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SPORT | Page 1

Arabian Gulf Cup: Qatar's young players can create history, says Qatar coach



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Amir condolences with president of Nepal

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani and His Highness the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani sent cables of condolences to President of Nepal Bidya Devi Bhandari on the victims of a plane crash in central Nepal, wishing the injured a speedy recovery. HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Khalid bin Khalifa bin Abdulaziz al-Thani also sent a similar cable of condolences to Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal. (QNA)

HMC to give free flu shots at DHFC from today

Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC) has announced that it is offering free flu vaccination at Doha Festival City (DHFC) from today until January 26, between 1pm and 9pm. "Don't underestimate the flu - get your free flu shot at Doha Festival City. Protect yourself, your family and your friends against the flu," HMC said in an announcement on social media.

HMC, Qatar BioBank launch Tissue Biobank

Phase one of the Tissue Biobank Service has been launched in Qatar, through collaboration between the Department of Laboratory Medicine and Pathology (DLMP) at Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC) and Qatar BioBank (QBB). Tissue biobanking is the process of collecting, processing, storing, and distributing human tissue samples for research purposes. These tissue samples are acquired from surplus tissue after surgical procedures or biopsies, and used to study a wide range of diseases and health conditions. **Page 2**

Iraq PM backs US troop presence

Iraqi Prime Minister Mohamed Shia al-Sudani defended the open-ended presence of US and other foreign troops in his country, in an interview published yesterday. "We think that we need the foreign forces," Sudani told *The Wall Street Journal* in his first US interview since taking office in October. US and Nato forces have been training Iraqi soldiers on how to fight the Islamic State group. "Elimination of ISIS needs some more time," Sudani added. **Page 6**

Nato hints at heavy weapons for Ukraine

Kyiv can expect more deliveries of heavy weapons from Western countries soon, Nato said yesterday, as President Vladimir Putin praised his forces after their claimed capture of a Ukraine town. Washington meanwhile condemned the missile attack on a tower block in the eastern city of Dnipro, as the death toll rose to 30. Nato Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said Ukraine could expect more heavy weapons following Kyiv's requests to its allies for the vehicles, artillery and missiles it says are key to defending itself. **Page 11**

5-star al-Attiyah takes honours at Dakar Rally

AFP
Dammam, Saudi Arabia

Qatari driver Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah yesterday won his fifth Dakar Rally driver's title and second in a row, with Argentina's Kevin Benavides securing his second motorbike crown.

The 52-year-old al-Attiyah won three stages and had more than an hour's advantage in the overall standings over Frenchman Sebastian Loeb, who also finished runner-up last year.

Al-Attiyah's Toyota teammate Lucas Moraes of Brazil finished third on his debut in the iconic test of endurance which reached its climax in Dammam, Saudi Arabia.

Al-Attiyah took the overall lead after the third stage, having built up a commanding advantage in the first week and deployed a safety-first strategy in the second half of the race.

"We just finished and I'm so happy. It was a difficult Dakar for everyone," said al-Attiyah.

"It's crazy to manage to defend my title. I'm very happy to win five times, and Mathieu (his co-driver Mathieu Baumel) four... Sorry, Mathieu!

"We didn't have to attack like crazy. We managed to get through the second week and win the Dakar at the end, that's what really matters."

Loeb gave it all he could as he won a record six successive stages in the second week. But the 48-year-old Frenchman had lost so much time on the first part of the race that it was a lost cause.

"After the beginning of the Rally we had we could not hope for better than this," said Loeb.

"Nasser was so consistent that he was unbeatable, he produced a brilliant performance without any mistakes."

Moraes - whose co-driver Timo Gottschalk was al-Attiyah's partner in his first win in 2011 - was proud as punch to be the first Brazilian to finish in the top three.

"It was important for the rally community in Brazil because it had never happened before," he said.

"I'm going to celebrate with all the Brazilian photographers."

The car category may not have had a lot of suspense about it but the motorbike title race more than made up for it with plenty of thrills and spills.

Benavides, the 2021 champion, edged out Australian Toby Price by 43 seconds with Skyler Howes of the United States finishing third.

Benavides - who celebrated his 34th birthday during the race - trailed two-time champion Price by 12 seconds entering Sunday's 14th and final stage.

He produced a sterling ride to win the stage, however, and post a time 55 seconds faster than his 35-year-old rival.

Benavides win will be a popular one, as he showed selflessness in stopping to aid a stricken rival Matthias Walkner in Saturday's penultimate stage.

"It's incredible to pull off the win at the end of this completely crazy Dakar, and with such a small gap," said Benavides.

"I'm also the first to win with two

different motorbike brands, and that makes me very proud."

Final positions (unofficial)

1. Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah (QAT)/Mathieu Baumel (FRA) Toyota GR DKR Hilux 45hr 03min 15sec
2. Sébastien Loeb (FRA)/Fabian Lurquin (BEL) Prodrive Hunter BRX 46hr 22min 04sec
3. Lucas Moraes (BRA)/Timo Gottschalk (DEU) Toyota Hilux Overdrive 46hr 39min 46sec*
4. Giniel de Villiers (ZAF)/Dennis Murphy (ZAF) Toyota GR DKR Hilux 47hr 32min 27sec*
5. Henk Lategan (ZAF)/Brett Cummings (ZAF) Toyota GR DKR Hilux 47hr 37min 38sec*
6. Martin Prokop (CZE)/Viktor Chytka (CZE) Ford Raptor RS Cross-Country 48hr 43min 59sec
7. Juan Cruz Yacopini (ARG)/Daniel Oliveras (ESP) Toyota Hilux Overdrive 49hr 30min 24sec
8. Wei Han (CHN)/Ma Li (CHN) SMG HW 2021 Buggy 49hr 32min 36sec
9. Sebastian Halpern (ARG)/Bernardo Graue (ARG) Mini John Cooper Works Buggy 49hr 45min 53sec
10. Guerlain Chicherit (FRA)/Alex Winocq (FRA) Prodrive Hunter BRX 50hr 25min 25sec
11. Christian Lavieille (FRA)/Valentin Sarreaud (FRA) MD Optimus Evo 4 50hr 45min 47sec*
12. Pierre Lachaupe (FRA)/François Beguin (BEL) MD Optimus 51hr 40min 32sec*
13. Isidre Esteve Pujol (ESP)/José-



Toyota's driver Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah (right) of Qatar and his co-driver Mathieu Baumel of France celebrate their victory after winning the Dakar Rally 2023, at the end of the last stage between between Al Hofuf and Dammam, Saudi Arabia, yesterday. Qatari driver Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah won his fifth Dakar Rally driver's title and second in a row today after the iconic test of endurance finished in Dammam, Saudi Arabia. (AFP Sport Page 1)

- | | |
|---|--|
| 13. Maria Villalobos (ESP) Toyota Hilux Overdrive 55hr 42min 50sec* | 21. Zitzewitz (DEU) Toyota Hilux Overdrive 81hr 55min 30sec |
| 14. Andrea Laffarja (PRY)/Ashley Garcia Chavez (PER) Toyota Hilux Overdrive 60hr 53min 45sec* | 22. Lionel Baud (FRA)/Remi Boulanger (FRA) Toyota Hilux Overdrive RE-TIRED - SS9 |
| 15. Yazeed al-Rajhi (SAU)/Dirk von | * denotes not registered for W2RC |

Italian cruise ship arrives on maiden Gulf tour



Italian Cruise Ship, 'Costa Toscana,' the flagship vessel of Costa Cruises, arrived at Doha Port yesterday as part of its maiden tour of the Arabian Gulf. Offering 3-7-day cruise itineraries around the region, the ship can accommodate around 6,500 passengers and features its own waterpark, 13 swimming pools and hot tubs, 13 restaurants and 19 entertainment lounges. The LNG-powered Costa Toscana's Doha debut is part of Qatar Tourism's 2022-2023 cruise season, which will see a total of 58 world-class cruise ships and four cruise liner maiden calls. **Page 12**

Qatar continues to be ranked safest country in the world

Qatar continues to be ranked as the safest country in the world by the Numbeo index, a database of user-contributed information about cities and countries worldwide.

This is the fifth year in a row that Qatar has claimed the top spot, marking a continuation of the distinctive position enjoyed by the country globally in terms of safety.

A total of 142 countries were covered by the Numbeo Safety Index by Country 2023, with Qatar ranking first with a score of 85.2.

The other countries in the top 10 are the UAE, Taiwan (China), Isle of Man, Oman, Hong Kong (China), Armenia, Japan, Switzerland and Bahrain.

On the other hand, Qatar is ranked 142nd in the Crime Index by Country 2023 with a score of 14.8. The Crime Index is essentially a list of the same countries (and cities) in reverse order, with the lowest-ranked places considered the safest.

In another recognition for Qatar in terms of safety, Doha continues to be ranked the second

safest city in the world by the Numbeo Safety Index by City 2023. The Qatari capital has been ranked second for the sixth year running.

Doha's score in the 2023 index, which has surveyed a total of 416 cities, is 85.5. Abu Dhabi in the UAE tops the list of safest cities with 88.8, while the others in the top 10 are Taipei (Taiwan, China), Ajman (UAE), Sharjah (UAE), Quebec City (Canada), Dubai (UAE), San Sebastian (Spain), Bern (Switzerland) and Eskisehir (Turkey).

Conversely, Qatar's ranking in the Numbeo Crime Index by City 2023 is 415 with a score of 14.5. Abu Dhabi is 416th with 11.2.

The Numbeo database has been publishing annual reports since 2009, based on the crime rates in countries around the world. The index of crimes is measured according to the laws of the countries, as there are acts that constitute crimes in some countries while they are not deemed crimes in some other nations, which gives a real measure of the crime rate in countries in accordance with applicable laws.

8,000 to run at 'Doha Marathon by Ooredoo 2023'

Ooredoo, a staunch supporter of sporting events in Qatar, announced yesterday preparations for the 'Doha Marathon by Ooredoo 2023' which will have as many as 8,000 people running on January 20.

Moza Khalid al-Muhannadi, director CSR, Sponsorship and Media at Ooredoo, at a press conference announced the updates for this year's marathon, especially the new and improved race course.

The event is a complete sell-out in all categories, the official explained. The kick-off is at Parade Pavilion, The Amir's Grandstand - Al Corniche, with runners then heading towards Katara, Lusail, and back to Al Corniche.

The full marathon will start at 6.15am followed by the half marathon at 7am. The 10km category will start at 8.30am, while the 5km category will start at 9.30am. Finally, the 1km category for kids will start at 10.30am.

The total prize pool this year is around QR1mn for all categories, while all participants who finish



Mohamed Issa al-Fadala and Moza Khalid al-Muhannadi announcing details of the 'Doha Marathon by Ooredoo 2023' yesterday. **PICTURE:** Shaji Kayamkulam

their category will get a medal. Al-Muhannadi also announced that the event will include a raffle draw offering an SUV as a prize. All participants who cross the finish line in the 5km, 10km, 21km, and 42km categories will enter the raffle draw to win a Volkswagen T-Roc.

Al-Muhannadi said: "We're rightfully proud that the Doha Marathon by Ooredoo is consistently one of the most popular events on Doha's calendar year after year, but this pride must be shared with our invaluable sponsors, without whom we would be unable to present the race."

