



Manage your insurance easily



GULF TIMES



FRIDAY Vol. XXXXV No. 132258

January 17, 2025
Rajab 17, 1446 AH

www.gulf-times.com 2 Riyals

Published in QATAR since 1978

Enjoy our fibre plans, now with OSNtv included!



ROBSON The first Paint product that obtained Qatar Quality Mark

Robshield Topcoat Matt by ROBSON PAINTS Used as Exterior Coat - Matt

www.npfqatar.com Tel: 44601602

BUSINESS | Page 1

Qatar Investment & Innovation Conference highlights GCC region's economic future



Follow us on

- www.gulf-times.com
- gulftimes
- GulfTimes_QATAR
- gulftimes
- GulftimesVideos

TAP to school with talabat up to 60% off

Prosci Cheese Slices, Digestive Biscuits, Biscuits, Biscuits

selfdrive NOW RENT A CAR

STARTING FROM 1199 PM

QAR

KNOW MORE!

Qatar welcomes Syria's positive moves; Amir to visit Damascus soon

QNA
Damascus

HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani said that Qatar welcomes the new Syrian administration's positive moves, and that His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani will visit the country soon.

Addressing a joint press conference with Commander-in-Chief of the New Syrian Administration Ahmed al-Sharaa in the capital Damascus yesterday, HE Sheikh Mohammed said Doha hails measures to ensure the safety of civilians, the stability of state institutions, and the continuity of public services.

He conveyed His Highness the Amir's greetings and congratulations to the Syrian people on their victorious revolution, reiterating Doha's unrelenting support for Syrians.

Expressing delight at being in Damascus and the resumption of Qatar-Syria relations after a 13-year hiatus, HE the Prime Minister said that the meeting coincides Syria being on the cusp of a new phase, working to rebuild, develop, and maintain its stability.

He added Doha is reaching out to Syria to build a future partnership for the benefit of the two peoples and to back endeavours to provide sustainable public services to Syrians.

"Today, a revival is being witnessed in Syria after many of its people were forcibly displaced or sought refuge in many countries over the past years," said His Excellency, voicing hopes the new administration would engage in the state-building efforts and the return of refugees.

Reiterating Qatar's plans to press on technical support to



HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani met with leader of the new administration in Syria, Ahmed al-Sharaa, at Al Shaab Palace in Damascus yesterday. The meeting discussed aspects of co-operation between the two countries and ways to enhance and develop them, as well as the latest developments in Syria and issues of mutual concern. HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs reiterated Qatar's unwavering support for Syria's unity, sovereignty and independence, and for realising the aspirations of its brotherly people for a decent life and the establishment of a state of institutions and law. (QNA)

restore the country's infrastructure, His Excellency highlighted an agreement under which Qatar would provide 200MW of electricity, and gradually boosting it to more than 10 Syrian regions.

Moving to the humanitarian situation, he stressed the need for the international community to join hands to ensure a continued support, and to consider lifting the sanctions imposed on Syria as soon as possible.

Qatar to provide Syria with 200MW of electricity

Meanwhile, His Excellency dismissed the Israeli occupation's seizure of the buffer zones as reckless and condemnable acts, calling for an immediate withdrawal.

Qatar will always stand by the Syrian people in their quest for peace and justice, and will permanently co-operate with the new Syrian administration on various international issues, primarily the lifting of sanctions, His Excellency told the press conference.

Speaking about the meeting with al-Sharaa, HE the Prime Minister said the deliberations covered many items, primarily boosting bilateral relations and discussing projects that may open a new era of development for the two peoples. **To Page 12**

Gaza truce to start on time despite last minute hitch: US

Reuters/AFP
Doha/Cairo/Jerusalem

THE ceasefire in the Gaza Strip should start on Sunday as planned, despite the need for negotiators to tie up a "loose end" at the last minute, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said yesterday.

Israel delayed holding a cabinet meeting to ratify the ceasefire with Palestinian resistance movement Hamas, blaming the group for the hold-up, even as Israeli warplanes pounded Gaza with air strikes which Palestinian authorities said killed 77 people in the day since the truce was unveiled.

Hamas senior official Izzat el-Reshiq said the group remained committed to the ceasefire deal, scheduled to take effect from Sunday to halt 15-months of bloodshed.

"It's not exactly surprising that in a process and negotiation that has been this challenging and this fraught, you may get a loose end," Blinken told a news conference in Washington. "We're tying up that loose end as we speak."

A US official said the last remaining dispute was over the identities of some prisoners Hamas wanted released.

President Joe Biden's envoy

Brett McGurk and President-elect Donald Trump's envoy Steve Witkoff were both in Doha with Egyptian and Qatari mediators working to resolve the issue, which should be cleared up soon, the official said.

Israeli government spokesperson David Mencer told reporters Israeli negotiators were in Doha to reach a solution.

The complex ceasefire accord emerged on Wednesday after mediation by Qatar, Egypt and the US to stop the war that saw Israeli forces kill tens of thousands of Palestinians and devastate Gaza.

The deal outlines a six-week initial ceasefire with the gradual withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Gaza Strip. Captives taken by Hamas would be freed in exchange for Palestinian prisoners detained in Israel.

The first phase would see the release of 33 hostages from among around 98 still in Gaza - alive and dead. Israel would free around 1,000 Palestinian detainees.

It paves the way for a surge in humanitarian aid for Gaza, where the majority of the population has been displaced, facing hunger, sickness and cold. Rows of aid trucks were lined up in the Egyptian border town of Al Arish waiting to cross into Gaza, once the border is reopened.



Trucks carrying aid line up near the Rafah border, waiting to cross into the Gaza Strip, following the announcement of a ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas, in Al Arish, Egypt, yesterday.

Sheikh Khalid bin Abdulaziz is new CEO of QMC



HE Chairman of Qatar Media Corporation (QMC) Sheikh Hamad bin Thamer al-Thani issued yesterday a decision assigning HE Sheikh Khalid bin Abdulaziz bin Jassim al-Thani to carry out the duties and responsibilities of CEO of Qatar Media Corporation in addition to his work as Director of Media Development Department. (QNA)

Blinken regrets failure to end Sudan war

Outgoing US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said yesterday he regretted his inability to end the brutal war in Sudan and voiced hope that President-elect Donald Trump's administration will keep trying. "It is for me, yes, another real regret that when it comes to Sudan, we haven't been able on our watch to get to that day of success," Blinken said.

Russia, Iran to sign agreement today

Russian President Vladimir Putin and Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian may discuss the situation in Syria, the Middle East, and Iran's nuclear programme today, during Pezeshkian's visit to Russia, the Kremlin said yesterday. Putin and Pezeshkian are set to sign a long-awaited strategic co-operation agreement in a move likely to worry the West.

Israel massacres 80 more

Gaza's civil defence agency said Israel pounded several areas of the territory after the ceasefire deal was announced on Wednesday, killing at least 80 people and wounding hundreds. The Israeli military said it had hit about 50 targets across Gaza since late Wednesday, targeting Palestinian resistance fighters.

Top athletes vow to break records in Doha Marathon

More than 15,000 participants are expected to join the record-breaking Doha Marathon by Ooredoo 2025

SOME of the world's top athletes have vowed to break records in today's (January 17) Doha Marathon by Ooredoo 2025.

During the Elite Press Conference hosted by Ooredoo Qatar yesterday, Ethiopian Shura Kitata, renowned for his victory at the 2020 London Marathon and multiple podium finishes in major international races, was among the top runners who met with local and international media.

Aside from Kitata, the press conference also featured some of the most accomplished athletes in the world of long-distance running, each with an inspiring journey marked by incredible achievements: Kaan Kigen Ozbilen, Mohcin Outalha, Joan Kipyatich, and Aminet Ahmed.

Ozbilen, renowned as one of the fastest runners in the field, is a European cross-country champion and silver medallist in the half marathon. Adding to the elite lineup, Outalha, the reigning champion of the 2023 Doha Marathon, is representing the Arab world's



Ooredoo officials join some of the world's top athletes in the world of long-distance running during the Elite Press Conference hosted by Ooredoo Qatar yesterday. PICTURE: Shaji Kayamkulam

rising talent in long-distance running. With victories in prestigious half-marathons and accolades at regional games, the Moroccan athlete stands as a beacon of athletic promise.

The conference also celebrated the accomplishments of Kipyatich, known for her remarkable personal best set in Doha last year, and Ahmed, whose success in half-marathons and marathons highlights her growing influence in the sport.

Sabah Rabbiah al-Kuwari, vice-chairman of the Doha Marathon by Ooredoo Committee, stated: "The Elite Press Conference perfectly encapsulated the spirit of the Doha Marathon by Ooredoo. We are proud to bring together the world's finest athletes and our local community."

Over 15,000 participants are expected to join the record-breaking Doha Marathon by Ooredoo 2025. The sold-out event is one of the region's most prestigious athletic showcases, offering a platform for both world-class competitors and the wider community to come together in the spirit of sport.



Minister of Interior attends certificate awarding ceremony of Police Academy

HE the Minister of Interior and Commander of the Internal Security Force (Lekhwiya), also Chairman of the Supreme Council of the Police Academy, Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, attended the certificate awarding ceremony at the Police Academy yesterday.

The event included the awarding of certificates to the 7th batch of cadets from the Police College and the Ras Laffan Emergency and Safety College. HE Sheikh Khalifa handed certificates to 136 graduates from the Police College, including cadets from Palestine, Iraq, and Somalia.

Additionally, 11 graduates from the Ras Laffan Emergency and Safety College were honoured, including two cadets from Palestine.

During the ceremony, HE the Minister of Interior honoured Deputy Commander of the Internal Security Force (Lekhwiya) and former member of the Supreme Council of the Police Academy Staff Major General Mohammed Misfer al-Shahwani for his significant contributions to the academy's development during his tenure.

The ceremony, held at the Police Academy headquarters, was



also attended by HE the Minister of State for Interior Affairs Sheikh Abdulaziz bin Faisal bin Mohammed al-Thani, who presented certificates to the remain-

ing graduates of both colleges. The event was attended by senior officials, high-ranking officers, and the graduates' families. **(QNA)**



Labour minister meets ILO's regional director



HE the Minister of Labour Dr Ali bin Smaikh al-Marri met yesterday with Regional Director for Arab States at the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Dr Ruba Jaradat. During the meeting, the two sides discussed aspects of joint co-operation between the State of Qatar and ILO, and ways to support and develop them in the coming period. **(QNA)**

Minister of Labour chairs meeting of Workforce Planning Committee



HE Dr Ali bin Smaikh al-Marri, Minister of Labour and Chair of the Workforce Planning Committee, led the committee's regular meeting yesterday. The meeting reviewed the latest updates in the national labour sector and discussed initiatives and projects planned for implementation in 2025 as part of the National Strategy for an Effective and Highly Productive Workforce. These efforts aim to enhance national talent, attract highly skilled expatriate workers, and increase the participation of Qatari nationals in the private sector. **(QNA)**

Amir sends message to Lebanon's president



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani sent a written message to Lebanese President General Joseph Aoun pertaining to bilateral relations and ways to support and develop them. Ambassador of Qatar to Lebanon Sheikh Saud bin Abdulrahman al-Thani delivered the message yesterday during his meeting with the president of Lebanon. **(QNA)**

Minister of state in Doha meetings



HE the Minister of State for International Co-operation Maryam bint Ali bin Nasser al-Misnad met yesterday with ambassadors of the member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) accredited to Qatar. Discussion during the meeting dealt with relations between Qatar and the Asean member states, in addition to a host of regional and international issues, primarily the developments in the Gaza Strip and occupied Palestinian territories. **(QNA)**



HE the Minister of State for International Co-operation Maryam bint Ali bin Nasser al-Misnad met virtually with Minister of International Development of the Kingdom of Norway Anne Beathe Tvinnereim. During the meeting, the two sides discussed relations between the two countries, especially in the development and humanitarian fields. **(QNA)**

Qatar, Peru hold political consultations



The third round of political consultations between the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of Qatar and Peru was held in Lima yesterday. The Qatari side was headed by HE the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sultan bin Saad al-Muraikhi, while Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, John Peter Cannock, headed the Peruvian side. Discussion during the round, focused on the relations between the two friendly countries and ways to support and enhance them, in addition to a host of issues of common concern. Moreover, a co-operation agreement was signed between the Diplomatic Institute at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Diplomatic Academy of Peru. The agreement was signed on the Qatari side by HE al-Muraikhi, while on the Peruvian side it was signed by ambassador Julio Garro Galvez, Director of the Diplomatic Academy. **(QNA)**

Minister of state meets Peru's deputy minister of economy



HE the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sultan bin Saad al-Muraikhi met with Deputy Minister of Economy of Peru Carlos Alberto Mendoza. During the meeting, they discussed relations between the two countries and ways to support and develop them, particularly across economic fields. **(QNA)**

National Cyber Security Agency receives delegation from Vietnam



HE Abdulrahman bin Ali al-Farahid al-Malki, president of the National Cyber Security Agency, received yesterday a delegation from the Supreme People's Procuracy of Vietnam, led by Nguyen Duong, deputy prosecutor general of the Supreme People's Procuracy, alongside representatives from the United Nations Office on Drugs Crime (UNODC) in Doha. During the meeting, discussions focused on the agency's efforts to secure the nation's cyber space. The two sides explored opportunities for co-operation in digital security and combating cyber threats. The visit underscores the National Cyber Security's commitment to fostering international partnerships and promoting knowledge sharing in the fields of security and technology.

New Philippine ambassador to Qatar



Doha welcomed the new Philippine ambassador to Qatar, Mardomel Celo D Melicor, who formally assumed his post on Wednesday. Accompanied by his spouse, Mme Villaray Hope Noro Melicor, the envoy was greeted at Hamad International Airport by embassy officials and a delegation led by ambassador Ibrahim Yousef Abdullah Fakhro, director of the Department of Protocol at Qatar's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Melicor, a native of Cagayan de Oro, brings extensive experience from his decades-long career in the foreign service. His previous postings included assignments at Philippine consulates and embassies in Saudi Arabia, Switzerland, Germany, Libya, and Poland. Before his appointment as the Philippine envoy to Qatar, Melicor served as Assistant Secretary for Middle East and African Affairs at the Department of Foreign Affairs in Manila.

QNA organises awareness workshop in cybersecurity

Qatar News Agency (QNA) organised an awareness workshop for national cadres in cybersecurity on the prevention of cyber risks, as part of a series of training courses organized by the agency with the aim of raising the level of efficiency of its employees and enhancing their skills. Several of the agency's employees from various specializations attended the workshop, and it was

presented by the expert Al-Jilani al-Sadiq, who focused on how to identify the increasing cyber risks, as well as methods of preventing them and ways to enhance the security protection of data and information in the digital work environment. The workshop aims to raise awareness among employees about the importance of cybersecurity and provide them with the necessary knowledge

to protect digital systems from potential threats, in addition to improving their preparedness to confront cyber crises. In March 2023, QNA opened 'QNA Training Halls', equipped with latest training methods, as part of its vision to enhance the capabilities of Qatari media professionals and create a generation capable of leading the future of national media.

Indian community delegation attends PBD in Bhubaneswar



The representatives of the Indian community in Qatar have participated in the 18th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD), held in the Indian city of Bhubaneswar. According to an official statement from the Indian embassy, around 200 delegates attended the event to underscore the strong ties between India and the Indian diaspora in Qatar. Qatar delegation interacted with Kirti Vardhan Singh, Minister of State for External Affairs and Dharmendra Pradhan, Minister of Education on various issues such as business-to-business ties and close cultural connections between the two countries. Many delegates also travelled to Konark and Puri to explore the local culture and heritage. Indian Cultural Centre (ICC), Indian Community Benevolent Forum (ICBF) and Indian Business and Professionals Council (IBPC) co-ordinated the participation of the delegation from Qatar for PBD 2025 together with the embassy. The event was organised by the government of India in partnership with the Odisha state government from January 8-10. The event witnessed participation from members of the Indian diaspora from over 75 countries. Under the theme "Diaspora's Contribution to a Viksit Bharat", PBD celebrated the contributions of the Indian diaspora and provided a platform for discussing the role of the Indian diaspora in building a developed India.

Musawa, Shingari Beauty Centre organise 'Her Aura' to empower women



Musawa — a forum aimed at empowering women — in association with Shingari Beauty Centre celebrated 'Her Aura', designed to empower and educate women on health, wellness and self-care. The programme provided a platform for women to gather valuable insights into crucial aspects of health and wellness, with a particular focus on the unique challenges faced during different stages of life. The event featured a series of impactful and educational talks from leading experts in women's health. Lata Anand Nair, director of Shingari Beauty Centre and founder member of Musawa, cut a cake marking the 14th anniversary of the beauty centre. She said that with its focus on women's empowerment, health, and well-being, 'Her Aura' event remains a testament to the centre's commitment to supporting women. Dr Swathi Francis, Naseem Medical & Surgical Centre, presented an in-depth discussion on the importance of pap smears. She explained how this routine screening is a vital tool in the early detection and prevention of cervical cancer. Dr Francis also emphasised the numerous health benefits of regular pap smears and encouraged women to make them an integral part of their healthcare routine. Dr Tina Ann John, a specialist gynaecologist at City Medical Centre hosted a highly informative session on menopause. She covered key topics such as the pre-menopausal phase, navigating the physical and emotional transitions, and managing symptoms like stress, hot flashes, and mood swings. The event also included a session by Chinchu Mangalathi, a psychologist and workplace wellness specialist. She addressed the psychological impacts that often accompany menopause, shedding light on the mental health challenges women may face during this phase. She shared practical advice on managing stress, maintaining emotional well-being, and fostering a positive environment at home and at work.

