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Darb Al Saai festivities extended until Dec 21

The Organising Committee of the National Day 2024 celebration has announced the extension of the events organised by the Ministry of Culture on this occasion at Darb Al Saai until December 21. The decision to extend the National Day events at Darb Al Saai came to keep up with the large public turnout for heritage and cultural events that enhance the national identity on this occasion. **Page 6**



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Amir honours Khalid bin Mohammed al-Attiyah



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani awarded the Hamad bin Khalifa Sash to HE Dr Khalid bin Mohammed al-Attiyah, in appreciation of his great efforts in serving the country, which came during the Amir's meeting with him at Sheikh Abdullah bin Jassim Majlis at the Amiri Diwan yesterday. During the meeting, HE Dr Khalid bin Mohammed al-Attiyah extended his thanks and gratitude to His Highness the Amir for his support throughout his tenure, expressing his pride in receiving this honour. **(QNA)**

Amir, Erdogan discuss ties, regional developments

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani and President of the Republic of Türkiye, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, discussed the strategic ties between the two countries and avenues for strengthening and enhancing them across various fields. This came during His Highness the Amir's meeting with the Turkish president at the Presidential Complex in Ankara, yesterday. During the meeting, they shared perspectives on a range of issues and developments on the regional and global stages, especially the situation in the Gaza Strip and the occupied Palestinian territories, as well as the latest developments in Syria. The meeting was attended by HE the Chief of the Amiri Diwan, Abdullah bin Mohammed al-Khulaifi, HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dr Mohammed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh al-Khulaifi, alongside high-ranking officials, members of the delegation accompanying His Highness the Amir. From the Turkish side, the meeting was



attended by Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hakan Fidan, and several senior officials. His Highness the Amir arrived in Ankara, early

yesterday, on a working visit to the Republic of Türkiye, where he was welcomed by Turkish foreign minister Fidan. **(QNA) Page 6**

Our Say



Faisal Abdulhameed al-Mudahka,
Editor-in-Chief of *Gulf Times*

A day of pure pride and joy

Today, Qatar celebrates its National Day (QND), an occasion of profound significance that honours the enduring legacy of its founder, Sheikh Jassim bin Mohammed bin Thani, and a blazing record of incredible achievements ever since. Nearly 146 years ago, on December 18, 1878, Sheikh Jassim assumed leadership and laid the foundations of the modern Qatari state, fostering the principles of unity, sovereignty, and resilience. His vision of a dignified, cohesive nation continues to guide Qatar as it thrives in an era of unparalleled progress and prosperity. The celebrations of Qatar National Day are not merely a commemoration of a historic date but a heartfelt tribute to a journey defined by unwavering commitment to integrity, honour, and moral values. Sheikh Jassim's leadership united the people of Qatar, preserved their dignity, and established Qatar as a respected and principled member of the global community. His legacy lives on as Qatar continues to welcome allies, offer refuge to the distressed, and uphold the rights of neighbours while championing principles of mutual respect and collaboration. Today, Qatar stands as a beacon of security, stability, and progress – a nation that has successfully balanced rapid development with an unwavering commitment to the welfare and dignity of its citizens and residents. **To Page 8**
falmudahka@gulf-times.com

Truce talks serious, positive: Hamas

AFP
Doha

Palestinian resistance movement Hamas said talks in Qatar yesterday aimed at a truce and hostage-prisoner exchange in Gaza were "serious and positive".

"Hamas affirms that, in light of the serious and positive discussions taking place today in Doha under the auspices of our Qatari and Egyptian brothers, reaching an agreement for a ceasefire and a prisoner exchange is possible if the occupation ceases to impose new conditions," the Palestinian group said in a statement.

Qatar, along with the United States and Egypt, has been mediating between Israel and Hamas for months in the quest for a Gaza truce and hostage release.

On Monday, Defence Minister Israel Katz said Israeli negotiators had "not been this close to an agreement" since the November 2023 truce.

Another source close to Hamas said: "Everything indicates that we are getting closer to an agreement, I expect before (US president-elect Donald) Trump's inauguration" on January 20.



Palestinians stand in wait for a food portion at a distribution centre south of Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday.

Mohamed al-Hind, the deputy head of Hamas ally Islamic Jihad, said his group, which is believed to hold some of the hostages still captive in Gaza, had met with Egyptian officials to discuss the proposed deal.

A source with knowledge of the negotiations said they were "focused on reaching a two- or three-stage exchange deal, starting with a humanitarian phase with the release of living Israeli civilian prisoners in exchange for Palestinian prisoners".

That exchange would "take place at the same time as the gradual ceasefire for a period of

two to four weeks, which will be extended for two weeks and so on... in parallel with the Israeli withdrawal," the source added.

Sources close to Hamas said the agreement was a three-phase plan leading to a complete end to the war and full Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and that it was awaiting Israeli approval.

"We believe – and the Israelis have said this – that we're getting closer, and no doubt about it, we believe that, but we also are cautious in our optimism," White House spokesperson John Kirby said in an interview with Fox News.

Mol launches new Metrash app

By **Shafeeq Alingal**
Staff Reporter

The Ministry of Interior (Mol) introduced the updated version of Metrash yesterday to provide a more user-friendly experience while reducing steps, easing use and ensuring digital security. The application, available on the App Store and Google Play, offers more than 440 services, including 100 new services. In a video released by Mol, Brig Jassim al-Buhashim al-Sayed, Director General of Communications and Information Systems and Secretary to the Minister of Interior for Co-ordination and Follow-Up, explained that the services guarantee great facilities for users to complete their official procedures, whether they are inside or outside the country, around the clock, through a channel with high reliability and a distinguished degree of digital security. He pointed out that work is continuing to develop and provide new services with qualified Qatari hands within highly skilled local technical teams. "Work is currently underway to develop another qualitative and integrated version of Metrash, which will witness a major shift in the coming months to provide a unique and unprecedented experience," he noted. The services provided through the



application and other channels, such as the Ministry of Interior's website, various service centres and integrated services with other ministries and government and private entities, have grown with the number of total users crossing more than 2mn.

The new features include a new visual identity and modern interactive interface design taking into account quick access to services and re-engineering services and procedures merging some services, shortening them and reducing their steps. Also, more than 100 new services have been added including profile, authorisation, inquiry, security services, appointment booking services and certificates. Modern payment methods such as Apple Pay too were added. The updated version is easy to use with artificial intelligence technology and modern digital technologies.

Vinicius, Bonmati named FIFA Best players



FIFA's Chief of Global Football Development and French former coach Arsene Wenger (R) presents the Best Coach award to Italian coach Carlo Ancelotti during the Best FIFA Football Awards 2024 ceremony held at Aspire Academy in Doha yesterday.



Brazilian forward Vinicius Junior (L) receives the Best Player trophy from FIFA President Gianni Infantino during the Best FIFA Football Awards 2024 ceremony held at Aspire Academy in Doha yesterday. **Sport Page 4**



Bonmati (File)

Amir pardons prisoners

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani issued an Amiri gesture pardoning a number of prisoners on the occasion of the Qatar National Day. **(QNA)**

HTS to dissolve armed wing

The military chief of Syria's victorious Islamist group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) said yesterday it would be "the first" to dissolve its armed wing and integrate into the armed forces. "In any state, all military units must be integrated into this institution," Murhaf Abu Qasra, known by his nom de guerre Abu Hassan al-Hamawi, said in an interview with AFP, adding that "we will be, God willing, among the first to take the initiative (to dissolve our armed wing)". "The Kurdish people are one of the components of the Syrian people... Syria will not be divided and there will be no federal entities," he said.



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Qatar National Day, 18th of December
and in remembrance of the historic day in 1878,
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and all Employees of Milaha**



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Deputy Amir chairs QU Board of Trustees meeting



His Highness the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani, the Chairman of the Board of Trustees of Qatar University (QU), presided over the first meeting of QU Board of Trustees for the academic year 2024-2025, held at the Amiri Diwan yesterday. At the beginning of the meeting, the board reviewed the accomplished decisions and recommendations made during the fourth meeting of the academic year 2023-2024. It discussed the agenda items and appropriate decisions were taken. Among these decisions was the approval of the College of Arts and Sciences' Mass Communication Department's programmes, including the BA in Journalism and the BA in Strategic Communication. **(QNA)**

Amir, Turkish president meet



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani is being greeted by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan before their meeting at the Presidential Complex in Ankara yesterday.

PM, Deputy PM meet Greek defence minister



HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani met yesterday with the visiting Greek Minister of National Defence Nikolaos Georgios Dendias. The meeting discussed co-operation relations between the two countries and ways to support and enhance them. They also discussed the updates in the Gaza Strip and the occupied Palestinian territories, the developments in Syria, and a number of topics of common interest. **(QNA)**



HE the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defence Affairs Sheikh Saud bin Abdulrahman bin Hassan al-Thani met in the hospitality building (Al-Rumaila) yesterday with the visiting Greek Minister of National Defence Nikolaos Georgios Dendias and his accompanying delegation. During the meeting, the two sides discussed topics of common interest and ways to enhance and develop them. The meeting was attended by HE the Adviser to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defence Affairs for Military and Security Affairs Major General (Pilot) Mohammed Abdullatif al-Mannai, HE the Office Manager of the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defence Affairs Major General (Sea) Nasser bin Mohammed al-Kaabi, HE the Commander of the Amiri Air Force Major General (Pilot) Mohammed bin Abdullah al-Dosari, Head of the International Military Co-operation Authority Staff Brigadier General Abdulaziz Saleh al-Sulaiti, along with a number of senior officials and officers from both sides. **(QNA)**

Darb Al Saai festivities extended until Saturday

The Organising Committee of the National Day 2024 celebration has announced the extension of the events organised by the Ministry of Culture on this occasion at Darb Al Saai until Saturday, Dec 21.

The decision to extend the National Day events at Darb Al Saai came to keep up with the large public turnout for heritage and cultural events that enhance the national identity on this occasion.

The cultural and heritage events continue amidst a large turnout of families of citizens and residents who were keen to take their children to enjoy the various activities, as Darb Al Saai includes a variety of events suitable for all ages, which include various cul-

tural and movement activities and competitions.

Among the heritage events that witness a large turnout is the Falconry Event, where Mohammed Saeed al-Kubaisi, the event supervisor, confirmed that "Falconry" reflects Qatar's attention to this heritage, which is part of the human heritage, noting that there are many achievements of Qatar that confirm the interest in the falconry heritage, such as collecting books, documents, manuscripts, pictures, written, audio and visual materials, and documenting the oral history related to this Qatari heritage.

He pointed out that the event aims to introduce the public to this aspect that was and still is part

of the lives of Qataris, explaining that it includes face painting and feeding the Houbara through small openings in the cages without touching the birds themselves, in addition to providing a number of types of birds of prey to allow visitors to take pictures with them, and participating in the children's entertainment through a section for colouring falcons and hunting birds in general, in addition to hunting tools.

Darb Al Saai events witness a remarkable presence of folk art groups that present various artistic performances that highlight the authentic Qatari heritage and revive the heritage arts that express the identity of the community and its ancient history. **(QNA)**

Al-Khulaifi holds phone call with UN special envoy for Syria

HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Mohammed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh al-Khulaifi held a phone call yesterday with the UN Special Envoy for Syria, Geir Pedersen.

The two sides discussed the latest developments in Syria.

HE the Minister of State reaffirmed Qatar's position on the ongoing developments in Syria, emphasising the need to support the transitional process in a manner that preserves the unity and territorial integrity of Syria, and fulfils the aspirations of its people in all

their components. He also underscored the importance of concerted international efforts, including those by the UN and its agencies, to support the Syrian people and help achieve their legitimate aspirations for security, stability and prosperity. **(QNA)**

Qatar-Egypt media ties discussed



HE the Chairperson of Qatar Media Corp Sheikh Hamad bin Thamer al-Thani met yesterday with Head of Supreme Council for Media Regulation of Egypt Khaled Abdel Aziz. The meeting discussed the media relations between the two countries and ways to support and develop them. **(QNA)**

Working hours of Licensing Affairs Dept during National Day

The Ministry of Interior (MoI) has set the working hours of the departments of the Licensing Affairs Department of the General Directorate of Traffic during the Qatar National Day holiday for 2024, in the morning period (only) from 8am until 12pm.

The departments include the Vehicle Registration Section at the main Traffic Directorate building, the Technical Inspection Section (Mazrouah/ Mesameer), License Plate Manufacturing Workshop in Ain Khaled area, and the Traffic Violations Section at the main Traffic Directorate building. **(QNA)**






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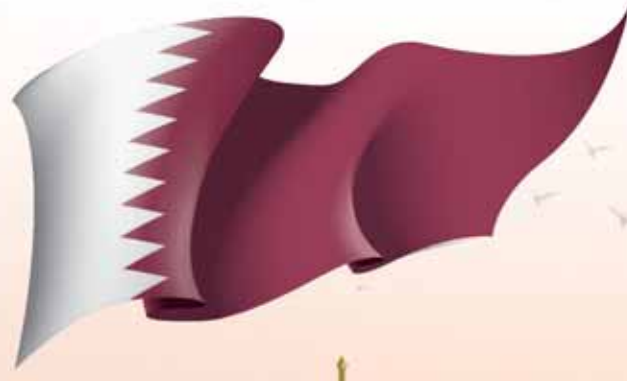
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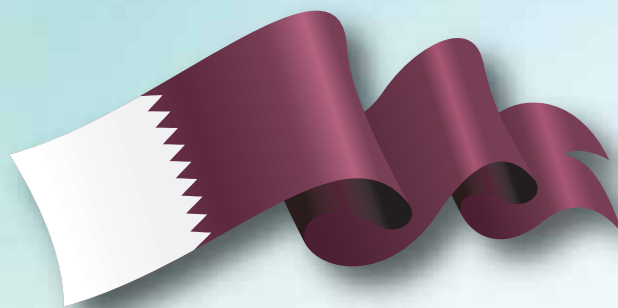
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Qatar, a saga of glory, progress



A row of Qatar flags line a street, in the backdrop of a section of the Doha skyline yesterday, as part of the decorations across the country for the Qatar National Day celebrations today.
PICTURE: Thajudheen

Qatar participates in CICA meeting

Qatar participated yesterday in Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA) meeting, which was held via video conference.

The Qatari delegation at the meeting was led by HE the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sultan bin Saad al-Muraikhi.

In his speech, HE al-Muraikhi thanked Azerbaijan for organising this important meeting, especially at a time when global and regional challenges are growing. He also praised outstanding role played by Kazakhstan during its successful presidency, which laid a strong foundation for boosting cooperation among member states.

He emphasised that Qatar, since joining CICA at its Fourth Summit in Shanghai, China, in 2014, has been committed



to actively participating at the highest levels in all of conference's activities. He reaffirmed Qatar's ongoing commitment to conferences goals and values, which aim to achieve peace and sustainable development across Asia.

He noted that Asia is at a historic crossroads, facing complex challenges and crises, whether on security, economic, or social fronts. However, we firmly

believe that Asia, with its vast natural and human resources, remains a continent of immense opportunities. Therefore, we call for enhanced cooperation and intensified efforts which fulfil the aspirations of our peoples towards stability and prosperity.

He also expressed Qatar's commitment to contributing to peace and security in the region and broader Asian continent, through initiatives and mediation efforts aimed at reducing tensions and achieving stability and prosperity.

HE al-Muraikhi reiterated Qatar's call for dialogue to be the primary tool for resolving disputes between countries. He emphasised Qatar's commitment to working towards goals of CICA, aiming to build a safer, more stable, and prosperous future for peoples of Asia. (QNA)

A day of pure pride and joy

From Page 1

Our Say

December 18 serves as a unifying milestone, a day that brings together Qatari citizens to reflect on the progress achieved under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani and to renew their loyalty to the vision of a prosperous and dignified future.

Under the guidance of successive leaders, Qatar has grown into a global model of success. Major strategic initiatives and investments have fuelled rapid economic and social progress, all while remaining grounded in the values and traditions inherited from its founding father. Qatar's achievements are not confined to economic development; they extend to cultural, sport, scientific, and legislative advancements, all underpinned by a commitment to sustainability and innovation.

The year 2024 has been particularly remarkable for Qatar, with numerous milestones achieved across various domains. As one of the world's leading producers of liquefied natural gas (LNG), Qatar has strengthened its position as a global energy powerhouse. Its diplomatic efforts, led by His Highness the Amir, have positioned Doha as a hub for international mediation and dialogue. Hosting strategic dialogues and participating in global forums such as the 79th session of the UN General Assembly, Qatar has reaffirmed its role as a key player in promoting international peace and security.

Such engagements underscore Qatar's commitment to fostering mutual respect and shared interests, while elevating its influence on the global stage.

Qatar has stood steadfastly by the side of the Syrian people through the dark days of a brutal regime and as the Arab country stands on the threshold of a new dawn, further extends the hand of brotherhood and support on this auspicious occasion so that the people of Syria can rebuild the nation of their dreams.

On this propitious day, Qatar also asserts its solidarity with the long-suffering people of Palestine and hope the war waged by the Israeli occupation forces on Gaza will come to an early end.

His Highness the Amir undertook several notable visits in 2024, with the latest being his outstanding state visit to the United Kingdom. These visits have further strengthened Qatar's bilateral relations and expanded its network of strategic partnerships. Such engagements underscore Qatar's commitment to fostering mutual respect and shared interests, while elevating its influence on the global stage.

One of the highlights of 2024 was His Highness the Amir's attendance at the 8th edition of the Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al-Thani International Anti-Corruption Excellence Award ceremony in Costa Rica. This event underscores Qatar's commitment to transparency and ethical governance on a global scale.

Domestically, the approval of constitutional amendments through a historic referendum reflects the nation's dedication to inclusive governance and its citi-

zens' active participation in shaping Qatar's future.

Qatar National Day also celebrates the robust bond between Qatar's leadership and its people, a relationship that has been instrumental in achieving the nation's ambitious goals. His Highness the Amir's focus on economic independence, national security, and bilateral relations has reinforced Qatar's position as a global leader. The nation's dynamic foreign policy, rooted in mutual respect and shared interests, continues to foster strategic partnerships and elevate Qatar's stature on the world stage.

As Qatar marches confidently toward the future, it remains steadfast in its commitment to preparing its people for excellence and contribution towards global welfare. The principles of self-sufficiency, knowledge, and dedication are at the heart of Qatar's vision for sustainable development. Guided by its wise leadership, the State of Qatar continues to prioritise the well-being and prosperity of all who call this land home.

Qatar National Day is a testament to the enduring spirit of unity, resilience, and progress that defines the nation. It is a day to celebrate the remarkable journey of a country that has transformed challenges into opportunities and emerged as a global exemplar of stability and success. As the festivities unfold today, the people of Qatar will not only honour their past but also reaffirm their commitment to a future of dignity, prosperity, and shared achievement.

