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Entertainment events at Lusail fan zone

The local organising committee for the FIFA Intercontinental Cup Qatar 2024 has announced a packed programme of cultural and entertainment events in the fan zone surrounding Lusail Stadium, which will host the final between Real Madrid of Spain and Pachuca of Mexico, tomorrow. The fan zone at Lusail Stadium will include exciting artistic performances and various interactive activities.



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350,000 'patients' face risk of death in Gaza, says report

• Israeli genocide toll tops 45,000

QNA
Gaza

A human rights report has revealed that the Israeli occupation's aggression on the Gaza Strip has put patients with chronic diseases at risk of death due to poor health services on the one hand, and the depletion of medicines on the other hand, in addition to food shortages and the repeated forced displacement of hundreds of thousands of them.

The report issued by the Al Mezan Center for Human Rights in Palestine said that patients with chronic diseases need to have appropriate medicines and treatments available on a permanent basis, and their delay in taking the medicine leads to the deterioration of their health conditions and exposes their lives to the risk of death.

The number of people suffering from chronic diseases in the Gaza Strip is about 350,000, all of whom have been deprived of receiving the necessary healthcare due to the genocidal war.

A separate report by UNRWA said that its baby milk supplies are almost finished in the Gaza Strip, putting the lives of more than 8,500 infants at risk.

Meanwhile, the health ministry in Ha-

mas-run Gaza said yesterday that at least 45,028 people have been killed during more than 14 months of the war between Israel and Palestinian resistance movement fighters.

It said 106,962 people have been wounded in the Gaza Strip since the war began on October 7, 2023.

Strike hits school

Relatives of Palestinians killed by Israel in Khan Younis gathered around their white-shrouded bodies yesterday before carrying them to their graves.

Palestinian health officials said on Sunday at least 20 people, including children, were killed in the strike at the school sheltering displaced families in the city in the southern Gaza Strip.

A bid by Egypt, Qatar, and the US to reach a truce, which would also include a hostage deal, has gained momentum in recent weeks, yet there has been no news of a breakthrough.

However, a report from Jerusalem, quoting Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz said Israeli negotiators have "not been this close to an agreement" for the release of hostages in Gaza since the November 2023 truce.

Signing of Book of Loyalty and Devotion at Katara



Katara is continuing for the 12th consecutive year, the signing of the 'Book of Loyalty and Devotion', as part of the Qatar National Day celebrations. Qatar residents from all walks of life are expressing their love and solidarity with the nation. Katara's QND celebrations run until tomorrow (Wednesday), from 3pm-9pm. **Page 20**

20 health centres to be open during QND holidays: PHCC

QNA
Doha

The Primary Health Care Corporation (PHCC) has announced the operational schedule for health centres during the upcoming National Day (QND) holidays, which fall on Wednesday and Thursday.

In a statement yesterday, PHCC said that 20 out of the 31 health centres will be operational during the holidays. The operational centres include Al Wakra, Airport, Al Muntazah, Omar Bin Al Khattab, West Bay, Al Thumama, Al Sadd, Rawdat Al Khail, Leabaib, Umm Salal, Gharafa Al Rayyan, Khalifa City, Abu Bakr Al Siddiq, Al Rayyan, Messaimer, Muathir, Al Khor, Al Ruwais, and Al Sheehaniya.

The Al Jumailiya Health Center will operate on a 24-hour on-call system. Family medicine and support services at centres inside and outside Doha will run continuously from 7am-11pm, with dental services available from 7am-10pm at the mentioned centres.

The 11 health centres that will not operate

during the National Day holidays include Umm Ghuwailina, South Al Wakra, Al Ghuwairiyah, Al Dhaayen, Qatar University, Al Wajba, Al Waab, Abu Nakhla, and Umm Al Seneem. Al Kaaban and Al Karaana centres will receive emergency cases only.

Specialist clinics will be available as per pre-scheduled appointments during the morning and evening shifts, with morning hours from 7am-2pm and evening hours from 4pm-10pm. Eye, dermatology, and ENT clinics will operate at Leabaib and Rawdat Al Khail centres.

Emergency services for adults will be available 24/7 at 12 health centres, including Gharafa Al Rayyan, Al Sheehaniya, Abu Bakr Al Siddiq, Rawdat Al Khail, Al Kaaban, Al Karaana, Al Ruwais, Umm Salal, Leabaib, Muathir, Al Muntazah, and Al Sadd.

Paediatric emergency services will be available at Al Ruwais, Umm Salal, Leabaib, Muathir, Al Muntazah, and Al Sadd centres.

The community contact centre at 16000 will continue to provide medical consultation services by phone 24/7. However, the home delivery service for medications will be suspended on Wednesday and Thursday, resuming on Saturday.

Amir appoints new Kahramaa president

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani issued yesterday Amiri Decision No 80 of 2024, appointing Abdullah Ali Abdullah al-Thayab as President of Qatar General Electricity & Water Corporation (Kahramaa). The decision is effective starting from its date of issue and is to be published in the official gazette. **(QNA)**

Two-day holiday for financial institutions

Banks, insurance companies and other financial institutions will remain closed on December 18 and 19, on the occasion of Qatar National Day. QCB announced yesterday. "All financial institutions will resume work on Sunday, December 22." Qatar Central Bank said. December 20 and 21 are weekend holidays for financial institutions in the country.

SoftBank to invest \$100bn in US

The Japanese tech titan SoftBank will invest \$100bn in the United States, creating at least 100,000 jobs, US President-elect Donald Trump said yesterday. "It will help ensure that artificial intelligence, emerging technologies and other industries of tomorrow are built, created and grown right here in the USA," added Trump. Speaking alongside Trump, SoftBank's chief executive Masayoshi Son confirmed his company's financial commitment and pledged to create 100,000 jobs, adding that Trump's victory had "tremendously increased" his confidence in the American economy.

Scholz loses trust vote, elections in Feb 2025

The German parliament accepted Chancellor Olaf Scholz's invitation to withdraw his confidence in him and his government yesterday, clearing the way for an early election on Feb 23 necessitated by the collapse of his government. Scholz's three-party coalition fell apart last month after the pro-market Free Democrats quit in a row over debt, leaving his Social Democrats (SPD) and the Greens without a parliamentary majority just as Germany faces a deepening economic crisis. **Page 25**



Mourners attend the funeral of video journalist Ahmed al-Louh, after he was killed in an Israeli strike, at Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital, in Deir Al-Balah, yesterday.

QCB launches new Real-Time Gross Settlement system

The Qatar Central Bank (QCB) launched the new Real-Time Gross Settlement System (RTGS), in line with the Third Financial Sector Strategy, and as a continuation of the QCB's ongoing efforts to develop the payment systems infrastructure in Qatar to keep pace with the latest technical developments.

This system is part of the pioneering initiatives that the QCB is working on to upgrade the payment and financial transfer system in the country, as it represents a qualitative shift in Qatar's financial infrastructure, which increases the flexibility and efficiency of the financial system.

The Real-Time Gross Settlement system plays a vital role in Qatar's banking sector, as it is the core banking system that processes and settles financial transactions between banks directly. It complies with the latest international messaging standards ISO 20022 to enhance technical integration between banks. The system also aims to improve the efficiency and speed of financial transfers and liquidity management in Qatar's banks to increase operational efficiency and add more flexibility to the banking system in general in light of technological developments, which have resulted in banking

and financial services that require keeping pace with this progress by developing an infrastructure for payment systems that ensure the speed of implementation of financial settlements, transfers and banking transactions, while maintaining the highest standards of financial safety and stability.

This system is characterised by providing immediate settlement of transactions between banks, while offering advanced levels of security and transparency at all stages of settlement. This contribution enhances the strength of the financial system and managing liquidity and settlement risks in banks, and increases the confidence of dealers and stakeholders in the Qatari banking and financial sector. The system also contributes to accelerating the cash cycle and increasing the efficiency of financial operations in line with the vision, plans and strategic objectives of the QCB aimed at developing financial and banking services in the country, modernising and advancing them, based on the highest technical standards and international practices, and increasing investment in growth opportunities in this vital sector. **(QNA)**

Western powers resume contacts in Syria to prevent chaos

AFP/Reuters
Paris/Brussels

Western powers are looking to establish contact with Syria's new rulers, aiming to avoid Iraq- or Libya-style chaos after the fall of the Assad regime to Islamist-led opposition.

The situation in Syria, long allied with Iran and Russia, remains volatile and Western nations are wary of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) that seized power in a lightning offensive.

But none wants to pass up the opportunity to forge links, given the risk of fragmentation and resurgence of the Islamic State group, which has never been completely eradicated.

HTS remains proscribed as a terrorist group by several Western countries, including the United States.

"But there's a political reality...and clearly a race to establish contact the fastest," said a former ambassador.

"The main objective," he added, is that Syria does not fall into "total chaos".

As well as Brussels and Washington, Paris plans to send a diplomatic mission to Damascus from today, to "retake possession" of French real estate and make "initial contact" with the new authorities.



Tents housing Syrian refugees in Arsal in eastern Lebanon before being dismantled and returning to Syria yesterday.

Spain is to appoint a special envoy while the UK has announced that diplomatic contacts have been established with HTS.

"Europeans waited for the American reaction, which encouraged them to take the step," said Hasni Abidi, director of the Study and Research Centre for the Arab and Mediterranean World in Geneva (CERMAM).

The approach was "pragmatic" while the Syrian people welcomed the rebels, he added.

Diplomats are not hiding the difficulties, with Syria at risk of fragmentation, the outgoing French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot said in Brussels. **Page 23**



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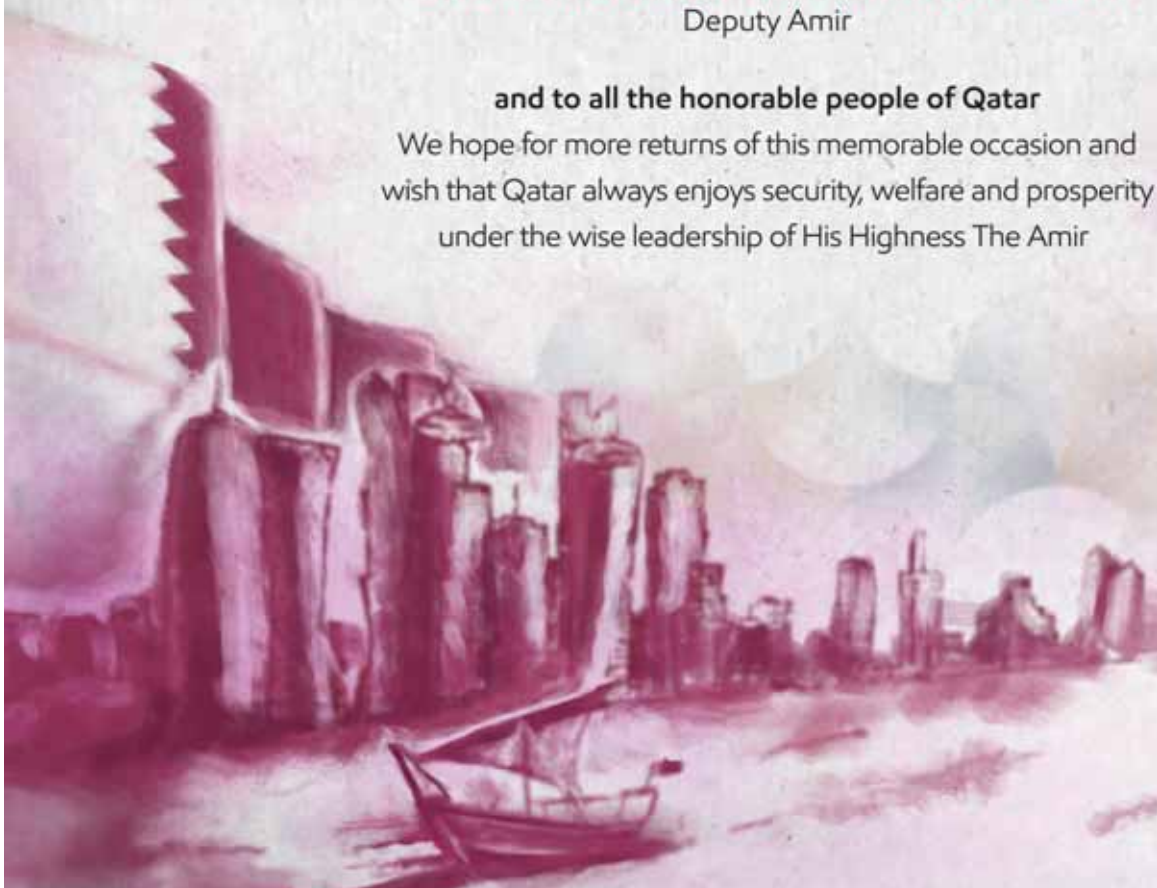
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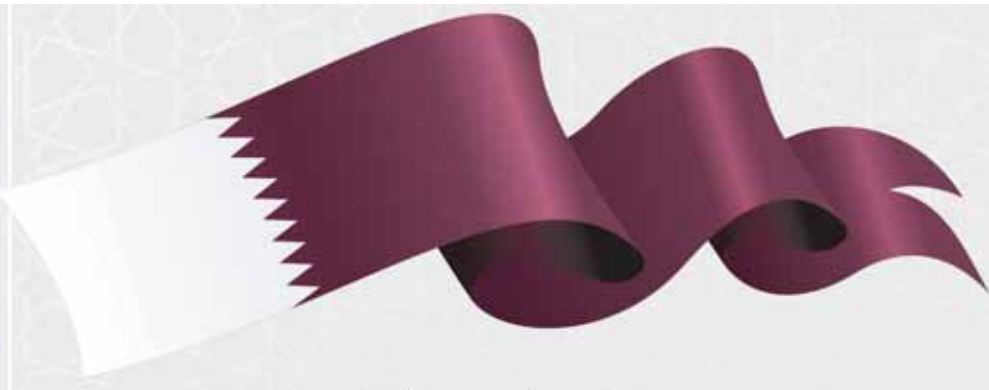
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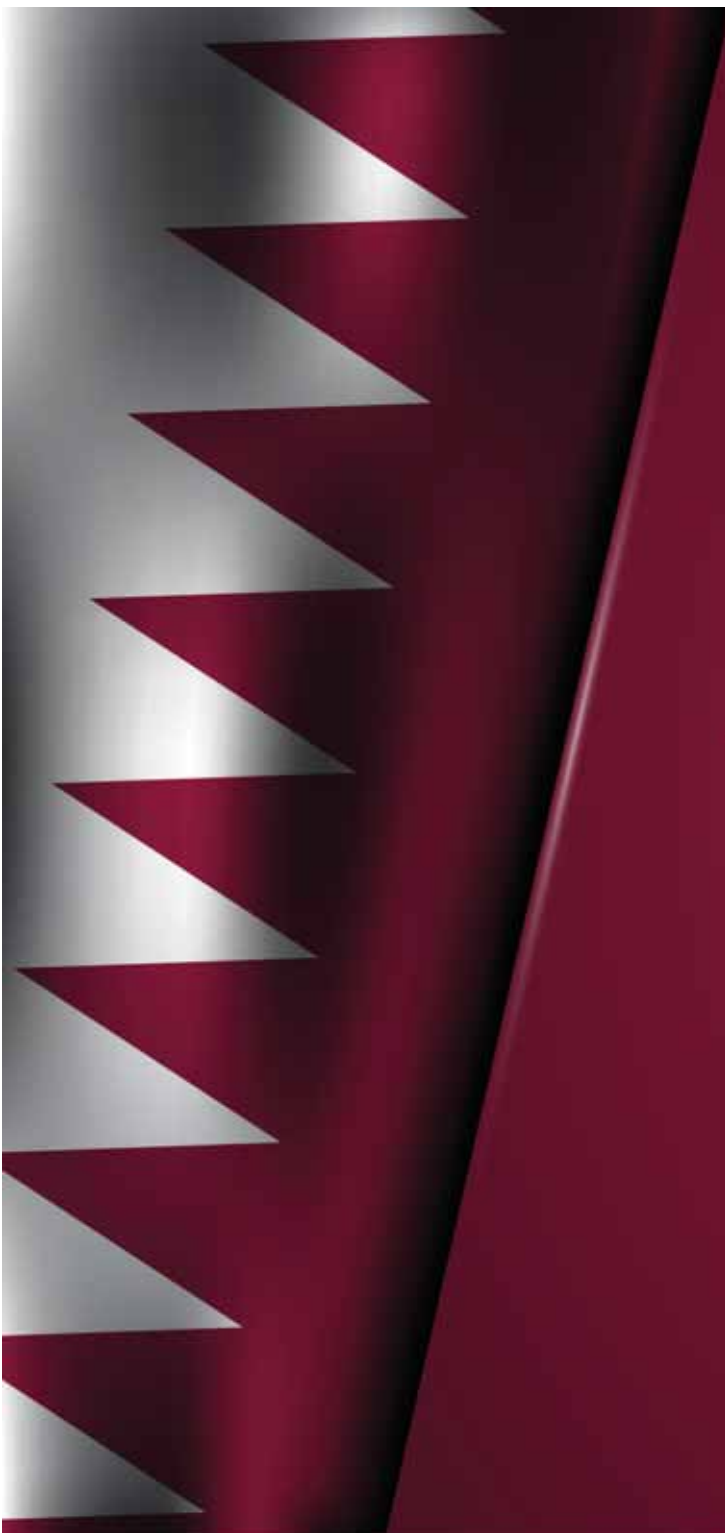
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Geely and Safety Rent a Car Partner to Elevate Fleet Standards in Qatar



