

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF QATAR  
ACHIEVES PLATINUM RATING  
IN GSAS OPERATIONS



NEBRAS ENERGY ACQUIRES ENGIE  
S.A.'S STAKE IN QATAR POWER  
AND RAS GIRTAS POWER



TOWNSEND MANOR  
DELIVERS LATE STRIKE TO  
CLAIM FUWAIRIT CUP



OUR DUTY  
TO QATAR'S  
ENVIRONMENT

FRIDAY / SATURDAY  
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# The Peninsula



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## Amir emphasises importance of protecting natural resources, biodiversity

QNA/THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Amir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani emphasised the importance of protecting natural resources and preserving biodiversity in the State of Qatar to ensure a balance between the country's development plans and its sustainability goals.

H H the Amir also urged all members of the public to protect the environment, which, in turn, will positively impact public health and quality of life.

In a post on his official X account, H H the Amir said, "On Qatar Environment Day, we recall the great importance of protecting our natural resources and preserving our biodiversity to achieve a balance between our development plans and the desired sustainability. We urge everyone to protect our environment, as this will positively reflect on the health of society and the quality of life."

Qatar marked Qatar Environment Day on February 26 with a renewed call for collective responsibility under this year's theme, "Our Behavior Reflects on Our Environment," highlighting the direct link between individual actions and environmental sustainability.



Observed annually since 1996, Qatar Environment Day has become a key national occasion to assess the country's environmental progress, review priorities, and reinforce community awareness about the importance of protecting the environment as a cornerstone of comprehensive development and the goals of Qatar National Vision 2030.

Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs H E Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al-Thani also emphasised safeguarding the

environment and ensuring the sustainability of its resources for future generations.

In a post on X platform, the Prime Minister wrote: "On Qatar Environment Day, we reaffirm our commitment to safeguarding our environment and ensuring the sustainability of its resources for future generations. Protecting it is a shared national responsibility that begins with the individual and extends to the wider community. We will continue to strengthen balanced environmental policies that support sustainable



تميم بن حمد  
@TamimBinHamad

On Qatar Environment Day, we recall the great importance of protecting our natural resources and preserving our biodiversity in a way that achieves a balance between our development plans and the sustainability we aspire to. We urge everyone to safeguard our environment, as this positively reflects on public health and the overall quality of life.



the country has steadily developed an integrated environmental system rooted in advanced legislation, strategic planning, and active community participation.

This year's theme reflects an advanced national awareness that environmental protection is no longer solely an institutional responsibility, but a daily practice that begins with individuals and extends to society at large. Officials emphasised that everyday practices by individuals and institutions directly impact environmental quality, reinforcing the importance of community engagement in supporting national environmental efforts.

Environmental responsibility, they noted, is a shared commitment between individuals and relevant entities to safeguard natural resources for future generations. This is achieved by adopting responsible practices, fostering innovation in sustainable solutions, and maintaining a balance between economic growth and environmental development, one of the four pillars of Qatar National Vision 2030.

Environmental sustainability has become an integral part of Qatar's development trajectory,

supported by comprehensive strategies and action plans that address present needs while anticipating future challenges. National efforts have significantly contributed to wildlife protection, strengthening environmental governance, and advancing climate action initiatives.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Municipality has also reaffirmed that sustainability is embedded in its daily operations through an integrated framework aligned with national and global trends. Its initiatives range from public cleanliness campaigns, waste segregation at source, and recycling programs, to expanding green spaces through parks and afforestation projects.

The Ministry also continues to support agriculture, livestock, and fisheries production while implementing sustainable building standards. These efforts aim to enhance the quality of life and reinforce Qatar's global competitiveness, with measurable results reflecting tangible environmental impact.

Backed by the country's leadership, Qatar has adopted a balanced environmental and climate policy that harmonises economic development with natural resource protection.

## Qatar's online sales market to reach QR18bn in 2026

JOEL JOHNSON  
THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Qatar's e-commerce sector is poised for sustained expansion, with market size projected to grow to \$4.96 bn (QR18.06bn) in 2026, up from \$4.54bn (QR16.53bn) in 2025, according to Mordor Intelligence's latest data.

According to industry estimates, growth is expected to accelerate further to \$7.75bn (QR28.22bn) by 2031, with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 9.34 percent between 2026 and 2031.

Analysts say a combination of luxury-oriented consumer behaviour, advanced digital infrastructure, and national economic diversification policies is underpinning the steady rise in transaction values, even as some regional markets experience slower growth.

Hassan Omar, a Doha-based digital economy analyst, stressed that Qatar's consumer base plays a distinctive role in shaping online retail performance.

"Qatar has one of the highest per capita income levels globally, and that translates into strong demand for premium and curated products online, while luxury consumption is not confined to physical retail anymore," he told The Peninsula.

Experts note that domestic and cross-border platforms are responding by targeting affluent consumers with exclusive collections, premium delivery options, and personalised shopping experiences.

Meanwhile, quick-commerce startups are capitalising on Doha's compact geography to offer ultra-fast grocery and essentials delivery, often within 15 minutes. ▶P4



### Awqaf Minister inspects Baraim Category test

Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs H E Ghanem bin Shaheen bin Ghanem Al Ghanem with other officials inspecting the tests of male Qatari participants in the Baraim Category at the conclusion of the 31st edition of the Sheikh Jassim bin Mohammed bin Thani Holy Quran Competition. ▶SEE ALSO P2

### Sheikha Jowaher hosts Iftar for MoEHE, diplomatic, development leaders

DOHA: Consort of H H the Amir, H H Sheikha Jowaher bint Hamad bin Suhaim Al-Thani hosted an Iftar banquet at the Lusail Palace yesterday, on the occasion of Ramadan, in honour of female teachers, school principals, and administrators at the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE), along with female diplomats at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and female employees of the Ministry of Social Development and Family. Minister of Education and Higher Education H E Lolwah bint Rashid Al Khater, and Minister of State for International Cooperation H E Maryam bint Ali bin Nasser Al Misnad attended the banquet. — QNA

## 'Mahaseel' illuminates Katara evenings during the holy month

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: The Mahaseel Festival continues its activities in Katara Village, located in the southern part of the Cultural Village, amidst a vibrant Ramadan atmosphere and a remarkable turnout of visitors.

The festival offers a comprehensive experience that blends heritage and family-oriented elements, through the diverse participating shops and farms showcasing local products, including fresh vegetables, dates,

honey, and their derivatives, reflecting the richness and quality of national production.

The festival is witnessing a distinguished family presence, with the children's play area and workshops proving particularly popular. These areas offer interactive and educational activities that combine entertainment with skill development, making them an attractive destination for children and a favorite spot for families.

As for the diverse Ramadan events, the traditional games

tournament (Carrom and Dama) will take place from February 28 to March 2, aiming to revive these heritage games and strengthen their presence in the collective memory through a competitive atmosphere that reflects the spirit of popular heritage. The 2026 Ramadan Chess Championship, held in cooperation with the Qatar Chess Federation, continues and will conclude on March 1. The tournament has witnessed remarkable participation and a high level of competition,

reflecting the game's popularity and its intellectual and athletic value. Similarly, Katara is organizing the Ramadan Beach Soccer Championship from February 27 to March 9, adding a vibrant sporting dimension that enhances the diversity of Ramadan events.

Meanwhile, the Katara Holy Quran Memorization Competition for boys and girls continues, held after Asr prayer at the Katara Grand Mosque and the Katara Golden Mosque. This underscores Katara's commitment to supporting religious activities and instilling spiritual values during the holy month.

In a related context, a series of lectures and religious lessons are being held at the Katara Grand Mosque after Taraweeh prayers. These lectures cover a range of topics, including intellectual, faith-based, and educational aspects, and are presented by a select group of esteemed sheikhs and preachers, enriching the Ramadan cultural landscape and promoting knowledge. Katara is also hosting a workshop on Diwani calligraphy, presented by calligrapher Nasser Al-Hamawi, from March 1 to 3, 2026, at the Katara Art Studios in Building 19, from 8:30pm to 10:30pm. ▶P4

## Qatar secures top-tier spot in global AI Adoption Index

VICTOR BOLORUNDURO  
THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Qatar continues to strengthen its footprint in artificial intelligence as consumer and organisational uptake accelerates across the Gulf, according to the latest AI Adoption Index released by Cybernews.

The comprehensive study, which tracks downloads of the 100 most popular AI applications across 64 countries representing 70 percent of global GDP and 55 percent of world population, places small, digitally advanced nations at the forefront of consumer AI engagement.

Qatar was named 16th in the rankings while Singapore leads with a 66 percent adoption rate, followed by Chile at 60 percent.

Qatar's high digital readiness positions it favourably within the broader momentum of the Middle East. With internet penetration at 99 percent and mobile connections exceeding 156 percent of the population, Qatar offers fertile ground for AI tools in daily life, from productivity apps to smart services.

This consumer trend aligns

seamlessly with Qatar's strategic push under the National AI Strategy and Qatar National Vision 2030. The strategy, an extension of the country's long-term diversification blueprint, emphasises AI integration across key sectors including healthcare, energy, finance and public administration. Recent milestones underscore this commitment: Ooredoo's launch of the region's first sovereign AI cloud platform powered by Nvidia technology, strategic partnerships with global leaders such as Accenture for Qatar Airways' "AI Skyways" initiative, and the rollout of AI-driven applications at Hamad Medical Corporation.

A parallel study by Boston Consulting Group, highlighted in local reporting, reveals Qatar recorded a 10 percentage-point increase in "Emerging" AI organisations between 2024 and 2025. Qatar's average AI maturity score now stands at 39, with 39 percent of GCC organisations classified as AI Leaders — nearly matching the global average of 40 percent. ▶P2



The festival offers a comprehensive experience that blends heritage and family-oriented elements, through the diverse participating shops and farms showcasing local products, including fresh vegetables, dates, honey, and their derivatives, reflecting the richness and quality of national production.

## Ministry of Culture launches 'Al Razji 2026' at Darb Al Saai

DOHA: The Ministry of Culture launched the "Al Razji 2026" heritage event on Wednesday at its permanent Darb Al Saai venue in the Umm Salal area.

The event is set to continue until March 3, offering a Ramadan experience that embodies the authenticity of the past and Qatar's time-honored heritage.

Director of the Public Relations and Communication Department at the Ministry of Culture, Ahmed Al Yafei, affirmed to QNA that the event is part of the ministry's strategy to preserve national heritage, strengthen its presence in the collective consciousness of society, and ensure the sustainability of popular traditions across generations. The event offers a unified platform for all age groups in an enduring heritage environment, providing

interactive experiences that immerse visitors in Qatari traditions and national identity, he underlined.