"We work tirelessly to find, establish, and develop partnerships with entities who share the values for which we are known, and also share our commitment to supporting sports and the communities in which we operate. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to all the sponsors whose names appear alongside ours at this year's Marathon, and we look forward to putting on yet another incredible event for Doha and for everyone taking part. Best of luck in the race." **To Page 2**

All 72 onboard feared dead in Nepal air crash



At least 68 people were confirmed killed yesterday when a domestic flight of Yeti Airlines crashed in Pokhara in Nepal. The plane, an ATR 72 twin-engine turboprop, which took off in Kathmandu for Pokhara, was carrying 72 people including crew. It is feared all on board died, sources said.

HMC, Qatar BioBank launch Tissue Biobank

Phase one of the Tissue Biobank Service has been launched in Qatar, through collaboration between the Department of Laboratory Medicine and Pathology (DLMP) at Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC) and Qatar BioBank (QBB).

Tissue biobanking is the process of collecting, processing, storing, and distributing human tissue samples for research purposes. These tissue samples are acquired from surplus tissue after surgical procedures or biopsies, and used to study a wide range of diseases and health conditions.

Tissue biobanking allows researchers to study diseases and health conditions at the cellular and molecular level. By analysing tissue samples, researchers can gain a better understanding of how diseases develop and progress, and they can identify potential targets for new treatments.

Dr Einas al-Kuwari, chairperson of Department of Laboratory Medicine and Pathology at HMC, said the launch of the programme is an exciting achievement and the result of the strong and long-lasting partnership



Dr Einas al-Kuwari



Dr Nahla Afifi

between the two organisations.

"The implications of this feat are numerous and substantive as more than 300,000 diverse surgical pathology samples from 2008 and up to date will be at the disposal of the researchers," Dr al-Kuwari said. "This will inevitably lead to further advancement in medicine and in the delivery of services to our valued patients. It is so inspiring to see how this will now enable researchers to access vast numbers of tissue samples in a smooth and robust manner to

what is tailored to the needs of the services and the patients."

While paraffin embedded tissue material will be available for researchers in Phase I, teams are getting the infrastructure ready for Phase II to store fresh tissue material, that will further enhance the pool of samples available in the tissue biobank, and therefore enhance research potential.

Dr Nahla Afifi, director of Qatar BioBank said tissue biobanking helps to advance medical research and improve

patient care. "By providing researchers with access to high-quality tissue samples, tissue biobanks like this one can support the development of new therapies and diagnostic tests that can benefit patients," Dr Afifi said.

"Enabling researchers to study human tissue samples directly can provide more accurate and relevant results. Through collaborations on important projects like the Tissue Biobank, we are building capacity in medical research in Qatar which will lead to new insights and advances."

All researchers who are interested in tissue samples are advised to contact Qatar BioBank in the first instance to start the application process by sending their inquiries to: qbbresearch@qf.org.qa

Once the application is approved by DLMP and tissue availability is confirmed, these will be included in the research proposal. Afterwards, researchers will have to apply for all necessary approvals from HMC IRB (Institutional Review Board), MRC (Medical Research Centre) and others, and submit their application on ABHATH website.

QU, QNB sign MoUs to strengthen co-operation



QU and QNB officials at the signing ceremony.

Qatar University (QU) signed two MoUs with QNB Group, one of the largest financial institutions in the Middle East and Africa, to enhance co-operation and benefit from the joint capabilities.

Dr Khalid al-Khater, vice president, Administration and Financial Affairs, QU and Adel Ali al-Malki, senior executive vice president, QNB Group Retail Banking, signed the MoU.

The signing of the two MoU's comes in the background of the ongoing co-operation of QU with QNB in the continuation of the bank's campus branch and

providing support and sponsorship for the university's various events.

Dr al-Khater said: "We are pleased to sign this agreement with QNB, which will benefit both parties. QNB will generously sponsor research or student activities at the university and continue operating the branch on the campus."

Dr al-Khater also noted the deep relationship between the two institutions. QNB contributed to the construction of QU's Ibn Khaldoun building, which has hosted many events. In 1997, QU and QNB signed an agreement lasting 18 years, which

was then renewed for an additional ten years.

Al-Malki said: "We are pleased to work with one of our most important partners, Qatar University, and to strengthen our long-term relationship with such an educational institution that enjoys a prominent position locally and internationally."

"We are confident that this co-operation will serve our vision to improve the level of services provided to students, academics and staff at the university, benefiting from the joint capabilities to serve the vision and objectives of both institutions," he added.



Participants in the launch ceremony.

QF's Difi launches advocacy campaign for mandatory pre-marriage counselling

Qatar Foundation's Doha International Family Institute (Difi) has launched an advocacy campaign that calls for mandatory pre-marriage counselling programmes in Qatar, a statement said.

The campaign, titled 'Plan & Prepare', was launched based on regional and international best practices as well as assessment reports of similar programmes, in addition to a critical analysis of the official statistics on divorce rates in Qatar and the proposed solutions.

In a ceremony to launch the campaign, held at Multaqa (Education City Student Center), Dr Sharifa Noaman al-Emadi, executive director of Difi, said: "Mandatory pre-marital counselling programmes are Difi's recommendation for our Qatari youth to ensure a happy and stable marital life."

An interactive discussion session saw participation from Difi's partners and guests, who addressed the importance of supporting and advocating for the campaign, specifically discussing how various countries around the world tackled the problem of divorce.

The case of Malaysia was highlighted as an example in this field, where a unit was allocated to providing training for couples before marriage, and which was followed by the establishment of specialised centres providing a "marriage license" for pre-marital programme attendees, which had notable impact on reducing divorce rates in the country.

Based on statistics by the Planning and Statistics Authority, divorce among the Qatari population mainly occurs during the early years of marriage, with 42.1% of divorces

happening within the first year of marriage, and 58.2% within the first four years. In contrast, 8% of divorce rates happen between 5-9 years of marriage, which is comparable with international and regional rates.

Identifying the root causes of the early marriage breakup, Difi conducted a study in collaboration with the League of Arab States that evaluated marital relationships in the first five years of marriage in the Arab world.

This study indicated that incompatibility, difference in personalities, financial and economic burdens, and parental intervention are all factors in early marital breakdown.

Compared to other countries, Qatar is one of the Arab countries that has high divorce rates, but compared to the world, its rates are among the lowest, the statement added.

Qatar presented a role model by organising unprecedented World Cup: NHRC chief

HE the Chairperson of the National Human Rights Committee (NHRC), Maryam bint Abdullah al-Attiyah, has underlined that Qatar presented a strong lesson to the whole world and served as a role model by organising an unprecedented World Cup with global recognition.

HE al-Attiyah described the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 as a unique edition that began with a dazzling opening, and concluded with unparalleled creativity, whether in terms of the overall organisation, or in terms of the contents and messages that it was able to deliver to the world with diplomacy and superior ability.

In an interview with *Al Sharq* newspaper yesterday, HE the NHRC chairperson said Qatar harnessed all capabilities to organise a successful World Cup without problems or violations, and despite the organised smear campaigns that it has been subjected to, since it won the bid to host the World Cup.

HE al-Attiyah added that Qatar dealt with the conspiracies with a conscious strategy, well-studied diplomacy and skill, and stressed that those campaigns promoted misleading, irresponsible and baseless allegations.

She noted that the Qatar World Cup succeeded in changing the stereotype about the Middle East, which was formed in the West due to historical and ideological reasons, and said the Arab person appeared in a way that differed from the image entrenched in the minds of the West, and most importantly, the Qatar World Cup promoted Islam, rituals and noble human values.



HE Maryam bint Abdullah al-Attiyah

HE al-Attiyah noted the annual strategy of the NHRC's activities, which aim to protect and promote human rights at the national and international levels.

She revealed that the committee will focus in 2023 on the centrality of climate change, and is expected to organise an international conference with its partners in the United Nations on human rights and climate change in February.

She added that the committee's new logo will be present in all its activities in 2023, celebrating the 20th anniversary. HE al-Attiyah said the NHRC office at Hamad International Airport reflects the extent of commitment to human rights, reaffirming that Qatar welcomes European or UN missions, and everyone who wants to know the reality in Qatar.

She explained that the NHRC organises frequent field visits to inspect workers' conditions at work and housing sites. Regarding the NHRC's participation in the activities of Qatar 2022, she said the committee's

World Cup-related activities started before the official events, through training courses and exhibitions, including the Human Rights and Football exhibition, which was organised inside and outside the country and which was held throughout the tournament period at the Sheraton Hotel Park.

The NHRC was also keen on preparing the community to receive the great sporting event, through the convening of the first National Forum for Human Rights, which was organised in September to discuss the role of law enforcement institutions in protecting human rights during the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022.

The forum aimed at highlighting the efforts carried out by various state institutions and ways to integrate sport within the culture of human rights.

She added that a specialised working group was formed to carry out awareness-raising and monitoring of everything related to human rights, in application of the guidelines that govern dealing with sporting events in accordance with an approach that respects human rights, in addition to co-ordination with the authorities concerned at the local and international levels, follow-up on the process of implementing the guidelines on the ground, and ensuring the empowerment of the most vulnerable groups to enjoy the right to sport, especially persons with disabilities.

In response to a question about the accusations regarding labour and human rights in Qatar, HE al-Attiyah said that Qatar has been subjected to unprecedented criticism and attack through systematic campaigns

intended to thwart its hosting of the World Cup, however Qatar was aware of all these conspiracies and did not pay heed to them, and rather proceeded with its tight organisation and arrangements in great silence.

The pace of the attack accelerated near the opening of the World Cup and increased in intensity. The malicious parties did not stop their attempts and are still continuing, she said.

HE al-Attiyah noted that 2021 witnessed the issuance of many legislations that are of particular importance in the promotion of human rights in Qatar. Of these, the most important was the Shura Council Election System Law, in implementation of the Qatari Constitution, which confirmed the state's keenness to continue efforts to ensure and promote human rights by creating the necessary legislative environment.

She pointed to a number of important laws, including the Labour Law which regulated the work of recruitment offices and reviewed contract development in more than one field, including health protection, social protection, wage protection, and human rights protection. In addition, there was explaining and analysing the provisions of the Labour Law and the successive ministerial decisions issued for its implementation, as well as other related legislations, such as Law No 12 of 2015 regulating the entry and exit of expatriates.

On the NHRC's keenness to attract Qatari cadres to work in the legal field, she said Qatar's universities provide a large number of graduates with their various specialisations, including law graduates. (QNA)

PHCC's electronic portal for research launched

Primary Health Care Corporation (PHCC) launched the electronic portal "Research" to provide a comprehensive system for the submitted research applications to facilitate the researchers' procedures and to save time and effort on the approvals required to accomplish their works.

The PHCC said the launch of the portal represents and extension of the digital transformation for its services, specially those that will provide essential tools with high efficiency to researchers on the approvals, in addition to providing safe monitoring for their studies.

Executive Director of the Clinical Affairs Directorate at the PHCC Dr Hanan al-Mujallil said the portal

offers an easy-to-use, flexible and informative platform for the researchers so that they have a single access point for all information related to research submission and are able to track their research plans according to appropriate timelines. The PHCC realises that scientific research constantly produces new findings that can contribute to an efficient health care. al-Mujallil pointed out. She noted that combining research data systematically in policies and health practices lead to improvements in advanced healthcare provided to the public, predicting that the portal will be a method to encourage researchers and to help them conduct quality researches in Qatar. (QNA)

8,000 to run at 'Doha Marathon by Ooredoo 2023'

From Page 1

Mohamed Issa al-Fadala, Qatar Athletics Federation president, said: "The preparations for the marathon have been completed after everyone made great efforts to present the best possible event. We invite everyone to come along, whether running or spectating, to enjoy the wonderful atmosphere, especially since the race this year will also witness the participation of a number of elite runners. Good luck to all the participants in the race, and we hope everyone has an awesome day."