In the picture: Maher Tinawi (General Sales Manager, Geely), Mohamed Eldeib (Fleet Sales Manager, Geely), Amr Yusef (General Manager, Safety Rent a car)

Geely has entered into a partnership with Safety Rent a Car, a move that emphasizes the brand's quality and dependability.

Under the agreement, Safety Rent a Car has expanded its fleet with 150 Geely vehicles in 2024, reinforcing the commitment of both companies to delivering exceptional service, innovative solutions, and enhanced value to their customers.

Maher Tinawi, General Sales Manager of Geely at Skyline Automotive, the exclusive distributor of Geely in Qatar, said: "This partnership outlines the growing trust in the market for Geely and showcases the reliability that the brand has developed over the years in the market."

Safety Rent a Car selected Geely for its unparalleled product quality, exceptional durability and the added assurance of a comprehensive manufacturer warranty.

These features ensure that Geely vehicles stand out and make the brand a preferred choice when seeking solid, high-performing fleet solutions.

This collaboration enhances Geely's reputation as a leading automotive brand in Qatar, demonstrating its ability to cater to a wide range of client needs. It also highlights the company's unwavering commitment to

customer service and product excellence that raise industry standards.

By working together, Geely and Safety Rent a Car are setting a new benchmark for excellence in the regional automotive market. As Geely continues to expand, its focus remains on delivering innovative solutions and exceeding customer expectations.

Safety Rent a Car has expanded its fleet with 150 Geely vehicles in 2024, reinforcing the commitment of both companies to delivering exceptional service, innovative solutions, and enhanced value to their customers.

As Geely continues to expand, its focus remains on delivering innovative solutions and exceeding customer expectations.

QND symbolises national unity, wise leadership of modern state

HE the Minister of Environment and Climate Change Dr Abdullah bin Abdulaziz bin Turki al-Subaie said that commemorating the founding of the State of Qatar by Sheikh Jassim bin Mohammed bin Thani holds deep significance for all those living on its soil, with the founder symbolising unity, sacrifice, and wise leadership for a modern, sovereign state, built on principles of dignity and national pride.



HE Dr Abdullah bin Abdulaziz bin Turki al-Subaie

Speaking to QNA on Qatar National Day (QND), HE the minister extended his congratulations and best wishes to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, His Highness the Father Amir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, and the Qatari people, praying for many more years of prosperity, security, and stability, and for Qatar continued advancements on all fronts.

He said that the National Day is an occasion to solidify citizens' sense of loyalty and unity, in addition to expressing pride in the national identity and heritage.

He described the National Day as a moment to affirm unity, cohesion, and solidarity; the principles on which the state was founded and have remained a constant through the ages. HE Dr al-Subaie pointed out that Qatar has continued to

achieve success after the other in various fields; the economy, health, education, research, the environment, institutional governance, and community development, all the while providing the means and infrastructure needed to achieve Qatar's national vision and fulfilling the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

He said that through overseeing and implementing the Qatar National Environment and Climate Change Strategy, Qatar has made significant progress over the past year in relation to the National Action Plan for Climate Change 2030, which sets national climate goals to enhance resilience through the implementation of over 35 initiatives to reduce carbon emissions, in addition to overseeing 300 adaptation measures to control or reduce the impacts of climate change, not

to mention the completion of the final phase of the factory emission monitoring system and the launch of many green initiatives promoting technological innovation in protecting the environment and improving quality of life.

HE the minister added that the national biodiversity strategy seeks to preserve endangered species by supporting projects such as the breeding of the endangered houbara bustard, regulating the hunting season of certain birds and wildlife, restoring coral reefs, and completing the rehabilitation of 38 nurseries across the country, as part of the Qatari mainland rehabilitation project and preserving mangrove forests.

He noted that the ministry launched a project to build a national integrated air quality monitoring network, comprising 41 monitoring stations across the country, as well as establishing an environmental data monitoring and analysis unit, a public platform on the non-ionising radiation emanating from electrical devices and communication networks, with 60 fixed stations and 15 mobile radiation level detection devices working around the clock to ensure that radiation remains within safe limits in accordance to international standards. (QNA)

Minister meets Kuwait's ambassador



HE the Minister of State for International Co-operation Maryam bint Ali bin Nasser al-Misnad met yesterday with ambassador of Kuwait to Qatar Khaled Badr al-Mutairi. They discussed co-operation relations between the two countries. (QNA)



On the occasion of
Qatar National Day, 18th of December
and in remembrance of the historic day in 1878 when
Sheikh Jassim Bin Mohammed Bin Thani,
founder of the State of Qatar,
set up the pillars of the Modern State of Qatar,

We extend our heartiest congratulations and greetings to

His Highness
Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani
Amir of the State of Qatar

His Highness
Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al Thani
Father Amir

His Highness
Sheikh Abdullah Bin Hamad Al Thani
Deputy Amir

and to all the honorable people of Qatar

We hope for more returns of this memorable occasion and
wish that Qatar always enjoys security, welfare and prosperity
under the wise leadership of His Highness The Amir



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On the occasion of
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Deputy Amir

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Lebanese Caretaker PM meets minister of state at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs



Caretaker Prime Minister of Lebanon Najib Mikati met here yesterday with HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Mohammed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh al-Khulaifi. The meeting discussed bilateral co-operation relations and ways to develop them, in addition to a range of topics of mutual interest. During the meeting, HE the Minister of State reaffirmed Qatar's firm stance regarding Lebanon and its territorial integrity, as well as Qatar's continuous support for the brotherly Lebanese people. **(QNA)**

Minister meets Lebanese speaker, commander



HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Mohammed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh al-Khulaifi met yesterday in Beirut with Speaker of the House of Representatives of Lebanon Nabih Berri. The meeting discussed co-operation ties between the two countries and ways to bolster them, in addition to discussing efforts to address the presidential vacancy in Lebanon. HE the Minister of State emphasised the importance of national unity and concerted efforts among the Lebanese to overcome current challenges and support the stabilisation of Lebanon. **(QNA)**



HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Mohammed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh al-Khulaifi met in Beirut yesterday with the Commander of the Lebanese Armed Forces General Joseph Aoun. Discussions during the meeting dealt with co-operation relations between the two countries, ways to support and enhance them, and a host of topics of mutual interest. HE Dr al-Khulaifi underscored the great importance of the role of the Lebanese Army in enhancing security and stability in Lebanon, and in preserving the sovereignty of the state and the unity of its territories in light of the increasing security and political challenges facing the region. In turn, General Aoun expressed thanks and appreciation to Qatar for the continuous support it provides to Lebanon and the military institution to overcome the current circumstances. **(QNA)**

Minister tours Hamad Port





HE the Minister of Transport Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdullah bin Mohammed al-Thani yesterday visited Hamad Port. He was briefed on the operational processes of its facilities and terminals as well as the Hamad Port Visitor Centre, a statement from the Ministry of Transport said. Professionals from Mwani Qatar briefed the minister on the strategy of the commercial ports, their expansions and contribution to the national economy.

Transport Minister meets Nauru's counterpart



HE the Minister of Transport Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdullah bin Mohammed al-Thani met in Doha yesterday with Minister of Transport of Nauru Reagan Winson Aliklik. The two ministers discussed bilateral relations in the areas of transportation and civil aviation, and ways to enhance them, particularly in air transportation. Following the meeting, the minister attended the initialing of a bilateral air services agreement and an open skies memorandum of understanding, allowing for the flag carrier airline of Qatar to fly to more destinations around the world. **(QNA)**

Public Announcement

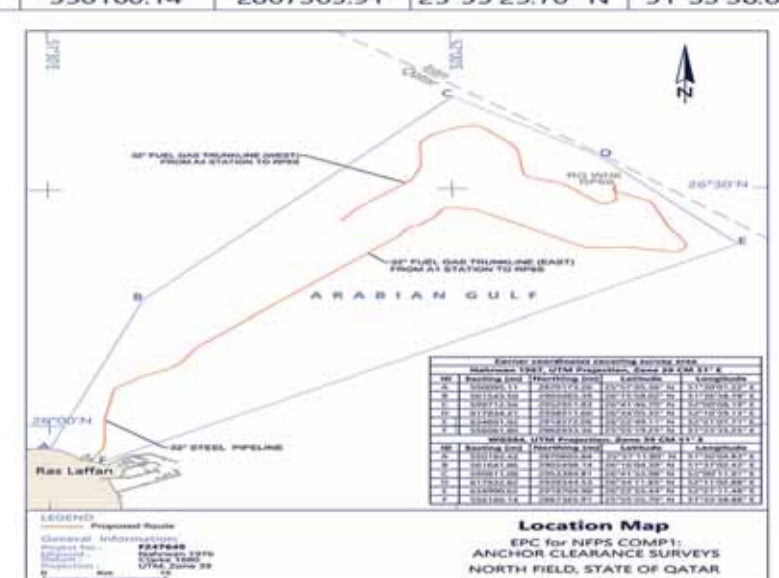
**To all Ships, Fisherman, and Mariners
Subsea Survey Works Offshore in "North Field"
By the Vessel "Fugro Proteus"**

**Subsea Survey Works Offshore Qatar from
16th October 2024 to 30th January 2025**

In pursuant and under directives from the Registration and Seafarers Affairs Department, Ministry of Transport, State of Qatar, this announcement is to inform all Vessels, Mariners, and Fisherman that Qatar Energy LNG" Formerly known as Qatar Gas Operating Company Limited intends to undertake subsea survey works by the vessel "Fugro Proteus" in North Field locations, bound by the coordinates and location map shown below.

Corner coordinates covering survey area Nahrwan 1967, UTM Projection, Zone 39 CM 51° E				
ID	Easting [m]	Northing [m]	Latitude	Longitude
A	550095.11	2870173.26	25°57'05.36" N	51°30'01.22" E
B	561543.50	2905065.39	26°15'58.02" N	51°36'58.78" E
C	599712.56	2952951.83	26°41'46.70" N	52°00'08.19" E
D	617834.21	2938911.60	26°34'05.35" N	52°10'59.13" E
E	634891.92	2918272.06	26°22'49.11" N	52°21'07.71" E
F	556061.80	2866933.36	25°55'19.25" N	51°33'35.25" E

WGS84, UTM Projection, Zone 39 CM 51° E				
ID	Easting [m]	Northing [m]	Latitude	Longitude
A	550193.42	2870605.84	25°57'11.80" N	51°30'04.83" E
B	561641.86	2905498.14	26°16'04.39" N	51°37'02.42" E
C	599811.08	2953384.81	26°41'52.98" N	52°00'11.91" E
D	617932.82	2939344.53	26°34'11.65" N	52°11'02.88" E
E	634990.62	2918704.90	26°22'55.44" N	52°21'11.48" E
F	556160.14	2867365.91	25°55'25.70" N	51°33'38.88" E





Location Map
EPC for NFPS COMP1
ANCHOR CLEARANCE SURVEYS
NORTH FIELD, STATE OF QATAR


All Vessels, Mariners, and Fishermen are expected to keep clear of the survey locations during the operations. Qatar Energy LNG takes no responsibility for any loss or damage caused to outside parties in association with this operation following the publication of this notice.


For more details contact 7048 9890


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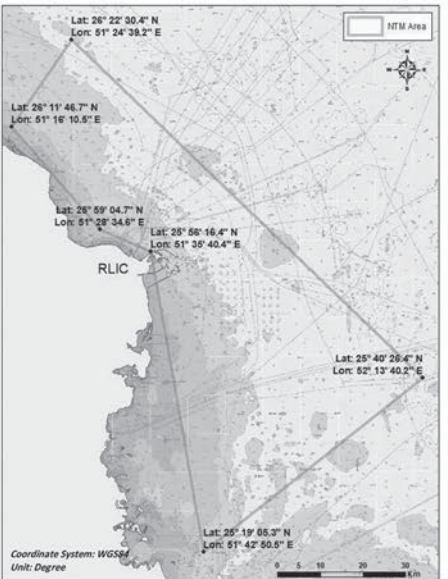
Public Announcement
To all Ships, Fishermen and Mariners
Seismic Survey Acquisition by Vessels AOS Glory, Stanford Hawk, GMS Apollo, Voyager Explorer, BGP Honor, and Safa Searcher
Seismic Survey Works Offshore Qatar from 27th November 2024 – 27th November 2025

Pursuant to and under directives from the Department of Seafarers Affairs & Registration, Ministry of Transport, State of Qatar, this announcement is to inform all Vessels, Mariners and Fishermen that QatarEnergy LNG intends to perform Ocean Bottom Node Seismic Survey Works with Vessels AOS Glory, Stanford Hawk, GMS Apollo, Voyager Explorer, BGP Honor, and Safa Searcher in the locations bound by the coordinates shown in the diagram below.


All Vessels, Mariners and Fishermen are expected to keep clear of the survey locations during the operations.

QatarEnergy LNG takes no responsibility for any loss or damage caused to outside parties in association with this operation, following publication of this notice.

