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BUSINESS | Page 1

Qatar is set for
economic growth in
2025, says Althaf

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MoPH, WHO develop modern occupational medicine programme

QNA
Doha

The Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) has developed an advanced occupational and environmental medicine programme in collaboration with the World Health Organisation (WHO)'s Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean. The programme is one of the outputs of the occupational health objectives outlined in the Second National Health Strategy.

MoPH said that a work plan has been established to implement the advanced programme as part of the Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Initiative, a priority under the National Health Strategy 2024-2030.

A scientific committee, comprising MoPH staff, an expert from the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean, and WHO representatives, was formed to study and outline a mechanism for the programme's national implementation and to identify trainees, targeting specialists and consultants in occupational medicine, family medicine, and community medicine.

The advanced occupational and environmental medicine programme is the first of its kind in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region.

In this context, the MoPH recently organised a training workshop for trainers on the advanced occupational and environmental medicine programme, in collaboration with

the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean and the WHO Country Office in Qatar.

The workshop was part of the strategy to build national capacity in the field of occupational health in Qatar. The ministry's Occupational Health Section, in partnership with the WHO, developed the advanced occupational and environmental medicine curriculum to equip healthcare professionals with the skills necessary to identify and manage occupational injuries and diseases, as well as to conduct occupational and environmental exposure assessments.

The ministry's Occupational Health Section, in partnership with the WHO, developed the advanced occupational and environmental medicine curriculum to equip healthcare professionals with the skills necessary to identify and manage occupational injuries

The workshop aimed to update knowledge and skills in occupational and environmental medicine by sharing experiences among participants from diverse work environments. It reviewed and clarified concepts such as occupational diseases and work-related illnesses, standardised the understanding of occupational health and safety concepts, and addressed professional practices in preventive and therapeutic occupational and environmental medicine. It also identified challenges in applying these practices at the national level.

In his opening remarks at the workshop, Acting Director of the Health Promotion Department at MoPH, Dr Salah Alyafei, welcomed WHO representatives and praised the collaboration between the ministry, the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean, and the WHO Country Office in Qatar in achieving the Qatar National Vision 2030. **To Page 5**



The team that worked to develop the new programme

Qatar slams US truck ramming incident

Qatar has strongly condemned the truck ramming incident that took place in New Orleans, US, which resulted in deaths and injuries. In a statement yesterday, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs reiterated Qatar's stance rejecting violence, terrorism and criminal acts, regardless of the motives and reasons. The ministry expressed Qatar's condolences to the families of the victims, the government and people of the US, and wished a speedy recovery for the injured. **(QNA)**

10 killed in US truck ramming attack

A driver crashed his pickup truck into a crowd celebrating New Year's Day in New Orleans' French Quarter and opened fire, killing 10 people and injuring more than 35, in an early morning attack the FBI said was a potential act of terrorism. The suspect died after a shootout with police. The incident occurred at 3.15am at the intersection of Canal and Bourbon Streets, a historic tourist destination. The driver fired at police and struck two police officers who were in stable condition. **Page 7**

Russian gas era in Europe ends

Russian gas exports via Soviet-era pipelines running through Ukraine came to a halt on New Year's Day, marking the end of decades of Moscow's dominance over Europe's energy markets. The gas had kept flowing despite nearly three years of war, but it had stopped at 0500 GMT after Ukraine refused to renew a transit agreement. The last remaining EU buyers of Russian gas via Ukraine, such as Slovakia and Austria, have arranged alternative supply. **Page 11**

Syria civil war killed more than 528,500

More than 528,500 people were killed in the Syrian civil war, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights war monitor said yesterday. The overall toll includes thousands killed since 2011 that were only confirmed dead recently, with access to detention centres and mass graves easier following the rebel overthrow of Bashar al-Assad. The Britain-based monitor said 6,777 people, more than half of them civilians, were killed in 2024 in fighting in Syria.

Dozens more killed in Israeli air strikes; toll 45,533

AFP/Reuters
Gaza Strip

Gaza's civil defence agency said an Israeli air strike killed at least 15 people in the territory's north yesterday, in what it called the first deadly attack of the New Year.

"The world welcomed the New Year with celebrations and festivities, while we witnessed 2025 begin with the first Israeli massacre in the town of Jabalia just after midnight," agency spokesman Mahmud Bassal said.

"Fifteen people were martyred and more than 20 were injured" in the strike on a house where displaced people were living, he said.

Since October 6, the military has been conducting a major land and air offensive in northern Gaza, particularly targeting Jabalia and its adjacent refugee camp.

Two further Israeli strikes in Gaza yesterday killed another 10 people, including children, the civil defence agency said.

On Monday, UN human rights

experts said the "siege" appears to be part of an effort "to permanently displace the local population as a precursor to Gaza's annexation".

Bassal said those living in the Jabalia house were members of the Badra, Abu Warda and Taroush families who had sought refuge there.

Nearly all of Gaza's 2.4mn people have been displaced at least once since the war began on October 7 last year.

"The house has turned into a pile of debris," said Jibri Abu Warda, adding that the strike hit at around 1am Tuesday.

"It was a massacre, with body parts of children and women scattered everywhere. They were sleeping when the house was bombed," Abu Warda said.

"We don't want aid, we want the war to stop. Enough with the bloodshed! Enough!" said Khalil Abu Warda, a relative of the deceased.

The assault, which began on October 6 in Jabalia, has since expanded across the north of the territory.



Rain water pools around the tents housing displaced Palestinians at a makeshift camp in Khan Younis, in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday.

On Friday, the military raided Kamal Adwan Hospital in Beit Lahia, emptying it of its last staff and patients.

Those detained included the hospital's director, Hossam Abu Safiyeh, a 51-year-old paediatrician.

"Around me there's nothing

but rubble and destruction. People don't know what to do, don't know where to go. And they don't know how to survive," said Jonathan Whittall, a UN aid official in a video released after he visited the Indonesian Hospital in north Gaza.

Several displaced Gazans said they were facing not just Israeli

Shop Qatar opens with fanfare



Shop Qatar opened yesterday with live performances by renowned artists, exciting competitions and a fountain show at Place Vendome. The month-long event will run until February 1 at various malls and shopping centres across the country, offering an array of promotions and special discounts, in addition to raffle draws with huge prizes.

PICTURE: Shaji Kaymkulam

Falcons and Hunting festival starts

The 16th edition of Qatar International Falcons and Hunting Festival (Marmi 2025) kicked off yesterday at Marmi area in Sealine and will continue until Feb 1, 2025.

Held under the patronage of HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, the event is supported by the Social and Sport Contribution Fund (Daam) and organised by Al Gannas Qatari Society. It commenced with Haddad Al Tahaddi contest in which 23 groups are competing, but the event did see the Farkh Shaheen falcons winning despite the intense competition, with the second group contests scheduled for today.

In his remarks to Qatar News Agency

(QNA), Marmi Festival chairman, Miteb Mubarak al-Qahtani, underlined that the falconry legacy will steadfastly continue to garner new generations of children and young people, affirming that the event is annually held to instil falconry in their hearts to be true guardians of this legacy, especially since the record turnout from visitors manifests the community's interest in this deep-rooted popular legacy.

Al-Qahtani stressed the importance of this festival on the map of major events that are held in Qatar, along with the successes achieved year after year and the huge turnout from members of the Qatari and Gulf communities. **Page 4**

15 world championships among QOC's 2025 events calendar

The Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC) has revealed its 2025 sports events calendar, featuring a robust lineup of 84 events, including 15 world-class championships. Among the most anticipated events are the ITTF World Table Tennis Championships, scheduled from May 17-27, 2025, across Lusail Multipurpose Arena, Qatar University Arena, and Qatar Sports Arena. Additionally, Qatar will host the FIFA U-17 World Cup from November 5-27, 2025, at the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 stadiums.

The year will open with the finals of King of the

Court beach volleyball tournament, organised by the Qatar Volleyball Association in early January, followed by the Beach Pro Tour Elite16 in February. February also features the Commercial Bank Qatar Masters, hosted by the Qatar Golf Association, the Qatar ExxonMobil Open for Men and Qatar TotalEnergies Open for Women, organised by the Qatar Tennis, Squash, Padel and Badminton Federation. Meanwhile, the HH The Amir's Shooting Cup and the Lusail Shotgun Championship will be held by the Qatar Shooting & Archery Association. **Sport Page 1**

Gaza population down by 6%

The population of Gaza has fallen 6% since the war with Israel began nearly 15 months ago as about 100,000 Palestinians left the enclave while more than 55,000 are presumed dead, according to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS). As such, the population of Gaza has declined by about 160,000 during the course of the war to 2.1mn, with more than a million or 47% of the total children under the age of 18, the PCBS said.

bombardments but also falling temperatures and heavy rains, which have flooded thousands of tents across the territory.

Israel's military campaign has killed at least 45,533 people in Gaza, most of them civilians, according to figures from the Gaza health ministry which the UN considers reliable.



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2 DAYS ONLY
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QAR 37.50
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سمك قاروص متوسط
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في تاريخ 02.01.2025



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Farmed Prawns
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QAR 20
قطع لحم بقري
برازيلي 1 كيلو
Beef Cubes
Brazil 1kg



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QAR 20
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كيك موس صغير منوع
(فانيليا/شوكولاتة/فراولة 1 قطعة)
Mousse Cake Asstd Small 1pc
(Vanilla/Chocolate/Strawberry)



QAR 15.00-
QAR 10
بيتزا ٣ مكونات كبيرة
1 حبة
3 Topping Pizza
Large 1pc



QAR 17.25-
QAR 10
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٤٣٣
Kiri Portion Cheese
24P 432gm



QAR 20.00
QAR 15
كيت كات شوكولاتة
١٧.٧ غرام / ١٦ قطعة
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Chocolate 17.7gm X 16pcs

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QAR 17.50
QAR 10.00
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٣٣٠ جرام
Nestle Nesquik
Cereals 330gm



QAR 20
جورمييه ستريپس الدجاج
منوع 1 كيلو / 1 حبة
Gourmet Chicken
Strips Asstd 1kg X 1pc



QAR 31.50
QAR 20
روبال صدور دجاج طرية
٢ كيلو
Royal Tender
Chicken Breast 2kg



QAR 42.00
QAR 20
لندن دايري آيس كريم منوع
٥٠٠ مل / حبتان
London Dairy Ice Cream
Asstd 500ml X 2pcs

٤ أيام فقط
4 DAYS ONLY
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QAR 30.00
QAR 20
جولدن آرز بسمي
٥ كيلو
Golden Basmati
Rice 5kg



QAR 15
إريال مسحوق غسيل برائحة
اللافندر ٢.٢٥ كيلو
Ariel Washing Powder
Green Lavender 2.25kg

٧ أيام فقط
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في تاريخ 02.01.2025



QAR 14.00
QAR 10.00
ماجى نودلز بنكهة الدجاج / الكاري
١٠ حبات / ٧٧ غرام
Maggi Noodles
Chicken/Curry 77gm X 10pcs

٥ أيام فقط
5 DAYS ONLY
في تاريخ 02.01.2025



QAR 56.00
QAR 30
آر أس زيت زيتون
٨٠٠ مل + ٢٠٠ مل / حبتان
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(800ml + 200ml) X 2pcs

يوم واحد فقط
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في تاريخ 02.01.2025



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QAR 5.50
موز أصفر (نندران)
هندي 1 كيلو
Banana Yellow
(Nendran) India 1kg



QAR 9.50
QAR 6.75
تفاح بينك ليدي
نيوزيلندي 1 كيلو
Apple Pink Lady
New Zealand 1kg



QAR 24.25
QAR 10.00
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٣٠٠ مل
Johnson's Hand Wash
500ml + 300ml



QAR 24.25
QAR 20.00
بانتن شامبو منوع
٧٠٠ مل / 1 حبة
Pantene Shampoo
Asstd 700ml x 1pc



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QAR 7.50
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كولومبي 1 باكيت
Golden Berry
Colombia 1pkt



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QAR 1.75
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1 كيلو
Potato Turkey
1kg



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QAR 37.75
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باكستاني 1 كيلو
Mutton Cuts
Pakistan 1kg

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Mutton cut, India



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/كغ سمك سبيطي، محلي
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27.00
15.75^{QR} /KG
/كغ أرز الياسمين
Jasmine rice 5kg assorted



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كريستال 2 لتر
Crystal blended olive oil 2L



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Al Shamal facial tissue 180s



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/كغ دجاج ساديا
Sadia chicken 1kg



25.00
20.75^{QR} /KG
/كغ لبننة بينار 700 غم + 180 غم
Pinar labaneh 700g + 180g



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/كغ مسحوق الفسيل
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Amir receives message from British PM



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani received a written message from British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, pertaining to bilateral relations and ways to support and develop them. The message was received by HE the Secretary-General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Ahmed bin Hassan al-Hammadi during his meeting with UK ambassador to Qatar Neerav Patel. (QNA)

Qatar Charity delivers aid for flood-hit families in Mauritania

Qatar Charity, through its office in Mauritania, has provided essential food assistance to families devastated by floods in the Brakna and Trarza regions in Mauritania.

