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# GULF TIMES



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Motorsport:  
Al-Attiyah wins  
stage 9 as al-Rajhi  
takes Dakar lead

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## Deputy PM opens Quantum Computing Conference



HE the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defence Affairs Sheikh Saud bin Abdulrahman bin Hassan al-Thani opened the Quantum Computing Conference, held for the first time in the region. The conference is the only destination to understand the transformative impact of quantum computing technology, as the latest quantum computing technologies and their applications will be explored during the conference. The conference includes more than 200 quantum computing experts from around the world, who will delve into Qatar's health, financial, communications, and transportation infrastructure; and industries in the Gulf region. The conference is held under the auspices of the Ministry of Defence, in partnership with Qatar Foundation's Hamad Bin Khalifa University. (QNA)

## Visit Qatar hosts first Arabia Luxury Travel Show in Doha

Visit Qatar recently hosted the inaugural Arabia Luxury Travel Show, bringing together more than 160 luxury travel agents and operators to showcase Qatar and the wider Middle East as a hub for premium tourism.

The event, which began on January 12 and set to conclude today (January 15), aims to strengthen Qatar's position as a leading luxury destination in the Middle East.

Participants include luxury tour operators and Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions (MICE) agents from key markets, including Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, and the Baltic States.

More than 50 hotels, destination management companies, and tourism boards from across the region, including Qatar, the UAE, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Turkiye and the Indian Ocean, took part in the four-day event.

The show featured a comprehensive agenda, including two days of one-on-one B2B meetings to facilitate important busi-



More than 160 luxury travel agents and operators attended the first Arabia Luxury Travel Show in Doha.

ness engagements. The last two days were dedicated to networking events between buyers and exhibitors.

In a press statement, Visit Qatar CEO Abdulaziz Ali al-Mawlawi said: "This event aligns with our strategic vision to expand Qatar's footprint in the global luxury tourism sector while strengthening our presence in key markets".

The 2025 Arabia Luxury Travel Show covered key themes including luxury travel, as well as

Doha's appeal as a family-friendly destination. The successful hosting of this event underlines Visit Qatar's commitment to advance the country's visibility as a global luxury hub, further solidifying the objectives of the Qatar Tourism Strategy.

The participants had the opportunity to explore Qatar, visiting its vibrant souqs, world-class museums, immaculate desert, immersing themselves in the rich culture, and marvelling at the stunning skyline.

# Gaza truce talks in final phase: Qatar

By Tawfik Lamari  
Staff Reporter

Qatar, a key mediator, said negotiations for a Gaza truce and hostage release deal were in their "final stages" yesterday, expressing hope an agreement could be reached "very soon".

Qatar, Egypt and the United States have intensified efforts to broker a ceasefire in Gaza.

Official spokesman for the Qatari Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), Dr Majed al-Ansari, said that the ceasefire and prisoner exchange negotiations taking place in Doha have reached the final stages, expressing his hope to obtain good news, especially after overcoming the main obstacles to an agreement between the two parties.

Dr al-Ansari said during the weekly media briefing: "We believe that we have reached the final stages regarding the agreement, but we should not be overly optimistic until we obtain good news," stressing that the draft has been delivered to the two parties and talks are now underway regarding the final details.

The MoFA spokesman urged the two parties to sign the agreement and end the sufferings of the Palestinians in Gaza, the hostages and the prisoners. Stressing that there is no time limit for announcing the Gaza agreement, he said the main issues that hindered an agreement have been removed. Emphasising that Qatar, Egypt and the United States are committed to everything that leads to the success of the ceasefire agreement in Gaza, Dr al-Ansari said that they are now at a point that is closest to reaching an agreement. He explained that "the pending details are related to the implementation of the terms of the agreement", noting that there is positive engagement in the negotiations.

Dr al-Ansari reiterated the position of Qatar, saying: "We in Qatar have always affirmed our position on the necessity of end-



Dr Majed al-Ansari addressing the media in Doha yesterday.

ing the Israeli occupation. Talking about how to manage Gaza after the agreement is a Palestinian decision, he said emphasising that "there is a very important guarantor and the mediators will be guarantors of the agreement."

Dr al-Ansari also appreciated the efforts of the United States and the efforts of the administrations of current US President Joe Biden and incoming President Donald Trump, with the launch of a "final round" of talks yesterday in Doha aimed at reaching a ceasefire in Gaza and exchanging prisoners and detainees.

He stressed that when the agreement is announced, the implementation of the ceasefire will begin.

Regarding Syria, Dr al-Ansari confirmed the continuation of the air bridge operated by Qatar to provide relief to the brothers in the sisterly Syrian Arab Republic and contribute to addressing their humanitarian conditions, explaining that the total aid delivered has reached 299 tonnes.

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi and US President Joe Biden discussed in a phone call yesterday the ongoing mediation efforts by Cairo, Doha and Washington to reach a deal for a ceasefire in Gaza, Reuters said.

They also discussed a hostages-for-prisoners exchange deal, the Egyptian presidency said in a statement.

# LA faces new peril as winds ramp up fire

AFP  
Los Angeles

Powerful winds yesterday threatened to rekindle and whip up major fires that have devastated parts of Los Angeles, killing at least 24 people and changing the face of America's second biggest city — perhaps forever.

Forecasters predicted "particularly dangerous" Santa Ana winds would spike the wildfire threat anew for already exhausted firefighters.

A large part of Southern California was under a Red Flag warning, indicating that intense dryness and furious winds gusting up to 110km an hour would make conditions ripe for wildfire.

Part of Los Angeles County and much of neighbouring Ventura County were in a "Particularly Dangerous Situation," according to the NWS.

"All the plants and vegetation is



A search and rescue member goes through damaged homes, as the Eaton Fire continues, in Altadena, California, yesterday.

really dry and ready to burn so... fires can grow pretty fast," meteorologist Ryan Kittell said.

The Palisades and Eaton Fires — both of which are still burning in places — could flare, and new

ignitions could quickly turn problematic, he said.

"Please be assured that the Los Angeles County region is prepared," fire chief Anthony Marrone said.

"We have checked the water



The Auto Fire spreads following the riverbed of the Santa Clara River in Oxnard, North West of Los Angeles, California.

system in the Eaton fire area, and it is operational, meaning that we have water and we have pressure."

The renewed danger comes with 24,000 acres of the upmarket Pacific Palisades in ruins and 14,000

acres of the city of Altadena badly charred.

Gusting winds were also whipping up toxic ash, with health officials urging everyone to wear a mask. Page 7

## Al-Khulaifi holds talks with Benin's FM and UN special representative for Iraq



HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Mohammed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh al-Khulaifi met yesterday with the visiting Foreign Minister of Benin Olushegun Adjadi Bakari. The meeting discussed co-operation relations between the two countries and a number of regional and international issues. (QNA)



HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Mohammed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh al-Khulaifi met yesterday with the visiting Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the UN and Head of the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) Dr Mohamed al-Hassan. The meeting discussed co-operation relations between Qatar and the UN along with ways to support development and stability efforts in Iraq, in addition to relevant regional developments.

## Qatar to host 1st Gulf Cybersecurity Forum

Qatar will host the Gulf Cybersecurity Forum today, under the slogan 'Building Capacities and Competencies in Educational Cybersecurity'. The event aims to facilitate the exchange of expertise among Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) countries in the field of cybersecurity and raise awareness about cybersecurity issues.

The forum seeks to increase awareness among university and higher education institution affiliates and equip technical staff in these institutions with practical skills related to cybersecurity. The forum will host numerous experts and specialists from GCC countries, as well as global companies and organisations, to share their expertise and experiences in support of the forums objectives.

The event, taking place on Jan 15 and 16, will highlight several aspects, including legislation, promoting a secure cyber culture in the field of educational cybersecurity, and focusing on building competencies, developing defensive capabilities, and enhancing laws, policies, and regulations related to this field. (QNA)

# Children's overall health key factor in advancement of nations: NHRC

QNA  
Doha

HE Chairperson of the National Human Rights Committee (NHRC), Maryam bint Abdullah al-Attiyah, has said that the real investment in human is predicated upon the protection of children's health and caring for their growth based on physical, psychological and educational foundation that drives the enduring advancement of nations.



HE Maryam bint Abdullah al-Attiyah

Addressing an event to mark Gulf Children's Day that annually falls on Jan 15, she added that providing healthy and superb services to children is the primary step toward building generations for a future full of creative national achievements, highlighting that Gulf Children's Day, an initiative declared by Gulf Health Council (GHC), serves as the bedrock of a tight-knit Gulf community.

HE al-Attiyah lauded the efforts of the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH), in terms of the outstanding services provided to the priority groups in need of care, including children. The MoPH, across its different institutions, provides numerous services, such as the healthy child clinics service at all primary healthcare centres to all children under the age of five in accordance with international standards.

The adolescent health initiative is highly prioritised to be advanced, as long as it is part of the adolescent-friendly healthcare services and includes an integrated health programme, comprising physical examination and psychological counselling offered to adolescents whose ages range between 10-18, she highlighted. And emphasised that all clinics provide this kind of service which comprises general physical tests, as well as other examinations related to managing the prevalent health issues that palpably affect this age group.

The adolescent health initia-

HE al-Attiyah indicated that such efforts are central to promoting and safeguarding the fundamental human rights, underscoring Qatar's priority in taking care of youngsters even before birth, through maternal and child healthcare. She underlined that Qatar's actions toward children

unequivocally align with their better interests as stipulated in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child which determines governments' responsibilities toward the child.

These rights are interconnected and equal in terms of their significance, and accordingly children shouldn't be deprived of them, whether it pertains to family guidance during children's growth, or ensuring that governments take measures to ensure children grow in the best possible way, or other rights outlined in the convention, underlined al-Attiyah.

She stressed that despite all these state-led efforts to protect and bolster the rights of the child, NHRC has been calling for further advancement of the rights of this important group, which constitutes the backbone of Qatar's present and future.

She called for capitalizing on this day to rejuvenate further initiatives, events, and activities that promote healthy living for children.

Announced by GHC, Gulf Children's Day is a crucial event that aims to shine a spotlight on the children's rights and raise awareness in various areas, foremost of which is the health and education sectors, in addition to focusing on the quality of their health, promoting awareness of proper child-rearing methods, and emphasising the enjoyable aspects of physical activities.

## Civic minister meets IOFS director-general



HE the Minister of Municipality Abdullah bin Hamad bin Abdullah al-Attiyah met yesterday with Director-General of the Islamic Organisation for Food Security (IOFS) Berik Aryn. The meeting discussed the activities of the IOFS and the key challenges facing the food security system in the region, emphasising the importance of unifying efforts to address them. The two sides reviewed ways to enhance joint co-operation between Islamic countries and the exchange of expertise and successful experiences in this field. (QNA)

## Qatar, Antigua and Barbuda hold bilateral dialogue in civil aviation



A bilateral talks session between the civil authorities of Qatar and Antigua and Barbuda was held yesterday. The Qatari side was headed by in-charge of managing Qatar Civil Aviation Authority (QCAA) Mohamed bin Faleh al-Hajri, while the Antigua and Barbuda side was headed by Minister of Tourism, Civil Aviation, Transportation and Investment Charles Fernandez. The talks included discussing the terms of signing an agreement to open the airspace between the two countries, ways to enhance co-operation in air transport, and exchanging views on several topics of common interest in civil aviation. (QNA)

## QCAA holds workshop on unmanned aircraft system traffic management



The Qatar Civil Aviation Authority (QCAA) organised yesterday an introductory workshop on the Unmanned Aircraft System Traffic Management (UTM), with the participation of several national entities, including the Ministries of Defence and Interior, the General Authority of Customs, Qatar Airways Group, the Qatar R/C Sport Center, and the Safety and Security Operations Committee, along with a number of QCAA employees. The workshop covered several key topics, including the concept and requirements of the UTM system, implementation strategies, its objectives, and its global significance. It also discussed the latest developments and updates related to air navigation services. The UTM project will be installed and activated at the Qatar Air Traffic Control Center, aiming to develop the Concept of Operations (CONOPS) to contribute to updating and enhancing regulations and supporting the overall air traffic management system. (QNA)



## Ministry attends marine environment workshop



The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change, represented by the Environmental Monitoring and Inspection Department and the Wildlife Development Department, participated in a workshop organised by the Regional Organisation for the Protection of the Marine Environment (ROPME) titled "Non-Indigenous Invasive Species in the Arabian Sea Region of Oman". The workshop aimed to raise awareness about the environmental impacts of invasive species on the marine environment. It included discussions on the current status of these species and an overview of field action plans. The programme also included training for representatives of member countries on classifying invasive species using advanced assessment tools such as the "Species Invasiveness Screening Kit (SK-ISK)" application, which helps assess the impact of invasive species on marine ecosystems. This participation is part of the ministry's commitment to supporting regional efforts to enhance marine environmental protection and developing national capacities to address biodiversity challenges and environmental risks arising from invasive species. (QNA)

## 'Land of Jaguar' exhibition opens at QPC

The 'Land of the Jaguar' exhibition was inaugurated yesterday at the premises of Qatar Photography Center (QPC) of the Ministry of Culture. The exhibition showcases an extraordinary collection of innovative art works by the Qatari photographers Jassim Ahmed al-Bouainain and Ali Seifuddin at building 18 of Katara - the Cultural Village. The 30-day event depicts the two photographers' expeditions to the Brazilian Pantanal, one of the regions that abounds with a prolific biodiversity, centred on capturing the jaguar, one of the foremost symbols of wildlife.

Commenting on this experience, al-Bouainain highlighted that it was an extraordinary expedition during which they spent long hours waiting for the exact time to capture unique photos that show the beauty of Jaguar and its behaviour within the natural habitat. For his part, Seifuddin highlighted that the expedition was an opportunity to figure out the relationship between human and nature and hoped that the captured photos would inspire the public to raise the awareness about the significance of conserving the environment and wildlife. (QNA)



## Interior minister honours security officials



HE the Minister of Interior and Commander of the Internal Security Force (Lekhwiya) Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani honoured a number of security officials from the ministry yesterday, presenting them with the Prince Nayef Medal for Police and Internal Security, along with other medals, in appreciation of their outstanding contributions to enhancing security and stability. As part of celebrating national achievements, HE the minister also honoured the teams instrumental in Qatar's inclusion in the US Visa Waiver Programme and those who contributed to the success of the Qatar Government Excellence Award. HE the Minister of State for Interior Affairs Sheikh Abdulaziz bin Faisal bin Mohammed al-Thani meanwhile honoured a group of distinguished employees from various departments within the ministry for their efforts and contributions toward achieving the ministry's objectives and elevating performance standards. - QNA

# Qatar is 'committed to global efforts, forums on humanitarian crises'

HE the Minister of State for International Co-operation Maryam bin Ali bin Nasser al-Misnad has underscored Qatar's enduring commitment to contributing to various efforts and forums devoted to addressing humanitarian crises and developmental issues.