Point	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE
1	26° 22' 30.4" N	51° 24' 39.2" E
2	25° 40' 26.4" N	52° 13' 40.2" E
3	25° 19' 05.3" N	51° 42' 50.5" E
4	25° 56' 16.4" N	51° 35' 40.4" E
5	25° 59' 04.7" N	51° 28' 34.6" E
6	26° 11' 46.7" N	51° 16' 10.5" E



Any further inquiries should be addressed to: Tel. +974 44531797



Qatar Red Crescent – Medical Affairs Division

Tenders Announcement: -

Sr. #	Tender No.	Description	Temporary Tender Bond	Documents Fees (Non-Refundable)	Closing Date
1	QRC/WHC/19-2024	Supply, Install, and Operate a digital motorized mobile X-Ray for Hemailla Health Center	30,000 Q.R	500 Q.R	12-01-2025

The documents can be collected from Medical Affairs Division, Ain Khalid Area, Sunday to Thursday from 08:00 am to 01:00 pm till the closing date.

Required Documents:

- Authorization letter to receive tender documents + ID copy of the person will be receiving the documents.
- Company's Commercial registration copy.
- Bank deposit voucher with the value of documents (500 QR) not refunded & account details:
 - Account Name: Qatar Red Crescent.
 - Bank: Al Rayan.
 - Account Number: 11199970201
 - IBAN Number: QA56MAFR00000000001199970201

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

Minister meets Nato Special Representative for Southern Neighbourhood



HE the Minister of State for International Co-operation Maryam bint Ali bin Nasser al-Misnad met with Special Representative of the Secretary-General of Nato for the Southern Neighbourhood Javier Colomina, on the sidelines of the meeting of the Policy Advisory Group of the Istanbul Co-operation Initiative (ICI) with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato), held in Doha on Sunday. During the meeting, they discussed co-operation relations between Qatar and Nato, the developments in the region, and a number of topics of common interest. Qatar's ambassador to the European Union and the Nato Abdulaziz bin Ahmed al-Malki and Acting Director of European Affairs Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Fahad bin Mohammed Kafoud attended the meeting. (QNA)

Official

Deputy PM receives phone call from US secretary of defence

HE the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defence Affairs Sheikh Saud bin Abdulrahman bin Hassan al-Thani received yesterday a phone call from US Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin. At the outset of the call, the US Secretary of Defence congratulated HE the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defence Affairs on holding his new position. Then, they discussed the latest updates and developments in the region. They also discussed ways to enhance and develop relations between the two sides, in addition to topics of common interest. (QNA)

Shura Council reviews Ministry of Municipality's strategy 2024-2030

The Shura Council held its weekly session yesterday under the chairmanship of its Speaker HE Hassan bin Abdullah al-Ghanem. At the outset of the session, HE the Speaker conveyed, on behalf of himself and Their Excellencies members of the Council, the congratulations and greetings to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, His Highness the Father Amir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani and His Highness the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani on the occasion of the National Day on December 18.

He also extended his congratulations to the Qatari people and all residents of Qatar, emphasising that this national occasion embodies the highest meanings of loyalty and cohesion between the wise leadership and the faithful Qatari people, and reflects the pride in the blessed journey of the country towards more progress and prosper-

ity. In another note, the Shura Council expressed its strong condemnation and denunciation of the horrific massacre committed by Israeli occupation forces in the Nuseirat refugee camp in Gaza, which resulted in the death of dozens of Palestinians and injuries to many others.

The Council called for urgent international action to protect the Palestinian people and immediately stop the Israeli aggression, highlighting the importance of national parliaments and regional and international parliamentary unions in intensifying political and humanitarian efforts to alleviate the suffering of Gaza's residents and prevent the deterioration of the security situation in the region.

The Council then listened to a presentation by HE the Minister of Municipality Abdullah bin Hamad bin Abdullah al-Attiyah on the ministry's efforts and sectoral strategy for 2024-2030. In

this context, HE the Speaker and the Council members praised the ministry's efforts to enhance the quality of its services, achieve sustainable development goals, and implement programmes aimed at improving infrastructure. They commended the ministry's services in food security, infrastructure development, and its role in regulating health inspections and ensuring food safety.

They emphasised the importance of the Ministry of Municipality's role in achieving sustainable development goals, in line with the directives of the wise leadership, praising the ministry's efforts to develop infrastructure and enhance food security, contributing to building a comprehensive society equipped for growth and prosperity.

HE the Speaker also praised the launch of the National Food Security Strategy 2030, which represents a significant step towards

enhancing food security sustainability and meeting the community's needs in line with Qatar National Vision 2030.

He stressed the importance of the ministry keeping pace with current challenges amid technological developments and global openness, indicating that the joint efforts between government bodies and the community are fundamental to achieving national goals and supporting the comprehensive development process, which enhances Qatar's position as a leading model in sustainable development.

In his presentation, HE the Minister of Municipality outlined the key pillars of the ministry's strategic plan (2024-2030), highlighting the ministry's efforts to support the agricultural sector, enhance food security, develop infrastructure, prepare residential lands for citizens, and oversee food safety.

He detailed initiatives aimed



at supporting local farm owners through technical and economic assistance to boost agricultural production and increase self-sufficiency in strategic goods.

The presentation also covered sustainable management of agricultural resources and enhancing the sector's ability to adapt to climatic challenges, contributing to sustainable development goals. HE the Minister pointed out the significant progress made in recent years and the plans to increase self-sufficiency in certain agricultural and livestock products.

HE the Minister of Municipality pointed to the infrastructure development plan across the coun-

try, focusing on improving urban planning and implementing modern, flexible infrastructure projects using AI and simulation technologies.

He highlighted the importance of implementing the concept of "humanising cities" to improve urban environmental quality by enhancing green spaces and public amenities, improving residents' well-being and achieving sustainable development.

Regarding the preparation of residential lands for citizens, he affirmed the ministry's commitment to streamlining land allocation procedures and improving related services. (QNA)

QND conveys patriotic fervour

HE the Minister of Communications and Information Technology Mohammed bin Ali bin Mohammed al-Mannai has hailed the anniversary of the founding of the State of Qatar by Sheikh Jassim bin Mohammed bin Thani as an occasion that conveys patriotic meanings.

In remarks to Qatar News Agency (QNA), HE al-Mannai said the anniversary represents a pivotal moment in Qatar's history when Sheikh Jassim bin Mohammed bin Thani showed a legacy of prudence and leadership that led to the establishment of a modern independent and unified state.

Sheikh Jassim bin Mohammed bin Thani's vision was the foundation for Qatar's multi-sector renaissance, HE al-Mannai said, highlighting that Qatari people's pride on this historic occasion is the result of their ancestors' sacrifices for a sovereign state.

This occasion reminds Qataris of a long history of hard work and dedication to build a single national identity through which all members of the Qatari people unite for a prosperous future. As marking this occasion prompts Qataris to reflect on Qatar's achievements, it also boosts the need to preserve their national heritage and the values set by the Founder, he added.

HE al-Mannai hailed the National Day as an opportunity for all nationals and residents to renew



their pledge to the country and its wise leadership to press on accomplishments that elevate Qatar's profile. Turning to the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (MCIT)'s achievements, al-Mannai highlighted the ministry's future digital vision, primarily the launch of the Digital Agenda 2030 — a six-pillar strategy striving to foster public and private sectors to build a thriving digital economy aligning with the Third National Development Strategy (NDS-3) and Qatar National Vision 2030.

In this respect, he spoke about the Fanar project — an Arab AI Project in collaboration with local and Arab agencies. A significant milestone underscoring Qatar's dedication to elevating the Arabic language and culture in the AI era, Fanar is expected to generate accu-

rate Arabic texts through original texts amounting to approximately 300bn words.

Also among the MCIT's accomplishments were the 2024 launch of the Qatar Digital Academy and TASMU project. The Qatar Digital Academy — an expansion of the Qatar Digital Government Training Program keeps a keen eye for enhancing digital competencies in Qatar, envisioning training 1,000 state employees annually. With a focus on many digital skills such as AI, cybersecurity and the Internet of Things, the academy also grants 250 employees international certificates annually to enhance their qualifications and keep pace with technological developments.

The academy's specialised training programmes aligning the needs of government institutions aim to build a qualified workforce that supports digital transformation in Qatar and overcome the future challenges. Tasmu — a project catalysing Qatar's ICT ecosystem — unites global innovators with the needs of the local market to fuel Qatar's digital transformation. The programme received 640 applications from 74 countries following a thrilling 2023 cycle, which garnered \$36m funding and over \$100m sales. HE the Minister also spoke about SafeSpace, a project set to be launched in 2025 with the aim of elevating awareness about digital safety.

Egypt's ties with Qatar based on common historical, human values

Egypt's ambassador to Qatar Amr El Sherbini has affirmed that the Egyptian-Qatari relations are based on common historical and humanitarian values based on the foundations of co-operation and mutual interests, stressing that they receive great attention from senior officials in the two countries to strengthen the bonds of friendship and co-operation in all political, economic, and social fields, and achieve more prosperity for the two brotherly peoples.

In a statement to Qatar News Agency (QNA) on the occasion of the Qatar National Day (QND), he pointed out his country's endeavour to maintain its relations with Qatar and push it forward towards a promising and prosperous future by developing political, economic, and cultural relations, as well as facilitating investment opportunities for companies from both countries, indicating that this occasion is an opportunity to emphasise the depth of fraternal relations that unite the two brotherly countries to remind that these deep-rooted relations are based on love and common aspirations for the progress of the Egyptian and Qatari peoples.

The ambassador praised the role of the two countries in developing aspects of co-operation in various political and economic fields as bilateral relations are witnessing broad movement at a high pace through mutual visits between officials of the two brotherly countries. The ambassador said that in addition



to the official level of relations, cultural co-operation constitutes an important component of soft power in the relations between the two countries, highlighting the role of the Egyptian community in supporting these relations at the popular level, through its contribution to achieving the state's goals towards development, progress, and prosperity. El Sherbini also highlighted Qatar's achievements and successes in recent years in various developmental, economic, investment, social, and political fields, through the implementation of national strategies and development projects, which made Qatar a model to be emulated in comprehensive and sustainable development.

He emphasised that the Qatari economy has succeeded in strengthening its strength in the regional and international arenas despite the effects that have occurred on the global economy, thanks to the solid policies, foundations, and sound measures taken by the state in dealing with challenges, as it has been able during the past years to achieve progress in economic diversification by completing a large number of important

industrial and agricultural projects, which have enhanced the achievement of the self-sufficiency strategy, in addition to its interest in economic and investment legislation and laws that help attract foreign investments and attract international companies to work in the State of Qatar. The ambassador highlighted the important and well-known role played by Qatar at the diplomatic level through mediation efforts in settling disputes, encouraging and establishing platforms for dialogue in peacemaking and resolving and settling many issues, crises, and disputes in the region, as Qatar has become a centre for conferences and meetings that discuss political, economic, developmental and social issues, in addition to its participation in many meetings and dialogues between conflicting parties and its launching of initiatives to enhance dialogue between cultures, religions, and peoples.

He referred to the humanitarian efforts undertaken by Qatar to support the affected areas, especially in the current conditions that Gaza is suffering from, through the institutions working in the humanitarian sector, and its role in delivering humanitarian aid to the sector in co-ordination with Egypt. The ambassador extended his sincere congratulations and best wishes to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani and the Qatari government and people, wishing goodness, security, and prosperity for Qatar. (QNA)

Time to reflect, celebrate achievements in all areas

Iran's ambassador to Qatar Ali Salehabadi considered Qatar National Day as an important time to reflect and celebrate the national achievements made by Qatar, noting that the State has become the focus of the world's attention for its achievements at all levels.

Speaking to QNA, he pointed out that Qatar's foreign policy is marked by its reliance on the principles of mediation and credibility, which has earned it the respect of the international community, especially in issues related to the security and stability of the region.

He noted the renewed renaissance witnessed by the country under the leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, who continues with steady steps to implement Qatar National Vision 2030 by launching major strategic projects contributes to achieving sustainable development and enhances Qatar's posi-



tion regionally and internationally.

He pointed out that Qatar celebrates National Day amidst an atmosphere of joy and brotherhood, noting that this day, known as Founder's Day, holds a special place in the hearts of the Qatari people as an occasion that represents a symbol of historical glory, present achievements, bright future hopes, and a source of pride and honour for all members of society.

He congratulated the Qatari peo-

ple on this occasion and wished the State continued progress and prosperity. Regarding Qatari-Iranian relations, he noted that they are based on the principles of good neighbourliness and co-operation, pointing to the remarkable development witnessed between them over the years thanks to the wise visions of the leaderships of the two countries.

Fraternal relations between Iran and Qatar are strengthened by mutual diplomatic and humanitarian stances, in addition to co-operation in various political and economic fields, the ambassador said, noting as well the two countries' keenness to consolidate their bilateral relations in a way that serves the interests of the two peoples, especially in light of the common vision that unites them regarding regional and international issues, and in efforts to enhance peace and stability. (QNA)

National Day reflects Qatari identity

Omani ambassador to Qatar Ammar bin Abdullah bin Sultan al-Busaidi has affirmed that Qatar National Day is a momentous and significant occasion, symbolising the founding of the modern State of Qatar by Sheikh Jassim bin Mohammed bin Thani. He emphasised that this occasion reflects the importance of national unity and Qatari identity, while fostering a sense of pride and honour among both Qatari citizens and residents alike.

In a statement to Qatar News Agency (QNA) on the occasion of National Day, he said that commemorating this day embodies national solidarity and renews the commitment to continue striving for further progress and prosperity. He affirmed that Qatar has become a global model for transforming challenges into opportunities.

The ambassador explained that



Qatar plays a pivotal role on both the regional and international stages thanks to its balanced and active foreign policy based on dialogue and constructive engagement. He noted that this approach has positioned Qatar as a key hub for those seeking peace and mediation in international crises. Qatar has successfully emerged as an influential diplomatic player contributing to the resolution of regional and global issues, reflecting its commitment to wisdom, peace, and stability in the region and the world.

He praised the tremendous progress Qatar achieved across various sectors, including infrastructure, education, healthcare, sports and culture.

He highlighted major projects, such as the World Cup stadiums and advanced infrastructure, as clear manifestations of Qatar's forward-looking vision and its ability to transform challenges into global accomplishments. The ambassador also commended Qatar's efforts in developing human resources and providing an outstanding educational and healthcare environment, which underscores the wise leadership of Qatar and its ambitious developmental vision.

Regarding the bilateral relations between Oman and Qatar, the ambassador emphasised that these relations are deeply rooted and distinguished, based on co-operation and respect. (QNA)



Minister chairs Lawyers Admissions Committee meeting

The Lawyers Admissions Committee convened yesterday under the chairmanship of HE the Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Ibrahim bin Ali al-Mohannadi. The agenda included the administration of the oath of admission for newly licensed attorneys, considering applications by several business owners to be registered on the legal roster, and approving applications of two trainee lawyers. Also discussed was the transfer of certain attorneys' registrations to the list of active practitioners eligible to appear before the Court of Cassation.