The event features the second Al Razji quiz, with questions about Ramadan and Islamic culture, alongside art exhibitions including animation films, heritage photography, and rare collectibles reflecting Qatar's rich cultural roots.

A dedicated interactive area for children (ages 5-13) combines learning and entertainment with traditional activities like Garangao, maritime challenges, weaving workshops, and knowledge stations to foster creativity and cultural awareness. The event runs daily from 8pm to 1am, offering a comprehensive journey to preserve Qatari traditions.

— QNA



### Qatar, Mongolia discuss environmental cooperation

Minister of Environment and Climate Change H E Dr. Abdullah bin Abdulaziz bin Turki Al Subaie met with Ambassador of the Republic of Mongolia (non-resident) to the State of Qatar H E Sergelen Purev. During the meeting, they discussed cooperation and relations between the two countries in the fields of environment and climate change, and explored ways to support and strengthen them.

## Amir sends condolences to Amir of Kuwait

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 Amir of the State of Kuwait, H H Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, on the death of Sheikh Salman Humoud Al-Salman Al-Humoud Al-Sabah. — QNA

## Qatar condemns attacks in Pakistan

DOHA: The State of Qatar expressed its condemnation and denunciation of the attacks that took place in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab provinces of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, resulting in deaths and injuries. In a statement issued yesterday, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs reiterated the State of Qatar's firm position rejecting violence, terrorism, and criminal acts, regardless of motives or justifications.

The Ministry expressed the State of Qatar's condolences to the families of the victims and to the government and people of Pakistan, while wishing the injured a speedy recovery. — QNA

## Qatar secures top-tier spot in global AI Adoption Index

FROM PAGE 1

Ahmad Dhaini, Principal at BCG, noted the surge demonstrates Qatar's ability to move rapidly "from experimentation to systematic implementation at scale".

The Cybernews methodology relies on verifiable download data from Google Play and Apple App Store, normalised by population, offering a clear snapshot of real-world consumer behaviour rather than infrastructure or investment alone. The report challenges the assumption that innovation leadership automatically translates into widespread adoption, citing the United States' 28th-place ranking at 41 percent despite hosting leading AI firms.

For Qatar, the gap between advanced infrastructure and consumer uptake presents an opportunity. Abundant, low-cost energy resources are already attracting hyper-scale data centre investments, while initiatives such as the Qatar Foundation's AI research programmes and expanded AI curricula at universities are building local talent. The Ministry of Communications and Information Technology continues to prioritise ethical AI governance, data sovereignty and digital inclusion to ensure benefits reach all segments of society.

Economically, the momentum is tangible. Qatar's AI market, valued at approximately \$560m in 2024, is projected to expand at a compound annual growth rate exceeding 36 percent through 2033, driven by adoption in government services, fintech and logistics.

## Awqaf Minister inspects tests as Sheikh Jassim Quran Competition concludes

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs H E Ghanem bin Shaheen bin Ghanem Al Ghanim inspected the tests of male Qatari participants in the Baraim Category at the conclusion of the 31st edition of the Sheikh Jassim bin Mohammed bin Thani Holy Quran Competition.

The visit comes as part of the Ministry's commitment to closely follow up on the competition's progress and ensure the readiness of the organising and judging committees.

During a field tour of the examination committees held at Imam Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab Mosque, the Minister reviewed the competition's organisational procedures and the electronic judging system adopted to ensure accuracy and transparency in score recording. He also received a comprehensive briefing on the number of committees, the evaluation mechanism, and the criteria



Contestants of Baraim Category at 31st edition of the Sheikh Jassim bin Mohammed bin Thani Holy Quran Competition held at Imam Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab Mosque.

applied in judging, all aimed at achieving the highest standards of objectivity and excellence.

Accompanying the Minister during the tour was Jassim bin Abdullah Al Ali, Chairman of the Organising Committee, along with several committee members. They provided a brief overview of the examination

process and the level of participation, affirming that a suitable spiritual atmosphere and all necessary organisational arrangements had been ensured for participants.

This year, 369 male and 384 female Qatari contestants registered in the Baraim Category, totalling 753 participants.

Overall participation in the competition reached 2,848 male and female contestants representing 45 nationalities from both citizens and residents, reflecting the competition's established standing as an inclusive platform that promotes Quranic values across diverse segments of society.

Jassim Al Ali emphasised the importance of the Sheikh Jassim Quran Competition in strengthening the place of the Holy Quran in the hearts of young people. He noted that the Baraim Category serves as an early educational milestone for discovering Quranic talents and encouraging children to memorize and master Quran recitation from a young age, contributing to the development of a generation that is conscious, confident, and proud of its religious identity and Islamic values. He further explained that the Baraim Category includes both male and female citizens and residents who memorize one part from the last five sections of the Holy Quran. The age requirement stipulates that Qatari participants must not exceed 12 years old, while resident participants must not exceed 8 years old, making the category an early educational platform that motivates children to engage in memorisation and mastery at a young age.

## GCC Standardization Organization adopts GSAS as Gulf's Green Building Standard

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: The Gulf Organisation for Research and Development (GORD) announced that the GCC Standardization Organization (GSO) has officially adopted GORD's Global Sustainability Assessment System (GSAS) as the regional Gulf Standard GSO 3000:2025 for sustainable buildings.

This standard applies to the construction and building sector across all GCC countries, aiming to enhance the environmental performance and efficiency of urban projects throughout the region.

The regional adoption of GSAS comes as part of GSO's efforts to develop an integrated framework guiding building and construction practices across the Gulf region, ensuring a practical methodology for applying sustainability requirements within the wider Gulf Building Code.

It also contributes to catalysing the implementation of green practices across both public and private projects.

## NMoQ achieves Platinum rating in GSAS operations

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: The National Museum of Qatar (NMoQ) has received the Platinum rating under the Global Sustainability Assessment System (GSAS) Operations' sustainable green building certification system, further underscoring Qatar Museums' position as a global pioneer in sustainable cultural institutions.

The certification was awarded following a rigorous assessment by the Gulf Organisation for Research & Development (GORD). The Platinum rating marks a global first for a museum under the GSAS Operations framework.

Speaking on the occasion, CEO of Qatar Museums Mohammed Saad Al Rumaihi said, "The National Museum of Qatar's advancement from Gold to Platinum under GSAS Operations marks a significant milestone in our sustainability journey. This achievement reflects Qatar Museums' long-term commitment to embedding environmental responsibility across our institutions, from building and design to day-to-day operations. As cultural leaders, we are proud to contribute to the goals of Qatar National Vision 2030 while setting new benchmarks for sustainable museum operations globally."

The museum was presented with the Platinum award at the NMoQ Auditorium yesterday. The event was celebrated on Qatar Environment Day, coinciding with national efforts to protect and preserve the environment.

The recognition highlights NMoQ's continued excellence in operational sustainability and builds on its earlier achievement of a GSAS 4-Star rating for design and build certification in 2018, awarded ahead of the museum's official opening. It also reinforces Qatar Museums' reputation as a leader in advancing sustainable cultural infrastructure



CEO of Qatar Museums Mohammed Saad Al Rumaihi, Chairman of GORD Dr. Yousef Alhorr, and other officials at the ceremony.

both in Qatar and internationally.

Head of Project Management Oversight and Director of Project Management at Qatar Museums Fahad Abdulla A Mana said, "Achieving the GSAS Platinum rating for the National Museum of Qatar is a proud moment that reflects our unwavering commitment to sustainability in cultural institutions. This milestone is the result of dedicated efforts across our teams to embed environmental responsibility into every aspect of operations. It not only strengthens Qatar Museums' leadership in sustainable practices but also sets a benchmark for museums worldwide to follow."

Chairman of GORD Dr. Yousef Alhorr said, "By upgrading their certification rating from Gold to Platinum, NMoQ has set a regional precedent for how cultural institutions can balance the preservation of heritage with the urgent demands of environmental sustainability. It is one thing to design a sustainable building, but it is a far greater challenge to operate it at peak efficiency over time. This achievement shows a higher level of institutional maturity, proving that it takes a dedicated, ongoing commitment to maintaining GSAS Operations certification for enhanced environmental performance."

## Aspire Sports Festival crowns champions in Family Fun Run and women's 3x3 basketball

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Aspire Zone Foundation (AZF) organised the Family Fun Run in partnership with the Qatar Sports for All Federation, as part of the 12th edition of the Ramadan Sports Festival 2026, hosted at Aspire Park amid vibrant Ramadan-inspired community spirit.

The race was held from 9pm to 11pm, drawing wide participation from various segments of the community in a sporting atmosphere that reflected the spirit of the holy month and emphasized the importance of physical activity as a lifestyle.

The competitions were divided



Officials and players during an awards ceremony.

into 1km and 3km categories in a free event open to all through registration via the QSFA application. The races

witnessed strong performances and sportsmanship before concluding with the awards ceremony for winners

across different categories.

The award ceremony was attended by AZF Events Manager Idris Mohammed Al Shershni, Community Engagement Specialist at AZF Ghada Al Obaid, and Awad AlShammari, event coordinator at Qatar Sports for All Federation, reflecting strong organisational coordination and administrative support for the accompanying activities.

The Ramadan Sports Festival continues to reinforce its position as one of the state's leading community events, combining sport and entertainment in a Ramadan atmosphere that promotes participation and social cohesion.

Beach volleyball competitions kick off today at 9pm on the sand court at Aspire Academy and will conclude on February 28.

The Women's 3x3 Basketball Tournament, held at the Ladies Sports Hall on February 24-25, concluded with Team Al Gharafa 1 claiming first place, while Team Al Mohariboon finished second. Eman Jalali of Al Gharafa was awarded Best Player of the Tournament.

The awards ceremony was attended by Executive Director of Marketing at Aspire Zone Foundation Amina Al Kuwari; Head of Marketing Fatima Al Kharaz; and Head of Visitor Relations Zeina Jaber.

## Five new lawyers take legal oath before Attorneys' Admission Committee

**DOHA:** The Attorneys' Admission Committee held its meeting chaired by Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs H E Ibrahim bin Ali Al Mohannadi.

Five new lawyers took the legal oath before the committee after completing their required training period.

During the meeting, the committee discussed the items on its agenda, reviewed applications from several business owners to be registered on the rolls of practicing lawyers, and approved the registration of

five trainee lawyers. It also reviewed applications to transfer the registration of four lawyers to the roll of practicing lawyers before the Court of Appeal.

In addition, the committee discussed several regulatory matters related to the legal profession, including the minutes of subcommittees and a proposal from the Attorney Affairs Department regarding the regulations for pleading a case. The committee made the necessary decisions to strengthen the regulatory framework for prac-

ting the profession.

