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Gulf Cup: Expect more surprises, says Qatar coach ahead of Oman tie

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Qatar vows to support Syria in multiple fields

QNA Damascus

HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dr Mohammed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh al-Khulaifi, stated that he held in-depth consultations with leader of the new administration in Syria, Ahmed al-Sharaa, pertaining to the future of Syria, during his visit to Damascus yesterday, leading a high-ranking Qatari delegation.

Speaking to Qatar News Agency (QNA), HE Dr al-Khulaifi affirmed that he underscored to the leader of the new administration of Syria Qatar's full readiness to provide support in multiple fields in a manner that serves the interest of the brotherly people of Syria.

He pointed out that the visit at this moment epitomises Qatar's unwavering position toward the brotherly people of Syria and reaffirms its utmost commitment to supporting all peaceful endeavours to achieve stability in the sisterly Syrian Arab Republic, along with its full readiness to constructively support the aspirations of the people of Syria toward a stable, secure and prosperous future.

HE the minister of state highlighted that Syria is on the cusp of a new promising epoch in its history, which requires solidifying all efforts to reconstruct the devastation caused by years-long

- Minister of State at Ministry of Foreign Affairs holds in-depth talks with new Syrian leader
- Qatar Airways to operate direct flights to Syria
- QFFD holds talks with Syrian officials to ensure unhindered delivery of humanitarian aid
- First Qatari delegation to visit Syria in 13 years

war and build a future that honours the aspirations and hopes of the people of Syria.

The delegation was accompanied by a technical team from Qatar Airways to meet officials at the Damascus International Airport and get familiarised with their needs, as well as provide the essential technical support for the airport's recommissioning, HE Dr al-Khulaifi underlined, emphasising that Qatar Airways intends to operate direct flights to Syria in the foreseeable future, following the technical assessment the team is currently conducting.

He indicated that a team from Qatar Fund for Development (QFFD) held crucial talks with the relevant officials in Syria with the objective of setting enduring and effective mechanisms to ensure the consistent and unhindered delivery of humanitarian aid, which is a foremost priority for Qatar at this stage. The two sides discussed the close bilateral relations and ways to boost them, the future of Syria and prospects for Qatar's unwavering support

for the Syrian people across all fields.

HE Dr al-Khulaifi affirmed Qatar's unrelenting support for the Syrian brothers to build a state of institutions, governed by justice, freedom, development and peace.

In this regard, he stressed the need to ensure the unity of Syria, work towards a peaceful power transfer through a political process that includes the whole spectrum of Syrian society under UN Security Council Resolution 2254, and foster efforts to protect civilians and combat terrorism.

He expressed Qatar's praise for the measures adopted by the new Syrian administration.

The first high-level Qatari delegation, led by HE Dr al-Khulaifi, arrived yesterday in Damascus, after a roughly 13-year estrangement with the previous regime due to its brutal attempts to suppress the revolution of the Syrian people in their inspiring struggle for justice, freedom, development, and prosperity.

This visit reaffirms the strong and close fraternal ties between Qatar and Syria. **Page 3**



HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dr Mohammed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh al-Khulaifi, is welcomed by leader of the new administration of Syria, Ahmed al-Sharaa in Damascus yesterday. **Page 2**

'Gaps have narrowed in Gaza truce talks'

Reuters Cairo/Jerusalem

Gaps between Israel and Palestinian resistance movement Hamas over a possible Gaza ceasefire have narrowed, according to Israeli and Palestinian officials' remarks yesterday, though crucial differences have yet to be resolved.

A fresh bid by mediators Qatar, Egypt and the US to end the fighting and release Israeli hostages and Palestinian prisoners has gained momentum this month, though no breakthrough has yet been reported.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu yesterday said progress had been made in hostage negotiations with Hamas in Gaza but that he did not know how much longer it would take to see the results.

A Palestinian official familiar with the talks said while some sticking points had been resolved, the identity of some of the Palestinian prisoners to be released by Israel in return for hostages had yet to be agreed, along with the precise deployment of Israeli troops in Gaza.

His remarks corresponded with comments by the Israeli diaspora minister, Amichai Chikli, who said both issues were still being negotiated. Nonetheless, he said, the sides were far closer to reaching agreement than they have been for months.

"This ceasefire can last six months or it can last 10 years, it depends on the dynamics that will form on the ground," Chikli told Israel's Kan radio. Much hinged on what powers would be run-

ning and rehabilitating Gaza once fighting stopped, he said.

The duration of the ceasefire has been a fundamental sticking point throughout several rounds of failed negotiations. Hamas wants an end to the war, while Israel wants an end to Hamas' rule of Gaza first.

"The issue of ending the war completely hasn't yet been resolved," said the Palestinian official.

Israeli minister Zeev Elkin, a member of Netanyahu's security cabinet, told Israel's Army Radio that the aim was to find an agreed framework that would resolve that difference during a second stage of the ceasefire deal.

Chikli said the first stage would be a humanitarian phase that will last 42 days and include a hostage release.

At least 24 Palestinians were killed in Israeli strikes yesterday, medics said.

Among the dead were four Palestinians killed when an Israeli airstrike hit a group of Palestinians tasked with protecting aid trucks into Gaza, medics said.

One of Gaza's few still partially functioning hospitals, on its northern edge, an area under intense Israeli military pressure for nearly three months, sought urgent help after being hit by Israeli fire.

Palestinians accuse Israel of seeking to permanently depopulate northern Gaza to create a buffer zone, which Israel denies.

Yesterday, the United Nations' aid chief, Tom Fletcher, said Israeli forces had hampered efforts to deliver much-needed aid in northern Gaza.

Qatari aid plane for Syria arrives in Beirut



A Qatar Amiri Air Force aircraft arrived yesterday at Rafic Hariri International Airport in Beirut, carrying humanitarian aid, including food and shelter supplies, provided by the Qatar Fund for Development (QFFD), as part of the air bridge operated by Qatar to provide relief to the brethren in the Syrian Arab Republic and contribute to addressing their humanitarian conditions. This aid comes within the framework of Qatar's supportive stance toward Syria, and its continued support for the fraternal Syrian people. **(QNA)**

Shop Qatar 2025 to be held from Jan 1-Feb 1

By Joey Aguilar Staff Reporter

Qatar residents and visitors will have the opportunity to explore new retail destinations and revisit iconic ones at the highly-anticipated Shop Qatar 2025, set to take place from January 1-February 1.

Dubbed as Qatar's biggest shopping festival, Visit Qatar noted that the month-long event is set to feature a host of attractions, including live shows, family-friendly entertainment, interactive activations, promotions, and raffle draws offering prizes ranging from cash to brand-new cars.

According to Visit Qatar, this

annual shopping extravaganza has grown to become a highlight of the country's retail and entertainment calendar. One of the key participants this year is Old Doha Port, a vibrant hub featuring approximately 100 shops and boutiques, dozens of cafes and restaurants, and 150 hotel apartments.

The Port's Mina District, known for its retail outlets and restaurants, is expected to draw large crowds, while the colourful Box Park, a striking development made from shipping containers, adds a unique charm to the venue.

Visitors to the area can also explore the Flag Plaza, a picturesque community space near the Museum of Islamic Art Park that celebrates cultural exchange with its

display of 119 national flags alongside the European Union, United Nations, and Gulf Co-operation Council flags.

Another venue in this year's festival is Abu Sidra Mall, a 92,000sq m premium shopping destination. The mall houses more than 200 retail outlets, extensive indoor and outdoor food courts, and various entertainment options, including the largest premium LuLu Hypermarket in the GCC. It is learnt that its expansive offerings are expected to make it a prime spot for shoppers during the festival.

To the northeast, Al Khor Mall will welcome visitors with its array of around 100 outlets, including dining options, clothing

stores, a cinema, and a family entertainment centre. This over 55,000sq m mall provides a blend of shopping and leisure, making it a popular destination for families, including those from Doha.

Ezdan Mall's Wukair branch in Wakra will also participate, offering a comprehensive shopping experience with a mix of fast-fashion brands and region-exclusive retail selections. Known for its convenience and variety, the mall has become a go-to spot for fashion-forward shoppers.

Shop Qatar 2025 also highlights the ease of access provided by the Doha Metro, which connects several major malls, including City Center Mall, Mall of Qatar, Place Vendôme, and Villaggio. High-



The colourful Box Park is a striking development made from shipping containers, adding a unique charm to Old Doha Port.

end retail enthusiasts can explore luxury destinations like Doha Oasis, The Gate Mall, Al Hazm, and Doha Festival City, all of which will showcase their exclusive collections during the festival.

Visit Qatar noted that the festival's opening day often features a unique celebration, including a captivating entertainment show and roving performers to welcome shoppers.