This crucial aid aims to address the urgent needs of those struggling in the aftermath of this natural disaster.

The distribution of food aid benefited 1,000 affected families, who received food baskets containing a month's supply of essential items. Speaking at the distribution event, Director of Qatar Charity's office in Mauritania Engineer Omer Abdelaziz thanked the Mauritanian government, local

authorities, and the Food Security Commission for their co-operation and support. He added that the food aid distribution is to assist the affected families.

Beneficiaries appreciated the food baskets and expressed their gratitude to the people of Qatar for their support. (QNA)



Cabinet approves draft legislation for artistic professions

The Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani chaired the Cabinet's regular meeting held at the Amiri Diwan yesterday. After reviewing the items on its agenda, the Cabinet approved - in principle - a draft law on artists and artistic professions.

The Ministry of Culture prepared the draft law in line with the state's Third National Development Strategy (NDS3) in regard to supporting and developing creative sectors.

One of the draft's objectives is to contribute to the sustainability of artists' creativity by regulating the ways in which they practise their professions.

The Cabinet decided to approve taking the necessary measures to ratify a

memorandum of understanding (MoU) for economic, trade and technical co-operation between the governments of Qatar and Colombia.

The Cabinet also decided to approve a draft agreement on organising the regular conference on the preservation of documentary heritage Doha 2025, between the government of Qatar and the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco), in addition to a draft agreement on the abolition of visa requirements for holders of diplomatic, special and service passports between the governments of Qatar and Rwanda, and a draft MoU on co-operation in the fields of labour and human resources development between the Ministry of Labour in Qatar and the Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratisation in the

UAE. The Cabinet also decided to approve an MoU in the fields of social development and family between the governments of Qatar and Jordan, as well as a draft co-operation agreement between Al Dhaayen Municipality in Qatar and El Bayadh Municipality in Algeria.

The Cabinet concluded its meeting by reviewing three reports and taking the appropriate decisions in their regard.

The reports included a report on the progress of implementing the localisation and replacement plans in government jobs, a report on the outcomes of participating in the 101 session of the Board of Directors of the Arab Labour Organisation, and a report on the outcomes of participating in the 41st session of the Saudi Agricultural Exhibition. (QNA)

Adhere to signs designated for trams, urges MoI

By Shafeeq Alingal
Staff Reporter

The Ministry of Interior (MoI) has urged vehicle drivers and passengers to adhere to traffic signs designated for the tram. MoI, in a video shared on social media handles, said that adhering to these signs reflects the commitment to traffic laws and guidelines, contributing to the smooth flow of traffic and the reduction of accidents.

In the video, Ft Lt Abdul Aziz Ahmed al-Neama, Security Patrol Officer at the Tram Stations Security Section of the Public Transport Security Department explained the signs designated for the tram. The 'Tram Only Lane' sign indicates that the lane is exclusively for trams and vehicle traffic is not permitted. The 'Keep Crossing Clear' sign is placed where the tram lines cross roads.

The sign warns drivers not to block the intersection for approaching trams. Consequently, vehicles must avoid stopping or waiting on the tram tracks. The 'Shared Lane Trams and Vehicles' sign is placed in areas where tram tracks and vehicle lanes overlap. This sign instructs drivers to exercise caution and give way to trams. "As our tram network expands nationwide, knowing how to navigate tram signs is more important than ever for ensuring traffic safety," the MoI official said.

"Tram traffic signs are crucial for maintaining road safety as following these rules helps keep everyone safe," he explained. The video further stated that "anyone who causes an accident involving public transportation vehicles shall be subject to imprisonment for a period not exceeding one year and a fine not exceeding five thousand riyals, or either of these penalties".



Falcons unable to beat homing pigeons on first day of Marmi

Haddad Al Tahadi Championship marked the start of the 16th edition of the Qatar International Falcons and Hunting Festival (Marmi 2025) yesterday morning. Held under the patronage of HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani and supported by the Social and Sports Activities Support Fund, the festival runs until February 1 and is organised by Al Gannas Qatari Society in Sabkhat Marmi, the Sealine Area.

This year, 23 groups are competing in the Haddad Al Tahadi Championship, with competitions scheduled during the festival days, taking place in the afternoon starting at 12pm. While the targeted prey of homing pigeons returned safely to their nests in Umm Ebairiya

and the falcons failed to achieve notable results within the first day of its launch, the competition remained fierce.

Several falcons demonstrated readiness and competitiveness but were not fortunate enough to secure victories or qualifications. Accordingly, no falcon could make a victory on the first day. Last year (Marmi 2024), three falconers, one from Kuwait and two from Qatar, won on the opening day.

Mutib Mubarak al-Qahtani, chairman of the Marmi festival, stressed the festival's commitment to ensuring that falconry remains a living heritage. He also noted the increasing popularity of these competitions, reflecting the community's deep-rooted interest in this

cultural heritage. Similarly, Abdulwahab bin Omair al-Nuaimi, deputy chairman of the Marmi festival, highlighted the festival's vital role in preserving and promoting falconry heritage. He added that the festival's diverse competitions, such as Al Tala'a Championship, where falcons hunt houbara bustard birds, contribute to sustainability.

Accordingly, he invited visitors and hunting enthusiasts to explore the festival site and discover its activities and competitions. Meanwhile, participating falconers expressed their gratitude to Al Gannas Qatari Society for its support and dedication to continuing festivals and championships that promote this traditional sport.



QRCS concludes participation in Spring Centers initiative

Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS) concluded its participation in the activities of the first initiative of its kind by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, represented in 'Spring Centers', held from Dec 22 until Jan 1. QRCS's participation was within the framework of its mission and vision in line with Qatar National Vision 2030 to prepare an aware and creative generation that possesses the values that enable it to serve its country and contribute to enhancing the role of youth in supporting humanitarian issues and protecting human rights at the local and Arab levels. Experts from the QRCS first-aid team presented a variety of workshops aimed at teaching students life-saving skills by properly dealing with common injuries in the school environment and society. (QNA)



QATAR FUEL ADDITIVES COMPANY LIMITED QAFAC

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

The Tender Committee of QAFAC invites qualified local suppliers to participate in the following Tender in accordance with QAFAC tendering procedures:

No.	Tender No.	Description	Collection Fees Qrs.	Tender Bond Qrs.	Bid Closing Date
1	QTC/105/24	Asphalting of Ground Surface and Roof Installation	300/-	75,000/-	19 th January 2025

Interested companies are invited to collect the above tender document as follows:

- **Collection Date** : From Thursday, 02nd January 2025 (QAFAC working days from Sunday to Thursday only)
- **Collection Time** : 09:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.
- **Location** : The Gate, Bay Tower 2, 13th Floor, West Bay, QAFAC
- **Tender Fees** : As shown above, (*non-refundable*) can be paid at QAFAC Doha Office
- **Validity** : Offers must be valid for 120 days from closing date.
- **Bid Bond** : Offers must include a Bid bond issued from a local bank and valid for 120 Days from closing date.
- **Authorization** : Tenders will be issued to authorized company personnel with the following:
 1. Official authorization on Company Letter Head
 2. Proper Identification
 3. Copy of Company's Commercial Registration
 4. Focal Point of Contact (Name, Telephone, Mobile & Email)
 5. Valid ICV Certificate (Mandatory for both tenders)

Note: "Effective from 1st July 2023, bids received from Local Companies (established under the Laws of state of Qatar with local Commercial Registration) who are not in possession of an ICV score in the ICV portal by Bid Closing Date (or commercial bid submission date if separately mentioned/notified) will not be accepted. Local Company that have been established for less than 2 years and insurance companies are exempted from this requirement. For further details please visit ICV digital Portal :- <https://icv.qa/US>

'Qatar ArtBeat' earns global recognition for QND artwork

Qatar ArtBeat, a groundbreaking artwork co-created by the nation, has officially set a new Guinness World Records title for the 'Most People Contributing to an AI-Generated Image'.

In celebration of Qatar National Day (QND) 2024, the campaign by Media City Qatar, in partnership with Google Cloud, reached over 5.4mn people and received 68,000 engagements from across the country.

With over 15,000 contributions to thought-provoking questions shared on Media City Qatar's and collaborating influencers' social media platforms, Google Cloud's cutting-edge Vertex AI platform, Gemini models, and Google BigQuery data platform transformed these diverse voices into an artwork.

The collaboration also involved analysing wider public conversations around Qatar National Day 2024 to create an awe-inspiring artwork. Achieving the unprecedented record for the 'Most People Contributing to an AI-Generated Image' required meeting

strict criteria and parameters, all of which were thoroughly verified by an official Guinness World Records adjudicator.

"This groundbreaking Guinness World Records achievement made possible through our collaboration with Google Cloud and Qatar's social media community showcases not just the power of AI, but its profound impact on the future of creativity and collaboration.

"By setting new records, rather than merely breaking old ones, we send a clear message to the world: Qatar is not just part of the future, we are shaping it," said engineer Jassim Mohamed al-Khori, CEO of Media City Qatar.

Ghassan Kosta, regional general manager of Google Cloud said: "Qatar ArtBeat not only turned imagination into reality but also set a world record. This collaboration with Media City Qatar perfectly demonstrates how Google Cloud's AI can be used to create impactful cultural experiences.

"By transforming the nation's

collective sentiments into stunning visual artwork, we've showcased the potential of AI to celebrate culture and creativity on a global stage. We are incredibly proud to be part of this historic achievement."

Shaddy Gaad, senior marketing manager, Guinness World Records, said: "This iconic record-breaking moment by Qatar ArtBeat is a truly historic achievement. Recognising the 'Most People Contributing to an AI-generated Image' highlights the innovation and collaboration that brought this project by Media City Qatar, in partnership with Google Cloud, to life. It is a testament to Qatar's ability to unite the nation around a creative and groundbreaking initiative."

Between December 9 and 17, 2024, the Qatar ArtBeat activation invited the public to share their thoughts by responding to questions like "What does Qatar mean to you?" on Media City Qatar's social media platforms. The artwork will be projected on some of Qatar's most iconic landmarks,



GWR winning 'Qatar ArtBeat' artwork.

while also reaching a global audience via Media City Qatar's digital channels.

Qatar ArtBeat exemplifies Media City Qatar's mission to be a

catalyst for next-generation media, innovation, and diverse voices, and contribute to the nation's economic diversification. By integrating advanced technologies

with community engagement, Media City Qatar positions itself as a leader in the media and technology landscape.

Lusail Boulevard fireworks show lights up the skies



Lusail Boulevard captivated the city last night with Qatar's largest fireworks display, illuminating the sky with a dazzling spectacle of light and sound.