During the meeting, the Minister of Justice reiterated the Attorneys' Admission Committee's commitment to providing a supportive legal environment that enables lawyers to fulfil their professional mission of serving justice and strengthening the legal system in the country, emphasising the importance of adhering to training programmes and honing legal skills to enhance the profession's performance and solidify its professional standards. — QNA



Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs H E Ibrahim bin Ali Al Mohannadi chairing the Attorneys' Admission Committee meeting.



Acting Charge d'Affaires of the Permanent Mission of Qatar to the United Nations in Geneva Jawhara bint Abdulaziz Al Suwaidi speaking during the meeting.

## Qatar reaffirms commitment to role as active global partner

**GENEVA:** Qatar reaffirmed its commitment to playing an active international role and continuing its mediation efforts, which have contributed, through its UN-sponsored hosting of meetings of special envoys on Afghanistan and priority working groups, to strengthening international consensus on key issues by providing an inclusive platform for dialogue and coordination. The statement emphasized Qatar's firm belief that constructive dialogue is the best path toward achieving peace.

This came in the statement delivered by Acting Charge d'Affaires of the Permanent Mission of Qatar to the United Nations in Geneva, Jawhara bint Abdulaziz Al Suwaidi, during the enhanced interactive dialogue on Afghanistan as part of the 61st session of the United Nations Human Rights Council.

Al Suwaidi said the occasion reflects efforts to build practical and effective dialogue between the Afghan caretaker government and the international community to meet humanitarian and development

needs, contribute to stability, and create conditions that enable Afghanistan to achieve internal peace, strengthen good-neighbourly relations, fully reintegrate into the international community, and fulfil its international commitments.

She noted that Afghanistan faces complex challenges that directly affect the promotion and protection of human rights, including the economic crisis, unemployment, rising humanitarian needs, recurring climate disturbances, widespread poverty, and food insecurity, in addition to the continuation of sanctions and asset freezes and the return of millions of refugees to the country.

Acting Charge d'Affaires stressed that Afghanistan is going through a delicate phase that requires a balanced collective approach toward the situation in the country, combining urgent humanitarian response with responsible political engagement in order to meet the Afghan people's aspirations for security, stability and development. — QNA

## QF's Academic Bridge Programme signs agreement with University of St Andrews

THE PENINSULA

**DOHA:** The Academic Bridge Programme (ABP), part of Qatar Foundation's Pre-University Education, has signed an academic agreement with the University of St Andrews in the United Kingdom, creating new pathways for students in Qatar to pursue higher education at leading UK universities.

The partnership strengthens academic programmes, enhances admissions pathways, and further develops student support services to ensure ABP graduates are well prepared to succeed at top universities worldwide.

Under the agreement, eligible ABP students can apply to

foundation programmes offered through the University's International Education and Learning Center. These programmes provide direct progression routes to degree studies at the University of St Andrews.

Available pathways include the International Year One in Science, leading to second-year entry into undergraduate programmes in fields such as Computer Science, Environmental Biological Sciences, Geography, Geology and Environmental Sciences, Mathematics and Statistics, Molecular Biological Sciences, Physics and Astronomy, and Psychology.

In addition, students have the opportunity to pursue a dedicated

Medicine pathway leading to a joint medical degree awarded by University of St Andrews and University of Manchester.

Students must meet specific academic and English language requirements to qualify.

Those who successfully complete the foundation programme are guaranteed progression to undergraduate study at the University of St Andrews, subject to meeting progression criteria.

A key feature of the agreement allows students to complete their foundation year in Qatar through ABP before transitioning to the UK. This approach strengthens their academic readiness while enabling them to remain close to their families and community.

ABP's Director, Dr. Saheim Khalaf Al-Temimi said: "This partnership reflects our commitment to empowering students academically and personally, while opening meaningful pathways that enable them to contribute to Qatar's knowledge-based economy and represent their country with distinction globally."

Vice-Principal for International Strategy and External Relations at the University of St Andrews, Professor Brad MacKay said, "We are honored to partner with Qatar Foundation.

"Their commitment to excellence in education and research aligns closely with our mission, and together we aim to create transformative opportunities for learners and communities."



The partnership strengthens academic programmes, enhances admissions pathways, and further develops student support services to ensure ABP graduates are well prepared to succeed at top universities worldwide.

## Qatar reiterates unwavering support for unity, territorial integrity of Sudan

**GENEVA:** The State of Qatar reiterated its firm and supportive stance on the unity and territorial integrity of Sudan, and the right of its fraternal people to live in dignity, security and stability, and rejected any form of interference in its internal affairs, voicing deep concern over the continuation of the war and the accompanying crimes and grave

human rights violations, which have led to the loss of thousands of Sudanese lives and property and the displacement of millions of them, in addition to the unprecedented destruction of infrastructure.

This came in a statement by the State of Qatar, delivered by Second Secretary at the Permanent Delegation of the State of Qatar to the United Nations

Office in Geneva Sheikh Sultan bin Khalid Al-Thani, during his participation in the enhanced interactive dialogue on Sudan, within the framework of the 61st session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva.

He said that the fraternal Sudanese people can no longer bear to wait any longer for a solution, and that urgent action is necessary to put an end to this

war. There is no way to do this except by conducting a comprehensive and rational dialogue to reach an agreement that restores security and stability to Sudan and spares it further destruction and division.

He emphasized that the State of Qatar, since the beginning of the crisis, has been keen to provide all forms of support and humanitarian assistance to

alleviate the suffering of the Sudanese people in this critical humanitarian situation. He noted that, in continuation of these efforts, on Feb. 9, a convoy of medical grants provided by the Qatar Fund for Development (QFFD) in cooperation with the Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS) was sent to provide urgent needs of emergency and life-saving medicines, in addition

to other batches to follow, with the number of beneficiaries estimated at half a million people in 12 Sudanese states.

He urged the international community to redouble its efforts and provide more support to the Sudanese, stressing the importance of facilitating unhindered access for humanitarian aid to those affected. — QNA

## QM welcomes Ramadan with reflection and creativity

THE PENINSULA

**DOHA:** Qatar Museums has unveiled an expansive line-up of cultural, educational, and wellness activities to mark the holy month of Ramadan, inviting residents and visitors to embrace reflection, creativity, and community engagement across multiple venues.

Blending heritage with contemporary experiences, Qatar Museums has curated programmes designed to appeal to audiences of all ages. The initiatives span interactive workshops, family-focused events, wellness sessions, and immersive cultural gatherings, reinforcing the institution's role as a central pillar of Qatar's cultural landscape.

Among the highlights this year is a series of wellness-oriented activities at the 3-2-1 Qatar Olympic & Sports Museum, where visitors can explore healthy Ramadan routines through an interactive Activation Zone.

The sessions focus on balanced nutrition, gentle movement, and expert-led cooking demonstrations aimed at promoting wellbeing during fasting. Conducted in both Arabic and English, the programme provides practical guidance in a family-friendly environment.

Families seeking engaging activities can participate in specially curated Ramadan experiences at the Dadu Children's Museum of Qatar, which is presenting a weekend series



structured around Health & Wellness, Community, and Environment themes. Hosted within a garden setting, the initiative encourages children and parents to connect with Ramadan's values through hands-on learning, play, and reflection.

Photography enthusiasts are also catered for through the Tasweer Photo Festival's themed photowalks. The festival offers participants the opportunity to document cherished Ramadan traditions, including Garangao celebrations and the iconic cannon firing.

Events will take place at culturally significant locations such as Bayt Al Wakrah and Lusail Boulevard, providing rich visual narratives of Qatar's

Ramadan atmosphere. One of the sessions will be guided by a professional photographer and will coincide with a classic and modern car parade.

Cultural exploration continues with community events linked to the Countryside exhibition at Qatar Preparatory School.

The full-day programme combines agricultural experiences with creative workshops, including mangrove ink-making and traditional Tatzreez embroidery, alongside a film screening supported by the Doha Film Institute. Organisers say the initiative underscores themes of sustainability, craftsmanship, and shared heritage.

Meanwhile, the Fire Station will host a Ramadan Night designed to bring together artists, creatives, and the wider public. The event will feature a creative marketplace, workshops for various age groups, and live performances, offering an informal yet vibrant setting for cultural interaction.

Ramadan programming at the Museum of Islamic Art further enriches the month's offerings. Visitors can attend calligraphy workshops, environmental discussions, and storytelling sessions, while the museum's Majlis Film Club will screen a documentary exploring nomadic traditions. The activities reflect the museum's commitment to linking Islamic artistic heritage with contemporary conversations on sustainability and creativity.

## Visit Qatar announces new activation 'Al Ruwais-Maritime Heritage Festival'

THE PENINSULA

**DOHA:** Visit Qatar has announced the upcoming launch of a new activation, Al Ruwais-the Maritime Heritage Festival, taking place from March 18 to April 4, 2026. Part of Qatar's northern tourism development strategy, the activation has been designed as a culturally authentic, community-driven and environmentally conscious experience celebrating the nation's maritime heritage and coastal traditions.

Curated as a living village along the northern shoreline, the Al Ruwais activation will offer residents and visitors the opportunity to engage with local fishermen, artisans, storytellers and chefs through immersive experiences that blend heritage preservation and education.

Commenting on the announcement, Director of Festivals and Events at Visit Qatar Ahmed Al-Binali said: "The Al Ruwais-Maritime Heritage Festival activation, reflects Visit Qatar's commitment to showcasing Qatar's cultural heritage through experiences that are authentic, accessible and rooted in community participation. By bringing maritime traditions, storytelling, craftsmanship and coastal cuisine together in Al Ruwais, this activation will offer residents a meaningful opportunity to engage with the cultural foundations of coastal life while supporting the long-term positioning of the north as a distinctive tourism destination."

Al Ruwais will bring together multiple themed zones inspired by Qatar's maritime, anchored by a central dhow installation and a traditional souq that will host artisan stalls and interactive games linked to fishing and harbour life.

A dedicated craft zone will feature live demonstrations and workshops led by skilled artisans, showcasing practices such as dhow making, fishing net knitting, pottery, palm frond weaving, pearl mining demonstrations, Arabic calligraphy and henna art.

The marine education zone will offer interactive learning experiences including the Sea Symbols Quiz Station, Live marine shows and booths for participating entities. All aimed at raising awareness about marine protection, sustainable fishing and coastal conservation.

Family-friendly programming will include creative workshops, interactive learning and play-based activities, with highlights such as the Safi the Fish environmental installation, a net playground, storytelling sessions, puppet theatre performances and a virtual reality experience inspired by Qatar's pearl diving heritage.