Ooredoo is hosting the Doha Marathon by Ooredoo each year, in partnership with Qatar Athletics Federation. Platinum sponsors for this year's Doha Marathon by Ooredoo include Qatar Tourism, Q-Auto, and Holding Group, while Qatar Airways and Seashore are Gold sponsors. Silver Sponsors are Al Rayyan Water, QIC, and Communication.

Price of desert truffles soars on low supply

The prices of imported desert truffles are currently high in the Qatar market, local Arabic daily *Arrayah* reported.

For instance a box of about 1.25kg of Saudi truffles cost QR1,800, with those from Libya costing QR1,300, and from Algeria at QR1,200.

These prices were seen for the prime quality types called Zubaidi. However, the other type called Khalas were sold for lower prices for the same amounts, for instance the Saudi origin sold for QR950, and those from Algeria for QR700.

The sellers attributed the high prices to the limited imports as it is the beginning of the season. Most customers have opted to wait until the prices drop to reasonable levels and when supply improves.

The sellers expect that the prices will drop considerably within the next fortnight when more supplies of different types hit the market from Algeria, Tunisia and Libya.

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry has allocated 10 selling points for truffle retailers at the traditional market. Desert



truffles, locally known as Fagaa, is a natural subterranean fungi that grows under the sands of the desert during the rainy season. It

is considered a rare delicacy and cooked and served in different ways as part of the local traditional cuisine.



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Khaled Abdulraoof Al-Rasheed
Zena Al Razem
Khaled Mohammed Al Tamimi *with First Class Honours*
Dana Alaa Awadallah
Nour Aref Ayche
Mohammed Basim Sadaqat Basim
Noor Binladn
Amro Essam Elsabagh
Seifeldin Essam Elsabagh
Amna Abdullah Gedle
Kaamil Mohammad Hendricks

Ahmed Kombar
Pratham Mahendru
Najeh Majdi Albustami
Sari Mohammad Mohomad *with First Class Honours*
Mirna Ahmed Mustafa

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Yousef Abdulqader Almulla
Razan Eihab Aboushakra
Abdulaziz Fareed Mohammad Al-Abdulla
Aref Ibrahim Alfayad
Ghaliya Al-Attiya
Maryam Al-Haddad
Enjood Abdoon Alhajeri
Abdulrahim Al-Heidous
Abdulaziz Al-Hemaidi
May Al-Hitmi
Rashid Al Hitmi
Manahil Ali Ibrahim
Mohammed Al-Jaber
Hamda Khamis Al-Jabor

Abdulaziz Al-Jassim
Sara Khalid Alkhalaf
Maha Al-Khater
Salem Khalifa Alkubaisi
Asma Al-Kuwari
Latifa Al-Maadeed
Amna Al-Malki
Mohammed Abdulla Almana
Alreem Al-Mohannadi
Noor Yaqoub Almulla
Ahmad Ibrahim Al-Nasr
Nasser Al-Nassr
Saoud Al-Saadi
Antsar Al-Safadi
Aysha Yousef Khalaf Al-Sahel
Fatima Hood Alsayed
Yousef Yacoub Al-Saygh
Mohammed Hussain Al-Siddiqi
Lana Khalifa Al-Subaey
Amna Yousuf Alsulaiti
Dana Al-Sulaiti
Aisha Abdulla Al-Thani
Khalifa Al-Thani

Mohamed Hamad M. H. Al-Thani
Monera Saud Al Thani
Saeed Baghazal
Martin Culjkovic *with First Class Honours*
Fatma Abdullah Gedle
Ahmed Abdulhameed Heji
Tarek Jweihan
Aisha Kandoshi
Fahd Khalaf
Alzubair Mohamed Maqsa
Ahmed Wael Yassin Mohamed
Maya Hazim Murad
Mohammed Ismail Qasemi
Jassim Mohammed Ranjbar
Anjala Farhath Sadath
Alhanoof Salem Alboinin
Limar Basem Shahrour
Ahmad Hamed Sharbak
Nabeel Mahmoud Swar
Abdulla Waleed Al Baker
Noof Yaqoub M M Al-Yousef

POSTGRADUATE GRADUATES FROM 2022

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HIGHER DEGREES AND AWARDS

TAUGHT PROGRAMMES

MASTER OF SCIENCE

INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

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Fatima Al-Ali *with Commendation*
Radoa Al-Ansari
Alya Al-Attayah
Lolowa Al-Buainain
Noor Al-Darwish
Hend Hassan Alemadi
Hassan Nasser H Th Al-Hadad *with Commendation*
Ahmad Naji Alhassan
Amna Abdulaziz Al-Jaber
Mohammad Al-Jaser
Abdulla Ali Aljassim
Aljazi Mohammad Al-Jehani
Aliya Al-Kabbi
Hamda Al-Khaldi
Afraa Eisa Al Kuwari
Aliaa Al-Kuwari
Mohammed Al Kuwari
Reem Al-Kuwari *with Commendation*
Shahed Al-Mahmalji *with Distinction*
Sara Al-Majid *with Commendation*
Bashayr Al-Malki
Hessa Al-Mana
Amna Mohammed Almannai
Hamad Al-Mannai
Maha Al-Mannai *with Commendation*
Maryam Al-Mannai *with Commendation*
Noor Al-Mulla
Lolwa Alnaimi
Mohammed Al-Naimi
Hamad Al-Nasr
Afra Al-Qahtani *with Commendation*
Reem Al-Qahtani
Mohammed Al-Ramahi
Maryam Abdulla Alsulaiti
Noora Abdulla Binown *with Commendation*
Amina Ahmed Fakhroo
Abdullah Hemadi *with Commendation*
AyeH Hosseini
Sameeh Iftikhar *with Commendation*
Dina Jaber
Fatemah Jasemi *with Commendation*
Ahmed Al Kalla *with Commendation*
Fahad Khalil
Ahmad Mansour Al-Haidar
Mubarak Mubarak
Suzan Said Mubarak
Mohamed Nasser Al Muhsin
Aya Soueid
Israa Sherif Fahmy Zaky Kabel *with Commendation*

INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Bdour Fakhr Sayyed Ahmad *with Commendation*
Feras Alasil
Fatma Almarri *with Commendation*
Safeya Sayer F Al-Anzai *with Commendation*
Najla Abdulrahman Al-Awad *with Commendation*
Yara Majed Al-Badriyeh *with Commendation*
Ahmed Essa Al-Baker *with Commendation*
Ali Abdulaziz Al-Hammadi *with Commendation*
Mohammed Al-Hetmi
Abdulrahman Khalifa SD Al-Kuwairi
Alanoud Al-Meer *with Commendation*
Mai Al-Najjar *with Commendation*
Aysha Al-Sarami *with Commendation*
Hamad Salem Alshekill *with Commendation*
Huda Naeimi *with Commendation*
Dana Obaid *with Commendation*
Hamda Radi *with Commendation*
Alshaima Tolefat *with Commendation*
Dalal Najeeb Yaqoob
Maysa Yaseen *with Commendation*

MASTER OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

Maha Aboudaoud *with Commendation*
Saleh Abuirshed *with Commendation*
Eman Khalid Abujrass *with Commendation*
Hana Abu-Nada *with Commendation*
Soha Ahmad *with Commendation*
Mohammed Eisa Abdulla Alabduljabbar
Sultan Abdulla Sultan Al-Ali *with Commendation*
Omar Al-Ansari
Areege Al-Assi *with Commendation*
Wedad Al-Bader *with Commendation*
Majdi Sofian Albaghdadi *with Commendation*
Zainab Al-Baker *with Commendation*
Maryam Ahmad Alboainain *with Commendation*
Marah Al-Bustami
Osama Al-Ejji
Ibrahim Abdulla I A Al-Emadi *with Commendation*
Raed Mohamed Alfwakhiry
Rouda Alghanim
Fatma Thani Al-Haddad *with Commendation*
Mohammed Al-Hammadi *with Commendation*
Ali Mohd Al-Heidous *with Commendation*
Aisha Al-Henailtem *with Commendation*
Jawaher Al-Hilal *with Commendation*
Eman Yehia Mohamed Ali
Dana Rachel Llamado Al-Jaber *with Commendation*
Noor Yaqoub Darwish Al-Jaidah *with Commendation*
Eiman Abdulla Al Khayat *with Commendation*
Mohammed Al-Kubaisi *with Commendation*
Tariq Mohammad Omar Al-Kurdi *with Distinction*
Omar Hamad K A Al-Kuwari *with Commendation*
Maha Al-Mahmoud *with Commendation*
Aljohara Mohammad Almana
Fatema Al-Mannai *with Commendation*
Hamad Mohammed Al-Mannai *with Commendation*
Hind Al-Maraghi
Maha Salem Almarri
Wadha Al-Marri *with Commendation*

Yousuf Al-Muzafar *with Commendation*
Maryam Al-Nisf *with Commendation*
Ghadah Mahdi Alqahtani *with Commendation*
Mohamed Al-Qubaisi *with Commendation*
Abdulla Nasser Al-Saadi *with Distinction*
Abdulhadi Al-Shahwani *with Commendation*
Mansoor Mubarak H A Al-Shahwani *with Commendation*
Jassim Al Souror
Juhaina Al-Sulaiti *with Commendation*
Noor Al-Sulaiti *with Commendation*
Noor Alsulaiti *with Commendation*
Tamader Al-Sulaiti *with Commendation*
Mohammed Jassim M S Al Sultan *with Commendation*
Mashael Ali Al Thani *with Commendation*
Tamim Fahad Al-Thani *with Commendation*
Reem Al-Wadaani *with Commendation*
Noor Bader M Alyahri Alyafei *with Commendation*
Abdulrahman Al-Yami *with Commendation*
Tala Amer Alzawaydeh *with Distinction*
Noor Ashkanani *with Commendation*
Ayesheh Ali Daryae *with Commendation*
Lama Ghalayini *with Commendation*
Tehaa Hamad Al-Muhannadi *with Commendation*
Mohammad Jihad Hasan
Amin Kabbara *with Commendation*
Fatemeh Hussein Karami Zadeh
Rajesh Kunath *with Commendation*
Huda Mohamed A M Mohamed
Mahasin Ali Osman
Lisa Beezette Reynolds *with Commendation*
Mohammed Samir Shafiq
Syed Hassan Shah *with Distinction*
Mohammed Shereef *with Commendation*
James Sikes *with Distinction*
Nivine Tarabay *with Commendation*
Fatima Khalid Telfat *with Commendation*
May Akram Yaseen *with Commendation*
Nayef Abdullateef Yousef *with Commendation*
Fatema Yusuf *with Commendation*

LAW

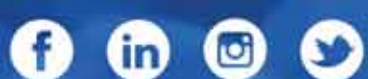
HIGHER DEGREES AND AWARDS

TAUGHT PROGRAMMES

MASTER OF LAWS

INTERNATIONAL COMMERCIAL LAW

Maha Abdulkarim
Talal Abdulaziz Alemadi *with Commendation*
Mariam Nabil Alfakhroo *with Distinction*
Aisha Zayed Alkhayareen
Nasser Saad Al Muhanadi *with Commendation*
Reem Fahad Alobaidan
Noora Ibrahim Alsada
Sulaiman Mohammed Alsouid
Aisha Mohamed Al Thani *with Commendation*
Ahmed Samir Elwazery
Ziad Kassem Halat
Amjad Ismail Hamoud *with Commendation*
Siddharth Baladevan Nair *with Commendation*
Alanood Suwaidan



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UN-Habitat official hails Qatar's efforts to achieve SDG

QNA
Doha

The Executive Director of the UN Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), Maimunah Mohd Sharif, has praised Qatar's efforts in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), especially in implementing a new urban agenda in parallel with its recent hosting of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022.

