOHNSON
THE PENINSULA

DOHA: The Middle East has the potential to become one of the world's leading hubs for artificial intelligence (AI), driven by abundant energy resources, large-scale infrastructure investment, and a rapidly expanding digital economy, according to Amit Jain (pictured), CEO and co-founder of Luma AI.

Speaking on the sidelines of this year's Web Summit in Doha, Jain said the region's combination of government-backed AI strategies, regulatory momentum, and growing demand for advanced computing positions it to play a pivotal role in the next phase of global AI development.

"The way I think about the region is that it's a single-language-speaking region, which is really valuable, and it's a fast-growing economy", he told *The Peninsula*.

"Whether you look at Saudi Arabia, Qatar, or the UAE, the number of new businesses forming is also really amazing.

Luma AI has raised \$900m

in Series C funding led by HUMAIN, a PIF company, with participation from AMD Ventures and existing investors Andreessen Horowitz, Amplify Partners and Matrix Partners, supporting the company's next phase of growth.

Jain also highlighted the Middle East's structural advantages for AI infrastructure, particularly in energy and land availability.

He explained that abundant solar resources and large tracts of land make the region well-suited for data centres, which are essential for powering large-scale AI workloads.

If current trends continue, he suggested the region could become one of the world's largest producers of AI computing output in the future.

Generative video and visual AI are poised to become the next major frontier of artificial intelligence, with the Middle East holding strong potential to emerge as a global hub for large-scale AI infrastructure, the official said

Jain said Luma AI is already working with some of the world's largest companies, positioning itself as a full-stack AI

laboratory that develops foundational models, end-user products, and the distribution layers required for enterprise adoption.

Headquartered in Palo Alto, California, Luma AI's technology is being widely deployed across media, entertainment, and advertising, Jain noted.

The company's generative video and image models are used by major film studios as well as smaller production houses that collectively produce much of the footage seen in movies and television.

Advertising agencies are also leveraging Luma's tools to generate high volumes of visual content required for modern marketing campaigns.

Beyond creative industries, Luma AI is increasingly embedded within corporate environments, supporting marketing functions as well as internal education and training programmes.

Jain said the company's models and AI agents enable organisations to scale visual content creation in ways that were previously impractical due to cost and time constraints.

Commenting on Web



Summit Qatar, which he attended for the second time, Jain described the event as a strong business-focused platform that brings together founders, investors, and decision-makers from across the world.

While not designed as a highly technical or academic forum, he said the summit plays an important role in fostering connections, supporting fundraising efforts, and accelerating commercial collaboration in the AI ecosystem.

"It is surprising not just how many people attend, but the quality of founders and investors who are here," Jain said, adding that such gatherings are valuable for shaping the commercial direction of emerging technologies like AI.

PHCC: Qatar National Sport Day is an investment in community health

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Qatar National Sport Day represents one of the state's leading national initiatives, embodying Qatar's vision of building a healthy, active, and productive society. This day is no longer merely an annual event; it has evolved into a deeply rooted social culture that reinforces prevention and promotes sustainable healthy lifestyles.

This year's celebration, taking place on Tuesday, 10 February, reflects the state's commitment to advancing public health, in alignment with Qatar National Vision 2030 and the National Health Strategy 2024-2030, which places people at the centre of priorities.

Primary Health Care Corporation (PHCC) plays a pivotal role in embedding this concept by implementing awareness and community programmes that encourage physical activity as a daily way of life. Physical activity has a direct impact on preventing chronic diseases, improving mental health, and enhancing quality of life for individuals and families. Sport is no longer a recreational choice; it is a health and behavioral necessity that contributes to reducing obesity, heart disease, and diabetes, while strengthening immunity and resilience to life's pressures.

This year's National Sport Day slogan, "I Chose Sport," delivers a clear message that reflects community awareness of the importance of making conscious, responsible decisions about health. It emphasizes that practicing sport is a long-term investment in both individual and community wellbeing. Through national partnerships and diverse events that include all segments of society, Qatar continues to position sport as an effective tool to promote public health, build more aware generations, and foster a balanced

lifestyle aligned with future aspirations.

Managing Director of PHCC, Dr. Mariam Ali Abdul Malik affirmed that Qatar National Sport Day reflects the country's commitment to preventive health and to embedding sport as a fundamental part of daily life. She noted that PHCC views this day as a national platform for raising health awareness and promoting positive behaviors across society.

She explained that physical activity directly contributes to preventing many chronic diseases and improving both mental and physical health. The Corporation integrates the concept of physical activity into healthcare services delivered through its health centres via awareness campaigns, preventive screenings, and health counselling.

She added that PHCC's strategy aligns with the goals of the National Health Strategy 2024-2030, which prioritises prevention over treatment and encourages community participation in adopting sustainable healthy lifestyles. National Sport Day represents an annual opportunity to renew the collective commitment to health and to transform sport into a year-round daily culture.

Assistant Managing Director of Quality and Workforce Development at PHCC, Dr. Zelaikha Al Wahedi stated that National Sport Day reflects the country's commitment to investing in human health as the true capital of sustainable development. Promoting physical activity improves work performance and enhances the psychological and physical wellbeing of employees and the wider community.

She emphasised that PHCC is committed to integrating health and sport concepts into the workplace and developing healthcare professionals capable of spreading awareness about the importance of physical activity.

Qatar Museums unveils programme for Rubaiya Qatar

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Qatar Museums (QM) recently announced the programme for Rubaiya Qatar, a new nationwide multidisciplinary contemporary art quadrennial developed under the auspices of ALRIWAQ Art + Architecture, the contemporary art and architecture institution of Qatar Museums dedicated to research, exhibitions, and public art.

Conceived to elevate Qatar's international presence and empower new generations of artists and thinkers, Rubaiya Qatar will present a dynamic programme of exhibitions, commissions, public art projects, residencies, publications, and more, organised every four years



under a single theme.

As part of this inaugural programme, Qatar Museums also announced further details of Unruly Waters, the flagship and largest exhibition of Rubaiya Qatar. Referencing the book of the same title by environmental historian Sunil Amrith, *Unruly Waters* features works by more than 50 contemporary artists, many of whom have been commissioned to create new work

for the project. The exhibition explores how both humans and nature have shaped today's realities across a region spanning from the Gulf to East Asia, while also examining Qatar's place within that region.

Qatar Museums Deputy CEO of ALRIWAQ Art + Architecture, Public Art, and Rubaiya Qatar Sheikha Reem Al Thani said, "Rubaiya Qatar builds on the growth of Qatar Museums over the past two decades, aiming to reflect the country's aspirations by positioning Doha as a hub for global art practice."