Cultural performances will animate the village throughout the day, with a main stage hosting Ardah processions, maritime chants, Fidyjeri sea songs, poetry readings, storytelling sessions and live music, complemented by roaming performers across the site.

## Qatar's online sales market to reach QR18bn

FROM PAGE 1

Omar said, "Doha's urban density gives quick-commerce operators a structural advantage. The ability to fulfil orders rapidly strengthens customer loyalty and increases basket frequency, which contributes directly to overall market growth." On the other hand, fintech innovation is also supporting the sector's expansion. The report states that the licensing of Sharia-compliant buy-now-pay-later (BNPL) solutions has introduced new liquidity into the market, reducing cart abandonment rates and enabling consumers to manage higher-value purchases more flexibly.

"Historically, checkout friction limited online transaction sizes," Omar said. "Regulated BNPL products that align with local financial principles have

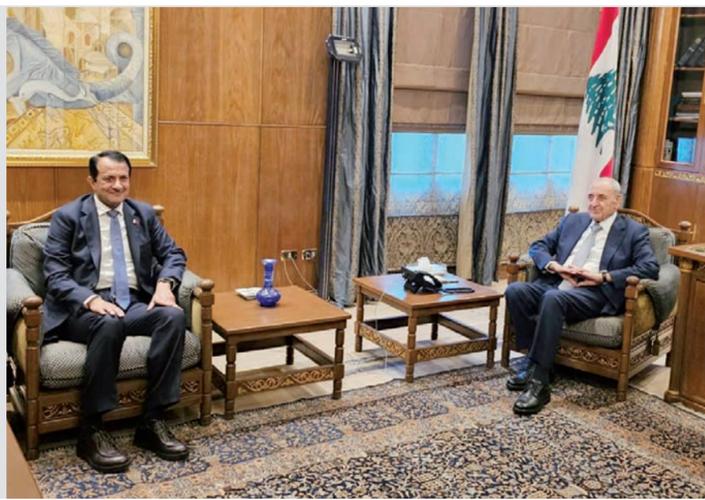
helped unlock deferred spending without compromising compliance."

Beyond consumer retail, B2B e-commerce is emerging as a second, less cyclical growth engine. Procurement digitalisation linked to stadium maintenance, infrastructure projects and smart-city pilots has shifted purchasing processes from traditional offline methods to integrated online platforms.

Omar further added, "Corporate and government procurement is increasingly digital. This transition creates steady transaction volumes that are less sensitive to consumer sentiment and seasonal fluctuations." Industry observers also mention that seamless 5G connectivity and high smartphone penetration continue to strengthen the digital ecosystem.

## Lebanon's Speaker and Qatari envoy discuss ties

Speaker of the Parliament of the Republic of Lebanon H E Nabih Berri met yesterday with Ambassador of the State of Qatar to Lebanon H E Sheikh Saud bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani. During the meeting, they discussed cooperation and relations between the two countries.



## HBKU College of Science and Engineering hosts Industry and Government Advisory Board meeting

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Leaders and decision makers from across Qatar's business community gathered at Education City for the second meeting of Hamad Bin Khalifa University's (HBKU) Industry and Government Advisory Board (IGAB).

Organised by HBKU's College of Science and Engineering (CSE), the IGAB is composed of prominent figures and academics committed to advancing the University's mission to develop capabilities and cultivate professionals who drive meaningful change. In doing so, board members provide counsel, funding, and additional support, enabling CSE faculty and students to gain hands-on experience in real-world settings.

Serving as a strategic bridge between academia and industry, IGAB ensures that HBKU's research areas address national



H E Dr. Mohammed bin Saleh Al-Sada and other officials during the meeting.

priorities. Chaired by former Minister of Energy and Industry, H E Dr. Mohammed bin Saleh Al-Sada, the gathering was also attended by Chief Executive Officer, Ooredoo Qatar, Sheikh Ali bin Jabor Al Thani; Deputy Chief Executive Officer QAFCO (Qatar Fertiliser Company), Sheikh Khaled bin Abdallah Al Thani; and Acting CEO, Qatar

District Cooling Company (Qatar Cool), Nahar Al Mutawah.

In addition, corporate leaders Taher Hamid, President and General Manager, Exxon-Mobil Qatar, and Neil Gunnion, Country Head and VP Operations, McDermott International, Ltd Middle East Inc, as well as representatives from energy and technology companies, added

key insights to the meeting, underlining the multidisciplinary reach of the Board.

H E Dr. Mohammed bin Saleh Al-Sada, said, "The advisory board ensures HBKU's research directly feeds into key economic drivers, such as human capital development and technological innovation. By bringing together leaders from

academia, industry and government, collaboration is strengthened, ensuring efforts translate into real-world impact. Our shared commitment to building capacity in Qatar will undoubtedly create clearer pathways that directly support the state's diversification ambitions."

During the session, attendees were updated on research activities as well as the expanded undergraduate and graduate programs. Faculty presentations highlighted key projects and engagements with local industry, demonstrating how HBKU actively leverages synergies with partners to facilitate expertise, build capacity, and translate research into practical applications.

Dean, CSE, Dr. Mounir Hamdi said, "The Industry and Government Advisory Board is a cornerstone of our strategy to position CSE as a catalyst for innovation and economic

transformation. Through this powerful partnership, we are co-designing future-ready programs, advancing mission-driven research, and creating a dynamic talent pipeline that directly supports Qatar's transition to a knowledge-based economy."

Dr. Hassan Said Bazzi, Head, Division of Science, and Professor of Chemistry, CSE, added: "The Industry and Government Advisory Board reflects the depth of HBKU's partnership with Qatar's leading industrial sectors. Through leadership and sustained engagement, members add to our academic focus, enhance our priority areas, and ensure our graduates are equipped with the skills and qualifications required to excel in a rapidly evolving workforce. By aligning innovation with market demands, we are translating research into market-ready solutions that further national development."

## Three new Qatari sites added to ICESCO Heritage List

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Qatar Museums has announced the successful inscription of a further three significant Qatari heritage sites on the Heritage List of the Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (ICESCO), reflecting Qatar's sustained commitment to preserving, promoting, and sharing its rich cultural legacy with regional and international audiences.

The newly inscribed sites, the village of Al Mafjar, the Ain Mohammed Village Site, and Al-Murwab Archaeological Site, mark a significant addition to Qatar's cultural recognition. With these inscriptions, the total number of Qatari sites inscribed on the ICESCO Heritage List now rises to ten, further reinforcing the country's commitment to preserving and celebrating its rich heritage. Previously recognised sites included Al Zubarah Fort, Al Jassasiya

*With these inscriptions, the total number of Qatari sites inscribed on the ICESCO Heritage List now rises to ten.*

Site, the Old Palace at the National Museum of Qatar, Al Ruwais Mosque, Al Rekayat Fort, Barzan Towers, and Al Khulaifi Heritage House.

Chief Executive Officer of Qatar Museums Mohammed Saad Al Rumaihi stated: "The inscription of these three sites on the ICESCO Heritage List marks another important milestone in Qatar's cultural journey. It reflects our nation's deep-rooted commitment to safeguarding its heritage and ensuring that future generations remain connected to the historical narratives that shape our identity. We are proud to see Qatar's heritage receiving increasing regional and international recognition."

The successful preparation and submission of the nomination files were carried out by Qatar Museum's specialised teams, including the International and Government Affairs Department led by Dr. Fatema Hassan Al-Sulaiti and the Architectural Conservation Department led by Adel Al Moslamani. Their coordinated efforts ensured comprehensive documentation and alignment with ICESCO's heritage criteria.

Al-Sulaiti commented: "This successful inscription is the result of extensive collaboration, technical preparation, and strategic coordination. Our teams worked diligently to highlight the 'Outstanding Universal Value' of these sites, ensuring they resonate with the shared history of the Islamic world. This achievement strengthens our role as partners in global heritage preservation." The inscription of the Village of Al Mafjar, Ain Mohammed Village



The newly inscribed sites include the village of Al Mafjar, the Ain Mohammed Village Site, and Al-Murwab Archaeological Site.

Site, and Al-Murwab Archaeological Site further strengthens Qatar's leading role in safeguarding and advancing cultural heritage preservation across the Islamic world, underscoring the nation's proactive commitment to international collaboration in the recognition, preservation, and promotion of shared heritage.

Al Moslamani added: "The recognition of these sites underscores the importance of continued archaeological research, documentation, and conservation efforts. Our priority remains the protection and sustainable management of Qatar's heritage sites to ensure their preservation for generations to come."

## UDC launches The Pearl Island Ramadan Padel Tournament with 32 teams

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Continuing its established Ramadan sporting tradition, United Development Company (UDC), the master developer of The Pearl Island and Gewan Island, has officially launched the third edition of The Pearl Island Ramadan Padel Tournament for Men, taking place from February 22 to March 3, 2026.

The tournament brings together 32 teams competing for the championship title in one of the most anticipated community sporting events of the Holy Month.

Each evening at 9pm, The Pearl Island's padel courts in Fanar Fayrouz come alive with dynamic competition, as skill, strategy, and determination

unfold in an atmosphere defined by Ramadan's spirit of unity and shared experience. Building on the strong momentum of previous editions, the tournament continues to strengthen its position on the community sporting calendar, particularly amid the growing popularity of padel as one of the region's fastest-rising sports, known for its energy and spectator appeal.

The tournament reflects UDC's broader vision of cultivating an integrated and vibrant community through thoughtfully curated sporting initiatives that enhance quality of life. By providing well-organized, safe, and engaging environments for residents and visitors alike, UDC reinforces its commitment to investing in sports



The tournament is taking place from February 22 to March 3, 2026.

infrastructure, promoting healthy lifestyles, and fostering positive competition that strengthens social bonds.

Commenting on the occasion, Eng. Abdullatif Ali Al

Yafei, Executive Director of Public Services at United Development Company, stated: "This third edition of the tournament reaffirms UDC's commitment to supporting sporting initiatives

that bring our community together, particularly during the Holy Month of Ramadan. Through events such as our Ramadan Football and Padel tournaments, we continue to promote active lifestyles, social engagement, and meaningful shared experiences. We wish all participating teams the best of success and look forward to welcoming residents and visitors to enjoy the vibrant atmosphere of this special Ramadan event." The tournament is expected to draw strong attendance throughout its duration, as The Pearl Island's Ramadan sporting evenings offer families and sports enthusiasts an ideal setting to enjoy competitive matches in a distinctive and lively atmosphere.