Addressing the signing ceremony of the co-operation agreement yesterday between the Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS) and the British embassy in Doha with the aim of proceeding with the implementation of the psychosocial project in support of the Palestinian families hosted by Qatar, HE al-Misnad noted the close connection between humanitarian and diplomatic actions which go side by side to bolster bilateral ties between nations, and the humanitarian and diplomatic organisations, thereby enhancing the humanitarian action and reaching out to regions afflicted by crises and disasters.

Brokered by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, she said that the agreement comes to implement the psychosocial project in support of the Palestinian families hosted by Qatar, and the two parties' efforts in this noble humanitarian aspect are appreciated.

HE the QRCS President Yousef bin Ali al-Khater praised the unwavering efforts of HE al-Misnad to support the Palestinian guests of Qatar, emphasising that this commitment was reflected in her firm interest in overseeing the signing of this agreement.

He thanked the British embassy for its support for this vital project that contributes to mitigating the psychological impacts and pressures arising from the aggression on the affected people, particularly the vulnerable groups such as women and children.

HE al-Khater highlighted Qatar's deep-rooted and honoured position, alongside all Qatari institutions in standing with the

people of Gaza and offering them unwavering support through all available means during the difficult adversity they are currently enduring.

HE al-Misnad asserted that the QRCS unwaveringly upholds its humanitarian and fraternal responsibilities toward the Palestinian people, both through its field offices and teams operating in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, as well as through its psychosocial support staffers, which have been actively engaged since the outset in delivering care to the Palestinian families arriving in Qatar.

UK ambassador to Qatar Nirav Patel stressed the importance of co-operation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the QRCS to back their invaluable efforts in providing Palestinians in Qatar with basic psychological health services.

In remarks to the Qatar News Agency (QNA), the envoy said that the UK and Qatar are diligently working every day to pro-



HE al-Misnad, Patel, HE al-Khater and other officials at the ceremony. - QNA

vide all affected people with basic support, which is a critical element of assistance for those communities and individuals in need of mental health support and services to surmount challenges posed by the conflict in Gaza.

He stressed that the United Kingdom and Qatar are connected with partnerships both at the regional and global levels.

HE the QRCS Secretary-General Faisal Mohamed al-Emadi said the significance of this agreement lies in providing the Palestinian brothers who came to Qatar from the Gaza Strip with the psychosocial support.

He said that they number 1,500, adding that the QRCS has, so far, implemented a similar programme for the Afghan brothers.

The objective of the agreement is to provide a financial contribution of £80,000 to foster psychosocial support services afforded to the Palestinian guests.

The project outlined in the agreement focuses on rejuvenating the psychosocial aspects of the beneficiaries through community engagement, group discussions, psychological counselling, sports and physical activities, handicrafts, as well as educational, awareness-raising, and recreational events.

The term psychosocial support refers to a range of interventions aimed at boosting the mental health and overall well-being of individuals and families within their social environment and are dedicated to strengthening their resilience and coping abilities, while facilitating their recovery and reintegration into normal life following crises or adverse experiences.

The QRCS is equipped with a highly trained relief team comprising 50 specialists, proficient in delivering psychosocial support to individuals affected by conflicts and disasters, as part of its broader external humanitarian efforts. - QNA



## Waseef highlights key real estate projects in Qatar

Leading real estate management and marketing company Waseef has highlighted its proven track record in managing, operating and maintaining real estate projects and facilities in Qatar.

According to an official statement, Waseef provides its services to a number of entities in the private and government sectors and operates, manages and provides maintenance services and cost analysis with real estate assets extending over an area of more than 4mn sq m across Qatar.

These include residential, administrative, commercial, industrial, educational, logistical, hospitality and multi-use properties.

With its deep knowledge of the real estate market, Waseef has a proven track record in managing and operating residential real estate projects that provide residents with a unique housing and living experience and meet all requirements and needs.

These projects include Madinatna, Masaken Mesaimmer and Masaken Al Sailyia.

The Madinatna project can accommodate around 36,000 people and includes 339 buildings with 6,780 fully furnished apartments equipped with all modern amenities and world-class facilities to provide an unparalleled and exceptional residential experience.

The apartments comprise 4,740 three-bedroom apartments and 2,040 two-bedroom units.

The project includes 166,481sq m of green spaces and 714,249sq m of walkways, parking lots and other areas.

The Barwa Housing project at Mesaimmer and Al Sailyia also provides services to the low-income category by collecting rental values at competitive prices and providing all the needs and requirements of its residents by providing a wide range of distinguished services.

Each site includes 992 residential units and 11 shops of various sizes.

Waseef provides integrated services to the workers' category and they are well received.

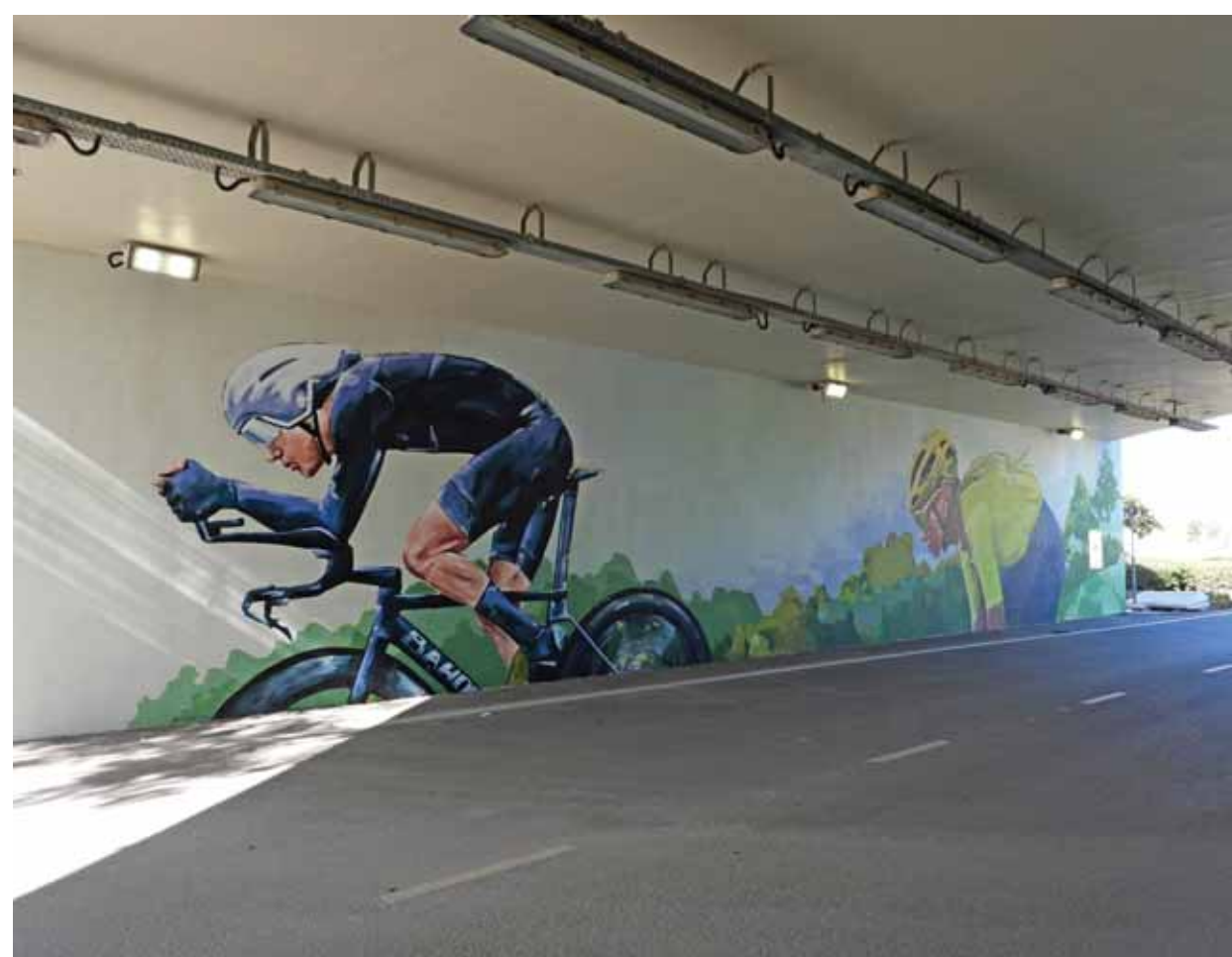
The most prominent of these projects are the Argentinian Neighbourhood and Barwa Al Baraha projects.

These were developed by Barwa Real Estate Group to provide distinguished and high-quality housing for the workers' category.

The Argentine Neighbourhood project is located in Al Wakra, across an area of 773,457,000sq m and comprises 1,404 housing units with 16,848 rooms, sporting a capacity for accommodating 67,000 workers.

The project also contains 126,938sq m of green spaces and 425,235sq m of corridors and space for walking and parking for cars.

Barwa Al Baraha project is located in the Industrial Area and extends over an area of 1.8mn sq m and consists of 64 buildings providing 8,576 rooms with a capacity of up to 52,000 workers and technicians.



## First phase of Jedariart activation complete

Qatar Museums recently announced the completion of the first phase of the Jedariart activation at the Qatar Olympic Cycling Track, thanks to the collaboration with Moroccan artist Hassan Bahou. Two tunnels at the Al Tarfa Interchange have been artistically transformed, celebrating the spirit of Qatar-Morocco 2024 Year of Culture.



# HMC pioneers total ankle replacement surgery in Qatar

The Orthopaedic Surgery Department at Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC) has successfully introduced total ankle replacement surgery for the first time in Qatar.

Last December, total ankle replacement was performed on three Qatari patients.

Dr Mohammad al-Ateeq, senior consultant and head of orthopaedic surgery and director of the Bone and Joint Centre at HMC, highlighted that the centre is one of the first specialised facilities in the Middle East to perform this advanced procedure. This achievement has been made possible through the adoption of cutting-edge surgical and treatment technologies and the continuous development of medical expertise, to enhance patient outcomes, improve the quality of care and facilitate faster recovery.

Total ankle replacement surgery involves replacing a damaged joint with a prosthetic one. This procedure is an innovative option for patients with severe joint damage who wish to maintain normal ankle movement. The surgery preserves ankle mobility, enabling patients to move the joint naturally, while also alleviating pain



The Bone and Joint Centre.

associated with damage or infections.

Dr Mohammad Majid Mukhaimar, senior consultant in orthopaedic surgery at HMC, stated that ankle replacement surgery significantly improves patients' quality of life. The flexibility of the prosthetic joint allows patients to resume daily activities with ease. "This surgery is ideal for individuals who wish to maintain flexibility of movement and have low to moderate physical activity requirements," he explained.

Dr Mukhaimar added that ankle replacement surgery involves removing the damaged parts of the joint and replacing them with prosthetic components made of titanium and hard plastic. These materials provide improved flex-

ibility and reduce the risk of infections in the surrounding joints. Recovery typically takes 6-12 months and includes physiotherapy to enhance mobility.

Dr Jassim al-Saii, associate consultant in orthopaedic surgery at HMC, explained that ankle fusion surgery was once considered the only solution for joint friction. This procedure involves fusing the joint bones using nails or metal plates after removing the damaged cartilage to alleviate pain caused by friction. However, this surgery results in permanent loss of joint mobility and is typically reserved for cases where the joint is severely deformed or unstable. Additionally, it increases pressure on surrounding joints, which may lead to future joint infections.

# Qatar's food security strategy aims to 'develop local products'

Director of the Food Security Department at the Ministry of Municipality Dr Masoud Jarallah al-Marri has stressed that the National Food Security Strategy 2030 is an ambitious roadmap to achieve sustainability in Qatar's food system in the face of global challenges.

In an exclusive interview with QNA, Dr al-Marri said that the strategy includes projects aimed at developing local production and increasing its efficiency using modern and sustainable technologies, such as fish farming projects, enhancing the production of red meat and vegetables, in addition to providing support to the private sector to implement initiatives that enhance self-sufficiency.

He pointed out that the new food security strategy aims to build a resilient and sustainable food system, through co-operation with all stakeholders in the public and private sectors, based on three main pillars: developing local production and local markets, developing strategic stocks and warning systems, and boosting international trade and investment. Regarding the development of local production and local markets, local production of targeted products such as vegetables, red meat, fish, and table eggs is developed, using modern and sustainable technologies such as hydroponic and vertical farming systems, he said, adding that this pillar includes supporting farmers and producers through guidance and knowledge transfer to improve production efficiency and utilisation of natural resources.

As for the pillar regarding the development of strategic stocks and warning systems, the strategy works to ensure the availability of food supplies throughout the year, even in times of crisis, by improving the strategic stock and adding agricultural production inputs, he added, pointing out that, when it comes to the international trade and investment boosting pillar, efforts are being made to diversify sources of international trade and develop supply chains and transport and storage infrastructure to ensure continuity of supplies at reasonable prices.

Dr al-Marri also said that the National Food Security Strategy 2030 reinforces the importance of partnerships with the public and private sectors, as partnership with the private sector is a fundamental pillar for developing the



Dr Masoud Jarallah al-Marri

food system, adding that the strategy includes several initiatives to support the private sector, such as: encouraging farmers to use protected agriculture techniques, offering fish farming and red meat production projects to local private sector companies.

The Director of the Food Security Department highlighted the issue of strategic inventory management with the private sector's contribution in storing and recycling food commodities and production inputs, as well as diversifying import sources by supporting local companies to expand into international markets and foreign investment, noting that these partnerships contribute to achieving sustainability by improving governance and expanding the scope of trade, which reduces dependence on limited sources.

The National Food Security Strategy 2030 focuses on fish farming by developing projects with a production capacity of up to 4,000 tonnes per year using advanced technologies that suit the local environment, while ensuring the sustainability of marine fisheries, Dr al-Marri said, adding that the strategy also focuses on modern irrigation systems to improve water use efficiency through pilot projects to select appropriate irrigation systems, and to develop programmes to facilitate the transition to modern technologies.

In regard to the regional trade centre establishment project, he explained

that the project includes establishing a commercial centre in Qatar based on the advanced facilities of Hamad Port. The project aims to develop the infrastructure for storing and processing food commodities, improving supply and shipping chains, and enhancing competitiveness in regional and global markets, he noted, adding that the project is being implemented in co-operation with the private sector and international companies to exchange expertise and promote international trade.

Dr al-Marri added that the Ministry of Municipality, represented by the Agriculture and Food Security Affairs Sector, provides support programmes for local production, including production inputs for farmers, fishermen, and livestock breeders, in accordance with the National Food Security Strategy 2030, a mechanism for allocating support and linking it to production outputs is also being developed to improve efficiency.

