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SPORT | Page 4

Al-Attiyah clinches record-breaking eighth victory at Oman Rally



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From left: HE Dr Mohammed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh al-Khulaifi, HE Sheikh Abdulrahman bin Hamad al-Thani, Azmi Bishara, HE Maryam bint Ali bin Nasser al-Misnad, attending the opening session of the forum yesterday.

Forum highlights Palestine issues, suggests solutions

By Tawfik Lamari
Staff Reporter

The Third Annual Palestine Forum kicked off yesterday in Doha, in the presence of HE Sheikh Abdulrahman bin Hamad al-Thani, Minister of Culture; HE Maryam bint Ali bin Nasser al-Misnad, Minister of State for International Co-operation; HE Dr Mohammed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh al-Khulaifi, Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; and a number of ambassadors and heads of diplomatic missions.

Organised by the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies in co-operation with the Institute for Palestine Studies, the forum will conclude on January 27. The forum is one of the most prominent annual academic events that brings together a group of the most prominent specialists and researchers in the Palestinian cause from all over the Arab world and the world at large, to discuss the most prominent Palestinian issues, and emphasise the importance of this issue and its centrality at the Arab and international levels.

The convening of the current session at this historical moment is of critical importance, because the war of extermination that took place is unparalleled in modern Palestinian history, and is the most far-reaching in terms of the killing, destruction and displacement that befell the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip.

The forum comprises seven sessions, each of which contains four parallel tracks, and includes three public seminars distributed over the days of the forum, plus a closed workshop on the third day, that would address the various dimensions of the Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, and the challenges facing the Palestinian national project.

Ayat Hamdan, the forum coordinator and researcher at the

Arab Center, began the first day with an opening session in which she spoke about the importance of holding this session in light of the complex political circumstances experienced by the Palestinian people.

Tarek Mitri, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Institute for Palestine Studies, in opening remarks emphasised the importance of the meeting for dialogue and reflection. He pointed out that this meeting comes after the ceasefire came into effect, while pointing to the fears that have not dissipated in Gaza or the West Bank, and because the Israeli aggression has not subsided. Mitri stressed that "we have the right to fear because what the American government has taken from Israel in the Gaza Strip, it is giving it back by allowing a free hand in the West Bank".

The forum is one of the most prominent annual academic events that brings together a group of the most prominent specialists and researchers in the Palestinian cause

He said that it is no longer possible to hide the Palestinian people from the world's field of vision, and that the conflict is no longer a local one that can be ignored or used as a sterile refrain in speeches that lead nowhere. He spoke about the work of the Institute for Palestine Studies in documenting the war of extermination in the fields of education, health, culture, and agriculture; to declare the truth as an immortal right.

Azmi Bishara, Director General of the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, delivered the opening lecture of the forum. He discussed the challenges facing Palestinians everywhere, especially in the Gaza Strip and the

West Bank, the effects of the war of extermination, and how to deal with them to prevent the success of the Israeli vision of transforming its current predicament, resulting from its practice of genocide and the establishment of an apartheid system, into a purely Palestinian predicament. He stressed the importance of unifying the Palestinian ranks under a comprehensive national umbrella to take control of matters and translate international and Arab solidarity into political action; otherwise the Palestinian cause will be moving in a tunnel at the end of which there is no light.

The first session was held in four parallel tracks. The first track "International Law and the War of Genocide on Gaza", the second track "The War of Genocide on Gaza and Cultural and Material Destruction", the third track "The Aggression on Gaza in the Arab Media". The second session was also held in four parallel tracks. The first track was "Stations in Palestinian History from the Nineteenth Century to the Nakba". The second track included "The Israeli Prison System: Experiences and Critical Visions". The third track "Palestine and Global and Arab Solidarity". The fourth track was on "Gaza and the 'Butterfly Effect': The Impact of the Israeli War on Gaza on the Regional and International Systems".

At the end of the first day, the forum organised a general symposium titled "The War on Gaza and the Fronts of Support for Palestine". The forum will continue in a similar format, with sessions held in parallel tracks. Two public seminars will be held on the second and third days respectively: "Trump's Policy in His Second Term towards the Palestinian Issue: What Prospects?" and "The Israeli Aggression on Gaza: Scenarios after the War of Extermination". On the third day, a closed workshop will be held entitled "Gaza under Hamas Rule (2007-2023)". **Page 4**

Israel frees 200 Palestinians; Hamas releases 4 Israeli soldiers

Releases are part of Gaza ceasefire's first phase

Reuters
Jerusalem/Cairo/Gaza

Palestinian resistance movement Hamas freed four female Israeli soldiers yesterday in exchange for 200 Palestinian prisoners in the second swap under the first phase of a Gaza truce.

But a delay in releasing another hostage prompted Israel to halt the return of Gazans to the enclave's bombed-out north. Hamas said it would free her next week, and called the halt to the reopening of the north a violation of the truce.

The four freed Israelis were led onto a podium in Gaza City amid a large crowd of Palestinians and surrounded by dozens of armed Hamas men. They waved and smiled before being led off, entering Red Cross vehicles to be transported to Israeli forces.

Soon after, buses carrying released Palestinian prisoners were seen departing from the Israeli Ofer military prison in the occupied West Bank. Israel's Prison Service said all 200 had been released.

The releases on either side were greeted by cheering crowds, including Israelis gathered in Tel Aviv and Palestinians assembled in Ramallah.

The truce calls for Hamas to release 33 women, children, elderly, sick and wounded hostages over a six-week first phase, with Israel freeing 30 prisoners for each civilian and 50 for each soldier.

Parents of the four Israeli soldiers freed - Karina Arie, Daniella Gilboa, Naama Levy and Liri Albag - clapped and cried out in joy when they saw them on screen. The women were reunited

Mediator Qatar announced that the handing over of the second group of four Israeli hostages was completed yesterday. Official Spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Majed Mohammed al-Ansari said one of the Israeli captives released held dual Bulgarian-Israeli citizenship

with their families and then flown aboard helicopters to a hospital in central Israel.

The 200 Palestinians freed include fighters, some serving life sentences, according to a list published by Hamas.

Palestinian officials said as many as 650,000 displaced people were waiting to return to the north from today under the ceasefire. Witnesses said there was a stampede on a road leading to the north, blocked by Israeli troops who opened fire.



Released Israeli hostage, Naama Levy, is reunited with loved ones in Petah Tikva, Israel, yesterday.



Palestinians welcome the freed prisoner Mohammed al-Arida, in Araba, near Jenin, in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, yesterday.

Today's **GULF TIMES** includes a 28-page tabloid supplement on **INDIA REPUBLIC DAY**

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NHRC signs co-operation deal with Turkish Ombudsman

QNA Ankara

The National Human Rights Committee (NHRC) has signed a co-operation agreement with the Ombudsman Office of Türkiye with the aim of strengthening partnership through utilising the expertise and capabilities available to the two parties, to achieve a sustainable and effective response to all humanitarian and human rights activities.

The agreement was signed by HE the Chairperson of National Human Rights Committee (NHRC) Maryam bint Abdullah al-Attayah and Chief Ombudsman of Türkiye Mehmet Akarca. The NHRC said in a statement yesterday that the agreement aims to intensify co-operation and develop strategies and action plans, as well as the exchange of technical and institutional experiences between them.

The statement said that the agreement stipulates that the two parties should include the exchange of Information, laws and

legislations, analytical materials and literature in the field of promoting and protecting human rights, as well as the exchange of experiences in the implementation of the parties' international obligations in the field of human rights, assistance in human rights issues and freedoms for citizens of Türkiye in Qatar, and citizens of Qatar in Türkiye in addition to mutual assistance in the field of promoting and protecting human rights and freedoms for citizens of both countries, in accordance with the competencies of the parties.

NHRC added that the agreement also covers the implementation of joint programmes and projects aimed at conducting research on the protection of human rights and freedoms. In a related context, HE the NHRC Chairperson during her meeting with Chief Ombudsman Akarca reviewed the joint efforts between the committee and the office.

She added that Türkiye is one of the leading countries in the field of legislation related to women's rights, as it has signed the UN



Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), as well as the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, in addition, it has amended its constitution and laws to ensure the protection and promotion of women's rights in various fields, noting that Qatar has also ratified the convention on the elimination of discrimination

against women, adding that it pays great attention to the development of the human rights situation of women, and the promotion of their rights.

HE al-Attayah proposed organising a joint training course focused on countering domestic violence and combating violence against women, with the aim of exchanging experiences and effective legislation between the two countries, enhancing awareness about ways

to protect women from violence, supporting the capabilities of professionals working in this field, as well as organising a second specialised event highlighting these topics, to exchange knowledge and enhance dialogue on justice and human rights issues, expressing her aspiration that this event will be an opportunity to provide new insights by discussing ways to promote justice and human rights in the context of contemporary legal issues.

She provided an overview of the NHRC in terms of its origin and mechanisms of work in human rights awareness and education, methods of receiving complaints, visits and monitoring, as well as providing an overview of the most important features of the strategic plan of the NHRC 2024-2030.

HE al-Attayah gave an explanation about the committee's interaction at the international level in terms of its leadership of the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI), and as the first woman at the level of the Asian continent and the

Arab region to chair the GANHRI. HE the NHRC Chairperson also met with Adviser to the Turkish President and former Chief Ombudsman Seref Malkoc, where she stressed the committee's readiness to co-operate with all governmental, national and non-governmental mechanisms and institutions concerned with human rights in Türkiye through the exchange of experiences, expertise and best practices.

During the meeting, she reviewed the human rights challenges in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, in light of the continuation of the policy of double standards and the continuation of impunity, pointing to the efforts exerted by the NHRC and the Arab Network of National Human Rights Institutions (ANNHRI) in this regard, through communication with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, and communication with other international officials with a view to ending the violations suffered by the Palestinian people.

Need to provide true picture of Palestine occupation: Ben Labidi

By Tawfik Lamari Staff Reporter

An associate professor and filmmaker in the media studies programme at the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies has expressed the hope that the Third Annual Palestine Forum is going to help educate the public and give them a better understanding of the Palestinian condition.

Speaking to *Gulf Times* on the sidelines of the forum, Dr Imad Ben Labidi said, "the incredibly long occupation of Palestine that has been constantly described as conflict is clearly bloody and almost genocidal.

It is a very violent event, and it has to be described in those terms. So, we need to change some of the semantics, where things should be described as they are."

Dr Ben Labidi who discussed "Unchilding Palestine: Media Representation and the Limits of Civilizational Discourse," during the first session of the forum, said: "A conflict in my opinion is confusing, it does not describe the real conditions on the ground. So, what we are doing in this event, is going to approach some of these problems, either on the linguistic level, or in terms of representation, in terms of images.

"Also, in terms of textuality and how many of the images and the narratives that are kept produced and intersect to confuse the viewers, audiences, to confuse Americans in particular, most of whom do not really understand how long and how bloody this occupation has been.

"Settler colonialism is probably one of the longest and the bloodiest experience in human history as we see it in occupied Palestine. What it tries to do, is really completely uproot the indigenous population and replace them with settlers and entities that do not really belong in Palestine."

With relevance to the impact of the intended approach, Dr Ben Labidi added: "We have been trying constantly to influence the western nar-



Dr Imad Ben Labidi

ative more, educate them about certain aspects that do not seem to be clearly understood. Or challenge this discourse that is completely confusing about the reality of settler colonialism, in a way that it does not really try to include the native. That does not try to live with the native, but it tries to completely eliminate the native."

Dr Ben Labidi's most recent film, *Alma Under the Rubble* (2024) received the Best Short Animation Award in the Hollywood Golden Age Film Festival.

Somali PM opens emergency centre built by QC in Mogadishu

QNA Mogadishu

Prime Minister of Somalia, Hamza Abdi Barre, inaugurated the emergency centre, which was constructed and equipped by Qatar Charity (QC), at De Martino Hospital in Mogadishu. The inauguration ceremony of the facility was attended by Somali Minister of Health Dr Ali Haji Adam and Qatar's ambassador Dr Abdullah bin Salem al-Nuaimi along with a delegation from Qatar Charity and a number of Somali ministers and health officials.

The centre is designed to address critical medical and emergency care needs for the Somali population. It features modern medical equipment, surgical facilities, intensive care units, and laboratories to provide advanced healthcare services. It also includes a radiology department with advanced X-ray and MRI machines and a pharmacy.

Prime Minister Barre toured the facility and commended its role in improving Somalia's healthcare sector. He emphasised the centre's importance in filling a significant gap in emergency medical services.

"This centre is a vital addition to our healthcare system and reflects our commitment to improving medical services for the Somali people," said Barre. "We are deeply grateful to the State of Qatar and Qatar Charity for their generous support in making this project a reality."