The celebration seamlessly blended creativity and revolutionary technology, which provided an unforgettable finale to 2024 for 300,000 spectators.

The celebrations began with a laser show at 6pm, followed by a theatrical performance from 7.30pm-10pm, offering a distinctive artistic and cultural experience.

At 10pm, the renowned drummer Kristina captivated the audience with her innovative musical act, marking the highlight of an exceptional evening.

At midnight, the Lusail sky transformed into a breathtaking work of art, as the fireworks synchronised with a spectacular display of pyrotechnic aircraft. Innovative technology was employed to craft innovative light formations, turning the sky into a vibrant canvas where colours and shapes blended in a dazzling visual harmony.

The celebrations featured the launch of 3,865 fireworks by drones, setting a new Guinness World Record by surpassing the required threshold of 3,204 fireworks for entry into the record book.

Lusail Boulevard saw a remarkable turnout, with visitors and residents of all ages coming together to take part in the celebration.



Qatar welcomed over 5mn visitors last year

Qatar Tourism marks several milestones in 2024

Qatar Tourism concluded 2024 with remarkable milestones, showcasing its growing influence and prominence in the global tourism landscape.

The year concluded with an impressive final tally of 5,076,640 visitors, reflecting an impressive 25% increase from 2023's 4,046,281 visitors. December alone turned in strongly with 594,079 visitors, a 14.6% rise from the previous year. The growth was driven by an additional 48,000 air travellers and 35,000 land visitors, offsetting a minor decline of 7,000 cruise passengers compared to 2023. Visitor numbers in December also surged by 74,000 compared to November 2024.

Qatar's hospitality sector achieved a new record, surpassing 10mn room nights for the first time. As of December 30, 2024, the figure stood at 10mn room nights, with the final tally expected to be bolstered by an additional 35,000 room nights on Dec 31.

Visitor demographics revealed a diverse appeal, with GCC nationals accounting for 41% of visitors and the remaining 59% coming from key international markets. Top five countries include Saudi Arabia, India, the United Kingdom, Germany, and the United States.

Qatar's commitment to innovation and excellence was recognised with three prestigious awards: the Microsoft AI Excellence Award for the Visit Qatar GenAI Chatbot Trip Concierge, the Gold Award for Best Application (Mobile/Tablet), and the Silver Award for Best Web Platform at the Mena Digital Awards. Visit Qatar also won the 'Enterprise AI Tech Awards' in the Best Use Case of Gen AI 2024 category for its Visit Qatar GenAI Chatbot and Trip Planner. The AI-powered Trip Concierge, available on the Visit Qatar website and app, provides personalised itineraries and insights in over 50 languages.



5,076,640 tourists visited Qatar in 2024.

The Visit Qatar app was honoured for its user-centric features, including the unified profile and Visit Qatar Pass, which offers up to 50% savings on experiences. These features have made the app an indispensable tool for travellers exploring Qatar. Additionally, the Qatar Tourism

Qatar's culinary scene reached new heights with the debut of the Michelin Guide in the country. This milestone affirmed Qatar's status as a global dining destination, with two restaurants earning one MICHELIN star, four receiving a Bib Gourmand, and 33 being Michelin-selected.

The year also saw Qatar Tourism actively participate in renowned international conferences, including the EU-GCC Business Forum, IBTM World in Spain, Web Summit in Lisbon, and World Travel Market in London. HE Saad bin Ali al-Kharji,

chairman of Qatar Tourism and chair of the Board of Directors of Visit Qatar said: "Surpassing five million visitors in 2024 is a landmark achievement that underscores Qatar's evolution into one of the world's premier family-friendly destinations. As we look ahead, we remain committed to enhancing the visitor experience and achieving our ambitious targets of tripling visitor numbers and significantly increasing tourism's contribution to GDP by 2030."

Abdulaziz Ali al-Mawlawi, chief executive officer, Visit Qatar, added: "This year's accomplishments represent the collective efforts of all stakeholders in positioning Qatar as a global tourism leader. From hosting world-class business events and cultural festivals to launching innovative initiatives and campaigns, we have significantly enhanced our tourism offering."

MoPH, WHO develop modern occupational medicine programme

From Page 1

He emphasised that this training reflects the Ministry's commitment to improving the health and well-being of workers, noting that workers' health directly contributes to the growth and development of the national economy and promotes sustainable development.

In turn, WHO Representative in Qatar Dr Rayana Bou Haka highlighted the importance of the training workshop in achieving one of the shared objectives between the WHO and MoPH, such as implementing programmes to enhance knowledge and skills for addressing and preventing workplace risks across various sectors. She noted that lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic

underscored the need to improve response plans to protect workers.

For her part, Occupational Health Officer at the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean Dr Rola Imam commended Qatar for leading the training of trainers in implementing the advanced occupational and environmental medicine programme.

Head of the Occupational Health Section at MoPH Dr Mohammed Ali al-Hajjaj, stated that the workshop was part of the action plan for building the capacity of health practitioners, which includes various training phases to enhance knowledge in occupational and environmental medicine among primary healthcare physicians and other specialists, thus supporting and improving occupational health practices and service delivery.

Closure of Mesaimeer Interchange Tunnel

The Public Works Authority (Ashghal) has announced the closure of Mesaimeer Interchange Tunnel for traffic coming from Mesaieed Road towards the Industrial Area Road from 2am-10am tomorrow. The closure that will be implemented in coordination with the General Directorate of Traffic has been announced to carry out essential maintenance works. During the closure, motorists coming from Mesaieed Road and heading towards the Industrial Area Road are advised to use the alternative routes shown on the attached map. Ashghal will install road signs advising motorists of the temporary closure and has requested all to follow and abide by the speed limit to ensure safety.



Long-time former Qatar resident passes away in India

Tony Alapatt (82), a long-time former Qatar resident, passed away at his hometown Thrissur, India, yesterday. He was a resident of Doha from 1978-2002 and retired as a senior engineer with the present-day Kahramaa. He is survived by his wife, Elsy and two sons, Binu and Dr George. The funeral will be held today (Jan 2) at Thrissur. He was actively engaged in various socio-cultural activities in Qatar. He graduated from TKM Engineering College and was employed with Kerala State Electricity Board before moving to Qatar. He was a life member of Pravasi and his son, Binu Tony is a senior banker currently working in a private bank in Qatar.





Awqaf opens new mosque at Al Rashida

The Ministry of Endowments (Awqaf) and Islamic Affairs, represented by the Department of Mosques, has opened a new mosque at Al Rashida Area where it spreads over an area of 7,694sq m.

The mosque can accommodate 300 male and female worshippers, according to an official statement from Awqaf.

The opening comes with Awqaf's plan to expand the number of mosques in all regions of the country, keeping pace with urban and population growth, which is in line with Qatar National Vision 2030.

With number MS 661, the mosque has a main prayer hall with space for 300 worshippers. The mosque also includes a spacious ablution place in addition to a large number of public parking lots, several of which are allocated to persons with disabilities. The entrances and exits of the mosque are disability-friendly. The mosque also has a tall minaret.

The Department of Engineering Affairs is concerned with fulfilling the needs of the regions in the country for mosques and prayer grounds while providing



temporary mosques and supervising their preservation as well as preparing the annual plan for the maintenance of mosques and imams' residences.

These are in co-ordination with the competent authorities. For mosque designs, the department takes into account the requirements of different areas along with the guidelines for green and sustainable buildings and preserving the aesthetics of heritage in designs that reflect the authenticity of Qatari and Islamic heritage by the highest standards.

The ministry's plans to build mosques also take into account the population density map along with engineering, architectural specifications and the heritage aspect within the framework of caring for the mosques to perform worship and to serve the worshippers. Awqaf's website provides the facility to search for mosque locations geographically, according to the global navigation system, through accurate and specific maps that facilitate access to mosque locations in all cities across the country.

Saudi Arabia's humanitarian air bridge to Syria launched

AFP
Riyadh

Saudi Arabia yesterday launched a humanitarian air bridge to Syria, delivering food, shelter and medical supplies, the official Saudi Press Agency reported.

The air bridge, established by the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Centre (KSrelief), aims to "alleviate the effects of the difficult conditions currently facing the Syrian people", SPA said.

Others, including the European Union and Ukraine, have also announced aid for Syria, where the United Nations said seven out of 10 people need support.

Riyadh's air bridge will "be followed by another land bridge in the coming days," said Abdullah al-Rabeah, the head of KSrelief, SPA reported. Syria has been devastated by 13 years of civil war as well as Western sanctions target-



First aid from Saudi Arabia arrives in Damascus, yesterday.

ing the government of deposed president Bashar al-Assad.

Millions have been displaced while the economy and civil infrastructure are in tatters, with a World Health Organisation analyst saying last week that approximately half of the country's hospitals are out of service.

A source close to the Saudi gov-

ernment earlier said a high-ranking Saudi delegation had visited Damascus and met Syria's new leader, Ahmed al-Sharaa, whose Hayat Tahrir al-Sham group led the overthrow of Assad on December 8, after a lightning offensive. Riyadh previously sent aid to Syria after a devastating February 2023 earthquake.

Syria's new information minister promises free press

AFP
Damascus

Syria's minister of information in the country's transitional government told AFP he is working towards a free press and committed to "freedom of expression", after decades of tight control under the country's former rulers.

"We are working to consolidate freedoms of the press and expression that were severely restricted" in areas controlled by the former government of Bashar al-Assad, said the minister, Mohamed al-Omar, after rebels on December 8 ended more than five decades of rule by the Assad clan.

Syria's ruling Baath party and the Assad family dynasty heavily curtailed all aspects of daily life, including freedom of the press and expression with the media a tool of those in power.

Reporters Without Borders, a freedom of information watchdog, ranked Syria second-last on its 2024 World Press Freedom Index, ahead only of Eritrea and behind Taliban-ruled Afghanistan.

"There was a heavy restriction on freedom of the press and expression under the regime which practised censorship. In the period to come we are working on the reconstruction of a media landscape that is free, objective and professional," Omar said during an interview with AFP on Tuesday.

He is part of the interim administration installed in Damascus by the victorious rebel coalition led by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham.

The group has its origins in the Syrian branch of the Al Qaeda group, but has sought to soften its image in recent years.

Diplomats from around the region and from the West have made contact with Syria's new rulers, who have also vowed to protect the country's religious and ethnic minorities.

Omar was previously minister of information in the self-proclaimed Salvation Government set up in 2017 by HTS in the rebel holdout of Idlib province, in Syria's northwest.

Solar-powered irrigation for trees in open areas introduced at Al Rayyan

Al Rayyan Municipality, member of the Unesco's Network of Learning Cities and Healthy Cities, has launched an initiative to plant trees in outdoor areas as part of the 10mn Trees Initiative.

The initiative is part of the Municipality's efforts to promote environmental sustainability and achieve sustainable development, where 3,963 tree seedlings have been planted in the areas of Al Karaana, Jaryan Al Batnah, Umm Qarn Al Gharbia, Al Amriya, Umm Hawta, and Markhiya Al Darb. Accordingly, a modern solar-powered irrigation system was installed in the Umm Qarn area to operate the water pumps needed for irrigating plants in remote areas without relying on the traditional power grid or generators.

The inauguration ceremony of the project was attended by Jaber Hassan al-Jaber, Director General of Al Rayyan Municipality; Nayef al-Ahbabi, member of the Central Municipal Council; Rashid bin Ayash al-Mansoor, Director of Services Affairs; Ali Talib al-Hanzab, environmental activist; and Mohamed Ajiyan al-Ghafrani, Head of the Al Karaana Office, alongside several experts, engineers from Al Rayyan Municipality, and local residents.

This initiative follows Qatar National Vision 2030, which aims to achieve sustainable development using innovative and environmentally friendly solutions. Solar energy is a key component of sustainability due to its role in reducing carbon emissions, decreasing reliance on traditional resources, and preserving the environment.