"This inaugural edition of Rubaiya Qatar will foster new creative networks, support emerging artists who are pushing the boundaries of

innovation, and showcase Doha as a platform for the exchange of cutting-edge ideas."

Director, Rubaiya Qatar Sheikha Alanood Al Thani said, "Unruly Waters locates Qatar as a meeting point for different cultures and traditions, underscoring the nation's past and present role as a geopolitical hub."

"Alongside works by major contemporary artists, the exhibition will present artefacts from Qatar Museums' extensive collections to propose new artistic and historical connections, shining a light on how the wider Gulf region has been shaped by nature and global weather systems as much as by commerce, trade, and culture."



Minister of Education, President of Arabian Gulf University discuss academic cooperation

Minister of Education and Higher Education H E Lolwah bint Rashid Al Khater met yesterday in her office with President of Arabian Gulf University H E Dr. Saad bin Saud Al Fahid, and the accompanying delegation, who are currently visiting the country. The meeting discussed ways to enhance academic and research cooperation, support institutional partnerships, and exchange expertise between Arabian Gulf University and the ministry's sectors, as well as relevant academic institutions in the country.

NPC to enhance AI use across its departments

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: On the sidelines of Web Summit Qatar 2026, the National Planning Council (NPC) announced it will advance the adoption of AI technologies and enhance operational practices across the Council's departments, as part of its enterprise-wide AI transformation plan. The transformation will be anchored around three key priorities: scaling the NPC adoption of Microsoft 365

Copilot, enhancing operational efficiency within the Council's departments through AI-powered tools and solutions, and cementing NPC's position as an AI frontier organisation. NPC's Microsoft 365 Copilot adoption is already underway, with activities progressing across the Council to enable employees to streamline routine tasks, boost productivity, and generate insights more efficiently within familiar Microsoft 365 applications. In parallel, the Council is

identifying and prioritising opportunities to transform NPC departments through AI-driven technologies supported by Microsoft. Raed Ibrahim Al-Emadi, Assistant Secretary-General for National Development Planning and Policy at NPC, stated: "Our commitment to transforming the Council into an AI frontier organisation remains unwavering. This collaboration with Microsoft will propel NPC as a pioneer in scaling AI adoption to transform and modernise how we operate."

Web Summit Qatar a global hub for tech, culture and investment: HiggsField CEO

VICTOR BOLORUNDURO THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Alex Mashrabov, CEO and co-founder of HiggsField AI, has described Web Summit Qatar 2026 as a uniquely powerful global platform, praising Doha's rapid emergence as a centre for technology, investment and culture. Speaking to The Peninsula on the sidelines of the four-day summit, Mashrabov said the event stood out not only for its scale and international reach, but also for the concentration of complementary global initiatives taking place simultaneously in the Qatari capital. "It's not just Web Summit," he said. "You also have major investor engagement, with Qatar Investment Authority being one of the biggest AI investors globally, and at the same time Art Basel is happening in the city. Historically, New York had this kind of concentration. Today, Doha is evolving into that kind of global centre." Mashrabov, a serial entrepreneur who previously sold his company AI Factory to Snapchat, said this year's Web Summit Qatar surpassed similar events he had attended in North America. "My opinion here is way better compared to the one in North America," he said, adding that the summit felt truly global rather than regional in scope. HiggsField AI focuses on democratising video artificial intelligence for social media marketers, enabling creative teams,



agencies and small businesses to produce high-quality visual content faster and at lower cost using generative AI. Mashrabov stressed that the company's mission is not to replace creative professionals, but to empower them. "There is a perception that AI is just about cutting costs," he said. "We strongly believe AI helps companies tell better stories, showcase their products and ultimately sell more." He pointed to the Middle East's strong appetite for AI-driven creativity, noting that the region has historically been quick to adopt advanced visual technologies, including face filters and generative content. HiggsField already has indirect exposure in the region through agencies that use its platform, including campaigns linked to Qatar Airways. "It shows that creative minds remain critical," Mashrabov said. "Agencies are transforming, not being replaced." Commenting on Qatar's broader technology ambitions, Mashrabov said he was particularly impressed by the country's speed of development. He cited the rapid rise of Qatar Airways as a global aviation leader and Doha's transformation into a major travel hub as examples of execution at scale. "It feels like everything was done very quickly and very efficiently," he said. He also highlighted Qatar's and the UAE's growing influence in the global AI landscape, not just through capital deployment but through infrastructure development. "It's not only about

investment," he said. "It's about building data centres, learning how to operate them and creating a real ecosystem. Historically, this would take decades. Here, it has happened in a very short time." Reflecting on his overall takeaway from Web Summit Qatar 2026, Mashrabov said the quality of

speakers, diversity of participants and depth of discussions set the event apart. "It's not a local event. It's a truly global one," he said. While HiggsField did not announce formal deals during the summit, Mashrabov confirmed several strategic conversations aimed at future expansion in the Middle

East. "We are very excited about the opportunities here," he said. "Web Summit Qatar makes those connections possible." As the summit concluded, Mashrabov said he hoped to return to Doha, calling the city's momentum in technology, innovation and culture "impressive and inspiring."



GCO Director H E Sheikh Jassim bin Mansour bin Jabor Al-Thani meeting Senior Fellow at Mastercard, Raja Rajamannar in Doha.



Doha Institute President Dr. Abdelwahab El Affendi with other participants at the conference.

Doha Institute participates in University Presidents for Peace Conference in Japan

TOKYO: The Doha Institute for Graduate Studies participated in the 5th University Presidents for Peace Conference, held in Hiroshima, Japan, in a joint coordination between the Presidency of the Arab Universities Union and Hiroshima University. The conference aimed to review the contribution

of universities in supporting and promoting peace efforts. President of Doha Institute for Graduate Studies Dr. Abdelwahab El Affendi highlighted during the conference the role of the Institute and the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies in supporting

humanitarian work, and sustainability, through several programmes and centers. Dr. El Affendi discussed, on the sidelines of the conference, mechanisms for cooperation with Hiroshima University and with the presidents of the participating universities in several fields. — QNA