Director of Development Operations at Qatar Charity, Abdulaziz Jassim Hejji stated that the project is part of Qatar Charity's commitment to strengthening Somalia's healthcare sector. "This centre is vital for enhancing the hospital's



capacity to handle emergency and critical cases," he said, adding that the project will also improve citizens' quality of life and the hospital's response to emergencies.

During their visit, Qatar Charity's delegation laid the foundation stone for a medical supply warehouse in the Banadir region and attended the implementation of "Compassionate Hearts," a humanitarian campaign that con-

ducted surgeries for 30 children with congenital heart defects. Somali government officials also attended the event. These projects were made possible by the generosity of the people of Qatar.

In 2024, Qatar Charity implemented 16 projects in the field of health and nutrition in Somalia. These initiatives, totalling over QR3.5mn, provided aid to more than 58,000 people.



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ANNOUNCEMENT FOR TENDERS

No.	Document No.	Description	Tender Bond	Bid Closing Date
1.	QC/TC/FM/4/25	Building & Furniture Maintenance Services for Q-Chem, Q-Chem II, Doha Office, RLOC & RLP for 5 Years	QR 1,046,500/-	12:00 hrs on 23 rd February 2025
Brief Scope: Company requires the services of qualified and experienced Contractor to carry out Building and Furniture Maintenance Services for Q-Chem facilities in Doha, Mesaieed and RasLaffan for 5 years.				
2.	QC/TC/P/5/25	Five Years Stocking and Supply Agreement for Industrial Gases, Including Carrier, Calibration and Specialty Gases for Q-Chem, Q-Chem II, RLOC & RLP	QR 136,500/-	12:00 hrs on 19 th February 2025
Brief Scope: Company requires the successful bidder to stock and supply Industrial Gases, including carrier, calibration and specialty gases for Q-Chem facilities in Doha, Mesaieed and Ras Laffan for a duration of 5 years.				

Tender Documents for the above description can be obtained as follows:

A. Pay to Bank and send the original receipt with authorization letter via email
For each tender pay a non-refundable document fee (cash only) of QR 1,000/- Payable to Q-Chem, Bank Account (Contract Services - Tender) - Account Number 001-242007-003 with HSBC Bank) and submit the original receipt with an Authorization letter on Tenderer Company Letterhead with ID copy of the Tenderer representative via email to tadvertising@qchem.com.qa In the authorization letter Tenderer shall nominate a single focal point with contact mobile number, official email address, office number, fax number for the communications related to this tender for the transfer and receipt of the tender documents. **The Bank receipt must indicate the tender number and the tenderer name (company name).**

B. Date and Time of Tender documents Issuance via email
Tender documents issuance from 26th January 2025 to 30th January 2025, 8am-12noon.

C. Proposal details
Proposals should be valid for 240 days from the tender closing date.

D. Submission of Proposals
Guidelines for Electronic Bids Submission is attached in the Tender documents.

Sealine season draws more than 48,000 visitors

Visit Qatar's Sealine Season, organised for the first time as a complete desert experience, has achieved remarkable success to date, welcoming more than 48,000 visitors since opening on Jan 3. Al Samri Night, held on Jan 24 was a standout event, attracting an enthusiastic crowd who experienced the rich cultural heritage of the Arabian Peninsula.

The Samri Band, consisting of 400 members, captivated more than 23,000 visitors with their traditional music and poetry. In an impressive feat, the entire site was fully prepared in just 72 hours, showcasing exceptional planning and execution. The final Sealine Season weekend also treated visitors to drone shows, a dazzling fireworks display, and the excitement of the Sealine Digital Raffle. With activities running until Jan 27 the Sealine Season continues to offer diverse experiences, including desert safaris adventures and family-friendly entertainment such as football, volleyball, kids' activities, and creative workshops.



تدعو شركة مناطق الاقتصادية (مناطق) الشركات المحلية والعالمية للاشتراك بالمنافسة الآتية

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TC-01-2025	خدمات تأجير السيارات (حسب الطلب) Vehicle Hire Services (Call-Off Basis)	50,000.00 QR	1,000.00 QR	February 25 th , 2025 12:00pm

Description of work: Vehicle Hire Services (Call-Off Basis). **وصف العمل:** خدمات تأجير السيارات (حسب الطلب).

Collection Date and Location: From January 26th to February 25th, 2025 (09.00am to 02.00pm) MANATEQ - Small and Medium Industries Zone Procurement & Contracts Department
Email: procurement@manateq.qa

موعد ومكان استلام وثائق المناقصة: بدءاً من 26 يناير حتى 25 فبراير 2025 (من 9:00 صباحاً حتى 2:00 مساءً) مناطق - منطقة الصناعات الصغيرة والمتوسطة إدارة المشتريات والعقود البريد الإلكتروني procurement@manateq.qa

Tender Fees could be paid through a cheque, payable to 'Economic Zones Company OSC (Manateq) ~ or electronically as per below: يتم دفع رسوم المناقصة من خلال شيك قابل للدفع بإسم شركة المناطق الاقتصادية (مناطق) أو عن طريق تحويل بنكي للحساب التالي:

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- 1 - Delegation for receiving tender documents. احضار تفويض لاستلام وثائق المناقصة.
- 2 - Copy of representative ID. صورة من البطاقة الشخصية للمندوب الذي سوف يحصل على وثائق المناقصة.
- 3 - Tender fees bank account depositing slip. إيصال إيداع رسوم وثائق المناقصة.

موقع التسليم: أمين سر لجنة المناقصات - شركة المناطق الاقتصادية - منطقة الصناعات الصغيرة والمتوسطة
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Novels by Qatari author tell story of falconry and maritime activities

Qatari author and historian Abdulaziz al-Bohashem al-Sayed has released two new novels diving into the history of hunting and the relationship between Arabs and falcons.

Speaking to Qatar News Agency (QNA), al-Sayed elaborated on his latest works, stressing that his first novel interweaves storytelling with historical research, dating back to Al-Harith bin Muawiyah bin Thawr al-Kindi and his history with taming the falcons. He emphasised that falcons became a symbol of strength, determination, and skill among Arabs.

He explained that the novel tells the tale of young men from Qatar, bonded by adventure and camaraderie, who embark on a hunting trip in Saudi Arabia's wilderness. They were joined by friends from Saudi Arabia and the UAE, spending enjoyable days hunting houbara bustards with their trained falcons.

The novel, he noted, includes rich details about the history, names of falcons, and hunting tools.

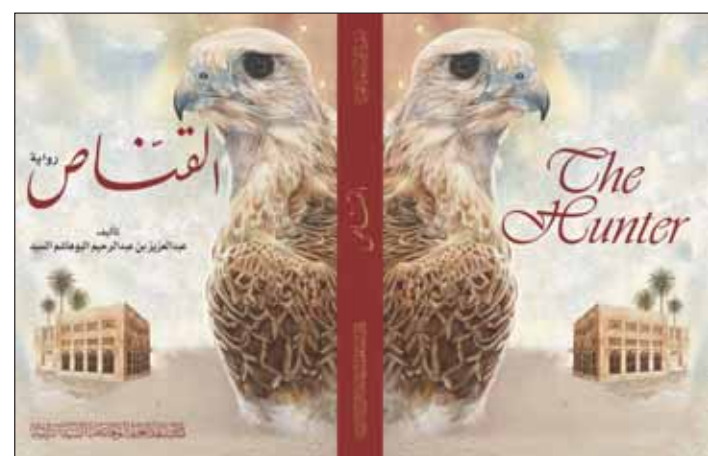
Furthermore, al-Sayed stressed that the plot follows a journey filled with drama and adventure, from the kidnapping of Fahd to the loss of Hussein's falcon. He underlined that although the events are fictional, they are inspired by the authentic and enjoyable experiences of falconry.



Discussing his second novel, al-Sayed clarified that it is inspired by Qatar's maritime heritage, set in 1937. The story follows a young man named Rashid, whose father, a dhow captain, wants him to learn the art of trade.

Al-Sayed pointed out that Rashid travels to Mumbai and other regions, gaining experience and facing challenges to earn his family's trust.

He emphasised that the novel reflects the historical maritime activities of Al Wakra, showcasing the trade journeys that brought various goods, like pearls, dates, coffee, and horses, to different parts of the world. Al-Sayed added that the story underscores the values and legacy of trade, turning it into a way of life passed down through generations. (QNA)



Prodigies compete at Marmi with impressive performance

Future Falconers from 6-15 years old gave an impressive performance yesterday evening at the Promising Falconer Championship in the 16th edition of the Qatar International Falcons and Hunting Festival (Marmi 2025).

The festival, organised by Al Gannas Qatari Society and sponsored by HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, with support from the Social and Sports Activities Support Fund (Daam), runs until Feb 1.

Metaib bin Mubarak al-Qahtani, chairman of Marmi Festival, said the championship is considered one of the most important championships in the festival. "It is related to the rising generations who will bear the responsibility of preserving and protecting the legacy of falconry. Marmi Festival is a fertile space for transferring the falconry heritage," he said.



The Promising Falconer Championship is held in two categories with the first as Al-Tabaa, Al-Shuwaihinah, Al-Jabaliya and the second category as Al-Wakri, Al-Kubj, Al-Qarmousha.

He highlighted the festival's keenness to make the falconry heritage a continuous legacy by caring for new generations of

children and youth.

Saad bin Ali al-Mohannadi, member of the Promising Falconer Committee, said the festival aims through these competitions to raise future falconers on the love of the heritage of fathers and grandfathers.

The first place winner in each category is given QR25,000

while the second place winner gets QR20,000. The third place winner gets QR15,000 while the fourth place winner is given QR10,000 and the fifth QR8,000.

Yesterday morning, the shooting championship was held for the amateur and professional categories to compete for the first three places in each category.



MWANI QATAR موانى قطر TENDERS AND AUCTIONS COMMITTEE AUCTIONS ANNOUNCEMENT

SL no.	AUCTION FOR	AUCTION NO.	BOND	DOC FEES	CLOSING DATE	CONTACT DETAILS
1	SALE OF MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS AT HAMAD PORT : MARINE ITEMS (FENDERS, BUOYS, BATTERIES) / IT ITEMS (COMPUTERS, LAPTOPS, PRINTERS, PHOTOCOPIERS, SERVERS, SWITCHES) / GENERAL ITEMS (CONTAINERS, GENERATORS, FURNITURE, MEP ITEMS)	MQ\TAC/AUCT \48\2024	QRS. 25,000	QRS. 500	20.02.2025	d.controller@mwani.com.qa
2	ARMOR ROCKS AT HAMAD PORT	MQ\TAC/AUCT \45\2024	QRS. 35,000	QRS. 300	23.02.2025	d.controller@mwani.com.qa
3	LEASING OF CAFETERIA SERVICES IN MQ BUILDING AT HAMAD PORT	MQ\TAC/AUCT \23\2024	QRS. 5,000	QRS. 200	09.03.2025	d.controller@mwani.com.qa
4	LEASING OF OURDOOR CAFETERIA AT VISITOR CENTRE BUILDING AT HAMAD PORT	MQ\TAC/AUCT \25\2024	QRS. 10,000	QRS. 300	10.03.2025	d.controller@mwani.com.qa
5	LEASING OF THE BUSINESS CENTER, AT HAMAD PORT (6 SHOPS)	MQ\TAC/AUCT \32\2024	QRS. 25,000	QRS. 500	11.03.2025	d.controller@mwani.com.qa
6	LEASING OF COMMERCIAL SPACE IN AL YEZWA PARKING AREA AT AL RUWAIS PORT FOR MOBILE CAFE AND CONVENIENCE STORE	MQ\TAC/AUCT \40\2024	QRS. 5,000	QRS. 200	05.03.2025	d.controller@mwani.com.qa
7	LEASING OF CAFETERIA SERVICES IN SHIPPING AGENTS BUILDING AT HAMAD PORT	MQ\TAC/AUCT \41\2024	QRS. 10,000	QRS. 300	06.03.2025	d.controller@mwani.com.qa
8	LEASING OF BANK SPACE IN SHIPPING AGENTS BUILDING AT HAMAD PORT	MQ\TAC/AUCT \42\2024	QRS. 25,000	QRS. 500	12.03.2025	d.controller@mwani.com.qa
9	LEASING OF COMMERCIAL ATM SPACE IN SHIPPING AGENTS BUILDING AT HAMAD PORT	MQ\TAC/AUCT \43\2024	QRS. 5,000	QRS. 200	13.03.2025	d.controller@mwani.com.qa
10	LEASING OF SPACE FOR CAFETERIAS/COFFEE SHOPS AT DOHA PORT CITY GALLERY	MQ\TAC/AUCT \44\2024	QRS. 25,000	QRS. 500	24.02.2025	d.controller@mwani.com.qa