The solar-powered irrigation system is designed to efficiently provide the adequate needed



amount of water to the trees, minimising water wastage and ensuring irrigation continuity even in areas far from the electrical networks.

The system also offers flexibility to adapt to climate changes and arid conditions.

This project contributes to achieving several environmental and strategic objectives, most of which include reducing greenhouse gas emissions, decreasing air and water pollution, preserving natural resources, enhancing resilience to climate changes,

and conserving water use, especially during the dry seasons.

This initiative reaffirms Al Rayyan Municipality's commitment to balancing environmental, social, and economic development, making it a model for implementing the concept of sustainable cities. It also highlights its role as a member of the Networks of Learning and Healthy Cities, stressing the municipality's dedication to sustainable development standards and ensuring a high quality of life for the inhabitants.



Institution of Engineers (India) Qatar chapter hosts webinar on AI security

The Qatar chapter of the Institution of Engineers (India) recently organised a webinar on 'Artificial Intelligence Security' with the participation of more than 100 engineers from the country.

The chief guest, Ahmed Jassim al-Jolo, president of the Federation of Global Engineers, discussed the activities of the IEI and its contribution to Qatar's professional community in various engineering disciplines. Indian Business and Professional Council (IBPC) president Thaha Muhammed was the guest of honour. He emphasised the importance of collaboration and knowledge-sharing in navigating the complexities of AI security. He also encouraged engineers to remain proactive in adopting secure practices while harnessing the transformative power of AI. The guest of honour, Huzur Saran,

head of the Bharti School of Telecom Technology & Management, Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) - Delhi, said: "In today's interconnected world, where digital technology forms the backbone of almost every industry and aspect of life, the importance of cybersecurity cannot be overstated."

"With rising threats from cybercrime, data breaches, and evolving malicious technologies, the need for robust measures to secure our systems, networks, and data is more critical than ever."

The keynote speaker, Satyavathi Divadari, Cloud Security Leader of India, discussed cloud security, AI security challenges, and AI best practices in various aspects. She also explained emerging AI technologies in cybersecurity in the areas of healthcare AI, finance AI, retail AI, manufacturing AI, and AI-powered prediction analysis.

Ivory Coast president says French forces to withdraw in January

AFP
Abidjan

Ivory Coast President Alassane Ouattara said in an end-of-year speech that French forces will withdraw from the West African nation in January, making it the latest country to weaken military ties with the former colonial power.

Ouattara said late on Tuesday that Ivory Coast could be proud of its army "whose modernisation is now effective."

"It is in this context that we have decided on the concerted and organised withdrawal of French forces" from the country, he announced.

France has been preparing for years what it calls a "reorganisa-



File photo shows Ivory Coast's President Alassane Ouattara.

tion" of military relations after the forced departure of its troops from Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, where military-led governments hostile to the ex-colonial ruler have seized power in recent years.

In November, within hours of each other, Senegal and Chad also announced the departure of

French soldiers from their soil. Senegalese President Bassirou Diomaye Faye said on Tuesday that all foreign military presence in the country would end from 2025.

The announcement, also made during a speech to mark the new year, was the first indication of a timeframe for the closure of foreign military bases in Senegal.

"I have instructed the minister for the armed forces to propose a new doctrine for co-operation in defence and security, involving, among other consequences, the end of all foreign military presences in Senegal from 2025," Faye said. "All of Senegal's friends will be treated like strategic partners, within the framework of open, diversified and uninhibited co-operation," he said.

Truck ramming kills 10 New Year's revellers in New Orleans

AFP
New Orleans

A man "hellbent" on "carnage" slammed a pickup truck into a crowd of New Year revellers in New Orleans yesterday, killing at least 10 people and injuring more than 35 in an attack authorities said they were investigating as terrorism.

The man, who initially fled after exchanging gunfire with police, "is now deceased", the FBI said, without giving details.

Local police said the incident took place at around 3:15am (0915 GMT) in the heart of the city's famous French Quarter, which was packed with people celebrating the start of 2025.

"This man was trying to run over as many people as he possibly could," Police Superintendent Anne Kirkpatrick told reporters.

Driving at "very high speed" and in a "very intentional" manner, "he was hell bent on creating the carnage and the damage that he did," Kirkpatrick said.

The attacker shot at police, who fired back. Two officers were wounded but were stable, she said.

The FBI said it was "working with our partners to investigate this as an act of terrorism." Multiple US media quoted law enforcement sources saying the attacker had been preliminarily identified



Police investigators surround a white truck that has been crashed into a work lift in the French Quarter of New Orleans, Louisiana, yesterday.

as Shamsud Din Jabbar, but with no further detail confirmed on his nationality or motive.

The vehicle used was a white Ford F150 electric pick-up, an AFP correspondent on the scene said. The New Orleans attack came

10 days after a similar car-ramming assault at a Christmas market in the eastern German city of Magdeburg that killed five and wounded more than 200. In that case police arrested a Saudi man and said he appeared to be men-

tally disturbed. President Joe Biden called New Orleans Mayor LaToya Cantrell "to offer full federal support following the horrific news", the White House said. "There is no justification for violence of any kind, and we will



Fans from both Notre Dame and Georgia in town for the Sugar Bowl watch the investigation in the French Quarter from Canal Street after at least ten people were killed when a person allegedly drove into the crowd in the early morning hours of New Year's Day in New Orleans, Louisiana, yesterday.

not tolerate any attack on any of our nation's communities," Biden said in a statement.

President-elect Donald Trump linked the attack to illegal immigration, giving no evidence, but police have yet to indicate the nationality of the assailant.

"When I said that the criminals coming in are far worse than the criminals we have in the country...it turned out to be true," Trump posted on social media.

Trump also claimed that the nation's crime rate "is at a level that nobody has ever seen." In fact, violent crime is sharply down across the country, according to the FBI.

ICONIC NEIGHBOURHOOD
In the wee hours of the year's first day the area would have been packed with revellers celebrating in the French Quarter, a district renowned for its bars, restaurants and jazz history.

A white truck crashed through a barricade "at a very high rate of speed," witness Jim Mowrer told CBS News.

"We were in the middle of the road and managed to run off the road onto the sidewalk and into the doorway of a building for cover. We did hear gunfire, saw

police running," he said. "Once the gunfire stopped, we stayed in the alcove until the gunfire stopped, came out into the street, and came across a lot of - several people who had been hit, (we) wanted to see what we could do to help," he said.

"People we came across were unfortunately deceased." New Orleans is one of the most heavily visited destinations in the US and the incident came shortly before the city hosts a major college level football game, known as the Sugar Bowl, featuring teams from the University of Georgia and Notre Dame.

"We are going to make sure that our routes and the Superdome are safe today for the game," Kirkpatrick said.

Policing had already been heavy over the New Year's, according to the city, as authorities braced for big crowds.

The city police department had announced staffing at "100%, with an additional 300 officers assisting from partner law enforcement agencies," including on horseback and using unmarked units.

The iconic French Quarter listed special deals for New Year's.

Power restored to most of Puerto Rico: utility

Power was restored to most of Puerto Rico yesterday after a major blackout plunged the island into darkness on New Year's Eve, the US territory's electric utility said, AFP reported from San Juan. Electricity supply had been restored to at least 1.44m customers, or 98.3% of those affected, by noon local time (1600 GMT), according to Luma Energy. The power company said preliminary findings indicated a fault in an underground cable may have been the cause of the outage, although investigations continue. Puerto Rico, a Spanish-speaking archipelago, came under US control in 1898 and has faced perennial infrastructure issues, exacerbated by devastating hurricanes and a 2020 earthquake. The utility company said power had been restored to both of the capital San Juan's major airports, key water supply facilities and to at least 31 hospitals. Spokesperson Jose Perez warned, however, that power cuts could continue to affect some areas "as the power plants reach their optimum level." Governor Pedro Pierluisi said he had spoken with US President Joe Biden, and had asked for continuing Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) support. "This is a long and arduous process that requires local and federal collaboration, which is why I requested that FEMA continue facilitating the projects we have begun," he said.

Brazil's Amazon saw highest number of fires in 17 years

AFP
Rio de Janeiro

Brazil's Amazon rainforest experienced its highest number of fires in 17 years in 2024, government data published yesterday showed, after the vast biome suffered months of a lengthy drought.

There were 140,328 fires detected by satellite imaging over the year, according to the National Institute for Space Research (INPE).

That was 42% more than the 98,634 fires recorded in 2023 - and the most since 2007, when 186,463 forest fires were seen.

Despite the high number of blazes, however, there were indications that the total area that suffered deforestation could be the lowest in years.

In early November, INPE said deforestation in the region in the 12-month period up to August 2024 had fallen by more than 30%, year-on-year, and was at the lowest amount in nine years.

Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva has made pres-

ervation of the Amazon a priority for his government, which in November this year will host the UN's COP30 climate conference in the Amazonian city of Belem.

Europe's climate monitor, the EU's Copernicus Atmosphere Monitoring Service, said last month that severe drought had stoked wildfires across South America in 2024.

Thick plumes of smoke at times clouded major cities including Brasilia, Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo last year, with choking pollution that lingered for several weeks.

Drought has parched the Amazon region since mid-2023, driven by human-caused climate change and the El Nino warming phenomenon.

This helped to create conditions for the massive blazes, but experts say that most fires were set deliberately by farmers to clear land for agriculture.

Scientists warn that continued deforestation will put the Amazon on track to reach a point where it will emit more carbon than it absorbs, accelerating climate change.

US Capitol riot fugitive seeks asylum in Canada

AFP
Ottawa

An American man who absconded after being sentenced to prison for his role in the US Capitol riot is now seeking political asylum in Canada, as he hopes for a pardon when Donald Trump returns to the White House.

Antony Vo, 32, was sentenced to nine months behind bars and ordered to report to a federal prison on June 14, 2024, but instead he fled to Canada.

More than 1,500 people have been charged in connection with the January 6, 2021 assault on Congress, which sought to disrupt certification of President Joe Biden's election victory.

Vo, from Indiana, was convicted at a jury trial in Washington of four counts of entering a restricted building and disorderly conduct related to his actions.

"I knew Canada has a history of being welcoming to refugees, from Vietnam War draft dodgers to the people who hid Edward Snowden in Hong Kong," he told AFP. "So I packed up my snow-

boarding gear and drove across the border." In refugee claim documents, Vo said the riot was "a peaceful protest" that was "subverted as part of a domestic regime-change operation to politically assassinate Trump and his supporters." He added that he was "persecuted, maltreated," and subjected to an "unfair trial" over his political beliefs, and if sent back to the United States would be jailed "under inhumane conditions." The assault on the Capitol followed a fiery speech by then-president Trump to tens of thousands of his supporters near the White House, in which he repeated his false claims that he won the 2020 vote.

More than 140 police officers were injured in hours of clashes with rioters wielding flagpoles, baseball bats, hockey sticks and other makeshift weapons along with Tasers and canisters of bear spray. Vo insisted that he saw no violence.

Images on social media showed Vo and his mother Annie - who fled Vietnam in 1991 and was granted asylum in the United States - smiling inside the Capitol that day. She was arrested in

March and is awaiting trial. Vo said he hopes to stay in Canada "until the situation is safe for me to return" to the United States. "When Donald Trump takes office, I hope he pardons me and the rest of the January 6 protestors." Trump has called the rioters "patriots" and "political prisoners" and told a CNN town hall that he was "inclined to pardon many of them." Several Capitol riot defendants have seized upon Trump's election victory over Vice-President Kamala Harris to ask that their trials or sentencing be put on hold.

Trump himself, who takes office again in January, was charged with conspiring to overturn the results of the 2020 election. But the case never made it to trial and is now being wound down under the Justice Department's policy of not prosecuting a sitting president. Vo said that he had also tried to seek asylum in Argentina, Mexico, El Salvador, Vietnam, Belarus, and Russia.