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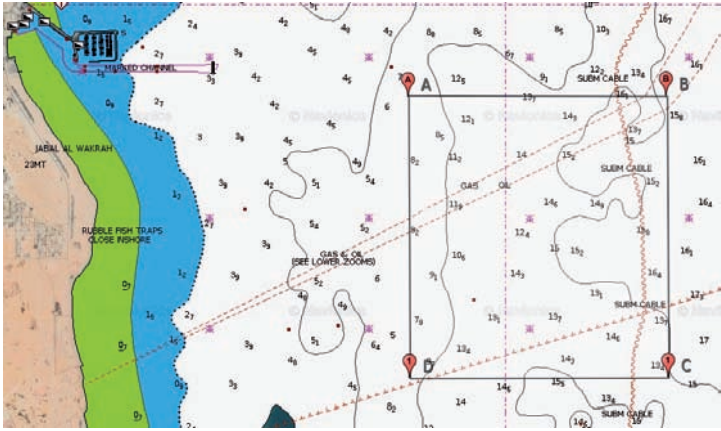
To all Ships, Fishermen, and Mariners

Pursuant to the directives issued by the Seafarers Affairs and Registration Department, Ministry of Transport, State of Qatar, this Public Announcement Notice is hereby issued to inform all vessels, mariners, and fishermen that Halul Offshore Services Company W.L.L. will be conducting geophysical survey works at Al Wakra within the location bound by the coordinates shown in the diagram below. These activities will be carried out by Halul Offshore Services Company W.L.L. using uncrewed remotely operated marine vessel USV: Milaha Kashif 1, vessel number: (1481).

Schedule: 1 to 24 February 2026.

The operations will be conducted within the area bounded by the following coordinates:

Proposed Location Coordinates (Geodesy: WGS84)		
Location	Latitude	Longitude
Launch Point	N25°09'40.8063"	E51°37'04.7548"
A	N25°09'25.6688"	E51°39'21.3334"
B	N25°09'25.9485"	E51°41'06.3902"
C	N25°07'42.4543"	E51°41'07.3171"
D	N25°07'42.1745"	E51°39'21.9514"



Important Notice:

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Al Misnad, UNITAC delegation discuss avenues for cooperation in innovation, technology

Minister of State for International Cooperation H E Dr. Maryam bint Ali bin Nasser Al Misnad, met yesterday with a delegation from the United Nations Centre for Innovation and Technology Acceleration for Cities (UNITAC), currently visiting Qatar. During the meeting, they reviewed avenues of cooperation, particularly in leveraging innovation and technology, including artificial intelligence, to support early crisis foresight and enhance diplomatic and humanitarian efforts.

Secretary-General of Arab League, Attorney-General review cooperation

Attorney-General of the State of Qatar H E Dr. Issa bin Saad Al Jafali Al Nuaimi met yesterday with Secretary-General of the Arab League H E Ahmed Aboul Gheit during his current visit to Cairo. During the meeting, the two sides exchanged views on several topics of mutual interest, and discussed ways to support and develop them.

Web Summit Qatar an eye-opener for investors and startups: Pass CEO

VICTOR BOLORUNDURO
THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Web Summit Qatar 2026 has emerged as a pivotal catalyst for the nation’s burgeoning startup ecosystem, according to Founder and CEO of Pass, Bashar Jaber (pictured), one of Qatar’s leading e-commerce logistics companies.

Speaking to *The Peninsula* on the sidelines of the event, Jaber emphasised how the international technology conference has become an essential platform for regional entrepreneurs and investors alike.

“The Web Summit is a major eye-opener,” Jaber said. “It is an eye-opener for investors, for startups, for anybody who wants to start their own company. It’s a testament of effort and a motivator that groups everybody together, puts them under the same roof.”

The event’s remarkable growth trajectory has exceeded all expectations. What organisers initially projected would attract 5,000 attendees within three years has mushroomed to over 30,000 participants in its third edition, with 1,600 startups participating, 85 percent of



which are from Qatar.

For Pass, Web Summit represents both a showcase and a moment of reflection. “In my specific case, the Web Summit is a reset button,” Jaber explained. “It’s a good way to look at what we’ve done so far and ensure that we’re not very hard on ourselves, and realise that we’ve been doing somewhat of a good job.”

Pass has experienced significant evolution since its establishment two years ago. After an initial diagnostic phase exploring various business models, the company has positioned itself as what Jaber describes as “the backbone of e-commerce” in the region, specialising in last-mile delivery

and fulfillment services.

“If you’re a seller anywhere in the world that would like to sell to anyone in the GCC, you would simply use Pass to become your fulfillment and last-mile partner,” Jaber said. The company handles the operational complexities of e-commerce, including storage, delivery, cash-on-delivery processing, and inventory management through API integration with platforms like Shopify.

The company’s participation at Web Summit has been “exhilarating,” with overwhelming support from local, regional, and global markets. “A few years ago, we started off with a small stand. Now, having a booth is a testament that growth is available and inevitable if you focus on the service that you find yourself the best at,” Jaber noted.

Beyond its own success, Pass actively supports Qatar’s startup community through sponsorship of local events like Startup Night. Jaber emphasised the importance of this support, noting that local startups “solve a lot of Qatari problems” by addressing real use cases and pain points. “Promoting them

is indirectly also helping shape a better life in Qatar,” he said.

Jaber observed a dramatic transformation in Qatar’s startup landscape over recent years. “Three, four years ago versus now, it’s a contrasting difference,” he stated. “Previously, getting an idea funded was somewhat difficult. But nowadays, as the region expands when it comes to fulfilling startups and realising that startups are actually the essence of solving problems, it’s a very refreshing change.”

The launch of Qatar’s Fund of Funds and its second version has further energised the ecosystem, attracting talent to the region. Pass is currently in talks for a Series A funding round, significantly larger than its pre-Series A round from eighteen months ago, which will be utilised to expand services and unlock more sellers across the region.

As Web Summit Qatar continues to grow, it serves as compelling evidence that Qatar’s commitment to fostering innovation and entrepreneurship is yielding tangible results, positioning the nation as a regional hub for technology-driven business solutions.

UDST showcases global engagement and student mobility at EduCon

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: The University of Doha for Science and Technology (UDST) participated in EduCon, an international education conference held in Seoul, Republic of Korea, which brought together global leaders, educators, and policymakers to discuss the future of education and workforce development.

The conference also witnessed the participation of UDST President, Dr. Salem Al-Naemi, as a keynote speaker.

In his presentation titled ‘From Oil to Artificial Intelligence: Why Is Qatar Betting on Education?’, he addressed various aspects of educational transformation within the framework of the State of Qatar’s strategic vision, highlighting the importance placed on investment in education as a fundamental pillar of sustainable development and human capital development.

The President of the University was also hosted in a panel discussion and high-level dialogues that addressed the role of education in the era of digital transformation and artificial intelligence. During the panel

discussion, Dr. Al-Naemi shared UDST’s perspective on preparing graduates for the future through applied learning, industry-aligned programmes, and strong international partnerships.