Minister witnesses signing of MoU between QAA and Rwanda ministry

The Qatar Aeronautical Academy (QAA) and the Ministry of Defence of Rwanda signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU), aiming at strengthening relations between the two countries in the field of technical training by providing specialised training services in aircraft maintenance by the QAA.

Witnessed by HE the Minister of Transport, Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdullah bin Mohammed al-Thani, the MoU was signed in the ministry's offices by QAA Director-General HE Sheikh Jabor bin Hamad al-Thani and the Permanent Secretary of the Rwandan Ministry of Defense Maj Gen Celestin Kanyamahanga.

The MoU, according to an official statement from the Ministry of Transport (MoT), also includes training Rwandan Air Force aircraft maintenance technicians according to the European Union Aviation Safety Agency standards, and mechanical and electronic engineering training through rigorous theoretical and practical programmes.

This collaboration stems from the commitment to strengthen strategic partnerships between Qatar and Rwanda, contributing



to the development of the Rwandan Air Force's capabilities and the exchange of technical expertise between the two parties. The signing ceremony took place following a meeting earlier between HE

the minister and Kanyamahanga where they discussed bilateral co-operation in areas of civil aviation and ways to enhance them, particularly training pilots and technicians.

Awqaf symposium centred on building cognitive foundation of students in secondary school

QNA
Doha

The Department of Islamic Research and Studies at the Ministry of Endowments (Awqaf) and Islamic Affairs, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE) concluded the cognitive foundation symposium that was held over three days.

In a statement, the Ministry of Awqaf indicated that the symposium targeted secondary school students (males) to build their cognitive immunity regarding several aspects of Islamic law and to enhance their knowledge, as well as Islamic values and identity.

In this context, Director of the Department of Research and Islamic Studies, HE Sheikh Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed bin Ghanem al-Thani, said that the symposium comes within the framework of the department's interest in the youth segment, which represents hope and a promising future, and its keenness to care for them and consider their problems, needs and challenges they face, and prepare programs that contribute to their cultural fortification, civilizational awareness and preservation of their identity.

He highlighted the department's efforts to build cognitive



awareness among the youth, instil values and raise them to horizons of moral excellence, as this symposium is considered a qualitative addition to a series of diverse and multiple cultural projects that the department has put forward in its extended journey, most notably the Ummah Symposium series.

He stated that the series chose the theme of 'Cultural Incubators' for its first season as the cognitive and cultural vessel that elevates the knowledge of the individual and the Muslim community, and the means that develops its cultural outcome, stressing that the selection of four incubators for the season (libraries, mosques, schools and councils) comes to confirm their special importance and based on the fact that they represent, as a whole, the tool that creates thought, develops knowledge and increases awareness.

The symposium witnessed the

participation of 218 students from 7 secondary schools and 14 supervisors.

The schools were divided into three groups, the first group included Musab bin Omair Independent Secondary School, Qatar Banking Studies School, and Khalifa Secondary School, with 60 students. The symposium was held at Imam Muhammad ibn Abd Al-Wahhab Mosque on Sunday, January 12.

The second group included Abdullah Al Misnad School and Simaisma Secondary School for Boys, with 103 students. The symposium was held at Nasser Al Misnad Mosque; In Al Khor City on Monday, January 13, while the third group included Al Wakra Secondary School and Amr Ibn Al Aas Secondary School, with 55 students. The symposium was held at Qanbar Al Ansari Mosque in Al Wakra City on Tuesday, January 14.

Global Alliance talks on two-state solution in Oslo



Qatar took part in the third high-level meeting of the Global Alliance for the Implementation of the two-state solution, hosted over two days in Oslo, Norway, with the participation of 90 countries and international organisations. Qatar was represented at the meeting by HE the Director of the Arab Affairs Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Nayef Abdullah al-Emadi, and Acting Assistant to the Director of Policy Planning Department at the ministry, Sheikh Jabor bin Abdulaziz al-Thani. The meeting followed up on the agreement made during the previous gathering in Brussels, reaffirming the importance of the two-state solution as the foundation for peace, in line with the UN resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative. (QNA)

Tanzania's FM meets Qatar's ambassador



Tanzanian Minister of Foreign Affairs and East African Co-operation Mahmood Thabit Kombo met with Qatar's ambassador in Dar-es-Salaam, Fahad Rashid al-Muraikhi. The meeting discussed relations between the two countries and ways to support and enhance them. (QNA)

'Ceasefire efforts reflect Qatar's unwavering commitment'

QNA
Gaza

Officials and analysts from the Gaza Strip commended the significant efforts made by Qatar in partnership with Egypt and the United States to reach a ceasefire agreement in the Gaza Strip.

In statements to Qatar News Agency (QNA), the officials and analysts emphasised that Qatar's success in reaching the ceasefire agreement reflects its unwavering commitment to supporting the rights of the Palestinian people, noting that Qatar was among the first countries to rush to support and assist the Palestinian people in the face of the ongoing aggression on Gaza since October 7, 2023, by providing urgent financial and logistical aid.

They affirmed that Qatar succeeded in playing a pivotal and influential role in reaching the ceasefire agreement, leveraging its previous experience and position as a neutral and accepted mediator by various regional and international parties. They highlighted Qatar's ability to manage complex negotiations under highly sensitive circumstances and demonstrated its exceptional diplomacy in handling difficult political issues. Director-general of the Government Media Office in the Gaza Strip, Dr Ismail

al-Thawabta, said Qatar played a central, pivotal and crucial role in this historic agreement, reflecting its steadfast commitment to supporting and protecting the rights of the Palestinian people.

Al-Thawabta said in statements to QNA that the success of this Qatari effort is the result of a wise policy based on dialogue and honest, impartial mediation, which has contributed to alleviating the suffering of the Palestinian people that have been ongoing for more than 15 months as well as restoring calm to the region.

He emphasised that Qatar's efforts to provide humanitarian aid to the people of Gaza have been and continue to be highly appreciated by the Palestinian people and all concerned parties, pointing out that Qatar was one of the first countries to rush to support and assist the Palestinian people by providing urgent financial and logistical support.

He reiterated that Qatar's humanitarian aid has had a profoundly positive impact on vital sectors in Gaza, particularly the health sector, where Qatari support included providing urgent medical supplies, repairing hospitals and medical centres damaged during the conflict, and supplying modern medical equipment. This continues Qatar's previous efforts over the years to support the Palestinian cause.

The Director-General of the Government Media Office in Gaza expressed confidence that Qatar will continue its efforts to provide assistance to various vital sectors in Gaza, including health, education, housing, infrastructure, and other important sectors.

Wissam Afifa, a political writer and analyst, noted that Qatar successfully played a pivotal and influential role in reaching the ceasefire agreement in Gaza, benefiting from its previous experience and its position as a neutral and accepted mediator by all parties. He emphasised that Qatar managed complex negotiations under highly sensitive conditions, proving that it possesses exceptional diplomacy to move difficult political issues forward.

Afifa added, in statements to QNA, that Qatar's success in mobilising international efforts stems from a strategy based on several tracks, including an active neutrality policy, which has granted it credibility as a trusted mediator capable of engaging with all parties. In addition, Qatar adopted multilateral diplomacy, using its diplomatic tools to rally international support through the United Nations and regional organisations while also coordinating with regional parties.

He highlighted Qatar's prominent role in alleviating the suffering of the Palestinian people

over the years, especially in Gaza, through various avenues such as direct financial support via Qatari aid, which contributed to providing salaries and rebuilding homes. Qatar also played a key role in reconstruction projects, such as building roads, schools and hospitals. It provided practical solutions to ease the population crisis, including supplying fuel to the Gaza power plant, which contributed to improving the lives of Gaza's residents.

Afifa also noted that the urgent humanitarian aid provided by Qatar during the aggression on Gaza was a vital element, with Qatar delivering medical aid and emergency relief materials that helped alleviate the burden of the blockade and destruction.

Assistant Undersecretary of the Palestinian Ministry of Health in Gaza, Dr Maher Shamieh, confirmed that Qatar's presence was evident in the relief and medical support provided to the people of the Gaza Strip. This role was particularly highlighted in delivering medical aid, rehabilitating damaged healthcare facilities, supporting medical teams, and receiving hundreds of wounded and injured individuals from Gaza for treatment in Doha.

In a statement to QNA, Shamieh said that Qatar spared no effort in providing everything possible to support the Palestinian people.

Pakistan Business Council Qatar welcomes new Pakistani envoy



Officials and members of the Pakistan Business Council Qatar during the welcome reception for ambassador Muhammad Amir.

The Pakistan Business Council Qatar (PBCQ) has organised a welcome reception for the newly-appointed ambassador of Pakistan to Qatar, Muhammad Amir.

The ambassador expressed gratitude for the reception and commended the council's pivotal role in fostering a robust and unified Pakistani community. Drawing upon his distinguished career in military and civil service, Amir, a re-

tired lieutenant general, reiterated his resolve to fortify the historical bonds of friendship and co-operation between the two countries. He also outlined strategies to enhance employment opportunities for skilled Pakistani workers and pledged unwavering support for local businesses within Qatar.

"It is my firm belief that by fostering unity and mutual collaboration, we can achieve re-

markable milestones in strengthening Pakistan-Qatar relations. My commitment to deepening this bond remains steadfast," Amir emphasised.

The event also acknowledged the notable contributions of Syed Mustafa Rabbani, deputy head of mission, and Serein Asad, trade and investment attaché, whose dedication to fostering bilateral relations was applauded.

Majlis holds a grand Urdu Mushaira in Al Wakra



Majlis Chairman Mohammad Atiq delivering his opening speech.

Majlis-e-Frogh-e-Urdu Adab (MFUA), one of the most vibrant literary groups of Indian and Pakistani expatriate communities, recently held its 28th poetic session at the DPS-Modern Indian School Auditorium in Al Wakra.

The Majlis has been offering a platform to Urdu poets from across the world for Urdu

Mushairas in Qatar for 28 years.

Maqbool Habib Jafer Khalfan, a prominent Qatari businessman and a former general manager of Doha Bank and Qatar Development Bank; Mohammad Atiq, Chairman of MFUA; and other members of the Majlis' board of patrons, launched the Majlis' magazine in the presence of hundreds of Urdu lovers.

Three top Urdu organisations collectively honoured Mohammad Atiq with 'Loh-e-Sipas' in recognition of his long services for Urdu in Qatar. Aziz Nabeel and Nadeem Mahir, representing Anjuman e Mohibban e Urdu, Qatar, and Mohammad Shahid Khan and Nishat Siddiqui, representing Karwan e Urdu, Qatar presented 'Loh-e-Sipas' and 'Tausifi Sanad', respec-



Majlis office bearers and invited poets.

tively, while all members of MFUA participated in the ceremonies.

Mohammad Atiq in his inaugural address welcomed the guests, the poets, the audience, heads of all local literary organisations and the ministries of culture and interior.

Prof Dr Khurshid Rizvi, the President of the Mushaira, in his address declared the Aalmi Mushaira formally started, which continued

successfully until 1.30am. The audience applauded each poet throughout the Mushaira.

The Mushaira was presided by renowned poet, linguist, writer, researcher, and intellectual Dr Rizvi and was well compered by Obaid Tahir, Majlis Secretary-General.

Among the local poets who recited their poetry included Raqim Azmi, Shabber Ali, Farzana Safdar

and Raza Hussain Raza, while guest poets from India included Dr Nadim Shaad, Salim Siddiqui and Asif Bilal. Poets from Pakistan included Abbas Tabish, Dr Tahir Shaheer, Fareeha Naqvi and Mir-e-Mushaira Dr Rizvi who recited his classic and selected poetry. About 800 Urdu-lovers packed the school auditorium for the literary evening.



Members of the Majlis presenting the Loh-e-Sipas to Mohammad Atiq.



Egyptian diplomats: Intensive efforts behind successful ceasefire mediation in Gaza

QNA
Cairo

Egyptian diplomats and experts praised the joint mediation efforts made by Qatar, Egypt, and the United States of America to reach an agreement between the Palestinian Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) and the Israeli entity for a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and the exchange of prisoners and detainees.

Diplomats and experts told Qatar News Agency (QNA) that the announcement of HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani on Wednesday night of the success of the mediation efforts came after

intensive efforts and actions at all levels, which represented a major achievement after 15 full months of the Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip, which led to the martyrdom of over 45,000 people, in addition to 15,000 bodies still under the rubble and not yet recovered, and 100,000 injured.

For his part, a member of the Egyptian Council for Foreign Affairs ambassador Rakha Ahmad Hassan affirmed in a statement to QNA that the ceasefire agreement came as a result of intensive efforts since last year made by the State of Qatar and the Arab Republic of Egypt, in co-operation with the US, indicating that these efforts did not stop in light of the keenness of the State of Qatar and Egypt on the necessity of stop-



ping the fighting and bringing humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip to end the starvation policy used by Israeli entity in addition to its prevention of food, medicine, and fuel and the siege of the Palestinian people, pointing out in this regard to the entity's targeting, during the

ongoing aggression on the Gaza Strip since Oct 7, 2023, of schools, hospitals, places of worship and even camps where the displaced have taken refuge.

He highlighted the strenuous efforts made by Qatar and Egypt over the past months to reach a ceasefire agreement in the Gaza Strip, exchange prisoners and detainees, and facilitate the entry of humanitarian aid to the Palestinian people in the Strip.

Ambassador Rakha Ahmad Hassan added that Qatar and Egypt are essential partners in the Palestinian file due to two important matters, the first of which is that Palestine is part of Egypt's national security, second is that Qatar has a long history and a firm position in supporting the Palestinian cause

and the national rights of the Palestinian people, including the establishment of their independent Palestinian state.

Member of the Egyptian Council for Foreign Affairs indicated in his statements to the QNA that Qatar has supported the Palestinian people throughout the past period humanely and financially, considering that the Gaza Strip is one of the most densely populated areas in the world, and is in constant need of more support, adding that in parallel with what the State of Qatar and Egypt have done to reach a ceasefire agreement in Gaza, they are keen to emphasize the necessity of establishing an independent Palestinian state so that stability can prevail in the Middle East.

Successful Gaza truce mediation highlights Qatar's influential role

QNA
Doha

Experts and political analysts emphasised that the success of the joint mediation undertaken by Qatar along with Egypt and the United States, to secure a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip proves once again Qatar's status as a reliable partner in the international community, and highlights its influential role in fostering sustainable dialogue and contributing to peace in the region and beyond.

In statements to Qatar News Agency (QNA), they noted that Qatar, through its ongoing mediation efforts over the past 15 months to reach a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, has demonstrated its ability to influence and manage negotiations with high professionalism, neutrality, integrity and reliability, reflecting its extensive experience in this field.

They expressed hope that Gaza ceasefire would pave the way for resolving other issues and crises in the Middle East. Dr Tarik Mohammed Yousef, Director of the Middle East Council on Global Affairs, stated that the success of the Qatari mediation in securing a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip marks a new achievement for Qatari diplomacy, which is characterised by wisdom, dynamism and flexibility in handling regional issues and crises.

He added that, despite widespread belief in recent weeks that negotiations had reached a dead end, Qatar, thanks to the wisdom of its leadership and its openness and co-operation with various partners, persisted in its mediation efforts with competence and commitment, ultimately securing a ceasefire and paving the way for a permanent settlement that halts the destruction and bloodshed.

"Qatar's efforts will lead to peace in the region. This agreement marks a major breakthrough for the Palestinian people, the region, and the world as a whole, considering the victims, destruction, and devastation caused by this unjust war on Gaza, as well as its significant negative repercussions on both the regional and international situation. In my view, the agreement announced today is the most important development and

Turkish ambassador praises Qatar's tireless efforts for conflict resolution

Dr Mustafa Goksu, ambassador of Turkiye to Qatar, expressed his profound appreciation for the significant efforts undertaken by Qatar to achieve the ceasefire agreement in Gaza, which represents an important step toward alleviating the suffering of the Palestinian people.

He commended the statement by His Highness Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, the Amir of Qatar, emphasising that Qatar's diplomatic role in reaching this agreement is a humanitarian duty before being a political one. He also praised His Highness's call for unwavering support for the Palestinian people and our brethren in Gaza.

The ambassador expressed his appreciation for the remarks of HE Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani, Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, during the announcement of the ceasefire agreement. He acknowledged Qatar's relentless efforts over several months to end the conflict and provide relief to the Palestinian people. Dr Goksu also extended his gratitude to the mediating countries, Egypt and the United States, for their contributions to reaching the agreement alongside Qatar. He added: "We salute with deep respect the people of Gaza and their courageous sons, who valiantly defended their land and freedom



against illegal and inhumane Israeli attacks." Dr Goksu affirmed Turkiye's steadfast commitment to supporting the rights of the Palestinian people and its dedication to enhancing co-operation with Qatar in all endeavours aimed at achieving peace and stability in the region. He further stated that Turkiye would continue to work hand-in-hand with brotherly and friendly nations to realize justice and lasting peace in Palestine. He reiterated the stance of the Republic of Turkiye and President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, emphasising that "Turkiye has never and will never leave the Palestinians alone in their struggle for their rightful cause". Dr Goksu also reiterated the statement by Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Hakan Fidan, affirming Ankara's continued support for Palestine on all levels. He stressed the importance of implementing all stages of the agreement in the next phase, ensuring the permanence of the ceasefire, and delivering urgent humanitarian aid to Gaza. Finally, he underlined the necessity for the international community to hold Israel accountable for fulfilling its obligations regarding these matters and expressed his hopes that the agreement would mark the beginning of relief and lasting peace for the Palestinian people.

the biggest achievement of 2025. I expect it to have positive impact on many ongoing issues and crises in the region, reinforcing the notion of mediation and dialogue as a strategic foundation for resolving crises, rather than resorting to war and destruction," Dr Tarik Yousef continued.