Qatari delegation arrives in Damascus



The first high-level Qatari delegation, led by HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Mohammed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh al-Khulaifi, arrived yesterday in Damascus, after a roughly 13-year estrangement with the previous regime due to its brutal attempts to suppress the revolution of the Syrian people in their inspiring struggle for justice, freedom, development, and prosperity. (QNA)

Al-Muraikhi receives copy of credentials of Pakistan's envoy



HE the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sultan bin Saad al-Muraikhi received yesterday a copy of the credentials of Pakistan's ambassador to Qatar Muhammad Amir. HE al-Muraikhi wished the ambassador success in his duties, assuring him of providing all support to advance bilateral relations to closer co-operation in various fields. (QNA)

Shura deliberates on National Emblem bill

QNA
Doha

HE Shura Council Speaker Hassan bin Abdullah al-Ghanem chaired yesterday the legislature's weekly session. The session in the Tamim bin Hamad Hall started with HE Shura Council Secretary-General Nayef bin Mohammed al-Mahmoud reading out the agenda before the minutes of the previous session were approved.

The agenda began with a debate motion based on a report of the Education, Culture, Sport and Information Committee on regulating digital content creation. In this regard, HE al-Ghanem highlighted free speech and personal freedoms as rights guaranteed by the Qatari constitution, yet he elaborated that all Qatar residents and visitors are required to adhere to public order and morals and to observe national traditions and established customs.

Stressing the dangers of the uncontrolled digital and social media



usage, especially among youths, HE the Speaker highlighted the digital platforms' mounting impact on shaping awareness and public opinion and the need for digital media content to keep the society stable and respect its values and ethics.

HE Chairman of the Education, Culture, Sport and Information Committee Khalid bin Ahmed al-Obaidan detailed the committee deliberations and consultations with representatives of several parties on the topic. Following the debate, the legislative body decided to submit a proposal to the

Cabinet to regulate a disciplined digital media content.

The proposal includes a legal framework under which social media influencers will be licensed by state relevant authorities to ensure a content consistent with values and national identity, and prevent the spread of foreign cultures and uncontrolled advertisements.

Furthermore, the envisioned licence makes sure the content never harms national unity and social cohesion, avoid hate speech, discrimination and violence and respects cultural heritage, values and national identity. Also among

the licensing regulations are credibility, intellectual property rights, transparency and the respect of social responsibility through avoiding misleading or unscientifically proven information.

Meanwhile, the Shura Council discussed a government bill on the national emblem of the State of Qatar and referred it to the Internal and External Affairs Committee for consideration.

The Council also approved a bill amending some provisions of the Income Tax Law issued by Law No 24 of 2018, and referred it to the esteemed government, after considering the Financial and Economic Affairs Committee report. The draft amendment to the law enables multinational companies to submit their tax returns, and implement global rules to combat tax base erosion and profit shifting for multinational companies.

Yesterday's session concluded with a review of reports on the recent participation of the Shura Council delegations in regional and international parliamentary events.

Shura attends AIPU's committee meeting



The Shura Council participated in the 36th meeting of the Executive Committee of the Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union (AIPU), held at the Arab League's headquarters in Cairo, Egypt. The Member of the Shura Council and Member of the Executive Committee of the AIPU Dr Sultan bin Hassan al-Dhabet al-Dosari represented the Shura Council at the meeting. The meeting discussed the report of the AIPU secretary-general, the report of the Arab Parliamentary Excellence Committee, and the draft agenda of the 38th Conference of the AIPU. The meeting also discussed mechanisms for developing the work of the AIPU and amending the charter. The committee addressed the developments in the Palestinian territories, condemning the continued Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip and the rest of the occupied Palestinian territories, and the heinous crimes it is committing against the Palestinian brethren, calling for the need for international intervention to stop this barbaric aggression, impose sanctions on Israel, and hold it accountable for all ongoing crimes and violations. (QNA)

Qatar participates in 1st meeting of Arab Cybersecurity Ministers Council



Qatar participated yesterday in the first meeting of the Arab Cybersecurity Ministers Council, held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. HE the President of the National Cyber Security Agency, engineer Abdulrahman bin Ali al-Farahid al-Malki, led Qatar's delegation. The meeting discussed a number of topics on its agenda, including the adoption of the organisational structure of the council, the adoption of a proposal to prepare a joint Arab strategy for cybersecurity, and the dates for holding the upcoming joint Arab cyber exercises, including the 2nd Arab exercise that will be hosted by Qatar during the last quarter of 2025. (QNA)

HMC partners with IHI for critical healthcare

Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC) has announced its partnership with the Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI) to expand access to critical healthcare quality and patient safety education.

In its press release issued yesterday, HMC said this collaboration marks a milestone in professional development by offering the renowned IHI Open School courses in Arabic for the first time.

It added that this long-standing partnership between HMC and IHI reflects a shared commitment to enhancing healthcare quality and

safety globally. HMC's Chief of Patient Experience and Director of the Hamad Healthcare Quality Institute Nasser al-Naimi emphasised the significance of this initiative.

He said: "By making these courses available in Arabic, we ensure that healthcare professionals across Qatar and the region can access critical learning in quality, safety, population health, and person-centred care, while enhancing their skills to deliver high-quality healthcare. This aligns with Qatar's Third National Development Strategy and Qatar National Vi-

sion 2030." In turn, President and CEO of IHI Dr Kedar Mate lauded the partnership, saying: "We are thrilled to work with HMC to bring the IHI Open School to more people through Arabic translations. This initiative will enable a broader audience to benefit from learning about proven improvement methodologies and practices, advancing healthcare quality and safety across the region."

IHI Open School provides an on-demand learning platform that empowers healthcare professionals, students, and institutions to develop leadership and improve-



ment skills. The courses are available to healthcare staff across Qatar's healthcare sector. (QNA)

Qatar Charity opens multi-service centre to foster education, healthcare in Chad

Qatar Charity (QC) has opened a multi-service centre in Abeche, the capital of the Wadai region in Chad. The centre is set to offer educational services, along with providing clean water and healthcare for students and residents.

One of QC's flagship projects, the centre includes a primary school, a health centre with multiple medical clinics, a pharmacy, and a laboratory. It also provides healthcare serv-

ices, including reproductive health and vaccinations.

The multi-service centre features an artesian well, a water tank, a mosque, and eight social housing units for teachers. It has been handed over to the Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Isesco), which will use it to train 1,000 teachers in Arabic language and Islamic studies, as well as oversee the provision of other services. (QNA)



QRCS, UNFPA provide healthcare for 63,000 beneficiaries in Yemen



A total of 63,422 women and girls have benefited from the project.

The representation office of Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS) in Yemen is pursuing the project of providing comprehensive healthcare services for the most vulnerable groups and enhancing access to maternal and neonatal health services, co-funded by QRCS and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

To date, a total of 63,422 women and girls in three governorates have received reproductive health services, including pregnancy and newborn care. Also, there were 4,959 natural childbirths and C-sections. The project meets the needs of six health facilities, including medications, medical consumables, operational expenses, and staff remunerations, at a cost of \$926,700.

The target facilities are General Khalifa and Wihda Hospitals in Taiz; Surgical Hospital in Al-Hudaydah; and Wihda Hospital, Al-Manar Hospital, and Bayt Hanzal Medical Complex in Amanat Al-Asimah.

This project is part of a strategic partnership between QRCS and UNFPA, aimed at improving reproductive health services in Yemen and strengthening resilience and self-dependence of the health system and local communities.

Al Jazeera Media Institute to hold AI conference in Jan

Al Jazeera Media Institute has announced the second edition of the Al Jazeera Artificial Intelligence in Media Conference, which will be held from Jan 11-12, 2025.

The conference features panel discussions and professional workshops with the engagement of a host of international experts, along with speakers from major tech firms including Microsoft, Google, IBM and Cisco.

The attendees will discuss cutting-edge AI tools in news collection, verification and deepfake detection and showcase successful Arab and global experiences in employing AI in media. In addition, the conference will address forward-looking issues, including algorithmic bias and its impact on the integrity of media content, ways to build trust between the audience and content produced using smart tools, and the impact of AI on professionals in journalism.

Director of Al Jazeera Media Institute Eman al-Amri emphasised that through organising this conference, the Institute aims to create a space for serious dialogue between technology experts and media organisations on a responsible and effective AI



use to ensure maintaining core journalistic values and adapting to technological advancements.

The conference provides an opportunity to blend in-depth discussions with practical application and features scientific sessions and debates on ethical and professional challenges with respect to leveraging AI, in addition to practical workshops that allow participants to explore the state-of-the-art advancements in this field.

The Al Jazeera Media Institute invited journalists, academics and tech enthusiasts to engage in the event, which represents a unique platform for exploring the latest technological innovations and an opportunity to learn about successful global experiences in integrating AI into journalism and sharing ideas and perspectives on the future of media in light of the rapid technological evolution. (QNA)

Arab League pledges medicines for health sector in Palestine

QNA
Cairo

Arab League pledged yesterday an essential medicine delivery to support the health sector in Palestine.