Additionally, the committee discussed legal profession regulations, including the minutes of the sub-committees and took the appropriate decisions accordingly. During the meeting, HE al-Mohannadi congratulated the committee on Qatar National Day, highlighting the occasion as a moment of pride in Qatar's achievements across all sectors. - QNA

QND celebrates 'nation-building journey'



HE the President of the Supreme Judiciary Council and President of the Court of Cassation Dr Hassan bin Lahdan al-Hassan al-Mohannadi highlighted Qatar National Day (QND) as a celebration of the journey of nation-building and giving that began with the founding of the state by Sheikh Jassim bin Mohammed bin Thani. In remarks to the Qatar News Agency

(QNA) on the occasion, HE Dr al-Mohannadi emphasised that the QND is an opportunity to reflect on the values of loyalty, dignity and sacrifice that laid the foundations of this nation, making it a model of development and progress. He extended congratulations to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, His Highness the Father Amir Sheikh

Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, and the people of Qatar on this national occasion which renews the pledge to uphold the principles of justice and promote the rule of law. HE Dr al-Mohannadi stressed the firm commitment to building a modern judicial system that guarantees the protection of individuals and institutions rights, and contributes to the security and stability that

underpin the nations renaissance and prosperity. He expressed wishes for continued security and safety of Qatar, and for guidance for the wise leadership in all that is best for the country and its people, emphasising that Qatar will always remain a beacon of justice and a model of progress and prosperity. - QNA



Rawabi Hypermarket launches 'WOW Qatar' for QND

Leading retailer Rawabi Hypermarket launched yesterday the "WOW Qatar" initiative in celebration of Qatar National Day, highlighting its commitment in promoting local products. The event, which promotes a wide selection of Qatar's finest products, is being held across all Rawabi Hypermarket stores in Qatar, a statement said. A ceremony at Rawabi Hypermarket Izghawa, the largest single-floor hypermarket in Qatar, was attended by Rawabi Group general manager Kamnu Baker, purchase manager Ismail V P, finance managers Navas K P and

Sabiq Ali, marketing manager Sajith E P, IT head Reneesh P, operations manager Ansar P P, and store managers. "We are thrilled to present the 'WOW Qatar' initiative, an important event that reflects our dedication to supporting Qatar's local economy and food heritage," Baker said. "On behalf of our management team, including chairman M P Abdullah Haji, managing director Mohammed Abdullah and executive director Ajmal Abdullah, I am proud to express our enthusiasm for promoting locally produced products in Rawabi stores." Rawabi Hypermarket, the statement said,

takes immense pride in being a premier destination in the region for locally-produced food and non-food items. Baker said the event strengthens Rawabi's connection with Qatar's food heritage. "We are proud to feature a wide range of Qatari products, including renowned brands such as Baladna, Rayyan Water, Dandy, Qatar Detergents, Batatos, Qbake, Qatar Filling, Tahaluf (Gourmet), Dr Puffs, and Qutoof," he said. "Additionally, Rawabi will highlight its own private label products, all proudly made in Qatar," he added.

NMoQ plans events and cultural activities

The National Museum of Qatar (NMoQ) is inviting the public to discover a series of activities planned in celebration of Qatar National Day (QND).



In a statement, the NMoQ said that the activities are presented for both local communities and tourists, adding that the series of events, held under the themes of *Alabarr (The Sea and The Land)*, include vibrant performances and heritage workshops aimed at fostering a sense of appreciation for the past while looking forward to a harmonious future.

The QND activities at the NMoQ will take place on December 18 from 3pm-7pm at the Baraha (*Albarr*) and Lagoon (*Albahar*) areas, with activities relevant to each area.

Albarr activities include demonstrations designed to offer visitors opportunities to explore various arts and crafts linked to Qatari heritage and culture, such as Alnaqda embroidery, Sadu performance, stilt garment show, and a live dance performance.

Visitors will also be able to enjoy a spectacular light installation in a lively atmosphere, while learning about the trades of the past.

Children will have the opportunity to learn old Qatari words and slangs and take part in assembling a costume puzzle sheet in a fun interactive workshop entitled "Eqalit".

Albahar activities include a light installation and a live demonstration where visitors will be able to discover how oysters are shucked to retrieve pearls, which was the main trade in the Gulf area.

Local cafes are also set to take part in the celebrations, offering visitors a unique variety of culinary choices.

Winners of the FANAN competition will also be announced for their creative input in creating original paintings inspired by the theme *Qatar's Treasures of the Sea: Then and Now*, reflecting the vital role the sea has played in the nations rich history and its ongoing importance.

In addition, Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art will be collaborating with the NMoQ to provide two workshops with renowned artists Ismail and Sumam Azzam in the Lagoon area.

Ismail Azzam's workshop will provide an understanding of the basics of drawing, light and shadow and perspective measuring.

Sumam Azzam's workshop will focus on contemporary model drawing that seamlessly combines observation and action.

The celebrations will conclude with a ceremony that will include a musical performance. - QNA

QND events for communities

The Workers Support and Insurance Fund (WSIF) will organise two mega cultural events for communities tomorrow in connection with Qatar National Day (QND), the Ministry of Interior (MoI) announced yesterday.

The first event will be conducted in the parking area of the cricket stadium at Asian town in Doha Industrial area while the second event will take place at Ideal Indian School ground from 3pm-9pm.

The two events include concerts, gift distribution for the public through lucky draws, safety and security awareness programmes, film shows, traditional shows by community teams, cultural performances by school teams and free medical checkups by private clinics.

"We are keen to hold both events in locations safe and convenient for the workers, to provide them with an opportunity to express happiness and joy on the occasion of the National Day of Qatar, which they consider their second home," WSIF executive director Khuloud Saif al-Kubaisi said.

"We are very happy to invite the members of communities of different nationalities residing in different parts of Qatar, and also the workers of the companies, to come and enjoy the celebrations and cultural events we have arranged," the official said.

On the same day from 3pm-7pm, the Bedar Initiative of Ras Laffan Community Outreach Programme, in association with Barwa, Waseef and the WSIF, will organise a QND-related event in Al Khor Barwa Workers Recreation Complex at the Industrial area in Al Khor.

The event will feature a concert by an Asian orchestra, a National Day parade by the workers of the Bedar Initiative member companies, a workers' talent show, safety and security awareness programmes and gifts for the public through draws.

Barwa and Waseef will organise two QND-connected events for the residents of the Argentine neighbourhood and Barwa Al Baraha in the Doha Industrial Area from 3pm-8pm.

HMC holds event to celebrate Qatar National Day

In celebration of Qatar National Day (QND) and as a reflection of enduring national values, Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC) organised an event under the patronage of managing director Mohammed bin Khalifa al-Suwaidi.

Al-Suwaidi participated in the flag-raising ceremony, which was followed by various events, including the Qatari Ardha.

The annual activities, organised by the HMC's Human Resources Employee Wellbeing and Wellness Department, commemorate the unity and establishment of Qatar in 1878 by the Founder, Sheikh Jassim bin Mohammed bin Thani.

The events aim to honour Qatari heritage, strengthen national identity among healthcare staff, and foster expressions of love and gratitude for the country.

They also highlight the state's history and cultural legacy.

The celebration programme fea-



tured a journey through history and Qatari heritage, offering an experience that blended tradition with modernisation.

The venue was designed to resemble a Fereej, a traditional Qatari neighbourhood, showcasing its cultural and social aspects.

The QND celebrations across the HMC's facilities included raising the Qatar flag to decorate HMC hospital façades.

Patients, visitors, and healthcare employees participated in the celebrations and exchanged congratulations on the occasion. - QNA



Qatari aircraft arrives in Turkiye with aid for Syria



A fourth Qatari Armed Forces aircraft arrived yesterday in the Turkish city of Gaziantep, carrying humanitarian aid, including medical supplies, food and shelter supplies, provided by the Qatar Fund for Development, as part of the air bridge operated by Qatar to provide aid to brotherly Syrian people and contribute to addressing their humanitarian conditions. - QNA

Civil Defence holds jail evacuation drill

The Operations Department of the General Directorate of Civil Defence conducted a mock evacuation drill yesterday at the inmate facilities of the Penal and Correctional Institutions Department. This exercise, according to an X post by the Ministry of Interior, was part of Civil Defence's ongoing efforts to ensure readiness and enhance response speed in cases of fires and other emergencies, in co-ordination with participating entities. The evacuation involved the Internal Security Force (Lekhwiya), the Penal and Correctional Institutions Department, and the Ambulance Service of Hamad Medical Corporation.





Amerigo Vespucci in Doha

The *Amerigo Vespucci*, the historic sailing ship and training ship of the Italian navy, has arrived in Doha.

Doha is the 30th stop on the Vespucci World Tour, which started from Italy on July 1 last year.

The Vespucci World Tour's arrival in Doha and docking Old Doha Port is part of the relationship between Italy and Qatar that has strengthened in recent years.

During the stopover in Doha, the *Amerigo Vespucci* will be open to the public free of charge from December 18-21, and will be flanked by the Villaggio Italia, the international exposition of "Made in Italy," which brings together a diverse programme of artistic and musical events and Italian food tasting.

Prior booking to go aboard the ship is available on the Vespucci World Tour's official website.

The Villaggio Italia, which was previously in Los Angeles, Tokyo, Darwin, Singapore and Mumbai, is being held in Qatar with the support of the Italian embassy in Doha, the Italian Trade Agency and local partners Qatar Tourism, Katara - the Cultural Village and Old Doha Port. - **QNA**



6th edition of Katara Space Science Programme concludes

The 6th edition of the Katara Space Science Programme (KSSP), which took place from December 12-14 at the Al Thuraya Planetarium at Katara - the Cultural Village, marked another milestone in promoting space science education in Qatar.

The programme, which focusing on the theme *Our Outer Solar System*, attracted more than 500 space enthusiasts, students, and experts, underscoring the growing interest in space exploration and planetary science in the region.

The event featured lectures, discussions, and hands-on activities designed to deepen understanding of the outer solar system.

Attendees interacted with renowned scientists and experts, including National Aeronautics and Space Administration programme scientist Dr Henry Throop, and the Planetary Science Institute's research scientist Dr Kirby Daniel Runyon and senior scientist Dr Amanda A Sickafosse.

Their presentations delved into the mysteries of distant planets, moons, and other celestial bodies, offering insights into ongoing space exploration missions.

Katara general manager Prof Khalid bin Ibrahim al-Sulaiti said: "This event not only strengthens our commitment to advancing cultural and scientific knowledge in Qatar but also inspires future generations to explore the wonders of space."

"This month's theme, focusing on the outer solar system, sparked enthusiastic discussions and curiosity about distant worlds like Pluto and Charon," said Rashmi Agarwal, president and chief executive of event organiser Maps International.

Attendees had the chance to engage in solar observations using a specialised telescope and learn about the unique geologic features on the dwarf planet Pluto and Charon, one of Pluto's moons.

Katara's QND celebrations attract more visitors

Qatar National Day (QND) celebrations organised by Katara - the Cultural Village attracted more visitors on its second day yesterday.

These festivities run until December 18, from 3pm-9pm, alongside the Katara Corniche, and feature a wide variety of activities, including military parades, heritage events, and artistic performances.

Spectators enjoyed the military music performance, the Qatari Ardha (traditional dance), perform-

ances by military music bands from China and Italy, and theatrical show *Suhail and Thuraya*, which combined entertainment and education.

Katara is also continuing, for the 12th consecutive year, the signing of the *Book of Loyalty and Devotion*.

The heritage tents, including Al Qannas tent and Al Galayel Championship tent, the street arts festival featuring artistes and musicians, and the daily shows at Al Thuraya Planetarium are among the highlights.



Labour ministry celebrates QND

The Ministry of Labour organised events yesterday to mark the Qatar National Day (QND).

The celebration, organised under the auspices of HE the Minister of Labour Dr Ali bin Smaikh al-Marri at the Museum of Islamic Art Park, featured diverse cultural and heritage activities, community performances, and special programmes for children, embodying the spirit of national unity and pride in Qatari identity while fostering loyalty and national belonging among all attendees.

The celebration included a national art exhibition featuring photographs of Qatar's

heritage, tourist, and cultural landmarks.

A collective mural allowed attendees to express their love for Qatar, while interactive activities for children and youth, workshops to draw the Qatari flag, and cultural and heritage competitions reflected the nation's authentic customs and traditions.

Additionally, interactive activities were organised to share information about the ministry's initiatives supporting Qatari citizens and children of Qatari women.

The festivities witnessed wide participation and strong engagement from senior officials, ministry staff, labour sector partners, various segments of Qatari society,



and expatriate communities.

Expatriate communities participated in a heritage parade, with members of each

community wearing traditional costumes while carrying the Qatari flag alongside the flags of their home countries. - **QNA**

Qatar National Day celebrates remarkable journey: QNL official

Qatar National Day (QND) is the celebration of a remarkable journey of human development and sustainable growth, guided by the visionary leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, Qatar National Library (QNL)'s National Collections and Special Initiatives director Abeer al-Kawari said.

"His leadership has solidified Qatar's position as a global hub for innovation, knowledge exchange, and cultural dialogue," she said.

"At Qatar National Library, we take immense pride in the pivotal role we play as a cultural institution, contributing to a knowl-

edge-based economy, fostering intellectual exchange, safeguarding our rich heritage, and promoting a culture of learning, reading, innovation, and exploration among all community members," al-Kawari continued.

"Through our community initiatives, diverse resources, and the Heritage Library's rare collection, we not only document and celebrate Qatar's traditions and legacy, but also preserve the rich history of the Arab and Islamic world," she added. "This ensures that future generations can draw lessons from the past to shape the present and inspire the future."

"Our National Collection is

central to our mission of documenting Qatar's history and identity, deepening our understanding of our cultural roots," the official said. "This invaluable treasure is cherished and preserved through our restoration and digitisation efforts, empowering youth to contribute to the nation's continued development."

"We remain committed to introducing Qatar and the region to the world through our diverse digital resources," al-Kawari stressed.

"These include the Qatar Digital Library, the world's largest online platform dedicated to the history of Qatar and the Gulf, our

digital repository of Arab manuscripts and aerial photographs that document the urban development of Doha and Qatar, our open-access platform Manara, which makes scientific research available globally, and our latest initiative to document and preserve the collections of Qatari families," she stated.

"Looking ahead, Qatar National Library remains steadfast to its mission of fostering an inspiring environment that strengthens the community's understanding of Qatari identity," the official said.

"By exploring our past and the legacy of our ancestors, we nurture innovation and empower the



community through knowledge exchange," al-Kawari emphasised. "We will continue to collaborate closely with our partners in both the government and the private sectors to raise awareness of our national heritage."

QCDC volunteers participate in QND celebrations at Darb Al Saai

Qatar Career Development Centre (QCDC), a member of Qatar Foundation (QF), has launched the latest iteration of its 'EmpowerAbility' career development programme, to support individuals with disabilities and learning difficulties. The initiative, launched ahead of Qatar National Day (QND), brought together 13 volunteers and key partner organisations – such as the Ministry of Labour, Qatar Charity's Ezdehar Platform, Qatar Voluntary Centre, the Young Entrepreneurs Club, Wafeeq Platform, and Qatar Manpower Solutions & Co 'Jusour' – to make significant contributions toward organising the Darb Al Saai Qatar National Day activations. Participants received specialised training from the Qatar Voluntary



An activity by EmpowerAbility.

Centre, equipping them to take on key roles in planning and executing various activities at Darb Al Saai. The



EmpowerAbility participation at Darb Al Saai.

participation demonstrates their immense potential and showcases their ability to meaningfully contribute to

the workforce and society at large. Saad Abdulla al-Kharji, acting director of QCDC, said: "Programmes

like 'EmpowerAbility' underscore the critical role stakeholders play in building an inclusive and thriving society. By mobilising efforts and resources, we can create meaningful opportunities for people of all abilities to contribute to the community. The success of this initiative reflects the power and impact of collective action, and we are grateful to our partners and volunteers for their dedication to this cause." In addition to their efforts at Darb Al Saai, 'EmpowerAbility' participants will host special activities at Al Hazm Mall tomorrow. The public is invited to join in the Qatar National Day celebrations and witness the hard work, enthusiasm, and commitment of the volunteers firsthand.