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Ministry of Environment celebrates QND



The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change marked the National Day of Qatar with a ceremony attended by HE the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Dr Abdullah bin Abdulaziz bin Turki al-Subaie, along with ministry's assistant undersecretaries and several department directors. During the event, the ministry employees expressed their joy for this deeply rooted national occasion, which embodies the values of loyalty and belonging to the homeland. It reflects pride of Qatari people in their rich history and wise leadership. They also expressed pride in the remarkable achievements that contribute to enhancing the journey of sustainable development across various fields. (QNA)

QGOSM hails comprehensive development, great renaissance

HE the Chairman of Qatar General Organisation for Standardisation and Metrology (QGOSM) engineer Mohammed bin Saud al-Musallam has emphasised that the celebration of the National Day this year comes after the Qatari people's participation in the general referendum to amend the constitution, where they renewed, in an epic of love for the homeland, their loyalty and devotion to the wise and prudent leadership, and their solidarity and support in all major stations of the path of development and renaissance in Qatar.

In remarks to Qatar News Agency (QNA), he said that the QGOSM, as it participates with the Qatari people in celebrating this occasion that is dear to all our hearts, renews its loyalty to the wise leadership, and expresses its pride and appreciation for the distinguished and prestigious political, economic, and social status

that the state has achieved at the regional and international levels. It also renews its determination to support the comprehensive development process and the great renaissance that has included all aspects of life.

He added that he is pleased with all feelings of pride and honour to extend, on his behalf and on behalf of all employees of the QGOSM, congratulations and blessings to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, His Highness the Father Amir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, the esteemed government, and all the generous Qatari people and residents of this good land, on the occasion of the National Day, through which we recall the biography of the founding fathers led by Sheikh Jassim bin Mohammed bin Thani.

He added that they will do their utmost to implement the QGOSM's message and what the



country aspires to achieve during the next phase, in accordance with the Third National Development Strategy and Qatar National Vision 2030, by achieving more accomplishments, reaching the highest levels of excellence, safety, and quality through specifications and standardisation, and continuing to support the economic sector by helping the national companies and factories achieve the highest levels of quality compliance and the superiority of their products over other products in local and regional markets.

HE al-Musallam indicated that the QGOSM was able to complete several projects of its strategic plan for 2021-2025, especially preparing and updating standard specifications and technical regulations, which contribute to achieving sustainable development and supporting the projects of the National Development Strategy. (QNA)

QNA chief meets Italian news agency CEO



HE the Director-General of Qatar News Agency (QNA) Ahmed bin Saeed al-Rumaihi met yesterday with CEO and Managing Director of the Italian news agency (ANSA) Stefano De Alessandri. The meeting discussed aspects of co-operation between the two agencies. (QNA)

Public Announcement

To all Ships, Fisherman, and Mariners

Subsea Survey Works Offshore in "North Field" By the Vessel "Pacific Grouse"

Subsea Survey Works Offshore Qatar from 18th December 2024 to 31st 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 "Pacific Grouse" in North Field locations, bound by the coordinates and location map shown below.


Coordinates: -

Corner Coordinates Covering Survey Area				
Nahrwan 1967, UTM Projection, Zone 39 CM 51° E				
ID	Easting [m]	Northing [m]	Latitude	Longitude
1	564 130.00	2 945 000.00	26° 37' 35.70"	51° 38' 39.23"
2	562 130.00	2 920 000.00	26° 24' 03.39"	51° 37' 22.52"
3	562 130.00	2 890 000.00	26° 07' 48.20"	51° 37' 17.32"
4	600 000.00	2 890 000.00	26° 07' 40.53"	52° 00' 00.90"
5	600 000.00	2 920 000.00	26° 23' 55.63"	52° 00' 09.27"
6	596 000.00	2 945 000.00	26° 37' 29.18"	52° 57' 51.69"

Corner Coordinates Covering Survey Area				
WGS84, UTM Projection, Zone 39 CM 51° E				
ID	Easting [m]	Northing [m]	Latitude	Longitude
1	564 228.36	2945 432.94	26° 37' 42.00"	51° 38' 42.89"
2	562 228.36	2920 432.82	26° 24' 09.74"	51° 37' 26.17"
3	562 228.36	2890 432.67	26° 07' 54.60"	51° 37' 20.96"
4	600 098.55	2890 432.69	26° 07' 46.92"	52° 00' 04.61"
5	600 098.53	2920 432.83	26° 24' 01.97"	52° 00' 12.98"
6	596 098.50	2945 432.95	26° 37' 35.48"	51° 57' 55.40"

Coordinates of Geotechnical Boreholes				
Nahrwan 1967, UTM Projection, Zone 39 CM 51° E				
ID	Easting [m]	Northing [m]	Latitude	Longitude
SITE 01_COJ-BH	580 130.00	2 931 183.00	26° 30' 03.65"	51° 48' 14.69"
SITE 02_COJ-BH	581 082.00	2 919 419.00	26° 23' 41.07"	51° 48' 46.39"
SITE 03_COJ-BH	576 968.00	2 907 571.00	26° 17' 16.78"	51° 46' 15.37"
SITE 04_COJ-BH	587 145.00	2 908 191.00	26° 17' 34.83"	51° 52' 22.46"

Coordinates of Geotechnical Boreholes				
WGS84, UTM Projection, Zone 39 CM 51° E				
ID	Easting [m]	Northing [m]	Latitude	Longitude
SITE 01_COJ-BH	580 228.44	2931 615.88	26° 30' 09.97"	51° 48' 14.69"
SITE 02_COJ-BH	581 180.44	2919 851.82	26° 23' 47.42"	51° 48' 46.39"
SITE 03_COJ-BH	577 066.43	2908 003.76	26° 17' 23.14"	51° 46' 15.37"
SITE 04_COJ-BH	587 243.48	2908 623.77	26° 17' 41.19"	51° 52' 22.46"



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

An occasion to take pride in Founder's legacy

QNA
Doha

HE the Speaker of the Shura Council Hassan bin Abdullah al-Ghanem emphasised that Qatar National Day is an occasion to honour the legacy of the founder, reaffirm the pledge, advance the development process, and celebrate the country's achievements under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani.

In a statement to Qatar News Agency (QNA), HE al-Ghanem highlighted that National Day serves as an opportunity to reaffirm loyalty to the wise leader-

ship and to continue working in the spirit of unity established by the founder, building on it to further the nation's development, progress, and prosperity.

He extended his warmest 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 His Highness the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani on the occasion of this cherished national celebration. He emphasised that celebrating the founding of the state by Sheikh Jassim bin Mohammed bin Thani carries profound significance, embodying the values of sacrifice and determina-



tion in building a united and stable nation.

He noted that this day serves as a reminder of the tremendous efforts made by the founder to establish the State and raise its banner.

These efforts laid the foundation for a unique model of national unity, loyalty, and solidarity that has become a defining characteristic of the country. He further emphasised that the celebration of this day is an opportunity to share in the pride of the founder's remarkable legacy, reaffirming the continuity of the approach established by the founding fathers in building a strong state based on principles of justice and law, ensuring a dignified life for its citizens, and playing an active role in its regional and international environment.

HE the Speaker also pointed out that this year's celebration takes place during a new phase of development, marked by the launch of

the Third National Development Strategy for 2024-2030, which reflects Qatar's vision for a sustainable future. He reaffirmed the Council's role and commitment to supporting this strategy by focusing on developing legislation that fosters economic diversification, encourages investment in key sectors such as education, health, and renewable energy, and addresses issues that meet citizens' needs to ensure comprehensive and sustainable development.

In this context, he highlighted that the Shura Council continues its distinguished role in supporting the nation's development journey. He noted that this year witnessed several important achievements,

including the approval of constitutional amendments, as well as several key legislative projects. The Council has also discussed vital issues and submitted proposals to the government, reflecting its significant role in decision-making and advancing the country's development while fulfilling citizens' aspirations.

Concluding his statement to (QNA), HE the Speaker of the Shura Council Hassan bin Abdullah al-Ghanem emphasised the council's contributions to strengthening parliamentary co-operation at both the regional and international levels, which helps enhance Qatar's standing and its active role on the global stage.

National Day manifests solidarity and loyalty

QNA
Doha

HE the Minister of Social Development and Family Buthaina bint Ali al-Jabr al-Nuaimi emphasised that Qatar National Day carries many lofty meanings that are manifested in cohesion, solidarity and loyalty to the leadership, and reflects the determination and willpower of the people of this country.



ing, a consolidation of the supreme national values, and a celebration of national unity, the foundations of which were laid by the founder of the state, Sheikh Jassim bin Mohammed bin Thani, who laid the foundations of the modern state on the principles of co-operation

and solidarity among the people of Qatar.

She pointed out that the celebration of this occasion coincides with many tangible development achievements that have been made over the past decades, making Qatar an inspiring model of development, stability and peace. She stressed the importance of the family as a fundamental pillar in the stability of society and building the nation, emphasising its pivotal role in instilling values and principles in future generations. She also noted that the ministry is working to support the family and enhance its role in developing society through various programmes and initiatives aimed at achieving family and community cohesion.

Concluding her statements to QNA, HE the Minister of Social Development and Family said that Qatar National Day is an occasion that embodies the true meaning of the nation's strength and solidarity under the wise leadership.

QND opportunity to celebrate achievements across all fields

QNA
Doha

HE the Minister of Labour Dr Ali bin Smaikh al-Marri affirmed that Qatar National Day is a significant occasion to reflect on the achievements of the nation across all fields, which have elevated its regional and international standing. These accomplishments are credited to the wise policies and visionary leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, the dedication of the country's loyal citizens, and the contributions of residents in Qatar.

In a statement to Qatar News Agency (QNA), HE the Minister extended his heartfelt congratulations 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. He prayed for continued prosperity, stability, and progress for Qatar year after year.

HE the Minister highlighted the Ministry of Labour's numerous achievements in line with the objectives of Qatar National Vision 2030, particularly in qualifying and developing the skills of the national workforce and increasing their participation in private sector institutions. He noted that, as part of efforts to develop and pre-



pare the national workforce and boost their employment in the private sector, His Highness the Amir issued the Nationalisation Law for Private Sector Jobs, marking a significant step forward in enhancing national workforce participation rates in the private sector. Currently, nationals represent 17% of the private sector workforce, with the National Strategy for an Effective and Highly Productive Workforce 2024-2030 aiming to raise this percentage to 20% by 2030.

HE the Minister also revealed that the Ministry of Labour's efforts have resulted in the employment of 6,000 Qatari men and women in the private sector over the past three years.

He added that the ministry is currently working on developing a comprehensive Nationalisation plan for private sector jobs in collaboration with private sector institutions. The ministry has conducted numerous consultations and workshops with private sector

representatives to devise an effective and actionable plan that aligns with national objectives.

Furthermore, the minister noted the activation of sectoral councils, which co-ordinate Nationalisation efforts with the private sector, ensuring continuity in dialogue, enhanced communication, and the building of effective partnerships. These councils align sectoral strategies between senior Ministry officials and private sector institutions and companies.

Regarding expatriate workers, HE Dr Ali bin Smaikh al-Marri emphasised that the ministry aims to attract highly skilled expatriates, raising their share from 20% to 24% of the total expatriate workforce by 2030. He also highlighted the ministry's digital transformation efforts over the past three years to enhance the work environment by leveraging artificial intelligence to collect and analyse labour market data. These efforts include developing a Labour Market Information System, which will aid in policy formulation, development, monitoring, and data analysis.

He concluded by stating that as part of the Third National Development Strategy, the ministry will implement 16 initiatives and 55 projects targeting national workforce development, expatriate workforce enhancement, and private and semi-private sector advancement.

National Day marks new era to continue development process

QNA
Doha

HE the Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Ibrahim bin Ali al-Mohannadi emphasised Qatar National Day as a dear occasion that embodies historical symbolism and highlights great achievements made by the State thanks to the vision and wisdom of the wise leadership.



In a statement to Qatar News Agency (QNA), HE the Minister said that National Day celebrations reflects a long-standing journey of renaissance and a comprehensive stage of prosperity thanks to the wise leadership, which has made Qatar a model to be emulated in security, prosperity and development, within a framework of established values that promote justice and the rule of law.

HE al-Mohannadi added that the Ministry of Justice continues to achieve advanced levels in developing government services, noting that the ministry launched the first phase of its digital legal services, including documentation services, as part of the digital transformation plan, to be completed with digital real estate services in conjunction with National Day celebrations.

The Ministry of Justice achieved great accomplishments in line with Qatar National Vision 2030 and the Third National Development Strategy 2024-2030, he pointed out, noting that work is currently underway to launch the ministry's strategic plan 2025-2030. The plan

includes developing legal services, enhancing legal professions, and ensuring their electronic provision with accuracy and high quality to meet the aspirations of individuals and institutions.

HE the Minister explained that the ministry took great strides towards digital transformation, as the number of services provided online increased to 223 services, in addition to launching advanced systems such as the state cases system, updating digital portals for lawyers and experts, and the real estate mediation system.

The ministry has paid great attention to developing human resources by launching an integrated training plan in co-ordination with the Qatar Leadership Centre, and implementing more than 104 specialised and legal training programmes, targeting new and legal lawyers in 35 entities in the country, HE the Minister said.

He also pointed out that this year laid witness to the licensing of a large number of Qatari lawyers,

real estate brokers, and experts, which reflects the development of the legal sector and its role in promoting national renaissance.

This year's National Day celebrations has a strategic dimension with the launch of the Third National Development Strategy 2024-2030, which aims to transform Qatar into an advanced country that achieves sustainable development for its future generations, he added. HE the Minister stressed that the Ministry of Justice is working to align its plans with this strategy through seven main axes and 27 ambitious initiatives.

HE the Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs concluded his statement to QNA by stressing that National Day is not only an occasion to celebrate achievements, but also a new era to continue the development process under wise leadership and a strong national will so that Qatar's name remains proud among countries, and an oasis of security and prosperity.

A celebration of our journey, commitment to future vision

HE President of the Public Works Authority (Ashghal), Eng Mohammed bin Abdulaziz al-Meer has affirmed that commemorating the anniversary of founding the modern State of Qatar by Sheikh Jassim bin Mohammed bin Thani, holds immense national and historical significance for Qatari people. It is an occasion to reflect on the country's journey and achievements while striving to fulfil its future vision under its wise leadership.

Speaking to Qatar News Agency (QNA) on the occasion of National Day, he highlighted that this day carries deep significance, as it symbolises the strong bond of Qataris with their history, identity, and national unity. He expressed his pride in Qatari identity, commitment to national cohesion, and adherence to the values and principles established by the founding leader.

He emphasised that National Day is both a celebration of a rich heritage and a recognition of the remarkable progress Qatar has made across all fields. These include social, economic, industrial, health, educational, and technological development. It is also a moment to reaffirm commitment to advancing the nation's infrastructure to the highest standards, ensuring prosperity of its citizens, stability of homeland, and sustainability of its growth and progress.

Eng al-Meer stated that the leaders of this beloved country



have worked diligently to preserve the historical achievements and follow the path of the founder, Sheikh Jassim bin Mohammed bin Thani. By upholding core values, strengthening national unity, fostering development, and safeguarding sovereignty and independence, Qatar has solidified its status as a modern, progressive nation with strong roots and visionary leadership.

He further pointed out continuous growth, prosperity, and elevated standing Qatar enjoys among nations. The country has made significant strides in its journey toward becoming one of the world's leading nations, achieving major accomplishments both domestically and internationally.

He also stated that Ashghal has made significant achievements in infrastructure, building projects, and maintenance for the 2023-2024 period, maintaining

steady progress to meet its desired objectives. The expressway network now spans over 954km, while cycling and pedestrian pathways have been expanded to a total length of about 1,327km. Additionally, green spaces and landscaping areas now cover over 9.2mn sq m, with 223,000sq m added during 2023-2024.

HE emphasised the Authority's strong commitment to developing road and infrastructure projects for both new and existing citizens' plots. By the end of 2023, over 250km of roads and 250km of pedestrian and cycling pathways were completed. The sewage network was extended by an additional 500km, with infrastructure services delivered to 480 plots in new areas and 2,100 plots in existing ones.

HE al-Meer explained that Ashghal is focusing on enhancing sustainability and recycling initiatives as a key goal to achieve Sustainable Development Goals outlined in Qatar's National Vision 2030. This includes striking a balance between economic growth and environmental conservation. Key initiatives include recycling asphalt materials, using treated wastewater for cooling systems, irrigating green spaces, and growing fodder, along with using recycled tire rubber in asphalt mixes and recycling construction and demolition waste. The recycling rate achieved in these efforts has surpassed 50%. (QNA)

Ministry of Social Development celebrates Qatar National Day

QNA
Doha

The Ministry of Social Development and Family, represented by the Community Care Department, celebrated Qatar National Day during an event held at the Enaya Center at Al Rumailah Hospital, as part of its ongoing efforts to enhance

community care and its effective role in community development.

This participation comes as part of the activities organised by the ministry on the occasion of Qatar National Day, where the esteemed persons staying at the 'Enaya' Center were honoured, in co-operation with the Department of Geriatrics and Long-Term Care, in a step that reflects the ministry's commitment to

The 'Enaya' Center were honoured, in co-operation with the Department of Geriatrics and Long-Term Care

highlighting the importance of the role of this group in building the Qatari society.

In a statement, the ministry emphasised the importance of the role of esteemed figures in

society, and making them feel the community's appreciation for them through their participation in this special National Day, considering that honouring esteemed figures on this occasion is part of appreciating their efforts and profound contributions to building Qatari society, and an affirmation of the ministry's commitment to the values of appreciation and respect towards

previous generations who played a major role in the renaissance of society.

On the other hand, this participation is a unique opportunity to strengthen human values in society and to consolidate the spirit of giving and effective participation, which contributes to building a more cohesive and united society.

It also reflects Qatar's com-

mitment to achieving the goals of Qatar National Vision 2030, which focuses on human development as one of its main axes.

In this context, the Ministry of Social Development and Family continues its ongoing efforts to support the esteemed in Qatari society, which enhances their active participation and emphasises their rich contributions to the country's renaissance.



QND observed amid comprehensive renaissance across various sectors

QNA
Doha

HE the Chairperson of the National Human Rights Committee (NHRC) Maryam bint Abdullah al-Attiyah (*Pictured*) affirmed that Qatar National Day is a precious and cherished occasion that fills every Qatari with pride and honour. She noted that this year's celebration comes amidst the State's ongoing comprehensive renaissance and major achievements in various fields, including economic, social, health, cultural and developmental sectors, among others.

HE al-Attiyah said in an exclusive statement to Qatar News Agency (QNA) that the celebration of the National Day reinforces national unity in light of the constitutional amendments made last month. It also reflects the progress and enhancement of all human rights for everyone living in Qatar, in alignment with Qatar National Vision 2030. This underscores the establishment of a state of law and institutions, thanks to the wise leadership and visionary guidance of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani.