He emphasised the importance of balancing technological advancement with human-centred education to ensure graduates remain adaptable, skilled, and globally competitive.

President of the UDST, Dr. Salem Al-Naemi, said: “Education represents a fundamental pillar of national transformation in light of the continuous advancement of digital development and artificial intelligence. The participation of the University of Doha for Science and Technology in international conferences such as EduCon reaffirms its commitment to global educational dialogue, partnership building, and the advancement of applied education and student exchange programmes in line with future demands.”

UDST provides students with opportunities to study abroad, gain cross-cultural experience, and develop global competencies.

QatarDebate organises ‘Let’s Debate’ forum for Qatari students

LONDON: QatarDebate Centre, a member of Qatar Foundation, in cooperation with the Qatari Cultural Attache in the United Kingdom, organised the “let’s debate” forum dedicated to Qatari students studying in British universities.

The organisation of this forum comes within the framework of the centre’s efforts aimed at promoting a culture of dialogue and intellectual empowerment among Qatari youth abroad, providing them with debate and influence skills, and enabling them with higher-order thinking tools, particularly analysis and critical thinking, which contributes to qualifying them to engage effectively in academic activities, championships and international conferences.

In this context, student Sarah Dhiab, the strategic events officer at the Qatari

Student Club, stressed the vital importance of this forum in shaping the personalities of scholarship students. She noted that the event provides a leading intellectual space to establish dialogue as a tool for building awareness away from the logic of victory and to promote the values of mutual understanding and respect for the opinion of others.

She said that the forum sessions highlighted the role of debate as a civilized practice that contributes to preparing a generation capable of managing differences consciously and responsibly, and interacting constructively with contemporary societal issues. She emphasised that these initiatives enable students to have professional expression tools to be honourable role models for the State of Qatar in international academic forums. — *QNA*

HBKU, QRDI partnership to accelerate intelligent systems

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Building on their shared commitment to strengthening national capabilities in advanced electronics, semiconductor technologies, and intelligent systems, Hamad Bin Khalifa University (HBKU) and the Qatar Research, Development, and Innovation (QRDI) Council have entered into a strategic partnership. Under the collaboration, QRDI will fund the University’s newly launched master’s programme in Integrated Circuits and Intelligent Systems Design.

Formalised through a funding agreement signed on the sidelines of Web Summit Qatar 2026 by President, HBKU Dr. Ahmad M. Hasnah and Secretary General, QRDI Eng. Omar Al Ansari, the new programme will provide world-class education and develop future generations of experts. Under the agreement, QRDI will provide funding of up to \$1 million. By combining HBKU’s academic and research



President, HBKU Dr. Ahmad M Hasnah and Secretary General, QRDI Eng. Omar Al Ansari at the signing ceremony.

expertise with QRDI’s advancement of Qatar’s RDI ecosystem, the programme will cultivate a highly skilled workforce aligned with national priorities in emerging technologies.

Commenting on the agreement, President of Hamad Bin Khalifa University, Dr. Ahmad M. Hasnah said, “This funding agreement with QRDI reflects a shared commitment

to advancing Qatar’s capabilities in semiconductor and intelligent systems technologies. Through this partnership, we are preparing a new generation of highly skilled talent equipped with the expertise and innovation mindset required to lead in critical fields that will shape Qatar’s knowledge based economy and global competitiveness and be responsive to

evolving technological needs and trends.”

“This partnership reflects QRDI Council’s focus on building deep technical capability in areas where advanced skills are critical to long-term competitiveness,” said Secretary General of the QRDI Council, Eng. Omar Al-Ansari, “We are supporting engineers with practical experience in semiconductor design, intelligent hardware, and system-level integration by funding HBKU’s master’s programme in Integrated Circuits and Intelligent Systems Design.

From his side, Distinguished Professor and Associate Dean, College of Science and Engineering, HBKU, Dr. Amine Bermak added: “This master’s degree underscores HBKU’s commitment to strengthening Qatar’s knowledge economy through world-class education and research in advanced integrated circuits and AI-enabled hardware.

ELYSIUM 2026: A graceful farewell at BPS

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Birla Public School, Doha, organised a Farewell Ceremony titled “Elysium” for the Grade XII students yesterday, 29 January 2026 at the main school campus. The event marked an important milestone in the students’ school journey and served as a heartfelt tribute to the graduating batch.

The ceremony was thoughtfully planned and impeccably executed by the students of Grade XI, reflecting their creativity, leadership, and commitment. The programme featured a blend of cultural performances, nostalgic

moments, and warm tributes that celebrated the shared experiences and achievements of the graduating students. The presence of the Principal, Dr. Anand R. Nair, along with members of the senior leadership team, added dignity and colour to the occasion.

The event commenced with a Warm Welcome Speech, followed by a soulful Prayer Song that set a serene and reflective tone. Adding to the celebratory spirit of Elysium, the Grade XI students presented a melodious Group Song, expressing their affection and admiration for their seniors.

One of the highlights of the

programme was the speech delivered by Grade XII students representing the Science, Commerce, and Humanities streams. They shared cherished memories, expressed gratitude, and reflected on their transformative experiences at school. This was followed by an energetic and well-coordinated Group Dance by Grade XI, which brought vibrancy and enthusiasm to the occasion.

A much-awaited moment of Elysium was the announcement and crowning of Birla Prince and Princess. Beno Arimboor was crowned as Birla Prince and Lena Mariya Thomas as Birla Princess, followed by a cake-cutting ceremony symbolising



Principal Dr. Anand R Nair along with members of the senior leadership team during the event.

celebration, camaraderie, and a fond farewell.

The programme concluded with a sincere Vote of Thanks, acknowledging the efforts of the

students, teachers, and organisers who contributed to the success of the event. Elysium was a perfect blend of emotion, entertainment, and

appreciation, leaving behind lasting memories for the graduating students as they prepare to embark on new journey beyond school.

Famine spreading in Sudan’s Darfur, warn UN-backed experts

PORT SUDAN: Famine is spreading in Sudan’s western Darfur, UN-backed experts warned yesterday, after the paramilitary takeover of the region’s main city El-Fasher triggered mass displacement into surrounding communities.

Since April 2023, Sudan has been engulfed in a devastating war between the army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces that has killed tens of thousands, displaced nearly 11 million and driven multiple regions into famine and hunger.

In an alert issued by the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), global food

security experts said that “famine thresholds for acute malnutrition have now been surpassed” in North Darfur’s contested areas of Um Baru and Kernoï, near the border with Chad.

