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Minister of Commerce and Industry meets with business leaders to address private sector challenges

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DOHA: Minister of Commerce and Industry H E Sheikh Faisal bin Thani bin Faisal Al Thani held a meeting yesterday with private sector representatives from Qatar Chamber and the Qatari Businessmen Association.

The meeting forms part of the Ministry's ongoing engagement with the business community to discuss key challenges facing the private sector, review proposed solutions, and follow up on initiatives and projects aimed at enhancing Qatar's business environment.

During the meeting, the Minister reaffirmed the Ministry's commitment to strengthening its partnership with the private sector and empowering it as a key driver of economic growth.

He noted that such meetings serve as a direct platform for dialogue with business representatives, enabling the Ministry to better understand market challenges and benefit from private sector insights in developing relevant policies and procedures.

Discussions also covered current economic and trade



Minister of Commerce and Industry H E Sheikh Faisal bin Thani bin Faisal Al Thani with private sector representatives during the meeting yesterday.

developments and their impact on private sector companies and institutions, in addition to measures aimed at mitigating potential effects and

supporting business continuity. The meeting further addressed initiatives focused on improving the business environment, including streamlining

procedures, modernising regulatory and legislative frameworks, and facilitating commercial activities in line with the country's economic growth objectives.

Qatar's economic resilience attracts global investor interest

JOEL JOHNSON
THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Qatar is increasingly positioning itself as a preferred investment destination with its strong financial foundations and economic strategy, drawing attention from international investors and industry leaders, according to experts.

"Capital is becoming more selective," Andrew Scott, a Doha-based Investment strategist, told *The Peninsula*. "Investors are prioritizing markets that demonstrate not just growth potential, but resilience against external shocks."

He added, "In times of disruption, countries with strong

balance sheets and clear strategic direction naturally rise to the top of investor considerations."

Another expert, Irina Duisimbekova, highlighted Qatar's unique combination of economic stability and long-term vision as key drivers of its appeal.

"For me, it comes down to a combination of strength and vision," Duisimbekova said. "Qatar has exceptional financial fundamentals, strong reserves, low debt, and consistent revenues from its energy sector. This creates a solid safety net that very few countries can match."

Qatar's economic

Qatar has implemented reforms aimed at strengthening its business ecosystem, including measures to attract foreign direct investment and encourage private sector participation.

resilience is largely supported by its vast natural gas reserves and its status as a leading global exporter of liquefied natural gas, which ensures steady revenue flows even during periods of global volatility.

These resources have enabled the country to maintain fiscal discipline while continuing to invest in critical sectors.

Duisimbekova emphasised

that the country's attractiveness extends beyond its resource wealth. "What truly differentiates Qatar is its ability to think long-term while acting quickly," the industry leader said.

"The country is investing heavily in diversification, infrastructure, and human capital, while continuously improving its regulatory environment."

In recent years, Qatar has

implemented reforms aimed at strengthening its business ecosystem, including measures to attract foreign direct investment and encourage private sector participation.

Meanwhile, major infrastructure projects and investments in innovation and education are helping to lay the groundwork for a more diversified economy.

"As an investor, you feel that you are entering a market that is not only secure today, but also preparing itself for the next decade," Duisimbekova noted, underscoring the importance of policy consistency and strategic planning in attracting long-term capital.

She stressed that this confidence is already translating into tangible expansion decisions.

"That is exactly why groups like ours continue to expand here, and why we see increasing interest from international partners looking to establish a presence in Qatar," Duisimbekova added.

Analysts say that as geopolitical tensions continue to reshape global trade and investment patterns, countries like Qatar, combining fiscal strength with proactive reform, are likely to remain at the forefront of investor interest.

Syria raises fuel prices amid regional pressures, higher global energy costs

DAMASCUS: Syrian authorities announced price hikes for fuel and cooking gas yesterday, citing rising global oil prices, higher transportation costs, and ongoing regional pressures affecting the energy sector.

According to the Syrian Petroleum Company, the price of diesel rose to 88 US cents per liter from 75 cents; the price of 90-octane gasoline increased to 1.10 US dollars per liter from 85 cents; 95-octane gasoline rose to 1.15 dollars per liter from 91 cents; the cost of a household cooking gas cylinder climbed to 12.50 dollars from 10.50 dollars. Industrial gas cylinders rose to 20 dollars from 16.80 dollars.