This agreement affirms the wisdom of Qatar and the correctness of its stance in advocating for dialogue. Today, Qatar's belief in dialogue is realized, and we hope this agreement will be a step toward achieving permanent and comprehensive peace in the Middle East, he added. Political Analyst and Qatar University's Professor Dr Bakil al-Zindani said Qatar has always been supporting the Palestinian cause as a central issue, earning the trust of the Palestinian

people and paving the way for this successful mediation.

Qatar's long diplomatic experience has been vital to facilitate this mediation over the course of 15 straight months, he added, stressing such efforts will not be forgotten by the Arab and Islamic nations and the Palestinians in particular, as they will contribute to stopping the bloodshed and aggression against the Palestinian people.

Dr al-Zindani also pointed out that the Qatari diplomacy has gained trust from all parties regionally and internationally as a result of the mediations it carried out in various regions of the world with efficiency and integrity. Meanwhile, Jordanian political analyst Dr Khaled Walid Mahmoud said Qatar's efforts to achieve a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip over

the past months were a prominent model of effective diplomacy based on dialogue and direct communication with the concerned parties.

He added Qatar continued its efforts with integrity and neutrality while maintaining the good faith of both negotiating parties and their trust in the Qatari mediators.

Despite the complexities of the political situation in the region along with the regional and international pressures, Qatar has shown great determination and flexibility to reach a solution that stops Palestinian bloodshed, puts an end to this genocide against the Palestinian people, and alleviates the suffering of the residents of the Gaza Strip, he added.

He stressed that Qatar's success in reaching a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip enhances hopes for the pos-

Pakistan commends Qatar's pivotal role in reaching ceasefire agreement

Commenting on Gaza ceasefire, ambassador of Pakistan to Qatar Muhammad Aamer said: "On behalf of the people and Government of Pakistan, I extend our heartfelt appreciation to the State of Qatar and its esteemed leadership for their instrumental role in brokering the Gaza Ceasefire Agreement."

In these challenging times, Qatar has once again demonstrated its unwavering commitment to peace, diplomacy, and the preservation of human dignity. The proactive mediation led by His Highness Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, the Amir of the State of Qatar, and HE Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani, the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Qatar, is a reflection of Qatar's steadfast dedication to justice and the resolution of conflicts through dialogue. "The Gaza ceasefire represents a beacon of hope for countless lives

affected by the ongoing crisis. Qatar's efforts are a testament to its significant role as a global peacebuilder and its solidarity with the Palestinian people." Pakistan remains committed to supporting peace in the region and continues to stand with the people of Palestine in their just struggle for self-determination. We deeply value Qatar's continued contributions to this noble cause and believe that such diplomatic efforts set a precedent for resolving conflicts worldwide. As the ambassador of Pakistan to Qatar, I take this opportunity to reaffirm the strong bonds of friendship and co-operation between our two nations, bound by shared values and mutual aspirations for a peaceful and prosperous future. Once again, Pakistan appreciate and commends Qatar for its exemplary leadership and prays for lasting peace in Gaza and the wider region.



Iranian women celebrate following the news of a ceasefire between Hamas and Israel, in Tehran, Iran.

sibility of resolving other crises in the region, and may even form a basis for rebuilding confidence be-

tween the conflicting parties, and open the door to a comprehensive settlement of the Palestinian issue.

US to impose sanctions on Sudanese army chief

Reuters
Nairobi

The United States imposed financial sanctions yesterday on Sudan's leader, army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, three sources with direct knowledge of the matter told Reuters. Washington was set to announce the measures just a week after imposing sanctions against Burhan's rival in a two-year-old civil war, Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, commander of the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces. Two of the sources said one aim of the sanctions on Burhan was to show that Washington was not picking sides.

Speaking among his soldiers earlier yesterday, Burhan was defiant about the prospect that he might be targeted. "I hear there's going to be sanctions on the army leadership. We welcome any sanc-

tions for serving this country," he said in comments broadcast on Al Jazeera television.

The Sudanese army and spokespeople for the US State and Treasury departments did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

The Sudanese army and the RSF together led a coup in 2021 removing Sudan's civilian leadership, but fell out less than two years later over plans to integrate their forces. The war that broke out in April 2023 has killed tens of thousands of people, driven millions from their homes and plunged half of the population into hunger.

According to one of the sources, a diplomat, the grounds for the sanctions against Burhan included the army targeting civilians and civilian infrastructure, denying humanitarian aid access and refusing to participate in peace talks last year. Dagalo, known as Hemedti,

was sanctioned after Washington determined his forces had committed genocide, as well as for attacks on civilians. The RSF has engaged in bloody looting campaigns in the territory it controls.

The United States and Saudi Arabia have tried repeatedly to get both sides to the negotiating table, with the army refusing most attempts, including talks in Geneva in August which in part aimed to ease humanitarian access. The army has instead ramped up its military campaign, this week taking the strategic city of Wad Madani and vowing to retake the capital Khartoum.

Rights experts and residents have accused the army of indiscriminate airstrikes as well as attacks on civilians, most recently revenge attacks in Wad Madani this week. The US had previously determined the army and RSF had committed war crimes.

Beirut blast investigator resumes work after two years: official

Lebanese judge Tarek Bitar resumed his investigation into the deadly 2020 Beirut port blast yesterday, charging 10 people including security, customs and military personnel, a judicial official said.

The fresh charges come after a two-year hiatus in the investigation into the August 4, 2020 explosion that killed more than 220 people, injured thousands and devastated swathes of Lebanon's capital.

Authorities said the explosion was triggered by a fire in a warehouse where a huge stockpile of ammonium nitrate fertiliser had been haphazardly stored for years.

But nobody has been held responsible for the blast, one of history's largest non-nuclear explosions. The probe stalled two years ago after Lebanese group Hezbollah had accused Bitar of bias and demanded his dismissal, and after officials named in the investigation had filed a flurry of lawsuits to prevent it from going forward.

The resumption comes with Hezbollah's influence weakened after its recent war with Israel.

It also follows the election of a Lebanese president after the top

position had been vacant for more than two years, with the new head of state Joseph Aoun last week pledging to work towards the "independence of the judiciary".

The judicial official told AFP that "procedures in the case have resumed", speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive matters. The official said that "a new charge sheet has been issued, charging three employees and seven high-ranking officers in the Lebanese army, in the General Security, (and) in customs" with negligence and "possible intent to commit murder". Their interrogations would begin next month.

In March and April, "investigating sessions" would resume for those previously charged in the case, including former ministers, lawmakers, security and military officers, judges and port management employees, after which Bitar would ask public prosecutors to issue indictments, according to the judicial official.

Analysts say Hezbollah's weakening in its war with Israel last year allowed Lebanon's deeply divided political class to elect Aoun last week and back his naming of Nawaf Salam as premier on Mon-

day. Salam, until recently the presiding judge at the International Court of Justice in The Hague, on Tuesday promised "justice for the victims of the Beirut port blast".

Hundreds of individuals and organisations, including Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, had previously called for the United Nations to establish a fact-finding mission on the disaster - a demand Lebanese officials have repeatedly rejected. Cecile Roukoz, a lawyer whose brother died in the explosion, said she was optimistic after "the promises made by the president and the prime minister, then the probe resuming".

"There is hope that the rights of the victims, for whom we never stopped fighting, won't be forgotten," said the attorney, one of several representing the relatives of those killed. Visiting Lebanon on Thursday, UN rights chief Volker Turk called for the "resumption of an independent investigation into the explosion". "I repeat that those responsible for that tragedy must be held to account and offer the support of my office in this regard," he said. —AFP



More than 360 journalists jailed last year, says NGO

AFP
New York

More than 360 media workers were behind bars in the final month of 2024, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) reported yesterday, highlighting China and Israel as jailing the highest number.

In its annual census the New York-based organisation counted 361 people as being in prison on December 1, 2024, its highest total since 2022, when 370 were counted.

China, Israel, and Myanmar – with 50, 43 and 35 journalists detained, respectively – “emerged as the world’s three worst offenders in another record-setting year for journalists jailed be-

cause of their work”, the CPJ said.

The organisation said that China’s “pervasive censorship” made it difficult to determine the exact number of journalists jailed there and highlighted rising cases in Hong Kong, notably the continued imprisonment of media tycoon Jimmy Lai.

Lai, 77, has been jailed since December 2020 and is one of the most prominent figures to be prosecuted under Hong Kong’s national security law, which was imposed following huge pro-democracy protests in the city.

“These numbers should be a wake-up call for us all,” CPJ chief executive Jodie Ginsberg said in a statement. “A rise in attacks on journalists almost always precedes a rise in attacks on other freedoms – the freedom to give and receive

information, the freedom to assemble and move freely, the freedom to protest.”

The CPJ said that Israel, a multi-party democracy, had rarely appeared on the annual prison sentence before the outbreak of the Gaza war in 2023.

It nonetheless “catapulted to second-place last year as it tried to silence coverage from the occupied Palestinian territories”, the CPJ said, noting all journalists detained by Israel were Palestinians.

According to the CPJ, Asia remained the region with the highest number of jailed journalists, with Vietnam (16), Afghanistan (two), Bangladesh (four), India (three) and the Philippines (one) adding to China and Myanmar’s world-leading figures.

Weather conditions in LA improve, giving firefighters respite

Wind gusts and dry conditions lingered throughout the day yesterday in Los Angeles where firefighters hope to gain on their momentum against two major wild fires that have ravaged everything in their path.

“Red Flag” warnings advising of extreme wild fire danger expired across the Los Angeles area late on Wednesday but one remained for an area east of the metro area, where winds were expected to be 15-25mph (25-40kph) with gusts to 40mph, the National Weather Service (NWS) said.

“The winds are expected to switch to a more onshore flow... bringing higher relative humidities and less chaotic wind flow, thus helping to mitigate the wild fire threat compared to recent days,” the NWS said.

The NWS added that the respite for fire-ravaged Los Angeles will be short, with high chances of renewed Red Flag warnings – when ideal fire conditions of high winds and low humidity dominate – starting again on Sunday.

The fires that have raged across Los Angeles for the last week and a half have consumed an area nearly the size of Washington, DC, resulting in at least 25 deaths so far, authorities said.

The fires have damaged or destroyed more than 12,000 homes and other structures, and forced as many as 200,000 people from their homes.

Some 82,400 people were under evacuation orders and another 90,400 faced evacuation warnings as of Wednesday, County Sheriff Robert Luna said.

Some 8,500 firefighters from the western United States, Canada and Mexico have kept the growth of the fires in check for three days.

The Palisades Fire on the west edge of the city held steady at 23,713 acres (96sq km) burned, and containment nudged up to 21% – 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 at 45%.

A new fire broke out on Wednesday in San Bernardino County east of Los Angeles, burning 34 acres (14 hectares), Cal Fire reported. – Reuters

Trump will keep TikTok from ‘going dark’ if deal is on table, adviser says

US President-elect Donald Trump’s incoming national security adviser said yesterday that the new administration will keep TikTok alive in the United States if there is a viable deal.

“We will put measures in place to keep TikTok from going dark,” US Representative Mike Waltz told Fox News.

He noted that the law gives authority for a 90-day extension for the app’s Chinese owner, ByteDance, to complete a divestiture.

This is the case, said Waltz, “as long as a viable deal is on the table. Essentially that buys President Trump time to keep TikTok going”.

TikTok is used by more than 170mn Americans monthly.

The *New York Times* reported yesterday that Trump is considering an executive order that would seek to allow TikTok to continue operating despite a pending legal ban until new owners are found.

It was not immediately clear if Trump has the authority to do so given the legal divestiture



Trump has repeatedly expressed his desire to save TikTok.

requirements imposed by Congress.

A group of U.S. lawmakers is also pushing for a 270-day extension as well, warning that a ban could hurt Americans who make a living from using TikTok.

TikTok did not respond to requests for comment.

A spokesperson for the Trump transition, Karoline Leavitt, said: “President Trump has repeatedly expressed his desire to save TikTok, and there’s no better deal maker than Donald Trump”.

Reuters reported that TikTok plans to shut US operations of its social media app on Sunday, when a federal ban is set to take effect, barring a last-minute reprieve, according to people fa-

miliar with the matter.

A White House official told Reuters on Wednesday that President Joe Biden has no plans to intervene to block a ban in his final days in office if the US Supreme Court fails to act.

The official added that Biden is legally unable to intervene absent a credible plan from ByteDance to divest TikTok.

The law signed in April mandates a ban on new TikTok downloads on Apple or Google app stores if ByteDance fails to divest the site.

Users who have downloaded TikTok would theoretically still be able to use the app, but the law also bars US companies from providing services to enable the distribution, maintenance, or updating of it once any ban begins.

The president can issue a one-time, 90-day delay to the ban if he certifies to Congress there has been evidence of significant progress and there are binding legal agreements in place to allow a complete divestiture in three months. – Reuters

Hundreds of homes evacuated as Patagonia fires grow in Argentina

AFP
Buenos Aires

Forest fires fuelled by a heatwave scorched a picturesque corner of Argentina’s Patagonia region yesterday, forcing the evacuation of hundreds of homes.

Strong winds and high temperatures fed a blaze that tore through grassland and forest near the remote village of Epuyen, reducing areas of pristine wilderness to a smouldering ruin.

“The fire grew exponentially yesterday thanks to weather conditions,” said provincial governor Ignacio Torres.

An area roughly the size of 1,600 football fields caught fire in only five hours on Wednesday, he said.

Some 50 homes and part of a school were engulfed by the flames and 200 families have been evacuated, Torres added.

Three water-bombing aircraft and hundreds of firefighters and volunteers have been dispatched



Flames and smoke rise from a wildfire in Epuyen, in the Patagonian region of Chubut, Argentina. – Reuters

to the area to try and contain the blaze, which has now veered away from inhabited areas.

Argentina’s National Weather Service has declared 17 of the country’s 23 provinces to be suffering “extreme temperatures”.

Fires are common in Patagonia’s austral summer, but a lack of rainfall and high temperatures have raised the risk this year.

In December, 4,200 hectares of the Nahuel Huapi National Park were burned.

Blue Origin’s New Glenn rocket blasts into orbit for first time

Reuters/AFP
Cape Canaveral

Blue Origin’s giant New Glenn rocket blasted off from Florida early yesterday morning on its first mission to space, an inaugural step into Earth’s orbit for billionaire Jeff Bezos’s space company as it aims to rival SpaceX in the satellite launch business.

Thirty storeys tall with a reusable first stage, New Glenn launched at 2.03am ET (0703 GMT) from Blue Origin’s launchpad at the Cape Canaveral Space Force Station, its seven BE-4 engines thundering for miles under cloudy skies on its second lift-off attempt this week.

Hundreds of employees at the company’s Kent, Washington headquarters and its Cape Canaveral, Florida rocket factory roared in applause as Blue Origin vice-president Ariane Cornell announced the rocket’s second stage made it to orbit, achieving a long-awaited milestone and the mission’s primary objective.

“We hit our key, critical, number-one objective, we got to orbit safely,” Cornell said on a company livestream. “And y’all we did it on our first go.”

“I’m incredibly proud New Glenn achieved orbit on its first attempt,” Blue Origin chief executive Dave Limp said in a statement. “We knew landing our booster... on the first try was an ambitious goal. We’ll learn a lot from today and try again at our next launch this spring.”

Blue Origin said in a statement after the

mission that New Glenn’s payload, an in-house test satellite, “is receiving data and performing well”.

The rocket’s reusable first stage booster was due to land on a barge in the Atlantic Ocean after separating from its second stage, but failed to make that landing, Cornell confirmed. “We did in fact lose the booster.”

Telemetry from the booster blacked out minutes after lift-off.

Blue Origin had intended to land the booster – powered by liquid methane and designed for up to 25 flights – on a drone ship stationed about 620 miles (1,000km) downrange in the Atlantic Ocean.

Rival SpaceX has made such landings now routine, but this would have been Blue Origin’s first shot at the feat.

Blue Origin did not explain why or how much the booster missed its landing.

Fellow billionaire Elon Musk commended Bezos on New Glenn’s inaugural launch, offering congratulations “on reaching orbit on the first attempt” in a post on his X platform.

The culmination of a decade-long, multi-billion-dollar development journey, the mission had once been due for launch in 2020, but engineering challenges caused years of delay.

Secured inside New Glenn’s payload bay for the mission was the first prototype of Blue Origin’s Blue Ring vehicle, a manoeuvrable spacecraft the company plans to sell to the Pentagon and commercial customers for national security and satellite servicing missions.



The Blue Origin New Glenn rocket lifts off on its inaugural launch at the Cape Canaveral Space Force Station in Cape Canaveral, Florida. – Reuters

Yesterday’s mission sets up New Glenn’s next planned flight in spring, Blue Origin’s chief executive Limp said in a statement.