HE Sheikh Faisal bin Qassim al-Thani

Ode to Our Land to screen at Msheireb Downtown Doha

• The film screening is part of a broader series of events to mark QND

Msheireb Downtown Doha (MDD), in partnership with the Doha Film Institute (DFI), has announced the screening of the documentary *Ode to Our Land*, a tribute to His Highness the Father Amir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani's visionary leadership in building a modern, prosperous nation. The documentary, directed by Amal al-Muftah and Rawda al-Thani, will be screened at Barahat Msheireb on Qatar National Day (QND), December 18, at 3pm. The film highlights His Highness' commitment to transforming Qatar into a modern, thriving nation, ensuring the prosperity of all its people while advancing Qatar's role in the Arab world.

The film screening is part of a broader series of events organised by MDD to mark QND and offer diverse programming during the winter months.

This includes a range of family-friendly activities, performances,

and competitions to engage guests of all ages.

Starting at 4pm on December 18, activities will take place in Sahat Al Nakheel, where visitors can enjoy traditional Qatari performances such as the Ardha (sword dance), arts and crafts workshops, and more.

Baraha Cinema, an open-air cinema, will screen films from December 18-January 4, 2025, offering family-friendly movie nights in partnership with Novo Cinema. Additionally, the live screening of the FIFA Intercontinental Cup Qatar 2024 final will take place at Barahat Msheireb on December 18. From December 21-January 3, the live screening of Gulf Cup 2024 matches will also be held at Barahat Msheireb.

MDD is also hosting a variety of activities as part of its winter season programming, which runs through February 2025.

The Mal Awal exhibition, showcasing the history of video games from the perspective of local col-

lectors, will be on display at Sahat Al Nakheel Msheireb until April 10, 2025.

The Winter Experience at The Company House Courtyard will run from January 2-31, turning the space into a luxurious winter destination with cozy cabanas and fire pits.

MDD will host the Qatar Investment and Innovation Conference on January 15, bringing together industry leaders to discuss how emerging technologies can drive economic growth and regional co-operation.

From January 23-February 1, 2025, Sahat Al Nakheel at MDD will come alive with Candy Zone, with towering sweet-themed structures, colourful installations, and the Candy Land experience.

On January 30-31, 2025, Barahat Msheireb will host Downtown Tech, showcasing the latest in artificial intelligence (AI), Internet of Things (IoT), robotics, and autonomous vehicles. The event will



bring together innovators, tech enthusiasts, and industry leaders to explore how these technologies are shaping the future.

MDD will celebrate Qatar National Sport Day on February 11, featuring interactive sports stations and activations.

Cultural enthusiasts can look

forward to the Orchestra in Barahat Msheireb performances, in partnership with the Qatar Philharmonic Orchestra, on February 14-15 and 18-19.

A series of Ramadan Iftar and Suhoor events is also planned offering exquisite dining and live entertainment.

HBKU Press interacts with Sheikh Faisal

The book celebrates Qatar's milestones and achievements, chronicling its journey as it became the formidable regional and international power it is today

HE Sheikh Faisal bin Qassim al-Thani discussed the miracle of Qatar in his book *Qatar Through My Eyes: History, People, and Sovereignty* with publisher Hamad Bin Khalifa University Press (HBKU Press).

His book contains the all-encompassing history of Qatar through the ages, highlighting its remarkable development as it transitioned from its desert and pearl diving heritage to the era of oil and gas, and further on to its economic diversification and expansion toward a knowledge-based economy.

The book celebrates Qatar's milestones and achievements, chronicling its journey as it became the formidable regional and international power it is today while maintaining its status as one of the safest countries in the world.

HE Sheikh Faisal credits this inspiring transformation to the visionary leadership, strong governance, and the Qatari people. The full interview is available to watch now across all HBKU Press social media channels.

Old Doha Port lines up cultural activities and performances

Old Doha Port is gearing up for Qatar National Day celebrations tomorrow with a lineup of cultural activities and performances.

The celebrations will begin at 4pm with a live performance by a traditional Qatari band, continuing until 10pm. Visitors will have the chance to explore traditional Qatari crafts, with craftsmen showcasing live demonstrations from 4pm-10pm, of activities including ship building, pottery, and fish net installation.

The artisans will demonstrate how to make bait boxes, knitted fishing nets, bamboo handicrafts, and more.

Attendees will be able to witness the intricacies of calligraphy, henna art, Al Sadu weaving, and bisht embroidery. Gypsum carving and hay handi-



craft will also be on display.

The Nomas Centre, an educational institution under the Ministry of Culture dedicated to youth development by engaging them in activities relat-

ed to the heritage and authentic customs of the people of Qatar. Visitors can participate in traditional Qatari games such as Taq Taq Taqiya, Al-Sobba, and Al-Dahrouj.

Giant jute bag display at Safari Mall

Safari Hypermarket has unveiled a five-metre tall jute bag display at Safari Mall. Abu Hamour, showcasing its commitment to innovation, sustainability, and customer engagement.

The display, created entirely by Safari's in-house Creative and Joinery Division, highlights the eco-friendly nature of jute bags while encouraging shoppers to adopt greener alternatives in their daily lives, a statement said.

The installation, which stands as a centerpiece in the hypermarket, is made using reusable and biodegradable jute bags. These bags are designed to be stylish, durable, and convenient, offering customers an environmentally conscious alternative to single-use plastic bags.

Safari's management emphasised that the initiative aligns with the company's ongoing efforts to promote sustainability while delivering creative and engaging shopping experiences.

The project reflects Safari's dedication to both quality and environmental responsibility while showcasing the creative expertise of its own team.

The jute bags are available for purchase at all Safari outlets for QR10, making it an affordable and eco-friendly option for customers looking to embrace sustainable shopping practices, the statement added.



Qatar Foundation media director commends Qatar National Day



An aerial view of Qatar Foundation's Education City.

On the occasion of Qatar National Day, Qatar Foundation honours the visionary leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani and congratulates the people of Qatar in driving the nation's progress, media director Aljazi T al-Henzab said.

"This is a journey which Qatar Foundation is itself proud to contribute to. Everything we do is in the service of Qatar and its community – from the world-class education we offer and the breakthroughs we make within our research and innovation hubs, to the opportunities we provide for everyone to embrace lifelong learning and be active citizens within our diverse, open, and welcoming environment of Education City.

"From our unique ecosystem of knowledge, over 17,000 school and university students have graduated, equipped with the skills and mindsets to

be future leaders and drivers of change in sectors critical to Qatar – as we can see across our country's key industries and organisations.

"Through our efforts in the fields of progressive education – at both pre-university and higher education levels – precision health, Artificial Intelligence, and sustainability, we are helping to advance our country's status as a hub of knowledge and innovation, every day. And from perpetuating our cultural heritage to promoting the value of healthy lifestyles, our programmes and initiatives cultivate a strong, active community rooted in its national identity.

"In 2024, our ecosystem has continued to evolve and expand, with the establishment of Qatar Precision Health Institute and Al-Mujadilah Centre and Mosque for Women. We have opened up new, inclusive sporting pathways that everyone can experience, enjoy, and benefit from. We brought the

world together in Doha to discuss the future of families, and the future of global healthcare, and showcased the beauty of vibrancy of the culture and creativity of Arab-Islamic civilisations through Al Ghorrah for Literature and Arts. And the establishment of Education City High School has enhanced our education model, from which over 900 university students and over 700 pre-university education students graduated this year.

"In 2025 – a very special year for Qatar Foundation, as we mark 30 years since our founding by His Highness the Father Amir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, and Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser. We will continue to meet change and challenges with the same purpose, ambition, and belief in what knowledge makes possible that has always defined our organisation. And we will do this in the name of the great nation of Qatar – and for its people."



Strong co-ordination to implement GCC unified visa: QT chief

By Shafeeq Alingal
Staff Reporter

There is strong co-operation and co-ordination among the member countries to implement the proposed unified Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) visa, HE the Chairman of Qatar Tourism and Chair of the Board of Directors of Visit Qatar Saad bin Ali al-Kharji has said.

While talking to Qatar TV, he said the visa will benefit all countries in the region.

"There is great co-ordination with GCC countries regarding the calendar of events or joint campaigns to promote visits to the region. There is no doubt that the unified Gulf visa will serve all countries in the region," the official explained.

The proposed multi entry visa will allow travel to Qatar, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, and Bahrain.

"The region has unique features with anyone visiting able to travel from one city to another in trips that do not exceed an hour. We launched a trial with



HE Saad bin Ali al-Kharji speaking to Qatar TV.

the Ministry of Tourism of Saudi Arabia to promote the two countries and we noticed the success of this campaign, which can be applied to all GCC countries. There is great development and co-ordination between us and the GCC countries, even in the type of events and their timing," al-Kharji said.

The official explained that the goal of diversifying the calendar of events is to highlight Qatari culture to visitors, and the cal-

endar is distributed in line with major events in the country, pointing to many diverse and distinctive events to encourage citizens and residents to engage in domestic tourism, including activities and events in Ras Brouq, Sealine, Al Udeid and Al Shamal. "Qatar's tourism strategy is in line with the comprehensive development plan to achieve Qatar National Vision 2030 and diversify the national economy," al-Kharji said while explaining there are multiple strengths Qatar owns when it comes to the tourism sector. These include the strategic geographical location, the distinction of Qatar Airways with more than 170 destinations around the world and the distinction of Hamad International Airport which won many international awards.

"These make the country one of the fastest growing tourist destinations in the Middle East. We have witnessed a significant increase in the number of international visitors and in 2023 we achieved 4mn visitors. This year we will reach nearly 5mn visitors from different countries," he added.



National Museum of Qatar launches Mal Lawal 4 exhibition in Msheireb



The National Museum of Qatar (NMQ) has unveiled Mal Lawal 4, the one-of-its-kind platform in the region that celebrates the art of collecting.

The exhibition will be on view in Msheireb Sahat Al Nakhel Unit X04 until April 10, 2025.

Held under the patronage of HE Sheikha Al Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, Chairperson of Qatar Museums (QM), Mal Lawal aims to showcase the local heritage and offer insight into the lives of private collectors, collections, and the practice of collecting in Qatar. With a focus on the 1990s, this edition of Mal Lawal (in English: 'From the old times') adopts a curatorial approach exploring the history of gaming before the turn of the millennium, marked by the evolution of advanced graphic capabilities which spurred remarkable growth in the gaming world. The exhibition aims to highlight how collectors have preserved memories of this crucial time in gaming through their collections. Among the highlight objects are consoles and games that date back to the mid seventies, such as Fairchild channel F console and games lent by Fahad al-Kuwari; Sakhr AX-170 keyboard from 1986 lent by Dr Mohammad al-Kuwari; Atari 2600 console from 1980 lent by Kamal Naji Muhammad, among many more unique objects.

Commenting on the occasion, Sheikh Abdulaziz bin Hamad al-Thani, director of the National Museum of Qatar, said: "Since 2012, NMQ has offered the public a rare glimpse into the private collections of Qatar's collectors, bringing to life their unique stories in an innovative, holistic and immersive way. As such, Mal Lawal 4 is the perfect platform to bring people

together under one roof with a shared passion for preserving memories. In this exhibition, we go beyond the walls of our museum and gather diverse communities in this historic location to experience memories of an exciting and crucial time in gaming history. We invite everyone to take a trip down memory lane to this special time with us."

The selection of the exhibition's location at Msheireb Downtown Doha, specifically near the storied Kahraba Street, is no coincidence; Kahraba Street, meaning "Electricity Street", holds a special place in Doha's legacy as the first street in the city to receive electricity. This milestone marked Qatar's embrace of modernity and progress, and in the decades that followed, Kahraba Street became the go-to spot for electronics shops. While certainly a delightful look at vintage gaming, the exhibition also celebrates the spirit of curiosity and discovery that Kahraba Street represented. Through this thoughtful alignment of venue and theme, Mal Lawal 4 and Msheireb Properties came together to honour the origins of Qatar's technological journey.

Speaking on the occasion of the exhibition opening, Msheireb Properties Senior Director of Corporate Communications Dr Hafiz Ali Abdulla said: "The Mal Lawal exhibition of vintage gaming items is a tribute to the deep connection between technology, culture, and community in Doha's history. Msheireb Downtown Doha's sustainable, smart city framework provides a contemporary lens through which visitors can explore the evolution of gaming technology and reflect on how electronics have shaped personal and communal experiences over time." (QNA)

Qatar Charity partners with Jordan's education ministry to build school

Qatar Charity (QC) has signed a co-operation agreement with Jordan's Ministry of Education to launch the construction of the Al-Hilaliya Primary School for Boys in the Madaba Governorate.

The agreement was signed by Saleh al-Merri, the general supervisor of QC's office in Jordan, in the presence of Qatar's ambassador Sheikh Saud bin Nasser bin Jassim al-Thani, and Jordan's Minister of Education, Dr Azmi Mahafzah.

The agreement outlines the construction of a primary school covering approximately 1,300sq m, with 12 classrooms capable of accommodating 400 students annually. The school will also include a range of essential educational facilities. The total cost of the project is estimated at 450,000 Jordanian dinars.

Al-Merri emphasised that



Qatar Charity is committed to enhancing co-operation with the Jordanian government and trusted local organisations to consolidate efforts for the benefit of humanitarian causes.

Ambassador Sheikh Saud underscored that the agreement is part of broader efforts to strengthen the educational sector by creating positive and conducive learning environments. He highlighted Qatar's ongoing partnership with Jordan

in achieving significant milestones through effective Qatari institutions in the humanitarian response field.

Dr Mahafzah praised QC's generous contribution to the project, which aligns with the ministry's strategic plans to expand school construction, eliminate rented buildings, and phase out the two-shift system, ultimately ensuring a better educational environment for students.

'Qatar of Eminence' expo held to mark National Day

Souq Waqif Art Center yesterday organised an art exhibition under the theme of 'Qatar of Eminence' to mark the Qatar National Day (QND).

The event shines a spotlight on the Qatari culture, and expresses values of patriotism, pride and belonging through the prism of fine arts. In his remarks to Qatar News Agency (QNA), deputy director of Souq Waqif Art Center Faisal al-Abdullah highlighted that 25 Qatari and foreign artists are showcasing diverse groundbreaking innovations that feature paintings, sculptures, pottery art, and other works on display to seamlessly blend Qatari heritage with contemporary art expressions. Those artists endeavour to reflect Qatar's national vision and its cultural values through their creations, while also highlighting the pivotal role of arts in strengthening national identity, highlighted al-Abdullah. He added that the event is held as part of QND activities that essentially aim to foster national ethos, thereby offering them the opportunity to express their feelings toward the nation through art, positioning itself as a platform for engagement among innovators and the public to share ideas and inspiration.