In remarks carried by Syrian state media, the company said that the measures aim to ensure fuel supply sustainability and service continuity amid regional and international developments. — *XINHUA*

Jordan and EU sign €135m financing agreements

AMMAN: Amman and the European Union signed three financing agreements yesterday to enhance cooperation in human capital development, refugee support, and border security in Jordan, with a total value of €135m, within the framework of the comprehensive strategic partnership between the two sides.

In a statement, Jordan's Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation said the agreements include €30m for human capital development, €80m for refugee protection and support to ensure decent livelihoods for host communities and Syrian refugees, and €25m for integrated border management and internal security, aimed at strengthening Jordan's capacities in combating transnational crime, cyber threats, and human trafficking. — *QNA*

QSE extends rally on regional de-escalation hopes

DOHA: The Qatar Stock Exchange (QSE) closed the week sharply higher, with its benchmark index rising 2.16 percent, or 226.34 points, to 10,714 points, driven by strong gains in the industrial sector and banking stocks.

The industrial sector led advances with a 3.43 percent jump, followed by banks and financial services, which climbed 2.81 percent.

Speaking to QNA, financial market analyst Youssef Buhulaiqa said the market's improved performance, particularly in the final trading sessions of the week, was fueled by stronger investor sentiment amid growing political signals favoring de-escalation between the United States and Iran.

He noted that Qatar's market benefited directly from easing concerns over regional energy supplies and maritime trade routes, especially with rising expectations of a resolution to tensions surrounding the Strait of Hormuz and the continued

The industrial sector led advances with a 3.43 percent jump, followed by banks and financial services, which climbed 2.81 percent.

normal flow of oil tankers and commercial shipping.

Buhulaiqa said the ongoing rally reflects a gradual return of investor confidence, supported by strong liquidity levels and renewed institutional buying in fundamentally solid stocks.

He added that Qatar's market remains well-positioned for sustained growth, backed by a resilient banking sector, continued infrastructure spending, strong sovereign credit ratings, and stable macroeconomic indicators, making the Qatari Stock Exchange one of the region's most attractive investment destinations. — *QNA*

QFC, PHDCCI sign MoU to boost Qatar-India trade and investment collaboration

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: The Qatar Financial Centre (QFC), a leading onshore financial and business centre, has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PHDCCI), a leading national apex chamber representing over 150,000 companies across India, to strengthen bilateral trade, investment flows, and business connectivity between the two markets.

The MoU establishes a framework for collaboration aimed at promoting Qatar as a destination for Indian businesses and facilitating greater engagement between companies operating in both ecosystems. It builds on a series of high-level engagements of PHDCCI-led delegations to Qatar, which helped identify opportunities for deeper cooperation.

Under the agreement, both parties will work closely with Invest Qatar and the Qatar Chamber to organise joint initiatives, including a dedicated roadshow in India.

Commenting on



the partnership, Mansoor Rashid Al-Khater, Chief Executive Officer, QFC, said, "As a gateway to Qatar's dynamic market, QFC continues to identify new avenues to facilitate investment inflows and strengthen cross-border trade and cooperation. This MoU with PHDCCI deepens Qatar-India economic ties by providing Indian companies with a clear pathway to establish their regional presence through QFC, which offers a world-class legal, regulatory and tax environment that supports business growth."

Dr Ranjeet Mehta, Chief Executive Officer & Secretary

General, PHDCCI, further elaborated on the MoU: "The signing of the MoU between PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Qatar Financial Centre heralds a new era of collaboration, focused on fostering trade, investment and knowledge exchange. This partnership reflects our commitment to expanding global outreach and supporting businesses in exploring new markets and opportunities. It also underscores our shared vision of fostering sustainable growth and unlocking new opportunities for businesses in both regions."

Oil prices drop awaiting Middle East peace progress

LONDON: Oil prices fell and global stock markets traded mixed yesterday awaiting an update on a US plan to end the Middle East war and reopen the Strait of Hormuz.

After having plunged more than 10 percent at one point Wednesday on peace hopes, crude futures fell more than another two percent.

The benchmark international oil contract Brent Crude was back under \$100 per barrel.

Wall Street traded mixed, European stock markets declined after big gains the previous session, while leading Asian markets climbed.

Tokyo soared 5.6 percent, which largely reflected resumption of trading in Japan after the country's public holidays this week.

"The wild streak of enthusiasm which hit markets amid hopes for a major de-escalation

in the Iran conflict is tempering," noted Susannah Streeter, chief investment strategist at Wealth Club.

"There's a realisation that there are more hurdles to climb for a longer-term resolution to be agreed, even though Iran is reported to be studying a US peace proposal aimed at formally ending the conflict."