The celebration of Qatar's National Day underscores the nation-

al identity of the State and its great history, which has always been and will remain a symbol of loyalty, solidarity, unity, noble values, and the lofty principles for which Qatari society has been known throughout the ages. These values were instilled by the Founder, and have been upheld by successive generations, becoming a legacy.

Qatar confronts all challenges with resilience, and overcomes them with strong will and self-confidence, serving its people and nation, working towards sustainable development, and striving to achieve security, peace, and stability in the region and the world, she added.

The NHRC chairperson explained that the celebration of National Day is also a celebration of the achievements and accomplishments realised across various levels. She highlighted, in this regard, the accomplishments of the Committee, which has become a model for national human rights institutions at the Gulf, Arab, and international levels. This status enabled it to secure an "A" accreditation rating from the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI) for three consecutive cycles (2010, 2015, 2020) and until 2025, in recognition of its achievements, best practices, and adherence to the principles of

independence, transparency and pluralism. This year, the National Human Rights Committee continued its efforts and responsibilities aimed at promoting and ensuring human rights for everyone under Qatar's jurisdiction.

This was achieved in co-operation with various governmental and non-governmental entities, as well as through presenting necessary proposals and recommendations to safeguard human rights in the country. These efforts were detailed in the Committee's 2024 Annual Report, she said.

She affirmed that the Committee spared no effort in addressing complaints from citizens and residents, co-ordinating with the relevant authorities in the State. It also conducted numerous visits to monitor the human rights situation, addressing any violations or abuses and following up on the necessary measures to achieve this goal, including resolving issues or referring them to the competent authority to halt or rectify their impacts.

In the context of raising awareness and educating about human rights, HE al-Attiyah pointed out that the NHRC organised numerous events, most notably the conference titled "Food Justice from a Human Rights Perspective: Challenges of Reality and Future



Stakes", held in February of this year. This conference served as a unique platform for bringing together experts and stakeholders from various sectors to discuss the challenges facing the achievement of food justice at both local and global levels. The aim was to enhance awareness of the importance of food justice and contribute to the development of effective policies and strategies to achieve it.

She added that the National Human Rights Committee also organised a conference in co-operation with the European Ombudsman Institute on "Protecting Children and other vulnerable groups", held in Doha on October 14 of this year. This event provided an impor-

tant platform to promote dialogue and exchange knowledge on safeguarding children and other vulnerable groups.

Additionally, the Committee held the "Inaugural Business and Human Rights Dialogue in the Arab States Region" conference on October 28, in partnership with the Arab Network of National Human Rights Institutions, the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions, the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, and Unicef. The event was held under the theme "Charting the Course for Responsible Business Practices in the Arab States Region" in the field of international co-operation to promote human rights, HE al-Attiyah stated that the National Human Rights Committee signed several Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) this year with various entities.

These include the African Union Commission, the National Human Rights Commission of the Republic of Mauritania, the Penal Reform International organisation in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, the Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines and the Institute for Democracy and Human Rights in the Republic of Azerbaijan.

One of the key achievements of the National Human Rights Committee this year was the launch of its third strategic plan (2024-2030), which aligns with Qatar's Third National Development Strategy (2024-2030).

The Committee's strategy aims to contribute to the establishment of a legislative environment that complies with international human rights standards, strengthen mechanisms for human rights protection and enhance the advisory role of the Committee.

The strategy also focuses on promoting the culture of human rights on the widest possible scale, consolidating Arab, regional, and international co-operation and partnerships at the national level in the field of human rights, supporting civil society organisations and building their capacities in this area, and improving both the institutional and individual performance of the Committee.

HE al-Attiyah concluded her statements to QNA by saying that everyone in Qatari society has the right to feel proud and honoured for the comprehensive renaissance the nation has achieved in all fields and sectors, as well as for the prestigious position the state has attained regionally and internationally, under our wise leadership.

QND represents moment of pride in Qatar's long history

QNA
Doha

President of the Communications Regulatory Authority (CRA) Eng Ahmad Abdulla al-Muslemani emphasised that celebrating the anniversary of the founding of Qatar by the Founder Sheikh Jassim bin Mohammed bin Thani represents a moment of pride and honour in Qatar's long history, which reflects the vision and wise leadership that laid the country's foundations.

In a statement to Qatar News Agency (QNA), Eng al-Muslemani explained that National Day enhances the feeling of national belonging and unites citizens and residents of Qatar with values of unity and cohesion.

He underscored that Qatar today is following in the footsteps of the founder towards a bright future. He pointed out that National Day represents a source of inspiration for current and future generations, as it links the present to the glorious past of the legacy of the founder, Sheikh Jassim bin Mohammed bin Thani.

He reviewed the values of unity, determination, and wise leadership that laid the foundations of the state, and in light of this ancient legacy, the vision of construction and development is inspired to complete the journey toward a bright future. The celebration of National Day is an occasion that inspires Qatari youth to innovate and instils in them a sense of responsibility to continue enhancing Qatar's global standing, while preserving the authentic values that have shaped its identity.

He congratulated His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, His Highness the Father Amir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-

Thani, and the citizens and residents of Qatar on this occasion, and hoped for the country to continue to enjoy the blessings of security, prosperity and progress, and that its flag would remain flying high among nations.

During the past year, the CRA witnessed remarkable achievements that strengthened Qatar's position globally, most notably its fourth place rank globally in the ICT Development Index (IDI) 2024, CRA President said. He pointed out that the CRA issued the policy and regulatory regulations to protect the consumers, and took strategic decisions related to mobile communications in Qatar to improve the quality and efficiency of services, in addition to enhancing public communications networks by switching to the use of high-speed network technologies.

Qatar's 5G network is almost completely available in the whole country, and Fibre Optic Coverage expanded to cover 100% of the population, Eng al-Muslemani added. The CRA President explained that the CRA launched the Space Radio Monitoring Center to enhance the infrastructure for satellite communications and maintain a frequency spectrum free of interference.

Regarding the postal sector, al-Muslemani stressed that CRA put forward a set of regulatory tools for public consultation with the aim of improving the postal services provided, developing the postal sector and enhancing competition in it in a way that supports the national economy in line with the CRA's strategy and Qatar National Vision 2030.

He pointed out that this year's National Day celebration marks the beginning of a new phase of development and progress in light of the Third National Development Strategy 2024-2030, which aims to enhance the country's position as a

leading centre in various fields.

The CRA is working to translate its strategic vision to support these national goals through its pivotal role in building an integrated digital economy based on knowledge, and achieving digital transformation, which is a fundamental pillar for achieving sustainable development, the CRA President said. He stressed that the CRA's strategy aims to enhance the advanced digital infrastructure and ensure optimal management of national resources such as the frequency spectrum, in a way that enables innovation and growth. The CRA also focuses on supporting innovation by encouraging competition in the local market, and activating the provision of modern services such as artificial intelligence, which contributes to strengthening Qatar's position as a regional centre for advanced technology.

Al-Muslemani noted that the CRA continuously works to improve the regulatory environment to attract technical investments, stimulate entrepreneurship in the communications sector, and ensure the provision of high-quality communications services at competitive prices.

As part of its commitment to achieving Qatar National Vision 2030, the CRA is focusing on enabling digital transformation at all levels, which enhances the competitiveness of the national economy and achieves tangible results that reflect on the well-being of society, he added.

Eng al-Muslemani concluded his statement to QNA by saying that through these efforts, the CRA is proving its vital role in achieving the goals of the National Development Strategy and supporting Qatar's journey towards a sustainable digital future.

QND: Palestinians praise Qatar's support for Gaza

QNA
Gaza

On the occasion of Qatar National Day, Palestinians hailed the tremendous efforts exerted by Qatar to stop the Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip and address its catastrophic humanitarian repercussions.

In separate interviews with the correspondent of Qatar News Agency (QNA) in Gaza, many Palestinians expressed their hope for the success of the Qatari efforts to stop the aggression, pointing to Qatar's pivotal role in calming down and stopping previous wars in 2012, 2014, and 2021, and the subsequent Qatari efforts to rebuild Gaza and improve its humanitarian conditions.

In front of one of the aid distribution centres of the Qatar Red Crescent in Gaza, Mohammed al-Sharafa praised the Qatari support that has extended for years, saying

that Qatar has always been present to support the Palestinian people and alleviate their suffering amid the ongoing Israeli aggression.

Qatar has honourable positions towards the Palestinian cause, and is making tremendous efforts in the mediation and diplomatic movement to stop the aggression, he added. For his part, Ibrahim Khaled, supervisor of the "Touch of Loyalty" relief project in the northern Gaza Strip, said that Qatari efforts represent a fundamental pillar in providing aid to Palestinians affected by the Israeli aggression. He explained that Qatar is strongly present by providing food parcels, equipping shelter camps and providing their residents with basic life necessities, in addition to implementing vital service projects that address the repercussions of the aggression.

In the same context, media professional and, editor-in-chief of Safa News Agency, Mohammed Abu Qamar, highlighted the Qatari

role that has extended since the imposition of the blockade on Gaza 17 years ago. He pointed to Qatar's success in reaching calm following the March of Return demonstrations in 2018, during which it supported the unemployed and covered the costs of fuel supplies to the power plant at a monthly cost of \$30mn.

At the end of his speech, Abu Qamar highlighted Qatar's political and diplomatic efforts to stop the current Israeli aggression, noting its pivotal role in reaching a humanitarian truce in November. He expressed his hope that the current shuttle talks Qatar is leading would culminate in a complete cessation of aggression that ends the suffering of the people of the Strip.

The hope remains pinned on Qatar's role in halting the Israeli aggression, especially since Qatar has repeatedly demonstrated its commitment to supporting the Palestinian cause and alleviating the suffering of the people of Gaza.

National Day occasion to recall history of ancestors

QNA
Doha

HE the President of the UN General Assembly's 66th session and former High Representative of the UN Alliance of Civilisations, Nassir bin Abdulaziz al-Nasser affirmed that the National Day of the State is an occasion to recall the history of the ancestors and the spirit instilled by fathers in the hearts of future generations.

In exclusive remarks to Qatar News Agency (QNA) on the occasion of National Day, HE al-Nasser said that this is a day when the people of Qatar renew their pledge to remain loyal to the journey of sacrifices and unwavering determination that built this nation since its founding by Sheikh Jassim bin Mohammed bin Thani.

The people of Qatar remain steadfast in their loyalty to their homeland and leadership, drawing strength from a rich past and a present filled with achievements.

He added since its founding, Qatar has been built on unity and loyalty between its people and leadership. We all recall the historic document known as The Pledge



of Al-Ghuraifa of 1905, from the founder Sheikh Jassim bin Mohammed bin Thani, signed by members of the ruling family and the dignitaries of Qatar to appoint Sheikh Abdullah bin Jassim as the ruler of Qatar.

This symbolises the bond between the people of the state and its wise leadership from that time to the present day.

The president of the 66th Session of the UN General Assembly noted that since its accession to the UN, Qatar has spared no effort in being an active member of the international community. Qatar has worked toward achieving the purposes of the UN and

promoting international peace and security, particularly concerning Arab and Islamic issues, foremost among them the Palestinian cause. One of the most prominent features of Qatar's foreign policy is the use of preventive diplomacy as an effective tool for promoting international peace and security.

This approach has achieved significant success, particularly in the field of mediation, establishing Qatar as a trusted and impartial mediator that fulfils the desired objectives in resolving many conflicts and wars. As an Arab and Islamic state, Qatar has become a model in the international arena, HE noted.

In conclusion, HE Nassir bin Abdulaziz al-Nasser told QNA that under the leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani the country is steadily moving toward a better future for our beloved homeland and its loyal people.

The challenges that Qatar has faced, both in the past and present, serve as a true testament to the fact that the leadership and the people are inseparable parts of this generous and cherished nation that is dear to all our hearts.

Occasion to highlight rich heritage of Qatari people

HE Chairman of the General Authority of Customs (GAC) Ahmed bin Abdullah al-Jamal underlined that the founding anniversary of Qatar by Sheikh Jassim bin Mohammed bin Thani provides a great opportunity for successive generations to learn about the rich heritage of the Qatari people to derive from it an incentive and motivation towards achieving future goals and hopes.

In remarks to Qatar News Agency (QNA) on the occasion of Qatar National Day (QND), HE the GAC Chairman said that QND celebration is an occasion to remember the achievements of the leader Sheikh Jassim bin Mohammed bin Thani and the ancestors who endured hardships to establish the pillars of a just state that embraces its citizens and provides them with security, safety, dignity, prosperity, and all means for a decent life.

He emphasised that QND celebrations manifest the harmony and cohesion in the Qatari society that enhances the values of loyalty and belonging. Since Sheikh Jassim bin Mohammed bin Thani assumed the reins of power, Qatar has been on a continuous development journey toward the future. The progress and advancement it has achieved reflect a long journey of genius work and continuous effort made by the Founder and all the great leaders of Qatar who achieving pride and dignity for everyone who resides on this good land, he added.

The rulers of Qatar continued the process of building and development, achieving successes and accomplishments through major national development projects, while instilling moral values and principles among citizens and spreading awareness of the importance of preserving national unity and cohesion among the people, he said.

He emphasised that the general referendum on the constitutional amendments, which saw over 90% turnout, reinforced the concept of national unity and equality among citizens, and reflected the people's keenness to participate in decision-making.

Regarding the most prominent achievements of the GAC, HE Ahmed bin Abdullah al-Jamal highlighted a number of accomplishments in 2024 within its sphere of competence which covers securing the entry of goods and travellers and facilitating trade exchange with countries.

He noted that GAC has continued important role in implementing strategic and national programmes and projects, both in terms of developing and human, technical, and procedural aspects, and in terms of co-operation between customs and various entities inside and outside the country, as well as working with its partners to achieve smooth trade movement and support import and export operations.

Regarding the most prominent goals that the GAC seeks within the framework of its sectoral strategy, HE GAC Chairman Ahmed bin Abdullah al-Jamal said that the authority has established a long-term plan in line with the pillars

and objectives of Qatar National Vision 2030, and the National Development Strategy. With regard to the Third National Development Strategy 2024-2030, the authority has identified strategic goals and projects that are compatible with the states National Development Strategy, with a focus on the economic aspect.

Through its upcoming strategic plan, the GAC also seeks to develop customs services to create a stimulating investment climate and facilitate trade exchange to ensure an increased flow of goods and commodities to and from the country, in addition to effectively contributing to the success of Qatar's efforts in combating the financing of terrorism and money laundering and raising the efficiency of controlling crimes of smuggling drugs, harmful psychotropic substances and hazardous materials, he added.

Among the most important strategic projects (2024-2030) are digital transformation projects in the customs sector with Al Naadeb system for the use of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies, business intelligence, data management strategy projects, and cybersecurity, in addition to institutional development projects such as institutional performance management, institutional risks, institutional excellence, and others. The authority also seeks to raise Qatar's rank in global indicators and reports related to logistical performance indicators, economic competitiveness and quality of customs services. (QNA)

National Day 'an opportunity for people to feel pride'

Ambassadors from various nations have congratulated His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, and the government and people of Qatar on the occasion of the Qatar National Day (QND).
 German ambassador Lothar Freischlager congratulated the leadership, government, and people of Qatar on the occasion of the National Day, noting that this occasion is an opportunity for the people of Qatar to feel proud of their rich history and values, their vibrant culture, in addition to their outstanding achievements.
 Finland's ambassador to Qatar Pekka Voutilainen said that the QND is an important

event from which successive generations draw inspiration through the meanings of belonging to the homeland and of contributing to serving and further advancing it.
 Romanian ambassador Nicusor Daniel Tanase said that the QND is a renewed opportunity to reaffirm the nation's national unity, vision and collective goals that unite the people of Qatar in their pursuit of a prosperous future.
 South African ambassador Ghulam Hussein Asmal has that this occasion embodies the essence of the prolific Arab and Islamic legacy of Qatar, and is a vivid reminder of the significant evolution that Qatar has experienced, from

its initial stages to its present flourishing.
 Brunei's ambassador Mohamed Bahrain Abu Bakar said the National Day is an important occasion to celebrate values and solidarity, with citizens and residents joining hands to celebrate this important day, not only with history but also with the common values and solidarity that bind them together in a common destiny.
 The charge d'affaires of the Senegal embassy in Doha, Dr Abdourahmane Kane, hailed the QND as a historic occasion commemorating Sheikh Jassim bin Mohammed bin Thani's founding of the country on principles and values from the Islamic teachings. **(QNA)**

QND embodies 'identity, pride, loyalty'

The ambassadors of Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco have congratulated 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, expressing wishes for further progress and prosperity to the people, on the occasion of Qatar National Day (QND).
 Algerian ambassador Salah Attia hailed the QND as an occasion that embodies the values of unity, pride in the national identity, and loyalty to ancestors.
 Moroccan ambassador Mohamed Setri meanwhile stressed that the National Day celebrations are an occasion to recall the achievements and gains made by the people of Qatar in various fields.
 Tunisian ambassador Farhad Khalif said the National Day honours the efforts of those who built and safeguarded the state, ensuring its unity and progress, and serves as a powerful message to future generations, instilling patriotism and a spirit of sacrifice. **(QNA)**

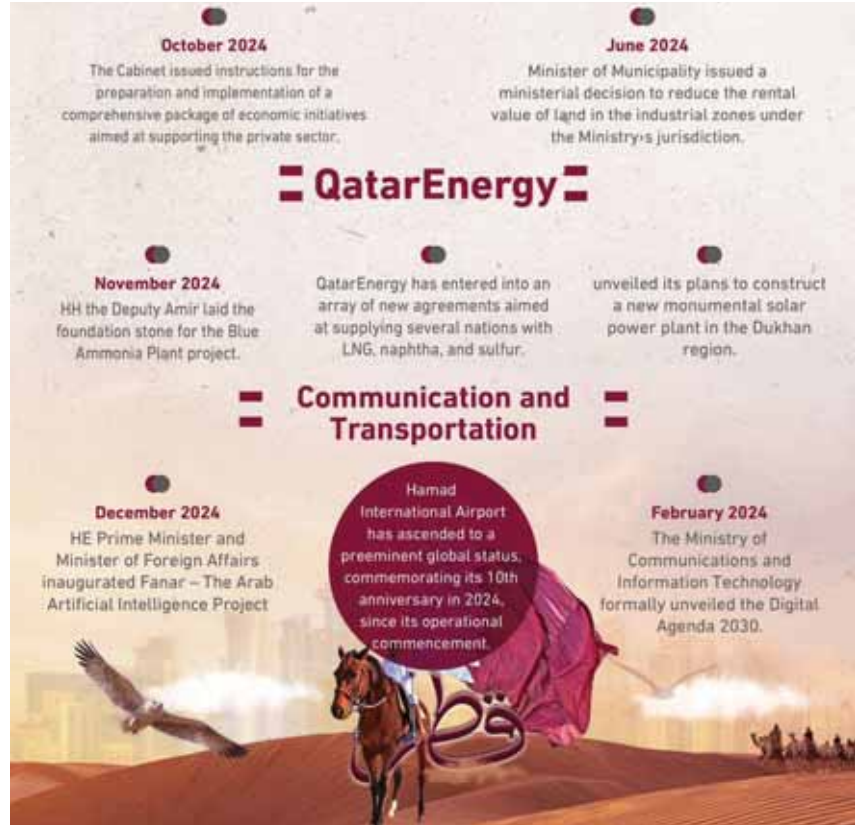
Qatar emerging as 'shining example to world'

Qatar celebrates its National Day today. The event is annually observed on December 18, marking the legacy of the founder Sheikh Jassim bin Mohammed bin Thani, who, nearly 146 years ago, upon assuming the reins of leadership on December 18, 1878, laid the foundations of the modern nation, establishing the pillars upon which Qatar's development, progress, and sovereignty have been built.
 Under his leadership, Qatar emerged as a cohesive nation that welcomes both its brothers and allies, offers refuge to the distressed, honours its pledges, respects the rights of its neighbours, and steadfastly upholds the principles of honour, ethics, and moral values.