The company is likely to start an engineering investigation into the cause of the booster landing failure, potentially holding up progress to the next mission.

Blue Origin has several boosters in production at its Cape Canaveral rocket factory.

The rocket’s first attempt to launch on Monday was scrubbed around 3am ET because ice had accumulated on a propellant line.

Yesterday the company cited no issues ahead of launch.

Bezos monitored the launch from a few miles away in Blue Origin’s mission control room, wearing a large headset and flanked

by dozens of launch staff. Limp was at a computer next to him.

New Glenn is expected to press ahead with a backlog of dozens of missions worth hundreds of millions of dollars, including up to 27 launches for Amazon’s Kuiper satellite Internet network that will rival SpaceX’s Starlink service.

New Glenn is the latest US rocket to debut in recent years as governments and private companies beef up their space programmes and race to challenge Musk’s SpaceX and its workhorse Falcon 9.

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (Nasa)’s giant Space Launch System rocket had a successful debut in 2022, as did the Vulcan rocket last year from United Launch Alliance, Boeing and Lockheed Martin’s joint launch venture.

Biden warns of ‘oligarchy’ in last speech

Reuters/AFP
Washington

Biden: The free press is crumbling.

President Joe Biden said an oligarchy is forming in the US that threatens democracy, issuing the bleak warning on Wednesday in his final Oval Office speech as he prepares to hand over power to Donald Trump next week.

Biden opened his speech with a familiar message – asking Americans to join together – but quickly warned about a dangerous concentration of wealth in the United States.

“Today, an oligarchy is taking shape in America of extreme wealth, power, and influence that really threatens our entire democracy, our basic rights and freedom, and a fair shot for everyone to get ahead,” Biden said.

He warned of a “tech industrial complex” that is bringing an “avalanche of misinformation and disinformation, enabling the abuse of power”.

Biden warned there was a “dangerous concentration of power in the hands of a very few ultra-wealthy people” with “dangerous consequences if their abuse of power is left unchecked”.

The free press, he added, “is crumbling”.

“Editors are disappearing. Social media is giving up on fact checking,” Biden continued. “The truth is smothered by lies told for power and for profit”.

Biden’s farewell address, capping half a century in politics, sought to bolster a legacy that has been overshadowed by Democrats’ failure to stop the Republican Trump from returning to the White House.

Trump, who takes office at noon (1700 GMT) on Monday, has nominated a slate of cabinet members who have pledged to upend traditional American alliances and governing norms.

Biden and his allies oversaw the recovery from the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic, funded an infrastructure revival, sparked new semiconductor chips manufacturing, and tackled climate change as they tried to rebalance inequality and invest in the future.

He leaves an outperforming US economy and optimistic businesses.

However, Biden was unable to heal divisions in the country the way he had hoped, or stop democratic backsliding around the world.

Now the Republican president-elect has vowed to undo much of what the Democratic administration accomplished.

“All Joe Biden wanted was to be remembered for the great things he did for this country and, at least in the short run, they’ve been eclipsed by his ill-conceived decision to run,” said David Axelrod, a former adviser to president Barack Obama.

“He became a historic president when he defeated Trump. So obviously the fact that Trump is resurgent and returning to power, more powerful than he was when he left, is an unhappy coda to the story”.

Senator Chris Coons, a long-time ally, said that when Biden took office he faced an economic crisis, a public health crisis, and a democracy crisis following the January 6, 2021, storming of the Capitol by Trump supporters.

“The country was in the depths of crises. The recovery from that pandemic has been his single greatest accomplishment,” Coons said.

Biden’s administration oversaw the distribution of Covid-19 vaccines and an economic recovery that defied predictions of a recession, even as inflation soared and prices remained high, which soured voters on his economic stewardship.

“You cannot reverse four and a half decades of rising inequality with a few years of absolute good economic outcomes and policy changes,” said Heidi Shierholz, president of the Economic Policy Institute. “But one of the most fundamental things they did was provide relief recovery at the scale that was needed to generate a strong jobs recovery”.

Biden, who spent more than three decades in the US Senate and eight years as vice-president to Obama, cites a unified Western response to Russia’s war with Ukraine, the strengthening of alliances and the US withdrawal from Afghanistan as key foreign policy achievements.

Thirteen US military personnel died during the chaotic Afghanistan withdrawal in August 2021, and Biden’s popularity never recovered.

His staunch support for Israel in its war in Gaza after the events of October 7, 2023, split the Democratic Party, and Biden’s reputation with the left suffered.

Polls show Biden remains an unpopular president.

A CNN poll published on Wednesday showed him with a 36% approval rating, remaining at the lowest of his term.

That puts him above Trump, who left office with a 34% approval rating, according to the American Presidency Project.

The lowest in recent times was Richard Nixon with 24% while the highest was Bill Clinton with 66%, followed by Barack Obama with 59%.

Bolsonaro denied passport for Trump inauguration

Brazil’s top court has refused to return the passport of right-wing former president Jair Bolsonaro so that he could attend the inauguration of US President-elect Donald Trump.

The court said that Bolsonaro still posed a flight risk, almost a year since his passport was seized as part of an investigation into his alleged orchestration of a coup attempt to remain in power after losing the 2022 election.

“The scenario that justified the imposition of the ban on leaving the country, with the surrender of passports, continues to indicate the possibility of an attempted evasion by the accused,” Judge Alexandre de Moraes wrote.

The authenticity of a simple e-mail invitation to the inauguration – sent to Bolsonaro’s son Eduardo without details of the event – was the subject of widespread media attention in Brazil this week.

Moraes had requested additional proof of the invitation, which was not provided.

Nevertheless, the court analysed and denied the request to return the former president’s passport.

The 69-year-old former army captain is staring down multiple criminal charges from investigations launched after his razor-thin election loss to Lula. – AFP

Top court bars infrastructure in Nepal's protected areas

Nepal's Supreme Court has scrapped controversial laws allowing hydropower and hotel projects in protected nature reserves, a lawyer said yesterday, calling it a win for the Himalayan republic's conservationists.

A fifth of Nepal's lands are designated as protected areas. However, both hydropower projects and tourism are major earners, and the government passed laws last year to allow infrastructure projects in national parks, forests and other conservation areas.

"The controversial decision was made with deception," environmental advocate Padam Bahadur Shrestha, one of the petitioners challenging the changes to the law, told AFP. "It clearly shows how our government is working just to appease investors because it lacks farsightedness."

Shrestha said that the verdict, which was issued on Wednesday, offers "justice to preserve ecology and biodiversity".

Nepal's protected habitat laws have helped to triple its tiger population to 355 since 2010 and to increase one-horned rhinoceros from around 100 in the 1960s to 752 in 2021.

After decades of logging, Nepal also nearly doubled its forest cover between 1992 and 2016.

"The laws should have never been passed," said Rampreet Yadav, former chief conservation officer of Chitwan National Park, Nepal's most important conservation area. "If development projects are allowed in protected areas, it will destroy our nature, it will destroy the habitats of animals." - AFP

Patients are dying in corridors as UK hospital standards 'collapse': report

By Akshata Kapoor
AFP

UK patients are "coming to harm" with hospitals so overwhelmed people are dying in corridors awaiting treatment amid a "collapse in care standards", a report said yesterday.

In the latest indictment of Britain's beleaguered state-funded National Health Service (NHS), nine in 10 NHS nurses surveyed by the country's nurses union said "patient safety is being compromised".

Nearly seven in 10 (66.8%) said they were delivering care in "overcrowded or unsuitable places" on a "daily basis", including in corridors, converted cupboards, car parks and even bereavement rooms.

"The experiences of more than 5,000 nursing staff across the UK highlight a devastating collapse in care standards, with patients routinely coming to harm," said the Royal College of Nursing (RCN).

The report condemned the "normalisation" of so-called "corridor care", with nurses unable to access life-saving equipment in cramped spaces.

One nurse in east England said corridor care in their hospital trust was "not an exception, it's the rule".

Last month, some 54,000 patients in emergency departments in England had to wait over 12 hours until a hospital bed was available, up 23% from December 2023.

The report is a result of a Royal College of Nursing request at the end of December, asking members to fill out a short survey.

The report includes "the raw, unedited and often heart-breaking comments" of the thousands of nursing staff working across the UK who responded, the RCN said.

The report comes as NHS figures released separately yesterday revealed that last week was the busiest yet for the health service this winter, with hospitals "jam-packed" with patients.

Some 96% of all hospital beds were full,

said Julian Redhead, the NHS national clinical director for urgent and emergency care, warning that despite a drop in flu numbers "winter viruses are much higher than usual for this time of year".

The RCN report included testimonies from nurses treating up to 40 patients waiting in a corridor, as well as reports of pregnant women miscarrying in corridors.

Some said the overcrowding in corridors impeded them from giving life-saving resuscitation (CPR).

One nurse recalled a patient dying after a cardiac arrest "by the male toilet".

Another alleged having to treat cardiac arrests "with no crash bell, crash trolley, oxygen, defibrillator... straddling a patient doing CPR while everyone watches on".

"This devastating testimony from front-line nursing staff shows patients are coming to harm every day," said RCN general secretary Nicola Ranger. "Vulnerable people are being stripped of their dignity and nursing staff are being denied access to vital lifesav-

ing equipment. We can now categorically say patients are dying in this situation."

In June 2024, the RCN declared a "national emergency" over overcrowding and care being delivered in unsuitable places.

Health Foundation charity's assistant director of policy Tim Gardner said record delays in emergency care "were a rarity before the [coronavirus (Covid-19)] pandemic, but are now the worst we have seen since records began in 2011".

There are 7.5mn people on the NHS waiting list, with more than 3mn having faced delays longer than 18 weeks for treatment.

Labour Prime Minister Keir Starmer, who was elected in July on a ticket which included fixing the NHS, rolled out a plan at the start of the year which included expanding community health centres to reduce pressure on hospitals.

Health Secretary Wes Streeting said on Wednesday that corridor care was "unsafe" and "undignified" but it would "take time to undo the damage" to the NHS.

Bollywood actor Saif Ali Khan stabbed in burglary

Bollywood star Saif Ali Khan underwent surgery yesterday after he was repeatedly stabbed in an apparent burglary at his home in Mumbai, his public relations team said.

Khan, 54, who has appeared in more than 70 movies and television series, is married to top star Kareena Kapoor.

"There was an attempted burglary at Mr Saif Ali Khan's residence," his team said, urging "fans to be patient".

Khan was attacked just after midnight when he tried to stop the intruder, believed to be a burglar, from entering his apartment in the upscale neighbourhood of Bandra, police and local media said.

A female employee at the apartment was also attacked and was being treated, police said.

Kapoor told local media that "Saif had an injury on his arm for which he is in hospital".

His doctors told reporters however that Khan received stab wounds on his spine, neck and hand.

"He sustained a major injury to the thoracic spinal chord due to a lodged knife in the spine. Surgery was performed to remove the knife and also repair the leaking spinal fluid," said Nitin Dange, one of the doctors operating on Khan.

Khan is the son of former Indian cricket captain Mansur Ali Khan Pataudi, and Bol-

lywood actress Sharmila Tagore.

His acting credits include the 2001 hit *Dil Chahta Hai*, and the popular Netflix crime series *Sacred Games*.

Niraj Uttamani, a top official at Mumbai's Lilavati Hospital, told the *Hindustan Times* newspaper that the actor had six injuries, including two that are deeper.

The Press Trust of India news agency broadcast images of police carrying out forensic examinations of Khan's residence in Mumbai.

Police had identified the perpetrator and had launched a search for him, senior police official Dikshit Gedam told reporters. - AFP/Reuters

Woman charged with poisoning baby for money

An Australian mother has been charged with poisoning her one-year-old baby girl and posting video of the infant's distress to get online GoFundMe donations, police and local media said yesterday.

The 34-year-old woman allegedly went to "great lengths" to conceal that she was giving prescription and pharmacy drugs to the baby without medical approval, Queensland detective inspector Paul Dalton told reporters.

Hospital staff in the Queensland capital Brisbane alerted police to their suspicions in October last year when the girl was there for treatment of a serious mental condition, Dalton said.

The woman from Queensland's Sunshine Coast was widely reported in local media to be the baby's mother, though police would not officially confirm this.

She was accused of filming and posting images of the baby's "immense distress and pain" between August and October last year to elicit financial donations from online followers, Dalton said.

She was charged yesterday with 11 offences.

The woman is accused of raising just over A\$60,000 (\$37,000) via GoFundMe. - AFP

India's space agency achieves satellite docking milestone

Reuters/AFP
Bengaluru

India became the world's fourth nation yesterday to achieve the feat of space docking, a technological milestone that underscores its ambitions to expand its share of a rapidly growing \$400bn global space market.

Target and Chaser, two satellites of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) that are each roughly the size of a large refrigerator, successfully latched onto each other about 9am (0330 GMT), an agency spokesperson said.

The indigenous technology, crucial for satellite servicing, space station operations, and interplanetary missions, positions India for a key role in commercial and exploratory space efforts.

"India has ambitious missions planned and to achieve those, this is an important technology," astrophysicist Jayant Murthy said. "Various missions, like building a space station, need assembly in space, which is not possible without space docking."

The ISRO said the two satellites participating in its Space Docking Experiment (SpaDeX), will now be controlled as a single object.

The mission had been postponed twice, first because the docking process needed further validation through ground simulations, and then to resolve an issue stemming from excess drift between the satellites.

SpaDeX, launched on December 30 from India's main spaceport, deployed the satellites in orbit with an Indian-made rocket.

Among 24 payloads and experiments were eight cowpea seeds, sent to space to study plant growth in microgravity conditions, which germinated within four days of the mission's launch.

Scientists say this is a critical step demonstrating that food can eventually be grown in space during long missions.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi congratulated Indian scientists.

"It is a significant stepping stone for India's ambitious space missions in the years to come," he said on social media.

Space exploration and commercialisation is a key part of Modi's efforts to position India as a global superpower.

Yesterday India approved the setting-up of a third launch pad in the southern state of Andhra Pradesh, to be completed in four years at a cost of 39.85bn rupees (\$461mn), giving a further boost to its space plans.

India became just the fourth nation to land an unmanned craft on the Moon in August 2023.

Philippines, China pledge to seek common ground on South China Sea

The Philippines and China agreed to seek common ground and find ways to co-operate despite their disagreements in the South China Sea, their foreign ministries said yesterday, as heated rows persist over vessels deployed around disputed features.

The two countries held yesterday a 10th round of talks under a bilateral consultation mechanism set up to address issues in the South China Sea, where disputes have been frequent and tense, with ties at their lowest point in years.

Both countries said they agreed to advance coast guard and marine scientific cooperation and pledged to resolve issues peacefully.

"We firmly believe that despite the unresolved challenges and differences, there is genuine space for diplomatic and pragmatic cooperation in dealing with our issues in the South China Sea," Philippine foreign affairs undersecretary Theresa Lazaro said in her opening remarks, according to a statement.

China said it called on the Philippines to remain committed to resolving differences through dialogue and consultation.

Both agreed to boost communication and deepen dialogue, but also called out each other over recent standoffs.

US ally the Philippines said it had expressed concern about the conduct of China's coastguard, including its sustained presence in Manila's exclusive economic zone.

China said it lodged complaints over recent "maritime infringements and provocations" and for "hyping up" maritime disputes.

China's expansive territorial claims in the key maritime trade route overlap with the EEZs of Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Vietnam.

A 2016 ruling of an international arbitral tribunal said Beijing's claims, based on its historic maps, have no basis under international law, a decision China does not recognise. - Reuters

Ready for the Lunar New Year



Traditional red lanterns marking the forthcoming Lunar New Year of the Snake are hung outside the Peninsula Hotel in Kowloon, Hong Kong. - AFP

Japan's 'megaquake' probability up to 82%

AFP
Tokyo

The probability of a "megaquake" in Japan in the next 30 years has marginally increased, a government panel said yesterday, with a 75-82% chance of it happening.

Such a jolt could potentially have a devastating 8-9 magnitude, trigger colossal tsunamis, kill several hundred thousand people, and cause billions of dollars in damage, experts say.

The Earthquake Research Committee said it has increased its estimate of the probability to between 75-82% from between 74-81% previously.

It concerns what is known as a subduction megathrust quake along the Nankai Trough, an 800km (500-mile) undersea gully running parallel to Japan's Pacific coast.

The trench is where the Philippine Sea oceanic tectonic plate is "subducting" - or slowly slipping - underneath the continental

plate that the Japanese archipelago sits atop.

The plates become stuck as they move, storing up vast amounts of energy that is released when they break free, causing potentially massive earthquakes.

Over the past 1,400 years, megaquakes in the Nankai Trough have occurred every 100-200 years, according to the government's Headquarters for Earthquake Research Promotion.

The last one happened in 1946.

"It's been 79 years since the last quake, and the possibility of another quake occurring is rising every year at a pace of by about 1%," an official of the Earthquake Research Committee's secretariat told AFP.

According to government estimates in 2012, smaller islands off the main coasts could be swamped by a tsunami over 30m (100') high.

Densely populated areas on the main islands of Honshu and Shikoku could be hit by huge waves within a few minutes.

One estimate by the *Nikkei* business daily says around 530,000 people could be left

shelterless in the event of a megaquake along the Nankai Trough.