The move is part of Arab League's unwavering efforts to meet health and humanitarian needs in Palestine, in implementation of the decisions of the council of Arab health ministers. Assis-

tant Secretary-General and Head of Social Affairs Sector Haifa Abu Ghazaleh said in a statement the shipment would be sent in two parts, each weighing five tonnes.

It is paramount to proceed with the efforts of immediately allowing the delivery of humanitarian, health and fuel supplies to the Gaza Strip, stressed Abu Ghazaleh, pointing out the Arab League General Secretariat's consistent co-ordination with the member states to ensure getting those life-saving aids into the Strip.

Protecting Syria's territorial integrity an 'unchanging line' for Turkiye: Erdogan

AFP
Istanbul

Ensuring the protection of Syria's territorial integrity is an unchanging line for Turkiye, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said yesterday.

"Protecting Syria's territorial integrity and unitary structure under all circumstances is Turkiye's unchanging line. We never step back from this," he said after remarks warning Israel that it would be "forced" to withdraw from land it had seized.

Last week, Erdogan hit out at Israel over its plans to double the population living in the occupied and annexed Golan Heights, denouncing it as a bid to "expand its borders" in the wake of the fall of Syria's Bashar al-Assad.

The move came just days af-

ter Israeli troops seized a UN-monitored buffer zone bordering Syria.

"Although Israel is opportunistic, sooner or later it will withdraw from the lands it occupies. It will be forced to do so," Erdogan said, without elaborating.

The Golan Heights is a mountainous plateau at Syria's southwestern edge, most of which was captured by Israel during the 1967 Six-Day War and later annexed.

It is separated from the Syrian side by the UN-patrolled buffer zone. Israel has said its presence there was a "limited and temporary step" for "security reasons".

Erdogan also said Turkiye would continue to press its offensive against "terrorist organisations" in northern Syria, which were being carried out with "surgical precision without

harming civilians". On Saturday, a war monitor said five civilians in northeastern Syria were killed by a drone.

Two days earlier, two Kurdish journalists were killed in similar circumstances while covering clashes between Ankara-backed and Kurdish fighters, the war monitor and journalists' groups said.

The Turkish army insists it never targets civilians but only "terrorist" groups.

Turkiye has been pressing an offensive there to root out Kurdish fighters it sees as linked to the banned PKK which has fought a decades-long insurgency on Turkish soil.

"The PKK and its extensions will either disband or be destroyed. Time is running out for them, the end is in sight. They cannot escape," he said.

Syrian medics coerced into false chemical attack testimony

AFP
Douma

Two Syrian doctors and a nurse said in a series of interviews over the weekend that Bashar al-Assad's government coerced them into providing false testimony to international investigators after a deadly 2018 chlorine attack.

The three, who treated the wounded at a field hospital in the rebel-held town of Douma near Damascus after the April 7, 2018 attack, said they were summoned to national security headquarters in the capital.

"I was told...that they knew where my family is in Damascus," said orthopaedic surgeon Mohammed al-Hanash, giving public testimony which would have been impossible before the fall of Assad's government on December 8.

Emergency and intensive care specialist Hassan Oyoun said that "when I arrived before the investigator...his gun was on the table pointing towards me". "I immediately understood what was being asked for and that the objective was for us to say" there had been no chemical attack," he said.

Muwafaq Nisrin, 30, who worked as an emergency responder and nurse in 2018, said: "I was under pressure because my family lives in Douma - like most of the medical personnel's families".

The attack targeted a building near a field hospital, where the wounded were taken and where the three personnel were among those working.

A video soon circulated online showing chaos at the facility, with medics treating the wounded including children, and a man spraying people with water.

Assad's government called the images "fake", and security services questioned those who appeared in the video, including the medical staff whom AFP met.

In January last year, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) blamed the Damascus government for the attack, which killed 43 people.

Investigators said there were "reasonable grounds to believe" that at least one Syrian air force helicopter had dropped two cylinders of the toxic gas on Douma.

Damascus and ally Moscow said the attack was staged by rescue workers at the behest of the US, which afterwards launched air strikes on Syria, as did Britain and France.

"A team of us doctors who were at the hospital went to the national security building and met an investigator, and we tried as much as possible to give vague answers,"



Intensive care specialist Hassan Oyoun and Orthopaedic surgeon Mohammed al-Hanash (right) prepare to walk into a tunnel at a previous makeshift hospital in Douma, east of the Syrian capital Damascus.



Muwafaq Nisrin, a veterinary student who worked as an emergency responder and nurse, in Douma during an attack in 2018, sits at his house in Douma.

Hanash said. "I was asked, for example, what happened that day... I told them that I was in the operating room," where chemical attack victims would not have been taken, he added.

Oyoun said that "all those at the hospital at the time were put under intense pressure, reaching barely concealed threats".

"We denied the incident...we avoided responding to certain questions, such as 'where were the dead taken?'" he said, and tried to blame cases of suffocation on "the dust, the dirt and the smoke from the fighting". Nisrin, seen in the video helping a girl in extreme distress, said the authorities "told us that no chemical attack happened" and that they "wanted to end this story and deny it so that Douma could turn a new page".

The OPCW watchdog said an "elite" Syrian unit known as the Tiger Force had launched the attack during a military offensive to reclaim Douma, and that rebels had agreed to withdraw the day afterwards. All three medical personnel said that after the first round of questioning, they were told to repeat their responses in front of a camera as testimony for an investigating committee working with the OPCW. The footage was "edited and some passages were deleted or taken out of context to serve the point of view" of the authorities,

Hanash said, and broadcast on state television the following day.

The trio found themselves turned into false witnesses for the very government whose overthrow they had hoped for. On April 14, the trio - among 11 members of the medical personnel who were not allowed to return to Douma - were told an OPCW fact-finding mission would interview them at a Damascus hotel.

But hopes of telling the true story were dashed when authorities put recorders in their pockets or ordered them to record the interview on their phones.

"They forced us to repeat the story that they wanted," Hanash said. Days later, authorities told them they would go to the Netherlands, where the OPCW is based, to testify "on neutral ground". On April 25, with several other witnesses, they travelled to The Hague via Moscow.

"We expected to meet the investigating committee behind closed doors, but were shocked" to find it was "an open session for members" of the OPCW, Hanash said.

Russia at the time had said Damascus would put forward witnesses to demonstrate that footage of the attack was fabricated.

The OPCW last year said its investigators "considered a range of possible scenarios" and concluded that "the Syrian Arab Air Forces are the perpetrators of this attack".

OPCW investigators have concluded that chemical weapons were used or likely used in 20 instances in Syria. The medics said the findings eased a burden they had been struggling with for years.

Hanash said he and his colleagues had waited a long time for "the security grip upon us to lift and for the day we could talk truthfully about what happened".

"We were happy... that our testimony did not impact the course of the investigation," he said.

But until those who carried out the attack are punished, "the joy is incomplete".

Jordan offers Syria support in meeting with new leader

Reuters
Damascus

Jordan stands ready to help Syria rebuild, its foreign minister said after meeting Syria's new de facto ruler Ahmed al-Sharaa in Damascus yesterday, the highest-level contact by an Arab state with Syria's new administration.

Qatar's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs HE Dr Mohammed al-Khulaifi also arrived in Damascus yesterday for meetings aboard the first Qatar Airways flight to land in the Syrian capital since former president Bashar al-Assad was toppled, the Qatari foreign ministry spokesperson said on X.

The meetings further widen the diplomatic contacts of the new administration established after Sharaa's Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) group, led a decisive rebel offensive that overthrew Assad after more than 13 years of war.

Turkiye, which long backed



Jordan's Foreign Minister Ayman al-Safadi meets with Syria's de facto new ruler Ahmed al-Sharaa in Damascus, in this handout released yesterday.

the Syrian opposition, was the first state to send its foreign minister to Damascus.

Sharaa, also known by his nom de guerre Abu Mohammed al-Golani, wore a suit and tie during the meeting with Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman al-Safadi, photos posted on social media by the Jordanian Foreign Ministry showed. "Our talks were clear that we in the Kingdom are ready to provide support," he said after the meeting, adding that the new Syrian administration must have the opportunity to develop its

plans. "I focused on reconstruction efforts and Jordan will provide aid," Safadi added.

Syria's stability is a key security concern for Jordan, a US allied state which borders the country to the south.

Safadi said he agreed with Sharaa on co-operating to counter the smuggling of drugs and weapons from Syria to Jordan - a problem for years under Assad.

Safadi also noted that Islamic State, with which Sharaa's group clashed earlier in the Syrian war, remained a threat.

Mobile cinema brings Tunisians big screen experience

AFP
Djemmal

Like many of his fellow Tunisians, 23-year-old Amine Elhami has never been to the cinema, but now, thanks to a mobile theatre touring the country, he can finally enjoy the big screen.