They added that the spread of famine came as the fall of North Darfur capital El-Fasher led to “massive displacement of residents and displaced persons into surrounding areas of North Darfur”.

El-Fasher, long the Sudanese army’s final stronghold in western Darfur, fell to the RSF last October after 18 months of bombardment and

starvation.

Thursday’s alert, based on data available up to February, comes nearly three months after the IPC confirmed famine conditions in El-Fasher and Kadugli, the capital of South Kordofan, about 800 kilometres (500 miles) to the east.

Kadugli endured a punishing RSF siege for much of the country’s nearly three-year conflict before the army lifted the blockade this week.

Nearby Dilling, where the army also broke an RSF siege earlier this month, is believed to be experiencing similar famine conditions though lack

In an alert issued by the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification global food security experts said that “famine thresholds for acute malnutrition have now been surpassed” in North Darfur’s contested areas of Um Baru and Kernoï, near the border with Chad.

of access and ongoing insecurity prevented a formal declaration.

The IPC said that 20 more areas in Sudan’s Darfur and neighbouring Kordofan were at risk of famine.

Fighting between the army and the RSF in Kordofan — now a key battleground — has displaced about 88,000 people since October, the latest UN figures show. The fall of El-Fasher — which was accompanied by reports of mass killings, rape and abductions — also pushed at least 127,000 people to flee to nearby towns, according to the same data.

“The movement of tens of thousands of people facing hunger and malnutrition into

already fragile areas of North Darfur is likely to sharply increase the number of people facing catastrophic food insecurity,” the IPC experts said.

Across Sudan, more than 21 million people—almost half of the population—are now facing acute food insecurity, with two-thirds of the population in urgent need of assistance, according to the UN.

The conflict, nearing the three-year mark, has also effectively split Sudan in two, with the army holding the north, east and centre and the RSF dominating Darfur and, with its allies, parts of the south. — **AFP**

Nepal’s youth lead the charge in upcoming election

KATHMANDU: Kishori Karki, 25, has been seeking blessings from elders in her community as the young candidate prepares to fight for change ahead of Nepal’s landmark election next month.

The 25-year-old is among a slate of fresh faces on the March 5 ballot and said fighting against corruption and elevating youth demands are among her highest priorities.

“Our demands and aspirations should not be sidelined,” she said while speaking with **AFP** in her hometown of Okhaldhunga in eastern Nepal.

Kishori had just graduated from law school and moved to Kathmandu in September when deadly youth-led anti-corruption protests erupted in the region. A video of the young candidate taking an injured demonstrator to the hospital on a motorbike became one of the movement’s defining images.

The two-day demonstrations had initially been triggered by rage over a brief government ban on social media and were spearheaded by young protesters under the loose “Gen Z” banner.

But their anger ran deeper: years of economic stagnation and entrenched corruption had primed the country of 30 million for upheaval.

The resulting violence killed 77 people, wounded scores and saw hundreds of buildings torched.

“After the Gen Z movement, if educated youth like us stand back, then the same old parties will play the same game,” Kishori explained.

Kishori is running under the newly formed Ujyalo Nepal Party, led by former minister Kulman Ghising, who won significant public support for easing the country’s chronic power shortages.

Former chief justice Sushila Karki,



Manjil Rana (centre), Ujyalo Nepal Party election candidate for Tanahu constituency, speaking with his party workers in Kathmandu on February 3 (AFP)

no relation to Kishori, is serving as interim prime minister until the vote.

Members for the 275-seat House of Representatives, the lower chamber of parliament, will be voted in -- with 165 members chosen in a direct vote and 110 through proportional representation.

A total of 3,406 candidates have registered for the direct election, of which 30 percent are under the age of 40.

“If you look at the candidates, the bigger portion are the new generation,” said Prakash Nyaupane, spokesperson for the election commission.

Younger candidates are “a bit different”, Nyaupane said, adding that “some older leaders have had to step back because of this”.

Kathmandu’s rapper-turned-mayor

Balendra Shah, who resigned from his position to join the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP), is also a strong contender.

A prime minister hopeful, Shah will challenge ousted premier KP Sharma Oli in his eastern Nepal stronghold, Jhapa.

Shah told **AFP** that the protest had “opened a door” for new faces to enter politics, while raising the importance of governance among younger constituents.

Sudan Gurung – a key figure of the September unrest – is also running for the RSP from the Gorkha district in central Nepal. Gurung, 38, has been urging families in his constituency to “vote for the right person”.

Meanwhile, further west in the Rukum district, 28-year-old Sandeep Pun will challenge ex-rebel leader and

Maoist chief Pushpa Kamal Dahal, also known as Prachanda, a term that means “fierce” in Nepali.

Several new parties and alliances have emerged nationwide, recruiting fresh and popular faces in a bid to reconnect with disillusioned voters, members have said. Though many young candidates are also running in the election independently.

“It does seem that the September protest has galvanised young people to take part in politics, and not just as candidates,” said journalist Pranaya Rana, who covers politics in the region.

Civil war engulfed Nepal, a former monarchy, for more than a decade until a peace deal brokered in 2008 saw Maoist insurgents brought into government. A revolving door of ageing prime ministers and a culture of horse-trading between the three dominant parties, however, has fuelled public frustration.

“It is very difficult for us to again be fooled by promises from the people who have already been in parliament so many times,” said Manjil Rana, 37, a candidate for the Ujyalo Nepal Party in Tanahu.

“The recent revolution was a lot about young people, their voices and them participating in the government.”

There are some 18.9 million eligible voters, including more than 800,000 first-time voters, according to the latest election commission data reviewed by **AFP**. Sachin Timalseña, a 33-year-old candidate from Nepali Congress, said Nepal was at a “critical juncture”, and the elections could bring the country back on track. “I think the environment is supportive of the youth. I feel our society is ready for young people,” he said. — **AFP**

South Africa to sign ‘duty free’ trade deal with China

JOHANNESBURG: China will allow duty-free imports of some South African products under a deal being finalised as Pretoria seeks to diversify its markets, the trade ministry said yesterday.

China is South Africa’s biggest trade partner by country, followed by the United States, which in August last year imposed 30 percent tariffs on some South African products. Trade Minister Parks Tau is travelling to China to sign an agreement that “will see South African exports getting duty-free access to the Chinese market and attract investment into South Africa”, the ministry said. “This trip comes at a time when South Africa is pursuing an objective of market diversification and export growth,” it added, without specifying which sectors would benefit from the duty-free deal.