"I seriously explored getting paramotoring lessons and then paramotoring from Key West to Cuba to seek asylum there too," he said in his claim.

Carter's Middle East peace legacy survives, but mostly in name

AFP
Cairo

US president Jimmy Carter, who died on Monday, left an enduring legacy when he brokered historic peace between Egypt and Israel - tepid and shaky, but unbroken even by the nearly 15-month long Gaza war.

"For 45 years we've had no war" with Egypt, said Ruth Wasserman Lande, a former Israeli diplomat in Cairo. But, she told AFP, "I would not go as far as to say it's a peace." Egypt and Israel have maintained ties for nearly half a century since the agreement.

The 1979 treaty saw Israel return the vast Sinai peninsula occupied in war years earlier, and Cairo become one of the top recipients of US military aid alongside neighbouring Israel.

But for ordinary Egyptians,

Israel generally remains a public enemy. Government officials in Cairo, for example, avoid clear references to Israel in economic briefings despite significant energy trade.

The devastating Israel-Hamas war in the Gaza Strip, which borders both countries, has reinvigorated Egyptians' long history of solidarity with Palestinians. Some analysts accuse Israel of breaching the peace deal with its actions in Gaza. Cairo University professor Mustapha Kamel al-Sayyid said the Israeli takeover of the Palestinian side of the Gaza-Egypt border in May was a "flagrant violation of the treaty".

But still, the agreement has survived and analysts agree suspending it is not on the table for either government.

On Monday, both Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi and Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu paid tribute to Carter's

diplomatic legacy, which earned him a Nobel Peace Prize.

MIRROR IMAGE
Carter made history when he hosted Egyptian president Anwar al-Sadat and Israeli prime minister Menachem Begin.

But even at the time, the reconciliation ruffled feathers and Sadat was accused of abandoning the Palestinian cause.

Forty-five years later, Carter himself is remembered differently on opposite sides of the border.

"In recent decades, Carter has primarily emerged in connection with his criticism of Israeli policy on Palestinian issues, leading significant portions of the Israeli public to view him as biased," said Ofir Winter, senior researcher at the Institute for National Security Studies at Tel Aviv University.

The Nobel laureate had infuriated Israel by suggesting that its treatment of the Palestinians could constitute apartheid.

And in his 2006 book *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*, the former US president criticised Israel's expanding settlements in the occupied West Bank.

For the same reasons, Sayyid said, Carter will be remembered as "the US president who proved the most fair to Arabs".

'NO ONE WANTS A WAR'

No Israeli flags have flown over the embassy in Cairo since protesters stormed the diplomatic mission in the aftermath of the Egyptian uprising in 2011, angry over the deaths of Egyptian border guards.

When it reopened in 2015, the embassy operated out of the ambassador's residence in the upscale Maadi district of southern Cairo. Nearly a decade later, the Israeli government still lists no official Cairo address.

A seemingly apathetic policeman directs passersby to go around the block. According to re-



File photo of Egyptian president Anwar al-Sadat (left) and US president Jimmy Carter meeting prior to talks on the Mideast situation, on April 8, 1980 in Washington, DC.

searcher Winter, Cairo has stalled on granting a new Israeli ambassador credentials, awaiting "a political climate that would allow the Egyptian president to receive him publicly".

But public animosity is one thing, and Egypt's national security interests are another.

In 1978, the Camp David Accords that preceded the peace agreement sealed Egypt's exit from the Soviet Union's sphere of influence and entry into the United States; which it has never left.

And so Cairo has walked a diplomatic tightrope since the Gaza

war began. It has often accused Israel of committing war crimes, while seeking to maintain its role as mediator without rousing too much domestic ire or angering Israel's closest allies in Washington.

When images of Israeli flags at the Gaza border stirred widespread anger in Egypt in May, Cairo's foreign ministry only said potential treaty violations are handled "at a technical level".

"Egypt holds fast to the peace treaty as a strategic choice," said historian Tewfik Aclimandos of the Egyptian Center for Strategic Studies.

Kim attends New Year celebration



North Korea's leader Kim Jong-un and his daughter Ju Ae waving as they attend a performance to celebrate the New Year at May Day Stadium in Pyongyang.

First sunrise of new year in Aceh



The Masjid Jamik Babussalam mosque is seen during the first sunrise of the new year in Lambaro, Aceh province, Indonesia, yesterday.

S Korea investigators vow to execute Yoon arrest warrant

AFP
Seoul

South Korean investigators said yesterday they would execute an arrest warrant for Yoon Suk-yeol over his declaration of martial law by the deadline of January 6, as the impeached leader vowed to fight to the bitter end.

Supporters and opponents of Yoon, who was suspended from office by lawmakers over his attempt to subvert civilian rule last month, have been camped outside the compound where he has been holed up for weeks, fending off investigators' efforts to question him.

The Corruption Investigation Office (CIO) requested the warrant after Yoon failed to report for questioning a third time, but it has been unclear whether they could execute it as the Presidential Security Service have previously refused to comply with search warrants. Yoon has remained defiant and late Wednesday appeared to suggest he would refuse to hand himself over in a statement shared with supporters camped outside his residence in Seoul.

"The Republic of Korea is currently in danger due to internal and external forces threatening its sovereignty and the activities of anti-state elements," he said in the statement, his lawyer Yoon Kab-keun confirmed to AFP. "I vow to fight alongside you to the very end to protect this nation," he added, saying he was watching the hundreds-strong protest on a YouTube live stream.

Jo Seung-lae, a lawmaker for the opposition Democratic Party said in a statement that Yoon's message was "highly inappropriate" calling him "delusional" and accusing him of trying to incite clashes.

CIO chief Oh Dong-woon said yesterday the warrant would be executed "within the deadline", which is on Monday, January 6.



A participant wearing a face mask with US and South Korean flags takes part in a rally to support impeached South Korea's President Yoon Suk-yeol near the presidential residence in Seoul.

"We aim for a smooth process without major disturbances, but we are also coordinating to mobilise police and personnel in preparation," he told reporters.

He also warned that anyone trying to block authorities from arresting Yoon could themselves face prosecution. Yoon's legal team have filed for an injunction to block the warrant and claimed yesterday the arrest order was "an unlawful and invalid act". The suspended president's die-hard supporters raced to Seoul to support him. Outside the presidential compound dozens of people - some in elaborate costume - could be seen chanting, singing and hurling vitriol at police. As night fell pro-Yoon protesters waved glowsticks and anti-impeachment placards.

South Korean officials have previously failed to execute arrest warrants for lawmakers - in 2000 and 2004 - due to party members and supporters blocking police from entering for the seven-day period the warrant was valid. Yoon has been stripped of his presidential duties by parliament and faces criminal charges of insurrection, which could result in life imprisonment or even the death penalty.



Police stand guard at the entrance to the presidential residence in Seoul.

On Wednesday, the majority of Yoon's remaining staff, including his chief of staff and special advisers, all tendered their resignations to the country's acting president - who rejected them, calling instead for unity. "This is a time for everyone to come together for the stability of the livelihood of the people and national affairs," acting president Choi Sang-mok said. The resignations were a show of discontent over Choi's decision to appoint two new judges to the constitutional court hearing Yoon's impeachment - meeting a key demand of the opposition, but branded an overstepping of the powers of the acting leader by Yoon's staff.

The suspended president declared martial law in a televised address, saying it was aimed at eliminating "anti-state elements" but lawmakers rushed to parliament to vote it down.

At the same time, heavily armed troops stormed the building, scaling fences, smashing windows and landing by helicopter. A constitu-



Participants wave US & South Korean flags during a rally to support impeached South Korea's President Yoon Suk-yeol near the presidential residence in Seoul.

tional court will rule whether to uphold Yoon's impeachment. The turmoil deepened late last week when Yoon's replacement, Han Duck-soo, was also impeached by parliament for failing to sign bills

for investigations into his predecessor. Choi took office on Friday and found himself thrust immediately into a disaster with the Jeju Air plane crash on Sunday that claimed 179 lives.

Myanmar says 2024 census shows population of 51.3mn

Myanmar said its 2024 census found a population of 51.3mn, slightly smaller than 10 years ago, as the junta prepares for promised elections amid ongoing conflict and unrest across the country, state media reported yesterday. The census, which was held in October, will be used to compile voter lists for the elections planned for this year that opposition groups have widely condemned as a sham.

"I am striving to successfully organise a free and fair election, which is the ultimate goal of the State Administration Council," junta chief Min Aung Hlaing said in his New Year speech that was published in state media. Myanmar has been in turmoil since early 2021, when the military overthrew an elected civilian government and violently suppressed pro-democracy protests, sparking a nationwide armed rebellion.

The military is fighting rebels on multiple fronts, struggling to govern and manage a crumbling economy that was seen as a promising frontier market before the generals ended a decade of tentative democracy. Last month, Myanmar's foreign minister briefed neighbouring countries on the junta's progress towards holding an election, which has been widely criticised due to the absence and sidelining of opposition groups.

The 2024 population of 51.3mn was down from a 51.5mn figure in the previous census in 2014, the reports said. The country's Muslim Rohingya minority was not included in either census. The population figure was made up of 32.2mn people counted in the census and an estimate of 19.1mn people in areas that were inaccessible due to security and transportation issues, the reports said.

"For estimating the population...high-resolution satellite imagery (ranging from 0.3-0.8m) was acquired from commercial providers in Russia, China, India, and various European countries," the census report said. The census figure is lower than an estimated 2024 population of 54.5mn from the World Bank, which is based on the United Nations World Population Prospects report. The World Bank has estimated Myanmar's population at 50.7mn in 2014. —Reuters

Taiwan's Lai says island must show 'determination' to defend itself

AFP
Seoul

Taiwan President Lai Ching-te said yesterday the island must boost defence spending and "demonstrate its determination" to protect itself, in a New Year's speech just weeks before Donald Trump takes office in the United States.

Self-ruled Taiwan faces the constant threat of invasion from China, which claims the island as part of its territory and has refused to renounce the use of force to bring it under its control. Washington has long been Taipei's most important backer and biggest supplier of arms but Trump's transactional style of diplomacy has raised concerns about his willingness to defend the island. "Taiwan must be prepared for danger in times of peace, continue to increase its defence budget, strengthen its defence capabilities, and demonstrate its determination to protect the country," Lai said in a speech delivered in front of reporters at the Presidential Office Building.

—AFP

South Korea to send Jeju Air crash black box to US

AFP
Seoul

South Korean investigators probing a Jeju Air crash which killed 179 people in the worst aviation disaster on its soil said Wednesday they will send one of the retrieved black boxes to the United States for analysis.

The Boeing 737-800 was carrying 181 people from Thailand to South Korea Sunday when it issued a mayday call and belly-landed before hitting a barrier and bursting into flames, killing everyone aboard except two flight attendants pulled from the burning wreckage.

South Korean and US investigators, including from Boeing, have been combing the crash site in southwestern Muan since the disaster to establish a cause. "The damaged flight data recorder has been deemed unrecoverable for data extraction domestically," said South Korea's deputy minister for civil aviation, Joo Jong-wan.

"It was agreed today to transport it to the United States for analysis in collaboration with the US National Transportation Safety

Board." Joo earlier said both of the plane's black boxes were retrieved, and for the cockpit voice recorder "the initial extraction has already been completed." "Based on this preliminary data, we plan to start converting it into audio format," he said, meaning investigators would be able to hear the pilots' final communications.

The second black box, the flight data recorder, "was found with a missing connector", Joo said. Officials initially pointed to a bird strike as a possible cause of the disaster, but they have since said the probe was also examining a concrete barrier at the end of the runway, which dramatic video showed the plane colliding with before bursting into flames.

A special inspection of all Boeing 737-800 models operated by local carriers was examining their landing gear after it "failed to deploy" in this case, said the director general for aviation safety policy, Yoo Kyeong-soo.