He pointed to local production marketing initiatives such as agricultural product yards, purchasing, and marketing programmes in co-operation with Mahaseel Company, in addition to seasonal activities to market dates and vegetables and support the marketing of sheep and goats during Ramadan and Eid al-Adha. He also touched on the projects implemented within the previous National Food Security Strategy 2018-2023, indicating that they included vegetable production, sheep farming, fodder, and fish farming, adding that existing projects are being followed up to provide the necessary technical support.

He affirmed that the most prominent challenges facing the previous strategy were the limited natural resources such as agricultural land and water, harsh climatic conditions, and the need for innovative technologies to maintain sustainability.

Regarding current and future projects, he explained that efforts are focused on enhancing the flexibility of local production while monitoring the levels of self-sufficiency for Qatar's strategic products, pointing out that, during the previous strategic plan, self-sufficiency was achieved in fresh poultry and fresh dairy products, indicating that the focus in the coming period will be on increasing local production of vegetables, red meat, fresh fish, and table eggs through the initiatives of the National Food Security Strategy 2030. (QNA)

## Closure of Mesaimmeer Interchange Tunnel

The Public Works Authority (Ashghal) has announced the closure of Mesaimmeer Interchange Tunnel for vehicles coming from Mesaieed Road towards the E-Ring Road from 2am-10am on Jan 17.

The closure that will be implemented in co-ordination with the General Directorate of Traffic has been announced to carry out essential maintenance work.

During the closure, road users coming from Mesaieed Road heading to E-Ring Road are advised to use the alternative routes as indicated 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.



# Registration opens for Awqaf's 'Little Muhadeth' contest

Organised by the Ministry of Endowments (Awqaf) and Islamic Affairs, represented by the Department of Dawah and Religious Guidance, and in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, the registration for the 11th edition of the 'Little Muhadeth' contest started yesterday.

The organising committee announced the opening of registration for those interested in participating in the competition's categories via the competition's website: <https://awqaf.gov.qa/muhadeth/>

Director of the Department of Dawah and Religious Guidance, Jassim Abdullah al-Ali stated that the competition serves as a model for promoting education through role models and community engagement, emphasising that the competition provides an opportunity to learn and master public speak-

ing skills, particularly through the presentation of Hadiths in school activities.

The 'Little Muhadeth' contest perpetuates the tradition of Qur'anic competitions across Qatar, and reflects co-operation between the Department of Dawah and Religious Guidance, the General Directorate of Awqaf, and various schools, including Jassim bin Hamad Secondary School for Boys, Um Al-Qura Primary School for Boys, and Al-Iman Secondary School for Girls.

The competition targets students of various age groups across both public and private schools in Qatar, with participation also extended to the parents.

The support of the General Directorate of Awqaf for the competition aligns with the objectives of the Endowment Fund, which aims to promote the teaching of the Qur'an and Sunnah through such competitions. (QNA)

# QU's genetic discovery offers new hope for treating a rare disorder

A recent research conducted by members of Qatar University's (QU) Health Sector delineated the mechanism that a mutation in a gene encoding for an important protein can lead to homocystinuria, a rare inherited disorder.

This breakthrough discovery holds the potential to pave the way for more effective treatments for those affected by this condition.

In detail, this study revealed how an amino acid change (T236N) in an enzyme called cystathionine-synthase (CBS) causes it to malfunction. CBS is an enzyme that helps break down homocysteine, a substance in the body. When CBS does not work properly due to a mutation, it causes a condition called homocystinuria.

This genetic disorder leads to a harmful buildup of homocysteine, which can cause serious health problems like vision issues, blood clots, and bone deformities. Right now, treatment options are limited for those affected. By understanding how the mutation affects CBS, researchers hope to develop treatments that restore its normal function, offering hope for better care to affected individuals around the world and especially to those in Qatar, where this condition is more common.

This research study was led by Dr Michail Nomikos from QU's College of Medicine, Dr Gheyath Nasrallah from the College of Health Sciences, and PhD graduate Dr Duaa al-Sadeq. Together, this dedicated team combined their expertise in genetics, biochemistry and medical sciences to investigate the impact of the mutation on the CBS enzyme, advancing understanding of this disorder and its potential treatments.

Dr al-Sadeq, who received the Best Dissertation Award in Medical Sciences for her outstanding work on this project, commented: "Our study sheds light on how a single genetic mutation can alter enzyme function in ways that contribute to serious health risks." Dr Nomikos added: "By understanding these molecular changes, we move closer to developing targeted treatments for homocystinuria, offering hope to individuals and families affected by this rare yet impactful disorder in



Dr Michail Nomikos from QU's College of Medicine.

Qatar and across the world." The researchers carefully studied the T236N mutation by using special lab techniques to see how it affects the CBS enzyme's physiological function. To do this, they created two versions of the CBS enzyme, one with the mutation and one without. By comparing how these two versions worked, they were able to observe how the mutation changes the enzyme's structure and how well the mutant enzyme functions.

This research helped them understand exactly how the mutation causes problems in the body, giving important clues about the genetic cause of the disorder. The next step in this exciting research is to find compounds that could potentially recover the function of the mutated enzyme. Through drug screening, researchers hope to find solutions that restore normal enzyme activity, offering a new direction for treating homocystinuria and similar disorders.

## QatarEnergy LNG Tender Invitation

No.	TENDER NUMBER / DESCRIPTION	TENDER ISSUE PERIOD	TENDER FEE (QAR)	TENDER BOND (QAR)	TENDER CLOSING DATE
1	LTC/C/NFE/6688/24 FOR OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE OF LIFTING STATIONS ON CALL-OFF BASIS	15/01/2025 to 21/01/2025	0	500,000	18/02/2025

### Scope of Work:

Contractor shall provide the necessary equipment, tools, spare parts and systems as well as competent, trained, and qualified personnel covering all relevant disciplines and functions to be able to plan and perform the following scope of work in compliance with the applicable rules and regulations on call-off basis.

- Operation, maintenance, repair of lifting station, pipeline and valve chamber installations and all associated equipment including pumps, mechanical filters, odor control units, electrical panel power and control system, electrical and instrument, and pipelines situated between the EPC labor camps at Ras Laffan Industrial City (RLIC) and the new Wastewater Treatment Plant.
- Conduct liquid and sanitary waste removal, transportation and disposal from lift stations at RLIC.

The duration of the awarded Contract shall be for thirty (30) months with an option to extend for One year.

**Important Note:** Tenderer interested to participate must have documented past experience of at least 3 years as a Contractor in providing similar services of an equivalent or greater complexity internationally or within an Industrial city inside Qatar. Tenderer in its submission shall provide documents as evidence in support of the above requirement.

**Bid Validity:** Bid Offer should be valid for 180 calendar days from the Tender Closing Date.

### Place for Tender Collection and Bid Submission:

ITT document for this tender will be available in QatarEnergy LNG website under Suppliers tab >Current Open Tenders. The bids shall be submitted through the QatarEnergy LNG online platform (SMART by GEP).

# MoECC promotes ecotourism in Ras Abrouq

The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change (MoECC) stressed the importance of ecotourism and its role in raising awareness about natural reserves in Qatar and promoting environmental consciousness that entails adopting sustainable practices that would contribute to preserving biodiversity.

As part of the ministry's increasing interest in supporting ecotourism, the MoECC is partaking in the Ras Abrouq events, organised by Visit Qatar in collaboration with a host of partners.



Thanks to its natural and heritage riches, Ras Abrouq is a prominent local eco-touristic destination and an embodiment of Qatar's vision of striking a balance between tourism development and environmental preservation.

The reserve is one of the key sites involved in wildlife relocation projects, home to hundreds of gazelles and oryx, exemplifying the country's efforts to promote sustainable development in line with Qatar National Vision 2030, which seeks to balance economic growth and environmental conservation.

Designated as a natural reserve under Law No 7 of 2005, Ras Abrouq lies within the Al Reem Biosphere Reserve, which is part of the International Co-ordinating Council of Unesco's Man and the Biosphere programme, together with 23 other new global sites.

In this context, head of the Ras Abrouq unit Faisal Falah al-Rumaihi said that the reserve is characterised by its unique terrain and breathtaking landscapes, making

it an exceptional destination that combines the beauty of nature with authentic Qatari heritage, providing a unique experience for explorers and adventure enthusiasts.

Al-Rumaihi added that the ministry's Natural Reserves Department has put in place a comprehensive plan to ensure that events on site meet environmental

sustainability standards, in addition to monitoring tourism activity there in order to prevent the occurrence of any negative impacts on the reserve, in co-ordination with relevant authorities. The plan includes the safe disposal of waste, noise reduction, and the protection of wildlife on the reserve.

Al-Rumaihi said that the ministry places great emphasis on Ras Abrouq due to its status as one of the country's most important natural reserves. He added that the MoECC is working on plans to maintain ecological balance and to turn reserves into major ecotourism destinations by creating sustainable facilities that could support the continuity of this type of tourism. (QNA)

## All-new Patrol marks bold design evolution for Nissan SUV lineup

The recently launched all-new Nissan Patrol has solidified its position as a design benchmark for the region and beyond.

The Patrol exemplifies Nissan's bold approach to design innovation, seamlessly blending its legendary legacy of over 70 years with modern sophistication.

The all-new Patrol introduces a new era of SUV design for Nissan, with a distinctive silhouette that balances rugged capability with premium refinement. Bringing together timeless heritage and cutting-edge aesthetics, the all-new Patrol embodies the perfect balance of Nissan's global design philosophy of "Bold Presence" and "Solid Dignity". Thierry Sabbagh, divisional vice-president, president - Middle East, KSA, CIS - Nissan, INFINITI, commented: "The all-new Nissan Patrol is a bold statement of Nissan's refreshed design language and an embodiment of our vision for SUVs in the Middle East. A pioneer of Nissan design language, the all-new Patrol reflects our unwavering commitment to meeting the needs of our customers while setting a new standard for premium SUV."



All-new Nissan Patrol.

Nassim Mourani, general manager of the Automotive Group at Saleh Al Hamad Al Mana Co, said: "The all-new Nissan Patrol has been exceptionally well-received in Qatar. Its bold, striking design and premium features truly resonate with our customers. With enhancements like the distinctive V-motion grille, modern lighting elements, and a refined interior, the all-new Patrol sets a new standard for SUVs in the region. It embodies both power and luxury, perfectly aligning with Qatar's growing demand for innovative and sophisticated vehicles."

Upfront, the Patrol proudly displays its "Bold Presence" design philosophy, now enhanced by a wider, more pronounced V-motion grille that pays homage to the second-generation Patrol with its integrated horizontal bar. This commanding feature is paired with sharply sculpted lines and modern lighting elements, including the distinctive new "double-C" lamp design, which together forge a futuristic yet unmistakably Patrol exterior. The full-width rear light bar further accentuates this evolution, maintaining the vehicle's sense of power and prestige.

The all-new Nissan Patrol is currently available at Saleh Al Hamad Al Mana Co, showrooms conveniently located across Qatar.

sign philosophy, now enhanced by a wider, more pronounced V-motion grille that pays homage to the second-generation Patrol with its integrated horizontal bar. This commanding feature is paired with sharply sculpted lines and modern lighting elements, including the distinctive new "double-C" lamp design, which together forge a futuristic yet unmistakably Patrol exterior. The full-width rear light bar further accentuates this evolution, maintaining the vehicle's sense of power and prestige.

## Symposium explores GCC trends in bottled water consumption

QNA  
Buraydah, Saudi Arabia

A symposium titled 'Prospects and Challenges of Bottled Water in the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) Countries' began yesterday in Saudi Arabia, addressing the rising consumption of bottled drinking water in the GCC region and exploring various aspects of this trend.

The awareness-focused event aimed to promote more conscious and measured water consumption across the GCC countries. It covered topics such as the current state of the bottled water industry, its regulations in GCC countries, and the drivers behind the growing use of bottled water. The discussions are intended to help policymakers optimise the benefits of bottled water while minimising costs and both visible and hidden impacts. The event also aimed to raise public awareness of the different facets of bottled water and its quality, including the tap water supplied to homes.

Sessions at the symposium included discussions on the legislative and regulatory framework for water sourcing in bottling plants, consumption patterns across GCC countries, and the bottled water industry in Oman. The role of private sector investment in bottling plants and the challenges faced by bottled water companies were also explored.

Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Gulf Water Sciences and Technology Association, Eng. Abdul Rahman al-Mahmoud, emphasised the growing global significance of the bottled water sector, noting that global bottled water consumption has reached hundreds of millions of cubic metres annually.

He highlighted that bottled water is no longer a luxury but a necessity in many locations.

He explained that the rising consumption prompted the association to organise the first symposium in Kuwait, followed by subsequent events in Qatar, Oman, and now Saudi Arabia, in collaboration with the Ministry of Environment, Water, and Agri-

culture in Al Qassim. This ongoing effort reflects the importance of the issue and the need for continued research into various aspects of bottled water, including sourcing, standards, and packaging.

Al-Mahmoud also pointed out that the symposium is part of a long list of initiatives the association has organised since its establishment in 1987, in partnership with various water-related organisations across the GCC. These include biennial Gulf Water Conferences, training sessions, workshops, and scientific studies. It is noteworthy that the bottled water phenomenon has grown significantly worldwide over the past two decades. Global bottled water sales now exceed \$100bn annually, with the industry growing at over 10% per year.

GCC countries are among the highest in the world for both the growth rate and per capita consumption of bottled water, with individual consumption levels more than double the global average of 45 litres per person annually.

## Tunisians rally for political prisoners' release on uprising anniversary

AFP  
Tunis

Tunisians protested yesterday in the capital on the 14th anniversary of the uprising that sparked the Arab Spring revolts across the region, calling to release jailed political figures.

The dozens-strong march in Tunis, organised by a political coalition that includes staunch opponents of current President Kais Saied, commemorated the day in 2011 when Zine El Abidine Ben Ali was ousted.

The protesters expressed their anger at Saied's administration, accusing the judiciary of acting on the government's "orders" and demanding an end to a crackdown on the president's political opponents.

Though fewer than in similar gatherings in previous years, the demonstrators yesterday were faced with a heavy police presence, according to an AFP journalist.

Many carried pictures of de-

tained opposition figures, including former prime minister Ali Larayedh of the Ennahdha party, part of the National Salvation Front (FSN) that called the rally.

Larayedh, who has denied wrongdoing, is held on charges linked to sending militants to Syria.

Other prominent detainees include Rached Ghannouchi, the 83-year-old leader of Ennahdha, and Jawhar Ben Mbarek, co-founder of the FSN who faces charges of plotting against state security.