In an interview with Qatar News Agency (QNA), Sharif said that she was briefed on the achievements and urban development projects, such as modern mass transit projects, open green spaces, and urban services that constitute significant progress toward achieving the indicators of Goal 11 of the SDG.

She noted the progress in the field of preventive and psychological care in various sectors, including the early detection of disease and the health coverage reaching the level of full inclusion by 100%, which is considered a remarkable progress.

She pointed out that Qatar is working towards 70% of food security during 2023 as Qatar National Vision 2030 adopted the promotion of the SDG.

It is worth noting that Qatar was ranked first in the list of safest and most crime-free countries in the Arab region and the world in



Maimunah Mohd Sharif

2017, 2019, and 2020, which constitutes a major progress.

She believes that with the rapid urbanisation in Qatar, there is a room for co-operation where the UN-Habitat can support local authorities and stakeholders in their efforts to implement the SDGs and the New Urban Agenda, as well as promote sustainable and inclusive urban development.

She said that UN-Habitat hopes to expand co-operation with the Ministry of Municipality to make progress in building Urban Observatories to support urban data and evidence-based policymaking.

Regarding the UN Human Settlements Programme view of the achieved SDGs in the Arab world, Sharif stressed that there are positive indicators and setbacks around the region, not only

regarding Goal 11 but the whole SDGs.

Many countries are on the right track to achieving goal four (Quality Education), goal seven (Affordable and Clean Energy), and Goal 13 (Climate Action), while other countries showed moderate performance increases across many of the other SDGs.

She believes that several Arab countries have taken measures to empower local administrations, especially in implementing the New Urban Agenda.

Countries like Algeria, Tunisia, and Palestine have adopted measures to move towards decentralisation and build the capabilities of local authorities, while Egypt has developed a central co-ordination mechanism that focuses on bridging the gap between different regions.

In this regard, she indicated that a number of Arab countries monitor the implementation of the SDGs at the local level through Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs). The first VLRs in the Arab region was launched in Amman, Jordan, and more cities like Agadir, Morocco; Ramallah, Palestine; and Tunisia are working on developing their VLRs.

According to the 2022 SDG index, and the rates related to the Arab region, most countries in the region show a decline or stagnation in goal eleven (Sustainable

Cities and Communities), which can be explained by the conflicts experienced by low-income countries in the region and populations affected by conflicts and natural disasters.

She said that countries of the Arab region were repeatedly described as hotspots of future climate change negative effects.

Many of these climate change effects have begun to emerge, such as droughts, floods, and extreme heat.

These effects are just a few of many examples as they exacerbate the existing social, economic, and environmental vulnerabilities, acting as drivers of resource insecurity and displacement in vulnerable countries and those affected by conflicts.

She said that the region is already home to 12 of the world's most water-scarce countries and has some of the highest levels of dependence on food imports.

Despite all that, the Arab region still has a great opportunity to accelerate the implementation of Goal 11 and the other SDGs through the ability to access technology, innovation, and environmental awareness for the youth segment that reaches 60% (under 25 of age), in addition to the initiatives of sustainable urban development and clean energy investments, which are seen as major catalysts for accelerating the 2030 Agenda.



Qatar Charity starts building Al-Attiyah Hospital in Sudan

Qatar Charity (QC) has announced the start of the implementation of the Al-Attiyah Hospital project in Sudan, which will be the largest of its kind in the southern countryside of Omdurman and will provide various medical services.

The hospital will have obstetrics and gynaecology services, a dialysis centre, and a surgical and intensive care facility, in addition to diagnostic radiology and emergency services.

The hospital's total area is nearly 20,000sq m, and the built-up area is about 3,026sq m. The hospital is expected to benefit 250,000 people from Khartoum State, White Nile, and North Kordofan States.

The Acting Federal Minister of Health of Sudan Haitham Mohamed Ibrahim said that "Al-Attiyah Hospital project is being

implemented with the generous contribution of Qatar, through QC, and we rely on it at the Ministry of Health to provide health care services to people in the southern countryside of Omdurman."

The minister expected that the hospital will contribute to reducing the pressure on the service outlets in the heart of Khartoum, as it is an extension of the ministry's approach to achieving comprehensive coverage and access to service for people.

The project is one of Qatar Charity's continued interventions to support the health system in Sudan, as part of its constant keenness to implement qualitative development projects to serve the neediest groups in the various states of Sudan.

Since the opening of its office

in Khartoum, Qatar Charity has completed more than 100 health projects in nine states.

Health authorities in the southern countryside of Omdurman thanked Qatar Charity for its efforts to build Al-Attiyah Hospital, which will be a great service for the people of the region who desperately need the various health services, which are expected to be provided by the hospital.

Ajeeb al-Hadi, one of the notables of the area where the hospital is being established, said that this project will cover the deficit and need of 80 villages in the region that lack the necessary health services, especially on the border with the White Nile and North Kordofan states, and will ease congestion at the Omdurman Hospital, which is difficult to reach in light of the high cost of transport. (QNA)

HBKU centre announces winners of Entrepreneurship Programme Fund

Hamad Bin Khalifa University's (HBKU) Innovation Centre has announced the first five winners of its Entrepreneurship Programme Fund.

Each awardee will receive kick-starter funding of QR100,000 to advance their entrepreneurship projects. The five awardees are: IQemoQarar, SUNPave, ISalati, Qoot Qatar, and Q Green.

IQemoQarar - Majed Hadid, PhD student in Logistics and Supply Chain Management graduate, College of Science and Engineering (CSE), for an artificial intelligence-based decision-support application tool that uses

clinical and patient health data to address booking, scheduling, and workload issues to meet the standards of cancer treatment services in Qatar.

SUNPave - Mohamed AlGammal, technical lab co-ordinator, Texas A&M University at Qatar (Tamuq), for a revolutionary patented solar panel technology that generates as much energy as existing solar panels with 10-15% less energy costs (with even more savings in some applications) without the need to dedicate land areas, disturb landscapes or build high frames.

ISalati - Dr David Yang, as-



Dr Saad Shannak

sociate professor, CSE, for an EdTech patented interactive platform that aims to enrich children's spiritual and social lives

by engaging them in a commonly practised activity - the Islamic prayer - with the help of artificial intelligence and social networking technologies.

Qoot Qatar - Dr Saad Shannak, scientist, Qatar Environment and Energy Research Institute (Qeeri), for an innovative market research and decision-making support tool that addresses different layers of the challenge of food security and supply. It also supports managing logistics and supplies for sustainable products, and facilitates linking points of demands with food suppliers.

Q Green - Dr Ameni Boumaiza, scientist, Qeeri, for an online trading platform for green energy trading between consumers and prosumers that will offer a secure, convenient, and robust trading market for people and organisations who intend to consume or sell renewable electricity.

Dr Shannak said: "Qoot Qatar strives to present an indispensable mechanism to support the backend logistics and supply chains that are now vital for delivering on the long-lived promise of a more sustainable planet."

Speaking on behalf of the EdTech project, Dr Yang said:

"It's fundamentally important to employ the best of what AI has to offer in strengthening our youth's spiritual journey. AI technologies can help underscore the importance of self-awareness and deploy new - and improved - processes to achieve this intended goal."

The EPF aims to support Qatar Foundation (QF) entrepreneurs in realising their industry-driven innovations and is exclusive to participants of the Education City Innovative Entrepreneurship Programme, managed by the Innovation Centre.

The five winners were selected

from the 15 entrepreneurs who took part in the first round of the Entrepreneurship Programme Fund, among them faculty, scientists, students, and senior administrators from CSE, Qeeri, QF, and Education City partner universities including Tamuq, Georgetown University in Qatar, and Weill Cornell Medicine - Qatar.

Building on the insights and practical skills they developed during the training, the five funded projects will now develop their business ideas further and have a chance to pitch these at a Demo Day in mid-2023.

QATARGAS OPERATING COMPANY LTD

Tender Invitation

No.	TENDER NUMBER / DESCRIPTION	TENDER ISSUE PERIOD	TENDER FEE (QAR)	TENDER BOND (QAR)	TENDER CLOSING DATE
1	SUP/C/FMD/5897/22 Indoor Plant Maintenance Services	15/01/2023 to 23/01/2023	0	0	06/02/2023

Scope of Work:
Contractor shall provide maintenance services for Indoor Plants and Pots available at various offices of Company located in Doha and Ras Laffan Industrial City (RLIC) for a period of 5 years. In addition, Contractor shall also supply and install the new plants and pots based on Company requirement on call off basis.

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

Place for Tender Collection and Bid Submission:
ITT document for this tender will be available in Qatargas website under Suppliers tab >Current Open Tenders. The bids shall be submitted through the Qatargas online platform (SMART by GEP).

The World's Premier LNG Company
www.qatargas.com.qa



Dr Khalifa bin Jassim al-Kuwari, left, with the Saudi Haj ministry official.

Qatar, Saudi sign deal to facilitate Haj

The Saudi Ministry of Haj and Umrah has signed an agreement with the delegation of Qatar's Ministry of Endowments (Awqaf) and Islamic Affairs related to the arrangements for the Haj season 1444 AH, on the sidelines of the Haj and Umrah services expo Haj 2023 Conference and Exhibition, local Arabic daily *Arrayah* reports.

Within the developmental measures that Saudi Arabia offers to improve the experience of the guests of Al Rahman in Haj and Umrah. The agreement includes the quota of Qatar pilgrims, the ports, and means of arrival and departure. As well as organisational instructions that enhance the safety and

comfort of pilgrims from the moment of preparation for the journey of a lifetime until leaving the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Dr Khalifa bin Jassim al-Kuwari, adviser to the Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, said: The agreement is a good opportunity for great work, and it included very comfortable items, indicating that the Haj expo 2023 is a great service value for a very honourable work. It brings together all companies and service agencies related to Haj under one umbrella. This greatly facilitates the work of the institutions that manage Haj affairs in their countries, and co-ordination with the competent authority in the Saudi Ministry of Haj.

QATAR FERTILISER COMPANY

INVITATION TO TENDER

QAFCO ANNOUNCES THE FOLLOWING TENDER

TENDER NO.	DESCRIPTION OF WORKS	TENDER FEE (QAR)	TENDER BOND (QAR)	TENDER FEE RECEIPT SUBMISSION DATES	TENDER CLOSING DATE
RFQ-369156	OVERHAUL TWENTY-FIVE (25) SEMI-HERMETIC CARRIER COMPRESSORS	500/- (Non-refundable)	Not Applicable	16.01.2023 17.01.2023 18.01.2023 19.01.2023 22.01.2023 23.01.2023 24.01.2023	01.03.2023
RFQ-369157	OVERHAUL ELEVEN BITZER COMPACT SCREW COMPRESSORS	500/- (Non-refundable)	Not Applicable	16.01.2023 17.01.2023 18.01.2023 19.01.2023 22.01.2023 23.01.2023 24.01.2023	01.03.2023

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

- During the period this tender is offered, the interested bidders shall first deposit appropriate Tender Fee amount in cash (Cheque will not be accepted) into Company's following Account at any QNB branch:
 - Account Name : QATAR FERTILISER COMPANY (QAFCO)
 - Account Number : 0013-025828-058
 - IBAN : QA51QNB0000000000013025828058
 - Bank Name : QATAR NATIONAL BANK
- The interested Bidders shall mention their company's name and Tender Number on the payment receipt provided by the bank and submit it as Tender Fee receipt.
- Besides the Tender fee receipt (which should have the Tender Number and bidder's name clearly mentioned on it), interested bidders shall also submit a copy of the valid Commercial Registration, an authorization letter from their company with the name, telephone, fax and e-mail ID of the focal point for this tender (**Very Important**) during the submission of Tender Fee Receipt for ensuring electronic receipt of the Tender Document.
- Tender Fee Receipt along with the specified documents shall be submitted to purchase@qafco.com.qa on the dates indicated above, after payment of Tender Fee (nonrefundable).
- After submission of the above documents to the above email, Tender Document will be provided through an electronic platform separately after the last date of Tender Fee Receipt Submission Date.
- For any queries related to non-receipt of the tender documents after the last date of Tender Fee Receipt Submission Date, you may contact at purchase@qafco.com.qa or on 44227797
- Technical & Commercial details and Submission Procedures will be specified in the Tender Documents.
- The Company will not consider any offer without the enclosure of the Tender Bond.
- Bids shall be submitted at QAFCO Tender Office, between 0930 - 1100 hours during the Holy month of Ramadan and 0930 - 1130 hours and 1230 - 1400 hours, of any working day of the Company, on/before the "Tender Closing Date".