US President Donald Trump said an agreement could be near after positive talks, with Iran adding that it would pass on its latest position to mediator Pakistan.

The war, launched by the United States and Israel in late February, has seen Iran respond with attacks across the Middle East and impose a chokehold on the Strait of Hormuz, the gateway to the Gulf oil and gas industries and a strategic trade route.

In foreign exchange Thursday, the dollar lost some



A view of Valero refinery in Corpus Christi, Texas, US.

of its safe haven support.

Investors in Tokyo were closely watching the yen after speculation of intervention by the Japanese government to prop up the beleaguered currency.

Norway's central bank on Thursday hiked its guiding rate by a quarter point to 4.25

percent, citing a risk that the war in the Middle East could worsen already elevated inflation.

"Inflation is too high and has run above target for several years," Norges Bank governor Ida Wolden Bache said in a statement.

Away from the war, there

has been a fresh wave of cash pumped into the technology sector as traders snap up all things artificial intelligence, helped by standout earnings from Apple, Google parent Alphabet, Microsoft and Samsung during the ongoing first-quarter reporting season.

"It does feel as if US stock indices are in a melt-up phase," said Trade Nation analyst David Morrison, using an expression for a situation when a large amount of money is invested in stocks in a short period of time.

Both the S&P 500 and the tech-heavy Nasdaq Composite set fresh all-time highs as trading got underway, even if they only edged higher.

"FOMO (fear of missing out) is playing an important role here, yet it's difficult to work out what could trigger a significant pullback," said Morrison. — *AFP*



QCB Governor meets GIP Founding Partner

Governor of Qatar Central Bank (QCB) and Chairman of Qatar Investment Authority H E Sheikh Bandar bin Mohammed bin Saoud Al Thani met yesterday with Founding Partner, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Global Infrastructure Partners (GIP) Adebayo Ogunlesi. During the meeting, they discussed the latest developments in global finance and investment.

MoCI organise workshop on innovation capabilities in industry

DOHA: The Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI), in cooperation with the Qatar Research, Development and Innovation Council, organised a specialised workshop, aimed at strengthening innovation capabilities in the industrial sector.

The workshop convened factory managers, technical leaders, and research and development teams for interactive sessions combining practical applications.

In a statement yesterday, the ministry said participants gained skills in design thinking to address industrial challenges, and explored rapid prototyping techniques for developing innovative solutions.

The sessions highlighted

The sessions highlighted opportunities for collaboration within Qatar's research and innovation ecosystem.

opportunities for collaboration within Qatar's research and innovation ecosystem, as well as available funding tools to transform ideas into implementable industrial solutions. It forms part of a national initiative linking factories with research centers and universities under Qatar's National Manufacturing Strategy, with the goal of enabling local industries to convert operational challenges into innovation-driven opportunities. — QNA

Cambodia draws fixed asset investment project of \$2.6bn in first four months

PHNOM PENH: Cambodia attracted a total of 184 fixed-asset investment projects worth more than \$2.6bn during the January-April period of 2026, Deputy Prime Minister Sun Chanthol said here yesterday.

Chanthol, who is also the first vice-chairman of the Council for the Development of Cambodia, said those approved projects included special economic zones (SEZs) and a five-star hotel, among others. "New investment truly reflects the investors' confidence in Cambodia's peace, political stability, and business potential," he told at a forum. — XINHUA

QICCA concludes 'Qualification and Preparation of Arbitrators Programme'

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: The Qatar International Centre for Conciliation and Arbitration (QICCA) at Qatar Chamber recently concluded the second edition of the 'Qualification and Preparation of Arbitrators Programme' in 2026, held in cooperation with Qatar University's Centre for Continuing Education.

The programme aimed to prepare and qualify Qatari personnel through a scientific and training curriculum focused on arbitration. The closing ceremony was attended by QICCA Vice Chairman Sheikh Dr Thani bin Ali Al-Thani.

In statements, Sheikh Dr Thani bin Ali said that the programme witnessed wide participation from trainees representing governmental and semi-governmental agencies, including jurists, engineers, and individuals interested in arbitration.

Sheikh Dr Thani bin Ali added that it contributes to enhancing knowledge of arbitration and clarifying the foundations of international



QICCA Vice Chairman Sheikh Dr Thani bin Ali Al-Thani and other officials during the second edition of 'Qualification and Preparation of Arbitrators Programme'.

arbitration. It also includes practical training in procedural, practical, and legal aspects, which are essential skills required in the field of arbitration, whether for arbitrators or lawyers. Sheikh Dr Thani stressed QICCA's continued support for the programme's graduates to further develop their expertise and apply their knowledge in practice, by organising workshops and seminars that connect them with real-world arbitration experience. Following the completion of the final stage, titled

"Practical Mock Trial," Sheikh Dr Thani presented certificates to trainees from various governmental, semi-governmental, and private entities.