Local media reported the landing gear had deployed properly on Jeju Air Flight 2216's first failed landing attempt at Muan airport before failing on the second. The issue "will likely be examined by

the Accident Investigation Board" through a review of testimony and evidence, the ministry of land, which oversees civil aviation, said at a briefing. At Muan airport, relatives of the victims were allowed to visit the site on Wednesday for the first time since the crash.

Families were taken to see the runway and the cement wall that the plane hit, according to the ministry of land.

Hundreds of people also queued up to pay their respects at a memorial altar set up to honour the victims.

So many people came to the memorial that the queue stretched for hundreds of metres and the local cell phone network was overloaded, local media reported. Other altars for the victims have been set up nationwide.

Officials have said the bodies were extensively damaged by the crash, making the work of identifying remains slow and immensely difficult, while investigators had to preserve crash-site evidence. But the country's acting president Choi Sang-mok, who has been in office less than a week, said Wednesday the process had finally been completed, and that



The flight data recorder retrieved from Jeju Air flight 2216 which crashed killing 179 people.

more bodies had been handed over to relatives so that they could hold funerals.

"Our investigators, along with the US National Transportation Safety Board and the manufacturer, are conducting a joint investigation into the cause of the accident," Choi said at a disaster response meeting.

"A comprehensive analysis and review of the aircraft's structure and the black box data will re-

veal the cause of the accident," Choi added. US investigators arrived Monday and headed straight to Muan, with the initial on-site joint probe focusing on a navigation system known as a localiser that assists in aircraft landings and was blamed for exacerbating the crash's severity. The plane was largely carrying holidaymakers back from year-end trips to Bangkok, with all passengers Korean nationals except for two Thais.

New Year's Day parade in London



Members of the public watch the London's New Year's Day Parade event under rainy weather, in London.



Performers dressed as The Beatles attend the London's New Year's Day Parade event, in London.

Migrants crossing Channel to Britain in 2024 soar by 25%

AFP
London

The number of irregular migrants arriving in Britain on small boats soared in 2024, data showed yesterday, piling pressure on Prime Minister Keir Starmer to stem the dangerous Channel crossings. Immigration, both irregular and regular, was a major issue at July's general election, which brought Labour to power but also saw a breakthrough for Nigel Farage's hard-right Reform UK party.

Some 36,816 people were detected in the Channel last year, a 25% increase from the 29,437 who arrived in 2023, provisional figures from the interior ministry showed.

The 2024 total, however, was still well below the record 45,774 undocumented migrants who arrived on the UK's shores in flimsy inflatable boats in 2022. At least 76 deaths were recorded in about 20 accidents last year, making it the deadliest year for migrants who are taking ever greater risks to evade Britain's border control.

According to French officials, at least 5,800 people were rescued at sea last year and authorities prevented more than 870 attempted crossings. Starmer has pledged to crack down on the crossings after his election win returned Labour to government after 14 years in opposition. Upon entering office, he scrapped the previous Conservative government's controversial scheme to send irregular migrants

to Rwanda, branding it a "gimmick". Instead, he has promised to "smash the gangs" of people traffickers running the crossings and has signed a number of agreements with foreign countries to co-operate on law enforcement.

He has described the smuggling networks as a "global security threat similar to terrorism". The latest figures mean last year had the second highest number of annual arrivals since data on the crossings began to be collected in 2018. More than 150,000 people have arrived by boat in the last seven years in total. In the first nine months of last year, Afghan migrants accounted for the single largest group of arrivals, making up 17% of the total. People from Vietnam, Iran and Syria were the

next largest groups. Vietnamese migrants appeared to fuel the surge in crossings in 2024.

They made up just five percent of arrivals in 2023, well below the January-September 2024 figure of 13%. "It's often not possible to pin down a specific reason," for why the numbers fluctuate, Madeleine Sumption, director of the Migration Observatory at Oxford University told AFP.

"The reason that brought numbers a bit higher this year is partly there was some increase in the first half of the year, and then we've seen this kind of sustained increase from October, November, December, which is usually when the numbers start to settle down because the weather's not as good". More than 3,200 arrived in De-

ember alone, including several hundred over Christmas. Starmer has also set up a new Border Security Command and strengthened cooperation with European partners, including Europol. Britain has signed joint action plans with Germany and Iraq aimed at tackling the smuggling gangs.

They build on earlier agreements signed under the previous Conservative government, including with France and Albania.

Starmer's government also points to an increase in the return of irregular migrants to their countries of origin.

Some 29,000 people were returned between January and early December, a quarter more than in 2023, and a level not seen since 2017, according to the Migration

Observatory. "In terms of what the current government is doing, it's too early to tell you know whether their approach is having an impact on the numbers," said Sumption.

Starmer is also under pressure to reduce legal migration as he tries to fend off growing support for arch-Eurosceptic Farage's hard-right Reform UK, which won roughly 4mn votes during the July 4 poll -- an unprecedented haul for a far-right party. Net legal migration is running at historically high levels, and was estimated at 728,000 for the year to June 2024.

The surge has come despite Britons being told during the 2016 Brexit referendum that leaving the European Union would allow the country to "take back control" of its borders.

PM Starmer seeks to boost public morale after negative messaging

AFP
London

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer attempted to boost public morale by pledging a "year of rebuilding" while "rediscovering the great nation that we are" in 2025. In his first new year's message since winning power in July, Starmer attempted a change of tone from the doom-mongering of previous messaging.

Critics have accused his Labour government of talking down the economy, leading to a drop in business confidence.

The government has also been accused of constantly blaming the last Conservative government for the challenges it faces amid an ongoing cost of living crisis. Starmer said his government had begun the

"work of change", highlighting a minimum wage hike, clean energy projects and investments in the state-run National Health Service (NHS).

"I know there is still so much more to do and that for many people it's hard to think about the future when you spend all your time fighting to get through the week," he said. "Until you can look forward and believe in the promise and the prosperity of Britain again, then this government will fight for you," he added.

Starmer's government has had a bumpy start since its landslide election victory ousted the Conservatives from 14 years in power. "Rarely has confidence in a new government evaporated so swiftly," said the right-leaning The Times daily in an editorial. Starmer and leading members of his govern-

ment faced accusations of hypocrisy after it was revealed they had accepted gifts from a wealthy Labour Party donor while axing a winter heating allowance for pensioners on low incomes.

On the economic front, after coming to power on a pledge to boost economic growth, Chancellor Rachel Reeves has struggled to get business on side after her first budget included sharp tax rises for companies.

Data earlier this month showed the economy was stagnant in the third quarter, as lobby group CBI warned of a "steep" decline in private sector activity in the first quarter of 2025, citing the impact of the budget's tax hikes. Local elections in England in May will be the electorate's first opportunity to give its verdict on Labour's first months in government.

Chagos deal talks not only over finances: Mauritius

AFP
Port Louis

Resumed negotiations over a proposed deal to return the strategic Chagos Islands to Mauritius from Britain are not solely over financial compensation, the premier and a government official have said. After decades of negotiations, Britain agreed in October to hand back the Indian Ocean islands to Mauritius, a former colony, on the condition that a UK-US military base can remain on the largest, Diego Garcia.

But a new government took power in Mauritius last month and has reopened the talks, reportedly seeking greater financial compensation. But Prime Minister Navin Ramgoolam said in a statement on

Tuesday the talks were not only concerned with that aspect of the deal. "It is also about sovereignty and the duration of the lease. The tenant must not become the owner of Diego Garcia either," he said.

His office firmly denied figures reported in the British press, but did not give any further details. A treasury official, who requested anonymity as he was not authorised to speak to the press, rejected suggestions the talks had been resumed solely over financial compensation.

However, inflation needed to be accounted for, he said, a factor that had been overlooked in previous discussions. He did not give any further details. "It is not just a question of money but of sovereignty," he told AFP, adding the duration of the lease of Diego Gar-

cia was also important.

"The deal will have to be solidly negotiated on the basis of sovereignty, the duration of the lease and also finances," he said. Under the proposed agreement, the UK would retain a 99-year lease on the strategic island, which is home to a crucial United States military base.

Britain kept control of the Chagos Islands after Mauritius regained independence in the 1960s, and set up the military base which it leased to the United States. In doing so, it evicted thousands of Chagos islanders who have since mounted a series of legal claims for compensation in British courts. The military base has played a key strategic role as a hub for long-range bombers and ships, notably during the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Weather warning



People look at the waves in Brighton, yesterday, as weather warnings were put in place for rain, snow and wind across the UK.

2024 India's hottest year since 1901: met

AFP
New Delhi

India's meteorological department said yesterday that 2024 was the hottest year since 1901, with sizzling temperatures in the world's most populous nation following a global pattern of extreme weather sparked by climate change. "The year 2024 was the warmest year on record since 1901," Mrutyunjay Mohapatra, director general of the India Meteorological Department, told reporters.

"The annual mean land surface air temperature across India in 2024 was 0.65C above the long-

term average, 1991-2020 period." The United Nations said last month that 2024 was set to be the warmest year ever recorded, capping a decade of unprecedented heat. Climate change sparked a trail of extreme weather and record heat globally in 2024, fueling natural disasters that caused billions of dollars worth of damage.

India sweltered through its longest ever heatwave last year, with temperatures soaring over 45C. A heatwave in May in New Delhi saw temperatures match the capital's previous record high: 49.2C clocked in 2022. India is the world's third-biggest emitter of greenhouse gases but has

committed to achieve a net zero emissions economy by 2070 - two decades after most of the industrialised West.

For now, it is overwhelmingly reliant on coal for power generation. Global warming, driven largely by the burning of fossil fuels, is not just about rising temperatures, but the knock-on effect of all the extra heat in the atmosphere and seas.

Warmer air can hold more water vapour, and warmer oceans mean greater evaporation, resulting in more intense downpours and storms. Impacts are wide-ranging, deadly and increasingly costly, damaging property and destroying crops.

Ring in 2025!



People hold balloons during New Year celebrations outside a church in Ahmedabad, India.



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Deputy Managing Editor

K T Chacko

- 📍 P.O.Box 2888, Doha, Qatar
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GULF TIMES

Climate crisis also an inflation crisis

Global inflation in recent years has pushed the prices of food, energy, and basic goods to unprecedented levels. As a result, the rising cost of living has dominated political discussion around the world, but especially in G20 countries. Ahead of this year's presidential election in the United States, for example, 41% of Americans cited inflation as their top economic issue.

High inflation risks overshadowing another urgent crisis: global warming. But rising prices and climate change are closely linked. Extreme weather damages crops, spoils harvests, and drives up food prices, and its impact is growing more pronounced as heatwaves, droughts, and floods become more frequent and intense. These events also disrupt supply chains and energy production, pushing up the price of other essential goods.

Climate-induced inflationary pressures are especially acute in Africa and Latin America, where food accounts for a significant share of household spending. For example, an extensive drought exacerbated by El Niño raised the price of staples in Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia, and Zimbabwe earlier this year, creating a hunger crisis. By contrast, households in wealthier countries tend to spend a smaller share of their income on food and are thus better insulated.

Discussions about climate change often overlook its economic toll on vulnerable populations and how it deepens inequality, focusing instead on green growth and emissions reductions. But as inflation increasingly disrupts economic stability, this toll can no longer be ignored. Shifting weather patterns have raised the prices of oranges in Brazil, cocoa in West Africa, and coffee in Vietnam. A recent study by the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research and the European Central Bank estimates that rising temperatures could drive up food inflation by 3.2 percentage points per year, with overall inflation increasing by 1.18 percentage points annually by 2035.

Failure to act collectively and decisively could deepen inequality, erode economic stability, and jeopardise climate goals

Central banks and finance ministries should also work with climate organisations to create practical solutions that help cushion economies from the interrelated shocks of extreme weather, soaring inflation, and food insecurity. For example, the African Climate Foundation (where one of us works) has developed Adaptation and Resilience Investment Platforms (ARIPs), which use advanced analytics that combine climate and weather data, biophysical models, and economy-wide models to facilitate investment and policy prioritisation – a more comprehensive approach to building resilience.