The Tenders and Auctions Committee of Mwani Qatar hereby announces the above auctions with the following terms and conditions:

- Auction documents can be obtained (via Email) from the Finance and Accounting Department Tel No. (40453724/568) , after depositing the non-refundable amount mentioned above at MQ A/C No. (0850 - 102030 - 060) at QNB and submitting the bank depositing receipt and copy of the Commercial Registration/ ID to : (tender.secretary@mwani.com.qa) Tel. (40453724/568 - 31265655 / 30121037) .
- Offer should be accompanied with a Bond / issued by one of the Banks operating in Qatar for the amount shown in the above table and valid for 120 days from the closing date. The offer which is not accompanied by the Bond will not be considered. The successful bidder should pay the total awarding amount within five working days from the awarding date.
- Offers should be valid for ninety (90) days commencing from the closing date.
- The deadline for submitting offers will be 02:00 pm of the date shown above. Any offer arriving thereafter will not be considered.
- The offers should be deposited in the Tenders and Auctions Committee Box of MQ as per the address given above. The auction submitting party should confirm that he has received the receipt for delivering the offer. It should be in closed envelopes, sealed with red wax and addressed to the Chairman, Tenders and Auctions Committee of MQ , writing the number and subject of the auction.
- The offers must be submitted in One envelope system, (Original and Copy) The envelopes should not bear any mark denoting the name of the Company. The original bond must be attached with the Original offer.
- Mwani Qatar has the right to divide the auction among more than one bidder.
- For Technical clarification please contact the concerning Dept. as per the Email above , For more information you can visit MQ website : (www.mwani.com.qa)

Mwani Qatar @Mwaniqr Mwani.qatar Mwani.Qatar Mwani Qatar

Investment Opportunities at QETAIFAN ISLAND NORTH

Qetaifan Projects W.L.L., the owner and mega-developer of Qetaifan Island North - Lusail, invites visionary companies, entrepreneurs, and innovators to activate and bring their unique event

Qetaifan Island North, the premier waterfront hub in Qatar, invites visionary companies, entrepreneurs, and innovators to activate and bring their unique events to life on our stunning island.

This one-of-a-kind destination offers 46,832 SQM of prime, customizable space for cultural activations, retail markets, sports facilities, and seasonal festivals. Whether you're looking to host a dynamic sports tournament, set up an immersive retail experience, or create a cultural festival.

Total Activation Area: 46,832 SQM (Square Meters) of prime waterfront land. Individual Plot Breakdown:

- Plot No. SH-01 5,402 SQM
- Plot No.SH-02 6,006 SQM
- Plot No.SH-03 6,006 SQM
- Plot No.SH-04 5,436 SQM
- Plot No.SH-05 5,290 SQM
- Plot No.SH-06 5,497 SQM
- Plot No.SH-10 6,277 SQM
- Plot No.SH-11 6,968 SQM



Types of Activations:

These plots are designed to host a variety of activations, including but not limited to:

- Sports Facilities:** Areas for building sports courts, fields, or arenas for recreational or competitive events.
- Cultural Activations:** Spaces for art exhibitions, cultural festivals, or live performances.
- Retail and F&B Markets:** Set up pop-up shops, food stalls, and retail markets that can cater to visitors and residents.
- Seasonal Festivals:** Perfect for holiday-themed events, music festivals, or other large gatherings.

Terms and Conditions

- Relevant past performance/experience
- Technical expertise/experience of bidder and bidder's staff
- Local market experience/ local Authorities involvement/approval experience
- Payment of QAR 10,000 as non-refundable bidding fee
- Qetaifan Projects' Bank Account Details will be provided following receipt of your interest via email
- Deadline of proposal: 19th of February 2025
- The applicant shall not have any recourse, whatsoever, for any redress if Qetaifan Projects, for whatever reason, awards a contract to another investor or does not award any contract.



Amir sends cables of condolences to Kuwait's Amir

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, His Highness the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani and HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani sent cables of condolences to Kuwaiti Amir Sheikh Meshal al-Ahmad al-Jaber al-Sabah on the death of Sheikh Fadhel Khaled al-Salman al-Sabah. (QNA)

Safety inspections of restaurants in Industrial Area

The Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) has recently conducted an intensive inspection campaign targeting all restaurants and cafeterias in the Industrial Area.

The campaign aimed to ensure the safety of food products provided by these establishments by verifying their compliance with health requirements, based on the Food Safety Code of Practice guidelines prepared by the ministry and available on its website.

The campaign focused on examining food practices that directly or indirectly affect the safety and quality of food items in the Industrial Area. Inspectors from the Food Safety Department at the MoPH paid particular attention to reviewing and inspecting the preparation and handling of high-risk foods. Additionally, samples were collected to verify the safety of food products.

Director of the Food Safety Department at the Ministry of Public Health, Wasan Abdullah al-Baker, said, "During the campaign, we managed to cover all restaurants and caf-

eterias in the Industrial Area through 1,038 inspection visits, including 555 follow-up visits. Our inspectors worked diligently to provide support and ensure that corrective measures were implemented by food establishments, helping to raise their compliance with technical and health standards."

Wasan al-Baker added that 320 samples of ready-to-eat meals were collected and subjected to testing and analysis at the Central Food Laboratories of the MoPH. The test results indicated that all samples fell within the permissible safety limits. She also noted that the owners of the establishments demonstrated a clear willingness to improve their facilities during the campaign. Their co-operation and commitment to implementing the recommendations of the Food Safety Department's representatives contributed to an improved assessment of establishments in the area by the end of the campaign.

The Ministry of Public Health reaffirms its ongoing commitment to achieving the highest standards of quality and safety across all food establishments in Qatar. (QNA)

Dadu wins HundrED award

Dadu, Children's Museum of Qatar proudly received the HundrED Award for innovation with its pioneering educational project, A-Z Ramadan Cards for the second time.

This accolade, awarded by HundrED in partnership with Qatar Foundation, recognised Dadu's outstanding contribution to academic innovation and dedication to cultivating meaningful cultural and educational impact.

The A-Z Ramadan Cards project was celebrated for its unique approach to promoting empathy, cultural awareness, and understanding during the holy month of Ramadan. By blending creativity with cultural relevance, the initiative offered students an enriching learning experience that transcended traditional educational methods. "Ramadan A-Z" offered insights into Qatari and Islamic customs observed over the holy month through key vocabulary. The English version supports those who do not



observe Ramadan and introduces transliterated Arabic words linking them to what they witness around them. On the other hand, the Arabic set supports those observing the holy month to deeply explore the spirit of Ramadan through key Arabic vocabulary.

Farah al-Taweel, deputy director, Curatorial Affairs & Exhibitions Dadu, said: "We are incredibly proud to share the Ramadan A-Z cards with our audience and see them enjoy the beautiful artworks and meaningful content. Many children were excited to recognise their own traditions and asked their grand-

parents about unfamiliar ones. They also shared the experience with friends who don't observe Ramadan but enjoyed celebrating it while playing with the English version of the same cards."

The HundrED Award, part of a special spotlight collaboration with Qatar Foundation, was designed to discover and highlight the brightest innovations originating from Qatar. This year's recognition of A-Z Ramadan Cards positioned Dadu as a leader in advancing educational excellence, joining an elite group of impactful projects that inspire positive change globally.

Dukhan Bank picks third winner of QR1mn Thara'a Savings Account grand prize

Dukhan Bank has announced that Amal Nasser al-Attiyah is the third winner of the QR1mn Thara'a grand prize.

The winner was selected through a random electronic draw, conducted under the supervision and in the presence of a representative from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry's Qualitative License and Market Control Department.

The Thara'a Savings Account campaign has been a testament to Dukhan Bank's commitment to rewarding its customers. The initiative included three grand prizes of QR1mn each, 30 monthly cash prizes of QR5,000, and a total of 273 prizes distributed to customers, amounting to QR4.35mn in rewards.

Commenting on her win, al-Attiyah said: "I sincerely thank Dukhan Bank for this wonderful prize. It was a delightful surprise. I'm proud to be a Dukhan Bank customer and encourage everyone to open a Thara'a Savings Account for a chance to win valuable monthly prizes."

Talal Ahmed al-Khaja, Dukhan Bank Chief Marketing & Communications officer, said: "We are thrilled to con-



Amal Nasser al-Attiyah is the third winner of the QR1mn Thara'a grand prize.

gratulate Amal Nasser al-Attiyah on winning the grand prize in the Thara'a Savings Account draw. We wish her all the best for the future and reaffirm our commitment to delivering innovative products and services that exceed our customers' expectations."

Customers may conveniently open a Thara'a Saving Account via the Dukhan Bank mobile application. Upon account opening, a debit card will be issued and customers will be eligible to apply for a complimentary credit card for the first year, secured

against their Thara'a account balance, providing ongoing opportunities to win valuable cash prizes.

Eligibility for the monthly draws requires maintaining a monthly balance of at least QR10,000. However, the QR1mn-prize draw necessitates opening an account at least four months prior to the draw date and maintaining the aforementioned minimum balance throughout this period. For each additional QR1,000 held in the account, customers receive an additional entry into the respective draw.

Vodafone Qatar signs MoU with Honor

Vodafone Qatar has announced the signing of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Honor, bringing exclusive benefits to its customers.

The announcement was made during Honor's flagship Magic 7 Pro launch event, which was recently held at the Museum of Islamic



Art. The partnership will introduce a shop-in-shop concept at select Vodafone Qatar stores, providing a dedicated space exclusively for Honor to showcase its product range. Customers will also benefit from a two-year exclusive warranty on Honor devices purchased through Vodafone Qatar, both in-store and through its website.

Baran Yurdagül, chief operating officer at Vodafone Qatar, commented: "We are excited to partner with Honor to bring premium services and products to our customers. This collaboration is a testament to Vodafone Qatar's commitment to innovation and delivering exceptional customer experiences." To find out more about Vodafone Qatar, visit <https://www.vodafone.qa/en/home>

Max relaunches store at Mall of Qatar after overhaul

Max at Mall of Qatar has a completely new refreshed look after the complete overhaul of the store. The newly renovated store aims to enhance the customer shopping experience at Max. Picture shows Nitin Grover, DGM-Finance, Landmark Group Qatar, Rajgopal, head of Marketing, Landmark Group Qatar with Landmark Group team.



End of the Liquidation Announcement

The Liquidator – Samer Hussein Jaghoub
Deloitte & Touche – Qatar Branch
Declares

finalizing the procedures
of the Liquidation of

Hello Fashion – Cotton On W.L.L.
(the "Company")
Commercial Registry No. (59500)

In accordance with the provisions of the law, and accordingly, he disclaims his responsibility from the Company, and its commercial registration was cancelled from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

Over QR212mn Zakat assistance disbursed in 2024: Awqaf

The Zakat Affairs Department at the Ministry of Endowments (Awqaf) and Islamic Affairs provided QR212,237,868 in assistance to thousands of beneficiaries in Qatar during 2024.

In a statement yesterday, Director of Zakat Affairs Department Malallah Abdul Rahman al-Jaber said that the department, through the Zakat Disbursements Section, investigates the eligibility of those who apply for assistance by verifying the validity of the data and documents provided.

He said the department has the largest database of those eligible for assistance within Qatar, with the number of files reaching about 30,000. For his part, Head of the Zakat Disbursements Section Muhammad Hassan al-Tamimi explained that the assistance provided includes periodic and lump sum assistance, tuition fee coverage, carers support, therapeutic assistance, as well as in-kind assistance such as Zakat Al Fitr and charity basket, which are provided in different seasons. For his part, Head of the Collection and Zakat Accounts at Zakat Fund Mohammed Ahmed al-Sayed said that the channels of collection of Zakat funds are multiple, including: the application of the Department of Zakat Affairs on smart devices, collection offices and points scattered throughout the country and in markets and commercial complexes, the department's website, the payment of Zakat through ATMs of Qatar Islamic Bank and the payment of Zakat through the devices of the General Directorate of Endowments. (QNA)

End of the Liquidation Announcement

The Liquidator – Samer Hussein Jaghoub
Deloitte & Touche – Qatar Branch
Declares

finalizing the procedures
of the Liquidation of

Legendary Fashion – Forever Twenty-One W.L.L.
(the "Company")
Commercial Registry No. (59566)

In accordance with the provisions of the law, and accordingly, he disclaims his responsibility from the Company, and its commercial registration was cancelled from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.



A freed Palestinian prisoner gestures as he is greeted by people after being released by Israel as part of a hostages-prisoners swap and a ceasefire deal in Gaza between Hamas and Israel, in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip, yesterday.