The programme, held at Qatar University's premises, included five stages covering the concept of commercial arbitration and its practical applications, arbitration case management procedures, drafting arbitration awards and their key components, as well as practical training, including a mock trial with the participation of all trainees. QICCA further stated

that it is worth noting that the 'Qualification and Preparation of Arbitrators' programme, launched in 2007 by the Qatar International Centre for Conciliation and Arbitration in cooperation with national and international partners, including Qatar University, aims to prepare and qualify Qatari and resident professionals in commercial arbitration through a practical and academic approach aligned with international standards. To date, it has graduated more than 1,000 participants.

AI use surges globally but rich-poor divide widens: Microsoft

SAN FRANCISCO: Generative artificial intelligence is being used by 17.8 percent of the world's working-age population, but the gap between wealthy and developing nations continues to widen, according to a report published Tuesday by Microsoft.

In the first quarter of 2026, 27.5 percent of people aged 15-64 in developed countries used a generative AI tool, compared with 15.4 percent in the developing world -- a gap that widened by 1.5 percentage points from the second half of 2025, according to the report's estimates.

The divide stems from significant inequality in access to internet connectivity, basic digital skills and electricity, according to the Microsoft AI Economy Institute.

AI model performance -- historically

stronger in English as most of the major AI companies are based in the US -- is also slowing the spread of such tools in non-English-speaking countries.

But progress in processing non-European languages is fueling a catch-up in adoption in some countries, particularly in Asia, the US tech giant noted.

The United Arab Emirates tops the ranking of AI usage at 70.1 percent, followed by Singapore, Norway, Ireland and France.

The estimates were based primarily on measurements from computers running Windows and Microsoft products such as Bing and Copilot.

They only partially captured usage on Apple devices, and consolidated data was lacking for Russia, Iran and China.

The United States -- home to dominant large AI models like ChatGPT, Claude and Gemini -- ranked only 21st, at 31.3 percent.

AI usage in China -- the world's second-largest economy which is jostling with the US for an edge in the AI race -- was 16.4 percent, the report said.

Pushing back against fears of job losses driven by automation, Microsoft argued in the report that AI coding tools "could increase demand for developer jobs."

The company cautioned, however, that "it is still too early to know the full impact" of AI on the labor market.

For the first time in its history, the company itself offered voluntary departures to nearly 9,000 of its US-based employees in April. — AFP

Norwegian central bank raises policy rate to 4.25%

OSLO: Norway's central bank announced yesterday that it had raised its policy rate by 0.25 percentage point to 4.25 percent, citing persistent inflation, marked wage growth in recent years and higher global energy and commodity prices.

Norges Bank said its Monetary and Financial Stability Committee had made the decision as inflation remains above the central bank's target of close to 2 percent over time.

According to the bank, consumer price inflation recently stood at 3.6 percent. Excluding energy prices, which can fluctuate widely from month to month, inflation has been around 3 percent over the past year and a half.

Inflation "is too high and has run above target for several years," Norges Bank Governor Ida Wolden Bache said at a press conference following the announcement.

Bache said prices for domestically produced goods have been rising the fastest, while recent data indicate that domestic inflation may remain elevated for longer than the central bank had expected at the beginning of the year.

An important reason behind the persistent inflation is the

marked wage growth in recent years which has increased firms' costs and contributed to keeping price growth high, said the governor.

Global price pressures have also intensified, she added. Oil prices rose sharply after the United States and Israel attacked Iran at the end of February and have remained high. Prices for other commodities, including aluminum and fertilizers, have also increased due to the war in the Middle East.

Norges Bank said these price increases can spill over into domestic prices, with higher energy prices directly affecting households through petrol and diesel costs and

indirectly through higher costs for airlines and other businesses, which may be passed on to consumers. The central bank said raising the policy rate would help bring down inflation and preserve confidence in the inflation target.

The central bank's March forecast indicated that the policy rate could rise to between 4.25 percent and 4.5 percent by the end of the year, suggesting that further tightening may be needed later in 2026. Norges Bank did not present new forecasts yesterday, but said the monetary policy outlook had not changed materially since March. — XINHUA



According to the bank, consumer price inflation recently stood at 3.6 percent.