Qatar currently serves as a shining example to the world, an epitome of security, stability, and resilience, capable of achieving unparalleled rates of development while ensuring the highest standards of living and dignity for its citizens and residents alike.
 December 18 each year will remain a historic milestone, uniting the hearts of the people of Qatar.
 The progress and prosperity achieved by Qatar unequivocally reflect the enduring legacy and vision of the founding father, and carried forward by successive leaders of Qatar.
 Qatar National Day (QND) stands as a significant symbol in Qatar's history and is a cherished occasion for all citizens, offering an opportunity to renew the pledge and loyalty to the leader of the prosperous journey, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani.
 The robust bond between the people and leadership, coupled with major strategic initiatives, has propelled the country's remarkable development in record time, with Qatar emerging as a global model of success, stability, and prosperity, underpinned by economic and social progress grounded in the values and foundations passed down through generations.
 The year 2024 has been a remarkable one, filled with successes, milestones, excellence, and distinction for Qatar in a variety of fields both domestically and globally, with the nation becoming a hub for successful diplomacy and mediation, and witnessing one of the fastest economic growth surges in the world.
 It is now the leading producer of liquefied natural gas (LNG) globally and has emerged as a major player in the field of foreign investments.
 In addition, the nation continues to achieve remarkable successes across political, economic, scientific, cultural, social, and legislative spheres, as 2024 has been marked by dynamic Qatari political and diplomatic activity, contributing significantly to further successes and achievements in Qatar's foreign relations across the gamut of political, economic, investment, military, and defence arenas.
 The nation has fostered its strategic partnerships through an open and measured diplomacy, rooted in mutual respect and shared interests.
 Charted by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim, these diplomatic efforts have been furthered by his insightful guidance in building the foundation of Qatar's economic independence, safeguarding its national security, and reinforcing its bilateral relations with all nations around the globe.
 His Highness the Amir undertook a series of diplomatic trips to numerous Arab, Islamic, and friendly nations, and subsequently Doha has emerged as a global hub for political, diplomatic, and economic engagement, hosting an array of visits by heads of state, senior officials, and prominent international figures.
 In 2024, Qatar hosted a series of strategic dialogues and political consultations with a host of sisterly and friendly nations and remained steadfast in its participation in key international forums, including the 79th session of the UN General Assembly in New York.
 In November, His Highness the Amir attended the award ceremony for the 8th edition of the His Highness Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al-Thani International Anti-Corruption Excellence Award (ACE), held in San Jose, Costa Rica.
 On October 29, His Highness the Amir issued a decree inviting all citizens who have reached the age of 18 to participate in a national referendum on the amendments to the country's permanent constitution.
 Upon completion of the voting and the tallying of votes, HE the Minister of Interior and Chairperson of the General Referendum Committee, HE Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, announced that the proposed constitutional amendments had received 90.6% approval from the total valid votes cast.
 On December 12, His Highness the Amir issued a decree approving the general state budget for the fiscal year 2025, with HE the Minister of Finance Ali bin Ahmed al-Kuwari announcing that the total projected revenues for Qatar's 2025 budget amount to QR197bn, reflecting a decrease of 2.5%, compared to the total revenues of the 2024 fiscal budget.
 Regarding the total expenditures, HE the Minister of Finance stated that they amount to QR210.2bn, marking an increase of 4.6% over 2024, emphasising that the allocations for the health and education sectors reached QR41.4bn, representing 20% of the overall budget.
 This allocation underscores Qatar's commitment to human capital development policies and boosting the quality of public services.



In addition, necessary financial resources have been designated for strategic sectors, including trade and industry, research and innovation, tourism, digital transformation, and information technology, to back efforts aimed at diversifying the economy and achieving sustainable development.
 In October, His Highness the Amir enjoined the Cabinet to issue instructions for the preparation and implementation of a comprehensive package of economic initiatives aimed at supporting the private sector and fostering its participation in the national economy.
 These initiatives included the forgiveness of outstanding loans for Qatari firms that benefited from the national guarantees programme, which was designed to assist the private sector during the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic.
 New initiatives were introduced to provide short-term financing for working capital to those Qatari firms that had previously benefited from the aforementioned programme.
 In June, HE the Minister of Municipality Abdullah bin Hamad bin Abdullah al-Attayah issued a ministerial decision to reduce the rental value of land in the industrial zones under the ministry's jurisdiction, in pursuit of fostering the growth of the national economy, bolstering the private sector's role in economic diversification, and contributing to the ongoing development trajectory of the nation.
 In September, His Highness the Amir promulgated a law concerning the localization of employment within the private sector, elevating the efforts to attract a talented national workforce to the private sector, and expanding the opportunities for enhancing the competencies of the national workforce, while encouraging the private sector to absorb and nurture national talent.
 In May, His Highness the Amir issued an Amiri decree establishing the National Planning Council, with the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers clarifying that the decree ushered in a new era in the strategic and developmental planning of the state, positioning the country to better align with the ongoing developmental renaissance across multiple sectors.
 Recognising that education is the cornerstone underpinning Qatar's advancement and the prosperity of society, the nation has embraced the principle of investing in human capital, positioning it at the vanguard of its national priorities.
 The leadership consistently strives for excellence, seeking the highest aspirations for the dignity, welfare, rights, and aspirations of its people.
 With the commencement of the current academic year on September 1, 136,802 students enrolled in 303 public schools and kindergartens began their studies,



In alignment with its commitment to the health and well-being of both its citizens and residents, Qatar has dedicated itself to the creation of a world-class public healthcare system over the past few years, guided by the principles outlined in the Qatar National Vision 2030, and made substantial investments in promoting the health and welfare of its population, which culminated in significant advancements in healthcare services.
 Recent statistics revealed that by the end of 2023, the number of public hospitals and long-term care facilities reached 19, with the number of public health centres, including those operated by the Primary Health Care Corp (PHCC) and others managed by the Qatar Red Crescent Society (CRCS) under an agreement with the Ministry of Public Health, ris-

ing to 35 centres distributed across the country.
 In September, HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs formally launched the National Health Strategy 2024-2030, titled "Health for All", devoted to transforming Qatar's healthcare sector, ensuring the provision of a high-quality standard of living for all members of the community, with the aim of positioning Qatar as one of the premier countries for family life, while simultaneously promoting the nations standing on the global stage within this critical sector.
 In April, Her Highness the Chairperson of Qatar Foundation Sheikhha Moza bint Nasser formally launched the Qatar Precision Health Institute (QPHEI), to consolidate the efforts of key health and genomics initiatives in the country, namely the Qatar Biobank and Qatar Genome Programme, in pursuit of advancing Qatar's commitment to personalised medicine and its application across the healthcare system.
 In July, HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs inaugurated the Medical Care and Research Centre that operates under Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC), as part of Qatar's commitment to advancing healthcare services.
 In October, the PHCC launched its third strategic plan 2024-30, entitled "The First Choice for Our Community's Health".
 Qatar has unequivocally excelled itself in the area of clean energy and continued throughout the year 2024 to further its position and leadership in the global gas industry.
 In February, His Highness the Amir laid the foundation stone for Ras Laffan Petrochemical Complex in the Ras Laffan Industrial City.
 This ambitious project is one of the largest petrochemical ventures globally and is poised to elevate Qatar's petrochemical production capacity to approximately 14mn tonnes annually by the final quarter of 2026.
 With an investment totaling \$6bn, it stands as the single largest investment in the petrochemical sector in the history of QatarEnergy.
 Throughout 2024, QatarEnergy entered into an array of new agreements aimed at supplying several nations with LNG, naphtha, and sulfur, while also undertaking offshore exploration operations along the coastlines of a range of countries.
 The firm has secured multiple contracts for the construction of LNG carriers, bringing the total number of vessels ordered as part of its fleet expansion programme to 128, including 24 giant Q-Max class carriers.
 In addition, QatarEnergy has awarded

Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani laid the foundation stone for the Blue Ammonia Plant project in November at the Mesaieed Industrial City, positioning itself as the world's first and largest blue ammonia facility, with an annual production capacity of 1.2mn tonnes.
 The facility is set to commence operations in the second quarter of 2026, with a total investment value of QR4.4bn.
 Last April, the Qatar General Electricity & Water Corp (KMI) Kahramaa, launched the Qatar National Renewable Energy Strategy (QNRES), aimed at diversifying and increasing the utilization of renewable energy sources, particularly solar energy, and incorporating them into the national electricity mix, by virtue of the high-quality solar energy resources, with Kahramaa stating that the launch of the strategy is an ambitious step that will yield future benefits for the energy sector in terms of economic advantages, environmental impact, and energy security.
 Early in December, HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs officially launched the Qatar National Food Security Strategy 2030, as part of Qatar's strategies and plans for food security.
 In November, the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change (MOECC) inaugurated its strategic framework for the period 2024-30, developed under the overarching theme *Together towards a sustainable environment for a better future*.
 In February, the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (MCIT) formally unveiled the Digital Agenda 2030, in consistent with Qatar's ongoing digital advancement, thereby constituting the definitive roadmap for Qatar's digital transformation, designed to achieve the objectives outlined in the third National Development Strategy, in full alignment with the broader vision articulated in the Qatar's National Vision 2030.
 On December 10, HE Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs inaugurated Fanar - The Arab Artificial Intelligence Project, during the opening of the World Summit AI Qatar 2024, in Doha.
 The project is a salient milestone that reflects Qatar's commitment to promoting the omnipresence of the Arabic language, and the Arab and Islamic culture in artificial intelligence (AI) era.
 It comes by virtue of the productive collaboration between the MCIT and Hamad Bin Khalifa University (HBKU), a member of Qatar Foundation for Education, Science, and Community Development (QF).
 Concerning Hamad International Airport (HIA), it has ascended to a preeminent global status, commemorating its 10th anniversary in 2024, since its operational commencement.
 Over the course of its first decade, the HIA has consistently delivered extraordinary travel experiences to passengers transiting through Doha to destinations around the world.
 During this period, it has garnered numerous prestigious accolades, including three occasions as the world's best airport, while also securing the second position in the Middle East for air connectivity.
 From May 2014 to May 2024, the HIA has efficiently processed 325.1mn passengers, facilitated by its continually expanding and state-of-the-art facilities.
 In 2024, Qatar's ports played a profound role in enhancing maritime trade flows both domestically and globally, witnessing a 23% increase in transshipment volumes.
 Currently, the port is directly and indirectly connected to over 100 maritime destinations worldwide through over 28 shipping lines operated by a range of global shipping firms.
 In June, HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs inaugurated the Al Semaisma project, one of the latest Ministry of Municipality's initiatives.
 Managed by the Qatari Diar real estate investment firm, the project represents an investment of QR20bn and spans an area of 8mn sq m.
 Upon completion, it is anticipated to become a new landmark in Qatar, further promoting the country's iconic landmarks and distinctive tourism destinations.
 In the quest for safeguarding the security of the nation and its citizens, the Qatar Armed Forces with their diverse branches, alongside the Ministry of Interior and its operators, have been receiving foremost care from His Highness the Amir and his sagacious government through outfitting them with the state-of-the-art accoutrements and weapons, in addition to their participation in military trainings at home and abroad with the forces of friendly and sisterly nations.
 On January 23, His Highness the Amir inaugurated the Qatar Amiri Air Forces No.5 Ababil (F15 QA) strategic fighter jet wing at Al Udeid Air Base.
 And on November 30, Qatar's flag was held aloft on the strategic transport and support vessel "Al Fulk", with the ceremony for signing of its handover to the Qatari Amiri Navy taking place in La Spezia, Italy. **(QNA)**

Huawei's ICT Competition regional finals begin at King Saud University

Huawei's 2024-25 Middle East and Central Asia (ME&CA) ICT Competition Regional Finals is taking place at King Saud University (KSU) in Riyadh, coinciding with the 10th anniversary of Huawei's ICT Academy in the region, a statement said.

Held in partnership with the Unesco Institute for Information Technologies in Education and supported by the Saudi ministry of communications and information technology, the KSU and the Technical and Vocational Training Corporation (TVTC), the three-day event brings together more than 300 participants from 19 countries across the ME&CA.

"Since its launch, the Huawei ICT Competition has been at the forefront of bridging the digital talent gap in the Middle East and Central Asia region to pave the way for an intelligent era," said



Huawei's vice-president (ME&CA) Wang Shunli.

The activities started with the Huawei ICT Instructor Contest, where outstanding educators showcased their teaching methodologies and expertise in infor-

mation and communications technology (ICT) education through comprehensive presentations and practical demonstrations.

Running parallel was the Innovation Competition, featuring student teams

presenting groundbreaking projects across various tracks, including artificial intelligence (AI), Computing, Cloud, and Network technologies.

This year's Huawei ICT Competition has seen over 31,000 student registra-

tions from 640 regional universities and colleges in 19 countries.

The competition featured 290 participants in the Innovation Track and 30,900 participants in Practice Competitions, competing across multiple tracks, covering Cloud, Network, Computing, and AI Innovation.

The event will see students and teachers from the regional final teams embarking on a Huawei Innovation and Technology Tour, which will include an exclusive visit to Huawei's facilities, Future Space, and flagship store in Riyadh.

Over the past decade, the ICT Academy has trained more than 300,000 students, certified over 35,000 talents, and developed a network of more than 2,000 qualified instructors.

There are partnerships with 106 ICT academies managed by six Huawei ICT Academy Support Centres.



Aman Centre organising series of activities on QND

The Protection and Social Rehabilitation Centre (Aman), part of the Qatar Social Work Foundation under the auspices of the Ministry of Social Development and Family, is organising a series of interactive events for children to celebrate Qatar National Day (QND).

Aman's awareness events kicks off today with a booth dedicated to offering educational and entertainment segments for children, running from 4pm-11pm.

Aman Centre executive director Sheikh Dr Nasser bin Ahmed al-Thani underscored the importance of participating in QND celebrations, dedicating an awareness booth for children in collaboration with the AlHazm Mall, reflecting love for and sense of belonging to one's country, educating children and engaging them in competitions.

He added that national identity will be highlighted and Qatari culture in all its forms celebrated, delivering a message of love for one's nation, with Aman committed to educating children, being at the heart of the centre's work and the country's future.

Head of the Aman Centre's Communication and Information Office, Hanan al-Ali, stressed the importance of being present at QND celebrations with children and sharing in their joy on this day.

She highlighted the many activities in place, along with awareness raising messaging shared on the centre's social media platforms, stemming from Aman's conviction in the significance of this day.

The director of community awareness at the Aman Centre, Bakheeta al-Ghayathin, also noted the centre's commitment to diversifying its awareness activities and programmes for children. (QNA)

Classic cars parade held to mark Qatar National Day

As part of the Qatar National Day (QND) celebrations, the Gulf Qatari Classic Cars Association (GQCCA) and the United Development Company (UDC), in partnership with the Mercedes Classic Kuwait Group, organised a classic car parade on Sunday.

The parade, according to a GQCCA statement, was taken out from Gewan Island all the way through Porto Arabia, to Medina Central, The Pearl and back to Gewan Island again.

"Participation from our brothers from other GCC countries in our National Day celebrations elates us to further strengthen the bonds between us," said engineer Abdul Latif Ali al-Yafei, secretary-general and member of the association's board of directors, while lauding the support by the Kuwait Mercedes Classic Group.

"We will be organising another parade on December 18 in partnership with the Kuwait Mercedes Classic Group and members of the GQCCA," he said. "We gather at 2.30pm and the parade starts at 3.45pm from Gewan Island and passes through Porto Arabia, Medina Central, Qanat Quartier in The Pearl and back to Gewan Island."

Adnan Awad of the Kuwait Mercedes Classic Group praised the QND activities.

"We are pleased to accept the invitation from our brothers at the Qatari Gulf Classic Cars Asso-



ciation to participate in the classic cars gathering and march to celebrate the National Day of the beloved Qatar," he said.

"We enjoyed the picturesque landmarks of the Pearl and Gewan Island and the participation of classic cars from Qatar," said Kuwait Mercedes Classic Group member Hassan al-Birmi.

"I came to participate with the Kuwait Mercedes Classic Group to participate in this wonderful parade," said Ali al-Tarouti from Saudi Arabia. "I am pleased to express my gratitude for the kind invitation we received from the Qatar Gulf Classic Car Association."

Issa Youssef Fakhro praised the participation of the members of the Kuwait Mercedes Classic Group in the QND celebrations.

"The association participates in the celebrations of Qatar National



Day with unparalleled success, and we thank those in charge of organising such events, which support

us greatly as owners of classic cars to exchange experiences with like-minded people," he said.



Katara's QND celebrations conclude today

As part of Katara - the Cultural Village's Qatar National Day (QND) celebrations, Al Thuraya Planetarium is screening a documentary on His Highness the Father Amir today at 6pm.

Directed by Amal al-Muftah and Rawda al-Thani, the film highlights the life and journey of His Highness the Father Amir, showcasing his achievements that

contributed to the nation's progress and prosperity.

Omani cellist Maryam al-Manjia meanwhile gave a captivating performance yesterday that blended tradition and modernity.

On the Katara Corniche, an evening of poems celebrated the love for Qatar, presented by poet Mohamed al-Shahwani.

The event also featured poet and artist Ali Mirza, poet and writer Mohamed al-Sada, and journalist poet Mustafa Matar.

Today, there will be a paramotor and parachuting show in collaboration with the Joint Special Forces at the southern area of Katara at 4.15pm.

Katara's QND celebrations will conclude today at 9pm.