Crowds cheer, families hug as Palestinian prisoners released

AFP
Ramallah

Azzam al-Shallalta dropped to his knees and wept at his mother's feet as he arrived in the West Bank city of Ramallah with other Palestinian prisoners released under the Gaza ceasefire yesterday.

A jubilant crowd carried Shallalta on their shoulders from the bus that brought him from jail, the freed prisoner still wearing his grey prison tracksuit.

"My situation was heartbreaking, truly heartbreaking. We pray to God to free all our brothers we've left behind," he told the crowd, his head shaved and his face pale and thin under a long red beard.

"I can't describe the feeling – just hearing the news that I would be released was overwhelming," he said while shaking hands with well-wishers.

Around him Palestinians cheered and waved the national flag, as they welcomed dozens of

prisoners who arrived in buses.

Hundreds waited in the local sports centre where the prisoners were dropped off for a short health checkup, while hundreds more watched on from the surrounding hills as fireworks went off.

Israel said it released 200 Palestinian prisoners yesterday in exchange for four Israeli women soldiers held in Gaza since Hamas' October 2023 storming of Israel which sparked the war.

Not all of the prisoners were bused to Ramallah. Sixteen were taken to Gaza, while 70 were sent via Egypt into exile in Algeria, Tunisia or Turkey.

A total of 121 of the prisoners released had been serving life sentences.

Tareq Yahya, another freed prisoner, spoke with emotion as he stepped off the bus into the crowd.

"It's amazing how much love our people have shown us, how they've stood by us and expressed their solidarity," the 31-year-old from the northern West Bank city of Jenin said.

Looking through the crowd, Yahya searched for relatives, finding none.

"It seems, based on the situation in Jenin, they weren't able to make it," he said, referring to an ongoing Israeli military operation in the city.

"I'll try to find them, though."

Thinking of the other prisoners who will be released in the coming weeks in exchange for Gaza hostages, Yahya said the ceasefire's guarantors "need to set strong conditions to prevent the beatings, humiliation and mistreatment the jailers have inflicted on us in these last days before our release."

Maisa Abu Bakr, 33, came early with her family to see her uncle Yasser Abu Bakr, whose name was on the list of those to be released this week.

She said they avidly followed the news "on Telegram and TV, and we were ready, wearing our (best) clothes, waiting for the time to get out and come here."

Yasser Abu Bakr had been in jail since 2002 serving multiple life sentences.

Yemen fighters in Trump's sights free 150 war prisoners

AFP
Sanaa

Yemen's Houthi fighters, who are poised to return to the US blacklist, released more than 150 prisoners of war in tearful scenes yesterday.

Those freed, who included elderly men with long, grey beards, hugged and kissed relatives, some of them crying, as they were reunited in the fighters-held capital Sanaa.

The second unilateral release in eight months took place with the Houthis in the sights of not only US President Donald Trump but also the United Nations, after they detained seven UN humanitarian staff on

Thursday. The fighters, part of Iran's "axis of resistance", have also been firing on Israel and Red Sea shipping during the Gaza war, claiming solidarity with the Palestinians. Prisoners in traditional izar skirts, sandals and keffiyah scarves were led out under the eyes of heavily armed Houthi soldiers in combat fatigues.

"We can't describe our feelings, as if we are born again," said Mohammed Nasser, one of the released prisoners. "We thank God that we are out of this prison. We thank everyone who helped in the success of this initiative."

The International Committee of the Red Cross, which had interviewed the prisoners and carried out medical checks during preparations for the release, said 153 "conflict-related" prisoners were freed.

Drone attack on hospital kills 67 in Sudan's Darfur

AFP
Port Sudan

A drone attack on one of the last functioning hospitals in El-Fasher in Sudan's Darfur region has killed 67 people and injured dozens, local activists and a medical source said yesterday, updating an earlier toll.

"Thirty-seven of those injured in the drone strike yesterday died today, bringing the number of victims up to 67," the source said, requesting anonymity for fear of retaliation.

He added that a number of those injured were still being treated, but could not give an exact figure.

The bombing of the Saudi Hospital late Friday had "led to the destruction" of the hospital's emergency building, the source said.

AFP could not independently verify which of Sudan's warring sides had launched the attack.

Since April 2023, the Sudanese army has been at war with the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), who have seized nearly the entire vast western region of Darfur.

Since May they have besieged El-Fasher, the state capital of North Darfur, but have not managed to claim the city where army-aligned militias have repeatedly pushed them back.

Last week, the RSF issued an ultimatum demanding army forces and allies leave the city by Wednesday afternoon in advance of an expected offensive.

Local activists have reported intermittent fighting since, including repeated artillery fire from the RSF on the famine-hit Abu Shouk displacement camp.

On Friday morning alone, heavy shelling killed eight people in the camp, according to civil society group the Darfur General Coordination of Camps for the Displaced and Refugees.

The UN has voiced alarm, calling on both parties to ensure the protection of the city's civilian population – some 2mn people.

"The people of El-Fasher have suffered so much already," Seif Magango, spokesman of the UN rights office, said Wednesday.

According to the medical source, the Saudi Hospital's emergency building had been hit by an RSF drone "a few weeks ago".

Between December 9 and January 14, Yale University's Humanitarian Research Lab observed three advanced drones at the RSF-controlled Nyala Airport, some 200 kilometres south.

In its report, it said the Chinese-made drones have "significant electronic surveillance and warfare capabilities and can be equipped with air-to-ground munitions", but could not verify

which countries had purchased them.

The United Arab Emirates has been repeatedly accused of funneling weapons, including drones, to the RSF.

UN experts determined in December 2023 the allegations were "credible", but Abu Dhabi has issued repeated denials in the face of mounting international criticism.

In December, it assured the outgoing administration of US president Joe Biden that it was "not now transferring any weapons" to the RSF.

But on Friday, two US lawmakers said the UAE had violated its promises to Washington and "is continuing to provide weapons" to the RSF – who the US concluded earlier this month had committed "genocide" in Darfur.

The RSF's latest attempt to consolidate its hold on war-ravaged Darfur – a vast region about the size of France, home to a quarter of Sudan's population – comes as the army claims significant victories elsewhere.

Some 850 kilometres east, army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan yesterday toured the Jalli oil refinery, the country's largest, a day after his forces reclaimed it.

In a statement, his ruling Transitional Sovereignty Council said Burhan "pledged to rebuild what the militia had destroyed" and rehabilitate a key economic resource.

Israel orders thousands of Lebanese not to return to border area until further notice

The Israeli army ordered thousands of displaced Lebanese not to return to villages near the border until further notice, a day after it said its forces would remain in south Lebanon beyond a deadline today to withdraw, Reuters reported from Beirut/Jerusalem. The deadline is part of a ceasefire that ended last year's war between Hezbollah and Israel. Brokered by Washington and Paris, the deal stipulated that Israeli forces should withdraw from south Lebanon as the group's weapons and fighters are removed from the area and the Lebanese army deploys, within in a 60-day period which ends today. But Israel said on Friday the terms had not been fully enforced by the Lebanese state, meaning Israeli troops would stay beyond Sunday, without saying for how long.

Lebanon's US-backed military yesterday accused Israel of procrastinating in its withdrawal. In a statement on social media platform X, the Israeli military posted a map showing an area of the south containing dozens of villages. It said until further notice residents remain forbidden from returning to their homes. "Anyone who moves south of this line puts themselves in danger," the statement said. The line stretches from Shebaa, less than 2km from the border in the east, to Mansouri

in the west – about 10km from the border. The ceasefire ended a war, which was fought in parallel with the Gaza war, and which peaked in a major Israeli offensive against Hezbollah that uprooted more than a mn people in Lebanon and left the group badly weakened. Hezbollah lawmaker Ali Fayyad said indications that Israel would not complete its withdrawal on time marked a dangerous development that threatens the course of the agreements agreed to by the Lebanese government. The government should "re-evaluate the position, to explore the most effective ways to... impose the Israeli withdrawal and reassure the Lebanese, especially the southern community which is experiencing a state of extreme anger", he said in a statement distributed by Hezbollah. The Israeli military says it has been seizing Hezbollah weapons and dismantling its infrastructure in the south. The White House said on Friday that a short, temporary ceasefire extension was urgently needed. French President Emmanuel Macron told his Lebanese counterpart Joseph Aoun that he was making contacts to maintain the ceasefire and complete the implementation of the agreement, the Lebanese presidency said in a statement.

South Africa's DA party declares dispute with unity government

South Africa's Democratic Alliance (DA) party declared itself in dispute with the Government of National Unity (GNU) yesterday, accusing it of failing to consult its coalition partners on bills relating to health and land expropriation, Reuters reported from Johannesburg. The DA, the second largest party in the government after the African National Congress (ANC), said it was not about to walk away but relations had to be reset following the disagreements over issues that have long been sticking points. "We have declared a dispute, and it's up to the leaders of the parties (in the coalition) to decide how to move forward," DA leader John Steenhuisen told a news briefing. "The president needs to accept that his party is now just another minority party, and that the DA are partners in the GNU. The DA will not, under any circumstances, be reduced to being mere spectators," Steenhuisen said. President Cyril Ramaphosa's ANC said it was ready to engage. "The ANC will not change in its path in transforming South Africa. We will persist with the transformation agenda. But we are ready to engage, including with the DA on these particular matters," ANC Secretary-General Fikile Mbalula said, also addressing the news briefing. The ANC was forced to form a unity government last year after it failed to secure enough parliamentary seats to govern alone. The government has said it was implementing the National Health Insurance bill, which aims to provide universal coverage through a major overhaul of South Africa's two-tier system.

Six peacekeepers killed as fighting rages in DRC

AFP
Goma

Six foreign peacekeepers have been killed in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, where fighting between the Congolese army and Rwandan-backed M23 fighters intensified yesterday, officials said.

Fighting raged in the region despite calls from the international community for the Rwandan-backed M23 to halt its advance on Goma, the key city in the mineral-rich east and home to more than a million people.

An AFP reporter saw a burned-out, smoking armoured vehicle of the UN peacekeeping force Monusco on the road between Goma and Sake, scene of intense fighting in recent days.

A political party in South Africa said three of that country's peacekeepers were killed and a further three from Malawi also died, according to a military spokesman. In Goma, the main city of the restive North Kivu province, artillery detonations in the distance resonated as far as the city centre.

The European Union yesterday urged the M23 to halt its advance.

"Rwanda must cease its support for the M23 and withdraw. The EU strongly condemns Rwanda's military presence in the DRC as a clear violation of international law, the UN charter and the territorial integrity of the DRC," EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas said.

The African Union in a statement called for the "immediate cessation" of fighting and said it "urges the parties to preserve the lives of civilians".



Uruguayan soldiers of the United Nations Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Monusco) travel on their pick up trucks in Goma, yesterday.

End of the Liquidation Announcement

The Liquidator – Rami Mohammad Ali Qudah
Deloitte & Touche – Qatar Branch
Declares

finalizing the procedures
of the Liquidation of

Tadmur Real Estate W.L.L.
(the "Company")
Commercial Registry No. (33037)

In accordance with the provisions of the law, and accordingly, he disclaims his responsibility from the Company, and its commercial registration was cancelled from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.



Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth speaks after being sworn in by US Vice-President J D Vance in the Indian Treaty Room at the Eisenhower Executive Office Building, Washington, DC. - AFP

Hegseth is sworn in as defence secretary

Reuters
Washington

Pete Hegseth narrowly secured enough votes on Friday to become the next US defence secretary, a victory for President Donald Trump after fierce opposition from Democrats and even some Republicans to his controversial nominee.

Hegseth was confirmed after a 50-50 vote in the Senate, when Vice-President J D Vance came to the chamber to break the tie in his role as president of the Senate, after three Republicans joined every Democrat and independent in voting no.

He was sworn in yesterday by Vance and in a message to the military stressed "restoring the warrior ethos, rebuilding our military, and re-establishing deterrence".

Speaking after his swearing in, Hegseth said he was thinking of "the guys that I served with on the battlefield, the men and women who I locked shields with and put my life on the line with".

"We will work with allies and partners to deter aggression in the Indo-Pacific by Communist China, as well as supporting the president's priority to end wars responsibly and reorient to key threats," he later wrote.

The 44-year-old is a former Army National Guard officer and Bronze Star recipient with previous deployments to Iraq, Af-

ghanistan and Guantanamo Bay in Cuba.

Hegseth, a former Fox News personality, is promising to bring major changes to the Pentagon.

However, his leadership will be under intense scrutiny after a bruising confirmation review that raised serious questions about his qualifications, temperament and views about women in combat.