Toyota Dream Car Art Contest to end on Jan 31

The 16th Toyota Dream Car Art Contest organised by Abdullah Abdulghani & Bros Co (AAB), in association with Toyota, is getting a good response from children across Qatar.

The competition began on November 24 last year and concludes on January 31, 2023. AAB's Toyota showroom at City Center Doha is getting a large number of drawings every day, AAB has said in a statement.

The competition is open to children residing in Qatar across three age groups: under 7 years, 8-11 years and 12-15 years. Dream Car is a global competition that allows emerging youth talents to unleash their creative imagination and express their ideas in shaping the future of the transportation sector.

"At AAB, we believe in the power of creativity and design to change the world and build a better future for everyone. The Toyota Dream Car Art Contest creates an opportunity to take this belief forward and continue the passion for creating amazing experiences. We are proud to support the next generation of creators by offering them a platform to explore and develop their ideas with expert assistance, together with the opportunity to showcase their designs," the statement explained.

The top three artworks from each age category in the Qatar National Contest will be announced on the Toyota Qatar website and prizes will be awarded to the winners. Both original artworks and digital data will be acceptable. The recommended size is A3 or tabloid size. (A4, quarter and octavo sizes are also acceptable)

Any drawing material can be used, such as colour pencils, markers, crayons or paints. Multiple submissions are allowed from the same person; however, only one prize will be awarded per person.



The artworks that will not be accepted are as follows:

- Collaborative artwork drawn by multiple individuals
- Artwork created by a person other than the participant
- A piece with incomplete entry forms or missing information
- Drawings fetching photographs
- Drawings that resemble famous paintings and previous Toyota Dream Car Art Contest artworks
- Drawings that include trademarked characters, logos and specific goods
- Submissions that have previously been released, submissions that have been entered in other contests, and submissions that infringe on a third party's copyrights.

Application forms and rules & regulations of the competition can be found on the Toyota Qatar website at <https://www.toyotaqatar.com/dream-car-contest>

All drawings should be submitted to the Toyota Showroom City Center Doha

branch (ground floor) on or before January 31.

• **National Contest:**
1. Artworks entered are judged as the Qatar Contest (National Contest). The Top 3 excellent artworks are to be selected from each category.

2. The top 3 places in each category in the Qatar Contest (National Contest) will be submitted for the World Contest that will be held in Japan.

• **World Contest:**
1. In the World Contest, these entries selected from each country and region will be judged by a jury panel, where award winners will be selected.

• **Meca (Middle East & Central Asia) Contest:**

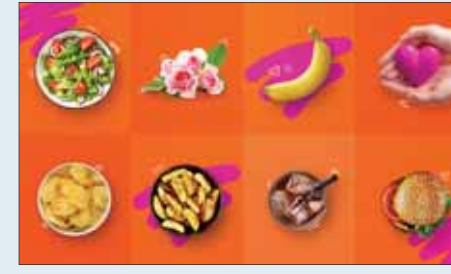
The Meca Awards will be selected from among the entries submitted in accordance with the 16th Toyota Dream Car Art Contest entry terms and conditions.

R K Murugan, AAB CEO, highlighted the keenness of AAB and Toyota Motor Corporation to sharpen imagination and creative thinking among young people.

"We believe that children are our future and that their dreams are important. That's why we hold the Toyota Dream Car Art Contest - to encourage creativity and inspire kids to chase their dreams. We hope that by drawing their dream cars, they'll have fun and realise just how vital their dreams are. As a manufacturer, Toyota is committed to supporting children's dreams and believes in their importance," he said.

"Qatar has seen distinguished participation in the past editions of the competition through many promising drawings, and we are always happy with what young minds offer in terms of their visions about the future of mobility," the statement added.

talabat customers in region donate more than \$3.3mn for virtual charities in 2022



During 2022, talabat customers in the region donated more than \$3.3mn across 33 different virtual charities in 2022, a statement said yesterday.

It was also last year that talabat announced its biggest partnership to date by announcing Cristiano Ronaldo, five-time Ballon D'or winner and one of the most recognisable sporting icons on the planet, as its official Brand Ambassador.

Having Ronaldo, the highest all-time international goal scorer who played (and scored) for the fifth time in the FIFA World Cup, marked 2022 as an exciting year for the tech leader.

As the year drew to an end, talabat, the region's leading local tech platform reviewed 2022, highlighting multiple customer ordering trends, donations and rider initiatives across the region.

In 2022, eating healthier has been a priority for people across the region, and numbers show that salads were ordered more than 10mn times on the talabat app. However, people also still ordered and enjoyed a burger with potato wedges and a soft drink later in the evening hours.

When it comes to talabat Mart, the company's Q-commerce grocery offering, customers' top three favourite items to order were chips, snacks, and water last year. However, eating healthy also prevailed with bananas continuing in 2022 as the most popular fruit three years in a row, with more than a million orders delivered - and one customer alone ordering 21kg.

Throughout 2022, talabat continued to grow within the #Tech4Good space, facilitating more than \$3.3mn in customer donations to 33 virtual charities across six markets. Additionally, talabat was the biggest contributor to its parent company Delivery Hero's 10mn meals milestone - with more than 4.6mn meals donated by talabat alone. talabat's achievement is part of Delivery Hero's global food donation programme to fight world hunger, including a flagship partnership with the World Food Programme's ShareTheMeal initiative.

Customers were incredibly generous in giving back to their community, with one customer donating more than 450 times in 2022 (an average of 1.5 times a day), and the most generous day of the year being July 8, the first day of Eid al-Adha, where talabat facilitated more than \$130,000 of donations from customers in one single day.

As part of its commitment to bringing a positive impact, talabat launched multiple initiatives to support communities in need, fight hunger and to take action against climate change.

In 2022, the company contributed to Delivery Hero's carbon footprint report for the first time - which we believe is a first in our industry in the region, and it participated in COP27,



the global conference uniting countries, NGOs and private companies towards collaboratively driving the climate change agenda. At the conference, talabat highlighted its climate action strategy and commitment towards sustainability.

talabat continuously prioritises the safety of riders who use the platform, and as part of this commitment multiple initiatives were launched across the region. One of those was 'Road Safety Week', a regional quarterly initiative, during which several on-ground interactive sessions were hosted with dedicated talabat patrollers and fleet captains, and in collaboration with local traffic authorities, universities, medical institutions and government entities.

talabat also took several further steps towards the safety and well-being of riders during the warmer months. Through the company's summer initiatives, riders were equipped with cooling summer gear, and 48 rider buses and 31 shaded waiting areas were launched across the region, offering riders an air-conditioned and shaded space to spend their breaks in - which saw over 200,000 visits recorded in the summer.

In addition, talabat's restaurant partners supported the initiative and launched nearly 4,000 indoor waiting areas for riders picking up orders across the region. Lastly, customers made the best use of talabat's in-app rider tipping feature this year, with one generous customer tipping one rider more than \$290 for their dedicated work.

These include some of talabat's most notable initiatives throughout the year, as the company continuously aims to play an integral role in bringing a positive impact to the communities it is part of, and to bring customers innovative tech for their everyday life.

The talabat app can be downloaded from the iOS App Store, Google Play Store or Huawei App Gallery.

Qatar gives priority to promoting children's rights and protection

■ GCC countries celebrate Gulf Children's Day

QNA
Doha

The Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) member states mark the Gulf Children's Day on January 15 each year, stemming from their consolidated belief that they represent the youth of tomorrow and protectors of homeland who should be perfectly brought up by instilling the religious, national and social principles in their spirits.

The GCC states celebrate this day in recognition of their interest in educating them to be a vibrant extension of humanitarian customs and traditions which the region's countries and people boast of.

Subsequently, Qatar gives an increasing and absolute priority to the question of promoting children's rights and protecting them at local, regional and international levels, and ensuring full implementation of the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child which was ratified by Qatar on April 3, 1995.

Qatar's national endeavours, along with its engagement in international efforts dedicated to promoting and protecting the child's rights primarily stem from the principles enshrined in the permanent constitution of the state, which stated that the state's foreign policy underpins the principle of respect for human rights and repudiation of violence.

The permanent constitution of Qatar prioritised a special care for childhood and motherhood and underscored that family is the core foundation of society, as the law regulates the means of protecting the family, safeguarding motherhood, childhood and ageing accordingly.

Qatar's interest in child's rights and protection is substantiated by the establishment of several governmental and non-governmental institutions relevant to protection of child rights and implementing everything related to the provisions of the international convention.

The Qatar National Vision 2030 has vital themes relevant to a child, specially in the area of education, capacity development, as well as all aspects of preventive and therapeutic health care, considering the various requirements of a child.

Qatar believes in the vital and fundamental role of education in protecting the children and empowering them in realising their rights, in addition to their transition to be effective decision-makers through building essential capabilities to obtain job opportunities in the future.

The interest of Qatar in education has not confined to merely afford such a right to its citizens and the residents on its land, but went beyond that to encompass the adoption of international and regional initiatives that aim to offer good education for millions of underprivileged children due to poverty, armed conflicts,

disasters and discrimination.

In this context came the launch of the "Protect Education in Insecurity and Conflict" programme, which is a founding member of the Global Alliance to Protect Education from Attacks, as well as the "Educate a Child" programme, which succeeded as an unprecedented initiative in enrolling 10mn children in school through the implementation of more than 65 projects in 50 countries, in partnership with 82 global partners.

Qatar has a consolidated partnership with Unicef in carrying out numerous projects and programmes that has saved children's lives and defended their rights.

Celebrating Gulf Children's Day aims to bring a smile on the faces of innocent children, raise their level of interest and sense of life, raise awareness of proper education methods for children, and avoiding violent methods that lead to psychological complexes.

It also aims to instil concepts of Gulf identity in children, focusing on the rights guaranteed by law in various GCC countries, disseminating legal and societal culture to introduce their rights, raising awareness among children about the importance of the media, teaching them to clearly express their opinions, demands and needs through the media, and improve their conditions in the GCC countries, leading to excellence.

The celebration of Gulf Children's Day includes many national events and activities. Children wear national dresses and carry flags of their respective national identities.

On this occasion, institutions, schools, educational centres, and institutions related to children organise various events and provide children with information about their Arab and Gulf origins.