MoEHE, Al Jazeera Media Institute hold seminar on Arabic language

The Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE), in co-operation with the Arabic Language Department at Al Jazeera Media Institute, organised a seminar on "Arabic Language and Digital Challenges" on the occasion of the World Arabic Language Day, which falls on December 18 of each year.

Moderated by Al Jazeera Channel broadcaster Mohammed Krishan, the seminar was aimed at discussing the challenges facing the Arabic language in digital media, analyse the reality of the Arabic language in artificial intelligence (AI) models, the level of its presence in its applications, explore innovative solutions and methods for learning the Arabic language in the digital age, and providing recommendations to enhance the presence of the Arabic language in the digital space, which would contribute to improving the use of the Arabic language in the media and digital education, and introduce learning the Arabic language at the Al Jazeera Institute and its contributions to supporting and enhancing it.

In her speech at the opening of the seminar, the director of the MoEHE's Public Relations and Communication De-



partment, Maryam Abdullah al-Mohannadi, stressed that the Arabic language faces challenges in light of the rapid digital transformations, which necessitates preserving the linguistic identity and cultural heritage, keeping pace with the digital revolution, harnessing technology to serve the Arabic language, and enhancing its presence in the digital age.



She highlighted the ministry's efforts in promoting the Arabic language, represented in developing curricula, creating modern teaching methods, and encouraging research and initiatives aimed at enabling the language to keep pace with the digital age.

Al-Mohannadi called for concerted efforts to keep the Arabic language an effective

and vital element in the digital scene.

Al Jazeera Media Institute director Iman al-Amri noted that the seminar coincided with the celebration of the International Day of the Arabic Language.

She said that the presence of the Arabic language in the digital scene is still modest compared to other languages, noting that Arabic content on the Internet does

not reach 1% of the total content published digitally.

Al-Amri called for exploring ways to enhance the position of the Arabic language in the digital environment, developing digital tools that support it, and adopting teaching methods that suit the rapid technological developments.

She said that the objectives of the seminar go beyond mere discussion to presenting practical and innovative suggestions and solutions, and coming up with clear and applicable recommendations that contribute to restoring the status of the Arabic language as a language of science, knowledge and creativity.

Al Jazeera Centre for Studies director Dr Muhammad Mukhtar al-Khail spoke at the seminar about "The Arabic language in digital media - challenges and solutions", stressing the importance of language as an expression of thought.

He highlighted the challenges facing the application of digital technologies in learning the Arabic language, represented by the lack of Arab expertise in Arabic language technologies, the difficulty of convincing media institutions of Arabic language learning programmes, and other challenges. (QNA)

Qatar National Day enhances dignity in the homeland: QRCS president

HE Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS) President Yousef bin Ali al-Khater hailed the Qatar National Day (QND) as a great occasion that instills pride and dignity in the homeland. In remarks to Qatar News Agency (QNA), he

added the QND is an occasion for Qataris to renew commitment to serving and sacrificing for the homeland preservation.

Extending his heartfelt congratulations and best wishes to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, he

also congratulated all citizens and residents of Qatar on the commemoration observed December 18 annually.

He added that the QRCS follows in the footsteps of the founding fathers and grandfathers, who carried the banner

of construction and development from generation to generation. Dedicating all its efforts to fostering humanitarian, social, and developmental work, the QRCS adopts a highly efficient strategy to support those in need worldwide, particular-

ly the victims of conflicts and disasters, he added. He also highlighted that history stands in respect before Qataris' present achievements and their future aspirations, wishing Qatar continued success and prosperity. (QNA)



UDC partners with Dreama for supporting orphaned children

United Development Company (UDC), the master developer of The Pearl and Gewan Islands, and the Orphan Care Centre (Dreama) have signed a co-operation agreement to enhance humanitarian and social initiatives in the country, by providing effective support to orphaned children.

Dreama's members will participate in local and national events organised on The Pearl and Gewan Islands, providing them with the opportunity to engage and contribute to community activities, a statement said. In addition, joint awareness events and programmes will be organised to enhance community awareness about orphans' issues and needs.

Both UDC and Dreama seek to enhance the social experiences

and confidence of orphaned children, while also fostering a sense of community and inclusion. This agreement serves to strengthen the ongoing collaboration between UDC and Dreama in supporting community initiatives, particularly in preparing the children of Dreama to enhance their professional growth and personal development.

A key part of the co-operation is UDC's commitment to providing short-term administrative training and skill development opportunities for Dreama's members. These training programmes, available on a rolling basis, will focus on equipping participants with essential workplace skills such as communication, organisation, and basic administrative knowledge. By preparing these children for

the professional world, UDC aims to help them build stable and prosperous futures, contributing positively to Qatar's workforce and economy.

The agreement with Dreama is a significant step forward in UDC's corporate social responsibility strategy, reinforcing the company's commitment to supporting all groups within Qatar's society.

Dreama is a specialised institution dedicated to providing comprehensive care for orphans and fostering their family stability through innovative programmes and initiatives that facilitate their integration into society. The centre offers social, psychological, and educational support to its children, focusing on developing their skills and abilities for a promising future, the statement added.

GCC-Stat reveals high achievement by Qatar in sustainable development

QNA
Muscat

The Statistical Centre for the Co-operation Council of the Arab Countries of the Gulf (GCC-Stat) affirmed that the development indicators of Qatar reflect its commitment to achieving its national goals as it has attained 100% achievement rates in many sectors and it is ranked first globally in energy sector infrastructure.

In a report on the occasion of Qatar National Day which will be marked today, December 18, the GCC-Stat said Qatar celebrates its national day to mark the day on which it was established in 1878 under the Founder Sheikh Jassim bin Mohammed bin Thani. Since that date, the country has made great strides in its efforts to build a state that make achievements in many fields at various levels. Presently, Qatar moves forward under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani. The indicators monitored by the GCC-Stat reflect that Qatar National Vision (QNV) 2030 builds a bridge connecting the present to the future. The indicators also suggest that QNV 2030 sets a vision for a vibrant and prosperous society in which economic and social justice prevails.

The data published by the GCC-Stat indicate that Qatar logged high levels in achieving the sustainable development objectives. Qatar registered 100% rates in deliveries that take place under medical supervision, as well as the population living in households with access to basic services. The same percentage was achieved when it comes to the population benefiting from safely managed drinking water services, as well as the population benefiting from electricity services and children under five whose births were registered in cities. The rate of local governments that adopt and implement national strategies to reduce disaster risks and treated hazardous wastes also reached 100%.

Qatar logged achievement



rates of 92% when it comes to the proportion of fish stocks within biologically sustainable levels. The rate of participation in organised pre-school education reached 44.5%.

In terms of economic indicators, the data published by the GCC-Stat explain that the annual growth rate of real GDP per capita was 4.7%. Total government revenues as a percentage of GDP amounted to 27%, whereas the share of labour in GDP reached 27.9%.

The total government spending of the state in 2023 amounted to about US\$58.049mn. The relative contribution of the non-oil sectors added value to GDP accounted for 60.7% at current prices. The per capita GDP amounted to 80.4 thousand US dollars, whereas the inflation rate reached 2.9%.

Qatar ranks first globally in the energy sector infrastructure index in 2024, whereas it comes fourth in the Global Economic Performance Index for 2024 and ranks fifth globally in the telecommunications infrastructure index. Qatar also comes seventh on the list in the Government Efficiency for 2024.

The country ranks first in the Arab world in the Agility Environmental Sustainability Index for the Middle East and Africa 2023 and in GDP per capita in 2024 and the general unemployment rate in 2024.

Qatar pays keen attention to aligning the sustainable development goals with the national development pillars contained in Qatar National Vision 2030, which aims to enhance Qatar's position as an advanced country capable of achieving sustainable development and ensuring

a decent life for its people. The country has successfully accomplished many development initiatives. The FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 created a sustainable national, Gulf and Arab legacy. This tournament attracted 1.4mn visitors from around the world and welcomed 3.4mn fans. As such, the Qatari edition witnessed third largest attendance rates in the history of the World Cup.

In terms of sustainability, hosting the World Cup has resulted in many achievements. The tournament witnessed the launch of the first optional carbon offset programme in the region. Additionally, the Doha Metro network was used heavily in transportation, which contributed to reducing traffic congestion, air pollution and noise.

Qatar is home to Lusail and Msheireb Downtown Doha, two smart cities designed to combine environmentally friendly technology with improved urban planning.

In the energy sector, Qatar Energy launched its new sustainability strategy that sets a number of goals in line with the Paris Agreement, such as a plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 25% by 2030.

Qatar has also launched the Umm Al Houl Power Plant, one of the largest water desalination and power generation plants in the region. The plant will contribute to reducing pollution and protecting the environment.

The Al Kharsaah Solar Power Plant was also inaugurated. Covering an area of more than 10sq km, the plant contains more than 1.8mn solar panels and generates about 10% of the electricity used in Qatar.

Apparel Group launches 24 new retail concepts at Doha Mall

Apparel Group, a leading global retail and fashion conglomerate, has announced the launch of 24 new retail concepts at Doha Mall in Abu Hamour.

These stores will feature renowned international brands and cater to the diverse needs of Qatar's fashion-conscious consumers, a statement said.

Doha Mall is located at the intersection of Sixth Ring Road and Central Market Street, with access to a Metro Bus link and proximity to the Doha Expressway. Doha Mall serves as a key retail hub for shoppers from nearby neighbourhoods, including Abu Hamour, Ain Khaled, Al Waab, Al Mamoura, Al Thumama, and Al Wakra.

Neeraj Teckchandani, CEO of Apparel Group, said: "This expansion is a testament to our



commitment to bringing global fashion trends and quality shopping experiences to Qatar. Our collaboration with Apparel Group. This agreement reflects our presence in the region and offer our customers a truly unparalleled retail experience."

Robert Hall, adviser to Al Mir-

qab Malls, said: "We are excited to introduce new and distinctive retail concepts at Doha Mall in collaboration with Apparel Group. This agreement reflects our ongoing efforts to attract leading international brands to Qatar and offer consumers a diverse and exceptional shopping experience."

Rare jaguars introduced to Al Khor Park



The Ministry of Municipality has announced the arrival of a couple of jaguars (male and female) at Al Khor Park Zoo. The rare and endangered animals are a gift from Guyana to Qatar, as part of an initiative to enhance international co-operation in the protection of environment and wildlife, in addition to enhancing awareness about the importance of protecting and maintaining the rare and endangered species of animals.

Closure at Bani Hajer Interchange

The Public Works Authority (Ashghal) has announced a temporary 8-hour closure at the Bani Hajer Interchange on Khalifa Boulevard for traffic coming from Khalifa Boulevard towards Al Shahama Street from 2am-10am on December 20. The closure in co-ordination with the General Directorate of Traffic is for carrying out maintenance works. During the closure, road users heading from Khalifa Boulevard towards Bani Hajer via Al Shahama Street are advised to use the bridge leading to New Al Rayyan Street, make a U-turn at Al Shafi Intersection, and then use the Bani Hajer Interchange and then use the Bani Hajer Interchange underpass to reach their destinations. Ashghal will install road signs advising motorists of the temporary closure and has requested all to abide by the speed limit to ensure safety.



Closure on Sabah Al Ahmed Corridor service lane

The Public Works Authority (Ashghal) has announced a closure on Sabah Al Ahmed Corridor for service lane exiting towards Al Rayyan Palace Intersection, from midnight on December 19 until 10pm on December 29. The closure in co-ordination with the General Directorate of Traffic is for carrying out maintenance and repaving work. Road users can use nearby alternative roads to reach their destinations. Ashghal will install road signs advising motorists of the temporary closure and has requested all to abide by the speed limit to ensure safety.



Temporary closure of Muaitheer Club Intersection

The Public Works Authority (Ashghal) has announced a temporary closure of Muaitheer Club Intersection in all four directions while keeping the right turn lane open to traffic from 2am-10am on December 20. The closure in co-ordination with the General Directorate of Traffic is for completing surface water drainage works. Road users can turn right and use the next intersection or roundabout to make a U-turn and reach their destinations. Ashghal will install road signs advising motorists of the temporary closure and has requested all to abide by the speed limit to ensure safety.



QU celebrations highlight commitment to fostering national identity

Qatar University (QU) concluded its National Day celebrations yesterday. The event witnessed the presence of students, faculty members, and the public, embodying QU's commitment to fostering national identity and instilling values of loyalty and belonging.

The celebrations included a traditional marine performance, showcasing Qatar's rich marine heritage, as well as two film screenings by the Doha Film Institute - *The Land of Pearls* and *The Hidden Ball*.

The activities also featured the announcement of winners in several competitions, including a video production contest titled "My Soul Qatar: Moments of Pride and Belonging" and an art competition under the theme "Qatar in the Eye of an Artist."

Additionally, a "Treasure Hunt" contest was organised, blending excitement and fun, and aimed at enhancing interaction between students and the wider community.

Eatidal al-Qatami, director, Communications and Public Relations Department at QU, stated: "The activities we organised to celebrate Qatar National Day



reflect the University's commitment to strengthening national identity and instilling the values of loyalty and belonging. These events included a variety of ac-

tivities showcasing Qatar's rich heritage, blending cultural and entertaining elements, which created a unique experience for students and community members."

QMC CEO congratulates people, wise leadership on Qatar National Day

Qatar Media Corporation (QMC) CEO HE Sheikh Abdulaziz bin Thani al-Thani extended his congratulations and best wishes to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, the Qatari people, and residents on the occasion of Qatar National Day.

He also expressed his appreciation and gratitude to QMC employees for their outstanding efforts in covering the events of this day on Qatar TV, Al Kass Sports Channels, and the eight radio stations under the corporation's umbrella. Sheikh Abdulaziz said: "The

significant economic, social, and cultural developments witnessed by the State of Qatar reflect the Qatar National Vision 2030, which serves as a roadmap toward building a progressive and sustainable society."

He emphasised the importance of unity and solidarity in achieving further milestones on the path of national development.

He also highlighted the vital role of media in documenting Qatar's stages of development and success, adding: "On this day, we renew our

commitment to ensuring that Qatari media remains the voice of the nation and its people, a reflection of its achievements, and a platform for its values and identity. We aim to keep pace with global media advancements and continue working with dedication and professionalism to be a part of our nation's success story." He concluded by saying: "I pray to Allah to preserve Qatar's security and stability, and I wish the government and people of Qatar further progress and prosperity."

QF schools honour nation's rich heritage

Qatar Foundation schools marked Qatar National Day with celebrations that honoured the nation's rich heritage, culture, and traditions. This annual occasion served as a unifying platform, bringing together students, teachers, and families to reflect on Qatar's journey while fostering a profound sense of pride and belonging. The activities included interactive ex-

hibits that brought Qatar's traditions and heritage to life, cultural displays that highlighted the nation's rich historical legacy, creative art workshops, and student-led performances that reflected Qatar's journey. Each activity was thoughtfully designed to deepen participants' connection to Qatar's history and values, providing a meaningful and inspiring experience for all attendees.



Celebrating Qatar's founding anniversary 'reflects national pride'

The Chairman and Managing Director of Qatar Postal Services Company (Qatar Post) Faleh Mohammed al-Nuaimi emphasised that Qatar's celebration of its founding anniversary by Sheikh Jassim bin Mohammed bin Thani reflects the nation's deep pride and honour in its identity.

On the occasion of National Day, al-Nuaimi highlighted that the day marks a pivotal moment in Qatar's history, founded by Sheikh Jassim bin Mohammed bin Thani on the principles of independence, sovereignty, and justice.

He noted that this celebration serves as a reminder of the sacrifices made by the nation's founders, strengthens the sense of belonging and pride among the people, and reflects the unity between citizens and residents.

Al-Nuaimi also emphasised the significant progress Qatar has made across various sectors. Al-Nuaimi noted that Qatar's rulers have upheld the legacy of the late Sheikh Jassim bin Mohammed bin Thani with unwavering determination and a strong commitment to sovereignty and national dignity, as their path was an extension of the founder in consolidating identity and unity of rank, while balancing the preservation of traditional values with openness to the world.

This approach has enabled Qatar to rise to a prominent and influential position, with significant advancements in institutions, education, the economy, and

infrastructure. He pointed out that the wise leadership has established the foundations of the national renaissance, thus strengthening the cohesion between the people and the leadership, so that this solidarity remains the vibrant spirit of Qatar, and a mirror that combines the fragrance of heritage and the ambition of the future.

Al-Nuaimi explained that Qatar Post has continued its pioneering journey during the past year, by achieving qualitative achievements that have enhanced its position as an innovative entity in providing postal and logistics services, as the automated parcel sorting system was launched using robotic technology to speed up daily processing operations and accommodate larger quantities with high efficiency.

A box project was also launched on a trial basis as a modern digital delivery option that provides greater flexibility to customers. He indicated that within the framework of digital transformation, the electronic archiving system was implemented to manage documents effectively, in addition to the Qatar Post Green Environment Initiative, which aims to reduce the use of paper, in line with global environmental trends.

He noted Qatar Post's keenness to improve the customer experience, by launching the "Customer Experience" platform that facilitates communication and meets needs quickly and

efficiently, in addition to launching the smartphone application that provides innovative and easy solutions.

In terms of trade and shipping, he explained that land connectivity has been enhanced through the Abu Samra border crossing, and the Qatar Post e-market has been launched as an innovative digital platform, in addition to co-operation with Qatar Airways to handle mail and track shipments with high accuracy, indicating that this comes within the framework of Qatar Posts expansion to find e-commerce solutions with a capacity of up to 30,000 parcels per day, which contributes to accelerating operations and providing an integrated experience for customers.

Al-Nuaimi pointed out that this year's National Day coincides with Qatar's launch of a new phase of comprehensive development under the Third National Development Strategy 2024-2030. Qatar Post has set ambitious goals to drive innovation and operational efficiency by adopting the latest digital technologies to enhance postal services. This includes improving customer experience through advanced platforms that provide quality, efficiency, and effective access to services, meeting the needs of customers as well as public and private institutions.

Al-Nuaimi also emphasised Qatar Post's commitment to sustainability through various environmental initiatives. (QNA)

QIC rolls out QND art initiative

Qatar Insurance Company (QIC) has rolled out a special art initiative celebrating the values of unity, national pride and a sense of belonging to Qatar through the work of local artists, in commemoration of Qatar National Day.

Themed 'Qatar. Unity. Future', the initiative involves award-winning Qatari visual artist Abdulaziz Yousef, multi-disciplinary Qatari artist Sheikh Mubarak Nasser al-Thani, Qatar-based Lebanese graphic and motion designer Rami Kanso, and Qatar-based Canadian artist and textile designer Paula Bouffard, who collaborated with QIC to create exclusive digital artworks reflecting Qatar's national unity, and translating the commitment of citizens and residents to give back to Qatar, all in an expressive artistic language.