"We have not had a secretary of defence like Hegseth before," said Jeremi Suri, a University of Texas, Austin, history professor and presidential scholar.

Hegseth is the most divisive candidate to clinch the US military's top job, a position that has historically gone to candidates with deep experience running large organisations and who enjoy broad bipartisan support.

It was only the second time in history a cabinet nominee needed a tie-break to be confirmed.

The first was also a Trump nominee, Betsy DeVos, who became secretary of education in 2017.

The nearly party-line confirmation vote was a departure for a position that Republican and Democratic administrations have long sought to ensure was bipartisan.

Former president Joe Biden's defence secretary, Lloyd Austin, was confirmed by a 93-2 vote in 2021, and Jim Mattis, Trump's first defence secretary in his last administration, was confirmed 98-1 in 2017.

Trump administration says 'Gulf of America' name change is now official

The Trump administration's Interior Department said yesterday that it had officially changed the name of the Gulf of Mexico to the Gulf of America, and the Alaskan peak Denali to Mount McKinley.

US President Donald Trump ordered the name changes as part of a flurry of executive actions hours after taking office on Monday, making good on a campaign promise.

"As directed by the president, the Gulf of Mexico will now officially be known as the Gulf of America and North America's highest peak will once again bear the name Mount McKinley," the department said.

While Trump can direct the US Geological Survey (USGS) to change how it denotes the Gulf of Mexico, such a name change would be unlikely to be recognised internationally.

Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum previously jokingly suggested North America, including the US, be renamed "Mexican America" - a historic name used on an early map of the region. - Reuters

CIA now says Covid-19 'more likely' to have come from a laboratory

The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) has assessed that the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic is "more likely" to have emerged from a lab rather than from nature, an agency spokesperson said yesterday.

The agency had for years said it could not conclude whether Covid-19 was the result of a lab incident or it originated in nature.

However, in the final weeks of the Biden administration, former CIA director William Burns asked CIA analysts and scientists to make a clear determination, stressing the pandemic's historical significance, according to a senior US official.

The CIA says it has "low confidence" in its assessment that a "research-related origin of the Covid-19 pandemic is more likely" and notes in its statement that both scenarios - lab origin and natural origin - are plausible.

Beijing has said claims that a laboratory leak likely caused the pandemic have no credibility. - Reuters

QatarDebate, New York Times collaborate for 4th Davos Debates

QatarDebate, affiliated with the Qatar Foundation for Education, Research, and Community Development (QF), organised the fourth edition of the Davos Debates in collaboration with the New York Times along with the World Economic Forum.

The event featured New York Times international president Stephen Johnson and QatarDebate Centre programme management director Abdulrahman al-Subaie.

In his speech at the opening ceremony, al-Subaie praised the New York Times's role in supporting constructive dialogue.

He said that dialogue is a fundamental pillar for exchanging ideas and building bridges of cooperation between cultures and generations.

This edition of the Davos Debates is focused on the global leadership of the US, including its ability to maintain its leadership role in light of geopolitical and environmental transformations, its role as a defender of democracy and human rights, its future as a superpower in light of current challenges and the possibility of the emergence of leadership alternatives that contribute to achieving global balance.

The event witnessed the participation of a group of decision-makers and international experts, where the discussion was moderated by New York Times climate management correspondent David Giles, and head of the international section of the newspaper, Stephen Dunbar-Johnson.

The jury featured eminent personalities, in-

cluding climate activist and president of the Association of Fulani Women and Indigenous Peoples Hindou Oumarou Ibrahim, De-Vex editor-in-chief and expert on international business Raj Kumar, and president of the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) Michael Froman.

Opinions were mixed on the continuation of American leadership.

The supporting team, which included prominent figures such as BSR chief executive Aron Cramer, risk management consultant Ashley Hunter, Human Rights Watch (HRW) executive director Tirana Hassan, and climate activist Luisa Neubauer, stressed that the US still has the qualifications to maintain its global leadership, noting its importance in addressing global challenges, such as climate change, counterterrorism, and the stability of the international system.

In contrast, the opposing team, which included Amnesty International secretary-general Agnès Callamard, Dartmouth Univer-

Trump fires 17 independent inspectors-general: media

Reuters/AFP
Washington

US President Donald Trump has fired 17 independent watchdogs at multiple government agencies, a person with knowledge of the matter said, eliminating a critical oversight component and clearing the way to replace them with loyalists.

The inspectors-general at agencies, including the departments of State, Defence and Transportation, were notified by e-mail from the White House personnel director that they had been terminated immediately, the source said on condition of anonymity.

The dismissals appeared to violate federal law, which requires the president to give both houses of Congress reasons for the dismissals 30 days in advance.

Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer, noting a possible violation of law in remarks yesterday on the Senate floor, called the firings "a chilling purge" and a preview of what he said was a "lawless approach" by the Trump administration.

"When government agencies disobey the law in the next year and there's no independent (inspector-general) to keep them in check, Donald Trump could well regret this action," Schumer said.

An inspector-general (IG) is an independent position with an oversight role to detect and deter fraud, waste and abuse by government employees.

They are responsible for investigating violations of laws, regulations and ethical standards by employees, and conducting audits of contracts, finances and staff performance.

Among the federal agencies affected by the ousters were the departments of Defence, State, Interior and Energy, as well as the Environmental Protection Agency and Social Security Administration, the Washington Post said.

"It's a widespread massacre," said one of the fired inspectors-general, according to the Post.



YOU'RE FIRED: Trump is reported to have dismissed more than a dozen independent federal government watchdogs responsible for investigating violations of laws, regulations and ethical standards by employees, and conducting audits of contracts, finances and staff performance.

"Whoever Trump puts in now will be viewed as loyalists, and that undermines the entire system."

Republican Senator Chuck Grassley, a long-time supporter of inspectors-general, said he wanted to know why Trump fired the watchdogs.

"There may be good reason the IGs were fired. We need to know that if so. I'd like further explanation from President Trump," Grassley said in a statement, adding that a detailed 30-day notice of removal was not provided to Congress.

The White House did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Agencies are pressing ahead with orders from Trump, who returned to the presidency on Monday, to reshape the federal bureaucracy by scrapping diversity programmes, rescinding job offers and sidelining more than 150 national security and foreign policy officials.

Yesterday's dismissals spared the Department of Justice inspector-general, Michael Horowitz, according to the New York Times.

Trump threatens aid cutoff on US disaster zone visits

AFP/Reuters
Los Angeles

US President Donald Trump visited disaster zones in North Carolina and California yesterday, using the first trip since his return to office to turn emergency aid into a political cudgel.

Trump said he would sign an order that could scrap the federal disaster agency, stepping up his effort to exert presidential power over the levers of government and to decide which states get money from Washington.

The Republican billionaire also threatened to withhold funding for Democratic-led California - a long-term target of his ire - to deal with devastating wildfires if it does not follow his orders.

However, faced with the destruction left by terrifying fires that ravaged California, Trump was emollient, pledging the "federal government (is) standing behind you. 100%."

"I don't think you can realise how rough it is, how devastating it is, until you see it," he said after flying over the damaged areas. "I mean, I saw a lot of bad things on television, but the extent of it, the size of it... it is devastation. It's incredible. It's really an incineration."

Trump's comments came after he threatened to withhold assistance if the Californian government does not change laws which the president says allow undocumented migrants to vote - and linked that to a false claim that the state



A person speaks as residents who lost their homes make comments and ask questions while US President Donald Trump attends a briefing on wildfires damage during his visit to the Pacific Palisades neighbourhood that was damaged by the Palisades Fire, in Los Angeles. - Reuters

could solve its drought by simply opening a valve.

"In California I have a condition," he said. "I want two things, I want voter ID for the people of California... and I want to see the water be released and come down."

In Los Angeles, a briefing with politicians and firefighters that began with empathy quickly derailed as Trump began claiming California had an "unlimited" supply of water.

He then embarked on an extended complaint about the Federal Emergency Management Agency (Fema).

"Fema is incompetently run, and it costs about three times more than it should cost," he said.

Trump also sparred with Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass and another Democratic lawmaker, pressing the mayor to use her emergency powers, let people get

back to their properties quickly, and allow them to remove debris on their own.

Bass emphasised the importance of safety and the lawmaker, Representative Brad Sherman, praised the Fema's work.

Governor Gavin Newsom, a Democrat who has had a tense relationship with the Republican leader, has told Trump that California would need his support.

Speaking in North Carolina earlier, where floods caused by Hurricane Helene last year killed more than 100 people in the state, he said that the Fema had "really let us down".

Trump said he would sign an executive order to overhaul or even get rid of the Fema.

"We're going to recommend that Fema go away," he said.

Experts doubt that Trump alone can shut down the Fema.



A resident who received assistance from the Fema after Hurricane Helene damaged her property, holds a sign in support of the government agency as she waits on the route of Trump's motorcade in Swannanoa, North Carolina. - Reuters

Rob Verchick, a former Obama administration official at the Environmental Protection Agency and now a professor at Loyola University New Orleans College of Law, said eliminating the Fema most likely requires Congressional action.

He said the agency was created by former president Jimmy Carter by executive order but has been assigned roles and funding by Congress for the country's emergency response programmes.

The Fema brings in emergency personnel, supplies and equipment to help areas begin to recover from natural disasters.

Funding for the agency has soared in recent years as extreme weather events have increased the demand for its services.

The agency has 10 regional offices and employs more than 20,000 people across the country.

Canada reduces international student permits for second year

Canada will cap the number of international students allowed to enter the country for a second year in a row in 2025, as the government continues to try to ease pressure on housing, health-care and other services.

Canada will issue 437,000 study permits this year, a 10% reduction from 2024, according to a statement from the immigration ministry. The country introduced a cap on new international student permits in 2024 after population growth in recent years was seen as aggravating a housing shortage.

In 2023, Canada issued more than 650,000 study permits to foreign students, according to government data, taking the number of international students in the country to a record of more than 1mn, roughly triple the number who entered the country a decade ago. - Reuters

Colombia sends army to fight guerillas on Venezuela border

Colombia has launched a military offensive against leftist guerillas blamed for a week of bloody violence on the border with Venezuela, Defence Minister Ivan Velasquez said yesterday.

"There has already been a first battle between the army and members of the National Liberation Army (ELN)... the order is to take over the territory," Velasquez said from the border city of Cucuta, adding that more than 9,000 troops are deployed in the area.

Colombia is struggling to contain violence in the mountainous northeastern Catatumbo region, where a 5,800-strong ELN has targeted rival armed groups and their alleged sympathisers.

The offensive has killed at least 80, according to government and United Nations estimates. - AFP

After the storm



People work to repair the roof of their home in the aftermath of Storm Eowyn, in Tullinadaly, Ireland.



Electricians work to repair power lines in the aftermath of Storm Eowyn, in Currandrum, Ireland.

Fired system contractor partly shuts down British Museum

AFP
London

The British Museum said it had closed a number of exhibits after a fired IT contractor "shut down" some of its systems, in one of several unrelated incidents targeting European museums yesterday.

The London venue, one of the UK capital's biggest tourist draws and best known for housing the Rosetta Stone and the Parthenon Marbles, said police had arrested the suspect.

"An IT contractor who was dismissed last week trespassed into the museum and shut down several of our systems," a museum spokes-

man said. "We are working hard to get the museum back to being fully operational but with regret our temporary exhibitions have been closed today and will remain so over the weekend."

Meanwhile in the Netherlands, the Drents Museum in Assen said it was closed for the weekend after robbers used explosives to break in and steal three antique bracelets and a gold helmet. Police were alerted to an explosion early Saturday, with the thieves stealing the golden helmet of Cotofenesti, dating from the mid-fifth century BC, the museum said on its website.

The helmet - the centrepiece of a temporary exhibition - was on loan from Romania's National History Museum in Bucharest. And in Paris,

the world-famous Orsay Museum was forced to disable its own ticketing system for several hours Friday after falling victim to a fraudulent scheme involving "mirror sites", it told AFP yesterday.

The museum, home to works by Vincent van Gogh and other master painters, was alerted Friday that visitors trying to buy tickets online were being redirected without realising it to bogus ticket sales websites. After suspending online ticketing services for some of Friday, operations were back to normal yesterday, it said.

A spokesperson for London's Metropolitan police said officers responded to the British Museum late Thursday following reports that a man on-site had "caused

damage" to its security and IT systems. Police arrested the man in his 50s at the scene on suspicion of burglary and criminal damage. He has been bailed "pending further enquiries," the spokesperson added.