That is out of up to some 9.5mn people that the government estimates could be displaced.

Last August the Japan Meteorological Association (JMA) issued its first megaquake advisory under rules drawn up after the devastating Tohoku earthquake and tsunami of 2011.

It said that the likelihood of a new major earthquake along the Nankai Trough was higher than normal after a magnitude 7.1 jolt that injured 15 people.

The advisory was lifted again after a week but caused shortages of rice and other staples as people stocked their emergency stores.

In 1707, all segments of the Nankai Trough ruptured at once, unleashing an earthquake that remains the nation's second-most powerful on record.

That quake - which also triggered the last eruption of Mount Fuji - was followed by two powerful Nankai megathrusts in 1854, and then two in 1944 and 1946.

Quake-hit Vanuatu heads to polls in snap election

Voters in Pacific nation Vanuatu cast ballots yesterday in a snap general election, a contest widely dismissed as a "distraction" while citizens rebuild from last month's deadly tremor.

A 7.3-magnitude earthquake rumbled through Vanuatu on December 17, rupturing roads, toppling buildings in capital Port Vila and killing at least 14 people.

Port Vila local Flora Vano, who works for an aid agency providing earthquake relief, remarked that it was "too soon" to hold an election.

"People are not focused on the election or campaign, they are solely focused on what they will see tomorrow," she told AFP.

Hard-pressed families in the developing nation were more concerned with buying gas and repairing community food gardens wiped out in the disaster, said Vano, who works for ActionAid Vanuatu.

Vanuatu's parliament was dissolved in November before disgruntled MPs could launch a "no confidence" motion designed to topple Prime Minister Charlot Salwai.

The motion reportedly cited a grab bag of grievances including the flagging fortunes of national carrier Air Vanuatu, a teachers' strike and financial transparency questions.

Such political instability has become all too familiar in the former British and French colony, which changed prime minister 20 times in a 26-year period starting in 1991.

The tumult reached crisis levels at the end of 2023, when Vanuatu churned through three premiers in the space of a month.

Vanuatu, which has a population of about 330,000, is highly vulnerable to natural disasters such as tropical cyclones, flooding and earthquakes, according to the *World Risk Report*. - AFP



Blasts in Kyiv as Starmer inks 100-year accord

AFP
Kyiv

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer signed a "landmark" 100-year partnership agreement with Ukraine during an unannounced visit to the war-torn country yesterday, seeking to shore up support for Kyiv before Donald Trump returns to the White House.

Loud blasts and air raid sirens rang out over the Ukrainian capital after Starmer's arrival as air defence systems in central Kyiv repelled a Russian drone attack, officials and AFP journalists reported.

In Starmer's first official visit to Kyiv since taking office last July, he pledged steadfast support for Ukraine in the face of the Russian invasion, and said any deal to end the fighting must "guarantee" Ukraine's security and independence.

The visit is the latest meeting that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky is holding in a flurry of talks with his country's allies before Trump's return next week.

The incoming Republican has stoked fears in Kyiv and Europe that he will cut Washington's vital military aid or force Ukraine to accept a ceasefire on terms that reward Russia for its February 2022 invasion.

Starmer said he would "work with all of our allies" to ensure any settlement was "robust enough to guarantee Ukraine's



Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky (right) shakes hands with British Prime Minister Keir Starmer after signing the agreement during the latter's visit to Kyiv. (AFP)

security, guarantee any possible peace and deter any future aggression."

Under the 100-year agreement, London and Kyiv pledged to "deepen defence co-operation" and boost Ukraine's defence industry, recognising it as a "future Nato ally."

Speaking in Kyiv, Starmer hailed it as a "landmark agreement, the very first of its kind, a new partnership between the UK

and Ukraine that reflects the huge affection that exists between our two nations."

Zelensky said ties with Britain were "closer than ever" and called the new agreement "truly comprehensive."

Starmer had kicked off the visit by laying wreaths with Zelensky to commemorate killed Ukrainian soldiers and visiting a burns hospital treating wounded servicemen.

Ahead of their meeting, Zelensky said that he and Starmer would discuss the possibility of having Western troops stationed in Ukraine to oversee any ceasefire agreement, a divisive proposal initially put forward by French President Emmanuel Macron.

Starmer did not say whether Britain would be willing to deploy troops.

"It is really important that Ukraine is put in the strongest possible position," he said in response to a question about whether Britain would send a military contingent to the country.

The UK has been one of Ukraine's biggest military backers, pledging £12.8bn (\$16bn) in military and civilian aid since Russia invaded three years ago.

London has committed £3bn (\$3.7bn) of support every year "for as long as it takes", and is also providing a £2.2bn loan backed by profits from frozen Russian assets.

The United States remains by far Ukraine's biggest financial backer — but that looks set to change when Trump arrives.

His nominee for secretary of state, Marco Rubio, said Wednesday that the new administration would instead seek "bold diplomacy" to end the war.

"There will have to be concessions made by the Russian Federation but also by the Ukrainians," he said.

Trump has previously vowed to end the war within a day, with his aides speaking

of leveraging US assistance to Ukraine to force it into territorial concessions.

Zelensky, who is pushing a "peace through strength" message, said Kyiv was "not considering security guarantees for Ukraine without the United States of America."

As part of Ukraine's whirlwind diplomatic programme, Italy defence minister Guido Crosetto announced yesterday that he had also arrived in Kyiv on an official visit for a "series of institutional meetings".

In Poland a day earlier, Zelensky had called for the West to buy Kyiv weapons with some \$250bn of unallocated frozen Russian assets.

The visits come at a precarious moment for Ukraine on the battlefield.

Fighting has escalated before Trump's inauguration on Monday, as both sides seek to gain the upper hand in anticipation of potential negotiations aimed at settling the war launched by Russia in February 2022.

Zelensky conceded yesterday that Russia had the "initiative" in the east of the country, but pointed to Ukraine's ongoing hold of Russian territory in its western Kursk region as a sign of his forces' potential.

At several key points in the northern Kharkiv and eastern Donetsk regions, Russian forces have exploited their advantages in manpower and resources to steadily advance.

Bulgaria parliament okays coalition govt to break stalemate

AFP
Sofia

Bulgaria's parliament yesterday voted to approve a conservative-led coalition government, formed in a bid to end the EU nation's worst political turmoil since the end of communism.

The poor Balkan country has seen seven snap votes after massive anti-graft protests led three-time premier Boyko Borisov to resign in 2021.

Borisov's conservative GERB party topped the most recent election in October, and on Wednesday announced it had managed to agree with the Socialists and a right-wing party to form government, with the backing of a Turkish minority faction.

A total of 125 lawmakers voted in favour of the new government lineup, while 114 voted against.

GERB secured the agreement after Borisov, 65, gave up his initial insistence to take up the premiership for a fourth time and instead designated former parliament speaker Rossen Jeliazkov as premier.

Introducing his cabinet, Jeliazkov told parliament that the different parties reached the coalition agreement "in a difficult, dynamic and tense period... putting aside our ideological and political differences."

"The country has been in a political crisis for some time, a crisis of confidence," the 56-year-old lawyer added, vowing to overcome it.

Jeliazkov is a close Borisov

ally, who has served in various posts, including transport minister, in past GERB-led governments.

European Union chief Ursula von der Leyen said she looked forward to working with Jeliazkov "for a thriving Bulgaria in a strong and united Europe" and appreciated his "support to our brave neighbour Ukraine", which Russia invaded in 2022.

"My congratulations to Rosen Zhelyazkov on your election as prime minister of Bulgaria," she said, using the transliteration of the Bulgarian name.

GERB on Wednesday said the new government would continue the country's efforts to join the eurozone.

Sofia secured a much-awaited full accession into the visa-free travel Schengen zone from January 1, but still needs to ensure price stability to apply to join the eurozone from 2026.

Modernisation of the army and improving judiciary procedures are also among the new government's priorities.

Analysts are doubtful whether the coalition can last.

"It will be a difficult government, in practice this is a four-party coalition, it can't be easy but it's better than going from one election to another," political analyst Daniel Smilov from the Centre for Liberal Strategies told AFP.

"In the most optimistic scenario, it will last a year or so to fulfil some urgent tasks like entering the country into the eurozone, securing EU resilience and recovery funds and passing this year's budget," he added.

German market attack suspect held 'anti-Islam, far-right' views

The suspect in a deadly car ramming attack on a German Christmas market was mentally unwell, "massively Islamophobic and close to right-wing extremist ideologies", Interior Minister Nancy Faeser said yesterday. His erratic behaviour over the years had come to the attention of law enforcement on at least 105 occasions without triggering a response, Faeser added.

The figure, compiled after the December 20 attack, showed the need for "better data management by the federal and state security authorities", Faeser said.

"Police data must be centrally and securely bundled" to identify threats, she told journalists at an event to commemorate the victims in the eastern city of Magdeburg. The suspect, 50-year-old Saudi psychiatrist Taleb al-Abdulmohsen, who lived in Germany, was arrested at the scene of the ramming, which left six people dead and over 200 wounded.

Investigators had pieced together the profile of a perpetrator who suffered "psychological issues" and was "influenced by incoherent conspiracy theories", Faeser said.

The suspect was "massively Islamophobic and close to right-wing extremist ideologies", she added, and "His hatred is directed against both the German state and against individuals."

A large amount of information on the suspect had been available before the attack, including a slew of social media posts, Faeser said. However, "no-one had all of the facts", she said. The lack of oversight was among the factors that kept authorities from intervening early to stop the attack, she said.

French PM survives his first no-confidence vote

AFP
Paris

French Prime Minister Francois Bayrou yesterday survived his first vote of no confidence in parliament after the motion, brought by the leftist opposition, failed to gain traction on the far-right.

The challenge in the National Assembly came after Bayrou's statement this week on his government policy agenda, in which he opened the door to fresh talks on a 2023 pension reform "without taboo" but also said that France's "excessive" deficits needed to be cut in this year's budget.

The speech sparked condemnation from most of the opposition in parliament where Bayrou — in the job only since last month — is well short of an absolute majority, making his government highly vulnerable to any no-confidence vote that, if successful, would force it to resign.

Jordan Bardella, the leader of the far-right National Rally (RN), dismissed it as "idle talk" by "a man of spineless continuity".

But the backers of the no-confidence motion, submitted by the hard-left LFI party, failed to win the RN's backing.

"We don't think a no-confidence vote should be a gadget to create a buzz," RN deputy Jean-Philippe Tanguy said ahead of the vote.

The RN's vice-president, Sebastien Chenu, added also before the vote that his party would judge the government "not by its words, but by its actions".

Tanguy warned, however, that the RN might still come for Bayrou over his budget for 2025 which



French Prime Minister Francois Bayrou reacts during a debate on a motion of no-confidence against the French government, tabled by members of parliament of La France Insoumise parliamentary group and joined by the Communists and the Les Ecologistes - EELV, at the National Assembly in Paris yesterday. (Reuters)

is overdue after the previous government of Michel Barnier was toppled over its austerity plans.

The new government's budget announcement would be a "moment of truth", Tanguy said.

The near-certainty of defeat as the vote neared did little to diminish LFI's combativity.

"Mr Prime Minister, the days of your government of unhappiness are numbered," said LFI coordinator Manuel Bompard as the debate on the no-confidence motion got under way.

"And when it falls, the monarch will follow," he said, in a reference to President Emmanuel Macron, who appointed Bayrou as France's fourth prime minister within a year only last month.

Bayrou meanwhile accused the hard left of trying to take France down the path of "infighting".

The prime minister welcomed

the decision of the moderately-left Socialists to deny the LFI motion their backing, despite having been allied with the LFI since last year's general election.

The Socialists' defection showed that "another path towards understanding is opening up", Bayrou said.

The no-confidence motion won the backing of 131 deputies, well short of the 288 it needed to pass.

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

Macron has 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.

French generative AI underdog taking on US giants

Founded less than two years ago, French generative artificial intelligence (AI) startup Mistral AI has swiftly staked out a place as the great European hope contending with US giants dominating the sector.

Named for a legendary chill wind that sweeps France's Mediterranean coast, Mistral raked in a €600mn (\$620mn) funding round last summer that was the largest of any French tech firm in 2024, according to consultancy KPMG.

The new investments brought the company's valuation to almost €6bn. Mistral was set up in April 2023 by Arthur Mensch, a graduate of France's prestigious Polytechnique engineering school with a mop of unruly dark hair who had previously worked at Google's DeepMind AI lab. He was joined by two countrymen, Guillaume Lample and Timothee Lacroix, both former researchers for Facebook parent Meta.

Within a year, they had raised more than €1bn to get Mistral off the ground. "Our ambition is to be at the cutting edge in the 10 years ahead, and to be one of the actors shaping (AI) technology and the way it's used," Mensch told AFP from his Paris HQ, where the company's logo is nowhere to be seen.

Among Mistral's offerings is a chatbot dubbed Le Chat — playing on the French word for "cat" as well as the English "chat" — similar to OpenAI's ChatGPT.

The bot will in future have access to AFP's text content in six languages to inform responses based on news and current events, the two firms said yesterday. Mistral also produces a large language model (LLM) known as Mistral Large, specialising in text generation, as well as models focused on images and computer code.

The company has become a "shooting star", emerging just as investors were looking for a "French-style OpenAI" said Claude de Loupy, an expert on applying AI to languages.

Mistral has shone by showing off "superbly crafted" AI models from the very beginning, de Loupy added. Unlike US competitors OpenAI or Anthropic — accused of working as inscrutable black boxes — Mistral bet on an open-source approach for its models, offering access to their programming code.

This "allows our customers to deploy solutions onto their infrastructure with significantly improved data governance compared with our US competitors," Mensch said.



French founder of artificial intelligence startup Mistral AI, Arthur Mensch, smiles during an interview at the Mistral headquarters in Paris. (AFP)

Mistral has also shone in small-size AI models that can be hosted on computers or smartphones, which achieve savings over rivals by consuming less energy. Distribution deals with Google, Microsoft, Amazon and IBM have made the firm's products easier to access. Around 100 people work in Mistral's factory-fresh Paris offices, a sea of white tables and black screens below visible ventilation ducts.

Even before achieving profitability, the company is determined to grow, targeting both the French and foreign markets with offices in Britain, Palo Alto in California and Singapore.

"Generative AI is a revolution that will affect the whole world. All the regions of the world are becoming aware, at different speeds, that they must get involved and do it with some level of independence from the American players," Mensch said.

Developing AI models is an endeavour that continues to demand massive capital investment. Mistral is struggling to "fight on a level playing field" as it "squares up to giants like Google, Meta, Microsoft and Amazon," de Loupy said. Recent funding rounds by Elon Musk's xAI and Microsoft-backed OpenAI have been in the range of \$6bn — 10 times more than Mistral's last cash injection.

That calls into question the value of even the strong political backing enjoyed by Mistral — recently called a stroke of "French genius" by President Emmanuel Macron — in the global AI race.

Another European AI hope, German start-up Aleph Alpha, was forced in September to abandon its LLM ambitions, focusing instead on consulting for other businesses.

Teen kills fellow student, teacher at Slovak school

A teen killed a fellow student and a teacher in a knife attack at a secondary school in northeastern Slovakia yesterday and wounded a third woman.

The 18-year-old was detained shortly after the crime, police said.

"Two women aged 18 and 51 suffered fatal injuries," Danka Capakova from Slovakia's emergency service told AFP.

"An 18-year-old woman with moderate injuries was transported to hospital," she added. Police said earlier on Facebook that a female teacher and two students were attacked.

The stabbings occurred in the town of Spisska Stara Ves near the border with Poland, around 280km northeast of the capital Bratislava.

The emergency service "sent several ambulance crews to the Spisska Stara Ves grammar school before 13:00 (1200 GMT) today", said Capakova. Capakova said doctors had also treated a 51-year-old man and a 62-year-old woman at the site "because of acute stress reaction".

Police identified the attacker as 18-year-old student "S.S." and asked the public for help as he at first managed to escape.

They also published a photo showing him with cropped blonde hair.

The Markiza private TV station said the student had moved to the school from another one in the nearby town of Kezmarok after being expelled for threatening to attack fellow students. Slovak Interior Minister Matus Sutaj Estok condemned the crime, offering his condolences to the families of the victims and adding he was on the way to the crime scene.



Anchors of relief: Three phrases

Enveloped in triple darkness—the darkness within the belly of a massive sea creature, the darkness of the turbulent ocean depths, and the darkness of a storm-choked sky—buffeted by fierce winds that whipped the waves into towering mountains and tossed ships precariously, a pure and sincere plea pierced these layers of darkness and ascended swiftly to the heavens. The gates of heaven opened to receive it, and in response came swift divine rescue, delivering the supplicant from these perils and bringing relief.