The historical ties and connections between the Arab Gulf countries are also presented while showing the most important resources that exist in these countries.

The celebration of Gulf Children's Day is considered an occasion to commemorate children, so that they become a contributing part of building a strong, constructive, creative, generous, and effective society, without detaching from their Gulf heritage, values and principles.

By allocating a Gulf Children's Day, the GCC countries work to raise awareness of proper education methods for children and highlight their rights, the most important of which are health and education.

The GCC Statistical Centre pays great attention to children through the issuance of many booklets and animated films to educate children about the Gulf spirit in an entertaining and objective manner that is suitable for the target age group and to instil in children Gulf unity.

Ministries join hands to promote Gulf identity among children



Some of the participants at the celebration.

The Ministry of Social Development and Family (MSDF), in co-operation with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, organised the Gulf Children's Day celebration at the Social Development Centre at The Pearl.

The celebration of this occasion comes with attention directed to the children in the Gulf, in order to create a special international day for them, which is an ideal opportunity to instil patriotism, and to enhance their national and Gulf identity.

Several educational, artistic and recreational activities were held during the celebration, which facilitated the introduction of children to the customs and traditions of each Gulf country, in addition to experiencing wearing of traditional Gulf clothing and raising of flags that embody



the national identity. The participating children were also provided with important basic information about Gulf roots

and origin, and their environment. On this occasion, the Head of the Family Development Department at the Ministry of Social Development, Hadeel Ali al-Ajeel, said in a statement to Qatar News Agency (QNA): "The celebration of Gulf Children's Day, which falls on Jan 15, comes to confirm that this stage is considered one of the most important stages in human life", and indicated that the main purpose of this celebration is to bring a smile on the faces of children, and to enhance the feeling of close social distances in which the Arab Gulf countries coexist.

For their part, a number of parents of the participating children expressed their great pleasure over the organising of the celebration, and said that it is an occasion to emphasise the interest and care of children. (QNA)

Qatar Museums invites bid for ice cream kiosk at NMOQ

Qatar Museums (QM) has launched an open call inviting food and beverage (F&B) operation of an ice cream kiosk at the National Museum of Qatar (NMOQ). Bidding operators are invited to present a concept that suits NMOQ's persona and identity. Interested operators may send their company profile along with the proposals on the design for the kiosk (including dimensions); menu (including prices); photos of packaging, staff uniforms and credentials including commercial registration, company ID, and sponsor ID. Participating bidding operators for the ice cream kiosk will be evaluated according to the strength of concept in terms of, but not limited to menu, prices and creativity. In addition,



deliberation will be based on design and setup, product quality and social media presence. A solid experience in running F&B outlets will also be taken into consideration. For detailed requirements, interested operators may send

their inquiries by e-mail to BDFFP@qm.org.qa or by calling +974 31060040.

Applications may be submitted at <https://qm.org.qa/en/calendar/open-call-ice-cream-kiosk-vendor-in-nmoq/> on or before January 22.



Palestinians slam 'execution' at checkpoint in West Bank

AFP
Rammun

Palestinian officials yesterday condemned what they labelled the "execution" of a Palestinian man at an Israeli checkpoint in the occupied West Bank.

The ministry slammed the "heinous execution" of Ahmad Kahla, 45, who was shot dead in the morning by troops near the village of Silwad north of Ramallah.

The Israeli military said soldiers opened fire during a "violent confrontation" in which an unnamed person had "attempted to take hold of one of the soldiers' weapons". The man's son, Qusai Kahla, said he was in the car with his father when they were stopped at the checkpoint. "Soldiers came and they sprayed pepper spray on my face and pulled me out of the car," the 18-year-old said at the family home in Rammun village.

"I don't know what happened after that," he said. "I found out from my uncle that my dad was killed." Israel's military, meanwhile, said the Palestinians had refused to stop and soldiers used "riot dispersal means in order to detain one of the suspects in the vehicle". Kahla was shot in



Palestinian women march during the funeral procession of Ahmad Kahla carrying posters depicting him, in the village of Rammun in the occupied West Bank, yesterday.

the neck, the Palestinian health ministry said.

The army said no troops were hurt. A military spokesperson said they had no information to add regarding the weapons used to stop the vehicle, or whether the civilian was unarmed when he was killed.

The official Palestinian news agency Wafa reported soldiers forced Kahla out of his vehicle before shooting him at "point

blank" range. Dozens of mourners gathered for Kahla's funeral yesterday, an AFP correspondent said, with some calling for revenge. The widow, Zahiya Kahla, said her husband was not carrying a weapon when he was killed.

"He didn't have a knife with him," she said. "He had food with him and was going to work." Kahla's death brings to 13 the number of Palestinians killed in

the territory so far this month, the majority shot by Israeli forces, according to an AFP tally.

The Palestinian foreign ministry said the Israeli leadership had made it "easy for soldiers to kill any Palestinian without them posing any danger to the occupation soldiers". Israel's most right-wing government in history was sworn in last month, including ministers known for their anti-Palestinian remarks

who have taken over key powers in the West Bank. The rising toll this month follows the deadliest year in the West Bank since United Nations records began in 2005.

A surge in bloodshed last year saw at least 26 Israelis and 200 Palestinians killed across Israel and the Palestinian territories, according to an AFP tally.

More than 150 of the fatalities were in the West Bank.

Bomb kills 10 at DR Congo church, militants suspected

AFP
Beni

A bomb killed at least 10 people and wounded 39 others after ripping through a church in eastern DR Congo yesterday, in an attack blamed on suspected militants.

Details of the attack are hazy, but Congolese military spokesman Antony Mualushayi said the "terrorist act" happened in a Pentecostal church in North Kivu province's Kasindi, a town on the border with Uganda.

A Kenyan was arrested following the bomb blast, he added, although the perpetrator of the attack in the turbulent region remains unclear. The explosion killed at least 10 people and wounded 39, Mualushayi said, revising up an initial death toll of five.

Both tolls were provisional, he said. Joel Kitaua, a local civil-society figure, also put the death toll at 10. Kitaua said 58 people were wounded.

AFP was unable to independently confirm the numbers of casualties.

The DRC's communications ministry said on social media that the attack was apparently carried out by the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) - which the Islamic State group claims as its affiliate in central Africa.

The ADF is one of the deadliest of the over 120 armed groups in eastern DRC, many of which are the legacy of regional wars that flared at the turn of the 21st century.

It has been accused of slaughtering thousands of

Congolese civilians and carrying out bomb attacks in Uganda. ADF operatives have also planted bombs in towns in North Kivu in the past.

Mualushayi said investigations were ongoing into yesterday's church bombing.

In 2021, the United States labelled the ADF a "foreign terrorist organisation" with links to the Islamic State group.

The militia is active mainly in North Kivu and neighbouring Ituri province.

The same year, a joint Congolese-Ugandan military operation began targeting the ADF inside the DRC. But attacks have continued.

A report by independent experts for the UN Security Council, released in December, said the ADF had "continued its geographic expansion" despite the Congolese-Ugandan military operation, killing at least 370 civilians since April 2022.

It also warned that the ADF was changing tactics: opting for "more visible and more lethal" bomb attacks in urban areas.

In April last year, for example, a woman detonated a suicide vest in a bar in North Kivu's capital Goma, according to the independent UN experts.

Six people died in the attack and 16 more were wounded.

Congolese President Felix Tshisekedi placed North Kivu and Ituri under a so-called state of siege in 2021 in a bid to stem the violence, with military officials replacing civilian administrators.

The measure has also largely failed to stop attacks against civilians.

Eight dead in Somalia bombing claimed by insurgents: police

AFP
Mogadishu

Police said yesterday that eight people were killed in a roadside bombing claimed by Al Shebaab in central Somalia where a major offensive is underway to retake territory from the militants.

The attack occurred on Saturday afternoon in Buloburde, a city in Hiran district where government forces and clan militias have been battling the Al Qaeda-linked insurgents since the middle of last year.

The bomber detonated a car laden with explosives near an administrative building, said Abdullahi Mohamad, a local police commander.

"Five people were killed on the spot, while three others died

overnight in hospital," he said yesterday, adding the bomber had been planning to destroy the city's main bridge before re-directing the attack at a civilian area.

Witnesses said the explosion damaged buildings and the city's main mosque.

"I saw the bodies of five people.

Two were elders coming out of the mosque," said Muhidin Sokorow, who witnessed the blast.

Separately, police said a car bomb was detonated in Jalaqsi, another town in Hiran, but only the attacker died. A second attack was foiled and the suspect detained trying to flee a vehicle packed with explosives, police said.

Al Shebaab claimed responsibility for all three attacks in

a message transmitted via its communication service.

The militants have been waging a bloody insurgency against the frail internationally-backed central government for 15 years, carrying out attacks both in Somalia and neighbouring countries.

In recent months, the army and local clan militias have retaken swathes of territory in the centre of the country in an operation backed by US air strikes and an African Union force.

But the insurgents have frequently retaliated with bloody attacks, underlining their ability to strike at the heart of Somali towns and military installations despite the offensive.

Nineteen people were killed in twin car bombings in Mahas, a town in Hiran, earlier this month.

Iraq PM backs US troop presence

AFP
Washington

Iraqi Prime Minister Mohamed S al-Sudani defended the open-ended presence of US and other foreign troops in his country, in an interview published yesterday.

"We think that we need the foreign forces," Sudani told *The Wall Street Journal* in his first US interview since taking office in October. US and Nato forces have been training Iraqi soldiers on how to fight the Islamic State group. "Elimination of ISIS needs some more time," Sudani added. His comments are significant because the parties that back him and control parliament are aligned with

factions which are very hostile to the United States. Iraq also depends on Iran for natural gas and electricity. The United States has about 2,000 troops stationed in Iraq to train and advise Iraqi forces.

Nato has several hundred troops there, also in a non-combat role. Sudani said Iraq wants to have good relations with both the United States and Iran. "We strive for that," he said. "I don't see this as an impossible matter, to see Iraq have a good relationship with Iran and the US."

Sudani also faces a populace hit hard by an economic crisis and eager for a better life. His visit to Tehran in late November was marked by promises of stronger cooperation on economic and security matters.

Catholic priest burned to death in Nigeria

Gunmen burned a Catholic priest to death and shot and injured his colleague in northwest Nigeria yesterday, police said, the latest violence raising concerns about security ahead of an election next month, Reuters reported from Maiduguri.

Nigerians will vote for a new president on Feb 25 but kidnappings for ransom and killings by armed gangs in the north have led to fears that polls may not be held in some areas. The motive for the latest attack was not immediately clear but gunmen have previously targeted priests in the north. Wasiu Abiodun, police spokesperson for Niger state, said in a statement that armed men torched the residence of Father Isaac Achi, of Saints Peter and Paul Catholic Church, in Paikoro local government area, after failing to gain entry around 3:00am. Father Achi was burned to death while another priest identified as Father Collins, who was at the house, was shot and injured as he tried to escape.

Togo's opposition holds rally

AFP
Lome

An alliance of seven opposition parties in Togo held a peaceful rally Saturday in the capital Lome, after two years of bans due to Covid restrictions or for security reasons.

The West African nation and neighbouring Ghana, Benin and Ivory Coast are facing a growing militant threat spilling across their northern borders from Niger and Burkina Faso. Supporters of the Dynamique Monseigneur

Kpodzro (DMK), which includes the different opposition parties and with six civil society groups, gathered in Be Kodjindji, one of their strongholds.

A few police officers patrolled nearby streets, but there were no incidents reported. The DMK also organised a rally last November in Vogan, 67 kilometres north of Lome.