Tau will also meet with Chinese companies interested in investing in South Africa, it said. China became Pretoria’s largest trading partner in 2023 after overtaking the European Union, with South Africa exporting mainly minerals and agricultural products. Pretoria has said it is trying to negotiate a better trade deal with the US over fears its 30 percent tariffs on a range of products could cost thousands of jobs. — **AFP**

World in brief

January settler attacks cause record West Bank displacement since Oct 2023: UN

RAMALLAH: Israeli settler violence and harassment in the occupied West Bank displaced nearly 700 Palestinians in January, the UN said yesterday, the highest rate since the Gaza war erupted in October 2023.

At least 694 Palestinians were forcefully driven from their homes last month, according to figures from the UN’s humanitarian agency OCHA, which compiles data from various United Nations agencies. The UN Human Rights Office (OHCHR) said in late January that settler violence has become a key driver of forced displacement in the West Bank.

January’s displacement numbers were particularly high in part due to the displacement of an entire herding community in the Jordan Valley, Ras Ein al-Auja, whose 130 families left after months of harassment. “What is happening today is the complete collapse of the community as a result of the settlers’ continuous and repeated attacks, day and night, for the past two years,” Farhan Jahaleen, a Bedouin resident, said at the time. — **AFP**

‘Iran Guards seize two foreign-crewed tankers’

TEHRAN: Iran’s Revolutionary Guards have seized two oil tankers with their foreign crews in Gulf waters for “smuggling fuel,” the Tasnim news agency reported yesterday.

“More than one million litres of smuggled fuel were found on board of the two vessels,” Tasnim reported, and a total of “15 foreign crew members were referred to the judiciary.”

The Guards captured the vessels near Iran’s Farsi island in the Gulf, the agency said. — **AFP**

HK students dissolve pro-democracy group

HONG KONG: A pro-democracy student organisation in Hong Kong said yesterday its members had decided to dissolve, citing “increasingly severe pressures”.

Established in 1958, the Hong Kong Federation of Students (HKFS) played a leading role in mobilising the Chinese city’s student community to participate in once-vibrant social movements. The decision was “very difficult and painful”, Isaac Lai, chair of the HKFS representative council, said. — **AFP**

Mount Fuji cherry blossom festival cancelled

TOKYO: A cherry blossom festival boasting a highly Instagrammable view of Japan’s Mount Fuji has been cancelled after residents complained of overtourism fuelled by the weak yen. The city of Fujiyoshida, in central Japan’s Yamanashi region, said Tuesday that the weeks-long event attracting around 200,000 people will be called off this year because “the quiet lives of local residents are threatened”.

About 42.7 million tourists flocked to Japan in 2025, an all-time high, topping 2024’s record of nearly 37 million as the weak yen boosted the appeal of the “bucket list” destination. — **AFP**

China shuns calls to enter nuclear talks after US-Russia treaty lapses

BEIJING: China rejected calls to enter talks on a new nuclear treaty after a US-Russian agreement expired yesterday, ending decades of restrictions on how many warheads the two powers can deploy.

Campaigners have warned that the expiry of the New START treaty could trigger a global arms race, urging nuclear powers to enter negotiations.

The United States has said any new nuclear agreement would have to include China, whose nuclear arsenal is rapidly

expanding, but international efforts to draw Beijing to the negotiating table have so far failed. China’s foreign ministry joined a growing international chorus expressing regret yesterday over the expiry of the treaty, saying it was “of utmost importance to safeguarding global strategic stability”.

Nevertheless, “China’s nuclear capabilities are of a totally different scale as those of the United States and Russia,” foreign ministry spokesman Lin Jian told a news conference.

Beijing “will not participate in nuclear disarmament negotiations at this stage”, he said.

Russia and the United States together control more than 80 percent of the world’s nuclear warheads.

China’s nuclear arsenal, meanwhile, is growing faster than any country’s, by about 100 new warheads a year since 2023, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI).

China is estimated to have at least 600 nuclear warheads,

SIPRI says — well below the 800 each at which Russia and the United States were capped under New START.

France and Britain, treaty-bound US allies, together have another 100. Signed during a warmer period of relations, US President Donald Trump did not follow up on Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin’s proposal to extend New START’s limits for one year. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called the expiry a “grave moment”. — **AFP**

Japan’s first woman PM tipped for thumping election win

TOKYO: Japan votes in snap elections on Sunday with polls pointing to a resounding win for Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi’s conservatives after a honeymoon start for the country’s first woman leader.

But having angered China and rattled markets in her three months so far, it is unclear what a more confident and secure Takaichi will mean for the region or Asia’s number two economy. The arch-conservative Takaichi, 64, a heavy metal drummer in her youth and an admirer of Margaret Thatcher, became Japan’s fifth premier in as many years in October.

This followed a string of calamitous elections for the once-mighty Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), leaving it short of a majority in both houses of parliament.

With ordinary Japanese, especially younger ones, Takaichi has got off to a flier, becoming something of a fashion icon and a hit on social media. “It’s not just because she’s a woman... overall, it’s because she championed the idea of a society where the people can have hope for the future,” high-school student Makoto Hara, 17, told **AFP**.

Her tough talk on



Japan’s Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi (second right) and Chief Cabinet Secretary Minoru Kihara (right) pose with TSMC Chairman CC Wei (second left) and Vice President Jonathan Lee (left) at the Prime Minister’s Office in Tokyo yesterday. (AFP)

immigration appears, for now, to have snuffed out the rise of the populist “Japanese first” Sanseito party. “The words she uses are easy to understand,” Mikitaka Masuyama, professor of Japanese politics at the National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies (GRIPS), told **AFP**.

Her predecessor Shigeru Ishiba “had lots of thoughts inside himself, but he spoke like an academic”.

Despite dipping in recent weeks, her cabinet has enjoyed approval ratings of around 70 percent, much higher than previous administrations. Surveys

ahead of Sunday’s lower house election indicate — with some caution due to undecided voters — that the LDP will easily win more than the 233 seats needed to regain a majority. The ruling bloc of the LDP and its coalition partner Japan Innovation Party (JIP) could surpass 300 seats out of 465 up for grabs, giving it a two-thirds majority.

The new Centrist Reform Alliance of the main opposition Constitutional Democratic Party (CDP) and the LDP’s previous partner Komeito could lose half their current 167 seats. — **AFP**

Nigeria President deploys army after new massacre

JOS: Nigeria’s President Bola Ahmed Tinubu deployed an army battalion to a troubled state after gunmen killed as many as 162 people in one of the country’s deadliest attacks in recent months.

Ordering a battalion to secure the area, Tinubu condemned the “bestial attack” that he said was carried out against villagers who had rejected the militants’ ideology.