## 'Mahaseel' illuminates Katara evenings during the holy month

FROM PAGE 1

The three-day workshop is open to participants aged 15 and above, offering them the opportunity to explore the aesthetics and artistic styles of Diwani calligraphy in an experience that combines creative skill with aesthetic appreciation. Registration is available through Katara's official website.

The Ramadan atmosphere at Katara is further enhanced by authentic heritage events, most notably the Iftar meal and the pre-dawn meal (Musahhar), which infuse the atmosphere with a beloved traditional spirit, reflecting the beauty of heritage.



Community members during the Iftar gathering.

## QVPF hosts annual Iftar gathering for community

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Qatar Vanimal Pravasi Forum (QVPF), a socio-cultural organisation of Indian expatriates from Vanimal Panchayat in Kerala, hosted its annual Iftar gathering at the Asian Town Cricket Stadium Recreation Hall, bringing together over 800 community members.

The event was widely praised for its excellent organisation and strong turnout, reflecting the enduring unity and vibrancy of the Vanimal diaspora in Qatar.

For the past 25 years, QVPF has been a cornerstone of community engagement, promoting arts, culture, education, and public service across Qatar. The Iftar gathering highlighted the forum's ongoing commitment to fostering connections within the diaspora.

Wajid Wafi Chembrassy delivered an inspiring Ramadan message, emphasising the significance of such communal gatherings in strengthening bonds among expatriates. ICBF Secretary Jafar Thayyil extended his greetings, while QVPF General Secretary Sadath Saga officially welcomed attendees. President Subair K K presided over the function, and Treasurer Faisal V P expressed a vote of thanks to the community for their participation and support.

A special highlight of the evening was a session by Zaneeya, a renowned mind coach in Qatar, who addressed hundreds of women members on personal growth and empowerment. Selika Amjad welcomed the gathering. Former Panchayat President Suraiyya Teacher also addressed the community.

# Iran, US hold talks in push to avert war

GENEVA: Iran and the United States held talks in Switzerland yesterday, in a last-ditch bid to avert war under the shadow of the biggest American military build-up in the Middle East in decades.

The Oman-mediated discussions follow repeated threats from Donald Trump to strike Iran, with the US president last Thursday giving Tehran 15 days to reach a deal. While Iran has insisted the discussions focus solely on its nuclear programme, the US wants Tehran's missile programme and its support for militant groups in the region curtailed.

The US and Iranian delegations held a morning session at the Omani ambassador's residence amid tight security, and then paused ahead of resuming at around 1630-1700 GMT according to the foreign ministry in Tehran.

Oman's Foreign Minister Badr Albusaidi said after discussions began that the two sides expressed "unprecedented openness to new and creative ideas and solutions". UN nuclear chief Rafael Grossi joined the negotiations, a source close to the talks told AFP, with an Iranian state TV journalist also reporting he was attending.

Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian insisted ahead of the talks that the Islamic republic was not "at all" seeking a nuclear weapon.

As part of the dramatic US



Iranian diplomats and delegation during the Iran and US talks in Geneva, Switzerland, yesterday. (AFP)

build-up, the USS Gerald R Ford, the world's largest aircraft carrier, sent to the Mediterranean this week, left a naval base in Crete yesterday, an AFP photographer said.

Washington currently has more than a dozen warships in the Middle East: one aircraft carrier — the USS Abraham Lincoln — nine destroyers and three other combat ships.

It is rare for there to be two US aircraft carriers, which carry dozens of warplanes and are crewed by thousands of sailors,

in the region. The developments follow massive protests in Iran that rights groups say saw thousands of demonstrators killed.

In his State of the Union address on Tuesday, Trump accused Iran of "pursuing sinister nuclear ambitions", though Tehran has always insisted its programme is for civilian purposes.

Trump also claimed Tehran had "already developed missiles that can threaten Europe and our bases overseas, and they're working to build missiles that

will soon reach the United States of America".

The Iranian foreign ministry called these claims "big lies".

The maximum range of Iran's missiles is 2,000km (1,200 miles), according to what Tehran has publicly disclosed.

However, the US Congressional Research Service estimates they top out at about 3,000km — less than a third of the distance to the continental United States.

Trump's State of the Union accusations in Congress were

delivered in the same forum in which then-president George W Bush laid out the case for the invasion of Iraq in 2003.

Ahead of yesterday's talks, Secretary of State Marco Rubio warned that Iran must also negotiate on its missile programme, calling Tehran's refusal to discuss ballistic weapons "a big, big problem".

He followed up by saying "the president wants diplomatic solutions". US Vice President JD Vance told Iran to take Trump's threats "seriously", saying the US leader had a "right" to use military action.

"You can't let the craziest and worst regime in the world have nuclear weapons," Vance told "America's Newsroom" on Fox News. Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, who is leading the Iranian delegation at the talks, has called them "a historic opportunity", adding that a deal was "within reach".

The US was to be represented by envoy Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner, who is married to Trump's daughter Ivanka.

The two countries held talks earlier this month in Oman, then gathered for a second round in Geneva last week.

A previous attempt at negotiations collapsed when Israel launched surprise strikes on Iran last June, beginning a 12-day war that Washington briefly joined to bomb Iranian nuclear sites. — AFP

## Afghan military attacks Pakistan after air strikes

KABUL: Afghanistan attacked Pakistani forces yesterday and claimed to have killed and captured dozens of soldiers in retaliation for deadly air strikes days earlier.

The offensive at multiple points along the frontier follows a series of border clashes and Pakistani strikes on Afghanistan in recent months.

"In response to repeated violations by the Pakistani military, large-scale offensive operations were launched against Pakistani military bases and military installations," Taliban government spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said.

The governor's office and residents in the province of Kunar told AFP that military action was under way, while Afghan officials said armed forces were operating in multiple other provinces.

Pakistan said the attack was "being met with immediate, and effective response".

Afghanistan "opened unprovoked fire on multiple locations" across the border in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, Islamabad's information ministry said.

The Taliban government spokesman told AFP that Afghan forces had captured more than 15 Pakistani outposts in two hours.

"Dozens of (Pakistani) soldiers have been killed and we have transferred 10 dead bodies to Kunar and other areas. There are also several wounded and caught alive," Mujahid said.

There were no immediate reports of Afghan casualties. The military operation follows Pakistani strikes on Nangarhar and Paktika provinces overnight into Sunday, which the UN mission in Afghanistan said killed at least 13 civilians.

The Taliban government said at least 18 people were killed and denied Pakistan's announcement that the military operation left more than 80 militants dead. Both sides also reported cross-border fire on Tuesday, but without casualties. — AFP

## Israel aims to bring 'permanent demographic change' to West Bank, Gaza

GENEVA: Israel's actions in the occupied West Bank and the Gaza Strip seem aimed at creating "permanent demographic change", UN rights chief Volker Turk said yesterday.

"Taken together, Israel's actions appear aimed at making a permanent demographic change in Gaza and the West Bank, raising concerns about ethnic cleansing", Turk said in a speech before the UN's Human Rights Council in Geneva.

Turk pointed in particular to an ongoing, year-long Israeli military operation in the West Bank's north that has caused the displacement of 32,000 Palestinians.

Elsewhere in the West Bank, entire Bedouin herder communities have been displaced by

increasing harassment and violence from Israeli settlers, including near Mikhmas to the east of Ramallah, and Ras Ein Al-Auja, in the Jordan Valley, since the start of the year.

In addition to roughly three million Palestinians, more than 500,000 Israelis live in settlements and outposts in the West Bank, which are considered illegal under international law.

Israel has approved a series of initiatives this month backed by far-right ministers, including launching a process to register land in the West Bank as "state property" and allowing Israelis to purchase land there directly, in a move condemned by several countries as well as Hamas.

Israel's current government

has accelerated settlement expansion, approving a record 54 settlements in 2025, according to Israeli settlement watchdog NGO Peace Now.

Israel has occupied the West Bank since 1967.

In the Gaza Strip, most of the territory's 2.2 million inhabitants have been displaced at least once since the start of the war sparked by Hamas's unprecedented attack against Israel on October 7, 2023.

"Intensified attacks, the methodical destruction of entire neighbourhoods and the denial of humanitarian assistance appeared to aim at a permanent demographic shift in Gaza", the UN human rights office said in a report last week.

Israeli far-right Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich also

vowed to encourage "emigration" from the Palestinian territories in February.

"We will finally, formally and in practical terms nullify the cursed Oslo Accords and embark on a path toward sovereignty, while encouraging emigration from both Gaza and Judea and Samaria," he said, using the Biblical term for the West Bank.

"There is no other long-term solution," added Smotrich, who himself lives in a settlement in the West Bank.

"They want maximum land and minimum Arabs", Fathi Nimer, a researcher with Palestinian think tank Al-Shabaka, told AFP, referring to a commonly used phrase used to describe Israeli settlement tactics. — AFP



## North Korea's Kim shuns South but could 'get along' with US

SEOUL: Kim Jong-un (pictured) said North Korea could "get along" with Washington if it accepted Pyongyang's nuclear status, state media said yesterday, but has dashed any hopes of mended ties with "deceptive" neighbour Seoul.

Washington and Seoul have mounted a renewed push for high-level talks with reclusive North Korea, eyeing a potential summit between Kim and US President Donald Trump in China later this year.

Having largely ignored these overtures for months, Kim finally staked his position as thousands gathered in Pyongyang for a rare congress of the ruling Workers' Party. — AFP

## Philippine volcano sends ash into sky

MANILA: A volcano erupted in the central Philippines yesterday evening, sending a billowing plume of ash about 2,500 metres (1.5 miles) into the nighttime sky.

The two-minute eruption began at 7.04pm (1104 GMT), state volcanology agency director Teresito Bacolcol told AFP, saying "there might be a bigger explosive eruption in the next few days".

Kanlaon Volcano, one of 24 active volcanoes in the archipelago nation, has had several major eruptions in the past century — including a 1996 blast that killed three hikers who were near the summit at the time. "This is the second moderate eruption in a week," Bacolcol said in a phone interview, adding his agency would monitor the volcano for 24 hours before deciding if it should raise the alert level from two to three on its five-point scale. — AFP

## No proven link between Duterte speeches and drug deaths, defence tells ICC

THE HAGUE: There is no proven link between the "uniquely colourful and crusty" speeches of former Philippines president Rodrigo Duterte and the murders he is accused of, his defence lawyer told the International Criminal Court yesterday.

On the third day of a hearing to decide whether Duterte should face trial on crimes against humanity charges over his "war on drugs", lawyer Nicholas Kaufman said the prosecution had failed to show his client had directly ordered any murders.

"There is no smoking gun in this case," Kaufman told the three-judge panel at the ICC.