## Qatar Charity signs pact to enhance healthcare services in Somalia

Qatar Charity has signed a strategic partnership agreement with the Ministry of Health in Galmudug state in Somalia to establish and equip four new health centres across the region.

Following the signing of the agreement, Director of Qatar Charity's office in Somalia Abdul Fattah Adam Maalim, and Minister of Health and Social Welfare for Galmudug Dr Abdulwali Abdullah Jama praised the partnership between the two sides to support the health sector in Somalia and to implement health projects that serve the targeted people.

Commenting on the agreement, Maalim said: "This partnership is part of Qatar Charity's broader commitment to supporting the Somali people across various sectors, with a particular focus on healthcare, which is fundamental to sustainable development. These new centres aim to significantly improve the quality of healthcare available to citizens in the Galmudug state."

Dr Jama also expressed his gratitude, praising Qatar Char-



ity's ongoing support for Somalia's health sector and highlighting the vital role of Qatari donors.

Qatar Charity is currently operating the Tarkinely Health Center in the Kowajdi area, which provides comprehensive medical care to approximately 30,000 people from vulnerable communities.

Health Officer for the Benadir region Dr Abdulrahman Abdul-

lah highlighted the immense importance of the project, which aligns with the Somali government's health policies aimed at improving national health outcomes and fostering sustainable healthcare development.

He also underscored the importance of the partnership between humanitarian organisations and government institutions in achieving these goals. (QNA)

## Ministry participates in Arab culture panel meeting

The Ministry of Culture, represented by the Department of Culture and Arts, participated in the meeting of the Permanent Committee for Arab Culture of the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organisation (Alecso), in Rabat, Morocco, in preparation for the 24th Arab Culture Ministers Conference.

The meeting discussed a number of important issues on the agenda, with participants focusing on the role of cultural and creative industries as a strategic option to enhance development in the Arab world.

The meeting also discussed ways to develop digitisation and modern technologies, enhance the common Arab cultural market, and facilitate the movement of writers, intellectuals, and artists between member states. The meeting reviewed mechanisms to support the transfer of cultural industries



between Arab countries, in addition to discussing the development of cultural policies and enhancing Arab co-operation in the cultural field.

During the meeting, the presidency of the current session was handed over from

Saudi Arabia to Morocco, which will lead the work of this session. This meeting is part of the joint efforts to support Arab cultural work and develop initiatives that contribute to enhancing the presence of Arab culture regionally and internationally. (QNA)

## Lebanon's new PM says reaching out to all sides to save country

AFP  
Beirut

Lebanon's new Prime Minister Nawaf Salam said yesterday that he was reaching out to all political persuasions to help "rescue" his crisis-hit country ahead of talks aimed at forming a government.

After two years of a caretaker administration, Salam faces the difficult task of assembling a



Lebanon's new Prime Minister Nawaf Salam arrives for his meeting, in Beirut, yesterday.

cabinet to pull the Mediterranean country out of an economic

collapse. The new government will also need to oversee the implementation of a fragile ceasefire, as well as reconstruction, after a war between Israel and Hezbollah that ended in November. After flying back from abroad to take up his post, Salam appeared to appeal to the group and its allies after they declined to back his nomination. "My hands are extended to all to set off together on this mission of rescue, reform and rebuilding," he said in his first speech.



Members of the South African police patrol as they guard the mine shaft where rescue operations are ongoing to rescue illegal miners in Stilfontein, yesterday.

# Death toll hits 36 as SA clears illegal gold mine

AFP  
Stilfontein

Thirty-six bodies have been lifted out of an abandoned South African gold mine over two days, police said yesterday, with fears that dozens of people are still underground despite a months-long effort to force them to leave the shaft.

Another 82 people have left alive since Monday but were then arrested, police Brigadier Athlenda Mathe said in a statement.

"All 82 that have been arrested are facing illegal mining, trespassing and contravention of the immigration act charges," Mathe said. Illegal miners had taken over the mine shaft that was once part of South Africa's vast mining industry.

No longer viable for commercial mining, the men - many of them migrants from neighbouring countries - entered illicitly, hoping to ease their poverty by finding remnants of gold.

Blinded by the bright summer sun, haggard survivors staggered across ochre soil mixed with rubble near Stilfontein, about 140 kilometres (90 miles) southwest of Johannesburg.

Their legs, reduced to skin and bones, wobbled like sticks



Rescued miners are seen as they are processed by police after being rescued at the mine shaft where rescue operations are ongoing, in Stilfontein, yesterday.

in oversized rubber boots as they walked to a police checkpoint.

Officers used metal detectors to check that they had not brought up an ounce of gold from the shaft that runs 2.6 kilometres (1.6 miles) underground.

Operations to remove them from the site began in August.

Since then, 1,576 people have voluntarily left the shaft, all but 21 of them foreigners from neighbouring countries, according to the Ministry of Mineral Resources and Energy.

To force them out, police restricted the supplies of food and water that the surrounding community had been dropping down the shaft. "They are very sick. They are very dehydrated. You can see they are nearly dy-

ing," community leader Johannes Qankase told AFP yesterday.

Police say hundreds could still be underground but the exact number is unclear. "Last week, we received a letter from underground indicating that there were more than 109 bodies," Levies Pilusa, a spokesperson for the residents of the Khuma township, told AFP.

He said that many of the miners had HIV, but that police had refused to allow deliveries of the medication that keeps them alive.

A court ordered in November that police must end all restrictions at the shaft, allowing people above ground to resume lowering food and water to those below.

A professional mine rescue company on Monday set up a

machine called a Rescue Winder to reach the miners through a rough hole in the ground.

Minerals Minister Gwede Mantashe, on a visit to the site yesterday, called the miners "foot soldiers" for those who really profit from the illegal trade.

"These foot soldiers are taking this gold to somebody. That somebody must take responsibility for that," he said. "Those who make money out of gold mining must take full responsibility of the risk taken." The country boasts some of the deepest gold mines in the world, extending kilometres underground, according to the Minerals Council South Africa.

There were claims in mid-November that up to 4,000 people were underground but police have said the figure was probably in the hundreds.

Over the past weeks, miners who have exited the shaft reported dire conditions underground, including acute hunger and dehydration. Zinzi Tom, 31, who grew up in Khuma, said the community had gone to court to force authorities to rescue the miners.

"There's nothing to be happy about but at least those loved ones who have lost their family members, at least they will be able to bury them," he said.

# Russia eyes Libya to replace Syria as Africa launchpad

AFP  
Paris

The fall of Russian ally Bashar al-Assad in Syria has disrupted the Kremlin's strategy not only for the Mediterranean but also for Africa, pushing it to focus on Libya as a potential foothold, experts say.

Russia runs a military port and an air base on the Syrian coast, designed to facilitate its operations in the Mediterranean, the Middle East, and sub-Saharan Africa, especially the Sahel, Sudan, and the Central African Republic.

However, this model is in jeopardy with the abrupt departure of the Syrian ruler.

Although Syria's new leader, Ahmed al-Sharaa, has called Russia an "important country", saying "we do not want Russia to leave Syria in the way that some wish", the reshuffling of cards in Syria is pushing Russia to seek a strategic retreat towards Libya.

In Libya, Russian mercenaries already support Khalifa Haftar, a field marshal controlling the east of the country, against the Tripoli-based Government of National Unity (GNU) which has UN recognition and is supported by Turkey. "The goal is notably to preserve the ongoing Russian missions in Africa," said Jalel Harchaoui at the RUSI think tank in the UK.

"It's a self-preservation reflex" for Russia which is anxious "to mitigate the deterioration of its position in Syria", he told AFP.

In May 2024, Swiss investigative consortium "All Eyes On Wagner" identified Russian activities at around 10 Libyan sites, including the port of Tobruk, where military equipment was delivered in February and April of last year.

There were around 800 Russian troops present in February 2024, and 1,800 in May.

On December 18 the Wall Street Journal, citing Libyan and American officials, said there had been a transfer of Russian radars and defence systems from Syria to Libya, including S-300 and S-400 anti-aircraft batteries.

### 'NOTABLE VOLUME'

Since Assad's fall on December 8, "a notable volume of Russian military resources has been shipped to Libya from Belarus and Russia", said Harchaoui, adding there had been troop transfers as well.

Ukrainian intelligence claimed

on January 3 that Moscow planned "to use Sparta and Sparta II cargo ships to transport military equipment and weapons" to Libya.

Beyond simply representing a necessary replacement of "one proxy with another", the shift is a quest for "continuity", said expert Emadeddin Badi on the Atlantic Council's website, underscoring Libya's role as "a component of a long-standing strategy to expand Moscow's strategic foothold in the region". According to Badi, "Assad offered Moscow a foothold against Nato's eastern flank and a stage to test military capabilities".

Haftar, he said, presents a similar opportunity, "a means to disrupt Western interests, exploit Libya's fractured politics, and extend Moscow's influence into Africa".

The Tripoli government and Italy, Libya's former colonial master, have expressed concern over Russian movements, closely observed by the European Union and Nato. Several sources say the United States has tried to persuade Haftar to deny the Russians a permanent installation at the port of Tobruk that they have coveted since 2023.

It seems already clear the Kremlin will struggle to find the same level of ease in Libya that it had during Assad's reign.

"Syria was convenient," said Ulf Laessing, the Bamako-based head of the Sahel programme at the Konrad Adenauer Foundation.

"It was this black box with no Western diplomats, no journalists. They could basically do what they wanted," he said.

"But in Libya, it will be much more complicated. It's difficult to keep things secret there and Russian presence will be much more visible," he said.

Moscow will also have to contend with other powers, including Turkey, which is allied with the GNU, as well as Egypt and the United Arab Emirates, who are patrons of Haftar.

In Libya, torn into two blocs since the ouster of long-time leader Muammar Gaddafi in February 2011, "everybody's trying to work with both sides", said Laessing.

Over the past year, even Turkey has moved closer to Haftar, seeking potential co-operation on economic projects and diplomatic exchanges.

Russia will also be mindful to have a plan B should things go wrong for its Libyan ally.

## ANNOUNCEMENT

I, EVALINA JOHNVINO FLORENCE INBARANI

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India Passport No. V8361222  
QID No. 32135601068

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# Zimbabwe's Zanu-PF wants to extend president's term

Reuters  
Harare

Zimbabwe's ruling Zanu-PF party wants to extend President Emmerson Mnangagwa's term in office by two years until 2030, a party spokesman said yesterday.

He gave no details of how this could be achieved or whether constitutional changes would be sought to enable the 82-year-old Zanu-PF leader to stay on.

Zimbabwe's constitution limits the presidential office to two five-year terms, and Mnangagwa's second and final term as president expires in 2028.

"The issue of the president staying in power is a party position which has been agreed upon," the party's director of information, Farai Marapira, told Reuters by telephone.

Asked whether that meant changing the constitution to extend presidential



Zimbabwe's President Emmerson Mnangagwa.

terms to seven years, he replied: "The modalities have not been decided."

For much of its history since independence in 1980, Zimbabwe was led

by the late Robert Mugabe who was prime minister from 1980 until he was elected president in December 1987, a post he held until November 2017.

Mugabe openly believed in a one-party state and used violence and intimidation to prevent anyone challenging his monopoly on power at the ballot box. In 2013, Mugabe signed a new constitution into law limiting presidents to two five-year terms. It did not apply retroactively, and Mugabe would have been able to stay in power for a further 10 years were it not for the 2017 coup that replaced him with his then deputy, Mnangagwa. Mugabe died two years later.

### EXTENDED TERM LIMITS MOOTED AT CONFERENCE

Mnangagwa, a former spy chief, has said publicly that he will leave when his term expires, but the idea of Zimbabwe scrapping term limits was mooted at a

Zanu-PF conference last October.

Constitutional lawyer Welshman Ncube said that in theory any constitutional change could not apply to the incumbent. "Mnangagwa will have to subject himself to two referendums, one to scrap the term limits and another to remove the provision that an incumbent cannot benefit from any amendments," he told Reuters.

Another constitutional lawyer, Lovemore Madhuku, said it was not possible for Mnangagwa to stay in power legally beyond 2028 as "no one that has the power to extend the president's term of office".

Since 1990, 24 African governments have sought to extend their president's rule beyond existing constitutional limits, usually by scrapping the two-term ceiling, and with all but four of them successful, according to a 2023 paper in Scientific Research Publishing.

## ANNOUNCEMENT

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## ANNOUNCEMENT

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**THE PERMANENT COMMITTEE FOR NATIONALITY AFFAIRS**  
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## Venezuela restricts diplomats from France, Italy and Netherlands

Venezuela said yesterday that it would limit the number of accredited diplomats at the French, Italian and Dutch embassies, citing their governments' "hostile" response to Nicolas Maduro's inauguration for a third presidential term.

The Venezuelan foreign ministry said the diplomats – maximum three per country – would also need "written authorisation... to travel more than 40km (25 miles) from Plaza Bolívar" in the capital Caracas.

Maduro, 62, is embroiled in a standoff with the West and several Latin American countries over his disputed claim to have won another six-year term in July 28 elections.

The US, EU, G7 and several democratic neighbours have refused to recognise his re-election, and France, Italy and the Netherlands last week loudly condemned Maduro's administration.

Yesterday Venezuela's Foreign Minister Yvan Gil took to Telegram to accuse the three governments of "support for extremist groups" and "interference in the country's internal affairs".

Within 48 hours, he said, the embassies must each reduce to three their number of accredited diplomats.

Due to the new travel restrictions, any trip outside the capital will now require a permit.

The international airport, Simon Bolívar, which serves Caracas, is 23km from the Plaza Bolívar.

"Venezuela demands respect for sovereignty and self-determination... especially from those subordinated to the directives of Washington," wrote Gil.

The opposition says its tally of results from the July vote showed a clear victory for its candidate, 75-year-old Edmundo Gonzalez Urrutia, who went into exile in Spain in September after first taking refuge at the Dutch embassy.

Venezuela's CNE electoral council, loyal to the regime, had announced victory for Maduro within hours of polls closing.

It never provided a detailed vote breakdown.

More than 2,400 people were arrested, 28 killed and about 200 injured in protests that erupted after Maduro disputed claim to election victory.

He has since maintained a fragile peace with the help of the security forces and paramilitary "colectivos" – armed civilian volunteers accused of quelling protest through a reign of neighbourhood terror. – **AFP**

# Trump would have been convicted of election subversion, says report

AFP/Reuters  
Washington

Donald Trump would have been convicted for his "criminal efforts" to retain power after the 2020 election if the case had not been dropped because of his November White House victory, special counsel Jack Smith said yesterday.

In a 137-page final report on the results of his historic prosecution of the former and future president, Smith laid out the evidence amassed against the 78-year-old Trump.

"But for Mr Trump's election and imminent return to the Presidency, the (Special Counsel's) Office assessed that the admissible evidence was sufficient to obtain and sustain a conviction at trial," he said.