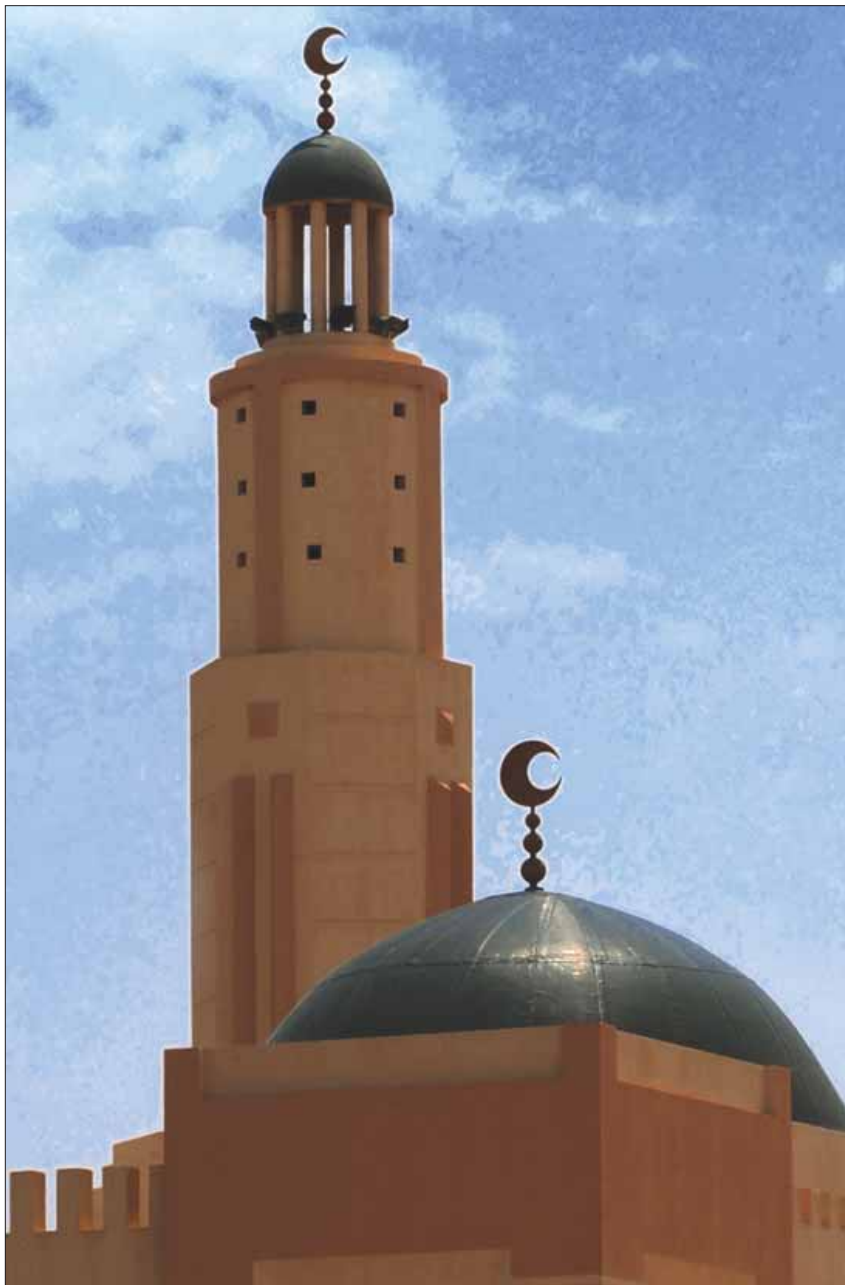
“There is no deity except You; exalted are You. Indeed, I have been of the wrongdoers.” [Qur’an 21:87] These three phrases encapsulated and alleviated much of the suffering of a Prophet of Allah. Allah had decreed that his trial would take place within a prison, but what a prison it was! This was no ordinary confinement with doors to be locked or unlocked, nor guards to be commanded to release the captive. Instead, the prison and the jailer were one—a sea creature incapable of understanding human speech. It was the whale that swallowed Prophet Yunus (peace be upon him), also known by his epithet “Dhu-n-Nun,” derived from this very encounter.

The story is well-known, so the purpose here is not to retell it or delve into its details. Rather, the focus is on the prophetic supplication that this noble prophet continuously repeated within the whale’s belly. This supplication raises several questions: What is the meaning of this plea? Why was it so effective in relieving distress? What is the significance of admitting wrongdoing and acknowledging sin in this context? Most importantly, how can this prophetic supplication be understood theologically, revealing its greatness, significance, and connection to a broader doctrinal framework?

To answer these questions, we begin by analysing these words with Allah’s guidance:

The First Phrase: *La ilaha illa Anta* (There is no deity except You)

The phrase of *Tawheed* (monotheism) encompasses both negation and affirmation. It is similar to Allah’s statement: “It is You we worship and You we ask for help.” [Qur’an 1:5], meaning: we worship none but You, and we seek help from none but You. Similarly, Allah, the Almighty, says: “And they were not commanded except to worship Allah, [being] sincere to Him in religion, inclining to truth...” [Qur’an 98:5] And He says: “That is because Allah is the Truth, and that what they call upon other than Him is falsehood...” [Qur’an 22:62] Therefore, every deity worshipped besides Allah is false, regardless of the virtue, status, or rank attributed to that being—whether prophets, righteous people, angels, or others. Every object of worship besides Allah is false, its worship is invalid, and its worshipper is misguided. Scholars explain that the term “falsehood” here refers to the fact that the worship neither benefits the worshipper nor the object being worshipped. For this reason, the Prophet, *sallallahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, praised the words of the poet Labid, considering them the truest words he ever spoke:



“Indeed, everything except Allah is false.”

It is noteworthy that many prophetic supplications and adhkar (remembrances) begin with the declaration of *Tawheed*. One example is the supplication known as the Master of *Istighfar* (*Sayyid Al-Istighfar*), as narrated in Sahih Al-Bukhari, “The master of *Istighfar* (seeking forgiveness) is for the servant to say, ‘O Allah, You are my Lord; there is no deity except You. You created me, and I am Your servant, and I am fulfilling my covenant and promise to You as much as I am able. I seek refuge in You from the evil of what I have done. I acknowledge Your favor upon me, and I confess my sin, so forgive me, for none forgives sins except You.’”

In the supplication “*La ilaha illa Anta* (There is no deity except You),” there is a profound meaning that few fully grasp. Beginning this supplication with the testimony of *Tawheed* serves to affirm and pledge steadfastness in servitude to Allah, regardless of the severity of trials and

tribulations. Allah, the Almighty, says: “And of the people is he who worships Allah on an edge. If he is touched by good, he is reassured by it; but if he is struck by trial, he turns on his face [to disbelief]. He has lost [this] world and the Hereafter. That is what is the manifest loss.” [Qur’an 22:11] This steadfastness in *Tawheed* is built upon a foundation of piety and seeking Allah’s pleasure, which is the source of a believer’s resilience during trials: “So is one who laid his foundation upon fear of Allah and [seeking] His approval better or one who laid his foundation on the edge of a bank about to collapse, so it collapsed with him into the fire of Hell?” [Qur’an 9:109] This illustrates the wisdom of beginning the supplication with these words, as they inherently encompass seeking Allah’s favor through righteous deeds—the greatest of which is *Tawheed*. It is as if the afflicted person is saying, “My Lord, whatever You decree and whatever trial You send my way, I will worship none but You.”

The Second Phrase: *Subhanaka* (Exalted are You)

In Arabic, *tasbeeh* means glorification, and saying *Subhan Allah* signifies declaring Allah free of any deficiencies or imperfections. It is an acknowledgment of Allah’s absolute perfection and majesty.

This negation of imperfection is not merely a denial of flaws, as scholars of Islamic creed explain. It is not a simple negation but one that affirms Allah’s praiseworthy attributes and absolute perfection. Shaykh Al-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah remarked, “Negation is not a form of praise unless it implies affirmation; otherwise, pure negation contains no praise. Denying flaws and imperfections concerning Allah necessitates affirming His praiseworthy attributes and perfection.”

While this phrase generally negates all deficiencies, its most significant implication in this context is the negation of injustice from Allah. This trial and affliction were not decreed unjustly or as punishment without cause. Injustice is among the most despicable traits, and Allah is far removed from it due to His perfect justice and benevolence: “Indeed, Allah does not do injustice, [even] as much as an atom’s weight; while if there is a good deed, He multiplies it and gives from Himself a great reward.” [Qur’an 4:40] “And Allah does not intend injustice to the worlds.” [Qur’an 3:108]

“And Allah does not intend injustice to [His] servants.” [Qur’an 40:31] “And whoever does righteous deeds while he is a believer—he will neither fear injustice nor deprivation.” [Qur’an 20:112] This is further confirmed by what is mentioned in the Sunnah (prophetic traditions), such as Allah’s words in the *Hadith Qudsi* (sacred *Hadith*), “O My servants, I have forbidden injustice for Myself and made it forbidden among you, so do not wrong one another... O My servants, it is but your deeds that I enumerate for you, then I will recompense you for them. So whoever finds good, let him praise Allah, and whoever finds otherwise, let him blame no one but himself.” [Muslim]

Shaykh Al-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah remarked, “In his saying: ‘*subhanaka*’ (Exalted are You), there is an affirmation of Allah’s innocence from any injustice and an affirmation of His greatness, which necessitates His being free from injustice. For the unjust individual commits injustice either due to need or ignorance, but Allah is free from any need and is All-Knowing of everything. He is self-sufficient, and all that exists apart from Him is dependent on Him. This is the perfection of greatness.”

Regarding the benefit and outcome of this glorification (*tasbeeh*), it is mentioned in Allah’s statement: “And had he not been of those who exalt Allah, He would have remained inside its belly until the Day they are resurrected.” [Qur’an 37:143-144]

This consistent glorification of Allah, declaring Him free from all deficiencies and faults, was the reason for the swift arrival of relief and the end of the trial.

The Third Phrase: *Imni kuntu mina Az-zalimeen* (Indeed, I have been of the wrongdoers)

After Prophet Yunus (peace be upon him) denied any injustice on Allah’s part, he followed this by confessing his own sin and shortcoming, which was undoubtedly the true cause of his trial. Many verses affirm that people’s wrongdoing is the cause of their suffering. Among them are: “And We did not wrong them, but they were [the ones] who wronged themselves.” [Qur’an 16:118] “And We did not wrong them, but they wronged themselves.” [Qur’an 11:101] “And We did not wrong them, but it was they who were the wrongdoers.” [Qur’an 43:76] Similarly, Prophet Adam (peace be upon him) said: “Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves...” [Qur’an 7:23]

This represents a profound dual approach stemming from prophetic guidance: The servant combines two crucial aspects of seeking Allah’s favour—seeking through righteous deeds and seeking through acknowledging one’s weakness. This makes the supplication worthy of being answered. For this reason, the Prophet, *sallallahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, taught his Companions to say in every prayer, during the opening supplication, “O Allah, You are the King; there is no deity except You. You are my Lord, and I am Your servant. I have wronged myself and admitted my sin, so forgive all my sins, for no one forgives sins except You.” [Muslim]

This acknowledgment, confession, and describing oneself as among the wrongdoers—since wrongdoing is an inherent aspect of humanity, whether directed at oneself or others—was a means of salvation. Al-Hasan Al-Basri said: “He was not saved except by confessing his wrongdoing.” Moreover, this confession included a request for forgiveness from Allah, which became a reason for his deliverance.

The Fourth Phrase: Allah Will Surely Respond

When these words encompassed the acknowledgment of *Tawheed* (the Oneness of Allah), seeking Allah’s favour through righteous deeds, glorifying Allah and declaring Him free from any injustice, and admitting one’s own sin, they collectively represented the perfect expression of helplessness, humility, and submission before the Lord of all creation. Allah, the Exalted, is characterised by modesty and generosity, as mentioned in the authentic *Hadith*, “Indeed, your Lord is modest and generous; He is shy to turn away empty the hands of His servant when he raises them to Him.” [Narrated by the compilers of the *Sunan* Books except An-Nasa’i] How much more so, then, for the one who perfects their supplication and humbly implores Allah? For this reason, Allah’s response is a guaranteed promise. Sa’d Ibn Abi Waqqas (may Allah be pleased with him) narrated that the Messenger of Allah, *sallallahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, said: “The supplication of *Dhu-n-Nun* (Prophet Yunus), when he supplicated to Allah while in the belly of the whale, ‘There is no deity except You; exalted are You. Indeed, I have been of the wrongdoers; no Muslim ever supplicates with these words for anything but that Allah responds to him.’ [At-Tirmidhi]

Article source: <http://www.islamweb.net/emainpage/>

The reality of Oneness of Allah and its connection to outward, inward actions

The foundation, essence, and ultimate goal of the religion is the Oneness of Allah (*Tawheed*) and devoting all worship to Him. This begins with the declaration of the two testimonies of faith (*Shahadat*): the testimony that there is no deity worthy of worship except Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah. Through these, a person enters Islam.

However, fulfilling these testimonies and acting in accordance with their requirements is a condition for maintaining one’s status as a Muslim. This Islam is the religion of *Tawheed* with which Allah sent all His prophets, despite the differences in their specific laws. Allah, the Exalted, says: “And We sent not before you any messenger except that We revealed to him that, ‘There is no deity except Me, so worship Me.’” [Qur’an 21:25] The Prophet, *sallallahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, said: “The prophets are paternal brothers; their mothers are different, but their religion is one.” [Al-Bukhari]

Through Islam, a Muslim fulfils the Oneness of Allah, believes in all of Allah’s prophets and in the messages with which they were sent, including *Tawheed* and other teachings. The testimony of *Tawheed* is the key to Paradise and salvation from Hellfire. The Prophet, *sallallahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, said: “I bear witness that there is no deity except Allah and that I am the Messenger of Allah. No one meets Allah with these two testimonies, without doubting them, except that he will enter Paradise.” [Muslim] He also stated: “No one testifies that there is no deity except Allah and that Muhammad is His servant and Messenger, except that Allah will forbid the Fire from touching him.” [Muslim]

A crucial aspect Muslims must understand is that these two testimonies

require not merely verbal utterance but also the actualisation of their meaning, both outwardly and inwardly, without contradiction. Al-Mundhiri quoted a group of scholars as saying, “All the pillars of the religion and the obligations of Islam are necessitated by the acknowledgment of the two testimonies and are their completions. If someone acknowledges them but refuses to fulfil any of the obligations, whether out of denial or negligence—depending on the details of the differing opinions—we would judge them as disbelievers and that they would not enter Paradise.”

Therefore, a Muslim must understand the true nature of the religion to fulfil the oneness of Allah, which is the requirement of the testimony *La ilaha illa Allah* (there is no deity except Allah), and to understand the obligation of adhering to the *Shariah* (Islamic law), which is the requirement of the testimony Muhammadun Rasul Allah (Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah).

The core meaning of the testimony *La ilaha illa Allah* (there is no deity except Allah) is that no one is rightfully worshipped except Allah. The comprehensive meaning of divinity (*luhuhiyyah*) in Arabic encompasses the heart’s turning to Allah, finding peace in Him, and directing itself toward Him out of profound love and dependence. Ibn Al-Qayyim explained, “The name of Allah signifies His being the One Who is worshipped and adored, toward whom creation turns in love, reverence, submission, and in seeking refuge in their needs and adversities.” This turning of the heart to Allah and loving Him represents the sincerity of intention and will in directing oneself exclusively to Him.

The human soul is never without will. This will must have an object and a

purpose. The human soul is inherently inclined to have no object of desire but Allah. In this, it is either sincere in its direction toward Him or deviates, following its own desires and whims. Ibn Taymiyyah stated, “The soul is never devoid of awareness and will, for their absence is impossible. Awareness and will are intrinsic to its reality. It is inconceivable for the soul to exist without being aware or willing. It is incorrect to say that the soul could lack awareness of the existence or nonexistence of the Creator or of love or lack of love for Him. Since a human must have an object of desire, that is the deity to which the heart is devoted. It is inconceivable for a human to be innately disposed to worship anyone other than Allah.”

Because humans are innately inclined toward this, the command was given to direct oneself to Allah with sincere intention and will. This objective is the foundation and essence of the religion, and deviation from it constitutes associating partners with Allah (*Shirk*).

The relationship between a believer and his Lord is one of will and intention, driven by love, reverence, and glorification, alongside the acknowledgment of Allah’s Lordship and the servant’s absolute servitude. The believer must prioritise love for Allah above all other loves and direct his will away from any object of desire other than Allah. This is the pure monotheism (*hanifiyyah*) for which Allah created all of creation. Ibn Al-Qayyim explained, “There is no relationship between Allah and the servant except absolute servitude from the servant and absolute Lordship from the Lord. There is no Lordship within the servant, nor any servitude within the Lord. The servant is a servant in every respect, and Allah is the true deity in every respect.

The foundation of the relationship of servitude lies in love. Servitude is tied to it such that when love dissolves, servitude also dissolves.”

If a servant’s relationship with their Lord is based on a will driven by love and dependence, this cannot be a mere claim without evidence. One must act according to the requirements and obligations of that relationship to achieve sincere devotion to the oneness of Allah (*Tawheed*). These obligations encompass both inward and outward actions. The inward obligations of *Tawheed* are the actions of the heart, such as fear, hope, reliance, and sincerity, among other actions that, when genuine, affirm the servant’s love for their Lord. The absence of these actions of the heart indicates that love for Allah is neither present nor genuine. Ibn Taymiyyah stated, “One of the early generations said, ‘Whoever worships Allah with love alone is a heretic (*zindiq*); whoever worships Him with hope alone is a Murji’ite; whoever worships Him with fear alone is a Kharijite, but whoever worships Him with love, fear, and hope is a believer and a monotheist.’”