"Not one witness relevant to any of the 49 incidents with which Mr. Rodrigo Duterte is charged will testify that he received a direct order from the former president to go out and kill someone."

Duterte has not attended proceedings, waiving his right to appear. Kaufman says the 80-year-old is not mentally fit to follow the hearing.

The lack of evidence of a "causal nexus" between



Families of victims in extrajudicial killings watch a live stream of Duterte's hearing from The Hague, in Quezon City, Metro Manila yesterday. (AFP)

Duterte's words and alleged crimes "should be sufficient to convince any reasonable bystander... that Rodrigo Duterte is innocent of these charges levelled at him", said Kaufman.

Earlier in the week, the prosecution laid out their case: that Duterte played a "pivotal" role in a campaign of extrajudicial killings that saw thousands murdered.

Duterte personally drew up death lists, incited murders and then boasted about them after-

wards, prosecutors alleged.

They showed multiple videos of the former president threatening to murder alleged drug users and joking about his skills in extrajudicial killing.

But Kaufman said the prosecution had "cherry picked" speeches, ignoring what he said were dozens of examples of Duterte stressing the need to act within the law.

"Do not kill if you are not in danger of losing your life," Kaufman cited Duterte as saying in one speech. — AFP

## Civilian death toll in Sudan war more than doubled in 2025, says UN

GENEVA: Killings of civilians in Sudan's war more than doubled in 2025 compared with the previous year, the United Nations rights chief said yesterday, warning that thousands more dead are unidentified or remain missing.

Since April 2023, Sudan has been engulfed in a conflict between the army and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) that has killed tens of thousands,

displaced 11 million people and triggered one of the world's worst humanitarian crises.

"This war is ugly. It's bloody and it's senseless," Volker Turk told the UN Human Rights Council, blaming both warring sides, which have so far rejected any form of humanitarian truce. He also blamed foreign sponsors funding what he called a "high-tech" conflict.

"In 2025, my office's

documentation points to an over two and a half times increase in killings of civilians compared with the previous year. Many thousands are still missing or unidentified," Turk said. There have been no official figures on the overall death toll in the conflict.

Turk condemned what he called the "heinous and ruthless" brutalities committed, including physical abuse,

summary executions and arbitrary detentions.

He highlighted "carnage" inflicted by the RSF during an attack on the Zamzam displacement camp in April, and again in October in El-Fasher, which was the army's last foothold in western Darfur.

Violence, torture and slavery, has also surged, Turk said, with more than 500 victims documented in 2025. — AFP



## World in brief

### Israel launches air strikes in eastern Lebanon

BEIRUT: Israeli warplanes launched yesterday a series of airstrikes on eastern Lebanon. Lebanon's National News Agency (NNA) reported a series of violent explosions in the Bekaa Valley, coinciding with low-altitude flights by Israeli warplanes. Israeli warplanes also launched a series of airstrikes targeting the western Baalbek region. On the other hand, field sources said that an Israeli drone targeted the Ali Al Taher area, on the northeastern outskirts of Nabatieh city, southern Lebanon, with a guided missile.

In a related context, the NNA said that the Lebanese army is completing its defensive measures in the Sarda area, where it installed metal wires along the earthen barrier. — QNA

### Hong Kong: Jimmy Lai wins appeal in fraud case

HONG KONG: Hong Kong pro-democracy media tycoon Jimmy Lai won an appeal yesterday over a 2022 fraud conviction, days after a court jailed him on separate national security charges. The ruling was a surprise win for Lai, the 78-year-old founder of the now-defunct Apple Daily newspaper, who was sentenced to 20 years behind bars this month on collusion charges under a Beijing-imposed national security law. — AFP

### China removes minister following graft probe

BEIJING: China ousted its minister of emergency management and stripped a former provincial party secretary of his legislative role yesterday, state media reported, following corruption probes into the pair.

The Standing Committee of the 14th National People's Congress (NPC), the country's top legislature, voted to remove Wang Xiangxi as minister of emergency management after a probe by the country's anti-corruption watchdog, state broadcaster CCTV reported. They also voted to remove Liu Shaoyun from his position as head of the People's Liberation Army's military court, without explaining why. — AFP

### Japan's births fall to record low in 2025

TOKYO: The number of babies born in Japan in 2025 fell from a year earlier to 705,809, the lowest since records began in 1899 and marking a 10th consecutive year of record lows, health ministry data showed yesterday.

The figure, including those of foreign nationals, was down 2.1 percent from 2024, the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare said. Japanese media have widely predicted that the number of babies born to Japanese nationals within Japan — due to be released around June — could fall into the 600,000 range for the first time. Kyodo News reported that the decline in births happened amid a rapidly graying population and increased anxiety over child-rearing due to the higher cost of living amid inflation. — XINHUA

# US, Ukraine hold talks in Geneva as Russia says 'no deadlines' to end war

**GENEVA:** US and Ukrainian officials were meeting in Geneva yesterday to discuss advancing efforts to end Russia's four-year invasion of Ukraine, just as Moscow signalled it was in no hurry to sign a deal.

US leader Donald Trump is pushing for an end to Europe's deadliest conflict since World War II, but has so far failed to broker any deal between Moscow and Kyiv.

Previous rounds of US-led negotiations between Russian and Ukrainian officials in Geneva and Abu Dhabi have failed to yield a compromise, including on the key sticking point of territory.

Russia, which has signalled it will not budge on its demands for full control of Ukraine's eastern Donetsk region, said yesterday it was too early to make forecasts about when a deal would take place.

"Have you heard anything from us about deadlines? We have no deadlines, we have tasks. We are getting them done," Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov told state media.

Kyiv says the only way of breaking the deadlock is a leaders' meeting between Vladimir Putin and Volodymyr Zelensky, and that it aims to lay the ground for such a



Ukraine's lead negotiator Rustem Umerov arrives to an hotel in Geneva, Switzerland, prior to fresh talks with US envoys yesterday. (AFP)

summit during talks yesterday.

"Today in Geneva we continue our work within the framework of the negotiation process. A bilateral meeting with the American delegation has begun — with Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner," Ukraine's lead negotiator Rustem Umerov said.

Ukraine aims to "synchronize positions" with the United States ahead of fresh trilateral talks in March, he added.

Russian negotiator Kirill Dmitriev plans to be in Geneva yesterday, though there is no indication he plans to meet the Ukrainian side, according to Russian state media.

"Dmitriev plans to arrive in Geneva on Thursday to pursue negotiations with the Americans on economic issues," Russia's TASS news agency cited an unnamed source as saying.

Hours before the meeting,

Russian forces launched some 420 drones and 39 missiles at Ukraine, wounding more than two dozen people in at least six different regions, according to authorities.

AFP journalists heard several explosions in central Kyiv shortly after authorities warned Russia had launched its attack.

The strikes hit an electricity substation in the southern Odesa region, as well as a school building in the southern Zaporizhzhia region, according to officials.

"Destruction has been recorded in eight regions, with many private homes and apartment buildings damaged," Zelensky said.

Also ahead of the meeting, Russia announced that it had returned the bodies of 1,000 killed Ukrainian soldiers to Ukraine, while Moscow received 35 Russian bodies in exchange.

The two sides regularly exchange the remains of killed servicemen, one of the few areas of cooperation between the warring countries.

Zelensky spoke with US President Donald Trump on Wednesday ahead of the talks, with US envoys Witkoff and Kushner part of the 30-minute call. — **AFP**

## US aircraft carrier Gerald R Ford departs Greece for Middle East

**CHANIA:** The US nuclear-powered aircraft carrier Gerald R Ford departed from the NATO naval facility at Souda Bay on the Greek island of Crete yesterday morning, heading toward the Middle East, according to Greek daily *Kathimerini*.

The vessel is expected to reach Israel within 24 hours, reports said. According to US media reports, the carrier arrived at Souda Bay on Feb 23 for resupply after experiencing repeated malfunctions in its onboard sewage system.

Commissioned in 2017, the Gerald R. Ford aircraft carrier is 334 meters in length, with a displacement exceeding 100,000 tonnes and a crew of nearly 4,600. — **XINHUA**

## Ukraine to receive first LNG shipment via Lithuania's Klaipeda terminal

**KIEV:** Ukraine will receive its first liquefied natural gas (LNG) shipment via the Klaipeda terminal in Lithuania, Ukraine's state-owned gas operator Naftogaz Group said yesterday.

Naftogaz, in cooperation with Lithuania's state-controlled energy group Ignitis Group, has secured the supply of 90 million cubic meters of LNG to be delivered throughout February and March, according to a company statement. The gas will be transported through the Klaipeda LNG terminal, with Naftogaz arranging delivery to Ukraine independently, it said. — **XINHUA**

## Two Dutch organisations sue Grok over unconsented AI images

**THE HAGUE:** Dutch online abuse expertise center Offlimits and the independent civil society group Victim Support Fund announced yesterday that they have initiated summary proceedings against the AI tool Grok on social media platform X.

The two organizations are seeking an immediate ban on the AI tool, alleging that it enables users to partially or fully undress individuals without their consent and to generate and distribute images depicting the abuse of minors. In a joint press release, Offlimits and the Victim Support Fund said the number of victims is growing at an alarming rate, and swift action is needed to prevent new victims. — **XINHUA**

## Asylum seeker claims in UK drop slightly in 2025: Government data

**LONDON:** The number of people claiming asylum in the UK in 2025 fell slightly compared to the previous record year, government figures showed yesterday, despite small boat arrivals jumping 13 percent. The interior ministry data showed 100,625 people applied for asylum in Britain last year, down four percent on 2024, but still more than double pre-pandemic levels.

Just over half — 52 percent — had arrived in the UK through illegal entry routes, typically on small boats bound for the shores of southeast England from France. The cross-Channel journeys have become politically toxic in Britain, helping to fuel the rise of eurosceptic Nigel Farage's anti-immigration Reform UK party, which has led in the polls for the last year. — **AFP**

## Danish Prime Minister calls general election for March 24

**COPENHAGEN:** Denmark's Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen (*pictured*) said yesterday that she had scheduled this year's general election for March 24, against a backdrop of tensions with both the United States and Russia.



The vote comes at a time when Denmark's relationship with the United States — which Copenhagen considers its closest ally — has been strained over US President Donald Trump's desire to acquire Greenland.

"Dear Danes, today I have asked His Majesty the King to call an election for the Folketing," Denmark's parliament, Frederiksen told the house. "Whether I will continue to be your prime minister depends on how strong a mandate you give the Social Democrats in the parliamentary

election to be held on March 24, 2026," she added. Under the Danish system, Frederiksen had to call an election within four years of the last, which was held on November 1, 2022.