The bright red truck of CinemaT'dour, or "moving cinema", has transformed parking lots and factory grounds in underserved towns and neighbourhoods across the North African country into pop-up theatres.

In the central town of Djemmal, dozens of workers unloaded the expandable truck, easily setting up a fully equipped outdoor movie theatre with 100 seats.

"The screen is huge, and the sound effects are amazing," said Elhami, who had so far only watched films on his phone or computer.

He had "never had the chance to go to a movie theatre", he said.

"It's a fantastic experience, especially because I'm watching with friends." Movie theatres are scarce in Tunisia, numbering at just 15 and largely concentrated in major urban hubs.

Recognising this gap, Cin-



Factory workers line up to watch a film at CinemaT'dour's mobile theatre, in Tunisia's town of Djemmal.

emaT'dour was launched in May by private cultural network Agora and nonprofit Focus Gabes, with funding from private donors.

"We wanted a way to reach as many viewers as possible, in a short time and on a limited budget, while offering them an authentic cinematic experience," project director Ghofrane Heraghi said.

Mobile cinemas have long existed in other countries, but Heraghi said CinemaT'dour was "unique" for turning a truck

into a full-fledged theatre.

Without government funding, CinemaT'dour relies heavily on partnerships with private companies to cover costs like film rights, maintenance and staffing.

The truck itself was purchased on credit for about 1mn Tunisian dinars (\$315,000), Heraghi said, with annual operating expenses of around 500,000 dinars.

For 10 days in Djemmal, residents could watch films for free thanks to a partnership with German car parts manufacturer

Draxlmaier, which has a factory in the town.

Jihene Ben Amor, Draxlmaier's communications manager in Tunisia, said the company wanted to "contribute to the development" of remote and underserved regions where it operates.

For many workers, earning up to 1,000 dinars a month, the cost of tickets and the journey to a main city with a movie theatre can be prohibitive.

"Having this cinema right outside their workplace also gives workers a sense of pride and belonging," said Ben Amor.

'SOCIAL IMPACT'
After Djemmal, CinemaT'dour set up in Hay Hlel, an impoverished neighbourhood of the capital Tunis.

Many children gathered around the pop-up theatre, eager for their turn.

Yomna Warhani, 11, was beaming with excitement, anticipating her first ever movie screening.

"I can't wait to see what it's like inside and what films they'll show," she said.

Nejiba El Hadji, a 47-year-old mother of four, said: "It's not just the kids who are thrilled, believe me." To her, the mobile cinema was a rare source of joy in an otherwise bleak environment.

"We have nothing here, no cultural centres and no entertainment, just the streets," said Hadji. "People say our kids are lost, but no one does anything about it."

CinemaT'dour's two-week stay in Hay Hlel was funded by the World Health Organisation, with screenings themed on mental health, smoking and drug abuse, and violence against women.

The shows were tailored for younger audiences as well as for viewers with hearing or visual impairments.

Heraghi, the project head, said that "what drives us is the social impact of culture."

"We want to break stereotypes, shift mindsets, and promote values like social cohesion and community spirit." In just a few months, CinemaT'dour has reached more than 15,000 people, including 7,500 in the southern oasis town of Nefta where a month of free screenings was sponsored by a date exporter.

The project now hopes to secure funding for additional trucks to expand its activities across the country.

But Heraghi has even bigger aspirations, she said, "taking it to Algeria, Libya, and maybe even across Africa".

TRAGEDY Nine killed in Iran as bus, fuel truck collide

At least nine people were killed yesterday when a bus collided with a fuel truck in Iran's southeast, state media reported, the second mass casualty road accident within days, AFP reported from Tehran. Mohammad Mehdi Sajjadi, head of the Red Crescent Society in Sistan-Baluchestan province, told the official IRNA news agency that "nine people lost their lives and 13 others were injured in the accident in which a bus collided with a fuel truck near Zahedan".

CONCERN South Sudan affected 'by refugee influx and cholera outbreaks'

South Sudan is facing a "completely overwhelming" influx of refugees from war-torn Sudan as well as a rapidly growing cholera epidemic, Doctors Without Borders (MSF) warned yesterday, AFP reported from Nairobi. The medical charity said up to 5,000 people were crossing the border every day. The United Nations recently put the figure even higher at 7,000-10,000 a day.

Mozambique's top court confirms ruling party win in disputed election

Reuters
Maputo

Mozambique's top court yesterday confirmed the ruling party Frelimo's victory in an October election, which has sparked massive protests by opposition groups who say the vote was rigged.

The Constitutional Council has the final say over the electoral process and its ruling is likely to spark further protests in Mozambique, a Southern African country of close to 35mn people that Frelimo has governed since 1975.

Western observers said the election was not free and fair, and the post-election period has seen the biggest protests against Frelimo in Mozambique's history.

At least 130 people have been killed in clashes with police, according to the civil society monitoring group Plataforma Decide.



A protestor holds a machete as he gestures next to a burning barricade in Maputo yesterday.

Outside the conference centre in the capital Maputo, where a senior Constitutional Council judge announced that Frelimo's Daniel Chapo was president-elect

and the party had retained its majority in parliament, the streets were deserted amid a heavy police presence.

But footage on local broadcaster



Protesters gather next to a burning barricade in Maputo yesterday.

TV Sucesso Moz showed protesters had taken to the streets in the northern city of Nacala-Porto within an hour of the announcement and in other areas of the capital.

In its final tally, the Constitutional Council said Chapo had secured about 65% of the vote, lower than the figure of more than 70% given by the electoral commission in late October. It also gave Frelimo fewer seats in the parliament than the commission did, without explaining why it had made those changes. Frelimo has consistently been accused by opponents

and election observers of rigging votes since it first allowed elections in 1994, although it has repeatedly denied those accusations. The electoral commission has not commented on allegations of fraud in this election. Chapo told a Frelimo gathering that as president he would work to improve the lives of Mozambicans.

A representative of opposition leader Venancio Mondlane, who the Constitutional Council said came second in the presidential election with about 24% of the vote, rejected the results announced yesterday. "We never

thought that the electoral truth would be trampled. The will of the people was obliterated," Judite Simao said. The post-election unrest has already affected the operations of foreign companies including the Australian mining firm South32 and led to the temporary closure of the main border crossing with neighbouring South Africa.

A senior International Monetary Fund official told Reuters Mozambique's 2024 economic growth would likely be below a previous 4.3% forecast because of the unrest and the impact of this month's Cyclone Chido.

Emergency response activated as Lassa fever kills 190 this year

Nigeria has launched an emergency response centre after recording 190 deaths from Lassa fever, a viral haemorrhagic illness, the country's disease control agency said yesterday, Reuters reported from Lagos.

The disease, mainly transmitted to humans via contact with food or household items contaminated with rodent urine or excrement, has infected 1,154 people in six Nigerian states.

Jide Idris, head of the Nigerian Center for Disease Control (NCDC), said the agency's risk assessment has categorised it as high, prompting the activation of the emergency Operations Centre to manage the outbreak. "While the disease occurs throughout the year, peak transmission typically happens between October and May, coinciding with the dry season when human exposure to rodents increases," he said at a press briefing in Abuja. The centre will ensure seamless co-ordination of the control and management of the outbreak. Symptoms of the virus – which can also be passed between people through bodily fluids of those infected – include fever, headaches and, in the most severe cases, death.

Nigeria govt resumes mining in Zamfara state on improved security

Reuters
Lagos

Nigeria has lifted a ban on mining exploration in the northwestern state of Zamfara after a five-year suspension, the mining minister said, citing improved security.

Mining activities in Zamfara, which holds huge gold, lithium and copper deposits, were suspended in 2019 following incessant bandit attacks.

"The security operatives' giant strides have led to a notable reduction in the level of insecurity, and with the ban on exploration lifted, Zamfara's mining sector can gradually begin contributing to the nation's revenue pool," Dele Alake, mining minister, said in a statement on Sunday.

During the suspension, he said illegal miners had exploited the state's resources.

Africa's biggest oil producer, which is also rich in gold, limestone and zinc, wants its min-



File photo shows workers crushing rocks containing gold to a fine dust at a mining site in Anka, Zamfara, Nigeria.

ing industry that contributes less than 1% of its GDP to play a bigger role in its effort to diversify the economy away from oil.

To try to encourage investors, it has introduced reforms, including revoking unused licences, offering investors a 75% stake in a new national mining company, cutting exports of unprocessed minerals, and enforcing compliance with rules against illegal mining.

In its efforts to build capacity, Nigeria at the start of this month signed a training and development agreement with France.

"We need all the support we can get, including technical, financial, and capacity-building assistance from abroad. This is not the first agreement of its kind; similar partnerships have been established with Germany and Australia," Alake said.

Cyclone death toll rises to 120 in Mozambique

AFP
Maputo

Cyclone Chido killed at least 120 people in Mozambique in its deadly rampage through the Indian Ocean last week, the country's disaster management agency said yesterday, up 26 from a previous toll.