He indicated that the exhibition is open to public at Souq Waqif Art Center and will last until Jan 6, 2025, as a unique opportunity for all to enjoy artworks that depict Qatar's ethos, history and future, pointing out that the exhibition showcases facets of inveterate Qa-



tari innovation and heritage, with a special emphasis on the Qatari environment, the life of forebears, the nation's identity and mores, as well as the life of the land and the sea. Fine artist Masoud Rashid told QNA that his participation came in recognition of the importance of celebrating QND everyone with his personal way through using brush and canvas to translate emotions of patriotism to be profoundly expressed through art and conveying the feelings of loyalty and belonging. (QNA)

Customs foils smuggling of chewing tobacco

An attempt to smuggle around 325kg of chewing tobacco was foiled by General Authority of Customs (GAC), an X post said. The Anti-Smuggling and Harmful Practices Department in co-operation with Hamad Port and Southern Ports Customs was able to effectively analyse the intelligence data in this regard. Accordingly, the targeted cargo was scanned using GAC's specialised equipment, where the banned substances were found hidden inside a cargo of detergent powder in boxes.



Al Jazeera 360 film wins Anhar Award in Jordan

By Tawfik Lamari
Staff Reporter

The documentary film *Gaza: The Sound of Life and Death* from the original production of the Al Jazeera 360 platform won the Anhar Award at Karama (Arabic for dignity) Human Rights Film Festival held in the Jordanian capital, Amman.

The film *Gaza: The Sound of Life and Death* highlights the idea of sound as a documentary work by shedding light on the daily life of audio technician Mohammed Yaghi during the ongoing war of extermination since October 7, 2023. Yaghi records all sounds in

the Gaza Strip and documents the crimes committed by the occupation there.

The film gains its strength from the fact that it was produced during the war, and its editing was done from inside a tent in one of the refugee camps, where the director, photographer and sound technician are stationed. The sound technician is the character of the film through which he transmits sounds that cannot be heard from Gaza due to the massacres that the occupation is constantly committing.

The head of the original production department at Al Jazeera 360, Awad Jumaa, confirms that the idea for the film came during

the filming of an episode of the programme *Diary of a Fighter* in Gaza before the war. While dealing with the sound engineer, he was inspired to document the life story of the sound engineer, who confirmed that he recorded all the sounds in Gaza, from the cry of a newborn to the death throes.

In turn, the film's producer, Shada Salhab, confirmed that the film is a cinematic icon that was able to transform sound into a witness to a tragedy and a human holocaust that has been ongoing for more than 14 months. She added that cinema is an act of resistance, and that the film is part of the Palestinian narrative that has changed in each era to suit the



View from Anhar Award ceremony at Karama Human Rights Film Festival.

nature of the stage. The festival witnessed several screenings of original productions on the platform, such as an episode of the

programme *Victims and Heroes*, the film *Eyes of Gaza*, in addition to the documentary film *Al-Shifa Hospital*, and the award-winning

film "Rivers of Gaza" "The Voice of Life and Death".

The Karama Festival is the first international human rights film festival to be established in Jordan. Since its first edition in 2010, Karama Human Rights Film Festival is a nine-day international film festival held in Amman, Jordan, with a global partnership that aims to promote dialogue, engage in debate, build capacity and launch high-impact programmes to address pressing human rights issues in the Middle East and North Africa region. Over the past 11 years of Karama, the festival has screened over 600 films from 66 countries. The films ranged from documentaries, feature films, short films and animation.



US strikes kill 12 IS militants in Syria

AFP
Washington

American forces carried out air strikes against the Islamic State group in Syria yesterday, killing a dozen of its fighters, the US military said.

"The strikes against the ISIS leaders, operatives and camps were conducted as part of the ongoing mission to disrupt, degrade and defeat ISIS," US Central Command (Centcom) said on social media, using an acronym for the Islamic State group.

The aim is to prevent "the terrorist group from conducting external operations and to ensure that

ISIS does not seek opportunities to reconstitute in central Syria," Centcom said. "These recent strikes are in former regime and Russian-controlled areas ensuring pressure is maintained on ISIS," it added.

Washington is seeking to prevent the group from taking advantage of the fall of Bashar al-Assad's government, which was overthrown by a rebel alliance that took the capital Damascus on December 8.

That day, US forces hit more than 75 targets associated with the Islamic State group in Syria using a combination of warplanes including B-52s, F-15s, and A-10s. The US military has around 900 troops in Syria and 2,500 in Iraq as part of an international coalition against the Islamic State group that was established in 2014 to combat militants.

Army drone attack in Sudan's Omdurman kills 15: lawyers' group

AFP
Port Sudan

A Sudanese military drone attack in the Khartoum area killed 15 civilians, pro-democracy lawyers said yesterday, 20 months into a war which has left the country in a crisis whose gravity the world does not understand, according to a UN official.

"The deadly attack resulted in the death of 15 people with six others injured and two individuals still missing," said the Emergency Lawyers, who have been documenting human rights abuses throughout the war between the army and paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

Most of Omdurman – the capital's twin city across the Nile River – is under army control but the drone attack – which occurred on Saturday –

took place in western Omdurman which is under RSF control.

The truck, carrying milk barrels from surrounding villages to an area near a camel market in Omdurman, reportedly broke down on the road before being targeted by the military drone, the lawyers said. They added that according to initial evidence the victims were all herders and workers involved in milk transportation.

Tens of thousands of people have been killed in the war which has displaced millions and left the northeast African country on the brink of famine, according to aid agencies.

Both the army and the RSF have been accused of targeting civilians and indiscriminately shelling residential areas.

The RSF holds Khartoum North (Bahri) just across the Nile River and also part of the greater Khartoum area.

Iran extends school closures in Tehran amid fuel shortages



Traffic flows on a main road past electricity transmission towers in Tehran, yesterday.

AFP
Tehran

Schools and public buildings in the Iranian capital will remain closed for a third day today, state television reported, as several power plants were shut down amid fuel shortages.

Iran is an energy giant and holds one of the world's largest reserves of natural gas, but it has been forced to ration electricity in recent weeks and close schools and government buildings.

Sub-zero temperatures continue to be recorded all over the country. President Masoud Pezeshkian, who has been advocating for reduced fuel consumption, apologised to the nation yesterday for the shortages and promised they would be resolved by next year.

State television said, citing a government statement, that "due to persistent cold weather, schools, universities and government offices in Tehran and its surroundings will be closed tomorrow (Tuesday)".

A gas-powered plant in west-

ern Lorestan province was partially closed yesterday because of "increased consumption of gas among household consumers", according to IRNA state news agency. It followed a move on Sunday by the northern province of Golestan to close plants and ration electricity, according to local media. People have also been hit with power cuts across the country, including in Tehran.

IRNA said yesterday that restrictive measures had saved two million cubic metres of gas and 100 megawatts of electricity in the 24 hours.

Uganda court orders govt compensation for LRA victims

AFP
Kampala

Ugandan court yesterday ordered the government to pay victims of a former Lord's Resistance Army commander up to \$2,500 each.

Thomas Kwoyelo was found guilty in August of multiple counts of crimes against humanity for his role in the notorious militia in the first such trial in the East African country.

He was sentenced to 40 years in prison in October.

Yesterday, the court in Gulu in northern Uganda found that he was unable to provide compensation to victims and their families and found the government liable in his place.

"The atrocities committed by Thomas Kwoyelo against his victims was a manifestation of the failure on the part of government that triggers a responsibility on

the state to pay reparations to the victims," the panel of four judges said. The LRA was founded by former altar boy and self-styled prophet Joseph Kony in Uganda in the 1980s.

Its rebellion against President Yoweri Museveni saw more than 100,000 people killed and 60,000 children abducted in a reign of terror that spread to several neighbouring countries.

The judges yesterday ruled that each of 103 registered victims of Kwoyelo would be paid four million shillings (about \$1,100) with an additional five million shillings (\$1,360) for victims of abuse and sexual violence.

The government's representatives in the court pushed back on the ruling, saying it contained no legal basis to hold the state responsible.

They suggested the money could instead come from a trust fund for victims at the International Criminal Court.

Medical workers protest over unpaid salaries



Doctors and medical practitioners under the Kenya Medical Practitioners Pharmacists and Dentists Union (KMPDU) participate in a demonstration to demand payment of their salary arrears and the immediate hiring of trainee doctors, among other grievances in Nairobi, yesterday.

Turkish rescuers search infamous Saydnaya jail

AFP
Damascus

A large team of Turkish rescuers began searching Syria's infamous Saydnaya prison near Damascus yesterday, trying to check for any hidden underground cells, its director said.

Located just north of the Syrian capital, the prison has become a symbol of the rights abuses of the Assad clan, especially since the Syrian civil war erupted in 2011.

Prisoners held inside the complex, which was the site of extrajudicial executions, torture and forced disappearances, were freed early last week by the rebels who ousted Syrian strongman Bashar al-Assad on December 8.

The search was being conducted "in line with a request made by the Syrian authorities," Okay Memis, the director of Turkiye's AFAD disaster relief agency, said in remarks quoted by Turkish state news agency Anadolu.

Memis said his 120-strong team, which arrived with 43 vehicles, would use "ground radar

and acoustic listening devices" to verify whether there were any as yet undiscovered locations underground the facility, which he described as covering "a vast area".

The complex is thought to descend several levels underground, fuelling suspicion more prisoners could be held in as yet undiscovered hidden cells.

The team, which specialises in urban search and rescue operations, was aware that as a place where huge numbers of people had been killed, the area could be forensically important for any future criminal prosecutions, Memis said.

"We are aware there are also issues that might involve evidence, and will conduct our work with those sensitivities in mind," he said.

According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, more than 100,000 people died in Syria's jails and detention centres from 2011.

The Association of Detainees and Missing Persons of Saydnaya Prison (ADMSP), believes the rumours about as yet undiscovered

underground cells are unfounded.

The prison complex was thoroughly searched by Syria's White Helmets emergency workers but they wrapped up their operations on Tuesday, saying they were unable to find any more prisoners.

Rescuers have punched holes in walls to investigate rumours of secret levels housing missing prisoners, but found nothing, leaving many thousands of families disappointed – their relatives are probably dead and may never be found.

The Turkish team is co-ordinating its work with the Syrian authorities, Turkiye's newly-opened Damascus embassy and the foreign and interior ministries in Ankara, Memis said.

ADMSP said the rebels freed more than 4,000 prisoners from Saydnaya, which Amnesty International has described as a "human slaughterhouse".

The organisation, which is based in southern Turkiye, believes more than 30,000 prisoners died there as a result of execution, torture, starvation or a lack of medical care between 2011 and 2018.

Germany urges Israel to 'abandon' plan to step up Golan Heights settlement

AFP
Berlin

Germany yesterday urged Israel to "abandon" a plan to double the population living in the occupied and annexed Golan Heights at the southwestern edge of Syria.

A foreign ministry spokesman said "it is perfectly clear under international law that this area controlled by Israel belongs to Syria and that Israel is therefore an occupying power". The spokesman, Christian Wagner, added that Berlin therefore called on its ally Israel "to abandon this plan" announced Sunday by the Israeli government.

As rebel forces swept Syrian president Bashar al-

Assad from power last week, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu ordered troops to seize the demilitarised zone on the Golan Heights. Israel has also launched hundreds of strikes on Syria targeting strategic military sites and weapons, including chemical weapons. Wagner said that "it is absolutely crucial now, in this phase of political upheaval in Syria, that all actors in the region take into account the territorial integrity of Syria and do not call it into question".

Speaking at a regular press conference, he added that the situation is "complex" and that Israel had an interest to ensure that the Assad regime's weapons "do not fall into the wrong hands". But he stressed that Germany was "now calling on all actors in the region to exercise restraint" and that war-ravaged "Syria has been a plaything of foreign powers for far too long".

CRIME Almost 800 arrested over scam in Nigeria

Nigeria's anti-graft agency said it had arrested 792 suspects in a raid on a building believed to be a hub for fraudsters who lured victims with offers of romance, then pressed them to hand over cash for phoney cryptocurrency investments, Reuters reported from Lagos. The suspects, including 148 Chinese and 40 Filipino nationals, were detained on Dec 10 at the seven-storey Big Leaf Building in Lagos, Nigeria's commercial capital, Economic and Financial Crimes Commission spokesperson Wilson Uwujaren said. The luxury building housed a call centre mostly targeting victims from the Americas and Europe, he added. Staff there would make contact with people through social media and messaging platforms, including WhatsApp and Instagram, then seduce them online or offer them apparently lucrative investment opportunities, Uwujaren told reporters.



TRAGEDY

11 Indians dead in Georgia ski resort accident

Eleven Indian citizens were among 12 victims of an accident at an Indian restaurant in the Georgian ski resort of Gudauri, the Indian embassy said yesterday. According to a preliminary report from the Georgian interior ministry, the victims, which included one Georgian citizen, were found dead inside the restaurant after using a power generator "placed close to an indoor area". The exact cause of death is yet to be determined. Gudauri is a popular South Caucasus ski resort located north of the Georgian capital, Tbilisi. The police has started an investigation under Article 116 of the Criminal Code of Georgia, which implies negligent manslaughter.

OBITUARY

India's tabla maestro Zakir Hussain dies at 73

Zakir Hussain, whose "dancing fingers" made him one of the greatest players of the tabla or Indian drums and who became a major force in contemporary world music, has died. Hussain, 73, died in a San Francisco hospital from complications of idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis - a chronic lung disease, his family said in a statement. "He will be remembered as a true genius who revolutionised the world of Indian classical music. He also brought the tabla to the global stage, captivating millions with his unparalleled rhythm," Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said in a post on X.

PEOPLE

Woman who attacked Farage spared jail

A woman who admitted throwing a milkshake at the right-wing Reform UK leader Nigel Farage during the general election campaign escaped jail yesterday. Victoria Thomas Bowen, 25, admitted assault by beating after Brexit figurehead Farage was doused as he left a pub in Clacton, east of London, on June 4. Tan Ikrum, a judge at London's Westminster Magistrate's Court, sentenced Thomas Bowen to a 13-week jail term, but suspended the punishment for 12 months, meaning she will be spared prison unless she reoffends. "We live in a country where you can assault a member of parliament and not go to prison," Farage said.

LEGAL

Gerry Adams to stand civil trial in 2026 over IRA bombs

Politician Gerry Adams, whose Sinn Fein party was once the political wing of the Irish Republican Army, will stand trial in 2026 in a civil case brought by IRA bomb victims, England's high court ruled yesterday. The case will go to trial between February and June 2026 and the former republican leader will defend himself. "Finally after five decades, for the first time Adams will appear in person in an English Court to be cross-examined by the victims of his alleged leadership of the IRA's terror campaign," said Matt Jury, a member of the law firm representing the victims.

India's solar energy agency 'changes bidding policy' after Adani graft claims

Reuters
New Delhi

An Indian government agency charged with promoting renewable energy has changed the way it issues power tenders to reduce the risk of corruption after US allegations of bribery in some tenders, said an official with direct knowledge of the matter.

About 75% of SECI's new bids for renewable power will now be based on specific demand from states instead of the earlier practice of mainly seeking power suppliers first through tenders and then approaching buyers

The Solar Energy Corporation of India (SECI) earns commission for linking renewable energy producers with buyers. It was an intermediary in solar power deals involving Adani Group and several states where US authorities have said bribes were paid to unidentified officials between 2021 and 2022.

The ports-to-power Adani Group has denied the allegations, calling them baseless.

US authorities have not accused SECI of any wrongdoing.

SECI, which selects renewable energy producers for projects through bids and then signs deals with power buyers, said last month it had "no basis so far" to investigate the allegations and that it was "not

clear if any of SECI's covenants have been violated".

About 75% of SECI's new bids for renewable power will now be based on specific demand from states instead of the earlier practice of mainly seeking power suppliers first through tenders and then approaching buyers, said the SECI official, who did not want to be named, citing the sensitivity of the matter.