The artistic creations are showcased in a virtual

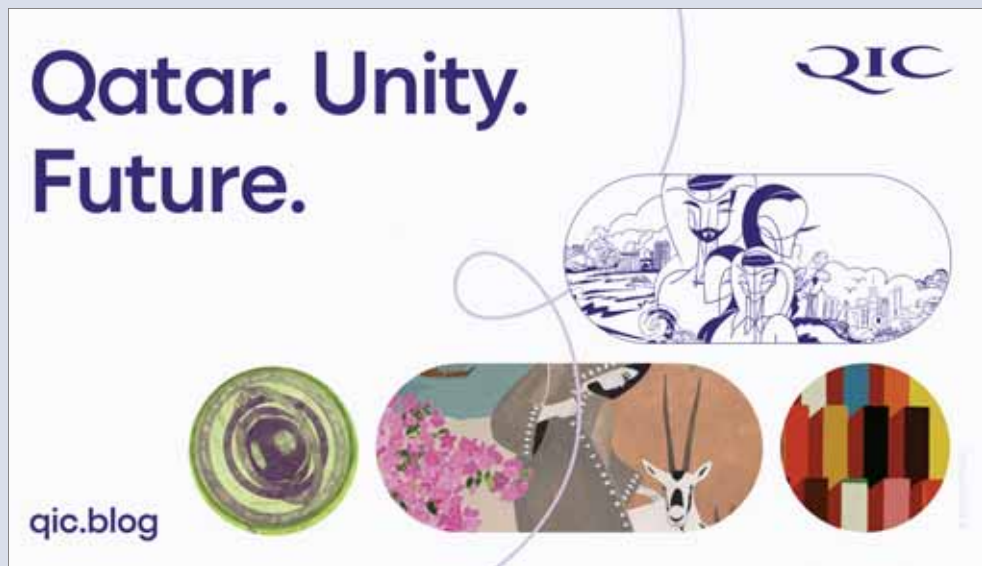


Rashid al-Buainain

exhibition on QIC Blog, and displayed on out-of-home banners in Lusail Marina Promenade and The Pearl until December 22. The artworks were also repurposed and printed on limited edition QIC merchandise, which is being distributed for free at the QIC branches in Qatar.

Rashid al-Buainain, QIC Group Chief Administrative officer, said: "The National Day is a special occasion and an opportunity for all citizens and residents of Qatar to show their attachment and love for the country, and art is certainly one of the most expressive ways to demonstrate the values of national unity and social harmony that distinguish Qatar."

"As a national company, QIC has always been committed to working closely with local talents, and our 'Qatar. Unity. Future' initiative is indeed a testament to our support of the dynamics of the Qatari artistic scene and strong belief in the power of art in enhancing national pride and unity. I would like to thank the artists who joined our initiative for their great work, and to invite everyone to explore our virtual exhibition, which I am confident they will truly enjoy."



EAA expands educational opportunities for youth in Qatar, Palestine

Education Above All (EAA) Foundation has announced two agreements to expand educational opportunities for youth in Qatar and Qatar Scholarship recipients from Palestine.

Signed in collaboration with Qatar Foundation (QF) and Al-Quds Bard College (AQB) at the recent Doha Forum, these partnerships underscore EAA Foundation's commitment to providing equitable access to quality higher education for marginalised and conflict-affected youth.

Under the first agreement, EAA Foundation's Al Fakhoora Programme is partnering with QF to provide 44 scholarships over the next two years to financially disadvantaged youth in Qatar.

These scholarships will enable students to pursue undergraduate degrees at universities at QF.

Beyond funding, EAA Foundation and its partners will support the recipients through the Qatar Connection platform with internships, and exchange opportunities provided by Qatari stakeholders.

This partnership is part of the Qatar Scholarship Programme in Qatar which aims to provide youth aged 17 to 25, who have spent most of their formative years in Qatar, with access to higher education.

The programme is implemented by EAA and made possible with the support of the Endowment Account for Scientific and Cultural Development in the General Department of Endowments - Awqaf.



The second agreement with Al-Quds Bard College, QF and EAA is offering undergraduate Qatar Scholarship recipients from Al-Quds Bard Programme in Arts and the Cultural Economy the opportunity to study for a semester in Qatar.

The Study Abroad programme combines course-

work from Al-Quds Bard College and QF partner university Georgetown University in Qatar, with internships facilitated by Qatar Museums. By integrating academic and professional experiences, the initiative provides Palestinian scholars with cross-cultural exchanges and career-advancing opportunities.

EAA Foundation will fully fund tuition, housing, and travel costs, offering marginalised youth in Palestine opportunities to engage in cross-cultural exchange and gain valuable professional experience.

Talal al-Hothal, director of the Al Fakhoora Programme at EAA, said: "These agreements are a testament to our commitment to transforming lives through education. By joining forces with esteemed partners, we are not just offering access to quality education - we are opening doors to professional development and personal empowerment for marginalised youth."

Francisco Marmolejo, president of Higher Education and Education Adviser, QF, said: "By welcoming students from Palestine to Georgetown University in Qatar and providing them with hands-on experiences at Qatar Museums, we aim to inspire innovation and mutual understanding, while equipping these students with invaluable global perspectives."

"This agreement will provide life-changing experiences for young Palestinians in outstanding cultural and academic institutions in Qatar," added Daniel Terris, dean of Al-Quds Bard College. "Our partnership with Education Above All and the Qatar Foundation creates an avenue of hope and growth at a time of profound crisis for the Palestinian people."



UN migration chief says 'not advising' large-scale returns to Syria now

AFP
Beirut

International Organisation for Migration chief Amy Pope said yesterday the UN agency was not advising the large-scale return of refugees to Syria before the situation has stabilised after the ouster of Bashar al-Assad.

"People have the right to return home...but we are not advising any sort of large-scale return...the system can't bear that kind of influx," Pope said.

"Absent an investment in Syria itself in terms of both humanitarian and these early recovery needs, sending people back will only destabilise the country further and will likely create pressures for people to migrate out again," she said during a visit to Lebanon.

A rebel alliance led by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) launched a lightning offensive on November 27, sweeping through swathes of territory and taking the capital Damascus on December 8.

Half of Syria's population were forced from their homes during nearly 14 years of civil war, with millions finding refuge abroad.

The UN refugee agency said yesterday it expected around 1mn people to return to Syria in the first half of 2025.

"Let's focus on stabilising the

situation on the ground in Syria now, before we start encouraging or forcibly returning people who have received asylum or have been living elsewhere," Pope said.

Already, "since this most recent activity, we've seen about 100,000 people come back into Syria" from abroad, she said, with "another 150,000 or so who have moved back within the country itself".

However, "tens of thousands" of people have fled Syria and "we are hearing that especially religious minorities are leaving", she said. Pope pointed to reports that members of the a minority community had fled "not because they're actually threatened, but they're concerned about the possible threat".

Faith leaders in Damascus "said that their Christian communities remain quite concerned, although they haven't yet left", she added.

HTS leader Abu Mohammed al-Jolani, now using his real name Ahmed al-Sharaa, has sought to reassure minorities at home and governments abroad that the country's interim leaders will protect all Syrians.

Pope noted that the rebels "came to power because of a coalition of various armed groups".

"Do they govern with the same kind of coalition?" she asked.

She said the international community was concerned about "ensuring that the most extreme voices who are part of that coalition do not destabilise a government that is more open and democratic and inclusive".

She noted that "humanitarian needs are quite high right now - basic access to shelter, to food, to hygiene, water, sanitation, health...and over 16mn people are in need of some humanitarian assistance".

An appeal for more than \$4bn has reached only 28% of its target and is "extremely underfunded" compared to the needs of "extremely vulnerable people", she said. Pope noted security was also an issue.

"We certainly as an international organisation would not be in a position to say that the government can guarantee the safety of people who are coming home, as much as their intent might be to create a more stable and secure environment," she added.

Pope noted that neighbouring and European countries "are looking with real expectation at the Syrian communities, encouraging them to go home," she said.

"There will be a time for people to go home" and many Syrians "very much want to go home, but we want them to be able to go home and stay home", she said.



Stephen Rapp, head of Commission for International Justice and Accountability, talks with media as people inspect the site of a mass grave from the rule of Syria's Bashar al-Assad, according to residents, after the ousting of the leader, in Najha, yesterday.

Syrian mass graves expose 'machinery of death' under Assad

Reuters
Qutayfah

An international war crimes prosecutor said yesterday that evidence emerging from mass grave sites in Syria has exposed a state-run "machinery of death" under toppled leader Bashar al-Assad in which he estimated more than 100,000 people were tortured and murdered since 2013.

Speaking after visiting two mass grave sites in the towns of Qutayfah and Najha near Damascus, former US war crimes ambassador at large Stephen Rapp told Reuters: "We certainly have more than 100,000 people that were disappeared into and tortured to death in this machine."

"I don't have much doubt about those kinds of numbers given what we've seen in these mass graves."

"When you talk about this kind of organised killing by the state and its organs, we really haven't seen anything quite like this since the Nazis," said Rapp, who led prosecutions at the Rwanda and Sierra Leone war crimes tribunals.

"From the secret police who disappeared people from their streets and homes, to the jailers and interrogators who starved and tortured them to death, to the truck drivers and bulldozer drivers who hid their bodies, thousands of people were working in this system of killing," Rapp said.

Syrian residents living near a former military base where one of the sites was located and a cemetery used to hide bodies from detention sites described seeing a steady stream of refrigeration trucks delivering bodies which were dumped into long trenches dug with bulldozers. In Qutayfah,



Fighters of the ruling Syrian body inspect the site of a mass grave from the rule of Syria's Bashar al-Assad, according to residents, after the ousting of the leader, in Najha, yesterday.

people declined to speak on camera or use their names for fear of the retribution, saying they were not yet sure the area was safe after Assad's fall.

"This is the place of horrors," one said yesterday.

Inside a site enclosed with cement walls, three children played near a Russian-made military satellite vehicle. The soil was flat and levelled, with straight long marks where the bodies were buried.

Satellite imagery analysed by Reuters showed large-scale digging began at the location between 2012 and 2014 and continued up until 2022. Multiple satellite images taken by Maxar during that time showed a digger and large trenches visible at the site, along with three or four large trucks.

Omar Hujerati, a former anti-Assad protest leader who lives near the Najha cemetery, said he

suspected several of his missing family members may be in the grave.

He believes at least some of those taken, including two sons and four brothers, were detained for protesting against Assad's government.

"That was my sin, what made them take my family," he said, a long, exposed trench behind him where the bodies were apparently buried.

He said those responsible must be held accountable in a clear judicial process or people would take matters into their own hands.

"We want our rights, according to Syrian law, and not by some behind-the-scenes process. These massacres and slaughterhouses of death are unacceptable to anyone with humanity," he said. "We want reputable organisations to come so this isn't covered up."

Iran's Khamenei says 'resistance' not over after Assad ouster

AFP
Tehran

Iran's supreme leader said yesterday that Israel and the United States were "completely wrong" to imagine the Tehran-backed axis of resistance had collapsed with the ouster of Syria's long-time strongman.

"With the developments in Syria and the crimes the Zionist regime is committing and the crimes that America is committing, and the help that some others are giving to them, they thought that the resistance was over," Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said in a televised speech.

"They are completely wrong."

On December 8, Syrian president Bashar al-Assad fled the country as rebel forces entered the capital Damascus after a lightning offensive.

Fellow axis members Hamas and Hezbollah have also suffered heavy losses since the Palestinian group stormed Israel on October 2023, sparking war in Gaza and later in Lebanon.



Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei looks on during a meeting with a group of Iranian women in Tehran, yesterday.

Since Assad's fall, Iran has sought to distance itself from the ousted leader, instead emphasising the history of friendship between the two countries.

Khamenei has also insisted that Assad's overthrow will not weaken Iran.

"The Zionist regime imagines it can encircle and eradicate the Hezbollah forces through Syria, but the one who will be eradicated is Israel," Khamenei said yesterday.

Pope says escaped two attempts on his life in Iraq

AFP
Vatican City

Pope Francis escaped two attempts on his life during his historic trip to Iraq in March 2021, according to excerpts from his forthcoming autobiography published yesterday by Italian media.

The pontiff's Vatican security detail received an urgent warning from the British secret services, Pope Francis wrote.

"A woman packed with explosives, a young suicide bomber, was heading towards Mosul to

blow herself up during the papal visit," he wrote in *Hope*, which goes on sale in over 80 countries in January.

"And a van had also set off at great speed with the same intention," he added, according to excerpts from the book published by the Italian daily *Corriere della Sera* daily.

The two attackers were intercepted and killed by the Iraqi police.

Pope Francis, who turned 88 yesterday, wrote that "almost everyone advised me against" the trip to Iraq "but I wanted to get to the bottom of things. I felt I had

to do it". The historic three-day visit in March 2021 took place amid intense security. It was Francis's first trip in 15 months and took place in the middle of the Covid 19 pandemic.

Despite the high risks to his personal safety, the Argentine pope criss-crossed the country, going to Baghdad and Mosul, the onetime bastion of the Islamic State group.

During his trips abroad, the pope's security is taken care of by the Pontifical Swiss Guard and the Vatican Gendarmerie, in collaboration with local law enforcement.

Turkiye's Erdogan says 'inclusive' administration needed in Syria

Reuters
Ankara

Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan said yesterday that an inclusive administration is needed in Syria and called on the European Union to support the return of Syrians who fled during the country's 13-year civil war.

"We have seen that we agree on the establishment of an inclusive administration in Syria," Erdogan said at a joint press conference with European Commis-

sion President Ursula von der Leyen in Ankara.

Western states are gradually opening channels to the new authorities in Damascus led by the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) group.

Erdogan said there was no place for terrorist organisations in the region, referring specifically to Islamic State and Kurdish militant groups. Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan has previously highlighted the importance of an inclusive transition process in Syria.

Erdogan also called on the European Union to support the return home of Syrians who fled the war, millions of them to Turkey.

Cyclone Chido kills at least 34 in Mozambique

AFP
Maputo

Cyclone Chido claimed at least 34 lives after sweeping across Mozambique, the National Institute of Risk and Disaster Management announced yesterday.

The cyclone first hit the country on Sunday at the Cabo Delgado province, where 28 people were killed, the centre said, releasing its latest information as of Monday evening.

Three other people died in Nampula province and three in Niassa, further inland, it said.

Another 319 people were re-

ported injured by the cyclone, which brought winds of around 260 kilometres an hour and heavy rainfall of around 250 millimetres in 24 hours, the centre said.

Nearly 23,600 homes and 170 fishing boats were destroyed and 175,000 people affected by the storm, it added.

Chido struck a part of northern Mozambique that is regularly battered by cyclones and is already vulnerable because of conflict and underdevelopment.

The cyclone landed in Mozambique after hitting the Indian Ocean island of Mayotte, where it is feared to have killed hundreds of people.

It moved to Malawi on Mon-



This handout picture taken and distributed by Unicef yesterday shows children next to a damaged tree after Cyclone Chido made its landfall near Pemba in northern Mozambique.

day and was expected to dissipate yesterday near Zimbabwe, which had also been on alert for heavy rains caused by the storm.

Unknown disease in Congo revealed to be severe malaria

Reuters
Kinshasa

Democratic Republic of Congo's health ministry said yesterday that a previously unidentified disease circulating in the southwestern Kwango province is a severe form of malaria.

Earlier this month, local authorities said the disease had killed 143 people in the country's Panzi health zone in November. The symptoms of the disease are fever, headache, cough, runny nose and body aches.

"The mystery has finally been solved. It's a case of severe malaria in the form of a respiratory illness," the health ministry said in a statement, adding malnutrition

in the area had weakened the local population, leaving them more vulnerable to disease. The statement also said that 592 cases had been reported since October, with a fatality rate of 6.2%. Provincial health minister, Apollinaire Yumba, told Reuters that anti-malaria medicine provided by the World Health Organisation (WHO) was being distributed in the main hospital and health centres in the Panzi health zone.

A WHO spokesperson said more health kits for moderate and critical cases were due to arrive today.

WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said last week that 10 early samples from patients in Congo suffering from a mystery illness had tested positive for malaria.



Japan, India startups to study laser-equipped satellite to tackle space debris

Reuters
Tokyo

Space startups in Japan and India yesterday said they had agreed to jointly study using laser-equipped satellites to remove debris from orbit, an experimental approach to the increasingly imminent problem of orbital congestion.

Tokyo-based Orbital Lasers and Indian robotics company Inspec-

ity said they would study business opportunities for in-space services such as de-orbiting a defunct satellite and extending a spacecraft's life.

Carved out from Japanese satellite giant SKY Perfect JSAT this year, Orbital Lasers is building a system that will use laser energy to stop the rotation of space junk by vaporising small parts of its surface, making it easier for a servicing spacecraft to rendezvous.

Orbital Lasers plans to demonstrate the system in space and supply it to operators after 2027, said Aditya Baraskar, the company's global business lead. It can be mounted on InspecCity satellites if the companies clear regulatory requirements in India and Japan, Baraskar added.

The companies said they had signed a preliminary agreement to initiate the collaboration. InspecCity was founded in 2022 and raised

\$1.5mn last year, while Orbital Lasers has raised 900mn yen (\$5.8mn) since it was established in January.

A United Nations panel on space traffic co-ordination in late October said that urgent action was necessary to track and manage objects in low Earth orbit because of the rapid increase in satellites and space junk.

There are already more than 100 companies in the space servicing market as satellite constellations expand, Nobu Okada, chief execu-

tive of Japanese debris mitigation pioneer Astroscale, said earlier this year.

The project is the latest example of collaboration between Japan and India, whose governments are working together on the joint Lunar Polar Exploration (LUPEX) mission, which could launch as early as 2026.

Indian rocket maker Skyroot and satellite builder HEX20 are also working with Japanese moon

exploration firm ispace on a future lunar orbiter mission.

The two countries' commercial space tie-ups have been driven by Japanese satellite data solutions for India's disaster management and agriculture, and can expand to more fields such as manufacturing, said Masayasu Ishida, chief executive of Tokyo-based nonprofit SPACETIME, which has hosted space business conferences since 2015.

Woman branded Chinese agent by UK govt loses case against MI5

Reuters
London

A woman who was branded a Chinese spy by Britain's MI5 has lost her case to sue the domestic spy agency over an alert issued to politicians which said she was an agent working for Beijing, a London tribunal ruled yesterday.

Lawyer Christine Lee had sued MI5 over the alert issued in January 2022 in which it alleged she was "involved in political interference activities" in the United Kingdom on behalf of China's ruling Communist Party.

The warning was circulated to lawmakers by the House of Commons speaker, who said MI5 had found that Lee had "facilitated financial donations to serving and aspiring parliamentarians on behalf of foreign nationals based in Hong Kong and China".

Lee was born in Hong Kong and founded a firm providing consultancy services to Chinese migrants. She helped set up a parliamentary committee, chaired by Barry Gardiner, a lawmaker for the then opposition Labour Party, designed to discuss issues affecting the Chinese community in Britain.