Part of the museum's permanent collection was also closed Friday following the incident, Britain's Press Association news agency reported. A message on the museum's website yesterday stated that it was "open but due to an IT infrastructure issue some galleries have had to be closed". It added this meant "capacity will be limited, and priority will be given to members and pre-booked ticket-holders". The incident is the latest embarrassing security lapse for the

museum after allegations emerged in 2023 that a former employee was suspected of selling items stolen from its vast collection.

About 1,800 objects were disclosed as missing or stolen in August 2023. The museum dismissed a staff member suspected of involvement in what it called "an inside job", and alerted police who have interviewed a person but made no arrests. Hundreds of the items have since been recovered.

Following a furore around that scandal, Hartwig Fischer, the director of the museum at the time, resigned. After a temporary head was appointed, Nicholas Cullinan - who was previously in charge of the National Portrait Gallery - took over the role last year.

Philippines stops research survey after 'harassment' in disputed sea

AFP
Manila

The Philippines said yesterday it had suspended a scientific survey in the contested South China Sea due to "dangerous" harassment by Chinese navy and coast guard vessels and aircraft.

China claims nearly all of the disputed waterway, brushing off rival claims from other countries - including the Philippines - and an international arbitration tribunal ruling that its assertion has no legal basis.

It has deployed navy and coast guard vessels in recent months in a bid to bar the Philippines from strategically important reefs and islands in the South China Sea.

Three Chinese coast guard vessels and four smaller boats made "aggressive manoeuvres" towards two Philippine Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources ships and their inflatable boats on Friday near Thitu island, a Philippine Coast Guard statement said.

The Filipino vessels were transporting scientists intending to conduct a "marine scientific survey and sand sampling" at a sandbar off Thitu, the largest Philippine-occupied island in the disputed Spratly chain, the coast guard said.

The Chinese coast guard said in a statement later on Saturday the Philippine boats had entered waters near Tiexian Reef, the Chinese name for Sandy Cay, a few kilometres from Thitu, and were forced to leave.

British growth plans get positive response in Davos: minister

Reuters
Davos

British industry and energy minister Sarah Jones said that meetings in Davos this week with CEOs considering where to make their next investment had been positive as the government took its growth mantra to the Swiss mountains. "People are enthusiastic with the message that they're getting from the government ... what people want to see is evidence that we mean it," Jones told Reuters on the sidelines of the

World Economic Forum annual meeting.

Official data has shown Britain's economy stagnated in the three months to September and the Bank of England has forecast that it flat-lined again in the last three months of 2024, adding to pressure on the government, which faced a recent steep rise in borrowing costs as a result of a wider bond market wobble. "Of course businesses are interested in what's happening with interest rates, what's happening with taxation, all of these things," Jones said, speaking on Thursday. "Regulation ... just knowing what

the rules of the game are, and understanding who to talk to as well, and how to navigate your way through investing in the UK."

Although Britain's high-profile mission to Davos to rally support for its economic plans gave investors and financiers some encouragement, several told Reuters they needed to see the government deliver on growth rather than just talk about it. Senior bankers and executives, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said there was a worried mood in the business community and one way to make investment in Britain more attrac-

tive was by making it more appealing to entrepreneurs.

One Davos attendee told Reuters that a change announced on Thursday to the rules around how wealthy, often foreign residents, pay tax on overseas income was "a small step in the right direction".

Concerns over Britain's debt levels have shown up in the bond markets, adding to its borrowing costs at the start of the year before they eased more recently.

Official data this week showed Britain ran a bigger-than-expected budget deficit in December, swelled by debt interest costs and

a one-off purchase of military homes. "In the end, to make debt sustainable you've got to grow the economy," finance minister Rachel Reeves told Reuters on Thursday. "We are taking out those barriers that have stopped businesses investing and growing in Britain," Reeves said, adding: "I'm confident we can get those growth numbers up."

The worry for businesses is that Reeves may have little choice but to make more spending cuts to keep her fiscal pledges, piling more pressure on the economy, one executive said.

S Korea to release preliminary report of Jeju Air crash by tomorrow

Reuters
Seoul

South Korea will release by Monday a preliminary report on last month's Jeju Air plane crash that killed 179 people, the deadliest air disaster on the nation's soil, the transport ministry said yesterday.

One area under investigation is what role a bird strike played in the Dec 29 crash of flight 7C2216 as it arrived at Muan International Airport from Bangkok, according to a ministry statement.

The report will be sent to the International Civil Aviation Organisation as well as the United States, France and Thailand, the ministry said. Seoul has been co-operating with investigators from the US National Transportation Safety Board and France's Bureau of Enquiry and Analysis for Civil Aviation Safety.

It will take several months to analyse and verify flight data and cockpit voice recordings, which stopped recording four minutes and seven seconds before the crash, and communication recordings with the control tower, the ministry said. At 08:58:11am, the pilots discussed birds flying

under the Boeing 737-800, then declared mayday at 08:58:56, reporting a bird strike while the plane was on a go-around, the statement said. Airport CCTV footage also showed the plane making "contact" with birds during the go-around, it said.

Previously the ministry had said the pilots issued the distress signal due to bird strikes before going around. The jet crashed at 9:02:57am, slamming into an embankment and bursting into flames that killed everyone aboard except for two crew members in the tail section.

The surveillance footage was taken from too far away to see if there was a spark from the bird strike but it "confirmed the plane making contact with birds, though the exact time is unclear," a ministry official told Reuters.

Duck feathers and blood were found in both of the plane's GE Aerospace engines, the ministry said. The ministry said it would conduct a separate analysis of the role of the concrete embankment that supported navigation antennas called "localisers". The ministry said on Wednesday that it would remove the embankment, which experts said likely made the disaster more deadly.

Indonesia, India sign wide range of agreements

Reuters
Jakarta/Mumbai

Indonesia and India signed a wide range of agreements yesterday covering culture, health, maritime, security and digital sectors. The signing ceremony was witnessed by Indonesia's President Prabowo Subianto and India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi ahead of India's Republic Day celebrations today.

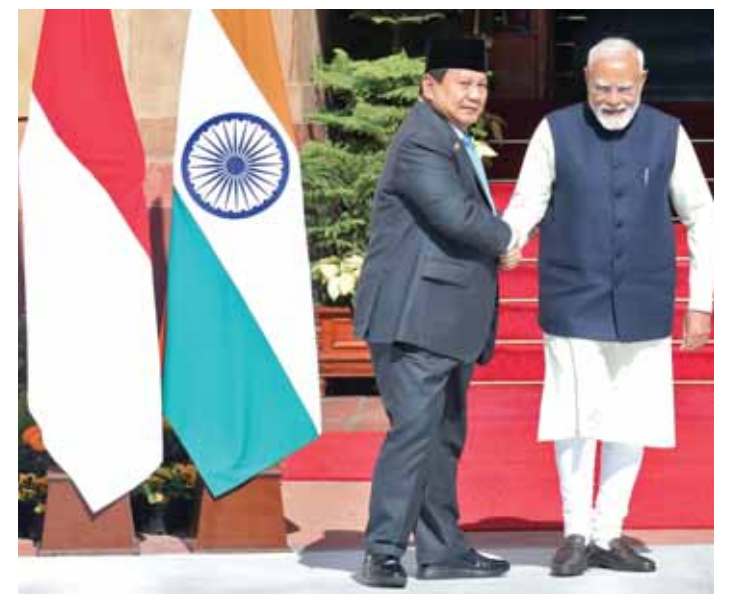
President Prabowo said his government will accelerate its economic partnership with India and prioritise the co-operation over the long term. "We discussed many key sectors of common interest in which we would like to accelerate the level of co-operation," Prabowo said in a press conference after the signing ceremony.

Prabowo also thanked India for its support of Indonesia through the process of becoming a member

President Prabowo said his government will accelerate its economic partnership with India and prioritise the co-operation over the long term

of Brics, saying the bloc of emerging market economies "will be beneficial for global stability and regional co-operation".

Speaking before Prabowo's remarks, Prime Minister Modi said the two countries will work together in defence manufacturing and improving supply chains. "We also decided to co-operate on issues such as maritime security, cybersecurity, counter terrorism and de-radicalisation," Modi said.



Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto and India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi shake hands ahead of their meeting at the Hyderabad House in New Delhi, India, yesterday.

Court rejects second request to extend Yoon detention

AFP
Seoul

A Seoul court rejected a second request yesterday to extend the detention of impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol over his failed attempt to declare martial law, putting pressure on prosecutors to quickly indict him.

Yoon was arrested last week on insurrection charges, becoming

the first sitting South Korean head of state to be detained in a criminal probe.

His December 3 martial law decree only lasted about six hours before it was voted down by lawmakers, but it still managed to plunge South Korea into its worst political crisis in decades. The Seoul Central District Court yesterday turned down a request for a detention extension, prosecutors said in a brief statement.

This follows a ruling by the same court a day earlier when a judge stated it was "difficult to find sufficient grounds" to grant an extension. Prosecutors had planned to keep the disgraced leader in custody until February 6 for questioning before formally indicting him, but that plan will now need to be adjusted. "With the court's rejection of the extension, prosecutors must now work quickly to formally indict Yoon to keep him behind bars,"

Yoo Jung-hoon, an attorney and political commentator, told AFP.

Yoon has refused to co-operate with the criminal probe, with his legal defence team arguing investigators lack legal authority. The suspended president is also facing a separate hearing in the Constitutional Court which, if it upholds his impeachment, would officially remove him from office.

An election would then have to be held within 60 days.



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Plastic pollution poses significant global challenges

Plastic pollution poses significant and urgent global challenges, impacting ecosystems, human health, and economies.

With 6mn tonnes entering oceans every year and over twice that amount polluting land, mismanaged plastic waste is severely disrupting ecosystems, harming biodiversity and threatening human health and livelihoods across the world.

Plastic pollution is also a significant contributor to climate change, responsible for an estimated 1.8bn tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions annually.

Microplastics have seen entering the food chain through seafood, salt, and even drinking water, potentially affecting human health. Incineration of plastics releases harmful toxins and contributes to air pollution.

Plastic waste in oceans harms marine life through ingestion, entanglement, and habitat destruction.

Microplastics disrupt aquatic food chains. Plastics degrade into microplastics, affecting soil health and agricultural productivity.

Wildlife often ingests or becomes trapped in plastic debris, leading to injuries or death.

Plastic production and disposal generate greenhouse gas emissions, contributing to global warming.

Recently, the World Economic Forum's Global Plastic Action Partnership (GPAP) reached 25-country milestone, becoming the largest global programme tackling plastic pollution, now impacting over 1.5bn people.

Seven new countries - Angola, Bangladesh, Gabon, Guatemala, Kenya, Senegal, and Tanzania - join forces to scale systemic plastic waste manage

Microplastics have seen entering the food chain through seafood, salt, and even drinking water, potentially affecting human health

to tackling its root causes and advancing a circular plastics economy worldwide.

The growing community will continue to drive systemic solutions to key challenges such as advancing sustainable materials, strengthening recycling systems, tackling greenhouse gas emissions, and more.

The seven new countries bring fresh momentum and new perspectives to GPAP's mission of amplifying impact, enabling best practice sharing and strengthening national and international efforts to reduce plastic pollution. Central to GPAP's model are National Action Roadmaps - tailored, country-specific strategies informed by the network's collective experience.

These have already mobilised \$3.1bn in investments, created safer jobs for informal waste workers and supported countries in achieving measurable progress on sustainability and climate resilience.

"Reaching this 25-nation milestone is not just a celebration of numbers, it's a testament to the growing global determination to tackle one of the world's most pressing challenges," said Clemence Schmid, Director of GPAP, World Economic Forum.

"These partnerships are not just symbolic, they represent concrete commitments to rethinking how plastics are produced, managed and reused. Together we are charting a path towards a circular plastics economy that benefits people and planet."

To mitigate plastic pollution, combined global efforts coupled with innovative recycling technologies, policy reforms, and public awareness campaigns are essential.

Reducing single-use plastics, promoting circular economies, and developing biodegradable alternatives can certainly help tackle this growing crisis.

Landfill emissions such as methane - over 80 times more potent than CO2 in the short term - can be drastically reduced through GPAP's systemic approach to waste management.

By promoting circular systems, GPAP aims to contribute to cut emissions from the plastics sector while fostering economic growth through green jobs.

It is estimated that circular solutions could create up to 6mn jobs globally by 2030, with the plastics sector driving much of this transformation.

This marks a pivotal milestone in the fight against plastic pollution and solidifies GPAP as the largest global initiative dedicated



Trump 2.0: Crypto bet big on him in 2024. Can it cash in?

By David Sherfinski
Richmond (Virginia)

After pouring record sums of money into the 2024 US elections, the cryptocurrency industry is hopeful - if not certain - of a newly friendly reception from DC policymakers after what it perceived to be a hostile environment in the Biden administration.