Seoul shares up nearly 1.5% at fresh peak after briefly topping 7,500 on Iran peace deal hopes

SEOUL: South Korean stocks extended their bullish run yesterday to close at a new all-time high after briefly topping the 7,500-point mark on hopes for a Washington-Tehran deal to end their war and positive outlooks on chip-makers, backed by an artificial intelligence boom. The local currency gained against the US dollar.

After choppy trading, the benchmark Korea Composite Stock Price Index added 105.49 points, or 1.43 percent, to a fresh record high of 7,490.05.

Trade volume was heavy at 755.4 million shares worth 49.8 trillion won (\$34.3bn), with losers outnumbering winners 501 to 353.

Institutions and individuals scooped up a net 1.1 trillion won and 6 trillion won, respectively, nearly offsetting foreign net selling worth 7.2 trillion won.

The main index renewed its record-high close for the third consecutive session, breaching the 7,300-point mark yesterday.

The index pulled off a strong start and hit a new all-time intraday high of 7,531.88 shortly after the opening bell.



An electronic board showing the Korea Composite Stock Price Index at a dealing room in Seoul, South Korea, yesterday.

After turning negative as investors locked in profits in early trade, the Kospi rebounded and extended gains beyond the 7,500-point level in the afternoon.

Investor sentiment was buoyed by positive developments in the Middle East as Washington and Tehran exchanged fresh proposals aimed at ending the war. US President Donald Trump also said a deal with Iran could be reached before his trip to Beijing next week.

"After breaching the 7,500 level, the Kospi became much more volatile due to profit

hunting," said Kang Jin-hyuk, an analyst from Shinhan Securities. "Foreign investors had led the recent rally, but they turned to net sellers."

Tech, auto and bank shares closed higher.

Top-cap Samsung Electronics rose 2.07 percent to 271,500 won, and chip giant SK hynix added 3.31 percent to 1.65 million won.

Hyundai Motor, the country's largest carmaker, jumped 4 percent to 572,000 won, and its auto parts affiliate Hyundai Mobis gained 2.08 percent to 441,500 won. — THE KOREA HERALD



WASHINGTON: Artificial intelligence (AI) research is plunging further into video games.

Alphabet Inc.'s AI lab, Google DeepMind, announced plans Wednesday to train its technology on Eve Online, a beloved role-playing game set in outer space.

As part of the arrangement, DeepMind will take a minority stake in Fenris Creations. The independent Icelandic company is a rebrand of CCP Games, the creator of Eve Online, which repurchased itself from Korean game-maker Pearl Abyss Corp. for \$120m in cash and cryptocurrency. The price was less than half of what Pearl Abyss paid for CCP Games in 2018. Eve Online "requires skills that AI has not yet fully mastered," said Adrian Bolton (pictured), a senior director at DeepMind, such as "long-term planning and continual learning."

Players of the online science-fiction game operate spaceships and join "corporations" where they trade goods, participate in an economy and infiltrate enemies - sometimes as part of protracted heists.

The game, which first launched 23 years ago, has been praised for giving players unprecedented power to deceive, scam and practice politics. Along the way, it has cultivated a highly intellectual fan base.

All of which made it an attractive source of complex social simulations for researchers at Google's AI lab, who previously trained their technology on multiple games, ranging from Atari's arcade classics to Blizzard Entertainment's StarCraft II.

Google DeepMind's investment is "in the millions" of dollars, according to Fenris Creations Chief Executive Officer Hilmar Veigar

Pétursson. Other investors include several Icelandic firms and individuals, he said. In a press release, the company said that in the fourth quarter of 2025 Eve Online generated the second-highest quarterly sales in the game's history, including a "record-breaking" month in November.

"We jokingly say that the final boss for AI in games would obviously be Eve Online," Pétursson said. "Eve is giving insights about our own society and the human condition." Social-science researchers already study Eve Online, which last year appointed Stefán Þórarinnsson, a former economist with the Central Bank of Iceland, to oversee its virtual economy.

Google DeepMind will initially research players' behavior on isolated Eve Online servers so that the work doesn't impact the live game. At the same time, Pétursson said, Eve Online will use insights from the research to improve the game.

Currently, Fenris Creations is working on a successor title, Eve Frontier, and an "extraction-adventure" first-person shooter, Eve Vanguard. The collaboration underscores growing interest in using complex virtual worlds to advance AI capabilities and better understand human behaviour dynamics. — THE WASHINGTON POST