Smith, who was appointed by Attorney-General Merrick Garland, brought two federal cases against Trump – for seeking to overturn the results of the election he lost to Joe Biden and mishandling top government secret documents after leaving the White House.

Neither case came to trial and Smith dropped the charges in line with a Justice Department policy of not prosecuting a sitting president.

This new stinging rebuke from Smith means Trump will have something of a cloud hanging over him as he takes the oath of office Monday at the Capitol, ground zero of the insurrection he inspired after losing the 2020 election.

However, it falls far short of the punishment which Trump critics had hoped for from at least one of four indictments against him.

In the end, after years of legal wrangling that Trump survived first by delaying tactics and ultimately by winning re-election, this is about all Trump critics can point to as justice – the special prosecutor's asser-



Trump wrote 'Jack is a lamebrain prosecutor who was unable to get his case tried before the Election, which I won in a landslide. THE VOTERS HAVE SPOKEN!!!'



Smith: Trump... resorted to a series of criminal efforts to retain power.

tion that, had Trump gone to trial in the election subversion case, he would have been found guilty.

Specifically, Trump was charged with conspiracy to defraud the United States and conspiracy to obstruct an official proceeding – the session of Congress held to certify Biden's win that was violently attacked on January 6, 2021 by a mob of Trump supporters.

In his report, Smith accused Trump of using "fraud and deceit" to overturn the election results.

"When it became clear that Mr Trump had lost the election and that lawful means of challenging the election results had failed, he resorted to a series of criminal efforts to retain power," the special counsel said.

"This included attempts to induce state officials to ignore true vote counts (and) to manufacture fraudulent slates of presidential electors in seven states that he had lost," Smith said. "Trump engaged in these efforts even though trusted state and party officials had told him from the outset that there was no evidence of fraud in the election."

Trump unsuccessfully pressured vice-president Mike Pence not to certify the election results, Smith said, and on Janu-

ary 6 he directed "an angry mob to the United States Capitol".

Trump's untruths included dozens of demonstrably false claims that large numbers of ineligible voters, such as non-citizens, had cast ballots, and that voting machines had changed votes, the special counsel said.

Trump lashed out at Smith following the release of the report, calling him "deranged" and claiming his prosecution was politically motivated.

"Jack is a lamebrain prosecutor who was unable to get his case tried before the Election, which I won in a landslide. THE VOTERS HAVE SPOKEN!!!" Trump said.

Smith flatly rejected the allegations of political bias in a letter to Garland that accompanied his final report.

"The claim from Mr Trump that my decisions as a prosecutor were influenced or directed by the Biden administration or other political actors is, in a word, laughable," he said.

Trump's lawyers tried but failed to block the report's release, calling it "undertaken in bad faith, and contrary to the public interest".

Smith has also prepared a report into Trump's mishandling of classified docu-

## More than 1mn people internally displaced in Haiti: UN

More than 1mn people, over half of them children, are now displaced within Haiti where gang violence continues unabated despite the start of a United Nations-backed security mission last year, UN data showed yesterday.

The tally of 1.04mn displaced people released by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) represents a threefold increase from December 2023 when 315,000 people were homeless.

Never before have so many people been displaced by violence in the country, according to UN data.

"Haiti needs sustained humanitarian assistance right now to save and protect lives," said IOM Director-General Amy Pope in a statement sent to journalists, stressing the need to address the root causes of the violence and instability.

Most of the displaced were from the capital, Port-au-Prince, which itself has seen internal displacement surge by 87% in the past year, the IOM said.

The displacement, it warned, was being "fuelled by relentless gang violence, the collapse of essential services – particularly healthcare – and worsening food insecurity".

Armed gangs within Haiti now have near-total control over the capital Port-au-Prince and wide remit over the rest of the country.

Despite a Kenyan-led police support mission, backed by the United States and the UN, violence in Haiti has continued to burgeon.

Last week, the UN rights office said soaring gang violence in Haiti had left more than 5,600 people dead last year and thousands

more injured or kidnapped.

The international mission led by Kenya and approved last year, tasked with restoring order, has so far seen just a fraction of troops deploying, although two contingents of Guatemalan soldiers arrived this month to boost the mission's forces.

IOM spokesperson Kennedy Okoth Omondi told a Geneva press briefing that spaces in shelters were running short, with many struggling to obtain basic services like food and water.

Deportations of migrants from the Dominican Republic and elsewhere have added to the strain on communities, he added.

"What has really made this worse is the fact that we have seen over and over deportation still occurring back to Haiti, where communities are already struggling to basically survive," he said. – **Reuters/AFP**

## Lawmakers urge Biden to extend TikTok ban deadline

Two Democratic lawmakers have urged Congress and President Joe Biden to extend a January 19 deadline for China-based ByteDance to sell the US assets of TikTok or face a US ban.

The Supreme Court held arguments on Friday on Tiktok and ByteDance's challenge to the law.

A lawyer for the companies, Noel Francisco, said it would be impossible to complete a sale by next week's deadline.

He said if banned, the short video app used by 170mn Americans would quickly go dark and "essentially the platform shuts down".

Biden could extend the deadline by 90 days.

Senator Edward Markey said he planned to introduce legislation to delay the deadline by which ByteDance must sell Tiktok or face a ban by an additional 270 days.

Representative Ro Khanna, a Democrat, has urged Biden "to put a pause on this ban so 170mn Americans don't lose their free speech. Millions of Americans' livelihood will be ended if this ban takes place". – **Reuters**

## Argentine heatwave 'to damage crops before next rains'

Argentina's soybean and corn crops will have to endure a heatwave over the next few days that will affect their yields, leading meteorologist German Heizenknecht said on Monday, before rains bring some relief by the start of the weekend.

Argentina, a major world supplier of soy, corn and wheat, has seen its main agricultural region face a prolonged dry spell since the onset of the Southern Hemisphere's summer last month.

Heizenknecht, with the CCA climate consultancy, predicted that a front of rain would come in on Friday, ushering in the start of a normalisation in rainfall.

"This is the toughest week," Heizenknecht said, forecasting highs of 36° Celsius (97° Fahrenheit) and up to 40C (104F) in some parts of the country.

While Heizenknecht predicted some 25-40mm (1.6") of rainfall across some parts of the key agricultural heartlands on Friday, he said the rainfall would not be even and would come too late to avert damage to crop yields.

"I don't think the crops will come through unscathed," Heizenknecht said. – **Reuters**

## LA firefighters holding the line despite extreme winds

Reuters/AFP  
Los Angeles

Firefighters held the line yesterday against two massive wildfires that have ravaged parts of Los Angeles for the past week, even as desert winds and a parched landscape presented extremely hazardous conditions.

Some 8,500 firefighters from at least seven states and two foreign countries prevented the fires from growing for a second straight day as they gained slightly more control of the perimeter of the blazes, which nonetheless have consumed an area the size of Washington, DC.

A fleet of aircraft dropped water and retardant into the rugged hills while ground crews with hand tools and hoses have worked around the clock since the fires broke out on January 7, with the aircraft occasionally grounded by high winds.

"Red Flag" conditions were expected to last through Wednesday, forecasters said.

A large part of Southern California was under a Red Flag warning, indicating that intense dryness and furious winds would make conditions ripe for wildfire.

Part of Los Angeles County and much of neighbouring Ventura County were in a "Particularly Dangerous Situation", according to the National Weather Service (NWS), a designation that was also declared before last week's deadly blazes erupted.

The Palisades Fire on the west edge of town held at 23,713 acres (965sq km) burned, and containment increased three percentage points to 17% – a measurement of how much of the perimeter was under control.

The Eaton Fire in the foothills east of the city stood at 14,117 acres (57sq km) with containment up two points to 35%.

A third fire, the Hurst, spanning 799 acres (3.2sq km) was 97% contained, while a new fire broke out in neighbouring Ventura County, burning 56 acres while it was 0% contained.

Three other fires in Los Angeles County have been fully brought under control in recent days.

The death toll held steady at 24 as did the estimate of 12,000 structures damaged or destroyed, still portending a Herculean rebuilding effort ahead.



A firefighter monitors the spread of the Auto Fire in Oxnard, North West of Los Angeles. – **AFP**



A swing with artwork that reads 'Palisades' hangs from a tree next to a home burned by the Palisades Fire, in the Pacific Palisades neighbourhood in Los Angeles. – **Reuters**



A sign for a missing cat is seen posted outside of a home burned by the Palisades Fire. – **Reuters**

Entire neighbourhoods have been levelled, leaving smouldering ash and rubble. In many homes only a chimney is left standing.

"It's one thing to see it on television. It's another thing to see it from the air. The massive, massive destruction is unimaginable until you actually see it," Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass told a press conference after taking an aerial tour.

Southern California has lacked any appreciable rain since April, turning brush into tinder.

Relative humidity has dipped into the single digits for much of the past week, when Santa Ana winds originating from the deserts have whipped over hilltops and rushed through canyons, sending embers flying up to two miles (3km) ahead of the fire.

"It is still very dangerous for the next 24 hours, so we're keeping a very close eye. That's why we have not downgraded the number of personnel," Los Angeles County Sheriff Robert Luna said.

Red Flag conditions peaked overnight, when wind gusts surpassed 50mph (80kph), the NWS said.

"Stay aware of your surroundings. Be ready to evacuate. Avoid anything that can spark a fire," an NWS message warned.

That led firefighters to deploy assets throughout Southern California due to the danger that new fires might break out.

"Life threatening and destructive and widespread winds are already here," Los Angeles Fire Chief Kristin Crowley said.

A few thousand more people were allowed back home but 88,000 remained under evacuation orders with another 84,000

under evacuation warning – large-scale displacements unprecedented in the metropolitan area's history.

"We thank God we're safe, but we don't know what's next," said Altadena resident John Adolph, 48, a video producer who, along with his wife and two children, has been staying with friends since they lost their home in the Eaton Fire a week ago.

Adolph went back to his home to see what he could salvage, but could not get close.

"There were burning grocery stores, gas stations, exploding cars that went pop with glass flying, not like in the movies. Walls of flames two storeys tall, tornadoes of flame. I was stupid with a side of crazy to try," he said.

"My house is gone, I know that. I've seen pictures and all that's left is the chimney. But I need to see it by myself to believe it," Fred Busche told AFP.

California Governor Gavin Newsom has said the firestorm could rank as the most devastating natural disaster in US history.

It is already the costliest wildfire in terms of insured losses.

Private forecaster AccuWeather's preliminary estimate of \$135-150bn in total damage and economic loss would come up short of the estimated \$225bn in losses from Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans in 2005.

In Washington, a battle over emergency aid broke out between Republicans and Democrats.

At a press conference on Tuesday, US House of Representatives Democratic Cau-

cus Chairman Pete Aguilar said his rank-and-file lawmakers would oppose any attempt by Republicans in Congress to attach special conditions to federal disaster aid for LA wildfire victims.

House Speaker Mike Johnson, a Republican, has said conditions would be considered when the emergency funding bill moves through Congress.

He also said the cost of any wildfire disaster assistance funding should be "paid for", meaning the cost should be covered to prevent adding to the budget deficit, possibly by cutting other programmes.

That is a departure from many previous natural disasters, and Democratic Representative Ted Lieu of California called Johnson's position "outrageous".

"We should not be leveraging the pain and suffering of our fellow Americans to try to force new policy changes," Lieu said.

There are also stories of generosity. At a converted parking lot in Arcadia, 600 people showed up in a single day to distribute donated supplies to evacuees, organisers said.

Many had been redirected from other shelters that also could not accommodate the extra help.

"It's a very different experience than any other volunteering that I typically do. Because there's really no difference between the people that are helping and the people that are being helped," said 19-year-old student Gianna Karkafi. "It's just, like, luck."

## North Korea fires short-range ballistic missiles before Trump's return

AFP  
Seoul

North Korea fired several short-range ballistic missiles into the sea yesterday, according to Seoul's military, in what experts said could be a message to US President-elect Donald Trump's incoming administration. The launch came as Japanese Foreign Minister Takeshi Iwaya visited South Korea for a series of meetings with top officials, with the Asian neighbours seeking to boost bilateral ties before Trump returns to office next week.

"The South Korean military detected several short-range ballistic missiles fired into the East Sea," the military in Seoul said,

referring to the body of water also known as the Sea of Japan. South Korean and US intelligence agencies had monitored Pyongyang's launch preparations, the military said, with Seoul maintaining "full readiness" and sharing information with Washington and Tokyo.

Tuesday's launch took place around 9:30am near North Korea's Ganggye area, with the missiles flying 250km before landing in the sea, according to the military. The United States Indo-Pacific Command condemned the test, calling on North Korea "to refrain from further unlawful and destabilising acts". Seoul's acting president Choi Sang-mok also slammed the launch, saying it violated UN Security Council resolutions. "Seoul will respond more strongly to

North Korea's provocations based on its strong security posture and alliance with the US," he said.

Experts said the latest launch could be intended as a message to the incoming US president. "It may indicate an intention to put pressure ahead of the Trump administration's second term," said Yang Moo-jin, president of the University of North Korean Studies in Seoul. Ahn Chan-il, a defector-turned-researcher who runs the World Institute for North Korea Studies, told AFP the test launch "appears to be an intention to assert presence ahead of the Trump administration".

He said it could also be aimed at "destabilising South Korea during Seoul's own period of turmoil". Suspended President Yoon Suk-

yeol's impeachment trial over his failed martial law bid began yesterday. Yesterday's launch was Pyongyang's second this month after it fired what it said was a new hypersonic missile system last week. The location of the test site was undisclosed but images released by North Korean state media KCNA showed leader Kim Jong-un observing last week's launch with his teenage daughter Ju Ae.

KCNA cited the use of a "new compound of carbon fibre" in the missile's engine, which experts warned could allow Pyongyang to hit further targets with technology to which only the United States, Russia and China currently have access. Relations between the two Koreas have been at one of their lowest points in years,

with the North launching a flurry of ballistic missiles last year in violation of UN sanctions. In response to Pyongyang's increased capabilities, South Korea's state arms procurement agency said on Tuesday it has begun developing a new missile defence system "aiming to intercept North Korea's nuclear and missile threats at higher altitudes". The missile system will cost 567.7bn won (\$388mn) and is scheduled to be ready by 2028, Seoul's Defense Acquisition Program Administration (DAPA) said in a statement. Last week's alleged hypersonic missile launch came as US Secretary of State Antony Blinken was visiting South Korea.

Blinken said during that visit that Moscow was increasing cooperation with Pyongyang, add-

ing they were working ever more closely on advanced space technology. Ahn said another reason for Tuesday's launch may be the testing of "missiles for export to Russia to be used in Ukraine".