The outward obligations of *Tawheed* are following Allah’s commands, avoiding His prohibitions, and inviting others to His religion. This means that whoever loves Allah must align their will with the will and love of Allah. What Allah loves and commands, the servant must also love and practice, and what Allah forbids, the servant must avoid and dislike. This is achieved by following the Messenger of Allah, *sallallahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, and adhering to his *Shariah* (Islamic law). Allah, the Almighty, says: “Say [O Muhammad], ‘If you should love Allah, then follow me, [so] Allah will love you and forgive you your sins. And Allah is Forgiving and Merciful.’” [Qur’an 3:31] Therefore,

whoever follows the Messenger of Allah and adheres to his *Shariah* loves Allah, and whoever does not follow him and his *Shariah* does not love Allah. The extent of a servant’s love for Allah is reflected in their adherence to the Messenger of Allah, *sallallahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*. In this, people vary greatly, and this is the true meaning of the increase and decrease of faith. If adherence is entirely absent, then love for Allah is also entirely absent.

Many verses and *Hadiths* indicate that adherence through actions is a sign of love for Allah. For example, Allah says regarding striving in His cause: “O you who have believed, whoever of you should revert from his religion - Allah will bring forth [in place of them] a people He will love and who will love Him [who are] humble toward the believers, powerful against the disbelievers; they strive in the cause of Allah and do not fear the blame of a critic.” [Qur’an 5:54] The Prophet *sallallahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, said: “There are three qualities; whoever possesses them will taste the sweetness of faith: to love Allah and His Messenger more than anything else, to love a person only for the sake of Allah, and to hate to return to disbelief as much as one would hate to be thrown into the fire.” [Al-Bukhari] Many other verses and hadiths emphasise this point.

Thus, it becomes clear that the essence of *Tawheed* and servitude to Allah is a love that necessitates obedience to Allah and adherence to His *Shariah*.

Article source: <http://www.islamweb.net/emainpage/>



CHAIRMAN

Abdullah bin Khalifa al-Attiyah

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Faisal Abdulhameed al-Mudahka

Deputy Managing Editor

K T Chacko

- 📍 P.O.Box 2888, Doha, Qatar
- ✉ editor@gulf-times.com
- ☎ 44350478 (News),
- ☎ 44466404 (Sport),
- ☎ 44466636 (Home delivery)
- ☎ 44350474
- 📘 facebook.com/gulftimes
- 🐦 twitter.com/gulftimes_Qatar
- 📷 instagram.com/gulftimes
- 📺 youtube.com/GulftimesVideos

GULF TIMES

Biden's late moves on China, Russia, AI may mostly boost Trump

With just days to go in his presidency, US President Joe Biden is releasing a flurry of new measures that challenge China's chip-making and shipbuilding and limit Russian oil, while a ceasefire in Gaza is said to be in reach after months of failed talks. The Biden administration is clearing the decks before Republican Donald Trump is inaugurated on January 20, wrapping up probes and issuing new policy. In many cases, analysts and officials say, these moves will benefit the incoming Trump administration, giving it new negotiating tools against China, Russia and others. In less than a week, the Biden White House has sanctioned Russian oil producers and ships, restricted semiconductor chip exports, found Chinese shipbuilding practices unfair, ceded federal land for AI centres and cemented plans to effectively bar Chinese vehicles.

With his last-minute announcements, Biden is "trying to shape how history will remember him", said Robert Rowland, a University of Kansas professor who specialises in presidential rhetoric. In doing so, "he's giving Trump a lot of leverage", he said, adding that Biden may not be helping himself.

If Biden wanted to burnish his legacy, he "should have been doing these things a year ago. It's too late now", Rowland added. Biden delivered a farewell speech from the Oval Office Wednesday evening.

The Biden team is teeing up some nearly final measures that Trump could use to fulfil campaign promises that helped Republicans best Democrats in every battleground state in the US election, political strategists said.

The Biden administration's investigation into Chinese shipbuilding, for example, recently concluded that Beijing used financial support, forced technology transfers and intellectual property theft to unfairly disadvantage US shipbuilders, sources told Reuters.

It has been part of a broader approach by Biden that prioritises a smooth transition, despite Trump's continual scathing criticism

Conducted under Section 301 of the US Trade Act, the probe's findings allow Biden to take credit for holding Beijing accountable, while creating a legal pathway for Trump to make good his promise of raising tariffs on China.

"In many ways, this is a test case for what we need to do domestically in terms of industrial policy to correct for decades of laissez-faire globalisation," said one Democratic source following the probe. Republicans would be smart to use the probe to further their own plans, the source added.

In some cases, Biden officials say they are deliberately advantaging Trump, including the new tough sanctions on Russian oil. But the longer-term impact may be more complicated.

The White House and the Trump transition team declined to comment on how Biden's final moves might boost Trump. On Monday, Biden national security adviser Jake Sullivan said the stepped-up sanctions would give Trump leverage to obtain a better deal for Ukraine in peace negotiations with Russia.

"The new team is setting up for a negotiation, and in a negotiation, you need leverage, and part of that leverage has to come from the kind of economic pressure that makes (Russian President Vladimir) Putin see he's going to continue to pay a significant price economically," he said. Sullivan told reporters that Trump aides had been briefed on the strategy in advance, but they were not coordinated.

The timing also leaves Trump's administration to deal with any increase in gasoline prices at the pump. In the days since the sanctions were announced, oil prices have risen to four-month highs.

Sullivan told reporters that Biden's team decided that oil prices - which jumped to over \$100 per barrel after Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 before dropping to around \$80 now - had subsided far enough to permit tougher action.

He said Biden did not believe the new sanctions would allow Treasury to "hit Putin's pocketbook without... taking too big a whack out of the American people's pocketbook."

Top Biden officials say they have briefed the Trump team on issues ranging from Russian sanctions to controls on artificial intelligence technology, countering Chinese cyber-espionage and the Gaza hostage negotiations. Sullivan said on Monday that Biden had tasked him with working closely with Trump's team.

It has been part of a broader approach by Biden that prioritises a smooth transition, despite Trump's continual scathing criticism of Biden even after his November election victory. Trump appointees and advisers continue to threaten to dismantle the federal workforce; Republicans say they could withhold federal aid from fire-stricken California, a Democratic stronghold.

The hope inside the White House, however, is to create "new options so that a new team and Congress can really hit the ground running," one Biden official said.

Rowland
GULFTIMES
17-01-2025

"Ceasefire on Sunday, huh?
Just enough time for a bloody feast"



Israel's 'heinous crimes' continue; 78 people killed in Gaza since the announcement of a ceasefire deal.

Russia's Arctic oil faces heat of US sanctions

Russia's vast Arctic oil business is facing major disruption from US sanctions on its tankers and depots, stranding crude supplies previously snapped up by Asian buyers in storage, according to three sources familiar with its logistics. The sanctions unveiled on Friday are the toughest yet on Russia's oil sector, targeting major producers Gazprom Neft and Surgutneftegas as well as 183 vessels that have shipped Russian oil.

Three sources who spoke to Reuters on condition of anonymity said all three of Russia's Arctic oil grades - Novy Port, ARCO and Varandey, with about 300,000 barrels of output per day - face disruption.

The vessels and infrastructure needed by Russia's Arctic oil business, which accounts for a tenth of its seaborne oil exports, are unique, two of the sources said.

Novy Port crude from Gazprom Neft's Novoportovskoye field, where temperatures can hit -55 C, ARCO, from the Prirazlomnaya offshore platform, and Varandey, from Lukoil's Timan-Pechora fields, are shuttled by a special type of ice-class vessel to the Umba and Kola floating storage facilities near Murmansk.

It is then offloaded to larger vessels - Aframax or Suezmax that can carry 100,000-140,000 tonnes, compared to the smaller vessels' 30,000 tons - for shipment to the international market.

The United States has now sanctioned both Umba and Kola, and more than a dozen small tankers used as shuttle suppliers of oil from the fields.

According to LSEG data, at least 15 of the tankers sanctioned by the US on Friday, including the Shturman Scherbinin, Mikhail Ulyanov and Aulis, have been actively involved in shipping Russian Arctic grades during the last two months.



The Russian national flag flies on a vessel moving along the strait of East Bosphorus in Vladivostok in this file photo. (Reuters)

The smaller shuttle tankers were designed to operate in northern seas and have a specific design allowing them to load more oil without compromising keel clearance.

"There is no option to replace those quickly. Nothing like this to buy elsewhere. The vessels were specifically built for the projects," one of the sources said.

That could leave Russia with millions of barrels of unsold oil in storage, the sources said. According to one, the limited storage capacities at all three projects mean a couple of weeks of loading disruptions might lead to cuts in output.

Lukoil did not respond to Reuters' requests for comment, while Gazprom Neft declined to comment.

Gazprom Neft, which produces ARCO and Novy Port, was also added to the US sanction package directly, although Lukoil, which produces Varandey, was not.

Novy Port and Varandey are favoured by refiners worldwide for their high quality - both are light, with 0.1-0.4% sulphur. The Arctic grades, which prior to a 2022 EU embargo had

been purchased by refineries in northwest Europe, have more recently been snapped up by refiners in India and China.

"Light Arctic oil grades from Russia were priced above the (G7) price cap due to their premium quality," one of the sources familiar with dealings in the Indian oil market said. India and China have shown however that they are not ready to accept oil coming from sanctioned tankers, and have started to look for replacements for Russian oil.

The absence of Russian Arctic oil grades in the market will likely push up prices of the US flagship WTI oil grade, which is also light, one of the traders in the Asian oil market said.

India reduced US oil buying after it started to snap up cheap Russian barrels from the market a couple of years ago, but a source at one Indian refiner said his company is looking at buying more US oil.

As all the oil volumes from the Arctic projects are bound for export, there is no logistical system in place for them to be fed into the Russian domestic oil pipeline system.

This means that if there are no buyers for those oil grades, volumes will have to be kept in floating storage, or Gazprom Neft will need to curb output on both projects, the sources said.

One of the sources said that while there is a possibility for some supplies of the grades to be shipped via sea to some refineries in the south of Russia, that might be costly and limited in volumes.

Lukoil's Varandey oil supplies could technically be loaded directly from its Varandey terminal straight to international markets.

However, the cost of such shipments will be higher, and the company needs time to fetch replacement tankers to the region, one of the sources said. - Reuters

Why are autism rates rising?

Autism spectrum disorder is a neurological and developmental condition marked by disruptions in brain-signalling that cause people to behave, communicate, interact, and learn in atypical ways.

Autism diagnoses in the United States have increased significantly since 2000, intensifying public concern over what might contribute to its prevalence. Here is what you need to know.

How is autism diagnosed?

There are no objective tools for diagnosing autism such as blood tests or brain scans. Instead, diagnoses are made based on observations and interviews.

The term spectrum reflects the wide range of possible manifestations. Some people with ASD may have good conversation skills while others may be nonverbal. Some may be acutely sensitive to sounds, touch, or other triggers. Some may have restricted or repetitive behaviours or interests. Some may need help with daily living, while others require little or no support.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends screening all children for autism at 18 and 24 months, when most children will begin to show symptoms. Yet the average age of diagnosis remains close to 4 years in the US and 5 years globally.

How common is autism?

By 2020, the US autism rate in 8-year-olds was 1 in 36, or 2.77%, up from 2.27% in 2018 and 0.66% in 2000, according to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. A 2021 study from England put the rate in children there at 1.76%, up from 1.57% in 2009.

The World Health Organisation estimates the worldwide prevalence in children at 1%, up from 0.62% in 2012, with the caveat that many countries lack the resources to identify cases and report them.



What causes autism?

The causes of autism are unclear. There is widespread speculation among scientists that its neurological characteristics may develop in utero, when the fetal brain is being wired. Studies have linked autism to maternal factors in pregnancy, and some research suggests a link to birth complications and timing.

A growing area of research focuses on epigenetics - the interactions between genetic and environmental factors. One theory suggests that a woman's exposure to air pollution or harmful contaminants before or during pregnancy may trigger a genetic mutation leading to autism in her child.

Gene variations in some people with autism strengthen the evidence for a genetic component. Among the genetic disorders linked with higher risks for autism are Fragile X syndrome, tuberous sclerosis complex, Phelan-McDermid syndrome, and Prader-Willi syndrome.

Other potential risk factors may include a sibling with autism, the age of parents when conceiving children, very low birth weight, jaundice as a newborn, complications in utero or during birth, having an unhealthy assortment of organisms living in the intestines, and immune system disorders. Robert F Kennedy, Jr, President-elect Donald

Trump's nominee for US health secretary, and other public figures have promoted a theory - contrary to scientific evidence - that childhood vaccines are a cause of autism. The idea stems from a since-debunked study from British researcher Andrew Wakefield in the late 1990s that connected a rise in autism diagnoses with widespread use of the measles vaccine.

No rigorous studies have found links between autism and vaccines or medications, or their components such as thimerosal or formaldehyde.

Why are autism rates rising?

Researchers attribute the rise in autism diagnoses to more widespread screening and the inclusion of a wider range of behaviours to describe the condition.

In 2013, mental health experts combined what had been three separate diagnoses - autistic disorder, Asperger's disorder and pervasive developmental disorder - under the umbrella of autism spectrum disorder. An October 2024 study of US insurance claims data found the largest increases in diagnoses were in groups with low screening rates in the past, including young adults, females, and children from some racial or ethnic minority groups.

Researchers have also noted that certain risk factors have become more common, such as having been born prematurely or to older parents.

Are there treatments?

There are no treatments or cures for autism, nor can it be reversed. However, experts agree that early diagnosis is crucial. Intervention with supportive measures - ideally before age three - is critical for improving cognitive, social and communication skills.

Such measures can include speech therapy, occupational therapy, social skills training, sensory integration therapy, visual aids, structured routines, individualised education plans, family therapy, and providing a calm and predictable environment. - Reuters

To Advertise

✉ gtadv@gulf-times.com

Display

☎ 44466621
☎ 44418811

Classified

☎ 44466609 ☎ 44418811
✉ gtcad@gulf-times.com

Subscription

✉ circulation@gulf-times.com



Eyeing political appointments, Trump team asks 3 US senior career diplomats to resign

By Humeyra Pamuk, Simon Lewis and Gram Slattery
Washington

Aides to President-elect Donald Trump have asked three senior career diplomats who oversee the US State Department's workforce and internal co-ordination to step down from their roles, two US officials familiar with the matter said, in a possible signal of deeper changes ahead for the diplomatic corps.

The team overseeing the State Department's transition to the new administration, the Agency Review Team, has requested that Derek Hogan, Marcia Bernicat and Alaina Teplitz leave their posts, the sources said.

While political appointees typically submit their resignations when a new president takes office, most career foreign service officers continue from one administration to the next. All three officials have worked in both Democratic and Republican administrations throughout the years, including as ambassadors.

Trump, who will be inaugurated January 20, pledged during his presidential campaign to "clean out the Deep State" by firing bureaucrats that he deems as disloyal.

"There's a little bit of a concern that this might be setting the stage for something worse," one of the US officials familiar with the matter said.

In response to a request for comment, a spokesperson for Trump's transition team said: "It is entirely appropriate for the transition to seek officials who share President Trump's vision for putting out



On his campaign website Donald Trump laid out how, in 10 steps, he would "shatter Deep State" and "fire rogue bureaucrats and career politicians"

nation and America's working men and women first. We have a lot of failures to fix and that requires a committed team focused on the same goals."

A State Department spokesperson said the department has no personnel announcements to make. Hogan, Bernicat, Teplitz did not respond to requests for comment.

Trump is likely to adopt a more confrontational foreign policy and has vowed to bring peace between Ukraine and Russia, and give more support to Israel. He has also pushed for unorthodox policies such as trying to make Greenland part of the United States and pushing

Nato allies for higher defence spending. A diplomatic workforce that dutifully implements rather than pushes back will be key to achieving his goals, experts say.

The decision to ask the three to step aside is reminiscent of staff shake ups at the State Department during the first Trump administration, when several key officials in leadership positions were removed from their jobs.

According to two separate sources familiar with Trump's plans for the State Department, the administration plans to appoint more political appointees to positions such as assistant secretary, which are typically filled by a mix of career

and political bureaucrats.

These sources said Trump's team wants to get more politically appointed officials deeper into the State Department as there was a pervasive feeling among his aides that his agenda was "derailed" by career diplomats during his last term from 2017-2021.

The Agency Review Team is already interviewing candidates for such positions, said the two sources.

According to the State Department website, Hogan is the State Department's executive secretary, the official that manages the flow of information between department bureaus and with the White House. Bernicat is the director-general of the US Foreign Service and director of global talent leading the recruitment, assignment, and career development of the Department's workforce.

Assistant Secretary Teplitz has been with the Department over three decades, serving overseas as well in Washington. Most recently, she has been implementing the duties of under secretary for management, which oversees more than a dozen bureaus responsible for issues from the budget to recruitment, procurement and human resources across the workforce.

"These are not policy positions. This is all the mechanics of the bureaucracy," said Dennis Jett, a professor at Penn State's School of International Affairs who spent 28 years in the foreign service. "But if you want to control the bureaucracy, that's the way you do it."

Choosing who fills the three roles would allow Trump's team to divert resources to and from parts of the State Department, control the information gathered by the

numerous bureaus and embassies and manage personnel decisions, he said.

Shattering the 'Deep State'

The requests for the officials to step down came as Marco Rubio, Trump's nominee for secretary of state, was testifying on Wednesday before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee for his confirmation hearing.

On his campaign website Trump laid out how, in 10 steps, he would "shatter deep state" and "fire rogue bureaucrats and career politicians".