"I have a feeling that we are getting closer to our goal of liberating this country," said DMK co-ordinator Brigitte Adjagmagbo-Johnson.

"We have shown that it is now possible to organise rallies in Lome and everywhere in Togo."

Tourists surge back to Jordan's desert marvel Petra

AFP
Petra

Tending to his camels in Petra, Jordan's spectacular archaeological marvel hidden deep in a desert canyon, Hussein Bdoul is all smiles: the tourists are back.

After years in which the Covid pandemic turned the storied "Rose City" into a deserted town, the father of seven is back at work, offering visitors rides on his decorated animals.

"Tourism has returned and the numbers are even greater," said Bdoul, 35, wearing Bedouin garb with a red keffiyeh scarf over his long black hair, reflecting on a resurgence last year.

"At the time of the coronavirus pandemic, we did not see anyone in Petra," said Bdoul - a disaster for the town where, he

said, "90 % of people work in tourism".

"We hope from God Almighty that people will stay well."

Jordan tourism authorities confirm that Petra is back in business and drew 900,000 visitors last year, close to the record of 1mn set in 2019.

Jordan as a whole received 4.6mn visitors in 2022 - almost four times the level from 2020 - earning the country \$5.3bn.

Top draw Petra, famous for its stunning temples hewn out of the rose-pink cliff faces, is a United Nations World Heritage site and was chosen as one of the New Seven Wonders of the World in a 2007 online poll.

It was built in 312 BCE as the capital of the ancient Arab kingdom of the Nabateans, which fell to the Romans in 106 BCE.

The ancient city remained unknown in the West until a Swiss



Tourists in a group pose for a photo before the site of the Treasury at the ruins of the ancient Nabatean city of Petra in southern Jordan on December 12, 2022.

traveller visited it in 1812.

"This place and the colours are incredible," marvelled French student Alia, 16, taking a break

from exploring with her mother to check out a souvenir stand.

Around 1,700 people make a living from Petra as tour guides,

trinket sellers or by taking visitors through the site on donkeys, horses, camels or electric buggies.



Suleiman Farajat, Chief Commissioner for the Petra Development and Tourism Region Authority (PDTRA), gives an interview outside the Petra Museum in southern Jordan.

"We breathed a sigh of relief when we saw the return of tourists," said Mohamed Samahin, 16, selling drinks while sitting on woven rugs inside the Moon Cave near the famed Treas-

ury site. Suleiman Farajat, head of the Petra Development and Tourism Region Authority, said the post-pandemic tourism comeback had exceeded all expectations.

At the height of the pandemic, "there were days when there were no tourists" in Petra, located 230 kilometres south of the capital Amman.

The recovery was helped by official promotional campaigns in new overseas markets, low-cost airline flights and new hotel rooms, said Farajat.

Petra now has 4,000 rooms, and permits have been granted for three new five-star hotels, so capacity will soon almost double from 2019, he said.

"If things continue this way, we may reach, during the next three to four years, the threshold of 2mn tourists in Petra" every year.

Peru president extends state of emergency in Lima, southern regions

Reuters/AFP
Lima

Peru's President Dina Boluarte has extended a state of emergency for 30 days in the capital and two southern regions, according to a decree signed late on Saturday, following protests that have left more than 40 people dead.

The extended measures, which grant police special powers and limit freedoms, including the right to assembly, apply to Lima and the heavily indigenous southern regions of Puno and Cusco.

Restrictions in Puno, which has seen violent

clashes between demonstrators and police, include a 10-day curfew.

Peru first announced a month-long, nationwide state of emergency in mid-December, shortly after protests broke out over the ousting of former president Pedro Castillo.

Supporters of the ousted president have taken to the streets and blocked roads across the South American country since December, demanding fresh elections and the removal of Boluarte, who has refused to step down.

Protests have been announced for today in Lima as well as the marginalised southern Andean regions, which have been the epicentre of the unrest.

Some groups of protesters from the south

plan to travel to Lima for a "takeover of the city".

"We have the decision to go to Lima, yes or yes," said Julio Vilca, a protest leader from the province of Ilaya, in the Puno region. "We cannot indicate the time, because what we want is to travel in unity."

More than 100 protest roadblocks were in place across Peru on Saturday.

The airport in Cusco, gateway to the famed Machu Picchu site, reopened on Saturday after being shuttered on Thursday, the second time it had been closed due to the protests.

Trains to Machu Picchu were still suspended, and local unions say tourism workers are losing out on up to 7mn sols (\$1.7mn) a day due to the crisis.

The mass anti-government demonstrations first broke out in early December, after Castillo was ousted from office for attempting to dissolve Congress and rule by decree, seeking to prevent an impeachment vote against him.

Peru has been politically unstable in recent years, with 60-year-old Boluarte being the sixth person to hold the presidency in five years.

Castillo, who was being investigated in several fraud cases during his tenure, has been remanded in custody for 18 months, charged with rebellion.

The unrest has been largely concentrated in the southern Andes, where Quechua and Aymara communities live.

The Inter-American Commission on Human

Rights, which visited the country this week, has said that in order to end the crisis, these groups need to be better integrated into Peruvian society.

Authorities insist radical groups are behind the protests, including remnants of the Shining Path communist guerrilla group.

As proof, they have presented the capture this week of a former member of that organisation, Rocio Leandro, known within the group as "Comrade Cusi".

According to police spokesman General Oscar Arriola, Leandro financed the unrest that left a dozen dead in the Ayacucho region.

He called Leandro "a Marxist, Leninist, Maoist assassin".

Fairest of them all



Miss US R'Bonney Gabriel reacts after being crowned Miss Universe during the 71st Miss Universe pageant in New Orleans, Louisiana, US.

Santos to be removed from US Congress 'if he broke campaign finance laws'

US Representative George Santos, who lied about much of his resume and life story, will be removed from Congress if found to have broken campaign finance laws, fellow Republican and House Oversight Committee chairman James Comer said yesterday. "He's a bad guy," Comer said on CNN's *State of the Union* programme. "It's not up to me or any other member of Congress to determine whether he can be kicked out for lying. Now, if he broke campaign finance laws, then he will be removed from Congress."

Santos has repeatedly refused to resign, even as pressure has grown within his own party.

On Thursday, he said he would vacate his New York City-area seat only if he loses the next election. More than a dozen Republican officials, many of them from Santos's district, which covers parts of Queens and Long Island, have demanded the resignation of the newly elected congressman. At least six of his fellow Republican representatives from New York have joined the calls for him to step down. - Reuters

Biden declares disaster in storm-hit California

AFP
Salinas, US

US President Joe Biden has declared a major disaster in California, as the latest in a succession of storm systems blew into the state, bringing heavy flooding to already waterlogged regions.

"Waves of heavy precipitation continue to batter California," said the National Weather Service (NWS) on Twitter. "Heavy rain will continue bringing the threat of flooding and mudslides/landslides. Hazardous travel due to heavy mountain snow and blowing snow from (California) to (Colorado)."

Late on Saturday Biden "declared that a major disaster exists in the State of California and ordered Federal aid to supplement State, tribal, and local recovery efforts in the areas affected by severe winter storms, flooding, landslides, and mudslides", the White House said in a statement.

The declaration makes federal funding available for relief to affected people, including temporary housing and repairs.

At least 19 people are known to have died from storm-related causes in the last three weeks.

Rescuers called off the search for five-year-old Kyle Doan, who was swept away in floodwaters as his mother tried to pull him to safety from their car, the San Luis Obispo County Sheriff's office said on Saturday, citing rising waters and unsuitable conditions.

An AFP journalist saw the Salinas River overflowing its banks in many spots, at times covering farm fields for hundreds of yards, as rain continued under leaden skies.

In Spreckels, a community a few hundred yards from the river, most residents opted not to evacuate despite warnings from authorities.

"It looks like we might have missed kind of the worst of it," said Robert Zagajeski, out walking his dog under a light rain.

However, Governor Gavin Newsom warned Californians that they were not in the clear yet.

"We're not done," he said on Saturday after visiting impacted residents.

Urging them to remain vigilant, he said Californians should continue to exercise "common sense over the course of the next 24-48 hours".

Nearly 26mn Californians remained under a flood watch as of Saturday evening, according to the NWS, with tens of thousands under evacuation orders and advisories.

The storms of recent weeks were originally welcomed - coming after years of drought - but by now have brought disastrous flooding, officials have said.

Around 0800 GMT yesterday, there were more than 16,000 homes without power in California, according to poweroutage.us.

"This place was hit hard by the drought over the past years," 58-year-old farm worker Manuel Paris told AFP near Salinas. "We're not used to this much rain anymore."

The NWS said another 2-3" (5-7.5cm) of rain could cause new flooding and mudslides, with parts of the Sierra Nevada seeing 3-6' of snow, and heavy winds buffeting central and coastal California at up to 50mph (80kph).

The most populous US state has been pummeled by near-record downpours over

three weeks - an average of 9" of rain has fallen - with the Salinas Valley among the hardest hit.

On Friday, forecasters warned that the Monterey Peninsula could be cut off and the whole city of Salinas - home to 160,000 people - could be hit by flooding.

However, on Saturday, an AFP journalist said the city itself had so far been largely spared.

Between storms, workers have rushed to clear some of the mess, shovelling mud from roads even in the heart of Los Angeles and using heavy machinery to remove fallen trees or clear rockslides.

An AFP journalist saw tractors in fields near Salinas fighting to pump floodwaters back into the river.

Newly falling rain was not helping the effort.

And forecasters say the unsettled weather in the US West - associated with what is called an atmospheric river pattern - is not done.

Over the mountains, heavy snow was making travel dangerous or impossible on a three-day holiday weekend honouring civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr.

Officials urged people to stay home due to a heightened risk of avalanches.

Authorities in the Lake Tahoe resort area posted pictures showing dozens of vehicles lined up on a road, stalled by a fierce blizzard.

Winter storms are not unusual in California; however, global warming is making them wetter and wilder.

At the same time, the western United States has been growing more arid for years.

Flooded three times in two weeks, California town residents are fed up

By Romain Fongsegrives
AFP

Using a plastic broom, Camilla Shaffer scrapes at the thick layer of mud caking her yard - it's the third time in two weeks that her house has been flooded thanks to the string of storms that have hit California in rapid succession.

"I'm so angry, it just makes me want to cry," said Shaffer, a 59-year-old Briton wearing boots covered in muck.

It was only a few days ago that she cleaned up her porch from the last storm, and now she has to start all over again.

Upstairs her belongings are safe but the furniture of her art studio on the ground floor is ruined.

In Felton, a town of 4,500 people tucked away in mountains and sequoia trees on the coast south of San Francisco, folks thought they knew the San Lorenzo River.

It had burst its banks a few times in the past decade.

However, this time was different, with locals saying that they had never seen the waterway flood so wildly or so often.

Since Christmas, no fewer than eight storms have slammed California, fuelled by weather phenomena known as atmospheric rivers - long plumes of vapour up high in the atmosphere and stemming from the tropics.

They carry huge amounts of water.

So in Felton, several parts of town woke up under water on New Year's Day. Then again last Monday.

Then yet again on Saturday. "Three times in two weeks, that's crazy," said Kevin Smith, a strapping 35-year-old who had recently purchased his parents' house near the river.

In the garage, the high-water mark from the flooding last week almost reaches his head.

"Monday was the worst flood in 40 years," said Smith, who restores old cars for a living.

Others in town share that assessment. It is hard to establish a direct link between these storms, which have claimed 19 lives in the state, and global warming.