North Korea test-fired in late October what it said was its most advanced and powerful solid-fuel intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM). It then fired a salvo of short-range ballistic missiles days later. US and South Korean intelligence also believe that North Korea started in October to send thousands of troops to fight against Ukraine and has since suffered hundreds of casualties.

However, neither North Korea nor Russia has officially confirmed that Pyongyang's forces are fighting for Moscow.

## New Year travel rush kicks off in China

- A record 9bn trips in China expected this year
- Mood to celebrate not dimmed by gloomy economy
- Lunar New Year falls on Jan 29

Reuters  
Beijing

The annual travel rush for China's Lunar New Year celebrations officially began on Tuesday, with many taking a mental break from their worries about the future to reunite with family or take a holiday.

The peak travel season in the world's second-largest economy kicked off with a train departing from Beijing minutes after midnight, taking early bird travellers from the capital to Hefei in eastern Anhui province.

Most people aim to be with family for the traditional reunion dinner on the eve of the New Year, which falls on Jan 29 this year. The 40-day travel season will continue until Feb 22, during which authorities estimate a record 9bn domestic trips will be made. The forecast matches 2024's estimate, although only 8.4bn trips were actually made during last year's festivities.



Passengers wait to check in at a railway station in Beijing yesterday.

Railway passenger volume is expected to exceed 510mn passengers, while more than 90mn passengers are expected to fly. However, the number of journeys by private vehicle is expected to reach 7.2bn trips, or about 80% of the total domestic passenger flow, national television broadcaster CCTV said. Most of China's 1.4bn population will be celebrating this year's Lunar New Year, also known as the Spring Festival, at a time

when the economy is struggling to sustain a durable recovery hampered by weak domestic demand and a prolonged property market crisis. Some travellers said they would not allow the state of the economy to take the shine off the upcoming celebrations.

"Although the economy has slowed down, I think the country as a whole is taking into consideration (the economic situation) and us, as ordinary people, are living

well (day to day)," said Wang Zhixu, a 55-year-old who works in property management services, and was at the station in Beijing.

"Peace within our country brings us the most happiness."

Air passengers who purchased multiple destination tickets for the festive period rose 50% compared to last year, and hotel bookings in some counties have increased, CCTV said. Beijing, Guangzhou, Harbin, Dali and Fuzhou were



popular destinations for holiday-makers making the most of the eight-day public holiday. But for young people looking for work, the outlook is different.

Shi Zhenyue, 22, en route to Harbin for a holiday with friends before travelling on to Wuxi in eastern Jiangsu province to celebrate the New Year with family, hoped for an improvement in the economy so she could join the workforce. "If the economy does get better (in the new year), I will have a better chance of finding a job, and I won't have to go back to study for a master's or doctoral degree. And if the economy improves, my father's bonus (from work) won't be halved. Everything else is fine," Shi said.

Youth unemployment hit 18.8% last August, the highest since the authorities changed the way they

calculated the figures in December 2023. Although joblessness data has shown some improvement in recent months, millions of college graduates have been pushed into accepting low-paying work or even subsisting on their parents' pensions. Many have also abandoned the stresses of big cities for a simpler life away from the hustle. For 33-year-old He who lives in northeastern Liaoning province with her fiancé, the slower pace of life is a comfort. "Because we are not in a very big city like everyone else, we may not have too much pressure," said the small business owner who only gave her surname.

"We had also stayed in the big city for a period of time after graduation, and then we chose to go back to our home town where we feel is friendlier, and also happier," she said.

## Impeachment trial of S Korea's Yoon adjourned after he does not attend

Reuters  
Seoul

South Korea's Constitutional Court adjourned the opening session of the impeachment trial of suspended President Yoon Suk-yeol within minutes yesterday, after the embattled leader did not attend court. A lawyer advising Yoon had said the president, who has been holed up in his hillside villa in Seoul for weeks, would not attend, saying a bid by authorities to detain him prevented Yoon from expressing his position at the trial.

The next trial session is scheduled for Thursday and if Yoon also does not attend, the trial proceedings will go ahead with his legal team representing him, acting chief justice Moon Hyung-bae said. Outside the court, one of Yoon's lawyers Yoon Kab-keun said the president would decide whether to go to the court in person on Thursday after discussions on his defence strategy.

The Constitutional Court must decide within 180 days whether to remove Yoon from office or restore his presidential powers. Yoon also faces a criminal investigation for alleged insurrection, with authorities seeking to execute an arrest warrant after he ignored summons to appear for questioning.

"A legitimate warrant must exist, and... it must be legally presented and executed," which does not mean "jumping fences or damaging property without presenting a warrant", his lawyer Yoon said, repeating that the current arrest warrant was invalid.

Yoon's declaration of martial law on Dec. 3 that was withdrawn after about six hours has plunged one of Asia's most vibrant democracies into a period of unprecedented political turbulence. Yoon's chief of staff said yesterday that Yoon's office can consult with investigat-



Supporters of impeached South Korean president Yoon Suk-yeol hold placards reading "No Impeachment!" in front of the Constitutional Court in Seoul yesterday.

**The Constitutional Court must decide within 180 days whether to remove Yoon from office or restore his presidential powers**

ing authorities in order to avoid a clash during the execution of the arrest warrant against Yoon. Yoon could go to a third location outside of his fortified residence, or a visit to his home could be arranged so that investigating authorities could question Yoon, presidential chief of staff Chung Jin-suk said in a statement yesterday.

Investigating authorities, including the Corruption Investigation Office for High-ranking Officials (CIO) and the police, have received a re-issued arrest warrant from a South Korean court after their first attempt to detain Yoon for questioning failed after a

stand-off with presidential security officers earlier this month. CIO, the police and Presidential Security Service (PSS) met on Tuesday to discuss the execution of the latest arrest warrant, investigating authorities said in a statement.

At the meeting, police and CIO asked the PSS for co-operation in executing the warrant peacefully and safely, and were awaiting a response. The defence ministry said yesterday that military forces in charge of presidential security would not be mobilised in relation to Yoon's warrant execution.

Amid South Korea's political chaos, North Korea launched several short-range ballistic missiles yesterday, coinciding with a visit to Seoul by Japanese Foreign Minister Takeshi Iwaya, and less than a week before US President-elect Donald Trump takes office.

South Korean lawmakers, after being briefed by the National Intelligence Service, said on Monday that the North's recent weapons tests were partly aimed at "showing off its US deterrent assets and drawing Trump's attention".

## Japanese tourist magnet Kyoto to hike hotel taxes

AFP  
Kyoto

Kyoto authorities announced yesterday plans to hike lodging taxes, as Japan's ancient capital seeks to assuage grumbles from locals about too many tourists. Lured by its myriad sights and a weak yen, Japan has seen foreign tourism numbers explode in recent years, with arrivals in 2024 expected to have hit a record of more than 35mn.

But like other hotspots worldwide such as Venice in Italy or Maya Bay in Thailand, this is not universally welcome, particularly in tradition-steeped Kyoto. The city, which is a modest bullet train ride away from Tokyo - with a view of Mount Fuji on the way - is famed for its kimono-clad geisha performers and Buddhist temples.

Residents have complained of disrespectful tourists harassing the geisha like paparazzi in their frenzy for photos, as well as causing traffic congestion and littering. For rooms costing between 20,000 and 50,000 yen (\$127-317) per night, visitors will now see their tax double to 1,000 yen (\$6.35) per person per night, under the new plans.

For accommodation over 100,000 yen per night it will soar tenfold to 10,000 yen. The new levies will take effect next year, subject to approval from the city assembly. "We intend to hike accommodation tax to realise 'sustainable tourism' with a high level of satisfaction for citizens, tourists and businesses," a statement said. Tensions are highest in the Gion district, home to teahouses where "geiko" - the local name



Tourists walk through the streets by Yasaka Pagoda (behind) during a visit to the city of Kyoto. Japan will today announce tourist figures for the year 2024, widely expected to break the record set in 2019.

for geisha - and their "maiko" apprentices perform traditional dances and play instruments.

Last year authorities moved to ban visitors from entering certain narrow private alleys in Gion after pressure from a council of local residents. One council member told local media about an instance of a maiko's kimono being torn and another who had a cigarette butt put in her collar.

In 2019, the Gion district council put up signs saying "no photography on private roads" warning of fines of up to 10,000 yen. "I appreciate tourists visiting the city, but there are also some downsides like the impact on the environment," resident Daichi Hayase told AFP, welcoming the new taxes.

"But it doesn't mean the city should impose excessive taxes. Tourists are coming despite painful inflation," the 38-year-old photographer said. "If there's a burden on the infrastructure, I do think taxing tourists is a good idea," said Australian tourist

Larry Cooke, 21. But he said that the city had to find the "right balance".

Tourism has been booming for over a decade in Japan, with foreign arrivals rising five-fold between 2012 and when the Covid pandemic torpedoed foreign travel in 2020. Since restrictions were lifted, and the government is hoping to welcome 60mn tourists per year by 2030, almost double last year's expected total. Authorities have also taken steps beyond Kyoto, including introducing an entry fee and a daily cap on the number of hikers climbing Mount Fuji.

Last year a barrier was briefly erected outside a convenience store with a spectacular view of the famous snow-capped volcano that had become a magnet for photo-hungry visitors. And in December Ginzan Onsen, a Japanese hot spring town with made-for-Instagram snowy scenes began stopping anyone arriving after 8pm if they don't have a hotel booked.



# Princess Catherine says she is in remission from cancer

AFP  
London

Catherine, Princess of Wales, said yesterday she was "in remission" from cancer after she and husband Prince William visited the specialist London hospital where she was treated. "It is a relief to now be in remission and I remain focussed on recovery," the princess posted on Instagram, alongside a picture of her visit to the Royal Marsden Hospital.

The couple thanked staff and met patients at the specialist cancer centre operating across three sites in the capital.

"I wanted to take the opportunity to say thank you to The Royal Marsden for looking after me so well during the past year," Catherine wrote on Instagram. "My

heartfelt thanks goes to all those who have quietly walked alongside William and me as we have navigated everything.

"We couldn't have asked for more. The care and advice we have received throughout my time as a patient has been exceptional," she added. The visit came as Kensington Palace announced that the couple had become the hospital's joint patrons. As patrons, members of the royal family support over 3,000 organisations such as charities and hospitals by highlighting their work through visits.

"In my new role as joint patron of The Royal Marsden, my hope is that by supporting groundbreaking research and clinical excellence, as well as promoting patient and family wellbeing, we might save many more lives, and transform the experience of all those impacted by



Catherine, Princess of Wales, talks with Katherine Field during a visit to the Royal Marsden Hospital in west London yesterday.

cancer," said the princess. The visit was said to be "incredibly poignant" for the princess, also known as Kate, who turned 43 last week.

The future queen, whose popularity is seen as key to maintaining the royals' position in a changing Britain, revealed last March she

had been diagnosed with an unspecified cancer and was undergoing chemotherapy. "The princess wanted to make the journey to both show her gratitude to the incredible team, but also highlight the world leading care and treatment the Marsden provides," a Kensington Palace spokesperson said.

It is the first time the royal family has given any information about where Catherine was treated. She announced in September that she had completed a course of chemotherapy and was doing her best to remain "cancer free".

She reflected on her diagnosis in a video message at the same time that showed her relaxing in the countryside with William, who is heir to the throne, and her three children Prince George 11, Princess Charlotte, nine, and six-year-old Prince Louis. "Life as you know it

can change in an instant and we have had to find a way to navigate the stormy waters and road unknown," she said, adding the previous nine months had been "incredibly tough". She wrote on Tuesday that "as anyone who has experienced a cancer diagnosis will know, it takes time to adjust to a new normal".

"I am however looking forward to a fulfilling year ahead. There is much to look forward to."

Catherine's diagnosis came just weeks after the UK's head of state King Charles III revealed he too was receiving treatment for cancer. Both have since made a return to public life, although Catherine's has been more limited. The Royal Marsden opened its doors in 1851 as the world's first hospital dedicated to cancer treatment and research.

# UK finance minister, hit by market woes, stands firm on growth

AFP  
London

Britain's finance minister Rachel Reeves yesterday insisted the Labour government needed to "go further and faster" in its bid to kickstart economic growth in the face of UK markets turmoil. The chancellor of the exchequer, in the role for just over six months following Labour's election win, faced a renewed call to resign by the main opposition Conservative party during a heated exchange in parliament.

The British pound slumped and government borrowing costs soared over the past week as markets reacted to a struggling UK economy - even if a recent run-up in bond rates and renewed inflation concerns are not limited to Britain. "We have seen global economic uncertainty play out in the last week," Reeves told parliament Tuesday.

"But leadership is not about ducking these challenges, it is about rising to them. The economic headwinds that we face are a reminder that we should - indeed, we must - go further and faster in our plan to kickstart economic growth."

The pound fell once more towards a 14-month low against the dollar following her statement, while UK gilts, or bonds, steadied.

Reeves told MPs she is "absolutely committed to meeting the

fiscal rules" set out in her maiden budget in October.

By this she referred to her target of meeting day-to-day spending with revenue rather than borrowing. UK 10-year bond yields, a key indicator of market confidence, reached last week the highest level since the 2008 global financial crisis. That puts fiscal pressure on the government and could force it to cut spending and further hike taxes. Reeves' budget included tax rises for businesses - a decision blamed for Britain struggling to grow its economy in recent months.

"Rachel Reeves is doing a fantastic job. She has my full confidence," Prime Minister Keir Starmer told parliament on Monday as he faced a barrage of questions over her future as finance minister. At the centre of Labour's growth plans is big investment for infrastructure projects, including improvements for the National Health Service, education, transport and house-building.

Reeves on Tuesday defended her decision to visit China during the market turbulence as a necessary move "to secure tangible benefits for British businesses trading overseas". At the same time, Reeves said she made it clear to Chinese leaders that while the UK "must co-operate on areas of mutual interest" it will "confidently challenge on areas where we disagree". The chancellor reported back that she had expressed Britain's "real economic

and trade concerns" over imbalances and economic security with China. Reeves earlier said "common ground" had been found on financial services, trade, investment, climate change and other areas with China.

She said the total value of what had been agreed would be worth £600m (\$730m) for the British economy over the next five years. Responding to Reeves' statement, the Conservatives' spokesperson on the economy, Mel Stride, compared the current position of the chancellor to a Shakespearean tragedy. "To go or not to go. That is now a question," he told parliament.

Labour has seen its public approval rating slump since its landslide election win in July that ended 14 years of Conservative rule on the promise of economic growth. Starmer is facing calls also to sack his anti-corruption minister Tulip Siddiq after she was named in an investigation in Bangladesh focused on her aunt, the country's ousted leader Sheikh Hasina.