Gardiner said he had received hundreds of thousands of pounds in donations from her, and her son had worked in his office.

She denied the MI5 allegations and sued the spy agency for unspecified damages, arguing the agency had acted unlawfully and

unreasonably by labelling her a risk to the state without any prior finding of guilt.

But the Investigatory Powers Tribunal rejected the claim brought by Lee and her son. It said MI5 was within its rights to issue the interference alert (IA) as part of its function to protect parliamentary democracy and that the pair's human rights had not been breached.

Lee's lawyer said in a statement that his clients were extremely disappointed and were "considering their options".

"Although the Investigatory Powers Tribunal's judgment did not determine whether the espionage allegations made against Christine Lee were factually true or false, we reiterate that Christine Lee has not engaged in such activities," the statement said.

In evidence given to the tribunal, Gardiner had queried whether the timing of the alert was to divert attention from former prime minister Boris Johnson's admission of an unlawful gathering at Downing Street during the first Covid lockdown. Yesterday's ruling came a day after a Chinese national banned from Britain on national security grounds, waived his right to anonymity.

While British Prime Minister Keir Starmer has sought to thaw ties with China since taking office in July, London and Beijing have repeatedly traded spying accusations, with British security services warning of Chinese attempts to infiltrate political, business and academic spheres.



Rescue workers arrive at the site of a collapsed building after a powerful earthquake struck Port Vila, the capital city of Vanuatu, yesterday.

Six dead as strong quake rocks Vanuatu

Reuters
Wellington

An earthquake of magnitude 7.4 struck Vanuatu's capital Port Vila yesterday, killing at least six people and damaging two reservoirs and a hospital, according to local media and the United Nations.

National broadcaster VBTC showed footage of vehicles crushed under the debris of collapsed buildings and boulders strewn across a highway. Drone footage showed landslips near a shipping terminal.

Caretaker prime minister, Charlot Salwai, yesterday declared a state of emergency and said

a curfew would be imposed for seven days in the worst affected areas. International assistance had been requested.

It was a "sad and devastating time" in Port Vila, he said, expressing sympathy to families who had lost loved ones.

An official at Port Vila's hospital told VBTC that six people had died and more than 50 were injured. Rescue efforts to find people trapped in collapsed buildings continued in the evening, a police official told local media.

"It was the most violent earthquake I've experienced in my 21 years living in Vanuatu and in the Pacific Islands. I've seen a lot of large earthquakes, never one like this," Dan McGarry, a journalist based in Vanuatu, said.

Australia's Foreign Minister Penny Wong said there was significant damage and Australia was preparing to deploy assistance, including urban search and rescue and emergency medical teams today.

Port Vila's international airport was closed, Vanuatu's High Commission in Canberra said.

The UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs estimated 116,000 people had been affected by the earthquake. It said there were six unconfirmed deaths and damage to the two main water reservoirs.

The structure of the hospital in Port Vila was affected, with the operating theatre not functioning and triage tents set up outside to manage the influx of patients, it said in a statement.

India proposes holding simultaneous mega elections

India's ruling party yesterday tabled a parliamentary bill to synchronise state and national elections. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) say the concurrent polls proposed by the "One Nation, One Election" bill would cut costs, but opposition parties condemned the move as bid to bolster power. Phased voting in general elections for the national parliament this year - when Modi won a third term - stretched over six weeks in a staggeringly complex logistical exercise for an electorate of 968mn. The bill "proposes aligning the election cycles" of the national parliament in New Delhi with state assemblies, India's justice ministry said. "By synchronising these electoral timelines, the approach aims to address logistical challenges, reduce costs, and minimise disruptions caused by frequent elections," it added.

New beginning for Filipina inmate



Filipina inmate on Indonesia death row Mary Jane Veloso (centre), Philippine foreign undersecretary for migration affairs Eduardo José A de Vega (left) and Indonesia's deputy co-ordinator of immigration and corrections Nyoman Gede Surya Mataram show signed transfer documents during a press conference at the Soekarno-Hatta International Airport in Tangerang yesterday, before her repatriation to Philippines. She is expected to fly home today.

China hopes to stabilise India ties 'at an early date'

AFP
Beijing

China yesterday said it was willing to work with India to stabilise bilateral relations "at an early date" ahead of rare high-level talks this week on a decades-long border dispute.

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

Their shared 3,500km frontier has been a perennial source of tension between the nuclear-armed neighbours.

This week's talks on the issue would be the first in five years, signalling a possible thaw in ties.

A spokesman for Beijing's foreign ministry said China was

willing to "work with India to implement the important consensus reached by the two countries' leaders".

Beijing would look to "enhance mutual trust through dialogue and communication, properly handle differences with sincerity and good faith, and push bilateral relations back to a stable and healthy track of development at an early date", spokesman Lin Jian said. Relations plummeted after a brutal skirmish in 2020 high in their Himalayan borderlands that killed at least 20 Indian and four Chinese soldiers.

However, New Delhi said in October it had reached an agreement with Beijing on patrols in disputed areas. Beijing said on Monday Foreign Minister Wang Yi will meet with Indian National Security Advisor Ajit Doval today to discuss the "China-India boundary question".

S Korean authorities fail to raid presidential office again

Reuters
Seoul

South Korean investigators probing President Yoon Suk-yeol's short-lived martial law declaration yesterday again failed to gain entry to his office to seek evidence after presidential office security staff denied them entry, Yonhap news agency reported.

Yoon was impeached on Saturday over his martial law decree and suspended from his presidential duties. Yonhap said that investigators looking for evidence about the legality of Yoon's martial law decision waited for about seven hours

to be let in, but the presidential office security service denied them entry.

A joint investigation team including police and the Corruption Investigation Office for High-ranking Officials (CIO) was trying to access computer servers of the presidential office's security service to get records of phones including one used by the police commissioner, Yonhap said, citing the team.

This would be the second time authorities have tried and failed to raid the presidential office over the declaration of martial law that was reversed within hours after a standoff with parliament. An at-

tempt on December 11 ended without entry, but the presidential office voluntarily submitted some data.

The presidential office's security service said it would express its position today concerning cooperation with raids, Yonhap reported.

The police and the presidential office did not have an immediate comment yesterday. The CIO declined to comment.

Since his last public remarks shortly after he was impeached by parliament in a vote on Saturday, Yoon has kept a low profile and authorities and the Constitutional Court have not been able to con-

tact or summon him, according to the court and officials.

Yoon has been putting together legal teams to defend himself against accusations of revolt and in the Constitutional Court case which will decide whether to remove him from office or restore his powers.

Seok Dong-hyun, a lawyer and an ex-prosecutor who helps Yoon, told reporters yesterday that the president's declaration of martial law did not constitute a revolt, Yonhap reported.

Yoon would also "confidently express his position in the (Constitutional) Court", Yonhap cited Seok as saying.

Seok declined to say whether Yoon would comply with a summons to appear for questioning on December 21, and said authorities needed to streamline current investigations being conducted by several agencies at once, including the prosecution, the police and the CIO, Yonhap reported.

Seok could not immediately be reached for comment.

Meanwhile, South Korea's acting president Han Duck-soo yesterday called during a cabinet meeting for next year's government budget to be swiftly implemented from the start of 2025 in order to help revive the country's slowing economy.

Han has been working to reas-

sure South Korea's allies and calm financial markets since taking over the duties of Yoon after the president was impeached.

The government has decided to frontload 75% of its 2025 budget to be implemented during the first half of the year, the finance ministry said in a statement yesterday.

South Korea faces economic challenges, including heightened uncertainty for the trade-dependent country created by US president-elect Donald Trump's pledge to hike tariffs, as export growth in Asia's fourth-largest economy slowed for a fourth-straight month in November, to the weakest level in 14 months.



Trump's envoy on Ukraine plans Jan trip to Kyiv

Reuters
Washington

President-elect Donald Trump's incoming Ukraine envoy will travel to Kyiv and several other European capitals in early January as the next administration tries to bring a swift end to the Russia-Ukraine war, according to two sources with knowledge of the trip's planning.

Retired Lieutenant-General Keith Kellogg (pictured), who is set to serve as Trump's special envoy for Ukraine and Russia, is not planning to visit Moscow during this trip, said the sources, who requested anonymity to discuss private matters.

Instead, he will visit senior leaders in Kyiv, and his team is working to set up meetings with leaders in other European capitals, such as Rome and Paris, said the sources. Planning for the trip is still being finalised and the itinerary could change, one of the sources warned.

The meetings are expected to focus on "fact-finding" on behalf of the incoming Trump administration, rather than on active negotiations, the sources said. Still, the planned trip illustrates the urgency the president-elect has placed on winding down the war in Ukraine.

Trump has promised to end the war within 24 hours of taking office, if not before. Former intelligence and national-security officials have expressed doubt that such a feat can be accomplished, in part because Russian President Vladimir Putin may have little reason to come to the negotiating table, at least on terms acceptable to Kyiv.

A representative for Trump's transition team did not immediately respond to a request for comment, nor did representatives of the Ukrainian and Italian embassies in Washington. It was not immediately possible to reach a representative of the French embassy in Washington.

Musk, SpaceX face reviews over security

Elon Musk and SpaceX face at least three federal reviews over whether they have complied with federal reporting rules aimed at protecting national security, the *New York Times* reported yesterday. Reviews have been initiated by the Air Force, the Defence Department's inspector general and the undersecretary of defence for intelligence and security, the newspaper reported, citing eight people with knowledge of the rocket company and internal documents. "Elon Musk and his rocket company, SpaceX, have repeatedly failed to comply with federal reporting protocols aimed at protecting state secrets, including by not providing some details of his meetings with foreign leaders," the *Times* report said. The *Times* said the Air Force recently cited potential security risks in denying Musk high-level security access and that allies including Israel have flagged concerns he could share sensitive data.

Russia's chemical weapons chief killed in brazen Moscow blast

AFP
Moscow

The head of the Russian army's chemical weapons division was killed yesterday in a brazen Moscow attack claimed by Kyiv, the most senior military figure assassinated in Russia yet as the Kremlin's campaign in Ukraine drags on.

Igor Kirillov was killed along with an assistant when an explosive device attached to a scooter went off outside an apartment building in southeastern Moscow, Russian and Ukrainian officials said.

The attack took place in a residential area in the capital a day after President Vladimir Putin boasted of Russian troop successes in Ukraine, nearly three years on from the Kremlin's invasion of its pro-Western neighbour.

Kirillov, 54, was the head of the Russian army's chemical, biological and radiological weapons unit and was recently sanctioned by Britain over the alleged use of chemical weapons in Ukraine.

A source in Ukraine's SBU security service told AFP it was behind the early morning explosion in what it called a "special operation", calling Kirillov a "war criminal".

Russia's Investigative Committee said an "explosive device planted in a scooter parked



Lieutenant General Igor Kirillov, chief of Russia's Nuclear, Biological and Chemical Protection Troops, during a press conference in Moscow in this still image from video released on November 5, 2024. (Reuters)

near the entrance of a residential building was activated on the morning of December 17 on Ryazansky Avenue in Moscow".

The blast shattered several windows of the building and severely damaged the front door, according to an AFP reporter on the scene.

Russian authorities said they were probing the attack as "terrorism".

But the SBU source told AFP: "Kirillov was a war criminal and an absolutely legitimate target, as he gave orders to use banned chemical weapons against the Ukrainian military".

"Such an inglorious end awaits all those who kill Ukrainians. Ret-

tribution for war crimes is inevitable," the source said.

Russian foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova accused Ukraine's allies of approving "war crimes" by remaining silent on the killing or expressing support for such attacks.

"All those who welcome terrorist attacks or deliberately hush them up are accomplices," she said on social media, accusing the West of increasing "approval for war crimes by fighters for the Kyiv regime".

Ex-president Dmitry Medvedev said Russia must do everything it could to "destroy" Ukraine's political and military leadership who ordered the attack.

AFP was unable to verify video footage shared by an SBU source that showed a scooter exploding seconds after two men left a residential building.

Residents said they had initially assumed the loud noise they heard came from a nearby construction site.

Student Mikhail Mashkov, who lives in the building next door, said he was woken up by a "very loud explosion noise", thinking "something fell at the construction site", before looking outside.

There have been assassinations on Russian territory before but such attacks in Moscow — where fighting in Ukraine often feels distant — are rare.

Previous targets included nationalist writer Darya Dugina — killed in a car bomb attack outside Moscow in 2022 — and pro-conflict military correspondent Maxim Fomin, who was blown up in a Saint Petersburg cafe in 2023.

Kirillov, who had been in his role since 2017, is the most senior Russian military official to be killed.

Kyiv had a day earlier charged Kirillov in absentia on allegations of committing "war crimes" against Ukraine.

The SBU on Monday said it had documented more than 4,800 cases of Russia using chemical munitions since the start of the conflict in February 2022.

Britain and the United States

have accused Russia of using the toxic agent chloropicrin, a choking agent used widely in World War I, in violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC).

The UK government in October imposed sanctions on Kirillov and his unit "for helping deploy these barbaric weapons" charges that Moscow has denied.

Yesterday a spokesman for British Prime Minister Keir Starmer said London was "not going to mourn" Kirillov's death, saying he had "imposed suffering and death on the Ukrainian people".

A US official said yesterday on condition of anonymity that "the US was not aware of the operation in advance and we do not support or enable these kind of activities".

White House spokesman John Kirby earlier told CNN it was "without question" that the Russian military had "used chemical weapons and other agents to kill, to maim, to hurt the Ukrainian people and Ukrainian soldiers".

Russia has said it no longer possesses a military chemical arsenal.

In lengthy televised briefings, Kirillov had regularly accused Kyiv and the West of running secret networks of bio-labs that were developing banned chemical agents across Ukraine — claims rejected by the West and independent fact-checking organisations.

France warns Mayotte cyclone toll to rise as curfew imposed

AFP
Saint-Denis de la Reunion

The toll from the devastating cyclone that ripped through the French overseas territory of Mayotte risks rising, the prime minister said yesterday, as the authorities announced a nighttime curfew to thwart looting.

According to the latest toll, 21 people are confirmed to have been killed by Cyclone Chido when it barreled into the archipelago at the weekend.

But authorities fear that hundreds, and possibly even thousands, will be confirmed dead once the true scale of the toll is revealed after the rubble is cleared and roads are unblocked.

In a sign of the potential magnitude of the tragedy, the Red Cross said it feared more than 200 of its volunteers were missing on Mayotte.

Cyclone Chido was the latest in a string of storms worldwide fuelled by climate change, with the exceptional system being super-charged by particularly warm Indian Ocean waters, according to experts.

"The toll is uncertain for the moment... The toll is, as of today, at more than 20 dead, 200 badly wounded and 1,500 wounded in a relative state of urgency," Prime Minister Francois Bayrou told parliament.

"This toll could rise. We all know this," he added.

The health services are in tatters while power and mobile phone services have been knocked out. The airport is closed to civilian flights and there is mounting concern over how to ensure supplies of drinking water.

Bayrou said progress was being



Paramedics walk as they transport an injured person to an aircraft at Dzaoudzi Pamandzi International Airport in the aftermath of Cyclone Chido in Pamandzi yesterday. (Reuters)

made with about 50% of the electricity network restarted, with a target of 75% "by the end of the week".

The main hospital has recovered around half of its activity, and "about 80% of the road network is accessible again", he added.

The curfew from 10pm-4am is being put in place as a security measure to prevent looting, the French interior ministry said.

French President Emmanuel Macron, who chaired a crisis meeting on Monday night, has described the situation as a "tragedy".

Late yesterday, Macron said he would visit territory tomorrow, cutting short a trip to Brussels to meet European Union leaders.

Interior Minister Bruno Retailleau, who on Monday visited the island, said that Mayotte has been

"completely devastated", with 70% of inhabitants affected.

Mayotte is France's poorest region, with an estimated one-third of the population living in shantytowns whose flimsy sheet metal-roofed homes offered scant protection against the storm.

"We're starting to run out of water. In the south, there's been no running water for five days," said Antoy Abdallah, a resident of Tsoundzou in the territory's capital Mamoudzou.

"We're completely cut off from the world," the 34-year-old lamented.

Most of Mayotte's population is Muslim and religious tradition dictates that bodies must be buried rapidly, meaning some may never be counted.

Assessing the toll is further complicated by irregular immi-

gration to Mayotte, especially from the Comoros islands to the north, meaning much of the population is not even registered.

Mayotte officially has 320,000 inhabitants but authorities estimate there could be 100,000 to 200,000 more people, taking into account illegal immigration.

Oussen Balahachi, a former nurse, said some people did not dare venture out to seek assistance, "fearing it would be a trap" designed to remove them from Mayotte.

Many had stayed put "until the last minute" when it proved too late to escape the cyclone, she added.

After hitting Mayotte, Cyclone Chido made landfall in Mozambique, claiming at least 34 lives and destroying 23,600 homes, authorities said.

Trump sues over Iowa poll with surprise Harris lead

Donald Trump has sued a pollster and newspaper over survey results published days before the US election showing him behind in Iowa — a state he ultimately won by a wide margin.

The president-elect's highly unusual complaint was filed on Monday evening in the central US state, and names the famed pollster Ann Selzer, the *Des Moines Register* and parent company Gannett as defendants. The Republican billionaire "seeks accountability for brazen election interference committed by the Defendants in favour of now-defeated former Democrat candidate Kamala Harris," he argued in court documents seen by AFP. Selzer's poll, released in the final weekend of campaigning before the November 5 vote, showed Harris leading Trump in Iowa by three points.

The poll was a shock given Trump's easy victories there in 2016 and 2020, and boosted Democratic hopes that other surveys showing an exceedingly tight race were actually overestimating the Republican's support.

Trump went on to win Iowa by 13 points, dealing a devastating blow to Selzer's reputation and prompting claims by Trump of alleged wrongdoing.

"In my opinion, it was fraud and it was election interference," he told a press conference on Monday. "She's a very good pollster. She knows what she was doing," he added. When contacted by AFP yesterday, Selzer's office declined to comment.

Lark-Marie Anton, a spokesperson for the *Des Moines Register*, said the newspaper had already acknowledged the poll "did not reflect the ultimate margin of President Trump's Election Day victory in Iowa."

'Game of nerves': Georgians vow to outlast govt in pro-EU protests

AFP
Tbilisi

Thousands of Georgians renewed pro-EU protests yesterday, vowing to win a "game of nerves" with the government, which faces a legitimacy crisis and mounting international outcry over human rights violations.

The government's decision in late November to postpone the opening of EU accession talks for years has sparked nearly three weeks of daily protests in the EU-candidate Black Sea nation.

The move came amid an unprecedented constitutional crisis that saw the country's president

declared newly elected parliament and the government "illegitimate" after the opposition accused the ruling Georgian Dream party of rigging October's parliamentary polls.