The first of those steps is to reissue a 2020 executive order that would have removed employment protections for certain civil servants, making it easier to fire them.

Opponents of the plan — often called "Schedule F" after the new class of civil servants it would create — say stripping employment protections from government workers would be an effort by Trump to politicise the federal bureaucracy to carry out his policy agenda.

Normally, presidents get to choose several thousand of their own political appointees to the federal bureaucracy, but the career civil service — around 2mm workers — is left alone. Schedule F would give Trump the power to fire up to 50,000 of those and replace them with like-minded conservatives.

Taking charge of State's personnel would "expedite" the process of appointing loyal officials, said Jett, the professor.

Unions and government watchdogs have said they plan to sue Trump if he carries out his promise to re-introduce a Schedule F.

Why does Donald Trump want Greenland and can he get it?

By Jacob Gronholt-Pedersen, Louise Rasmussen and Stine Jacobsen
Copenhagen

US President-elect Donald Trump says he wants to make Greenland a part of the United States and does not rule out using military or economic power to get Denmark to hand it over.

Why does Trump want Greenland?

Greenland's strategic location and resources could benefit the US. It lies along the shortest route from Europe to North America, vital for the US ballistic missile warning system.

The US has expressed interest in expanding its military presence, including placing radars there to monitor the waters between the island, Iceland and Britain, which are a gateway for Russian navy vessels and nuclear submarines. The island, whose capital Nuuk is closer to New York than the Danish capital Copenhagen, boasts mineral, oil and natural gas wealth, but development has been slow.

This has kept Greenland's economy reliant on fishing, which accounts for over 95% of exports, and annual subsidies from Denmark, which cover roughly half of the public budget. In total, Denmark spends just under \$1bn each year on Greenland, or \$17,500 for each of its 57,000 residents.

A 2023 survey showed that 25 of 34 minerals deemed "critical raw materials" by the European Commission were found in Greenland. They include materials used in batteries such as graphite and lithium, and so-called rare earth elements used in electric vehicles and wind turbines.

What presence does the US have in Greenland now?

The US military maintains a permanent presence at the Pituffik air base in Greenland's northwest.

A 1951 agreement between the United States and Denmark established the United States' right to move around freely and construct military bases in Greenland as long as Denmark and Greenland are notified.

Historically, Denmark has accommodated the US because Copenhagen does not have the capability

to defend Greenland, and because of US security guarantees to Denmark through the Nato alliance, said Kristian Soeby Kristensen, senior researcher at Copenhagen University's Centre for Military Studies.

Could Trump buy Greenland?

Trump's Republican allies in the US House of Representatives are trying to build support for a bill, which, if passed, will allow the president to enter into negotiations with Denmark on January 20, when Trump takes office.

According to Ulrik Pram Gad, senior researcher and expert on Greenland, the idea of buying Greenland is based on a misunderstanding of international law and the principle of self-determination, which gives people the right to choose their own political status.

While Trump has declined to rule out the use of military or economic means to gain control of Greenland, Vice-President-elect JD Vance, speaking to Fox News, has dismissed the use of military force.

What is Greenland's status now?

The island, a former colony of Denmark, became a formal territory of the Nordic kingdom in 1953 and is subject to the Danish constitution, meaning that any change to its legal status would require a constitutional amendment.

In 2009, the island was granted broad self-governing autonomy, including the right to declare independence from Denmark through a referendum.

Decades ago, the US under then-president Harry Truman sought to buy the island as a strategic asset during the Cold War for \$100mn in gold, but Copenhagen declined to sell. Trump offered to buy it in 2019 but both Greenland and Denmark rejected the proposal.

What does Greenland want?

Relations between Greenland and Denmark have been strained following revelations of historical mistreatment of Greenlanders under colonial rule. A majority of Greenland's inhabitants support independence, but they are divided over the timing and potential impact on living standards. Greenlandic politicians have since 2019 repeatedly said they are interested in strengthening cooperation and trade with the United States. However, Greenlandic Prime Minister Mute Egede, who has stepped up a push for independence, has stressed the island is not for sale and that only its people should decide their future.

What if Greenland becomes independent?

If Greenland becomes independent, it could choose to become associated with the US without becoming US territory.

The island could form a so-called "free association" with the United States that would replace Danish subsidies with US support and protection in return for military rights, like the Marshall Islands, Micronesia and Palau.

While there is a push in Greenland to be independent from Denmark, Greenlanders are not interested in a new colonial master, according to Gad, the researcher.

Gad also said that Greenlanders would likely ensure their future welfare before holding an independence referendum.

What does Denmark say?

Trump's 2019 offer to buy the island was firmly rejected by Denmark and labelled "absurd" by Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen.

When asked about Trump's renewed interest in January, Frederiksen said Denmark needed to co-operate closely with the US, but stressed that Greenland should determine its future.

How biodiversity impacts every corner of human life

By Andre Cabette Fabio
Rio de Janeiro

Overhunting, ecosystem destruction and climate change caused by human emissions are all contributing to a rapid decline of global biodiversity.

A new report released by the World Wildlife Fund, an NGO, highlights what humanity is losing as a result.

From the large whales that mix ocean waters and make them more able to sustain life to tapirs that help the Amazon forest grow and provide rainwater to South America, the planet's biodiversity is deeply connected to humanity's well-being.

Fishing and hunting

Hunting and fishing have been central to cultures throughout human history, and wildlife remains a key source of food and employment for humans.

Wild animal meat accounts for up to 80% of the animal protein consumed by populations in some rural regions of West and Central Africa, which makes it key both to the local economy as well as to food security, said the WWF report.

Humans also consume up to 2,500 freshwater fish species, research published in 2023 by the *WRES Water Journal* said, and a 2011 report in the *Fish and Fisheries* journal estimated that marine fisheries provide more than 200 million full-time jobs globally.

However, a decline in wild animal populations is harming fishing businesses and making less food available.

A study published in 2021 in the *ICES Journal of Marine Science* by researchers in Canada and Germany showed, for example, that cod catches in Eastern Canada reached a peak in 1968, at 810,000 tonnes, but fell to 10,559 tonnes in 2019 following a collapse in fishing stocks.

Ecosystem engineering and regulation

Biodiversity is also central to ecosystem engineering and regulation - the process by which organisms shape habitats.

Extinction of one living being often leads to cascade effects that threaten whole ecosystems.

In grassland ecosystems, hoofed terrestrial herbivores compact the bare ground and soil, altering landscapes and promoting higher biodiversity, a 2024 assessment of research



published in the *Nature Ecology & Evolution* journal showed.

Predators, meanwhile, contribute to keeping herbivore populations under control, limiting the risk of soil erosion from overgrazing, a 2014 report in the *Science* journal said.

In the oceans, sperm whales mix water and move nutrients through ocean layers with their large bodies, nourishing ecosystems and providing fishing grounds.

It is estimated, however, that great whale numbers have declined between 66% and 90% since commercial whaling began about 1,000 years ago, which means that they are making less of a contribution to keeping oceans plentiful.

Ecosystems services

Biodiversity is essential to keeping ecosystems healthy and able to provide humanity with what are called ecosystem services such as food, crop pollination, soil protection, cooling, fresh water and even leisure.

Research published in 2020 by the *Proceedings of the Royal Society B* journal showed that five out of seven crops studied in the United States already lacked enough pollinators, such as bees, to secure full development.

This means production would likely be greater if there were more insect biodiversity.

In the case of the Amazon, a 2019 paper published in the *Biotropica* journal by Brazilian researchers found that tapirs distribute seeds over long distances and help speed the recovery of disturbed forests.

Water from the Amazon forms clouds that pour rain over much of South America, making it crucial for drinking water, agriculture, cooling and protection from wildfires.

Globally, destruction of natural areas coupled with climate change enabled 4.3mn sq km of land (1.7mn square

miles), an area larger than India, to turn dry between 1990 and 2020, according to figures released in 2024 by the UN.

As the world dries up, it becomes more vulnerable to extreme climate events such as drought and the wildfires that hit South America in 2024 and now are spreading in California.

Human physical and psychological well-being

Biodiversity loss is also connected to humans suffering more from infectious diseases, according to a 2024 assessment of more than 2,900 studies.

For example, research published in 2011 as part of The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity initiative suggested that loss of small mammal species contributes to the spread of diseases such as hantaviruses.

With less biodiversity, rodents of the same species have more frequent violent encounters in which they contaminate each other, increasing the risk that those diseases spread to humans.

Hantaviruses may cause serious health issues such as difficulty breathing and kidney failure.

Biodiversity is also linked to psychological and cultural benefits.

In a 2013 paper, people exposed to bird sounds told British researchers they felt relief from stress and fatigue.

Wild animals have also long served as inspiration to humans, featuring in artwork and music, but humanity has been losing that connection.

A 2018 study published by the *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B* concluded that many human populations are undergoing an "extinction of experience," as destruction of habitats and concentration in urban areas makes interactions with wildlife more rare. - Thomson Reuters Foundation



Greenland's flag flutters at the Inussivik hall in Nuuk, Greenland. (Reuters)

Amir to visit Damascus soon

From Page 1

Also on the agenda were the latest international developments and the required support for the new Syrian administration to lift sanctions and streamline the work of other economic institutions.

HE the Prime Minister hailed Qatar's role in Syria as a moral and humanitarian duty towards Syrian brothers, reiterating that His Highness the Amir has always affirmed Qatar's unwavering support for all brotherly peoples.

HE Sheikh Mohammed said that the coming period will see a further momentum in the Qatari-Syrian projects and the relations between Qatari and Syrian businessmen.

Al-Sharaa meanwhile said that the meeting addressed a host of political and economic aspects and the future of the region.

The economic partnerships between Damascus and Doha in the coming days were discussed, he said, appreciating Qatar's continuous support for the Syrian people and its great efforts to develop Syria.

Qatar contributed to helping the Syrian people during their 14-year long ordeal and was always by their side until their triumph over the regime, he added.

On the Israeli advance in the buffer zone came under the pretexts of the presence of Iranian and Hezbollah-linked militias, al-Sharaa said that after the liberation of Damascus, there is no presence of these militias.

He noted that since the first moments of the Israeli advance, the new Syrian administration has been in talks with various international parties to confirm Syria's commitment to the 1974 agreement, stressing Syria's readiness and preparedness to receive UN forces and bring them into the region and work to protect them, until the situation returns to what it was before the Israeli advance.

Al-Sharaa lauded Qatar's condemnation of this Israeli advance, and its active efforts to form a pressure opinion against it, through co-ordination and co-operation with Western and regional countries, indicating that there is a consensus on the mistake of the Israeli advance into the buffer zone, and the necessity of returning to the situation before that.

Visit Qatar launches Visit Qatar_HarmonyOS Atomic Service

Visit Qatar and Huawei have launched the Visit Qatar_HarmonyOS Atomic Service to elevate the travel experience for Chinese visitors, seamlessly integrating personalised travel tools into their Huawei devices.

This service aims to help visitors plan and enjoy their trip to Qatar with ease.

From discovering cultural highlights to navigating their journey, it offers a simple and enjoyable method to experience Qatar's rich culture.

As global travel trends evolve, Qatar has become a popular destination in the Middle East, drawing Chinese tourists with its arts, culture and modern attractions.

To better serve this growing audience, Visit Qatar and Huawei signed a Memorandum of Understanding at the Arabian Travel Market in May last year.

The partnership brings together tools such as Petal Ads, Huawei AppGallery, Skytone, Huawei Wallet, Petal Maps, and Celia to create a smooth



and connected travel experience for Chinese visitors on Huawei devices.

The launch of this service is a milestone in Qatar Tourism's strategy to use innovative technology to position Qatar as a top destination for Chinese visitors.

HarmonyOS Atomic Meta Services are efficient, intuitive, and seamlessly cross-device.

Users can access them via the quick access screen, Smart Search, or Celia without downloading apps.

The service recognises tourists' locations and provides real-time guidance, such as attraction details, dining options, route navigation, and audio guides.

Additionally, the seamless cross-device experience of HarmonyOS Atomic Meta Services allows users to log in with their Huawei account across different devices - whether on a smartphone, tablet, or smart screen - synchronising personal data, ensuring consistent service with smoother and efficient operations.

Seminar discusses marital relationship built on trust

By Tawfik Lamari
Staff Reporter

Speakers highlight the impact of financial relations between spouses on family stability

The Minaretein Centre of the College of Islamic Studies at Hamad Bin Khalifa University (HBKU), in co-operation with the Doha International Family Institute (Difi), organised a seminar on Wednesday to highlight financial relations between spouses and their impact on family stability, as part of a series of seminars on the contemporary family.

The seminar moderated by Dr Mohammed al-Jamal focused on three main axes: the ideal financial situation between spouses and its effects on the contemporary family, the problems of financial participation between spouses and their jurisprudential, social and judicial solutions, and the effects of the wife's financial participation on her financial rights.

The speakers at the seminar explained that financial relations between spouses are not merely material relations, but rather a reflection of understanding and respect between the two parties.

They pointed out that money may be a means of supporting family stability or a source of disputes, contributing to enhancing happiness or ignite controversy

over financial responsibilities.

Dr Recep entürk, the dean of the HBKU's College of Islamic Studies, said: "From a sociological perspective, the family is a very complex institution, and the marital relationship has multiple dimensions that include financial, legal, religious, and emotional aspects."

He indicated that there is a need to study contemporary problems facing the individual, family, society, and state, and to provide enlightened solutions based on Islamic values.

"Our view of the financial dimension in the Islamic family is radically different from the Western view," Dr entürk added. "Money in Islam is a means of servitude and achieving justice, not an end in itself, and private ownership has become a necessity for the continuation of social life."

Dr Khalid al-Naama, director of the Difi's Family Research and Policy Department, said that the wife has a completely independent financial status.

She has the right to own and dispose of

her money, he said, without interference from any party, including her husband.

"The husband does not have the right to force his wife to earn or spend on the family, except in the case of agreement between them," Dr al-Naama said, adding: "The wife may work in areas that are in line with her nature and specialisation, provided that she adheres to Islamic ethics and social norms."

He stated that even when the wife goes out to work, this does not waive the obligatory maintenance that is the husband's responsibility, unless there are cases of disobedience that waive that maintenance.

Nonetheless, Dr al-Naama said, "financial relations between spouses raise many problems in reality, starting with the wife working outside the home, her financial contribution to spending on the family, and her financial rights in the event of divorce or the death of the husband"

Professor Dr Abdelkader Jadi, professor of Contemporary Jurisprudence at the College of Shariah and Islamic Studies at



Professor Dr Abdelkader Jadi (left), Dr Khalid al-Naama, Dr Mohammed al-Jamal (right) at the seminar.

Qatar University, said that the issue of financial relations between spouses has a normal aspect that deals with issues of maintenance, custody, women's work, and the exploitation of women's financial assets, and one aspect related to the new wave of amending family laws.

He indicated that some of these amendments are based on liberal and secular visions that seek to change the nature of relations between men and women from a purely material perspective, which does not take into account the objectives of Islam.

Professor Jadi said that Muslim societies today face major challenges as a result of international obligations, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of

Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which have affected family laws and legislation.

He stressed that it is necessary to discuss these effects and evaluate their harm to the Muslim family.

At the end of the symposium, the speakers concluded that family stability requires a balance in marital relations based on understanding, affection and mercy, away from dealing with the strict logic of rights and duties.

They stressed the importance of building the marital relationship on the foundations of mutual trust and taking into account the feelings of both parties to achieve a stable and balanced family life.



Katara celebrates art and poetry at 'New Queen of Sheba' exhibition



Katara - the Cultural Village and AlBahie Auction House have inaugurated the "New Queen of Sheba" exhibition, featuring the private art collection of poet Amal al-Jubouri.

The exhibition, held at Katara's Building 45, was attended by Katara general manager Prof Khalid bin Ibrahim al-Sulaiti, and AlBahie Auction House owner Ashraf Abu Issa, along with a group of cultural and artistic personalities, and enthusiasts.

The exhibition offers a unique opportunity to discover the fusion of visual art and poetry through the vision of al-Jubouri, a poet who has inspired generations of



The exhibition offers a unique opportunity to discover the fusion of visual art and poetry through the vision of poet Amal al-Jubouri.

artists and intellectuals.

In a statement, Prof al-Sulaiti said: "The 'New Queen of Sheba' exhibition reflects the unique connection between words and imagery, showcasing the experience of poet Amal al-Jubouri, who has conveyed humanistic and cultural messages that transcend borders."

Abu Issa highlighted the importance of the exhibition as a platform for presenting literary and visual arts innovatively.

He expressed his delight in collaborating with Katara on this exhibition, contributing to the support of cultural and artistic initiatives, and showcasing talents and creativity that enrich Arab culture.

The exhibition features a collection of artworks inspired by the poems of al-Jubouri, which focus on themes of peace, tolerance, and human coexistence.

Al-Jubouri thanked Katara for hosting the exhibition, in collaboration with AlBahie, describing it as a first of its kind in the Middle East characterised by a unique artistic vision that bridges Arab and Western cultures.

The exhibition includes a selection of works inspired by the



creativity of 1999 Nobel Laureate for Literature poet Günter Grass for his contributions to world literature.

It also features diverse creative experiments blending art, culture, and literature, along with special

artefacts, including significant photographic archives preserved by al-Jubouri for years, which will soon return to Iraq.

The exhibition runs until January 27 and is open to visitors daily from 10am-10pm.