Frederiksen took the opportunity to present the outlines of her election platform, which included a reform of the retirement age and the introduction of a wealth tax. — **AFP**

## Cuba vows to counter 'terrorist' attacks after clashing with US-based boat

**HAVANA:** Cuba vowed yesterday to defend against "terrorist and mercenary" attacks after reporting it had killed four gunmen on a US-registered boat — a bloody incident that added to deepening tensions between Havana and Washington.

President Miguel Diaz-Canel denounced Wednesday's incident as an attempted "infiltration" and said "Cuba will defend itself with determination and firmness against any terrorist and mercenary aggression against its sovereignty and national stability."

Cuban authorities said their forces responded after coming under fire from a Florida-registered speedboat just off the communist island's north coast.

Four of the alleged assailants were killed and six wounded, the interior ministry said. All aboard were Cubans living in the United States, according to the ministry.

The survivors were detained and are accused of intending to "carry out an infiltration for the purposes of

terrorism," the ministry said, reporting that assault rifles, handguns, Molotov cocktails and other military-style gear were seized.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said Washington had nothing to do with the clash and would "respond accordingly" after investigating.

The attorney general of Florida, which lies about 100 miles (160 kilometers) from Cuba across the Florida Straits, also ordered an investigation into the killings.

The Cuban interior ministry has released what it says are the names of seven of the people on the boat and said most of the 10 aboard had records in Cuba for "criminal and violent activity."

Another man sent from the United States to take part in this operation was arrested on Cuban soil and confessed, it added. The Cuban government frequently reports incursions by speedboats from the United States into its territorial waters but deadly clashes are rarer. — **AFP**

## Ecuador President fires new salvo in drug-related trade war with Colombia

**QUITO:** Ecuador escalated a month-old trade war with Colombia yesterday, hiking tariffs on imports from its neighbour to 50 percent over Bogota's alleged failure to combat organized crime along their shared border.

Ecuador's President Daniel Noboa, a staunch Washington ally, last month announced 30-percent tariffs on Colombia for what he called its lack of cooperation in combating drug trafficking and illegal mining. The move echoed President Donald Trump's tariff hikes on Canada and China — and threatened increases on Mexico — which he partly attributed to fentanyl trafficking into the United States. Colombia responded in kind to the tariffs and also suspended electricity sales to Ecuador, which in turn hiked a levy on Colombian oil flowing through an Ecuadorian pipeline by 900 percent. — **AFP**

## Trump calls Robert De Niro 'sick, demented' after actor's criticism

**WASHINGTON:** US President Donald Trump on Wednesday called screen legend Robert De Niro "sick and demented" after the actor urged Americans to "resist" his administration.

The "Taxi Driver" and "The Godfather" star is a vocal critic of Trump, and used his lifetime achievement award speech at the Cannes Film Festival last year to slam the "philistine" president.

"Trump Deranged Robert De Niro, another sick and demented person with, I believe, an extremely low IQ, who has absolutely no idea what he is doing or saying — some of which is seriously CRIMINAL!" Trump wrote in a lengthy post on his Truth Social platform. — **AFP**

## UK Labour party fights hard right, leftists in traditional stronghold

**MANCHESTER:** Voters in northern England cast ballots yesterday in a local poll seen as a key test of the ruling Labour party's ability to fend off growing support for the hard right and leftists, as the country's traditional two-party system splinters.

Defeat for the government in the parliamentary by-election would add to the woes facing unpopular UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer, who endures frequent mutterings about how much longer he can stay in office.

Labour has dominated the Manchester constituency of Gorton and Denton for decades and won almost 51 percent of the vote there at the July 2024 general election that swept Starmer to power.

But less than two years later, it is locked in a three-way fight for the seat with the anti-immigration Reform UK, led by Nigel Farage, and the Greens, led by left-winger Zack Polanski.

The lead-up to polling day has been fraught, with party leaders hurling insults at each other and activists accusing each other of misinformation and breaking campaign laws, highlighting the high stakes.

"I voted Reform because of immigration — I'm sick of it," retired nurse Elaine Simpson told AFP outside a polling station in Denton, a majority white working-class part of the constituency.

The 78-year-old noted she no longer trusted Britain's more



A person pushing a buggy walks past a polling station sign in Levenshulme, Greater Manchester yesterday to cast their ballot in the crucial Gorton and Denton by-election. (AFP)

establishment parties, adding: "You wouldn't be able to print what I think of Keir Starmer."

In nearby Levenshulme, home to more student and Muslim voters, the Greens appeared ascendant.

"The Green Party is offering hope to the wider society, marginalised people, and I think they're the choice for working people," writer Matt Alton, 31, told AFP after casting his ballot.

"Of people that I know around my age, I don't know anyone who's said that they're not voting Green."

But local Labour councillor Basat Sheikh was confident his party

could retain the seat.

"Our message has been clear from day one that it is about unity and not division," the 45-year-old said, as pouring rain did little to encourage voter turnout, which is typically lacklustre at such contests.

Labour won the seat by more than 13,000 votes in 2024.

The battle suggests British people appear increasingly willing to look towards insurgent parties to tackle long-standing, hot-button issues like the high cost of living and irregular immigration at the next general election, expected in 2029. — **AFP**

## Nearly 8,000 died or vanished on migrant routes in 2025: UN

**BERLIN:** At least 7,667 people died or went missing last year on migration routes around the world, but the true death toll is likely higher, the UN's migration agency reported yesterday.

The figure was down on 2024 when almost 9,200 deaths were recorded, but the International Organization for Migration (IOM) said numbers nonetheless reflected the "global scale" of the crisis faced by migrants.

"The continued loss of life on migration routes is a global failure we cannot accept as normal," said IOM Director General Amy Pope.

She argued for safer legal routes, adding: "These deaths are not inevitable." Funding cuts for aid groups, crackdowns on humanitarian NGOs and limited access to data are making it more difficult to accurately track deaths, the UN agency said.

Sea crossings such as the perilous journey across the Mediterranean Sea from Africa to Europe remain among the deadliest routes for migrants, the report said. — **AFP**

## German court rules spy service may not label AfD 'extremist' for now

**BERLIN:** A German court ruled yesterday that the domestic intelligence agency cannot label the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party as a "confirmed right-wing extremist" group, at least for now.

The AfD had challenged the designation, which would empower the spy agency to use broader surveillance powers to monitor it and would embolden political opponents who are seeking a ban of the anti-immigration party.

The Cologne administrative court's decision puts the designation on hold pending the final outcome of a legal battle between the AfD and Germany's intelligence agency, the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (BfV). The court found that there are indeed efforts to undermine Germany's free democratic order from within the AfD and highlighted its demands to ban Muslim minarets, public calls to prayer and headscarves in public institutions. But it ruled

that the party as a whole is not "shaped by these efforts" such that "an anti-constitutional tendency can be established" to characterise the party in its entirety as extremist.

Alice Weidel, the party's co-leader, hailed the ruling as "a major victory not only for the AfD but also for democracy and the rule of law" in a post on X. She added that the decision had also "thrown a spanner in the works" for the "fanatics" seeking to outlaw the AfD. — **AFP**

## Instagram to warn parents when teens search for suicide terms

**SAN FRANCISCO:** Instagram will begin notifying parents when their teenage children repeatedly search for content related to suicide or self-harm, platform owner Meta announced yesterday, as the company faces mounting legal pressure over its handling of young users.

The alerts, rolling out in coming weeks in the United States, Britain, Australia and Canada, will be triggered when a teen makes multiple searches for such terms within

a short period of time.

The alerts will be expanded to other regions later in 2026.

Parents using Instagram's parental supervision tools will receive notifications via email, text or WhatsApp, as well as through the app itself, along with expert resources to help them navigate potentially difficult conversations with their children.

Instagram already blocks searches for terms associated with suicide and self-harm,

directing users instead to help lines and support organizations. The new alerts are designed to flag cases where teens persistently attempt such searches despite those restrictions.

Meta said it consulted with its Suicide and Self-Harm Advisory Group in setting the threshold for alerts, adding that it had deliberately erred on the side of caution even if that meant some notifications might be sent without genuine cause for concern. — **AFP**

EDITORIAL

Our duty to Qatar's environment

AS Qatar marks Environment Day on February 26, the message resonates with renewed urgency: "Our Behavior Reflects on Our Environment." The theme is both a reminder and a challenge. It underscores a simple yet powerful truth: sustainability always begins in daily choices of individuals.

Observed annually since 1996, Qatar Environment Day has grown into more than a ceremonial occasion. Now in its 30th year, it stands as a national milestone to assess environmental progress, refine priorities, and strengthen public awareness. It reflects a longstanding commitment to safeguarding natural resources while advancing the comprehensive development envisioned in Qatar National Vision 2030.

The leadership's message has been unequivocal. Amir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani emphasized the critical importance of protecting natural resources and preserving biodiversity to maintain balance between development ambitions and sustainability goals. In his remarks, he called on every member of society to protect the environment, noting that such efforts directly enhance public health and quality of life. This linkage between environmental stewardship and societal well-being is fundamental. A clean environment is not a luxury; it is the foundation of a thriving nation.

Over the past three decades, Qatar has built an integrated environmental system grounded in advanced legislation, strategic planning, and community engagement. Environmental sustainability is now embedded in national policy, supported by comprehensive strategies and action plans that address present needs while preparing for future challenges. Wildlife protection initiatives, strengthened environmental governance, and climate action measures demonstrate tangible progress.

Environmental protection is no longer viewed solely as the responsibility of institutions or regulatory bodies. It is increasingly understood as a shared social contract. The quality of air we breathe, the conservation of water resources, the reduction of waste, and the protection of biodiversity are shaped by everyday practices; by how responsibly we consume, recycle, conserve, and innovate.

The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change's awareness message reinforces that sustainability must move beyond aspiration into daily practice. Economic growth and environmental development are not opposing forces; they are complementary pillars of national progress. Guided by data-driven decision-making, effective governance, and coordinated action among national entities, Qatar has adopted a balanced environmental and climate policy that harmonizes development with resource protection.

Qatar's message is clear and timely: environmental responsibility is a shared duty to present and future generations. Protecting natural resources is not merely about preserving landscapes; it is about securing health, prosperity, and stability.

The quiet conquest of the West Bank and the death of the Oslo Accords



MARIAM BARGHOUTI  
AL JAZEERA

ISRAEL always had a plan to annex more land in the occupied West Bank, and its actions prove it.

This week, the Israeli cabinet approved a plan to claim Palestinian lands in the West Bank as "state land". The proposal, pushed by far-right Israeli leaders, including Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, Justice Minister Yariv Levin and Defence Minister Israel Katz, emphasises Israeli supremacy over Palestinians.