Piling on the pressure, billionaire Elon Musk - who is set for a role in President-elect Donald Trump's administration - has used his X platform to launch a barrage of posts assailing Starmer and other Labour party figures. "Nobody trusts Starmer and for good reason. Investors won't invest without trust. He has created a financial crisis for Britain," Musk wrote last week on the social media platform.

# India to promote its textiles as political crisis hits Bangladesh's exports: sources

Reuters  
New Delhi

India aims to boost its textile and garments industry in next month's budget with financial support, tariff cuts on key inputs and incentives to produce locally, two government sources said. An ongoing political crisis in neighbouring Bangladesh has prompted global retailers to explore alternatives, including India, for garment imports, exporters told Reuters.

"Indian exporters are finding it difficult to meet the rush of export orders in last few months as many US companies are looking for alternative suppliers," said Mithleshwar Thakur, secretary-general at India's Apparel Export Promotion Council. India's textile sector employs an estimated 45mn people and the government is considering increasing the textile ministry's budget allocation for 2025/26 by 10-15%, from the current

Rs44.17bn (\$511mn), said a government source privy to discussions.

The government may also raise the allocation for production-linked incentives for the textile sector to around Rs600mn from Rs450mn for the current fiscal year, the source said. Under this scheme, the government offers tax incentives and other concessions to companies choosing to manufacture locally. Tariff cuts on raw materials such as polyester and viscose staple fibre, along with textile machinery, are also under consideration, a second government source said.

Import tariffs are currently in the range of 11-27% on fibre, compared to almost nil duties in Bangladesh, impacting Indian garment exporters. The sources requested anonymity as they are not authorised to speak to the media about discussions on India's annual budget, which is due to be announced on Feb 1. India's finance, commerce, and textile ministries

did not respond to emails seeking comments. Bangladesh's garment exports to the US fell by 0.46% to \$6.7bn between January and November last year, while India's exports rose 4.25% to \$4.4bn, data from the US Office of Textiles and Apparel showed. Shahidullah Azim, a Dhaka-based factory owner whose clients include North American and European retailers, told Reuters that some American buyers have shifted their orders to India and Vietnam, due to ongoing crisis in Bangladesh.

In the first eight months of the fiscal year through November, India's textile and garment exports rose by more than 7% year-on-year to over \$23bn, compared to just 2% growth in total goods exports. Readymade garment exports grew by more than 11% year-on-year, to near \$10bn during the same period, and are expected to cross \$16bn by March end, said Thakur at India's Apparel Export Promotion Council.

## Iraqi PM in London



Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer welcomes Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani at 10 Downing Street, in London, Britain.



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**GULF TIMES**

# Brics expansion gains ground, enhancing its economic clout

The Brics group of emerging-market powers – the acronym stands for Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa – has gone from a slogan dreamed up at an investment bank two decades ago to a real-world club that controls a multilateral lender.

Indonesia has become the newest member of the Brics group of developing nations, in a move that could further bolster the Global South as US President-elect Donald Trump's trade policies pose risks to world economy.

Comprising 10 member states, Brics pairs several major energy producers with some of the biggest consumers among developing countries.

The bloc expanded in early 2024 to include Iran, the UAE, Ethiopia and Egypt. Saudi Arabia was also announced as a new member, though the kingdom has yet to take a final decision on whether to join.

In November 2024, Turkiye said it had been granted "partner-country status", short of its expectation that it would gain full admission.

A number of other countries have also been offered such second-tier membership, which would come without voting rights.

Nations still seeking to join include Malaysia and Thailand.

**Comprising 10 member states, Brics pairs several major energy producers with some of the biggest consumers among developing countries**

The expansion push has been driven largely by China, now the world's pre-eminent industrial power, which is trying to boost its global clout. South Africa and Russia have backed the expansion.

India was initially hesitant because it was concerned that a bigger Brics would transform the group into a mouthpiece for China, while Brazil was worried about alienating the West – although both eventually agreed to an enlargement.

For new members, Brics offers the potential for easier access to financing from its wealthier members, and a political venue independent of Washington's influence.

The addition of major fossil-fuel producers may give the bloc more scope to challenge the dollar's dominance in oil and gas trading by switching to other currencies, a concept referred to as dedollarisation.

That prospect has drawn the ire of Trump, who said any nation that abandons the greenback can forget about selling anything to America. The biggest achievements of the group have been financial. The countries agreed to pool \$100bn of foreign-currency reserves, which they can lend to each other during emergencies. That liquidity facility became operational in 2016.

They also founded the New Development Bank, a World Bank-inspired lending institution that has approved almost \$33bn of loans since it began operations in 2015, mainly for water, transport and other infrastructure projects.

By comparison, the World Bank committed \$117.5bn to partner countries in fiscal 2024. For most of the time Brics has existed, China's gross domestic product has been more than twice the combined economic output of the four other members prior to the expansion.

In theory, that should give it the most sway. In practice, India, which recently surpassed China in population, has been a counterweight. There's still interest in emerging markets. But Brics is largely irrelevant as an investment theme today due to geopolitical changes and the members' different economic trajectories.

US-led sanctions have put Russia off limits for most foreign investors, and some sectors in China – especially technology companies – have also been sanctioned or face potential investment bans. China also is a maturing economy, increasingly separated from other emerging markets and facing a structural slowdown. Brazil's economy slowed markedly following the end of a global commodity boom about a decade ago.

India is still a growth story that investment banks compare with China 10 or 15 years ago, though it's unclear if it can follow China's manufacturing-led model.

In a wider sense, Brics membership is also a way of signalling increasing frustration with the US-led international order and key institutions that remain firmly in the control of Western powers, like the World Bank and International Monetary Fund.



# Europe: what will migration policy look like in 2025?



**EU leaders push for tougher migration rules**



**Calls for outsourcing asylum procedures grow**



**Rights groups say hard line policies endanger lives**

By Joanna Gill  
Brussels

**G**rowing support for parties across Europe looks set to shape migration policy in 2025 after a bumper election year in which immigration became a major political battleground.

With the European Union gearing up to implement its revamped asylum pact by 2026, some countries are calling for the rules fast-tracking asylum processes and returns to be sharpened or implemented sooner.

Rights groups say this would risk rolling back people's rights to seek asylum and put them at risk of arbitrary detention and increased pushbacks by authorities operating on Europe's external borders.

While immigration remains a highly sensitive topic in most of the bloc's 27 member states, the number of irregular migrants arriving in Europe has dropped from around 1mn in 2015 to around 220,000 in 2024, according to data from the EU's border agency Frontex.

So what's in store for migration policy in Europe in 2025?

**'Smashing' smuggling**

Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer has made cracking down on illegal migration by combatting gangs of people smugglers a cornerstone of his migration policy, reaching deals with his Italian and German counterparts to "smash the gangs", as well as signing a security pact with Iraq to target smugglers and strengthen border cooperation.

In 2025, EU lawmakers are set

to vote on the new Facilitation Directive, which aims to tackle migrant smuggling in the bloc. However, humanitarian groups say the current draft fails to clearly exempt those who seek to help migrants, by providing food and shelter for example, from criminal sanctions.

Rights groups add that the focus on smugglers fails to tackle the root cause of migration and could make Channel crossings from France more risky, with 2024 already being the deadliest year on record with at least 69 deaths, according to the Refugee Council.

Rights groups say the crackdown on smuggling has reduced the supply of boats as well as opportunities to launch, leading smugglers to load more migrants onto flimsy vessels, increasing the risk of people being crushed or drowning.

They want European governments to expand safe and legal pathways to international protection.

**Fast-track asylums and returns**

European governments are also looking at how to fast-track asylum procedures and increase deportation. Under the new asylum pact, people arriving at the bloc's borders face a rapid screening, and, if rejected, a swift deportation process. Rights groups fear the new expedited border procedure will be used to reject asylum applications without properly assessing individual cases.

Another proposal is to expand the number of 'safe list countries' – or countries where people are deemed less vulnerable to state persecution, violence, and armed conflict – to speed up asylum applications.

Under the proposal, people

from the 'safe list countries', which have a smaller chance of having their asylum applications accepted, can be deported more swiftly if their claims are rejected.

In a major policy shift, the EU is also considering so-called "return hubs" outside the bloc to increase and fast-track deportations of rejected asylum seekers – a plan that has echoes of the United Kingdom's scrapped plan to fly asylum seekers from Britain to Rwanda.

EU leaders called on the bloc's Commission to draft a law to speed up deportations last October. Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson recently said the EU could submit a proposal on the creation of so-called "return hubs" as soon as March.

EU countries have also called on the Commission to make the rules governing deporting people that do not have the right to stay in a country more strict. That includes people whose requests for asylum have been rejected or those who lose the right to international protection due changing circumstances.

A new proposal to sharpen the EU Returns Directive is expected in 2025.

**Outsourcing asylum**

There is growing pressure from EU governments to process asylum applications outside the bloc in countries along the main migration routes.

Last year, 14 countries – including Germany, France, and Italy – issued a joint call to send migrants arriving in the EU to partner countries.

The first deal allowing a non-EU country to process migrants on another country's behalf was agreed between Italy and

Albania last year. But it has been plagued with legal challenges, and only a few of the up to 36,000 non-vulnerable migrants per year Italy said it could transfer to Albania have made it to reception centres.

More than 100 NGOs issued a joint statement criticising the scheme, saying it risks leading to prolonged automatic detention and curbing people's access to fair asylum procedures. They called on the EU to uphold the right to asylum.

**Walls and automated borders**

In order to deal with an increase in migrant arrivals and security concerns, some EU countries have extended temporary border checks within the bloc's area of free movement, the Schengen zone, into 2025. These include Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, and Sweden.

Right-wing lawmakers have called for more funding for physical barriers along external borders in the next EU budget, due to be discussed in the second half of the year.

Europe is increasingly turning to artificial intelligence systems to strengthen border controls, an effort boosted by the bloc's approval of the AI Act in 2024. The new rules ban high-risk AI tools from the EU from February 2025 but have exemptions for the use of AI in law enforcement and in border zones.

Rights groups fear that AI-powered drones, cameras and other algorithmic profiling technologies are being deployed to detect and repel migrants and refugees, and create a double standard – with one set of rules for EU citizens, and another for migrants and asylum seekers.

- Thomson Reuters Foundation



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# French PM vows to tackle 'excessive' debt

AFP  
Paris,

French Prime Minister Francois Bayrou yesterday warned parliament about his country's spiralling debt and said he was ready to reopen talks on pension reform, hoping to avoid defeat in any no-confidence vote that could prolong the country's rumbling political crisis.

"The task that the country has set for us is to return to stability," he said in his first policy speech to a divided parliament.

Bayrou, who became France's fourth prime minister in a year when he took office a month ago, faces a huge challenge to get agreement on a long-overdue budget plan for 2025 and resolve bitter disputes over a controversial pension reform.

Like his predecessor Michel Barnier, who lasted just three months before being deposed in a no-confidence vote, Bayrou lacks a majority in the National Assembly and could be dispatched just as easily if he fails to win at least tacit backing from enough opposition deputies.

French politics was plunged into chaos last year when President Emmanuel Macron called an election to break political deadlock but the vote returned a hopelessly divided lower chamber.

A sustainable budget plan for this year is the priority for Bayrou, 73, after

Barnier's austerity budget was jettisoned along with his government.

Bayrou has been negotiating with the various blocs, with the far-right and most of the left rejecting deep spending cuts.

But Bayrou is mindful of the need to tackle France's spiralling deficit and growing debt.

In his speech, he zoomed in on the issue, saying it was his government's greatest worry.

"This debt is a sword of Damocles over our country and our social model," Bayrou said. "We have many reasons to worry, but one emerges with resounding force: our excessive debt."

His government is under pressure from the European Commission for overspending and from high refinancing costs demanded by financial markets.

Bayrou said the 2025 public-sector deficit target was now projected at 5.4% of gross domestic product (GDP), against 5% targeted by Barnier's administration.

Economic growth was projected at 0.9% for the year, down from a 1.1% target by the previous government.

A deficit level of three percent of GDP, demanded by EU deficit rules, would be reached in 2029, Bayrou promised.

Bayrou has concentrated on winning over centre-left Socialist deputies but no deal has been announced.

The far-left France Unbowed (LFI) party said it would lodge a no-confidence mo-



French Prime Minister Francois Bayrou replies to MPs who spoke after his general policy statement at the National Assembly in Paris yesterday. (AFP)

tion, which is likely to be debated tomorrow or Friday.

The Greens will vote in favour of the motion, said representative Cyrielle Chatelain.

To be successful, the motion would need Socialist backing after the far-right National Rally (RN) party said it was not seeking to topple Bayrou.

The Socialist party did not make its position clear.

Beyond the budget, a 2023 law to re-

form France's fragile pensions system has most opposition up in arms, with Socialists and other leftist parties demanding it be scrapped.

The plan notably includes a gradual increase in the retirement age to 64 years from 62. In a major departure from his predecessor's policies, Bayrou said that he was ready to reopen discussions on the pension reform.

He said he had "decided to put this issue

back on the table, with the social partners, for a short time and under transparent conditions."

"It is my conviction that we can seek a new reform path, without totems or taboos, even on the age of retirement," Bayrou said.

But he warned that if no agreement was reached, the 2023 pensions law would remain intact.

Boris Vallaud, head of the Socialist deputies in the National Assembly, said the Socialists were ready to discuss the pension reform but wanted the current version of the law dropped.

He indicated he was disappointed by the prime minister's proposals.

"This is not enough," Vallaud said.

Hard-left firebrand Jean-Luc Melancon accused the Socialists of dealing a blow to the left-wing New Popular Front alliance by negotiating with the government.

Jordan Bardella, the leader of the far-right National Rally, said on X Bayrou's speech was proof "that he is not a man who has broken with the past, but a man of spineless continuity, idle talk and endless concertation".

Macron, in his New Year speech last month, acknowledged his decision to dissolve the National Assembly had led to "divisions" and "instability".

Constitutional rules mean new legislative elections cannot be called until July.

## EU, China planning summit marking 50 years of ties

AFP  
Brussels,

The European Union and China are working to hold a summit this year, Brussels said yesterday, after a phone call between one of its top officials and Chinese President Xi Jinping.

European Council chief Antonio Costa, who heads the body representing the EU's 27 countries, said his first call with Xi since taking office in November had been "constructive".

"We agreed that the EU and China working together to tackle global challenges would be a positive signal for peace, stability, and prosperity," Costa posted on BlueSky.

"Marking the 50th anniversary of bilateral relations in 2025, I look forward to the next EU-China summit in Brussels later this year."

The heads of the EU's two main institutions — the Council and the European Commission — have held regular summits with China's leadership but did not meet in 2024.

An EU official said Xi and Costa "agreed to remain in contact, with invitations for a visit being extended in both directions and preparations for the EU-China Summit proceeding".