The ACF used an ARIP in Malawi last year, after the country was devastated by Cyclone Freddy, the longest-lasting tropical cyclone ever recorded. Using this financial tool enabled policymakers to identify lasting solutions that would mitigate the economic damage caused by the cyclone while protecting key industries and strengthening financial stability. Other climate think tanks are pursuing similar goals. Iniciativa Climática de México is pushing policymakers to consider climate risks in economic planning, while the Institute for Climate and Society in Brazil has called for social-protection plans and climate-sensitive policies to shield low-income communities from the economic consequences of extreme weather. Equally important is regional collaboration, which would allow countries in Africa and Latin America to develop and share economic policies that are specifically tailored to their climate vulnerabilities and support the most exposed communities. Initiatives like the Inter-American Development Bank's Regional Climate Change Platform of Economy and Finance Ministries can serve as a blueprint for such efforts.

At the global level, greater coordination between climate and economic institutions is crucial. Tools like the European Union's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism highlight the need for careful policy design to mitigate adverse effects – in this case, higher costs for consumers in developing countries. Brazil, as the host of next year's Brics Summit and United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP30), and South Africa, as the current G20 president, have a unique opportunity to redefine the global economic agenda, championing policies that address the twin crises of inflation and global warming.

Failure to act collectively and decisively could deepen inequality, erode economic stability, and jeopardise climate goals. But if policymakers develop innovative solutions that bridge the gap between climate and economic strategies, they can reduce the immediate risks of extreme weather and foster long-term stability and resilience. As both inflation and the planet heat up, the need for integrated, equitable policies has never been more urgent. – Project Syndicate

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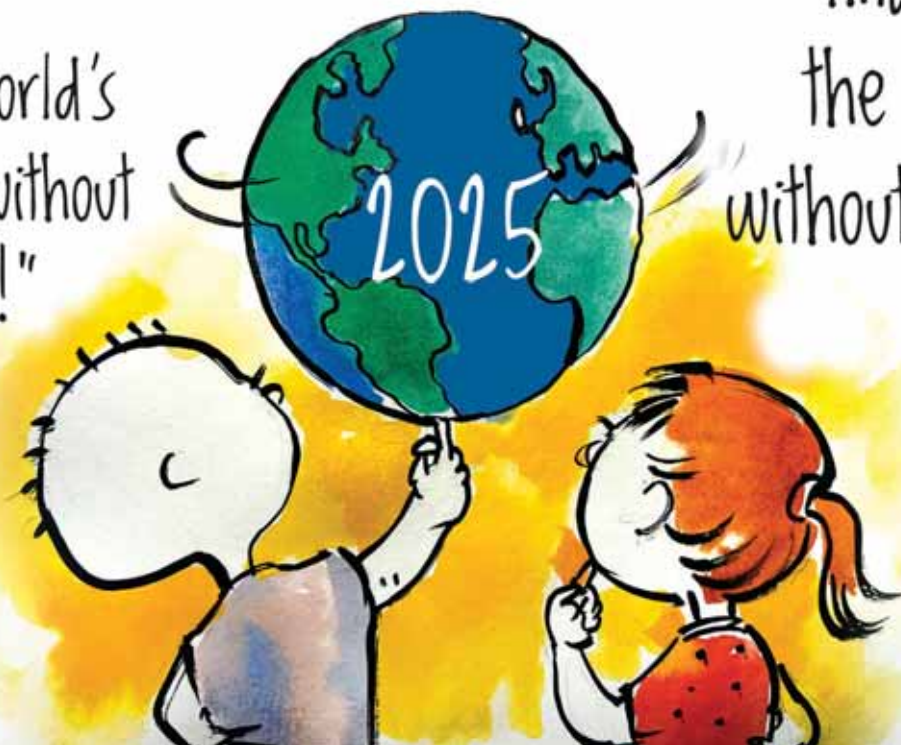
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"The world's lighter without Azad!"



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MAGA goes to Panama

By Ruti Teitel
New York

US President-elect Donald Trump clearly does not intend to pursue a "good neighbour" policy. He has been mocking Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau by calling him 'governor' while proclaiming that a country of 40mn people should become the 51st US state. His first telephone conversation with Mexico's new president, Claudia Scheinbaum, had to be followed by Scheinbaum politely saying that she had agreed to none of the terms Trump claimed that she had.

Now Trump is seeking to reopen a debate over control of the Panama Canal that was settled five decades ago. But here, Trump's statements resonate with a powerful sentiment that long underpinned previous US policy on the issue. After all, the Panama Canal was an American idea, the brainchild of Teddy Roosevelt at the start of the twentieth century – and the US has had difficulty letting go of it ever since.

Some 5% of all world trade in goods, and 40% of US container traffic, passes through the Panama Canal. Connecting the Atlantic and Pacific oceans via a 51-mile waterway across the Isthmus of Panama, the canal has become entangled in the intensifying geopolitical and geoeconomic rivalry between the United States and China. Trump's statements about the US retaking the canal in the face of alleged increased Chinese influence in Panama have shocked many – not least Panamanians, who see them as an affront to their sovereignty.

But sovereignty has been a pliable concept throughout Panama's history. Contending with the vestiges of the Spanish empire in the Americas,

As President-elect Donald Trump contemplates his next move on the Panama Canal, the question we should be asking is whether America ever became truly reconciled to giving it up



US president Donald Trump speaks at a campaign rally on October 12, 2024 in Coachella, California. (AFP)

Roosevelt thought it crucial to establish a route for US trade between the Atlantic and the Pacific that avoided the need to circumnavigate South America. There were two options: Nicaragua and Colombia. The latter proved easier but involved some US sleight of hand. Roosevelt's administration backed a faction that pursued secession from Colombia, which led to the creation of the new state of Panama, where the US could pursue Roosevelt's pet project. In 1903, the US received authority to build a canal and control of the Panama Canal Zone "in perpetuity", in exchange for annual payments to Panama.

More than a strategic trade route was at stake in seizing Panama and building the canal. In a letter to Sir George Otto Trevelyan, Roosevelt wrote: "Wherever I could establish a precedent for strength in the executive, as I did in...taking Panama...I have felt not merely that my action was right in itself, but that in showing the strength of, or in giving strength to the executive, I was establishing a precedent of value."

In his memoirs, Roosevelt conceded his "regret" for using force in violating Colombia's sovereignty, but the US never issued a formal apology or offered compensation. The 1914 version of the Thomson-Urrutia Treaty between the US and Colombia

conveyed the US side's "sincere regret that anything should have occurred to interrupt or to mar relations" with Colombia. But Roosevelt's continued opposition to such official statements, bolstered by US officials like Secretary of State John Hay (who supported the former president's actions in Panama), delayed the treaty's ratification. Only in 1921, when the offending passage was removed, did the Senate ratify the treaty, which offered reparations but no apology or explicit admission of wrongdoing.

Tensions over the Canal Zone continued to simmer for decades. By the 1960s, growing resentment of US power in Latin America culminated in Panama's brief suspension of diplomatic relations in 1964.

From that time on, the issue preoccupied more than one US administration. In 1964, after consulting with former presidents Harry Truman and Dwight Eisenhower, president Lyndon Johnson committed to work toward a new arrangement with Panama. It would take 14 years of bipartisan negotiation under two Democratic presidents and two Republican presidents before an agreement was reached. Ultimately, it was Jimmy Carter who decided that it was time to turn over the canal to Panama and correct injustices toward the region. In a nationally televised address, Carter told Americans that:

"The most important reason – the only reason – to ratify the treaties is that they are in the highest national interest of the United States and will strengthen our position in the world. Our security interests will be stronger. Our trade opportunities will be improved. We will demonstrate that as a large and powerful country, we are able to deal fairly and honourably with a proud but smaller sovereign nation."

Even with Carter pushing for ratification, it would take months of effort to overcome opposition among the American public and in Congress. Finally, in 1977, the US reached an agreement with Panamanian General Omar Torrijos to transfer control of the waterway.

But there was some important fine print. One of the two treaties that the countries signed specified that the US remained in control of the canal's security and could use military force to defend it against any threat to neutrality. In fact, the US retained the right to defend the canal forever. The treaties provided that the Canal Zone would be turned over to Panama in 1979, and transfer of the operation of the canal would be complete by 1999. A year later, the Senate ratified the Torrijos-Carter Treaties by a narrow margin, and the US continued to operate the canal until December 1999.

Seen in the light of this history, Trump's recent statements may be shocking, but they are not surprising. As Trump contemplates his next move on the Panama Canal, the question we should be asking is whether America ever became truly reconciled to giving it up.

– Project Syndicate

• Ruti Teitel is Professor of Comparative Law at New York Law School and the author of the forthcoming book *Presidential Visions of Transitional Justice*.



Immigration supporters march carrying signs including 'We Are All Illegals' during a New Year's Eve rally and march on the last day of the last year in Los Angeles, California. (AFP)

Romania and Bulgaria become full members of EU Schengen zone

Romania and Bulgaria scrapped land border controls to become full members of the European Union's Schengen free-travel area yesterday, joining an expanded bloc of countries whose residents can travel without passport checks. Fireworks lit the sky at a crossing close to the Bulgarian border town of Ruse just after the stroke of midnight as the Bulgarian and Romanian interior ministers symbolically raised a barrier on the Friendship Bridge straddling the Danube River. The crossing is a major transit point for international trade, and bottlenecks are common. "This is a historic moment," said Bulgarian Prime Minister Dimitar Glavchev. "From Greece in the south to Finland to the North and all the way to Portugal to the West - you can travel without borders." Checks on travelling by air and sea from Bulgaria and Romania were lifted in March 2024, but land checks continued until Austria last month dropped a veto it had maintained on the grounds that more was needed to stop irregular migration. Border checks between France, Germany, Belgium, The Netherlands and Luxembourg were first dropped in 1985. The Schengen area now covers 25 of the 27 EU member states, as well as Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland. Ireland and Cyprus are not members of the Schengen zone.



A man cooks food on a beach for the first day of the new year in Mbouanasta yesterday. **Right:** A woman waits in front of a stall where street vendors prepare grilled chicken in Chiconi. **(AFP)**



Mayotte families left homeless by cyclone leave shelters

Two weeks after a devastating cyclone hit the French Indian Ocean archipelago of Mayotte, the atmosphere at Le Manguier school in the capital Mamoudzou is tinged with sadness and resignation. At this time of year, preparations for the new school year are normally well under way. Instead, the families living there are having to find another place to live, with many of their homes blown away by the storm. In the courtyard of the Paulette Henry elementary school, as Le Manguier is also known, breakfast is a meal of bread and tuna, washed down with fruit juice. "There's no electricity here," said Mrahati Abdallah, one of the team that manages the centre. "So, we tried to stock up on non-perishable food." Amid bottles of water, milk, boxes

of biscuits and pureed fruit, town hall officials and volunteers took stock for the last time before distributing the provisions to homeless families who have spent the last two weeks at the school. "Sometimes we get donations. Then we can give something else," they said. As December and the old year drew to a close, faces were tense, with everyone aware that the centre - and 20 other emergency shelters like it in the capital - were shutting. They opened their doors on December 13, the day before Cyclone Chido hit, and have since been home to nearly 12,500 people. Le Manguier has housed 21 babies, 118 children and 63 adults. On Monday, Roukia Abdillah was already preparing to leave. She lived just a few metres from

the school but her home was flattened in the cyclone - the worst to hit France's poorest department in 90 years, in which at least 39 people were killed. High winds flattened many of the shanty towns in which some 100,000 to 200,000 people lived. "We won't leave here with dirty clothes," sighed Abdillah as she washed her laundry in a large metal basin. "It will dry in the afternoon and tomorrow we will leave." "They gave us a roof to shelter us," said Nadjati Mouhoudhoire, another local. "Now that they're asking us to leave, we will leave without trying to cause trouble." She had already begun to take her belongings back home nearby, stashing clothes, water bottles and valuable documents under corrugated metal. "I don't know where to go so

I'm going to come back here," she added, standing in what remained of her house. "I have to think about it but right now, I can't." How and when she and her son will rebuild is an unanswered question. On Monday, the mayor of Mamoudzou, Ambdilwahedou Soumaila, told visiting French Prime Minister Francois Bayrou that all the emergency shelters in the city would be closed from January 1 "so that we can get the schools back". "We have to clean up so the return to school, normally scheduled for January 20, can take place in the best possible conditions," he said. Soumaila also told Bayrou that a state school that served as an emergency shelter had been burnt down in his area. An investigation into the fire is under way, the Mamoudzou

prosecutor's office told AFP on Tuesday. Homeless families are at a loss to say where they will go when they leave the shelters, with the authorities still struggling to restore, water, power and telecoms to the impoverished archipelago. "We just need time to rebuild our house," said Siti, a student at the Mgombani middle school, near Le Manguier. "With my mother there are six of us. The youngest is just a few months old. We don't know where to go now. We know where to build but we haven't had time yet," he added. Soumaila pointed out that the prime minister was committed to "taking care of all of these families who will have no place to sleep". But exactly how has not been disclosed.