The cyclone, which devastated the French island territory of Mayotte before hitting the African mainland, also destroyed 110,000 homes in Mozambique, officials said. It comes as the southern African nation reels from a deadly post-election crisis pitting the party in power since Mozambique's independence from Portugal against an opposition crying foul over alleged electoral fraud.

After making landfall the storm ravaged the northern province of Cabo Delgado with gusts of around 260km (160 miles) per hour, pelting it with 250mm (10 inches) of rain in a day. The region is regularly ravaged by tropical storms and is also wrestling with unrest from a

long-running insurgency. More than 500,000 of the 700,000 Mozambicans affected by the storm – which experts say was made more intense by human-driven climate change – are concentrated in Cabo Delgado.

In the hard-hit Mecufi district a mosque had its roof stripped by the gale, as seen in images taken by Unicef. The ruling Frelimo party's presidential candidate Daniel Chapo – whose win at the ballot box in October has been denounced by the opposition as fraudulent – visited the affected areas on Sunday. At least 130 people have been killed in protests against Chapo's victory in an election that international observers say was marred by irregularities, according to Plataforma Decide. That local civil society group's figures have been cited by Amnesty International.

Chapo – who is due to be sworn in as president on January 15 after the Constitutional Council approved the election results yesterday – appealed on public television for citizens across the country to donate food and clothes.

Senegal's toy makers thrive ahead of Christmas

Reuters
Dakar

Senegal's local toymakers are experiencing a boom in demand ahead of Christmas, with sellers hoping to win market share with high-quality products that reflect the country's culture and values.

Mostly Muslim Senegal has a strong tradition in which different religions share and enjoy each other's holidays. Christmas is an example in the capital Dakar, where the city is lit up with decorations in December and holiday markets draw families seeking gifts. Awa Gaye, the co-founder of the toy brand Yeewu, was among the sellers at a bustling Christmas market this month. She launched the business after having a daughter and realising there were few toys that made her feel valued.

"She couldn't see herself reflected in the toys she played with. So, we decided to create a brand," Gaye said.

Yeewu dolls are adorned with

African hairstyles and clothing, and carry inscriptions in the widely spoken local language Wolof. The idea is still new to some Senegalese parents, who sometimes ask her for white dolls or for writing in French.

Another local producer, Racky Daffe, founder of Senegalese toy brand Alyfa, is known for toys that promote Senegalese culture, like traditional wrestler figurines or dolls that come in a wide range of skin tones, including albino.

Daffe says demand is growing, but there are challenges competing against cheaper, imported products. In Senegal, there are often shortages of raw materials or financing that constrain production.

"The biggest challenge compared with global brands is that we cannot produce at the scale needed to offer these toys at a price affordable for the Senegalese middle class," said Daffe.

Distributors, who have had rising sales in the past few years, are aware of the constraints.

At Kidz Palace, a toy distributor in Dakar, chief executive Fa-

timetou Diop, said the toys sell quickly among families that want educational toys that reflect the country's cultural identity.

"The market cannot always be supplied consistently," Diop said. "Sometimes we run out of stock due to raw material shortages or financing issues. Local manu-

facturers often face these constraints."

Daffe remains optimistic that demand for Senegalese toys will remain strong, and noted that children often point out toys that look like them.

"It's really about representing an entire community. Every child can see themselves through our toys," she said.

Liquidation Announcement - Number 2

Further to the decision of the extraordinary general assembly and the approval of all partners of **Sadafco – Qatar CR No. 17278**, the company will be voluntary liquidated. The liquidator, Hana Hakam S Alzurgi hereby declares commencement of liquidation procedures.

Any creditor should present its claim for payment together with the supporting documentation to the company within **75 days** from the first announcement dated **20/11/2024** either by registered mail to PO Box No. 9639, Doha – Qatar, or by email to the addresses: **sultan.alghamdi@sadafco.com, Hana.alzurgi@sadafco.com.**

For any inquiries, please contact the legal representative on **31110654**.



A customer holds a doll of the local toymaker Alyfa Toys, at Kidz Palace in Dakar, Senegal.



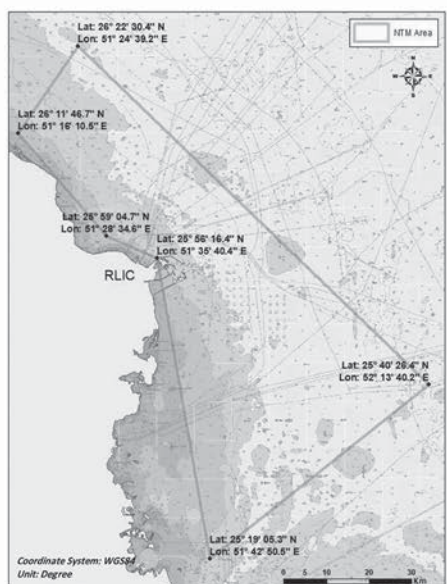
Public Announcement
To all Ships, Fishermen and Mariners
Seismic Survey Acquisition by Vessels AOS Glory, Stanford Hawk, GMS Apollo, Voyager Explorer, BGP Honor, and Safa Searcher
Seismic Survey Works Offshore Qatar from 27th November 2024 – 27th November 2025

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

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

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

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



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

Robot to assist paraplegics in walking



Kim Seung-hwan, who is himself a paraplegic and part of the Exoskeleton Laboratory team at the Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology (KAIST), demonstrates the prototype of exoskeleton robot 'WalkON Suit F1' at KAIST in Daejeon, South Korea.

Manila to acquire US Typhon missile system

AFP
Manila

The Philippines yesterday said it planned to acquire the US Typhon missile system as part of a push to secure its maritime interests, sparking warnings from China of a regional "arms race".

The US army deployed the mid-range missile system in the northern Philippines earlier this year for annual joint military exercises with its long-time ally, and decided to leave it there despite criticism by Beijing that it was destabilising to Asia.

Philippine army chief lieutenant-general Roy Galido told a news conference yesterday that the missile system would be "acquired because we see its feasibility and its functionality in our concept of archipelagic defence implementation".

"I'm happy to report to our fellow countrymen that your army is developing this capability for the interest of protecting our sovereignty," he said, adding the total cost of the acquisition would depend on "economics".

The presence of the US mis-

sile launcher had angered Beijing, whose navy and coast guard forces have engaged in escalating confrontations in recent months with the Philippines over disputed reefs and waters in the South China Sea.

Beijing claims almost the entire South China Sea despite an international ruling that its assertion has no legal basis.

Manila and Washington, long-standing treaty allies, have deepened their defence co-operation since Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos took office in 2022 and began pushing back on Beijing's claims to the South China Sea.

China yesterday swiftly condemned the decision to acquire the system as a "provocative and dangerous move" and warned it risked triggering an "arms race".

"It is an extremely irresponsible choice for the history of its own people and the people of southeast Asia, as well as for regional security," foreign ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said yesterday.

"The region needs peace and prosperity, not missiles and confrontation," she added, urging Manila to "correct its wrong practices as soon as possible".

As a rule, it takes at least two or more years for the Philippine military to acquire a new weapons system from the planning stage, Galido said yesterday, adding it was not yet budgeted for 2025.

It took five years for Manila to take delivery of the BrahMos cruise missile last year, he added.

The land-based "mid-range capability" Typhon missile launcher, developed by US firm Lockheed Martin for the US army, has a range of 480km, though a longer-range version is in development.

Galido said the Typhon system would enable the army to "project force" outwards up to 370kms, which is the limit of the archipelago nation's maritime entitlements under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

"You have to take note of the fact that at 200 nautical miles there is no land there and the army cannot go there," he said.

The Typhon platform "will protect our floating assets", he said, a reference to ships of the Philippine navy, coast guard and other vessels.

Chinese Defence Minister Dong Jun warned in June that the Typhon deployment was "severely damaging regional security and stability".

Cadbury loses royal warrant under King Charles III

Chocolate firm Cadbury yesterday said it was "disappointed" after losing its royal warrant for the first time in 170 years following King Charles III's first review of the coveted list since becoming monarch.

Campaign group B4Ukraine earlier this year urged the king to remove companies "still operating in Russia" following its invasion of Ukraine.

It singled out Mondelez International which owns Cadbury as well as Nestle and Unilever, the maker of the UK's hate-it-or-love-it breakfast spread, Marmite.

Cadbury was among 100 firms including Unilever missing from a new list of 386 royal warrant holders, although Nestle retained its warrant.

Not all those absent from the latest list, published by the Royal Warrant Holders Association, were necessarily actively removed, and instead may have ceased trading or not applied.

The review of royal warrants follows Charles' accession to the throne in September 2022 on the death of his mother Queen Elizabeth II.

Warrant holders receive "the right to display the appropriate royal arms on their product, packaging, stationery, advertising, premises and vehicles".

It is regarded as a guarantee of quality and can sway some customers to choose a particular firm's goods or services.