Yesterday protesters staged marches at a dozen locations across the capital Tbilisi before several thousand gathered outside parliament for 20th consecutive days.

Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze — who had threatened to "eradicate" opposition parties, calling them "liberal fascists" — downplayed the protests, saying an attempted revolution "has failed".

His remarks angered many at yesterday's rally where demon-

strators chanted slogans demanding the government's resignation and fresh parliamentary polls.

"Kobakhidze is trying to lift spirits of his inner circle, portraying our protests as a failure," said 18-year-old student Lali Korintheli, wrapped in an EU flag.

"If he wants to play a game of nerves with us, so be it," she added. "We have been rallying day in and day out for twenty days, despite police brutality, and will not get tired because the fate of our country's is being decided."

"Let's see who comes out on top," agreed her friend Gigi Gardaphadze, 19.

"The government has got a couple thousand rabid cops on their side, but what are they going to do

against an entire nation?" he said, adding that "all of Georgia backs" protesters.

During the protests' initial phase, riot police used tear gas and water cannons to disperse the crowds, with interior ministry reporting that more than 400 people had been arrested.

Georgia's top human rights official, ombudsman Levan Jseiliani, and Amnesty International have accused police of "torturing" those detained.

The alleged police brutality has sparked mounting international condemnation as Washington and several European countries have imposed visa bans on Georgian Dream officials and warned of further personal sanctions.



Anti-government demonstrators protest in central Tbilisi yesterday. (AFP)

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Italy's growth bubble bursts to reveal fragile outlook

Italy's growth rebound from the Covid-19 pandemic is petering out much faster than expected as structural weaknesses resurface, raising risks for the fragile public finances of the eurozone's third largest economy. After gross domestic product unexpectedly stagnated in the third quarter, national statistics bureau ISTAT said this month it expected no near-term recovery and forecast 2024 growth of just 0.5%, half the government's official 1% target.

ISTAT's estimate would return Italy to its customary place among the eurozone's weakest performers and contradict an upbeat picture painted by Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, as well as some economists, just a few months ago.

Recent data has been grim. Business confidence is at its lowest since 2021, a long-running manufacturing crisis is deepening, and the services sector which had propped up the economy for most of the year is now also contracting.

"Italy's business model made up of small firms is no longer conducive to growth, it has insufficient public investment and it is fighting the green transition instead of embracing it as a growth opportunity," said Francesco Saraceno, economics professor at Paris's Science Po and Rome's LUISS university.

Analysts say the situation is even more worrying considering that Italy is receiving a constant flow of tens of billions of euros from Brussels as part of the European Union's post-Covid Recovery Fund.

Spain, the other main recipient of the fund, is growing at least four times as fast.

Saraceno said Italy's buoyancy in 2021-2022 was based mainly on state-funded incentives for the building sector – the so-called "superbonus" – which powered an investment surge that has reversed this year as the costly scheme has been phased out.

Italy has been the most sluggish eurozone economy since the launch of the single currency 25 years ago, and its latest slump threatens to derail its public finances that have already been compromised by the superbonus.

The public debt, proportionally the second largest in the eurozone, is forecast by the government to rise to around 138% of GDP in 2026 from 135% last year.

If growth in 2025 comes in significantly below Rome's 1.2% target, as most forecasters now expect, that debt ratio will probably climb faster. Investors may then become more reluctant to buy Italian bonds, increasing the government's heavy debt-servicing burden.

Italy is already under EU orders to slash its budget deficit due to massive overshoots in the last two years, removing any hope of spending its way to growth.

The country's weakness stands in stark contrast to Spain, whose GDP is forecast to grow by around 3% this year. Over the last year Spain has expanded at quarterly rates of between 0.7% and 0.9%, while Italy has hovered between zero and 0.3%.

Angel Talavera, head of European research at Oxford Economics, said Spain's success in attracting migrants and integrating them into its economy had been a key driver of its growth, along with a tourism boom and firm consumer spending.

Italy's far fewer migrants rarely do skilled or even semi-skilled jobs, and are often confined to the informal economy. Meanwhile young Italians are leaving the country in their thousands due to a lack of promising career prospects. The shrinking population is in itself a source of economic weakness.

"They are quite different types of economies, Spain is strongly reliant on services and tourism, while Italy still has a large manufacturing sector which is increasingly uncompetitive and acting as a brake on expansion," Talavera said. "Over the last 20 years Spain also seems to have done a better job of modernising its infrastructures and public services," he added.

Economists agree that an incomplete list of Italy's problems includes under-investment in education, infrastructure and public services, stifling bureaucracy, risk-averse banks, an under-developed stock market and an inefficient justice system – all issues that have lain unresolved for years.

There is also a perhaps surprising degree of consensus on what the top policy priority should be to improve things, a question put by Reuters to five prominent Italian economists.

Roberto Perotti, economics professor at Milan's Bocconi University, Lorenzo Bini Smaghi, a former European Central Bank board member, Andrea Roventini, economics professor at Pisa's Sant'Anna University and Science Po's Saraceno all said the focus should be on investment in education and research.

Lorenzo Codogno, head of LC Macro Advisors and a former Italian Treasury chief economist, said his priority would be further liberalisation of the labour market. — Reuters

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QND celebrates heritage, unity and development

ACTA president highlights national pride, global achievements and commitment to transparency

QNA
Doha

HE President of the Administrative Control and Transparency Authority Hamad bin Nasser al-Misnad emphasised that commemorating the founding of the State of Qatar by the Founder Sheikh Jassim bin Mohammed bin Thani holds profound significance for the people of Qatar and all who live on its land.

Speaking to Qatar News Agency (QNA) on the country's National Day celebrations on December 18, he stated that this day symbolises the beginning of the state's historical march, founded on values of unity, pride, and dignity. He highlighted that this celebration reflects the Qataris' pride in their heritage and cultural legacy and serves as a reminder of the sacrifices made by the forefathers to build a stable and prosperous nation. He stressed that National Day is not just a festive occasion but an expression of pride in the achievements made under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani.

He noted that this occasion is an opportunity to affirm loyalty and belonging to a nation that embraces everyone, both citizens and residents, celebrating its achievements and renaissance that inspire everyone toward a brighter future. He highlighted ACTA's numerous accomplishments over the past year, both internationally and locally. On the international level, Qatar hosted global conferences and secured the hosting of the 6th session of the Conference of the States Parties to the Arab Convention against Corruption in 2026, and the 11th session of the Conference of the States Parties to the UN Convention against Corruption in December 2025, reflecting Qatar's international standing and commitment to promoting global integrity.

He recalled the hosting of the second ministerial meeting of anti-corruption law enforcement agencies, which saw the participation of 53 countries, marking the second-largest global gathering in this field. The Authority also signed memorandums of understanding with anti-corruption bodies in countries such as Rwanda, Palestine, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and France, enhancing the exchange of expertise and organising joint training programmes.

On the local level, Hamad bin Nasser al-Misnad mentioned that ACTA organised several programmes in collaboration with national entities such as the Qatar Finance



and Business Academy (QFBA) and the Rule of Law and Anti-Corruption Center (ROLACC), aimed at raising government employees' awareness of the values of integrity and transparency.

The Authority also held workshops to familiarise public employees with the code of conduct and the right to access information law, thereby enhancing transparency and trust between the government and the public.

Additionally, ACTA developed a national strategy project to enhance integrity and transparency in co-operation with relevant entities, aligning with Qatar National Vision 2030, and improved the system for receiving corruption-related complaints, contributing to accountability, transparency, and public trust in the government system.

He pointed out that the National Day celebrations coincide with the launch of

the third National Development Strategy (2024-2030), aiming to achieve sustainable development that promotes integrity and transparency. He explained that ACTA focuses on enhancing the legislative and regulatory framework by updating integrity and transparency-related laws, developing institutional and human capacities through specialised training programmes, and enhancing international and local co-operation to exchange expertise and best practices, and raising community awareness by launching campaigns to promote a culture of integrity.

In conclusion, the President of the Administrative Control and Transparency Authority affirmed that ACTA continues to work towards these goals, supporting the progress and prosperity of Qatar under its wise leadership.

Writers, academics seek enhanced Arabic content on the Internet

QNA
Doha

Writers and academics have called for enhancing Arabic content on the Internet and employing modern technology and AI to bridge the digital gap and build content that matches the status of the Arabic language in the contemporary world.

In statements to Qatar News Agency (QNA) on the occasion of the International Day of the Arabic Language, which is marked on December 18 every year, they noted Qatar's efforts in computerisation and digitisation of cultural and linguistic heritage, including the Doha Historical Dictionary of the Arabic Language, which is a significant contribution to supporting Arabic content on the Internet.

Qatari writer and academic Dr Marzouq Bashir said celebrating the International Day of the Arabic Language is an opportunity to comprehensively reflect on the conditions of Arab culture and its contemporary trends, and its ability to influence and be influenced in light of scientific and technological transformations, communication networks, and social media.

He pointed out that AI has doubled the challenges facing Arab culture, especially with regard to Arabic content in terms of thought, creativity, and science due to the weakness of this type of content in comparison to other living languages. Therefore, this requires the builders of scientific and development strategies to study the facts and develop appropriate solutions and methodologies to bridge the digital gap and build content that suits the human and material capabilities of the Arab nation, taking it from the consumer position to the production position and participation in the contemporary world.

Dr Bashir praised the efforts of Qatari institutions in digitisation and computing and called for enhancing these experiences at all educational levels and stages, stressing the need to formulate curricula and teaching methods that enhance students' and youth's awareness of new technology, as well as establish a critical awareness of scientific and cultural phenomena.

He noted the need to devise balanced systems, curricula, and approaches that

integrate attention to scientific research, systematic thinking, cultural heritage, and literary and artistic creativity, in order to restore the legacy and giving of the Arab nation, which has given humanity high scientific stature in astronomy, medicine, and engineering, as well as symbols of literature, linguistics, and rhetoric.

Executive Director of the Doha Historical Dictionary of the Arabic Language and Moroccan linguistic expert Dr Azeddine Bouchiki explained that Arabic content online is witnessing steady growth and continuous increase in its use and the expansion of its scope, and it is necessary to conduct studies to evaluate this content in terms of its quality, comprehensiveness, reliability, level of use, and the extent to which it meets the needs of the Arab public.

He stressed that the Doha Historical Dictionary of the Arabic Language is a significant contribution to supporting Arabic content online. This dictionary includes most of the correct Arabic words documented from printed and reliable sources, supported by textual evidence accompanied by dates of their composition and the names of their authors. It is expected that the number of these Arabic words in the dictionary will reach about 300,000.

However, the most important contribution is the textual corpus on which this dictionary relied in extracting its words, textual evidence, and other information related to the dictionary entries.

He pointed out that this corpus includes hundreds of millions of Arabic words in texts covering areas of human knowledge from literature, arts, philosophy, linguistics, legal sciences, and natural sciences over nearly twenty centuries of Arabic history.

Dr Bouchiki noted the content provided by the Doha Historical Dictionary of the Arabic Language, which is distinguished by being scientific, diverse, comprehensive, and reliable. It is expected that this content, with these features, will meet the needs of researchers, professors, and students, and will constitute an important database for their research, studies, and university theses, in addition to supporting Arabic content to achieve the purposes of creating Arabic linguistic models using AI systems.

Sudanese critic and academic Dr Hashim

Mirghani, winner of the Katara Prize for Arabic Novel for the year 2024 in the category of novel research and criticism, felt the celebration of the International Day of the Arabic Language should be a motivator to discuss a set of problems facing this language in the contemporary world. Among these problems is the lack of digital content for this language compared to others.

Although the Arabic language ranks fifth among the most spoken languages after Chinese, Spanish, English, and Hindi, it suffers from a diminishing presence on the international network that does not exceed 3%, according to the most optimistic statistics. Even this small presence suffers from a number of problems such as repetition, poverty of content, violation of copyright represented by pirating materials without referring to their authors and publishers, copying from others, and the lack of bridges of co-operation between academic institutions, etc.

As for the creative content of Arabic online, Dr Hashim noted that its biggest problem is the dominance of the culture of the image over the culture of the word, which began with the advent of television and is gaining new ground every day.

Syrian poet and novelist Issa al-Sheikh Hassan said renewed technologies through social media have added a new "resource" to Arabic literature, in terms of publishing available through virtual pages and ensuring its spread throughout the world.

Compared to what is published in literature on the pages of newspapers, magazines, and books, social media has achieved a huge leap in the duality of publishing and distribution or writing and reading, as different texts receive thousands of readings in record time. Barriers to the word have been eliminated, the cost required to publish books in print has been overcome, and censorship and prohibition have been eliminated.

The UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco) celebrates this year the World Arabic Language Day under the title: "Arabic Language and AI – Advancing Innovation While Preserving Cultural Heritage."

The date of December 18 of each year was chosen because it is the day on which the UN General Assembly took its historic decision in 1973 to make Arabic the sixth official language of the organisation. (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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**جلفار
المسناد**

Ministry opens Al Themaïd and Al Sudan parks in Al Rayyan area

The Ministry of Municipality, in collaboration with the Public Works Authority (Ashghal), inaugurated Al Themaïd and Al Sudan parks in Al Rayyan area yesterday as part of the National Day celebrations.

The inauguration ceremony was attended by assistant undersecretary for public services affairs engineer Abdullah Ahmed al-Kharani, Al Rayyan Municipality director-general Jaber Hassan al-Jaber, Public Parks Department director Mohamed Ibrahim al-Sada, and a number of officials

from the Ministry of Municipality and Al Rayyan Municipality.

Al-Sada said that the opening of Al Themaïd and Al Sudan parks is part of continuous efforts to develop the parks and recreation system across the country, in line with the Third National Development Strategy and Qatar National Vision 2030.

"When establishing parks, we focus on residential neighbourhoods to increase green spaces and provide diverse recreational areas for citizens and expatriates, given the social significance of these ar-



reas," the official pointed out. Al-Sada noted that the number of public parks and recreational spaces in the country has now reached 149, including plazas and corniches (120 public parks, 25 plazas, and four corniches).

He also pointed out that the ministry is preparing to open several new parks with international standards in the near future, further enhancing community well-being and achieving sustainable environmental development.

Al Themaïd Park spans a total area of 15,747sq m, featuring 9,892sq m of open green spaces.

The park includes various pathways, such as a 438m walking track, a 363m cycling track, and a 343m jogging track.

It boasts a rich environment with 212 trees and 1,054 shrubs forming green hedges.

The park offers a children's play area of 454sq m, equipped with safe play equipment, fitness areas, 29 parking lots, and 135 lighting units enhancing the overall scenic landscape.

Al Sudan Park covers a total area of 2,303sq m, with 1,471sq m of green spaces.

It includes a 164m walking track and a 258sq m children's play area with suitable equipment.

The park is distinguished by 39 trees of various types providing shade, 107sq m of shrubs forming green hedges, 12 parking lots, and 57 lighting units illuminating the green spaces.



(From left) Luca Andreoli, Matteo Perego di Cremona, Captain Giuseppe Lai, HE Maj-Gen (Sea) Abdullah bin Hassan al-Sulaiti, HE Maj-Gen Rashid Ali al-Qashouti, Paolo Toschi, and Prof Khalid bin Ibrahim al-Sulaiti at the event opening yesterday at Old Doha Port. PICTURES: Shajji Kayamkulam

Left: The Amerigo Vespucci at Old Doha Port yesterday. Along with Villaggio Italia, the ship will be open to the public free of charge.

Amerigo Vespucci, Villaggio Italia in Doha

By Joey Aguilar
Staff Reporter

The Italian naval ship *Amerigo Vespucci* sailed into Doha during the Qatar National Day celebrations, carrying a message of peace and partnership, as well as a tribute to the deepening ties between Qatar and Italy.

Speaking on the sidelines of the event at Old Doha Port, Italian ambassador Paolo Toschi highlighted the ship's arrival as a gesture of respect for Qatar's leadership and its contributions to regional and global peace.

"We truly pay tribute to Qatar as a country that has worked very hard for peace, dialogue, and peaceful resolution of differences," he said, adding: "Italy stands at Qatar's side, and we will not stop working for peace, we will not stop looking for solutions to the crisis in the region and beyond."

The envoy stressed that Italy and Qatar are linked by very strong cultural bonds, allowing the two countries "to appreciate what we cherish the most, which



is the beauty of art, the beauty of history, the beauty of creation as a force that can unite."

Toschi thanked institutions such as Qatar Museums and Katara - the Cultural Village for their ongoing collaborations with Italy in the field of art and culture.

He also invited the public to experience the rich programme of cultural events at Villaggio Italia, including movies, concerts and showcases of design and other creative industries, running until December 21.

The exposition (Villaggio Italia) forms part of maiden visit of the *Vespucci*, showcasing Italian culture and excellence.

Also located at Old Doha Port, it offers a rich programme of cultural events and further strengthen the bilateral relationship between the two nations.

Undersecretary of State to the Italian ministry of defence, Matteo Perego di Cremona, said that the *Vespucci* represents "the best of Italy, the Made in Italy, the Italian culture, tradition, heritage, innovation, and design".

"We (Italy and Qatar) have a strong relations, and I think this

Vespucci tour will also increase the co-operation between the two countries," the official said. "We share values, tradition, and the vision of the world, a world of peace and harmony of people."

Captain Giuseppe Lai, commanding officer of the *Amerigo Vespucci*, described the ship's maiden voyage to Qatar as a momentous occasion.

"This time we had the opportunity to travel to this very significant part of the world...it's expanding the message of spreading out the culture, the values of Italy, not only on the defence perspective," he said.

Lai stressed that the *Amerigo Vespucci*'s message extends beyond defence to include the Italian values of culture, design, cuisine and inclusion, all in the name of peace.

The captain added that the warm reception from the people of Qatar has been evident since their arrival, noting that "all the visits to the ship have already been sold out".

He highlighted the existing co-operation between the Italian and Qatari navies, revealing that many



Villaggio Italia forms part of maiden visit of the *Vespucci*, showcasing Italian culture and excellence.



The world tour of the *Amerigo Vespucci* stops in Qatar for the first time in its 93-year history.

Qatari cadets have trained at the Italian Naval Academy and that two Qatari Navy officers joined the *Vespucci* during their journey from Karachi to Doha.

Lai noted that the *Amerigo Vespucci*'s world tour began in Italy on July 1 last year, and will

continue until June 10, 2025.

The ship, he explained, serves as a training vessel where every Italian naval officer gains their first sea experience.

The event was also attended by dignitaries, including Katara general manager Prof Khalid bin

Ibrahim al-Sulaiti, Difesa Servizi chief executive Luca Andreoli, Qatar Amiri Naval Forces Commander HE Major-General (Sea) Abdullah bin Hassan al-Sulaiti, and Qatar Amiri Air Defence Force commander HE Major-General Rashid Ali al-Qashouti.