A car crosses the border yesterday at the Hungarian-Romanian border crossing in Nyirabran, eastern Hungary. **(AFP)**

Russia attacks central Kyiv with drones killing two

Russia launched an aerial attack on the centre of Kyiv in the first hours of 2025, killing two people and drawing fresh anger from officials towards Moscow. The attack - a rare strike on the heart of the Ukrainian capital - came just hours after Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky vowed in a New Year's message that he would do everything possible to bring the war to an end over the next 12 months. "Two people were killed, and seven others wounded in a Russian drone strike on Kyiv," Prime Minister Denys Shmygal said in a post on social media. The Prosecutor General's Office said two pregnant women were among the wounded. Local officials said the damage was caused by falling debris, suggesting the drones had been intercepted. AFP journalists in the city heard multiple powerful explosions early on Wednesday morning. Ukrainian officials said the Russian drones targeted the capital's Pechersky district, home to the presidential palace and government quarter. Apartment blocks were hit and Ukraine's central bank said one of its buildings in the city centre was damaged in the attack. Russian President Vladimir Putin has repeatedly threatened to strike at the heart of Kyiv in recent weeks - an attack he said would be a response to Ukraine firing US-supplied weapons on Russian territory. Zelensky blasted the Russian drone attack. "Even on New Year's night, Russia only cares about hurting Ukraine," he said in a post on Telegram. A total of 111 Russian drones were fired at Ukraine overnight, with 109 either shot down or disabled by Ukraine's air defence systems, the Ukrainian air force said.



Firefighters extinguishing a fire in a residential building following a Russian drones attack in Kyiv yesterday. **(AFP)**

Russian gas supplies to Europe end as Ukraine stops transit

Reuters
Moscow/Kyiv

Russian gas exports via Soviet-era pipelines running through Ukraine came to a halt on New Year's Day, marking the end of decades of Moscow's dominance over Europe's energy markets. The gas had kept flowing despite nearly three years of war, but Russia's gas firm Gazprom said it had stopped at 0500 GMT after Ukraine refused to renew a transit agreement.

The widely expected stoppage will not impact prices for consumers in the European Union - unlike in 2022, when falling supplies from Russia sent prices to record highs, worsened a cost-of-living crisis and hit the bloc's competitiveness.

The last remaining EU buyers of Russian gas via Ukraine, such as Slovakia and Austria, have arranged alternative supply, while Hungary will keep receiving Russian gas via the TurkStream pipeline under the Black Sea.

But Transnistria, a breakaway pro-Russian region of Ukraine's neighbour Moldova also reliant on the transit flows, cut off heating and hot water supplies to households early yesterday. Local energy company Tirasteploenergo urged residents to dress warmly, hang blankets or thick curtains over windows and balcony doors, and use electric heaters.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, writing on the Telegram messaging app, said the end of gas transit through his country to Europe was "one of Moscow's biggest defeats" and urged the US to supply more gas to Europe.

"The more there is on the market from Europe's real partners,



An employee works at the Chisinau-1 gas distribution plant of Moldovatransgaz energy company in Chisinau, Moldova, last March. **(Reuters)**

the faster we will overcome the last negative consequences of European energy dependence on Russia," he wrote.

Europe's "joint task" now, he wrote, was to support ex-Soviet Moldova "in this period of energy transformation".

The European Commission said the EU had prepared for the cut-off. "The European gas infrastructure is flexible enough to provide gas of non-Russian origin," a spokesperson for the Commission said. "It has been reinforced with significant new LNG (liquefied natural gas) import capacities since 2022."

Russia and the former Soviet Union spent half a century building up a major share of the European gas market, which at its peak stood at around 35%. But the EU has slashed its dependence on Russian energy since the start of the war in Ukraine by buying more piped gas from Norway and LNG from Qatar and the United States.

Ukraine, which refused to extend the transit deal, said Europe had already made the decision to abandon Russian gas.

"We stopped the transit of Russian gas. This is a historic event. Russia is losing its markets, it will suffer financial losses," Ukraine's Energy Minister German Galushchenko said in a statement.

Ukraine will lose up to \$1bn a year in transit fees from Russia. To help offset the impact, it will quadruple gas transmission tariffs for domestic consumers from Wednesday, which could cost the country's industry more than 1.6bn hryvnias (\$38.2mn) a year.

Gazprom will lose close to \$5bn in gas sales.

The company halted supply to Austria's OMV in mid-November over a contractual dispute but in recent weeks Russian gas has been reaching Austria via Slovakia at a rate of around 200 gigawatt hours (GWh) per day.

Cosmetic surgery aficionado Jocelyne Wildenstein passes away

Swiss socialite Jocelyne Wildenstein, also known as "catwoman" due to her extensive plastic surgery, has died aged 79, her partner said yesterday. "It is with heavy heart and with great sadness that Mr Lloyd Klein announces the unexpected death of his beloved fiancée and long-time companion Jocelyne Wildenstein," the fashion designer said in an English-language statement sent to AFP. "Mrs Wildenstein died peacefully in her sleep in the late afternoon of December 31st, 2024 in her... suite in Paris where the couple had taken temporary residence since August of 2024," he added.

He tried to wake her from a nap so she could get ready for New Year's Eve dinner, but she was unresponsive, he said. "Early reports from the doctors called to the scene indicate that she had endured heart failure and passed peacefully in her sleep," Klein added. Born in Switzerland in 1945, Jocelyn Perisset became a New York socialite after marrying art dealer Alec Wildenstein, with whom she had two children. She kept his name after their messy divorce in the late 1990s. The cosmetic surgery aficionado, with more than a million followers on Instagram, became known as



Jocelyn Wildenstein

"catwoman" in the tabloids for the feline-like shape of her eyes. She had been living between New York and Miami, she told French

media in recent months. Wildenstein last posted a video of herself and Klein posing for photographers outside the Ritz Paris on December 23, to the soundtrack of Wham's *Last Christmas*.

"I never wanted to change my face," she told French television news channel C8 this autumn, though admitting she might have wanted her lips to be a little thicker.

She denied rumours she embarked on cosmetic surgery to try to keep her ex-husband. She received \$2.5bn from their divorce, making it one of the most expensive at the time,

according to Klein. Asked if she had found love again, she said she had with Klein, who was 21 years her junior. Klein and Wildenstein "met during New York Fashion Week in 2001 when Lloyd was presenting his fashion collection on the runway," he said in his written statement. "She was a front-row guest and after that show the two became romantically involved and had remained inseparable since that time." "Jocelyne was my best friend, my partner, my fiancée. She had a zest for life, and had a wicked sense of humour," he added.

LOT - The Value Shop opens at LuLu Hypermarket Barwa Madinatna



Dr Mohamed Althaf, Group Director - Global Operations and CSO of LuLu Group International, leading the ribbon-cutting ceremony. **PICTURE:** Shaji Kayamkulam



spaces, the store ensures hassle-free accessibility for all customers. LOT - The Value Shop is set to redefine the shopping experience in Qatar, offering unparalleled value, convenience,

and style. Its extensive product range, unbeatable quality, and competitive pricing position. Kick-start the New Year with a remarkable shopping journey at LOT

- The Value Shop, and experience the joy of discovering quality products at unbeatable prices. Visit today and explore a world of exceptional value at LuLu Hypermarket, Barwa Madinatna.

LOT - The Value Shop has officially opened its doors at LuLu Hypermarket, Barwa Madinatna, offering an exceptional New Year's gift to Qatar residents: a vast selection of quality products at unbeatable prices, all under one roof. LOT - The Value Shop has been thoughtfully curated to cater to the diverse shopping needs of customers. From trendy fashion for men, women, and kids to stylish footwear, elegant jewellery, and ladies' bags, the store provides a one-stop destination for those looking to stay stylish and on-trend. Additionally, it offers a wide range of stationery products, home décor, furnishings, household essentials, toys, and much more, making it the perfect shopping hub for families and individuals alike. One of the standout features of LOT - The Value Shop is its dedication to providing quality products at incredibly low prices. Most items in the store are priced between QR1 and

QR19, ensuring that every customer finds exceptional value. Shoppers can also explore a dedicated section offering household essentials priced between QR1 and QR4 and a toys section where every item is priced at QR19 or less. Adding to its appeal, the store has unveiled a trendy winter collection for men, women, and kids, allowing shoppers to update their wardrobes with the latest seasonal fashion without stretching their budgets. The grand inauguration ceremony was led by Dr Mohamed Althaf, Group Director - Global Operations and CSO of LuLu Group International. The event witnessed the presence of several distinguished guests and prominent social media influencers, adding to the festive spirit of the opening day. Strategically located at LuLu Hypermarket, Barwa Madinatna, LOT - The Value Shop was designed to provide a seamless and enjoyable shopping experience. With over 1,000 parking

Gulf female poets regale poetry lovers at Katara

By Tawfik Lamari
Staff Reporter

The Katara - the Cultural Village has organised a poetry morning that brought together an elite group of creative Gulf female poets, with the participation of poets Badriya al-Badri, Dr Noura al-Wahimid and Moza Abdul Rahman al-Misnad. It was moderated by journalist Ishraf bin Murad. The event witnessed a large turn-

out of poetry and literature lovers, as the poets presented their poems that varied between love of the homeland, wisdom, description and elegy. The poems were distinguished by their touch on deep human and social aspects, inspired by the Gulf environment and its rich culture. In this field, the distinguished Omani poet Badriya al-Badri presented various poems about love for Qatar and on various topics that combined linguistic beauty with

sweet meaning. She switched between classical and Nabati poetry to confirm her poetic prowess. Al-Badri won the Katara Prize for the Poet of the Messenger in its fifth edition in 2021. In addition she won the second place in the Burda Prize for the category of popular poetry in 2023. As for Dr Noura al-Wahimid, she recited her poems in Nabati poetry, including *In the Name of God, the Most Gracious, The Sheikhs of the Tribe, A Source of Pride*, and an elegy

for Sheikh Sabah Khaled al-Kubaisi titled *The Morning Has Gone*. Al-Wahimid also recited verses about the love of sisters. The morning was an occasion in which Dr Noura revealed her talent in composing poetry since her early childhood and her influence by her grandfather, the popular poet Muhammad al-Jassim al-Wahimid. Distinguished poet Moza Abdul Rahman al-Misnad presented wonderful poems about the love of the homeland, dazzling the audience



with her powerful words and high meanings in various poetic verses. She concluded her participation with a touching poem dedicated to Palestine. The morning concluded with the

presentation of certificates of appreciation to the participating poets, expressing Katara's appreciation for their creativity and efforts in enriching the local, Gulf and Arab literary scene.

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