Cadbury, which was first awarded a royal warrant by Queen Victoria in 1854, was reportedly a favourite of the late queen.

A spokesperson for Mondelez said Cadbury had been "a part of British life for generations" and remained the "nation's favourite chocolate".

"Whilst we are disappointed to be one of hundreds of other businesses and brands in the UK to not have a new warrant awarded, we are proud to have previously held one, and we fully respect the decision," the spokesperson added. A Unilever spokesperson said it was proud of the long royal association of its brands, but that the granting of warrants was "a matter for the royal household".



Invitation to Tender

Tender / Auction Number	Subject	Tender / Auction Document Fees (Non-refundable)	Tender / Auction Bond	Tender/Auction Offer	Closing Date
AL-AWALIA/TD/2024/58	Security Services for Qatar Primary Materials Company ("Services")	1,000 QAR	66,000 QAR	Two Bids (Technical & Commercial)	31 December 2024 01:00 PM
AL-AWALIA/TD/2024/59	Repair and Replacement of Berth Rail 1.2.3 and GTSU Cranes Trolley Rail along with Berth Repair Works in Mesaleed for Qatar Primary Materials Company ("Works")	2,000 QAR	270,000 QAR	Two Bids (Technical & Commercial)	31 December 2024 01:00 PM

In accordance with the following conditions:

- Tender Documents can be collected online by sending email to tender.docs@qpmc.qa along with requested documents in point No.2.
- Tender Documents will be shared only after delivery of Deposit Slip Stamped by Commercial Bank along with Authorization Letter to the delegated person signed by authorized person as per Computer ID, Copy of commercial Registration (CR), Business License and Computer ID.
- Bids are to be submitted in two sealed (in red wax) envelopes (Technical & Commercial) and addressed to Tenders and Auction Committee. Tender reference number and subject are to be clearly written on the envelopes, provided that the last date for submitting bids is one o'clock in the afternoon on the closing day. Any bids submitted after this date and time will not be accepted.
- Tenderers shall submit the proposals to our head office located at Lusail, Building No. 108, St. No. 302, Bar/ Marina Tower, 17th Floor before the closing date. (To get the map of the new building, please scan the QR code below).
- Tender Fees are non-refundable and can be transferred online to Account of Qatar Primary Material Company - Bank A/C (4050-45311-006) at Commercial Bank of Qatar. IBAN No. (QA 18 CBQA 0000 0000 4050 651111 006). Tender reference number and subject are to be written on the deposit slip.
- Tender Bond (Bank Guarantee/ Manager Cheque) must be valid for 120 days after closing date and must be submitted in separate & sealed envelope along with technical bid and a photocopy is to be attached with commercial bid. Bids without tender bond will be rejected.
- Bids must be valid for 90 days after the closing date.
- Any queries relating to the Tender Documents must only be raised in writing, preferably by email, to the address specified in the respective Tender Document. Any response issued by Qatar Primary Material Company will be in the form of a question and answer and will be distributed to all Tenderers without revealing the identity of the originator of the queries in the Form of Tender Bulletins. Queries must be received at the address specified in the respective IT Documentation at least five (5) calendar days prior to the Tender closing date. Any queries received after such a date will be ignored.
- The amount of the Performance Bond to be provided by the awarded bidder is (10% of the contract value) and its validity period must remain valid under the contract implementation period and the guarantee period according to the terms of the tender.
- The Technical Bids shall be opened within one week of the closing date.
- Qatar Primary Material Company has the right, during the contract period, to request an increase or decrease in the amounts of the items, works or services by a percentage not exceeding (20%) of the contract value with the same conditions and prices, provided that the increase is of the same type of contracted items, works or services.
- Qatar Primary Material Company's tendering terms and conditions apply.
- For any inquiries about the tender except collecting the documents, please contact tender@qpmc.qa
- Location of the new building



For further Inquiry, please send your queries at Fax Number: 44479559 or email to tender@qpmc.qa or visit Qatar Primary Material Company website @ www.qpmc.qa

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Clear and present danger



Farmers in Moises Padilla town, Negros Occidental, central Philippines, work as Mount Kanlaon volcano spews ash into the air yesterday.

New Zealand govt rejects Cook Islands passport plan

Reuters
Wellington

New Zealand has rejected a proposal by the Cook Islands, a self-governing nation in free association with the larger Pacific country, to allow the creation of its own passports and citizenship but said it could discuss independence.

A spokesperson for New Zealand's Minister of Foreign Affairs Winston Peters said in a statement that a separate passport, citizenship and membership of the United Nations are only available to fully independent and sovereign countries.

As such, the Cook Islands could not access these things while it remains in free association with

New Zealand and would need to become fully independent for it to do so, the spokesperson said.

"If the goal of the government of the Cook Islands is independence from New Zealand, then of course that's a conversation we are ready for them to initiate," the spokesperson said. He added any decision on Cook Islands' future would be made by referendum.

The Cook Islands is a grouping of 15 islands and atolls in the South Pacific. It has a population of 15,000 and been a self-governing nation in free association with New Zealand for nearly 60 years.

The democratically elected government controls domestic and international affairs but the population has New Zealand citizenship. According to New Zealand's ministry of foreign affairs and

trade, New Zealand also has a constitutional obligation to respond to requests for assistance with foreign affairs, disasters and defence.

Nearly 100,000 people who identify as Cook Island Maori live in New Zealand currently.

In documents released first to broadcaster 1News, but seen by Reuters, Cook Island Prime Minister Mark Brown has been pushing for New Zealand to allow for the creation of the passport. Both New Zealand Prime Minister Christopher Luxon and Foreign Minister Peters have said this is not possible.

"A Cook Islands passport would raise fundamental questions for our shared constitutional relationship and shared citizenship," Peters wrote in a letter to Brown in September 2024.

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN BARWA TENDER

BARWA REAL ESTATE COMPANY WISHES TO INVITE CAPABLE AND COMPETENT COMPANIES TO PARTICIPATE IN THE TENDER DESCRIBED BELOW:

TENDER REFERENCE	TENDER DESCRIPTION	TENDER BOND	NON-REFUNDABLE TENDER FEES	CLOSING DATE
BRE/RFP/GRED/005/2024	THE CONSTRUCTION AND COMPLETION OF BARWA HILLS - BUILDING A AT LUSAIL CITY - FOX HILLS (PLOT MU/J24) CONSISTING OF RESIDENTIAL APARTMENTS AND RETAILS SHOPS (2B+G+M+5 FLOORS)	QAR 100,000	QAR 250	05 JANUARY 2025 12.00 P.M.

TO RECEIVE THE TENDER DOCUMENTS, A COPY OF THE TENDER FEE DEPOSIT SLIP AND VALID COMMERCIAL REGISTRATION OF THE BIDDER MUST BE FORWARDED TO THE FOLLOWING EMAIL ADDRESS: DEVELOPMENT.TENDER@BARWA.COM.QA

TO PAY THE TENDER FEE, IT SHOULD BE DEPOSITED INTO THE FOLLOWING ACCOUNT:

BENEFICIARY : BARWA REAL ESTATE COMPANY
BANK NAME : DUKHAN BANK, MAIN BRANCH, DOHA - QATAR
ACCOUNT No. : 200000008022
IBAN NUMBER : QA04BRWA000000000200000008022

NO OFFERS SUBMITTED BEYOND THE CLOSING DATE WILL BE CONSIDERED

TENDER BIDS TO BE SUBMITTED TO:

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India's popcorn tax formula sparks outrage against GST system

Reuters
New Delhi

India's move to tax popcorn differently based on its sugar or spice content has drawn criticism from the opposition and sparked social media outrage, with two former government economic advisers questioning the tax system introduced in 2017.

The Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council, chaired by the finance minister and including state representatives, announced on Saturday that non-branded popcorn mixed with salt and spices would attract a 5% GST, pre-packaged and branded popcorn 12%, and caramel popcorn, categorised as a sugar confectionery, 18%.

The differential rates come into effect immediately, ending confusion over rates as popcorn was taxed differently across states.

Explaining the rationale behind the decision to tax caramel popcorn at 18%, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said that any

product with added sugar is taxed differently.

The announcement, however, sparked a social media storm, with opposition politicians, economists and supporters of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government criticising the move and others creating memes and poking fun at it.

"Complexity is a bureaucrat's delight and citizens' nightmare," India's previous chief economic adviser K V Subramanian wrote on X. He questioned the rationale of the decision he said will contribute minimally to tax revenues, but inconvenience citizens.

His predecessor, Arvind Subramanian, said: "The folly is compounded because instead of at least moving in the direction of simplicity we are veering to greater complexity, difficulty of enforcement and just irrationality."

One widely circulated post on X showed an image of a branded "salt caramel" popcorn packet and said how it would send the taxman into a tizzy calculating the tax rate on it.