Crypto-aligned interests pumped millions of dollars into campaigns for President Donald Trump and pro-crypto candidates, hoping he and a supportive Congress would enact industry-friendly regulations after dealing with dozens of enforcement actions from the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) under Biden.

On the potential policy priority menu is legislation that would offer clarity on crypto's place in the markets, a US-backed "strategic Bitcoin reserve" and legislation on stablecoins, which are cryptocurrencies whose value is tied to another asset.

Even with Republican majorities, Congress could well end up stymied over major new legislation. But crypto advocates are still welcoming new leadership at key regulatory agencies like the SEC, which they have criticised for being heavy-handed in targeting the industry.

"I think we're going to see movement both from the executive branch and through Congress," said Zack Shapiro with the Bitcoin Policy Institute, adding that he would be very surprised if there were not at least one or two comprehensive bills passed.

The Fairshake PAC, an outside political group that received major donations from key crypto interests like the platform company Coinbase, was one of the most

active of such groups in 2024. Shapiro noted "the effect that crypto (as) a political force seems to have had up and down the ballot in the 2024 election," including what he called "the stunning impact" of groups like the Fairshake PAC.

"I think that did not escape legislators' notice," he said. For its part, Trump's team suggested a new day will dawn on how the industry is governed.

"There has been an effort in the Washington bureaucratic swamp to stifle innovation with more regulation and higher taxes, but President Trump will deliver on his promise to encourage American leadership in crypto and other emerging technologies," Brian Hughes, a spokesman for the transition team, told *Context* days before Trump was sworn into office.

Trump was expected to sign an executive order creating a crypto advisory council, Reuters reported.

Stifling innovation?

At or near the top of the priority list is a legislative decision on how digital assets are categorised - a significant distinction that could determine whether tokens are regulated through an entity like the Commodity Futures Trading Commission (CFTC) or the SEC.

Crypto enthusiasts have long been looking for definition on whether coins and tokens should be classified as commodities, the purview of the CFTC, or securities, which would fall to the SEC and mean tighter reporting and registration requirements.

"Right now if you were to try and do a registered offering in token form, it's really unclear where and how those tokens can trade and what disclosures you need to make," said Shapiro.

Trump allies and crypto backers in Congress like Sen. Cynthia Lummis of Wyoming are also

keen on creating a US strategic Bitcoin reserve - an idea Trump appeared open to during a recent appearance at the New York Stock Exchange.

Proponents say the reserve would help cement the United States as a leader in the sector and help bolster the country's finances in the long run.

"Bitcoin is transforming not only our country but the world and becoming the first developed nation to use Bitcoin as a savings technology secures our position as a global leader in financial innovation," Lummis said in a statement when she unveiled the Bitcoin reserve bill.

Another issue is legislation that would provide a regulatory framework for how to treat stablecoins, or cryptocurrencies whose value is linked to another asset.

Shapiro said how much Congress is able to pass "is very much up in the air and is probably subject to some amount of jockeying within the industry based on different people's different priorities."

'House of cards'

While the industry might be pleased to turn the page on Biden-appointed officials like former SEC Chair Gary Gensler, consumer advocacy groups warn that a swing towards a more laissez-faire environment could open the door for scammers to flourish.

"I'm not apocalyptic, but I lived through the first administration of that guy, and I am not optimistic about anything that's consumer-friendly," said Ira Rheingold, executive director of the National Association of Consumer Advocates (NACA).

"I view crypto as a house of cards that the wrong blow of wind will knock down."

Rheingold's group was part of a team that sued the crypto platform

Gemini last year, alleging Gemini's user agreement shifts losses to its customers in violation of both federal and DC law.

Gemini did not respond to requests for comment on the lawsuit.

"If I was a legitimate cryptocurrency company, I would want regulation because I think regulation actually legitimises the business and gives people some protection," Rheingold said.

Still, he's unsure of how DC policymakers will approach things.

"From a cynical point of view, I can see how much money the crypto industry is pouring into Washington, so one would think that they have a chance at making something happen. But I honestly don't know," he said.

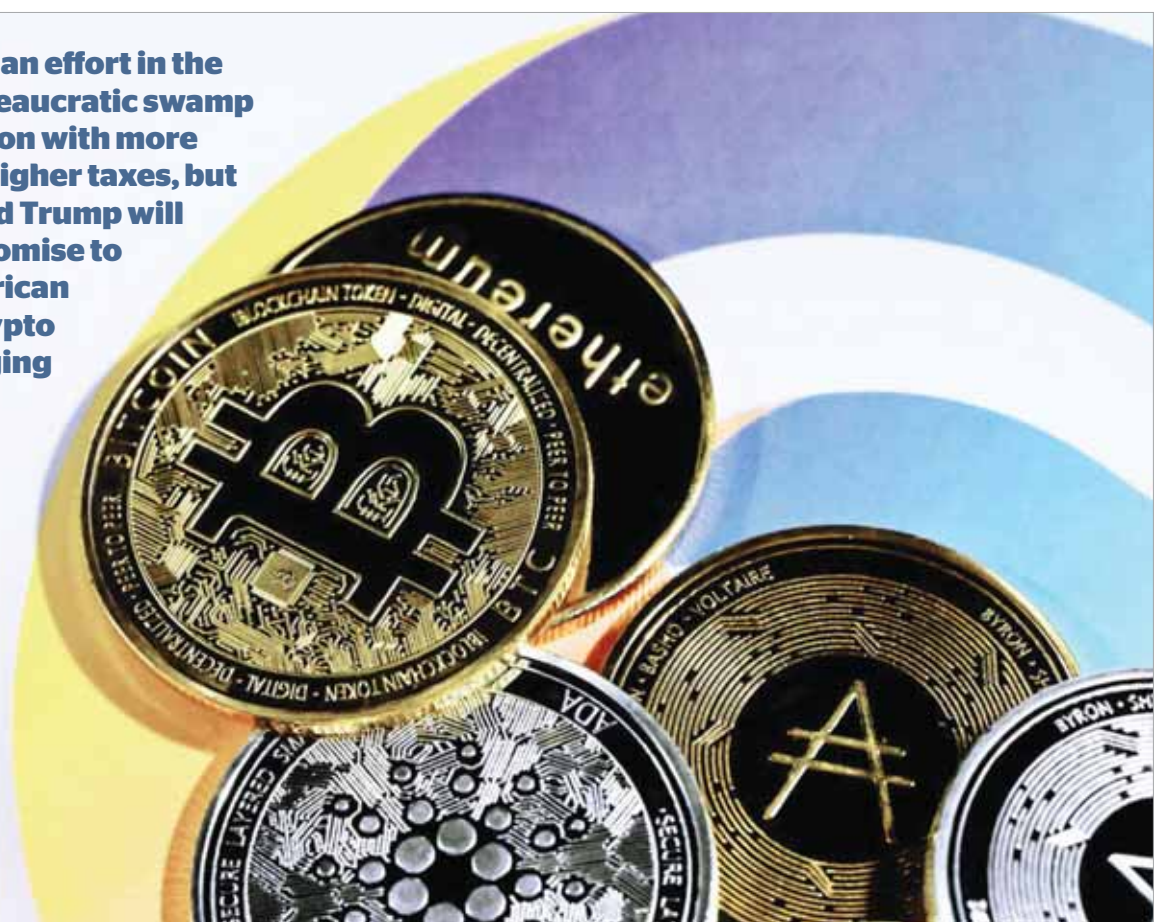
"Should something be done? Yes. But I'd rather nothing be done than regulations that legitimise an industry I have deep concerns about."

Alex Gladstein with the Human Rights Foundation said he is looking out for specific policies when it comes to making Bitcoin - which comprises most of the crypto market - more accessible for savings, to make payments and for Bitcoin mining.

"I think it's very simple: is America in 2028 going to be a better place to save and buy Bitcoin and join Bitcoin businesses than it is today?" said Gladstein, whose nonprofit group, among other things, operates a fund intended to promote the use of Bitcoin for human rights defenders in politically hostile countries.

"Or are you going to get debanked and are we going to be worrying about censorship and being deplatformed and things like that for being in the Bitcoin community? We're going to go one of two ways here!" - Thomson Reuters Foundation

"There has been an effort in the Washington bureaucratic swamp to stifle innovation with more regulation and higher taxes, but President Donald Trump will deliver on his promise to encourage American leadership in crypto and other emerging technologies," Brian Hughes, a spokesman for the transition team, told Context days before Trump was sworn into office.



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Afghans awaiting US resettlement feel betrayed

Reuters
Islamabad

A decision by President Donald Trump's administration to halt visa processing for refugees has caused uncertainty and shock at an English school for Afghans in Islamabad who are awaiting resettlement in the United States.

Normally enthusiastic students were quiet or crying in class after the news broke on Tuesday, said Sayed Hassib ullah, a 20-year old teacher whose application for resettlement in the US is in process.

Some feel betrayed, with many - including those who fled Taliban rule in Afghanistan - having already spent years in limbo.

"It was really a horrible moment for us. We have been waiting for almost three years and there is no hope anymore," he told Reuters at the school in Pakistan's capital.

The sudden delay has upended the plans of many Afghans in Pakistan and left them in despair after undergoing extensive vetting and making preparations for new lives in the US.

In an intermediate language class, about half of which had US visa applications in process, a 16 year-old girl broke down in tears.

"I feel very bad from this news," she said, unable to focus on her work - practising a list of English phrases for giving

formal presentations that was written on the class whiteboard.

She hopes to enrol in high school in the US after being barred from pursuing her education at school in Afghanistan.

The tutoring academy, which has roughly 300 students, is one of the few spaces available for studying for many Afghans waiting for US visas. They cannot legally work or formally study in Pakistan.

Shawn VanDiver, the founder of #AfghanEvac, the leading coalition of resettlement and veterans groups, said there were 10,000-15,000 Afghans in Pakistan waiting for special immigration visas or resettlement in the US as refugees.

Many have waited for years after being instructed when applying to travel to a third country for processing. For many the only option was Pakistan, which borders Afghanistan but, facing economic and security crises, began deporting tens of thousands of Afghans in 2023.

A spokesperson for Pakistan's foreign ministry did not immediately respond to request for comment on the US announcement. Nearly 1,660 Afghans cleared by the US government to resettle in the US, including family members of active-duty US military personnel, are having their flights cancelled under the order suspending US refugee programmes, Reuters reported on Monday.

One of Hassib ullah's students, Fatima, has no idea whether an official e-mail she received on January 14 - and seen by Reuters - seeking documents to proceed with

her family's travel arrangements for the US is still valid.

The 57-year old women's rights and development advocate who worked for years for US-funded organisations in central Daikundi province began learning English a few months ago.

She said she had previously never imagined leaving Afghanistan and that she and many others had trusted the US - which spent two decades leading foreign forces in Afghanistan, backing the now-collapsed government and spending billions of dollars on human rights and development programs.

"You supported us at that time and raised us up so we worked with you and after that you invited us to a third country (for visa processing) and now you are doing something like this," she said.

In addition to concerns about her own safety following her advocacy work, Fatima is particularly worried about her 15-year-old daughter. She hopes she can enrol in school in the US after years out of high school, and that her 22-year-old daughter can complete her engineering degree.

Many students and teachers said they had contacted UN agencies and the US embassy this week and were sharing any information they could find on the internet in Whatsapp groups. But there were few clear answers.

The US embassy and State Department did not immediately provide comment in request to a question from Reuters on



Afghan citizens, who were in the process for resettlement in the US, attend English language class on the outskirts of Islamabad, Pakistan, last week. (Reuters)

whether the new order would affect Afghans waiting in Pakistan for visas.

"We have been living here for three years with a hope of going to America to be safe but now when President Donald trump came... and told us we will not

process these case or maybe we will delay it, indeed you feel betrayed," Hassib ullah said.

"I just wanted to tell them respectfully that we have helped you and now we expect help back from you."

Slovak PM rejects calls to quit amid growing protests

Reuters
Bratislava

Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico (*pictured*) rejected protesters' calls for his resignation yesterday after tens of thousands demonstrated against his government's policy shift closer to Russia.

Around 60,000 protested in the capital Bratislava on Friday, organisers estimated, and media said in total around 100,000 had turned out for rallies in cities across the country, the biggest demonstrations since Fico returned to power in 2023.

The protests come after Fico privately travelled to Moscow in December to meet Russian President Vladimir Putin, a rare encounter for a European Union leader since Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022.

"The government can only be changed if there are elections," Fico said in interview with the public broadcaster yesterday when asked about the protests.

Fico's leftist-nationalist administration accused progressive opponents this week of planning to escalate protests to try to overthrow the government illegally. Opposition parties and civic groups organising protests reject the accusations.