A spokesperson for SECI did not immediately respond to a request for comment outside regular business hours yesterday.

The official said the earlier practice, which used to account for about 90% of the bids, had raised the risk of corruption by power producers seeking to influence buyers in states to sign up to deals even if they did not need the power. The official did not name any companies or give any examples.

The source said SECI had not found any reason to independently investigate any deals it had been part of and that no agency within India or outside had reached out to it.

The allegations against the Adani Group, nevertheless, could temporarily cut foreign investments in India's renewable sector, said the source, adding that SECI expected tendering to slow down for the rest of the fiscal year that ends on March 31. SECI's target for this fiscal year was to find bidders for 15 gigawatts (GW) of power, but it has managed only about 6-7GW so far.

India is still more than 10% short of its pledge to add 175GW of renewable power by 2022. It wants to reach 500GW by 2030.



Tourists enjoy a camel safari during sunset at a desert in Pushkar, India.

China, India to hold high-level border talks

Reuters
Beijing

China yesterday announced it would hold high-level talks later this week with India on their border disputes - the first such discussions in five years, signalling a possible thaw in frosty ties.

Relations had been tense since a deadly military encounter in 2020 on the border between Tibet and India's Ladakh region, which left at least 20 In-

dian and four Chinese soldiers dead.

Relations between India and China, except for trade, have remained largely frozen since the clash in October, New Delhi said it had reached an agreement with Beijing on patrols in disputed areas along their common border.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi will meet with Indian National Security Adviser Ajit Doval tomorrow in Beijing on the "China-India boundary question," foreign ministry spokes-

man Lin Jian said in a statement.

The talks will be held in the framework of a negotiations mechanism created in 2003 to handle the thorny issue.

The last such meeting took place in December 2019, according to Indian media.

External affairs minister S Jaishankar on December 3 said that India remains "committed to engaging with China through bilateral discussions to arrive at a fair, reasonable and mutually acceptable framework for a boundary settlement."

The October agreement was reached shortly before a rare formal meeting - also the first in five years - between Chinese President Xi Jinping and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on the sidelines of a Brics summit in Russia.

China and India, the world's two most populous nations, are intense rivals and have accused each other of trying to seize territory along their unofficial divide, known as the Line of Actual Control.

Bangladesh to hold polls in late 2025 or early 2026

Bangladesh's interim leader Muhammad Yunus, who heads the caretaker government installed after an August revolution, said yesterday that general elections would be held late next year or in early 2026. Pressure has been growing on Nobel Peace Prize winner Yunus - appointed the country's "chief adviser" after the student-led uprising that toppled ex-premier Sheikh Hasina - to set a date. The 84-year-old microfinance pioneer is leading a temporary administration to tackle what he has called the "extremely tough" challenge of restoring democratic institutions in the South Asian nation of about 170mn people. "Election dates could be fixed by the end of 2025 or the first half of 2026," he said in a broadcast on state television. Yunus has launched commissions to oversee a raft of reforms he says are needed, and setting an election date depends on what political parties agree.

India plans to supply LNG to Lanka, connect power grids

Sri Lanka's President Anura Kumara Dissanayake inspects an honour guard during his ceremonial reception at India's Presidential Palace Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi, India, yesterday.

Reuters
New Delhi

India plans to supply liquefied natural gas to Sri Lanka's power plants and will work on connecting the power grids of the two countries as well as lay a petroleum pipeline between the neighbours, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said yesterday.

Modi was speaking at a joint press briefing with Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake in New Delhi.

Dissanayake is on his first official visit to Sri Lanka's powerful neighbour after winning the presidency in September and securing a landslide parliamentary election victory last month.

Indian state-run firm Petronet LNG has signed a deal to supply liquefied natural gas to Sri Lankan engineering firm LTL Holdings' power plants in Colombo for five years through its terminal in the southern Indian city of Kochi.

Both sides also discussed a plan to connect power grids and lay a multi-product petroleum pipeline between the two countries, a joint statement from the Indian external affairs ministry said.

The two countries also agreed to jointly develop offshore wind power potential in the Palk Straits, an area where India's Adani Green Energy already has plans to invest \$442mn in two wind power stations.

Sri Lanka is reviewing the wind power project along with a \$553mn terminal project at the Colombo port also linked to Adani Ports. But it was unclear if the projects were discussed during the meeting between Modi and Dissanayake.

India extended more than \$4bn in aid to Sri Lanka when the island nation's economy plunged into a severe financial crisis in 2022 and entered into a preliminary debt restructuring agreement, along with other bilateral creditors Japan and China, in July.

UK pares back secretive China strategy review

Reuters
London

Britain's Labour government has pared back an audit of relations with China, four sources with knowledge of the matter said, preparing the way for a less critical report that could help Prime Minister Keir Starmer focus on improving economic ties.

The Labour Party said before taking power the audit would be Britain's first in-depth, potentially year-long appraisal of relations and supply chains with a country considered by the security services as the nation's biggest long-term

threat. The government is now opting for a quicker and less in-depth approach, which will most probably end up being less critical of China, the sources said. Two of the sources pointed to Starmer's growth agenda and plan to improve relations with an important trading partner for the decision.

Asked about Reuters findings, a British government spokesperson said "the audit process is ongoing".

"We are carrying out a full and comprehensive audit on the breadth of the UK's relationship with China which will bring a consistent, long-term and strategic approach to managing the UK's relations with China," the spokesperson said.

Ministers want to ensure that the audit, which began in October, will be finished before the inauguration of the US president next month, but the timeframe might slip, three of the sources said.

Donald Trump's return to the White House could put Britain under pressure to take a tougher approach to China. Trump's nomination of Marco Rubio for Secretary of State has signalled his approach towards Beijing could go beyond tariffs and trade to a more hawkish stance on China as the US' main strategic rival. Labour had originally planned for the audit to create a clear, consistent position for government, businesses and universities on how they should

deal with the security challenges posed by China, the sources said.

The review was the only mention of relations with Beijing in Labour's manifesto before the election that brought the party to power in July.

But unlike a British government strategic defence review being carried out by a host of experts and led by former Nato secretary-general George Robertson, the launch of the China audit, which began in October, was never formally announced.

Labour officials had said in opposition they wanted the audit to help limit goods entering Britain's supply chain from China's far western Xinjiang region, where human rights

groups have documented alleged abuses against the Uyghur population. China denies the accusation.

But Labour has since backed away from its position in opposition to push for international recognition of China's treatment of the Uyghurs, a mainly Muslim ethnic minority, as genocide, the sources said.

Labour had also intended to model the audit on a German review last year, which took a year-and-a-half to complete and involved government officials, members of parliament, businesses, academics and non-government organisations.

Instead, the British audit will now mainly rely on the expertise of government officials, two of the sources

said. It is being carried out by the Foreign Office, and some of the main findings will be published.

Reuters was not able to establish who had ordered the government to adopt the scaled back approach.

The published review was likely to largely repeat the government's "three Cs" strategy towards China: challenge, compete and co-operate, the sources said.

The sources asked not to be named due to the sensitivity of the review. Labour wants to improve ties with China after the previous Conservative government restricted Chinese investment and expressed concern at Beijing's increasing assertiveness.

Finance Minister quits after clash with Trudeau

Reuters
Ottawa

Canada's Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland quit yesterday after clashing with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on issues including how to handle possible US tariffs, dealing a huge blow to an already unpopular government.

In a stinging resignation letter, Freeland dismissed Trudeau's push for increased spending as a political gimmick that could hurt Ottawa's ability to deal with the 25% import tariffs US President-elect Donald Trump says he will impose.

The resignation by Freeland, 56, who also served as deputy prime minister, is one of the biggest crises Trudeau has experienced since taking power in November 2015. It also leaves him without a key ally when he is on track to lose the next election to the official opposition Conservatives.

"The government of Canada is itself spiraling out of control," Conservative leader Pierre Poilievre told reporters, repeating calls for an immediate election.

"We cannot accept this kind of chaos, division, weakness, while we're staring down the barrel of a 25% tariff from our biggest trading partner... we simply cannot go on like this," he told reporters.

Freeland said she was quitting in the wake of a meeting last Friday with Trudeau, who asked her to take on a lesser post after the two had argued for weeks over spending.

A Liberal source said Trudeau wanted Freeland to serve as minister without portfolio dealing with Canada-US rela-

tions in name only - in effect a major demotion.

Her resignation came just hours before she was due to present a fall economic update to parliament, a document widely expected to show the minority Liberal government had run up a much larger 2023/24 budget deficit than predicted.

Officials said the document would be unveiled yesterday as planned but gave no details.

"This will likely trigger a leadership crisis within the Liberal caucus... (it) is politically and personally devastating for Trudeau," said Nik Nanos, founder of the Nanos Research polling firm.

Polls show the ruling Liberals, who have been in power since November 2015, are set to be crushed in an election that must be held by late October 2025.

Freeland, a former journalist, served as trade minister and then foreign minister before taking over the finance portfolio in August 2020. As minister, she oversaw the massive government spending campaign to deal with the damage done by Covid.

Colleagues were clearly stunned. "This news has hit me really hard and I'll reserve further comment until I have time to process it," said an emotional Anita Anand, president of the Treasury Board.

Trudeau has been under pressure for months from Liberal legislators alarmed by the party's poor polling numbers, in part due to unhappiness over high prices.

But he is safe for now, since Canadian political leaders are chosen by special conventions.

"This is quite a bombshell," said Nelson Wiseman, political science professor at University of Toronto. "I think the prob-



NOT SEEING EYE-TO-EYE. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau listening to Chrystia Freeland during a news conference in Ottawa in this file photo. (Reuters)

lem the Liberals have is that they have no mechanism to remove Trudeau. Only a full blown caucus revolt could do that."

Trudeau's minority government, which needs support from other legislators to stay in power, has so far been kept in power by the left-leaning New Democrats.

In a statement reacting to Freeland's resignation, party leader Jagmeet Singh made no mention of whether he would continue to continue propping up Trudeau.

Canada's 10-year note yields climbed to their highest level since November 28. They were last up 4.2 basis points at 3.2%. The Canadian dollar weakened to a four and a half year low at 1.4268 per US dollar

before reversing course.

Domestic media reports said Freeland and Trudeau had clashed over a government proposal for temporary tax breaks and other spending measures.

"For the last number of weeks, you and I have found ourselves at odds over the best path forward for Canada," Freeland said in a letter to Trudeau posted on X.

Freeland said the threat of new US tariffs represented a grave threat.

"That means keeping our fiscal powder dry today, so we have the reserves we may need for a tariff war. That means eschewing costly political gimmicks, which we can ill afford," she wrote.

When Trump came to power in 2017 he

vowed to tear up the trilateral free trade treaty with Canada and Mexico. Freeland played a large role in helping renegotiate the pact and saving Canada's economy, which is heavily reliant on the United States.

Although tensions between prime ministers and first ministers are not unusual - Trudeau's first finance minister quit in 2020 in a clash over spending - the level of inactivity in Freeland's letter was remarkable by Canadian standards.

"On Friday, you told me you no longer want me to serve as your Finance Minister and offered me another position in the Cabinet... you made clear that I no longer credibly enjoy that confidence and possess the authority that comes with it," Freeland said.

"Upon reflection, I have concluded that the only honest and viable path is for me to resign from the Cabinet."

Freeland left the same day as Housing Minister Sean Fraser announced he was resigning for family reasons. Another six ministers have either already quit or announced they will not be running again in the next election.

Before entering politics in 2013, she worked as a journalist and in senior editorial roles with several media companies, including the *Financial Times*, the *Globe and Mail*, and Reuters News where she worked from 2010 to 2013.

One potential replacement could be former Bank of Canada governor Mark Carney, who already serves as an economic adviser to Trudeau. Carney, though, is not a legislator and tradition dictates he would need to run for a seat in the House of Commons elected chamber.

3 killed in US school shooting

Reuters
Madison (Wisconsin)

A juvenile student killed two people at a Wisconsin school before police found the suspect dead at the scene of the latest shooting to devastate a US campus, authorities said yesterday.

At least six other people were wounded, according to police, who said children were among the dead and wounded in the shooting, which took place in the state capital of Madison.

The shooting took place at Abundant Life Christian School, a private institution that teaches some 400 students from kindergarten through 12th grade, the Madison Police Department said.

The police department said in a written statement that at least three people were killed in the incident, including the suspected shooter, who was identified only as a juvenile student at the school. The shooter was found dead inside the school when police arrived. At least six people were transported from the scene to area hospitals, police said in a written statement.

Madison Police Chief Shon Barnes said the shooting took place just before 11am local time.

"Today is a sad, sad day, not only for Madison, but for our entire country, where yet another police chief is doing a press conference to speak about violence in our community," Barnes told reporters.

Barnes added: "Every child, every person in that building, is a victim, and will be a victim forever. These types of trauma don't just go away."

Video posted from the scene on social media showed a massive emergency response, including police, ambulance and fire vehicles.

Gun control and school safety have become major political and social issues in the US where the number of school shootings has jumped in recent years.

There have been 322 school shootings this year in the US, according to the K-12 School Shooting Database website. That is the second highest total of any year since 1966, according to that database - topped only by last year's total of 349 such shootings.



German Chancellor Olaf Scholz enters the presidential Bellevue Palace to meet with President Frank-Walter Steinmeier, after losing a confidence vote, in Berlin, yesterday. (Reuters)

Trump pledges to talk with Putin, Zelensky to stop war

AFP
Washington

US President-elect Donald Trump said yesterday he will speak with the leaders of Russia and Ukraine in an effort to end the war triggered by Moscow's invasion.

Trump has frequently questioned the billions in aid that President Joe Biden's administration has provided to Ukraine since the war started in 2022 and has spoken admiringly of Russian President Vladimir Putin, who ordered the invasion of Ukraine. During the US election campaign Trump said he could bring the war to an end in a day but has failed to say how he would do so, although some fear he envisions pressuring Ukraine to give up land

that Russia has captured. "We'll be talking to President Putin, and we'll be talking to the representatives, Zelensky and representatives from Ukraine. We gotta stop it, it's carnage," Trump told a news conference, referring to Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky, just over a month before his return to the White House.

Trump said the war had left cities in ruins - "there's not a building standing" - and drew on his experience as a New York real estate developer to draw a comparison. "It's just rubble. Just like when I knock down a building in Manhattan, which is actually, this is worse actually, because we do it step by step," said Trump.

"This thing has just got demolished, and by the way, in those buildings are many people," Trump said, adding that the structures are "flattened like a pancake."

Scholz loses confidence vote, paving way for polls

■ 394 legislators vote against chancellor; 207 for; 116 abstain

AFP
Berlin

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz lost a confidence vote yesterday, spelling the effective end of his troubled government and putting Europe's biggest economy on the path to elections on February 23.

Scholz had called the vote, expecting to lose it, weeks after his coalition collapsed. Later yesterday he asked President Frank-Walter Steinmeier to dissolve the legislature soon and ask voters to head back to the ballot box.

Although the centre-left chancellor continues in a caretaker role and with a minority in parliament, the political turmoil threatens months of paralysis until a new coalition government is formed.

Embattled Scholz, 66, lags badly in the polls behind conservative opposition leader Friedrich Merz who heads the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) of ex-chancellor Angela Merkel.