Jairam Ramesh, leader and

spokesman of the main opposition Congress party, said the "absurdity of three different tax slabs for popcorn under GST...only brings to light a deeper issue that the growing complexity of a system that was supposed to be a Good and Simple Tax".

A finance ministry spokesperson and the GST Council Secretariat did not respond to requests for comment on the controversy.

Gopal Krishna Agarwal, the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party's spokesman on economic affairs, said the GST Council "clarification" on how popcorn is to be taxed was in reply to a specific query on the issue.

"It is normal when basic ingredients are same but finished products attract different GST rates," he said, adding that GST has become a very efficient and effective ecosystem for enhanced and transparent tax compliance through a corruption-free and smooth process.

The GST system has run into similar controversies for its tax classifications in the past and faced questions although not on this scale.

Ancient martial arts display



Sikh youths perform 'Gatka', an ancient form of Sikh martial arts during a procession in Amritsar, India, yesterday.

Police kill three Sikh separatist militants

AFF
Lucknow, India

Indian police yesterday said they had killed three Sikh militants fighting for a separate homeland known as "Khalistan".

The campaign for Khalistan

was at the heart of a diplomatic firestorm last year after Indian intelligence operatives were linked to the killing of a vocal Sikh leader in Canada and an attempted assassination in the US - claims New Delhi rejected.

In the latest incident, the Khalistani rebels were killed after a gun battle in Pilibhit district in the

northern state of Uttar Pradesh.

The men were wanted for their alleged involvement in a grenade attack on a police outpost in Punjab state this month.

Pilibhit police superintendent Avinash Pandey said officers had surrounded the men after a tip-off, with the suspects launching "heavy fire".

Bangladesh requests India to send back Hasina for trial

Reuters
Dhaka

Bangladesh has told neighbour India that it wants former prime minister Sheikh Hasina, who fled to New Delhi in August, back in the country for "judicial process", the acting head of the country's foreign ministry said yesterday.

Ties between the South Asian neighbours, who have strong trade and cultural links, have become

fraught since Hasina was ousted following violent protests against her rule and she took refuge across the border.

Dhaka's request to New Delhi yesterday came two weeks after India's foreign secretary visited Bangladesh and the two countries said they hoped to clear the clouds and pursue constructive relations.

"We sent a note verbale to the Indian government saying that the Bangladesh government wants her (Hasina) back here for judicial process," Touhid Hossain told re-

porters, referring to diplomatic correspondence between the two countries.

Hossain did not elaborate on the judicial process.

Hasina's son, Sajeeb Wazed, did not immediately respond to requests seeking comment.

"We confirm that we have received a note verbale from the Bangladesh high commission in connection with an extradition request. At this time, we have no comment to offer on this matter," the official spokesperson of India's

ministry of external affairs said.

The head of Bangladesh's interim government, Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus, has demanded that India send Hasina back so that Bangladesh can try her for what it says are crimes against protesters and her opponents, and crimes she is accused of committing during her tenure over the past 15 years.

Yunus has also been upset with Hasina for criticising his administration from New Delhi.

Hasina faces numerous charges,

including crimes against humanity, genocide, and murder, among others. She denies the charges.

Indian foreign secretary Vikram Misri visited Dhaka this month and reiterated India's commitment to pursuing a constructive relationship with Dhaka.

New Delhi has said that Hasina came to India at a short notice for "safety reasons" and continues to remain here, without elaborating.

Bangladesh has also launched a probe into the alleged \$5bn embezzlement connected to a Rus-

sian-backed nuclear power plant by Hasina and her family, the anti-corruption commission said yesterday.

Along with Hasina, those subject to the inquiry include her son, Sajeeb Wazed Joy, and niece, Tulip Siddiq, a British lawmaker and government minister.

The allegations were raised by a writ seeking an investigation filed in the High Court by Hasina's political opponent, Bobby Hajjaj, chairman of the Nationalist Democratic Movement party.

Chery Establishes the Largest Automotive Spare Parts Distribution Center in the Middle East



On December 19, Chery Group Middle East Regional Spare Parts Distribution Center officially opened, marking the establishment of the largest spare parts warehouse in the region by a Chinese automotive brand. This milestone signifies a substantial improvement in Chery's service capabilities and responsiveness in the Middle East market. It also underscores Chery's commitment to its "Customer Satisfaction" mission, aiming to deliver high-quality vehicles and exceptional service experiences to global customers.

Establishing the Middle East Regional Spare Parts Distribution Center is a key part of Chery's globalization strategy and demonstrates the company's deep understanding of the region's market demands. Strategically located near Jebel Ali Port and Al Maktoum International Airport, this prime location allows for swift response to market needs with efficient and timely spare parts distribution. The Spare Parts Distribution Center stocks over 20,000 types of spare parts, covering a wide range of Chery models available in the Middle East, ensuring timely and accurate supply.

The Middle East Regional Spare Parts Distribution Center has state-of-the-art logistics facilities and is staffed with multi-language professionals exceeding industry standards. With 14 dispatch ports, the center significantly enhances cargo throughput. Adopting an advanced logistics management system and an optimized warehouse structure design has achieved a breakthrough in delivery efficiency, dramatically reducing shipping cycles and ensuring faster and more efficient service for customers. Furthermore, the launch of the spare parts center will further drive Chery's brand building and market expansion in the Middle East, laying a solid foundation for the company's long-term development in the region.

The official opening of the Middle East Regional Spare Parts Distribution Center and the dual-city launch of TIGGO 9 mark a new milestone in Chery's journey in the Middle East. These achievements highlight Chery's steadfast commitment to its globalization strategy, emphasizing enhanced service capabilities and product excellence. Looking ahead, Chery will leverage this state-of-the-art Spare Parts Distribution Center to strengthen partnerships with local stakeholders and drive the brand's continued development in the Middle East market.



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GULF TIMES

Navigating the risks of Digital Public Infrastructure

In recent years, the concept of Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) has gained significant attention from the international community, including the UN and the G20, as a new policy paradigm for development. But understanding the risks of DPI is crucial to ensuring that its potential benefits materialise.

The risks stem from the fact that “digital public infrastructure” lacks a clear definition. The term encompasses the many digital technologies that serve as economic and social infrastructure, from digital identification and payment systems to data exchanges and health services. As a policy initiative, though, DPI refers to a vague vision of using these technologies to serve the public interest. This could result in the Internet and technological innovation working for everyone – or just as easily turn them into tools for political control.

In discussions about DPI, policymakers often point to cases that highlight how technology and connectivity can spur development. They frequently cite India’s Unified Payments Interface, which has expanded financial inclusion and reduced the costs of digital transactions for its hundreds of millions of users.

It is also understood that such infrastructure is to be built with Digital Public Goods (DPGs), a concept that encompasses open-source software, open standards, and other non-proprietary components. This definition is partly intended to position DPIS as being “for the public” but also to enhance competition and mitigate concentrations of power in the global digital economy.

Lastly, proponents point out that DPI could bolster international co-operation, particularly as the 20-year review of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)

Policymakers often point to cases that highlight how technology and connectivity can spur development

concept poses significant risks. Ideally, governments would convene other stakeholders to create an enabling environment for DPI and safeguard users’ rights and interests. It is easy to imagine, however, that some governments will place their own interests above civil liberties and fundamental rights, using this infrastructure for surveillance and targeting in the name of law enforcement or national security. An especially pernicious example could involve the monitoring and regulation of individual behaviour through dystopian social-credit systems.

Moreover, while many proponents hope that DPI could chip away at Big Tech’s outsize power, it has also been associated with narratives of digital sovereignty that could contribute to the Internet’s fragmentation – a systemic threat to global communications. For example, one can imagine scenarios in which some governments challenge the multi-stakeholder model for governing global Internet resources like IP addresses and domain names on the grounds that they constitute DPIS.

The policy vision of DPI will continue to evolve, and ongoing discussions, it is hoped, will help identify and clarify further opportunities and risks. Initiatives such as the UN’s Universal DPI Safeguards Framework, which seeks to establish guardrails for DPI, are a promising start. But much more must be done. For example, the UN’s framework has recognised the need for continuous learning to ensure that the right safeguards are in place.

As the concept of DPI gains traction in the UN system and other multilateral organisations, vigorous and informed debate regarding its potential advantages – and pitfalls – will be essential. With clear-cut policy guidelines and protections, we can help prevent these technologies from becoming tools for surveillance and repression, ensure that everyone benefits from the burgeoning digital economy, and keep the Internet open, globally connected, and secure. – Project Syndicate

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Celebrating half a century of Malta-Qatar relations



By Simon Pullicino
Ambassador of Malta

The new year 2025 will mark a momentous occasion in the history of Maltese-Qatari relations, as the two countries prepare to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the establishment of bilateral ties. Since June 1975, Malta and Qatar have developed a robust partnership built on mutual respect, shared interests and co-operation. The two nations have forged deep ties, working and supporting each other in international fora, from economic collaboration to the promotion of peace and dialogue on various fronts.