A summit this year would come at a sensitive time, with Donald Trump taking the reins in the United States, and Beijing and Brussels involved in a growing trade row.

An official readout released by state broadcaster CCTV said Beijing "has confidence in the EU and hopes that the EU can also become a partner that China can trust".

"Xi Jinping stressed that China and Europe have no fundamental conflicts of interest or geopolitical contradictions," it said.

"Both sides are defenders of the multilateral trading system and have formed a strong economic symbiotic relationship."

The EU is also keen to see China put pressure on close ally Russia to end its war in Ukraine as the third anniversary of the full-scale invasion approaches.

Costa said he had "stressed that Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine threatens global peace" and "emphasized the need for a comprehensive, just and lasting peace".

He also underscored that EU-China trade "relations need to be balanced and based on a level-playing field".

"Both leaders reaffirmed their mutual commitment to a rules-based international order and to multilateralism," the EU official added.

The phone call came as the EU yesterday accused China of discriminating against European medical device producers in public contracts in the latest commercial tensions. The two economic powers have been sparring since Brussels unleashed a raft of probes in 2024, to which China has retaliated by launching investigations of its own into EU products.

Last year, the EU slapped higher duties on electric cars produced in China after concluding producers benefitted from unfair state subsidies, raising fears of a trade war between the two sides.

Beijing in response announced provisional tariffs on brandy imported from the EU, and later imposed "temporary anti-dumping measures" on the liquor.

China last week said the EU had imposed unfair trade and investment barriers on Beijing but Brussels has insisted its actions are compliant with World Trade Organisation rules.

## EU assesses Big Tech cases ahead of Trump comeback

Reuters  
Brussels/Stockholm

The European Commission said yesterday it was assessing its cases against Apple, Alphabet, X and Meta, stressing and that President-elect Donald Trump's return to the White House did not affect its commitment to enforcing its laws. The European Union has been at the forefront of investigating US Big Tech companies for potentially breaching laws designed to prevent them from using their clout to gain an unfair advantage over competitors.

Trump, who will start his second term as the United States' 47th president on Monday, has been critical of various European policies and his ally Elon Musk has repeatedly clashed with regulators and politicians in the continent.

The *Financial Times* reported yesterday that Brussels was reassessing its investigations of Big Tech in a review which could lead it to scale back or change the scope of its probes as US groups urge Trump to intervene.

Henna Virkkunen, the commissioner in charge of EU policy, told Reuters by email that the EU's investigations were continuing as normal and no decision has been taken to suspend them.

A Commission spokesperson told

reporters it was assessing rather than reviewing its cases, which was not linked to Trump's arrival, and reiterated its commitment to regulating Big Tech.

"What we do have is upcoming meetings to assess maturity of cases, to assess the allocation of resources and the general readiness of the investigation," the spokesperson said at the EU's executive's daily briefing.

US tech giants have complained that regulation was stifling innovation and balked at large antitrust fines imposed by Brussels.

Meta Chief Mark Zuckerberg last week called on Trump to stop the EU from fining US tech firms and Trump ally Elon Musk has repeatedly clashed with EU regulators.

Speaking to popular podcaster Joe Rogan, Zuckerberg said that the European Commission's application of competition rules is "almost like a tariff" on US tech companies.

The EU's newest laws — the Digital Markets Act (DMA), which imposes antitrust obligations, the Digital Services Act (DSA), which covers online content moderation, and the EU AI Act — have attracted the most criticism from US tech leaders.

Musk, for example, was under scrutiny earlier this month as he hosted Alice Weidel, leader of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party, for a discussion on his X platform.

There has been a change of guard in Brussels too with Henna Virkkunen taking the EU industry chief role from Thierry Breton. Breton had been at loggerheads with Musk and others over enforcing EU laws.

"We have been very clear that no matter which administration is in place in third countries, this will not affect our enforcement work," the spokesperson said. However, a person familiar with European Commission processes said that enforcement of the laws was put on hold until the government figures out the Trump agenda.

Investigations by the Commission often take years. Last November, it fined Meta nearly €800m (\$821.36m) over abusive practices after opening the investigation in 2021. An investigation against X, started in 2023, is still open.

The ongoing cases against Apple, Alphabet, Meta and X have not yet reached a point at which decisions could be taken, according to the spokesperson.

Breton said yesterday that the Commission should push back on attempts to weaken its rules.

"We can clearly see that there is a desire to attack the regulations," he told Reuters. "Regulation is in no way censorship, contrary to what its opponents constantly claim."

## Sweden wants to narrow path to citizenship

Sweden's government said yesterday it wanted to toughen the rules for obtaining Swedish nationality, with a government probe recommending "honest living" as a prerequisite.

It also recommended extending the required duration of time spent in the country prior to obtaining citizenship.

To become Swedish, a foreigner would have to live in Sweden for eight years — as opposed to the current five — pass a test on

Swedish society and values, and do a language exam, according to the probe ordered by the centre-right government in 2023.

"Citizenship must be earned, not be handed out unconditionally," Migration Minister Johan Forssell said in a post on Instagram.

Forsell told a press conference that citizenship also helped tie people of disparate backgrounds together under "a common Swedish identity".

"This is particularly important at a

time when Sweden has welcomed hundreds of thousands of people from many parts of the world in recent years," he said.

Following a large influx of asylum seekers to Sweden during the 2015 migrant wave, successive left- and right-wing governments have tightened immigration and asylum rules.

Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson's centre-right minority government, which is backed in parliament by the anti-immigration Sweden

Democrats, has introduced ever harsher curbs since coming to power in 2022.

Forsell said it was "crucial" to "always be very clear about the values that must apply in Sweden".

"Family is important but it does not stand above the law. There is equality between the sexes. You can marry whoever you want.

"Girls and boys have the right to swim and play football. If you don't accept that, Sweden is not

the country for you," the minister said. The probe recommended tightening up the requirement for "honest living".

In concrete terms, this would mean it would be harder for a person who has committed a misdemeanour or a crime, or who has unpaid debts, to obtain Swedish nationality, said Kirsi Laakso Utvik, who led the probe.

Human rights organisation Civil Rights Defenders was critical of the proposal.

## Trump look-alike strikes sweet notes in Pakistan

In a bustling market in Pakistan's eastern Punjab province, a food vendor who locals say bears an uncanny resemblance to US President-elect Donald Trump gets more business - and attention - than others.

"We feel as if Trump has come here to sell kheer (pudding)," said Mohammad Yaseen, a local resident who prefers to buy the dessert from Saleem Bagga, the look-alike vendor who also sings to draw customers.

"When he sings to sell kheer, we come down to him," Yaseen said.

Bagga, 53, pushes his colourful wooden cart along the road delivering the milky pudding, a black jacket over his beige shalwar kameez tunic to keep out the winter cold.

A crowd gathers as Bagga, who sports a distinctive blond quiff because of his albinism, sings the lyrics to a Punjabi song: "Now you come down to me my love, don't delay, my eyes are tired of waiting."

Local resident Imran Ashraf takes a selfie with Bagga. "His kheer is really delicious... we talk to him and we take selfies with him and we tell our friends that we have taken these pictures with Trump," Ashraf said.

Bagga is unfazed by the stream of attention and cameras that follow him throughout the market and even in his home neighbourhood in the district of Sahiwal.

"My face resembles Donald Trump, that is why people take selfies with me... I feel very good," he said, before extending an invitation.

"Donald Trump sahib (sir), you have won the election, now visit here and eat my kheer, you will really enjoy it," he said.



Saleem Bagga poses for a selfie with a customer while selling kheer, a traditional South Asian rice pudding, alongside a road in Sahiwal, Pakistan. (Reuters)



HE al-Nuaimi honouring *Gulf Times* Editor-in-Chief Faisal Abdulhameed al-Mudahka. With them is HE Sheikh Dr Khalid bin Jaber al-Thani.



HE Buthaina bint Ali al-Jabr al-Nuaimi and other dignitaries.

# QCS launches strategic plan for 2025-2028

By **Tawfik Lamari**  
Staff Reporter

Under the patronage of HE the Minister of Social Development and Family Buthaina bint Ali al-Jabr al-Nuaimi, the Qatar Cancer Society (QCS) launched its strategic plan for 2025-28.

The QCS conducted an institutional analysis of the internal and external environment and an assessment of stakeholders' needs and expectations. It also carried out benchmarking

with similar organisations. Based on the results of the analysis, the QCS developed its vision to be "a cancer-aware community and a better life for those affected" and its mission to be "a non-profit charity that relies on donations and community partnerships in providing its services that seek to raise awareness of cancer and ways to prevent it".

The QCS aims to spread awareness on the importance of early detection, providing support to patients, recovered people and their families, and contributing to professional development and sci-

entific research in the field of cancer. During the event HE al-Nuaimi honoured the sponsors and supporters of the QCS, whose contributions have had a significant impact on its sustainability in the fight against cancer and support for those living with the disease.

On this occasion, QCS chairman HE Sheikh Dr Khalid bin Jaber al-Thani expressed in his speech: "The QCS is proud to launch its new 2025-28 strategy, which truly reflects our ambitious vision of providing a better life for cancer patients, and offering the necessary support to combat the disease by building strong partnerships with relevant sectors to ensure the achievement of desired outcomes."

"This launch comes at a critical time when public health challenges have increased, and the need to enhance health services and improve care quality for patients and their families, particularly concerning cancer, has become more urgent," he added.

*Gulf Times* Editor-in-Chief Faisal Abdulhameed al-Mudahka was honoured by HE the Minister of Social Development and Family on this occasion.

On the sidelines of the event, al-Mudahka told local media outlets: "Today we celebrate the QCS's 2025-28 strategy. It is one of the main active non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Qatar... it serves many people in the country."

"They lead awareness campaigns, sup-

port people who have cancer, and they also screen people," he added. "We have been honoured today as a media platform, as one of the biggest supporter in this field."

"It has been a long journey for them, which started with one person," al-Mudahka said. "This shows how, when an organisation or society... joins forces with the media, the private sector and the government, we can achieve a great deal!"

"Congratulations to the QCS, and special congratulations to HE Sheikh Dr Khalid bin Jaber al-Thani and his team for this great achievement and dedication, especially the volunteers among them," he added. "It is really a great day and a great accomplishment."



## Arabian horse show at Souq Waqif kicks off

By **Shafeeq Alingal**  
Staff Reporter

The Souq Waqif International Equestrian Festival 2025 kicked off yesterday. Held at the western square of Souq Waqif, the event featuring the elegance of exquisite Arabian horses enthused spectators on the inaugural day with a large participation of owners, breeders, farms and stables in Qatar and the region.

The festival began with the 6th Souq Waqif International Arabian Horse Show (A), for year-old colts.

"There are 92 participating horses," said festival general supervisor Abdul Rahman al-Naama. "This shows that the turnout for this participation is very, very large and the turnout in the competi-

Snapshots from the event yesterday. PICTURES: Shaji Kayamkulam



tions will be greater in the coming days." "We have competition from the two-year, three-year, four-year and six-year categories," he said, adding that the number of participants has doubled this championship.

"The number of participants from Gulf countries has also doubled," al-Naama said. Running until January 16, the show features competitions of Arabian purebred horses.

The first day witnessed a number of competitions at Souq Waqif. The show started with the qualifying rounds for yearling fillies in four competitions. These were followed by the yearling colts' competitions that were held in two competitions. Several rounds of competition followed. The winners were honoured by the organisers.

The crowning of the champions with gold, silver and bronze medals will take place on January 16.

On January 17, as part of the event, children's heritage and competitions will be held, while the 14th Qatar International Arabian Peninsula Horse Show (S) will be held on January 18-20. The Arabian Horse Auction will be held on January 21.



Deap Qatar held a series of beach clean-up drives in various locations in the country this January, removing hundreds of kilogrammes of trash from nature. - Screenshot from Deap Qatar Facebook page.

## Students and community members take part in Deap Qatar beach cleanup drives

By **Joey Aguilar**  
Staff Reporter

Doha Environmental Actions Project (Deap) Qatar has collected hundreds of kilogrammes of trash from Qatar's beaches this January, engaging students and volunteers in a series of cleanup drives aimed at raising environmental awareness.

Throughout the month, Deap Qatar organised multiple clean-up events in various locations across Qatar, targeting areas particularly affected by pollution.

One event saw 30 students from Iqra English School for Girls participate in a clean-up at Al Thakira Mangroves, removing 30kg of trash from the beach.

It is learnt that the school previously hosted a presentation by Deap Qatar on the local and global impact of plastic pollution, where 50 students from Grades 3-6 learned about the importance of conservation and Qatar's unique wildlife, including the dugong and whale shark.

"We had the opportunity to visit one of the most beautiful places in Qatar and do our part for nature at the Al Thakira Mangroves," Deap Qatar posted on its

social media. "Thank you for helping us raise environmental awareness in Qatar. It really takes all of us to keep Qatar clean and beautiful for generations to come."

Further demonstrating the commitment of young people, 16 Grade 10 students from Newton International Academy Smash also took the lead in cleaning up at the Al Thakira Mangroves, collecting 35kg of waste.

Deap Qatar's efforts also witnessed strong community engagement, gathering 110 volunteers who took part in a large-scale clean-up drive in Zekreet, a location renowned for its striking rock formations, beaches, and public art.

The group collected 430kg of trash in the area, which is known for its natural beauty and kite surfing opportunities.

Building on this momentum, Deap Qatar announced another clean-up drive this Friday at the Singing Sand Dunes of Qatar.

This family-friendly event offers an opportunity for people to contribute to environmental conservation and for participants to socialise, enjoy the unique landscape, and witness a stunning sunset.



## Da'wa Championship begins at Marmi Festival

The local Da'wa Championship started yesterday at the 16th edition of the Qatar International Falcons and Hunting Festival (Marmi 2025).

The event is organised by the Al Gannas Qatari Society under the patronage of HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, supported by the Social and Sports Activities Support Fund (Daam), and set to go on until February 1 at Sabkhat Marmi in the Sealine area.

The semi-final competitions in the Tala'a Championship, according to the statement, will be held today.

The first qualifying rounds were completed last Wednesday after the postponed competitions were held. The number of qualifiers for the semi-finals in Tala'a reached 28 contestants.

Tala'a committee member Rashdan Obaid al-Rashdan said that the group competitions, which had been postponed previously, resulted in the qualification of five falcons to the semi-finals.

The semi-finals will be held today.

The competitions of Group 13 in the Haddad Al Tahadi Championship were also held yesterday, resulting in the victory and qualification of two contestants.



Marmi Festival chairman Metaib Mubarak al-Qahtani crowned the winning teams and those who qualified for the finals.

Haddad Al Tahadi committee chairman Shawi al-Kaabi said that competitions of the 14th group will be held this evening.