Citing information from intelligence services, Fico has alleged, without showing evidence, there was a group of unidentified experts in Slovakia that had helped in protests against a pro-Russian leader in Ukraine in 2014 and Georgia last year.

He said yesterday a list of people



to be expelled was under preparation, without giving more details.

Protests were nearing levels seen in 2018 when the murder of an investigative journalist caused mass demonstrations and forced Fico's resignation during an earlier stint in office.

Critics say the four-time prime minister's ruling coalition is weakening democratic values, while shifting foreign policy away from EU and Nato allies and closer to Russia.

The civic group Mier Ukraine (Peace to Ukraine), which organised Friday's protests under the slogan "We are Europe", will hold more demonstrations on Feb 7.

Fico has defended his government's foreign policy saying it seeks good ties with all sides, and while critical of some EU policies he has said policy was still determined by EU and Nato membership.

His fragile three-party coalition, which won 79 of 150 seats in 2023 elections, will be tested next week with an opposition motion of no-confidence due for debate.

Zelensky hopes Europe, US will be involved in peace talks

Reuters
Kyiv

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky hopes Europe and the United States will be involved in any talks about ending his country's war with Russia, he told reporters yesterday.

At a joint press conference with President Maia Sandu of neighbouring Moldova, Zelensky said Ukraine also needed to be involved in any discussions on ending the war for such negotiations to have any meaningful impact.

"As for what the set-up of the talks will be: Ukraine, I really hope Ukraine will be there, America, Europe and the Russians," Zelensky said, later clarifying that no framework was yet established.

"Yes, I would really want that Europe would take part, because we will be members of the European Union," Zelensky said he believed US President Donald Trump could end the war, but he could do so only if he involved Ukraine in the talks.

"Otherwise it will not work. Because Russia does not want to end the war, while Ukraine wants to end it," he said.

Trump promised during his campaign that he would end the war within 24 hours of taking office, but his aides have since said a deal could take months. The US president has expressed willingness to speak to Russian President Vladimir Putin about ending the war.

On Friday, Putin said he would like to meet Trump to talk about



Moldovan President Maia Sandu (left) and Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky shake hands ahead of their meeting in Kyiv yesterday. (AFP)

Ukraine. He cited a 2022 decree from Zelensky barring talks with Putin as a barrier to negotiations.

At the press conference, Zelensky said he introduced this prohibition to stop Putin from forming other channels of communication with interlocutors in Ukraine. Zelensky said Russia was actively trying to do this before he signed the order.

Zelensky said Ukraine was ready to offer coal to Moldova, which is in the midst of an energy crisis after flows of Russian gas through Ukraine stopped at the beginning of this year. Most of Moldova is controlled by authorities in Chisinau, but a size-

able minority of the population lives in Transnistria, a region that broke away at the end of Soviet rule and was engaged in a brief conflict with the newly independent Moldovan state. The pro-Russian region, which has Moldova's only power station, is facing the brunt of an energy crisis after losing gas supply, warning that its supplies will soon be exhausted.

"Russia's latest move has been to orchestrate an energy crisis," Sandu told reporters in Kyiv, adding that electricity prices had shot up in territories controlled by her government, but that things were even worse in the breakaway area.

"Those living in the Transnistrian region of Moldova, held hostage by an unconstitutional regime backed by Russia for the past three decades, are now left in cold and darkness."

Transnistria is subject to daily power cuts of about five hours and shortages of heating in winter conditions.

Sandu said this was part of a calculated Russian strategy to sow chaos in Moldova and to facilitate the coming to power of a pro-Russian government, an apparent nod to parliamentary elections coming up this year.

Zelensky said Ukraine could supply enough coal to Moldova or to Transnistria to solve their energy problems and to drive electricity prices down by 30%.

"The absence of a crisis in Moldova is also (in the interests of) our Ukrainian security," Zelensky said, adding that Ukraine could send a team of specialists to facilitate the use of Ukrainian coal at Transnistria's power plant.

Sandu said it was up to Transnistrian authorities in the region's capital of Tiraspol to accept the aid.

Transnistria enjoys no international recognition and its self-styled president, Vadim Krasnoselsky, said this week that the thermal plant on its territory needed anthracite coal to operate and that the variety offered by Ukraine was unsuitable.

The region's official news agency, in a post on Telegram, noted Zelensky's renewed offer on Saturday, but added: "It is most likely that this is the same coal which is unsuitable for the power station."

Ukraine folk artists harness music to fight Russian 'assimilation'

A Ukrainian band is treating international audiences to their country's traditional folk music, spiced up with world music and some rap, with the stated aim of aiding the struggle against cultural "assimilation" of their country by its neighbour Russia.

Ukraine's DakhaBrakha ensemble starts the performance at the Parisian Cabaret Sauvage venue with the greeting "Good evening from free Ukraine", before singer Marko Halanevych, cellist Nina Garenetska, keyboarder Iryna Kovalenko and percussionist Olena Tsybulska launch into the evening's programme.

With identical traditional peasant blouses and layers of necklaces, the group's three women could pass for sisters. Their tall black hats resembling stove pipes, however, are just a fun prop with no actual roots in Ukrainian folklore.

"We've been suffering from Russia's assimilation policy for three hundred years," said Halanevych.

After "so many tragic episodes", added the trained

philologist, "it's a miracle that Ukrainian identity, culture and language still exist".

Much of modern Ukraine's territory was part of the Russian empire under the tsars and then the Soviet Union following the Bolshevik revolution.

Many Western analysts believe that President Vladimir Putin long dreamed of absorbing Ukraine into Russian territory even before the February 2022 full-scale invasion.

In conversation, the singer's fatigue becomes apparent. He admits to being tired, not just from the group's ongoing tour taking it to France, Switzerland and Luxembourg, but also from the strain brought on by Russia's war on his country. DakhaBrakha's concerts are interspersed with reminders of the conflict, and part of the proceeds go to the national war effort.

"We are aware of course that people in Europe are tired of hearing about it," said Halanevych. "We understand, and we don't judge."

After a two-year break due to the Russian invasion, DakhaBrakha, which has



Nina Garenetska from the Ukrainian folk music quartet DakhaBrakha speaks to the audience as she performs on stage at the Cabaret Sauvage in Paris last week. (AFP)

been around for two decades, resumed touring. Mostly abroad, but sometimes at home.

Last spring, the quartet performed in Dnipro in the east of the country - where the gig was interrupted three times by air raid sirens - as well as in Chernivtsi, Odesa and Vinnytsia.

Next month, it is planning its first studio session since 2020 in Kyiv, which they call "an important and symbolic choice" of location. The folkloric repertoire has seen a resurgence in Ukraine over the past decades, with ethnomusicologists often recording elderly women to preserve the heritage as

faithfully as possible.

But DakhaBrakha is not shy about lacing central European polyphonic traditions with thumping bass lines, distorted electric guitars and vocal lines akin to rapping.

Their concerts, which have taken them across Europe, the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, sometimes have moments of "disconnect" as news from home abruptly bursts into joyful performances via alarm signals from Ukraine flashing up on their smartphone apps.

"Each time we worry about our loved ones," said Halanevych. The quartet's frontman is the first to acknowledge that weaponising music may not be enough of a contribution to the war effort indefinitely, given that Ukraine is finding it increasingly difficult to recruit soldiers.

"We may need more people to take up arms or dig trenches," he said. "I am ready to defend my country."

Halanevych's brother Taras, 37, a journalist and sound engineer, already began his military training last month.

Musk on video at German far-right campaign event

Elon Musk made a surprise appearance during Germany's AfD (Alternative fuer Deutschland) election campaign event in Halle in eastern Germany yesterday, speaking publicly in support of the far-right party for the second time in as many weeks.

Addressing a hall of 4,500 people alongside party leader Alice Weidel, Musk spoke live via video link about preserving German culture and protecting the German people.

"It's good to be proud of German culture, German values, and not to lose that in some sort of multiculturalism that dilutes everything," Musk said.

Last week, the US billionaire caused uproar after he made a gesture that drew online comparisons to a Nazi salute during US President Donald Trump's inauguration festivities. Yesterday, he said "children should not be guilty of the sins of their parents, let alone their great grandparents," apparently referring to Germany's Nazi past.

"There is too much focus on past guilt, and we need to move beyond that," he said. Musk, who spoke of suppression of speech under Germany's government, has previously attacked German Chancellor Olaf Scholz on X.

For his part, Scholz on Tuesday said he does not support freedom of speech when it is used for extreme-right views.

Musk spoke in favour of voting for the far-right party, saying: "I'm very excited for the AfD, I think you're really the best hope for German fight for a great future for Germany," he told onlookers.



Snapshots from the event yesterday. PICTURES: Thajudeen

Lulu unveils 'India Utsav 2025' festival

Lulu Group has launched the vibrant "India Utsav" to celebrate India's 75th Republic Day, showcasing an extensive range of Indian foods, spices, authentic cuisines, and traditional ethnic wear.

The festival, according to a statement from Lulu, showcases the finest quality Indian food and the rich diversity of India's culture and heritage, while highlighting the quality in manufacturing

and innovation of Indian products among the local and expatriate communities.

The 10-day-long festival has been organised annually by LuLu Group across all its regions for the past two decades.

The festival was inaugurated yesterday by Indian ambassador Vipul at LuLu Hypermarket, D-Ring Road.

The event saw the presence of Qatari dignitaries, prominent



guests, representatives from Indian community organisations, officials from the LuLu Group, and a large gathering of expatriate communities.

Vipul said in his speech that it is an important occasion for India.

"This is the 75th anniversary of our republic," the envoy said. "Our constitution came into force on 26th January 1950. In these seven and a half decades, India has grown tremendously."

"One of the things that we always talk about is the strength of Indian democracy, which was on full display in 2024 when we had the largest of our elections on planet Earth," he added.

"As far as India-Qatar relations are concerned, we have had a wonderful 2024," the envoy continued. "We had the visit of our prime minister to Qatar in 2024, we had several visits by our national affairs minister, and we have taken the

agenda of our co-operation."

"We have historic and friendly relations between our two countries, on trade, on investment, on energy, on new technologies across the board," Vipul noted.

"I think our relations are going forward," the envoy said. "Businesses like LuLu are emblematic of this co-operation between India and Qatar on the trade and investment side."

"I would say that centuries ago, the relationship was based more on trade and people ties," Vipul stated. "All that can be seen here in LuLu, is the number of Indian products which are available, but more than that, an Indian business which is also bringing products from elsewhere in Qatar, which is such an integral part now of the Qatari economy."

He congratulated LuLu for also organising India workshops.

The festival offers a variety of food products, including organic items imported from different parts of India.

LuLu Group regularly imports over 4,000 items of Indian origin, encompassing popular fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG), LuLu

private label products, fruits, vegetables, packaged food products, household goods, kitchen essentials, traditional wear, and other garments, making them available throughout the year in all stores across the region.

Meanwhile, LuLu Hypermarkets have announced their highly anticipated "Buy 2, Get 1 Free" promotion set to run from January 23 to February 5.

This offer features great deals on a wide selection of international fashion brands.

"India Utsav" offers an exclusive display of these products at all LuLu stores, providing customers with access to a wide range of choices.

Moreover, LuLu Hypermarket's special focus has been placed on showcasing a variety of millets from India, with an exclusive corner dedicated to different types of nutritious grains.

The festival also showcases a vast selection of bakery products made from millet and freshly prepared hot foods, including biryani, curries, popular street foods, traditional sweets, and other delicacies.



The 10-day festival showcases the best that India has to offer. -Supplied pictures

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Announcement

The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change, in cooperation with the Ministry of Interior, announces the beginning of a survey and inventory of dangerous animals and creatures, in implementation of the provisions of Law No. (10) of 2019 Concerning Regulating the Acquisition of Dangerous Animals and Creatures.

The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change invites the owners and possessors of these animals and creatures, listed in the table attached to the law, to register them in the special register, using the form attached to the announcement, and sending the same form via e-mail: DP@mecc.gov.qa

Please note that **the deadline for registration extends for three months from the date of this announcement and ends on 22 April 2025.**

The Ministry emphasizes that the acquisition of dangerous animals and creatures without a license from the competent department is considered a crime punishable by imprisonment for a period not exceeding three years and a fine not exceeding (100,000 QAR), or one of these two penalties, in accordance with Article (8) of the Law.

This measure aims to enhance public safety and ensure compliance with the provisions of the law, thus contributing to the protection of individuals and the environment.

For inquiries or assistance, please call: 16066

Dangerous Animal and Creatures Inventory Form

Table of Names of Dangerous Animals and Creatures