“President Tinubu expressed rage that the attackers killed the community members who rejected their obnoxious attempt at indoctrination,” a presidential statement said.

The gunmen invaded Woro at around 6pm (1700 GMT) on Tuesday and set “shops and the king’s palace ablaze”, said lawmaker Ahmed.

In a separate attack on Tuesday in northern Katsina state, bandits were suspected of killing 23 civilians in reprisal for air force operations which killed 27 “militants”, according to a security report prepared for the United Nations. — **AFP**

Russia, US agree to resume military contacts at Ukraine talks

ABU Dhabi: Russia and the United States have agreed to resume high-level military contacts at two-day Ukraine talks in Abu Dhabi yesterday, in a major step of rapprochement between the world's top nuclear powers.

Moscow and Washington suspended senior military dialogue shortly before Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, with then US President Joe Biden severing almost all contact with Russia.

But US President Donald Trump has restored communications with Moscow since he returned to the White House last year, holding several talks and a summit with Russian leader Vladimir Putin.

The agreement to restore military contacts came after two days of talks between US, Russian and Ukrainian delegates in Abu Dhabi, searching

Russia and Ukraine have agreed to exchange 314 prisoners. The first prisoner exchange in four months

for a deal to end the war in Ukraine.

Those negotiations resulted in the first prisoner exchange in four months, but Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky called the discussions complicated and urged faster progress.

It was also announced hours after the New START treaty the last nuclear agreement between Moscow and Washington expired, triggering fears of a global arms race.

"The US and Russian Federation agreed yesterday in Abu Dhabi to reestablish high level military-to-military dialogue," the US military's European

Command said in a statement, adding that "the parties continue to work towards a lasting peace." "Maintaining dialogue between militaries is an important factor in global stability and peace, which can only be achieved through strength, and provides a means for increased transparency and de-escalation," it added.

Moscow had not commented on the announcement.

Moscow and Kyiv agreed to swap more than 300 prisoners at the talks in Abu Dhabi, but there were no immediate signs of progress on the thornier issue of territory.

"It is certainly not easy, but Ukraine has been and will remain as constructive as possible," Zelensky said of the talks.

US mediator Steve Witkoff conceded that "significant" work still lay ahead in the quest for a broader deal to end the

war, dimming hopes for a quick breakthrough.

The negotiations are the latest bid in diplomatic efforts to halt the fighting Europe's deadliest conflict since World War II, with hundreds of thousands killed, millions forced to flee their homes and much of eastern and southern Ukraine left decimated.

As talks were underway, large swathes of the Ukrainian capital were still without heating in sub-zero temperatures, after successive Russian strikes knocked out energy supplies to hundreds of apartment blocks.

Kyiv's mayor Vitali Klitschko warned that more than 1,000 apartment blocks could be without heating for two months after a Russian strike earlier this week destroyed a critical power station.

The main sticking point in

the negotiations is the long-term fate of territory in eastern Ukraine.

Moscow is demanding that Kyiv pull its troops out of swathes of the Donbas, including heavily fortified cities atop vast natural resources, before any deal.

It also wants international recognition that land seized in the invasion belongs to Russia.

Kyiv has said the conflict should be frozen along the current front line and has rejected a pull-back of forces.

Trump has been pushing both sides to negotiate an end to the war since he returned to office, boasting he could strike a deal in hours.

Zelensky said the US president's role was crucial, telling French television in an interview broadcast Wednesday that "Putin is only scared of Trump". — **AFP**

Iran, US to hold new round of nuclear talks in Muscat today

TEHRAN: Foreign Minister of Iran Abbas Araghchi announced yesterday that his country will hold a new round of talks with the United States on its nuclear file.

Araghchi stated in a post on X platform that the nuclear negotiations with the United States will take place today morning in Muscat, highlighting the arrangements provided by Omani authorities for this new round of talks between Tehran and Washington.

Separately, Iranian sources indicated that the sixth round of negotiations between the parties will be indirect, noting the possible participation of Araghchi and US Presidential Envoy Steve Witkoff. — **QNA**

Venezuela Amnesty Law excludes serious human rights violations

CARACAS: Venezuela's parliament yesterday started weighing an amnesty law whose long-awaited draft text showed it would not cover "serious violations" of human rights committed under 27 years of socialist rule.

The bill is an initiative of interim president Delcy Rodríguez, who stepped into the shoes of Nicolas Maduro after he was deposed in a US military operation a month ago.

It was not immediately clear if the "Amnesty Law for Democratic Coexistence" was designed to benefit political prisoners, state agents or both. "It is recognised that it is important not to impose vengeance, retaliation or hatred, but to open a path toward reconciliation," said the text.

"Excluded from its benefits" are offenses such as "serious violations of human rights, crimes against humanity, war crimes, intentional homicide, corruption, it added. — **AFP**

Cuba President says willing to talk to US, but 'without pressure'

HAVANA: Cuba is prepared to hold dialogue with the United States but not under pressure, President Miguel Diaz-Canel insisted yesterday after months of threats from US President Donald Trump.

"Cuba is willing to engage in dialogue with the United States, a dialogue on any topic but without pressure or preconditions," Diaz-Canel said in an address to the nation on state TV and radio.

He added that any talks must take place "from a position of equals, with respect for our sovereignty, our independence, and our self-determination" and without "interference in our internal affairs."

Trump has made repeated threats against communist-run Cuba in recent months, vowing to cut off its access to oil and stating the island was "ready to fall." Cuba, in the grips of an economic crisis, has long relied on oil supplies from Venezuela, whose leader was ousted in a deadly US military operation last month.

Trump subsequently claimed to have control of



Cuba's President Miguel Diaz-Canel speaking during a press conference, in Havana, on Wednesday. (AFP)

Venezuelan oil, vowed to starve Cuba of the commodity, and threatened tariffs on any other nation stepping in to help US-sanctioned Havana.

The pressure tactics threaten to plunge Cuba into complete darkness, with its power plants already struggling to keep the lights on due to fuel shortages.

Earlier yesterday, hundreds of thousands of people in the country's east were left without electricity for hours after an electricity grid failure. An **AFP** analysis of official statistics recently found that the island

generated only half the electricity it needed last year.

Officials blame tight US sanctions for the crisis, which includes food and medicine shortages. But poor economic management and a tourism collapse following the COVID-19 pandemic have contributed to the island's woes.

Trump has repeatedly said Washington was in talks for "a deal" with Havana, which has denied any formal negotiations were under way. Trump has not specified the nature of the agreement he has floated. — **AFP**

Telegram founder slams Spain PM over under-16s social media ban

MADRID: Telegram founder Pavel Durov on Wednesday joined fellow tech tycoon Elon Musk in slamming Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez over his "dangerous" plan to ban social media for under-16s.