The Israeli government has created 35 new positions and allocated 244.1 million shekels (nearly \$79m) for the land registration project from 2026 to 2030.

The process outlined in the proposal is not new in itself. It is a process that has been frozen since 1967, and the most recent resumption is a continuation of Israel's longstanding plan to take over Palestinian lands. While Israel suspended the land registration process in 1967, it did not suspend its practices of ethnic cleansing, colonial violence and de facto land annexation.

For Palestinians, this decision does not mark a new escalation but a solidification of the Israeli presence in the West Bank. While it may seem like mere paperwork, it is actually a milestone in Israel's gradual takeover of the West Bank, the last remaining territorial obstacle to the completion of Israel's colonial project in Palestine.

Bureaucracy as annexation This shift cannot be understood without revisiting the Oslo Accords. Under the 1993 and 1995 agreements, the West Bank was carved into Areas A, B and C as an "interim" arrangement that was never meant to become permanent. Area C, the largest area containing the most land and resources, remained under full Israeli control while Areas A and B were left as fragmented Palestinian islands with limited Palestinian authority.

That made Area C the real battlefield.

As part of the new policy, land registration in Area C, which constitutes more than 62 percent of the West Bank, is to take place through the Land Title Settlement Administration, part of Israel's Ministry of Justice. What this in effect does is shift Area C from military administration into direct Israeli civilian governance.

These measures should not be taken lightly. They are telling of Israel's latest annexation strategy: governance.

Taken together, these measures mark a new phase of Zionist territorial conquest in the 21st century – one that relies less on overt warfare and more on administrative consolidation.

In 1948, Zionist militias pursued territorial conquest through large-scale warfare, mass displacement and the redrawing of borders. Today, conquest increasingly operates through clerical mechanisms.

It is not accidental that a minister as vocally racist as Smotrich explained the plan as an attempt to end "current chaos that is bad for everyone – Jews and Arabs alike". While Israel's goal of taking over Palestinian lands has remained unchanged, the post-Oslo era and the reputational damage Israel has sustained during its genocidal war on Gaza mean that visible and large-scale violence is not sustainable for long-term achievements in the West Bank.

So rather than tanks, bombs and dramatic declarations of territorial conquest, Israel is lowering both regional and international alarm by consolidating land through perceived bureaucracy.

From paperwork to dispossession Israel is pushing its West Bank policies as neutral cadastral clean-up when in reality they are large-scale land grabs carried out through administrative means. It is an act of state building that allows Zionist Israelis to determine whose claims over Palestinian lands are legal and whose vanish.

This is precisely why land registration matters: Once land is entered into the Israeli registry as "state land", it becomes a legal reality far more difficult to reverse than a temporary military seizure. For Palestinians, this policy signals serious danger because we have seen it before. After the large-scale dispossession of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from

their lands in 1948, about 150,000 Palestinians remained in what became Israel.

These Palestinians were put under military rule until the 1960s despite holding Israeli citizenship. This was not done for security; it was done to ensure territorial restructuring. Lands that did not have Palestinians physically present on them were absorbed through the Absentees Property Law.

A similar dynamic is unfolding today in the West Bank, where physical displacement and restricted access are again being converted into legal dispossession. In the West Bank, the last two years have seen alarming rates of settler violence that have pushed thousands of Palestinians off their lands while other areas have been taken and declared closed military zones. This denied Palestinians access to their homes, farmlands and properties. Under Israeli law, these can all be considered absentee lands, even if their rightful owners are just a few metres away and unable to reach their lands due to Israeli hostilities.

Through this, Israel is creating a system in which the default legal outcome produces territorial absorption. The bureaucratic aspect of this means that annexation becomes irreversible. It is no longer a temporary military seizure operation; it is transforming territory into property operating within a state system, in this case the Israeli legal system.

More dangerously, historical evidence shows that Israel has not only absorbed Palestinian lands through bureaucracy but also coerced Palestinians to engage with Israeli legal structures as a final avenue.

Still today, Palestinians with Israeli citizenship in areas such as Ein Hod are in legal battles over land. Not only were they displaced from their village, which now serves as a Jewish artist colony, but Palestinians are also just a few kilometres away, holding Israeli citizenship. Decades later, they remain in legal battles to secure building permits to live on the nearby lands they were forced to move to.

Why the world enables administrative conquest It is important to realise that all of this was made possible by the international community's refusal to address the criminality of the Israeli regime as a whole.

Condemnations of individual Israeli settler attacks in the last two years and refusal to disarm Israel despite having committed genocide are precisely what is allowing Israel to persist in its colonial expansion. For years Palestinians, as well as international human rights organisations, have warned not only of rising Israeli settler violence but also of a clear synchronisation of efforts by the army and armed Israeli militias in the West Bank.

Palestinians shared reports, tried to tell the stories of trees uprooted by the thousands, of water pipelines being destroyed by Israelis, of large-scale arson attacks and pogroms across different cities and towns, of settlers being armed with military-grade weapons and trained by the army in illegal settlements.

However, the world defined violence only when it came in the shape of bullets and bombs, which is what allowed Israel to shift strategies in the West Bank. While Palestinians are disarmed in the West Bank, all that was left were outcries and calls for media coverage. Violence enacted against Palestinians was reduced to random and exceptional acts of hostility.

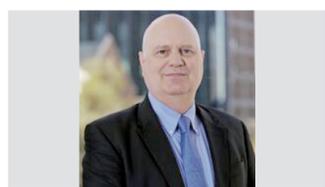
Yet in the West Bank, Israel did not choose dramatic war; it chose subtlety. In the last two years, the battlefield in the West Bank has diffused into everyday life and relocated into the nervous system. Violence no longer depends on constant lethal force but on permanent anticipation of a settler attack, a military raid or a court demolition order. Constant surveillance, drones overhead, incessant home invasions, arrests and checkpoints every few metres hold the body captive.

All of these practices paved the way for the ongoing displacement and dispossession of Palestinians from their lands. More importantly, they are precisely why Israel is able to push renewed policies to register lands as state lands and to allow Israelis to buy lands with little oversight.

What this must teach us is that sometimes war exists in the subtleties, and the absence of relentless bombing does not mean the absence of war.

– Barghouti's political commentary has been featured in the International Business Times, The New York Times, TRT-World, among others.

Factories can come back to the US. Jobs, not so much



THOMAS BLACK  
BLOOMBERG/W. POST

EVER since manufacturing employment started to decline in the US after hitting a peak of 19.6 million jobs in 1979, every president has trumpeted a plan to revive the country's industrial base. Despite these efforts, the number of factory jobs hit a bottom in 2010 (not counting a sharp one-month dip during the pandemic) and has been stuck between 12 million and 13 million for more than a decade.

The latest effort to pump up domestic output has been the most aggressive by far. Under President Donald Trump, the government has taken equity stakes in companies and browbeat industry leaders – domestic and foreign – to invest more in the US. His biggest club has been tariffs, which Trump expects will compel companies to open factories in the US instead of paying duties. Even with the Supreme

Court blocking Trump's use of the International Emergency Economic Powers Act to impose tariffs, they aren't going away.

There's also a different sense of urgency with this latest manufacturing push. The pandemic served as a urgent wake-up call that the US doesn't make nearly enough essential goods, such as pharmaceuticals and computer chips, and that the country depends too heavily on China. A second moment of clarity for the need to regain control of supply chains came in February 2022 after China gave support to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. "The reality is and the big picture is that reindustrialization is our future. Our trade relationships are at the heart of that," Michelle Giuda, the chief executive officer of the Krach Institute for Tech Diplomacy at Purdue University, said in a Bloomberg TV interview after the Supreme Court struck down most of Trump's tariffs on Friday. "There's no bringing the train back into the station." Success, however, will not be measured by a gain in factory jobs. If the effort to recapture production in the US is successful, it will be thanks to automation and robots, not in spite of this technology. The machines hold promise to drive down labor costs to a point where it doesn't make sense to produce overseas and export back to the US.

The push for more US manufacturing is an overdue realization that the country's economy is vulnerable to trade disruptions that cut off vital supplies. That concern was hammered home last year when China responded to Trump's tariffs by threatening to cut off the flow of rare earth elements, which could shut down production of a wide range of products, from automobiles to electronics.

The next conflict that impacts trade could be more permanent and damaging, which gives a sense of urgency to reinforcing supply chains. In contrast to the decades of policies to promote global trade, this national security rationale for boosting domestic manufacturing is a new and powerful argument that should garner bipartisan support for reshoring factory operations.

There's a green angle as well that follows the same logic as farm-to-table restaurants. Locally sourced goods and parts save all the time, cost and energy of shipping goods halfway around the world. Unfortunately it lacks the one component that most politicians focus on: job creation. Even if production returns, it will require fewer workers, though they will be better paid.

The challenges to rebuild the US manufacturing base are vast. It will take time to create clusters of suppliers to

support local production. Companies often struggle to hire skilled workers. The clampdown on immigration could tighten the labor market to the point that it slows growth. Also, robots are expensive, require programming and need maintenance. This makes it difficult for small businesses to adopt automation.

Still, the use cases for robotics have been ballooning as the machines become more dexterous. Cameras and sensors allow robots to see and distinguish objects. Machine learning has made them more capable and easier to program. Mobility is the latest breakthrough and autonomous mobile robots – the squatty machines that can carry pallets, racks and bins – are now common in warehouses. The holy grail for automation is a general-purpose robot that can do multiple tasks with simple instructions. This is the promise that AI brings to robotics, and specifically to humanoid robots – whether on legs or wheels.

Humans will be alleviated from the most tedious, physically stressful work and instead tend to the machines. This has happened throughout history – always despite hand-wringing about the potential of massive unemployment. The productivity gains from machines have allowed people to earn more, enjoy more free time and avoid

The latest effort to pump up domestic output has been the most aggressive by far. Under President Donald Trump, the government has taken equity stakes in companies and browbeat industry leaders – domestic and foreign – to invest more in the US.

the repetitive or backbreaking tasks that damaged their health.

After many false starts on reviving US manufacturing, the effort is now driven by the powerful forces of national security and the widespread recognition that the US has become too dependent on its main adversary for essential goods. There's a real possibility that tariffs will outlast the Trump administration but perhaps applied in a less chaotic manner. If a manufacturing rebound doesn't take place under these conditions, it's hard to see how it ever will. Regardless, don't expect a boom of manufacturing jobs.

– Thomas Black is a Bloomberg Opinion columnist writing about the industrial and transportation sectors. He was previously a Bloomberg News reporter covering logistics, manufacturing and private aviation.

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