Shared commitment to peace, security and diplomacy

Both Malta and Qatar have the same ambitions enshrined in their respective foreign policies. Malta’s second of its three strategic pillars clearly refers to the promotion of peace, security and dialogue. Similarly, Qatar’s foreign policy is based on a set of principles outlined in its constitution, which include strengthening international peace and security by encouraging the peaceful resolution of international disputes.

To this end, on the multilateral front, Malta is about to conclude its two-year non-permanent membership of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), where it continued to promote conflict resolution through dialogue, the upholding of international law, advocating for the protection of human rights, bringing to the forefront humanitarian issues and the empowerment of small states.

In addition to its role in the UNSC, Malta also played a key part, after having been chosen by consensus as Chair of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) for 2024, in ensuring that one of the last channels of communication in Europe remains open. Guided by the motto “Strengthening Resilience, Enhancing Security”, Malta hosted on Dec 5-6, 2024, the 31st Ministerial Council of this organisation, where it managed to find consensus to fill the top four leadership positions of the secretariat and institutions of this organisation.

Describing this meeting as “a proud milestone”, Malta’s Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs the Hon. Dr Ian Borg, in his opening speech, referred to the historic 1989 Malta Summit between presidents Bush

and Gorbachev which ended the Cold War. He admitted that times have fundamentally changed and that the “principles, rules that have underpinned international peace and security for almost 80 years are being questioned, challenged and actively undermined”. Nevertheless, Dr Borg reaffirmed that Malta remains a “staunch defender of peace and dialogue in the face of the seemingly insurmountable differences and challenges”.

Malta’s drive in the pursuit of peace will continue next year when it also assumes the Presidency of the European Committee of Ministers at the Council of Europe (CoE) from May to November 2025. During its presidency, Malta plans to focus on enhancing the council’s capacity to respond to emerging challenges, including strengthening the protection of human rights in the face of global political and social changes.

In a similar vein, Qatar remains one of the most prominent players in regional and global diplomacy, particularly in the fields of mediation and conflict resolution. We commend Qatar’s unwavering commitment to facilitating peace talks and negotiations, positioning itself as a neutral party with a strong commitment to achieving peaceful solutions to some of the world’s most complex conflicts. Qatar’s tireless work in the Middle East, Asia and Africa as well as between Ukraine and Russia has earned it recognition as a reliable and trustworthy mediator.

Qatar’s support for dialogue

is also evident in its hosting of numerous international gatherings such as the Doha Forum, besides actual peace negotiations. It continues to invest heavily in diplomacy, driven by the belief that peace cannot be achieved through military means alone, but must come through dialogue, compromise, and mutual understanding, something which Malta also believes in.

Qatar’s unstinting efforts for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, as well as the release of hostages and the unrestricted access of humanitarian aid are indeed admirable and commendable. Malta, like Qatar, believes that urgent progress is needed towards a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We want to see the State of Israel and a sovereign, independent, democratic, contiguous and viable State of Palestine living side by side in peace and security.

Malta and Qatar’s Thriving Relationship

The relationship between Malta and Qatar extends far beyond diplomacy, with both countries working closely together on a range of issues, including trade, investment, and cultural exchanges. The bilateral ties between the two nations have strengthened in recent years, with both governments recognising the importance of deepening co-operation in areas such as education, tourism, and sustainable development.

Throughout 2024, we had the 1st ever Session of Malta-Qatar

Political Consultations which took place in January 2024 in Valletta and led by Permanent Secretary Christopher Cutajar from the Maltese side and HE Dr Ahmad Hassen al-Hammadi, Secretary-General at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Qatar. This was followed by a considerable number of high-level visits including those of the Minister of Finance and Employment, the Minister of Education, Youth and Sport, the Minister of Health and Active Aging and the recent visit of Dr Lydia Abela, Spouse of the Prime Minister of Malta for the 30th Anniversary of the International Year of the Family Conference. This is a growing testament of the ever-growing trust between our two countries and the willingness to continue working together for the benefit of our two peoples.

From Malta’s active engagement in the multilateral front, to Qatar’s vital role in mediation and peacebuilding, both nations continue to play a significant role in shaping regional and global diplomacy. Their partnership, built over five decades, exemplifies the power of international cooperation underpinned by the shared belief that diplomacy, dialogue, and mutual respect are the keys to achieving a peaceful and prosperous future for all.

Let us continue persevering in our common endeavour to guarantee a more secure, peaceful and prosperous environment for future generations.



The first Session of Malta-Qatar Political Consultations took place in January 2024 in Valletta.

New Centrepoint, Home Centre stores at Doha Mall



Centrepoint and Home Centre launched their newest stores in Qatar last week at Doha Mall in Abu Hamour. Centrepoint's seventh store, is on the ground floor, while Home Centre's seventh store is on the first floor.



QNL hosts contest celebrating Father Amir's achievements

The Qatar National Library (QNL) has celebrated the winners of a student competition that recognised Qatar's achievements under the leadership of His Highness the Father Amir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani.

The award ceremony, according to a statement from the QNL, featured prizes for the top three winners in each competition category, which brought together primary and preparatory school students from across the country on the occasion of Qatar National Day.

Participants conducted extensive research to explore His Highness the Father Amir's pivotal role in shaping Qatar's modern identity and his contributions to education, culture, foreign policy and humanitarian efforts.

The competition was divided into two categories: poster design and article writing.

Primary school students created posters that depicted key moments in Qatar's renaissance while preparatory school students wrote essays on Qatar's economic and



social development, foreign policy, and humanitarian legacy.

QNL information service librarian Maha al-Naimi said the competition aligns with the library's efforts to enable youth to gain deeper insight into Qatar's history and the legacy of its leaders.

"Empowering youth to understand our history is essential to preserving our nation's cultural heritage," she said. "The competition highlighted the visionary leadership of His Highness the Father Amir and provided students with a platform to express their creativity in documenting his legacy."

Submissions were assessed on students' creativity and ability to showcase the impact of His Highness the Father Amir's leadership on the nation's development, as well as their effective use of sources - with a particular emphasis on referencing materials from the QNL.



ICC felicitates film stars

The Indian Cultural Centre (ICC) recently felicitated various celebrities from the South Indian film industry. The event, according to an official statement, was held on ICC premises. The actors included Khushboo Sundar, Sumalatha, Yogi Babu, Vemal, Rockline Venkatesh, Riyaz Khan, Vichu Viswanathan, Ammu Ramachandran, Azhar, and T Saravana Kumar. Director Muthu Kumar and fraternity members Bhuvan Selvaraj and Sindhu Dayalan were also felicitated on this occasion. Co-ordinating officer of the ICC and first secretary at the Indian embassy Dr Vaibhav Tandale felicitated the stars.



Registration opens for Marmi festival events

Registration for the "Al Daou" and "Al Tala'a" championships, as part of the 16th edition of the Qatar International Falcons and Hunting Festival (Marmi 2025), will begin this evening at the headquarters of Al Gannas Qatari Society in Katara - the Cultural Village.

The festival, held under the patronage of HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani and supported by the Social and Sports Activities Support Fund (Daam), is scheduled to take place from January 1-February 1 at Sabkhat Marmi in the Sealine Area.

Registration and inspection for the "Al Daou" and "Al Tala'a" championships will continue until December 26.

Online registration for these events is open until 11pm on December 25.

Meanwhile, registration for the "Haddad Al Tahaddi" championship, which started yesterday, continues until December 26.

However, registration for the Saluki Race has officially closed. Haddad Al Tahaddi Committee chairman Shawqi al-Kaabi said that the second day of registration saw a high turnout, as expected, following strong participation on the first day.

He stressed that registration for Haddad Al Tahaddi will continue until Thursday evening in Katara.

"We saw registrations from competitors across the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) countries, which is a promising sign of an exciting competition ahead between falcons and homing pigeons on the field," he said.

"The registration witnessed significant and expected turnout for the various races, including the hybrid and Arabian categories," said Ibrahim Khalil al-Tamimi, a member of the Saluki Race Committee.

"We anticipate a thrilling race and wish all participants success," he added. "The Saluki Race is a vital part of the Marmi Festival, attracting a dedicated audience due to its excitement, challenge, and entertainment."



Philippine ambassador at Winter Cup Football Tournament

Philippine ambassador Lilibeth V Pono graced the Winter Cup Football tournament at the Al Jazeera Academy in Abu Hamour recently (December 18).

In her remarks, the envoy noted the value of sports in building character and in promoting camaraderie.

The embassy said that the event was organised by Pinoy Young Futboleros Qatar, a community group dedicated to promoting football. Pono noted the recent strides made by Fili-



pino athletes on the global stage, highlighting the increasing competitiveness of the sports-loving country's national athletes.

"Sports teaches you the importance of discipline and hard work while having fun" she said. "You will only get better over time, and if you push a little bit harder, we might even see you make it to our national football team."