The Socialist leader announced a series of measures in Dubai to protect Spanish minors from harmful social media content.

As well as the ban, Sanchez pledged to change Spanish law to make the chief executives of tech platforms "face criminal liability for failing to remove illegal or hateful content".

Durov spoke of "dangerous new regulations that threaten your Internet freedoms" in a Wednesday post on his Telegram messaging app, which has an estimated billion users and is known for its privacy features.

"These measures could turn Spain into a surveillance state under the guise of 'protection'," he wrote, saying

mass data collection and censorship would result from their enforcement.

Sanchez responded on X with his own spin on a quote attributed to Miguel de Cervantes's 17th-century classic novel "Don Quixote" that embraces criticism as a sign of doing the right thing.

"Let the techno-oligarchs bark, Sancho, it's a sign that we are riding," Sanchez wrote.

Spanish government sources said Durov had used his "unrestricted control" of Telegram to send a message full of "lies and illegitimate attacks" to all Spanish users of the app.

This demonstrated "the urgent need to regulate social media and mobile messaging apps", the sources said.

Spain's move to ban social media for under-16s came after Australia became the first country to introduce such a measure in December.

France, Greece and Denmark have been leading a push for similar steps in the European Union. — **AFP**



Macron meets French astronauts ahead of ISS mission

French President Emmanuel Macron hosted a video conference at the Élysée Palace with astronaut Sophie Adenot as she prepares for her upcoming mission to the International Space Station. Macron posed with Higher Education and Research Minister Philippe Baptiste, ESA astronaut Thomas Pesquet, and astronaut Arnaud Prost following the call. The meeting comes as four astronauts are expected to launch the ISS next week, after a series of delays caused by medical emergencies, last-minute rocket issues, and scheduling conflicts linked to NASA's Moon programme. (AFP)

US, UK to work 'closely' to keep Indian Ocean base functioning

LONDON: British Prime Minister Keir Starmer and US President Donald Trump have agreed to work "closely" to maintain the key Diego Garcia military base in the Indian Ocean following recent criticism by Trump of UK action, the prime minister's office said.

The US president said last month that Britain had been wrong to give the Chagos islands, which includes Diego Garcia, back to Mauritius. The islands had been at the centre of a decades-long diplomatic battle. Trump had earlier endorsed the accord.

The base was discussed in a telephone conversation between Trump and Starmer that Downing Street reported.

"The leaders agreed their

governments would continue working closely to guarantee the future operation of the base. Under the deal agreed in May last year, Britain will hand back the Chagos islands to Mauritius but keep the Diego Garcia base, jointly run by US and British forces, on a 99-year lease.

"The UK giving away extremely important land is an act of great stupidity, and is another in a very long line of National Security reasons why Greenland has to be acquired," Trump said on January 20.

Starmer responded that the US leader's comments were an attempt apply pressure on him at a time when several European countries were resisting US claims to Greenland, a Danish territory. — **AFP**

Spain, Portugal face floods and chaos after deadly new storm

LISBON: Portugal has barely recovered from last week's battering by rain and winds that killed five people, injured hundreds and left tens of thousands without power.

Storm Leonardo on Wednesday dumped more than 40 centimetres (15 inches) of rain in some districts of Andalusia, southern Spain, the equivalent of several months of rainfall. Thousands of people were evacuated and roads and rail lines paralysed.

Portuguese officials on yesterday issued their highest flood alert for the Tagus river in the Santarem region. Authorities in Sanatarem evacuated people from homes near the river. — **AFP**

France charges four suspected of spying for China: Prosecutor

PARIS: French authorities yesterday charged four people, including two Chinese nationals, on suspicion of having intercepted sensitive military data for Beijing, the Paris prosecutor's office said.

The move comes after police arrested the four individuals at the weekend in the southwestern Gironde region where the two Chinese suspects allegedly rented an Airbnb as part of a plan to capture sensitive information, including military intelligence.

The Paris prosecutor's office said two individuals have been remanded into custody and two others placed under judicial supervision, without offering details on their identities.

The probe focuses on the "delivery of information to a foreign power" likely to harm key national interests. This

is punishable by up to 15 years behind bars.

The case was triggered after residents on January 30 spotted the installation of a satellite dish approximately two metres (around six-and-a-half feet) in diameter, which coincided with a local internet outage.

A search conducted the following day led to the discovery of "a system of computers connected to satellite dishes enabling the capture of satellite data", according to the prosecutor's office.

The set-up made it possible to intercept "exchanges between military entities", it said.

The two Chinese nationals had allegedly travelled to France with the intent to capture data from the Starlink satellite internet system and other "entities of vital importance" and transmit it back to China. — **AFP**

Ukrainian train had just 'minute' to evacuate before Russia hit

KYIV: Staff on a Ukrainian train attacked by Russia last Tuesday described their panic and desperate scramble to evacuate passengers after spotting drones headed towards them.

Five people died in the strike, which hit a passenger train carrying over 200 people between Ukraine's west and the northeastern Kharkiv region, according to officials.

"It all happened in the span of a minute," the train's conductor Anatoliy Tymotsko told **AFP** in an interview.

After spotting three Russian drones following his train in the Kharkiv region, the 33-year-old immediately ordered passengers to evacuate, fearing an imminent attack.

But in an instant, one of the drones hit the track in front of the train, forcing it to carry out an emergency stop, while a second drone "hit rail car 16," killing five passengers.

Train attendant Olga Terletska, who has worked for Ukraine's state-owned railway operator for 23 years, was among those who helped evacuate passengers.

"The train manager ran in and started shouting: 'Olga, they're probably going to attack. Let's start preparing the passengers for evacuation'," the 43-year-old said.

After rushing through the carriage to get as many people out as possible, she fled the train and into the bushes.

"It was cold, it was frightening." "You realise the cars are burning, and there's nothing you can do to help them," she added.

Russia has intensified strikes on Ukraine's rail infrastructure in recent months.

The attacks have left civilians dead and disrupted train routes used to evacuate people from the front line.

Russia denies intentionally targeting civilians. — **AFP**



Bogotá streets fall silent for annual Car-Free Day

Major roads across Bogotá were left unusually empty on Wednesday as the Colombian capital marked its annual Car and Motorcycle-free Day. The initiative, aimed at cutting pollution and encouraging sustainable transport, saw residents switch to walking, cycling, and public transit, offering a rare glimpse of the city without its usual traffic congestion. (AFP)