After more than three years at the helm, Scholz was plunged into crisis when his unruly three-party coalition collapsed on November 6, the day Donald Trump won re-election to the White House.

The political turbulence has hit Germany as it struggles to revive a stuttering economy hammered by high energy prices and tough competition from China.

Berlin also faces major geopolitical challenges as it confronts Russia over the Ukraine war and as Trump's looming return heightens uncertainty over Nato and trade ties.

Those threats were at the centre of a heated debate between Scholz, Merz and other party leaders ahead of the vote in the lower house, in which 207 MPs expressed confidence in Scholz against 394 who did not, with 116 abstentions.

After Scholz outlined his plans for massive spending on security, business and social welfare, Merz demanded to know why he had not taken those steps in the past, asking: "Were you on another planet?"

Scholz argued that his government had boosted spending on the armed forces which previous CDU-led governments had left "in a deplorable state".

"It is high time to invest powerfully and decisively in Germany," Scholz said, warning about Rus-

sia's war in Ukraine that "a highly armed nuclear power is waging war in Europe just two hours' flight from here".

But Merz fired back that Scholz had left the country in "one of the biggest economic crises of the post-war era".

"You had your chance, but you did not use it... You, Mr. Scholz, do not deserve confidence", charged Merz.

Merz, a former corporate lawyer who has never held a government leadership post, lambasted the motley alliance of the chancellor's Social Democrats (SPD), the left-leaning Greens and the liberal Free Democrats (FDP).

Coalition bickering over fiscal and economic woes came to a head when Scholz fired his rebellious FDP finance minister Christian Lindner on November 6. Scholz yesterday again lashed out at Lindner for the "weeks-long sabotage" that finally imploded the alliance and damaged "the reputation of democracy" itself.

The departure of Lindner's FDP left Scholz running a minority government with the Greens that has been limping along, unable to pass major bills or a new budget.

Berlin's troubles come as Germany's main EU partner France is also mired in a government crisis.

German politics in the post-war era was long staid, stable and dominated by the two big-tent parties, the CDU-CSU alliance and the SPD, with the small FDP often playing kingmaker.

The Greens emerged in the 1980s, but the political landscape has been further fragmented by the rise of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), a shock for a country whose dark World War II history had long made right-wing extremist parties taboo.

The AfD has grown in the past decade from a eurosceptic fringe party into a major political force when it protested against Merkel's open-door policy to migrants, and now has around 18 percent voter support.

While other parties have committed to a "firewall" of non-cooperation with the AfD, some have borrowed from its anti-immigration rhetoric.

After the fall of Syrian president Bashar al-Assad, some CDU lawmakers were quick to demand that the around one million Syrian refugees in Germany return to their home country.

We must be ready to fight Nato in Europe in next decade: Russian defence minister

Russia's defence minister said yesterday that Moscow must be ready to fight the Nato military alliance in Europe in the next decade, as President Vladimir Putin said he believed the Ukraine war was turning in Moscow's favour.

Andrei Belousov, Putin's defence chief, cited a Nato summit in July, and military doctrines in the US and other Nato members, as evidence that Moscow had to prepare for direct conflict with a more assertive Nato in the coming years.

"The activities of the Ministry of Defence are based on... ensuring full readiness for any scenario in the medium term, including a possible military conflict with Nato in Europe in the next decade," Belousov told an audience including Putin at his ministry.

Belousov set out a raft of changes and reforms that he said were needed, "taking into account the nature of future military conflicts". He cited US plans to modernise its nuclear forces, the opening of a US missile defence base in Poland, new Nato combat readiness plans, and plans announced at the Nato summit to deploy US medium-range missiles in Germany in 2026.

He said the US could soon have hypersonic missiles available that could reach Moscow in eight minutes. Putin told the same gathering that the large numbers volunteering for service

were turning the tide of the Ukraine war in Moscow's favour, as open-source maps suggest his army is advancing at the fastest pace since 2022.

"Russian troops have a firm grip on the strategic initiative along the entire line of contact. This year alone, 189 population centres have been liberated," he said.

He said roughly 430,000 Russians had signed army contracts this year, up from roughly 300,000 last year. Belousov said Russia had pushed Ukrainian forces out of almost 4,500sq km of territory this year, and was taking about 30sq km a day. Putin accused the West of pushing Russia to its "red lines" - situations it has publicly made clear it will not tolerate - and said Moscow had been forced to respond.

"They (Western leaders) are simply scaring their own population that we are going to attack someone there using the pretext of the mythical Russian threat," said Putin. "The tactic is very simple: they push us to 'a red line', from which we cannot retreat, we start to respond and then they immediately scare their population."

He said Russia was watching US development of short- and medium-range missiles with great concern and would lift its own voluntary restrictions on the stationing of such missiles if the US decided to put them into service.

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GULF TIMES

Closing AI skills gap in 2025

With artificial intelligence (AI) poised to reshape industries worldwide, a paradox is emerging. Despite growing demand for people with the knowledge to leverage the technology's potential, AI-related skills remain in short supply.

The scarcity of AI-related skills – from proficiency in machine learning, prompt engineering, and data science to an understanding of AI's ethical implications – is becoming a major obstacle to deploying the technology effectively. In one recent report, 47% of executives say their employees lack the necessary skills. This will affect companies' ability to move AI projects from conception to implementation. A 2023 report from the World Economic Forum finds that "six in 10 workers will require training before 2027, but only half of workers are seen to have access to adequate training opportunities today." This skills gap bodes ill not only for individual career growth, but also for economic growth more broadly. Capitalising on the opportunities that AI presents will require updated approaches to education and training. In the coming year, educational and vocational institutions will likely place a much greater emphasis on teaching AI ethics skills, offer flexible lifelong learning, and infuse AI into their offerings to be more competitive.

AI ethics skills will become a core concern – and for good reason. In the space of just a few years, generative AI has become available to anyone with a computer and an internet connection. For employers and their information technology (IT) departments, this raises the problem of "shadow AI", or unsanctioned use of generative AI by employees, which could expose companies to a wide range of security, compliance, and reputational risks. In addition, the workforce will need AI ethics skills to manage new AI agents: tools that can automate complex tasks that would otherwise require human resources.

This skills gap bodes ill not only for individual career growth, but also for economic growth more broadly

Shadow and agentic AI both demand new guardrails to help users protect AI applications based on responsible AI practices. To this end, education providers will begin to emphasise training on the fundamentals of AI explainability, fairness, robustness, transparency, and privacy. Without a basic understanding of how AI models generate their output, for example, those responsible for protecting data or controlling autonomous systems will be ill-equipped for the task.

With AI and other new technologies evolving rapidly, lifelong learning will become the new normal. The process can be divided into developing skills that meet immediate needs, anticipate future needs, and furnish always-in-demand expertise.

Many traditional roles within an organisation will soon change. For example, some employees who currently work independently (who don't manage other people) may join new types of teams in which humans manage AI agents. And to prepare them for this fundamental change, demand for online courses and digital credentials in AI-related fields like natural language processing and machine learning will likely increase. Moreover, the future use of quantum computing will continue to drive the need for new skills. And the steady rise in the number and variety of cyberattacks – such as "harvest now and decrypt later" (HNDL) hacks – underscores the importance of up-to-date cybersecurity skills. That is why our own organisation is working with community colleges across four US states to offer a new cybersecurity certificate that will prepare students for in-demand roles across the workforce. Similarly, our collaborations with Singapore Polytechnic and historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) in the US provide free training in AI to young learners. And while this process may begin in the classroom, we can also expect to see more opportunities for upskilling as the relevant technologies evolve. For anyone who wants to stay competitive in the job market, lifelong learning has become indispensable.

Finally, AI and automation technologies can make existing education platforms far more effective, as we are likely to see in 2025. AI-powered solutions have reached a tipping point from being a nice-to-have to a must-have. Educators, whether in schools or other organizations, will find new ways to apply AI-powered tools to personalise and tailor learning experiences, understand students' needs and match them with relevant courses, or enhance coaching and feedback.

The same technologies can also enhance customer-service aspects of education. For example, at IBM, we have already seen the benefits of using AI to analyse feedback from more than 60,000 learners in 47 languages, which led us to simplify online registration and other parts of the process. In the coming years, education systems and platforms will also benefit from multimodal AI models that can process audio, video, charts, and images to provide an even more effective, individualised learning experience.

By embracing AI, we can enhance learning and professional outcomes, improve operational efficiency, and reduce costs across the economy. But all of that will require developing the skilled workforce we need. – Project Syndicate

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Homs-coming!



A woman paints a calligraphic mural depicting the name of the city of Homs in the old city yesterday. Islamist-led fighters took Damascus in a lightning offensive on December 8, ousting president Bashar al-Assad and ending five decades of Baath rule in Syria. (AFP)

New technology aids Brazil's crackdown on illicit trade

By Ricardo Brito, Anthony Boadle
Brasilia

Harley Sandoval, an evangelical pastor, real estate agent and mining entrepreneur, was arrested in July 2023 for illegally exporting 294 kilos of gold from Brazil's Amazon to the United States, Dubai and Italy.

On paper, the gold was sourced from a legal prospect Sandoval was licensed to mine in the northern state of Tocantins. But police said not an ounce of gold had been mined there since colonial times.

Using cutting-edge forensic technology, along with satellite imagery, Brazil's Federal Police said it was able to establish that the exported gold did not come from the Tocantins prospect. Instead, it had been dug up from three different wildcat mines in neighbouring Pará, some on protected Indigenous reservation lands, according to previously unreported court documents dated November 2023 seen by Reuters.

The prosecution is one of the first in Brazil using the new technology to tackle clandestine trading that may account for as much as half of the gold output of Brazil, a major producer and exporter of the precious metal. Illegal gold mining has surged at thousands of sites in the Amazon rainforest, bringing environmental destruction and criminal violence to the region.

Seizures of illegally mined gold have surged seven-fold in the past seven years, according to Federal Police records obtained exclusively by Reuters.

Sandoval, who has been released pending trial and continues to preach with his wife at a Pentecostal Evangelical church in the central Brazilian city of Goiania, denies the allegations. He maintains there is no way to establish where the gold was mined once it is melted down into ingots for export.

"That's impossible. To export gold one always has to melt it down," he told Reuters by telephone.

Historically, gold is notoriously difficult to trace, especially once metal from different sources has been melted together, erasing the original signatures. After that, it can easily be traded as a financial asset or be used in the jewelry industry.

But investigators say that's starting to change. A police programme called "Targeting Gold" is creating a database of samples from across Brazil that are examined with radio-isotope scans and fluorescence spectroscopy to determine the unique composition of elements.

The technique, long used in archaeology, was pioneered in mining by University of Pretoria geologist Roger Dixon to help distinguish between legal and stolen gold.

The programme developed in partnership with university researchers includes the use of powerful light beams from a particle accelerator at a Sao Paulo lab to study nano-sized impurities associated with gold, be it dirt or other metals like lead or copper, that help trace its origins.

Humberto Freire, director of the Federal Police's recently-created Environment and Amazon Department, said the technology allows scientists to analyse "the DNA of Brazilian gold." "Nature has marked the gold with isotopes and we can read these unique fingerprints with radio-isotope scans," Freire said. "With this tool we can trace illegal gold before it gets refined for export."

The programme has helped fuel an increase in gold seizures since leftist President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva took office last year - up 38% in 2023 from 2022, according to government numbers seen by Reuters. New Brazil central bank gold market regulations, including mandatory

electronic tax receipts for all trades and tightened monitoring of suspect transactions, have also helped, according to Freire.

"We estimate that around 40% of the gold that is extracted in the Amazon is illegal," he told Reuters. Brazil exported 110 tonnes of gold in 2020 worth \$5bn, according to official data, ranking among the world's top 20 exporters. Last year, exports were 77.7 tonnes, a drop the government attributes to improved enforcement of illegal mining.

Lula's predecessor, far-right President Jair Bolsonaro weakened environmental controls in the Amazon. That triggered a new gold rush in Brazil, spurred by record world gold prices that were driven up by geopolitical tensions and central bank purchases, led by China. Prices have continued to new highs, trading at around \$2,650 per ounce on Friday.

Gold rushes have been a hallmark of mineral-rich Brazil from its Portuguese colonial past. But the latest surge in wildcat mining beginning during Bolsonaro's administration has been unprecedented. Satellite images show there are some 80,000 such prospects today in the Amazon rainforest, more than ever registered before. Once dominated by prospectors with gold pans, artisanal mining in Brazil has become an industrial-scale activity with heavy excavating machinery and million-dollar river dredgers. Criminal organisations fly people, equipment and gold into and out of the region with helicopters and planes that land at clandestine airstrips. Their excavations often leave behind gaping ponds of sludge contaminated with mercury, used to separate the gold from dirt and other minerals. Last year, thousands of miners who invaded the Yanomami territory, the country's largest Indigenous reservation on the

northern border with Venezuela, brought violence and disease that caused malnutrition and a humanitarian crisis among the tribe, prompting Lula to send in troops. But many returned this year after the military pulled out. Lula, who has pledged to stamp out illegal gold mining, tried to fight back by deploying special forces of the environmental protection agency Ibama into Indigenous reservations and forest conservation parks.

Police say cracking down on the organised crime gangs that back the wildcat miners is the next step in stanching an illegal trade that feeds the jewelry and watch industry in Switzerland, which buys 70% of Brazil's exported gold, according to government trade data.

Amazon neighbors, including Colombia and French Guiana, are considering adopting the Brazilian gold analysis method to deal with their illegal gold trade and European governments have shown interest, including Switzerland and Britain, the top importers from Brazil after Canada, police and diplomats said.

Brazil accounts for just 1% of gold imported by Switzerland, a global trade hub for the metal, and "measures are in place to import only legally mined gold," a Swiss embassy statement said. The embassy said it has set up a working group with other importing countries to study traceability and anti-counterfeiting tools.

A 2022 study by non-profit watchdog Instituto Escolhas found that 52% of the gold exported from the Amazon was illegal, nearly all from protected Indigenous reservation lands or national conservation parks.

A vibrant lobby for informal gold mining has survived Bolsonaro in Brazil's Conservative Congress, where pending bills propose legalising wildcat mining.

For now, though, gold samples from across Brazil are being added to a database with the help of scientists at the Federal Police's criminology institute lab in Brasilia, where forensic expert Erich Moreira Lima oversees microscopic scanning of gold nuggets that are kept in a safe.

"Now that we have a team set up, we hope to analyze the 30,000 gold samples the Brazilian Geological Service has collected. In a few years, we should have mapped all Brazil's 24 gold producing regions," he told Reuters.

Geologist Maria Emilia Schutesky and her team at the National University of Brasilia's geosciences lab conduct mass spectrometry scans on gold samples to identify associated molecules, such as lead, to place the gold's origins.

"We researchers seek a 100% ability to trace gold, but that is more than what the police needs to prove a crime, which is just to establish that the gold does not come from where a suspects claims it is from," Schutesky said. – Reuters



Fernanda Ronchi of the Brazilian Federal Police analyses a gold sample at the National Institute of Criminalistics of the Federal Police in Brasilia. (Reuters)



On the occasion of
Qatar National Day, 18th of December
 and in remembrance of the historic day in 1878
 when Sheikh Jassim Bin Mohammed Bin Thani,
 founder of the State of Qatar,
 set up the pillars of the Modern State of Qatar,

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We hope for more returns of this memorable occasion and wish that Qatar always enjoys security,
welfare and prosperity under the wise leadership of His Highness The Amir



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