However, scientists say climate change is making extreme weather events such as these winter storms wetter and wilder.

And in Felton, where sofas, garbage bins and other detritus lie haphazardly



Melissa Foley helping to clear debris in her neighbourhood in Felton Grove, California.

Right: Flooded Felton Grove is seen in this aerial shot.



Republicans want Biden home visitor logs - but not Trump's

Reuters
Washington

The Republican chairman of the House Oversight Committee has demanded visitor logs for President Joe Biden's house in Wilmington, Delaware, after classified documents were found in his office and garage.

"Without a list of individuals who have visited his residence, the American people will never know who had access to these highly sensitive documents," Representative James Comer said in a letter to White House Chief of Staff Ron Klain, dated yesterday.

Republicans have sought to compare the Biden documents case with that of former president Donald Trump, who faces a federal criminal probe of how he handled classified documents after he left the White House.

However, legal experts say there are stark contrasts between the two cases. Comer said he would not seek visi-

tor logs for Trump's Mar-a-Lago residence, where more than 100 classified documents were found in an Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) search.

"I don't feel like we need to spend a whole lot of time because the Democrats have done that for the past six years," he said in an interview yesterday with CNN.

Trump has announced he would seek the presidency again in 2024, with Biden as his expected Democratic rival.

The Biden disclosures emerged last week after his legal team said it had found classified documents relating to his time as vice-president in the Obama administration at his Delaware home.

His lawyers on Saturday reported finding five additional pages at his home.

There is no legal requirement that US presidents disclose visitors at their home or at the White House.

The Biden administration reinstated disclosures of official guests to the White House and released its first

batch of records in May 2021.

Trump had suspended the practice shortly after he took office in 2017.

Republicans in the US House of Representatives launched an investigation on Friday into the Justice Department's handling of improperly stored classified documents possessed by Biden.

The investigation comes as Trump is under federal criminal investigation for mishandling classified documents after his presidency.

In the Biden case, the president's lawyers informed the National Archives and Justice Department about finding a small number of documents at a think tank in Washington and later at Biden's Wilmington home.

In Trump's case, the National Archives tried for more than a year after Trump left office to retrieve all of the records he retained, without success.

When Trump finally returned 15 boxes of documents in January 2022, Archives officials discovered they contained classified materials.

After the matter was referred to the

Justice Department, Trump's lawyers handed over more material from Trump's Mar-a-Lago home and said there were no more documents on the premises.

That turned out to be false.

In the end, the FBI recovered an additional 13,000 documents, about 100 of which were marked classified, from the estate.

House Democrats introduced the "Mar-a-Lago Act" in 2017 that would require Trump to regularly disclose visitors to his Florida home, but it was never voted on in the chamber or full Congress.

Democratic Representative Adam Schiff, the outgoing House Intelligence Committee chairman, said Congress should seek an assessment from the US intelligence community on whether any documents, from either Trump or Biden, jeopardised national security.

"I don't think we can exclude the possibility without knowing more of the facts," Schiff said on ABC's *This Week*.

Architect of Mexico's war on drugs going on trial in the US for trafficking

AFP
New York

Once-powerful Mexican government minister who oversaw his country's war on drug trafficking goes on trial in New York tomorrow, himself charged with facilitating the smuggling of narcotics.

Genaro Garcia Luna is accused of taking huge bribes to allow the notorious Sinaloa cartel to smuggle cocaine when he was public security minister during Felipe Calderon's 2006-2012 presidency.

The 54-year-old is the highest-

ranking Mexican official to be charged in New York federal prosecutors' extensive pursuit of alleged drug traffickers from Central and South America and their ministerial accomplices.

Former Mexican drug lord Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman, who headed Sinaloa, is currently serving a life sentence in the United States after being convicted by a jury in Brooklyn in 2019.

Notorious Colombian drug lord Dairo Antonio Usuga, known as "Otoniel", is awaiting trial in the same district, while former Honduran president Juan Orlando Hernandez has denied drug trafficking charges filed by prosecutors in Manhattan.

Garcia Luna was detained in Texas in December 2019.

He has pleaded not guilty to five counts that carry possible sentences of between 10 years and life in prison.

US prosecutors accuse Garcia Luna of accepting millions of dollars in bribes to look the other way as Guzman's cartel shipped tons of drugs into the US between 2001 and 2012.

The US government alleges that Garcia Luna became a member of Sinaloa around January 2001 when he was working in police intelligence.

Prosecutors say that in exchange for millions of dollars, he agreed not to interfere with drug shipments, tipped off

traffickers about law enforcement operations, targeted rival cartel members for arrest and placed other corrupt officials in positions of power.

A former Sinaloa member told Guzman's trial that he had delivered suitcases containing at least \$6mn in cash to Garcia Luna at a restaurant in 2005, 2006 and 2007.

Garcia Luna, a mechanical engineer by training, headed Mexico's now-renamed Federal Investigation Agency, tasked with fighting corruption and organised crime, between 2001 and 2005.

Then, under Calderon, who launched a crackdown on Mexico's drug gangs during his six-year presidency, Garcia

Luna was public security minister, with control of the federal police.

Garcia Luna's defence team have indicated that they will argue that their client was actually helping the US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA).

Attorney Cesar de Castro has asked the judge to be allowed to present evidence that Garcia Luna had meetings with US government officials and received "commendations and awards ... for his efforts combating the Mexican drug cartels".

Cuban-Mexican investigative journalist Peniley Ramirez, who has written a book and made a podcast about Garcia Luna, says "not enough has been

said about how much the DEA knew" about his alleged activities.

"Why did the US government continue to trust him and for so many years despite the fact that there were many clues that something was wrong?" she told AFP.

Ramirez thinks the fact Garcia Luna moved to Miami in 2012 after Calderon left office shows "he had reason to believe that nothing was ever going to happen to him".

Garcia Luna is also accused of lying when he applied for US citizenship in 2018.

The trial is expected to last several weeks.

China, HK resume high-speed rail link

Reuters
Hong Kong/Beijing

China resumed yesterday high-speed rail services between Hong Kong and the mainland for the first time since the beginning of the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic, as it dismantles travel curbs after Beijing scrapped quarantine for arrivals a week earlier.

The reopening comes amidst a massive wave of infections nationwide and a day after authorities said nearly 60,000 people with Covid-19 had died in hospital, following last month's abrupt U-turn on "zero-Covid" policy in the wake of historic protests.

Despite the infections, some passen-

gers voiced excitement and relief about being able to more easily return to their hometowns in time for the approaching Lunar New Year.

"The resumption of the high-speed railway has made it very convenient for us and has brought us closer to home," said Mang Lee, 33, who was among dozens going through border checks at Hong Kong's West Kowloon station before boarding trains.

"For the past three years, due to the pandemic, it has not been easy to enter China in any way," added Mang, originally from the southern city of Guangzhou. "I have not been able to go home for a long time."

A surge in travel ahead of the holiday celebrations set to begin on January 21, as hundreds of millions of people return

home from cities to small towns and rural areas, has fuelled worries about more infections.

Saturday's updated death toll was a huge increase over previous figures, following global criticism of China's coronavirus data.

The move was welcomed by the World Health Organisation (WHO), although the body called for more detailed data.

However, the figure still falls short of the predictions of international health experts, who have said China could have more than 1mn Covid-related deaths this year.

Operations at West Kowloon station in the global financial hub have been smooth, with a flow of about 1,400 passengers by 10am, said Cheung Chi-

keung, head of operator MTR Corp's cross-boundary operations.

Tickets for nearly all trains were sold out yesterday, a display at the station showed, a Reuters witness said.

The reopening will initially be just for short journeys, MTR chairman Rex Auyeung told reporters at the station, but it was not immediately clear when long-haul journeys would resume.

In another sign of reviving transport links, Saturday's visitors to the nearby gambling hub of Macau exceeded 55,000, the highest daily arrivals since the pandemic began, the government said on its website.

The mainland contributed 44,025, with just over 10,000 from Hong Kong, it said in a notice.

The data, in line with a trend of ris-

ing daily numbers of visitors, promises a boost for the tourism-focused economy reeling from the previous zero-Covid measures.

As many in China scramble to secure Covid-19 drugs following reports of widespread hospital shortages, customs in Hong Kong seized 380 boxes of suspected smuggled Covid-19 drugs last week, of estimated value HK\$500,000 (\$64,000), the local government said.

The items were found in two places, one at the international airport in an air parcel arriving from India on January 11, and another at the home of a 40-year-old man on January 14.

The man and a 34-year-old woman have been arrested as suspects, the government added in its statement yesterday.

Taiwan VP elected ruling party chief

Reuters
Taipei

Taiwan Vice-President William Lai was elected as the new chairman of the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) yesterday, setting the stage for him to run in presidential elections early next year.

Lai was the only candidate for taking the helm of the DPP.

President Tsai Ing-wen resigned as party chairwoman in November after the DPP was trounced at local elections.

Lai has not directly said that he plans to run for the presidency, but is widely expected to do so now he is DPP chairman.

Tsai cannot run again as president due to constitutional term limits.

The DPP's acting secretary-general Sidney Lin told reporters that Lai had won election.

He formally assumes the role on Wednesday.

Lai, in a statement, pledged to win back public trust for the party and to "firmly protect Taiwan and promote Taiwan's democracy, peace and prosperity in a complex and changeable international situation".

Lai has previously angered Beijing, which views Taiwan as merely a wayward province not a country, with his staunch support for the island's sovereignty and separate identity.

A former premier and mayor of the southern city of Tainan, Lai has been Tsai's vice-president since 2020 following the DPP's landslide election win.

He has taken on an increasingly high profile international role over the past year, briefly speaking with US Vice-President Kamala Harris in January last year while they were both in Honduras, one of 14 countries to maintain formal diplomatic ties with Taiwan.

In 2018, while still premier, Lai told parliament that he was a "Taiwan independence worker" and that his position was that Taiwan was a sovereign, independent country.

China's influential *Global Times* tabloid responded at the time by saying that China should issue an international arrest warrant for him to face prosecution under the country's 2005 Anti-Secession Law.

The DPP won the 2020 presidential and parliamentary elections by a landslide by pledging to defend Taiwan against China and not submit to Beijing's threats.

Australia's natural disasters bill hits \$3.5bn in 2022

Reuters
Sydney

Floods and natural disasters that hit all but one Australian state and territory in 2022 cost the economy A\$5bn (\$3.48bn) and stoked inflation, according to Treasury estimates which forecast billions more spending in 2023.

Australia suffered four major bouts of flooding last year, with global reinsurer Munich Re estimating that February and March flooding across New South Wales state was the fourth most costly global disaster in 2022.

Natural disasters cost the economy A\$5bn or 0.25% of real GDP for last financial year, according to Treasury estimates, particularly delays to mining and construction.

The figures did not include damage or destruction of infrastructure and other assets.

"We've put that number out there really just as a reminder that even though we are rightly focused on the human cost of these natural disasters, which are becoming more and more frequent, there is a cost to the economy as well and a cost to the budget," Treasurer Jim Chalmers told ABC radio on Friday ahead of a tour of Lismore, a town 700km north of Sydney that was devastated by floods last year.

Chalmers also flagged more demands on the budget he will deliver in May, with billions of additional disaster-related spending expected this year on top of A\$3.5bn spent in 2022.

The government will focus on mitigating future disasters, he said, instead of policies like subsidising expensive insurance for those who live in disaster-prone areas.



Lunar New Year prep

People are seen walking past tangerines for sale ahead of the Lunar New Year of the Rabbit in Manila's Chinatown district.

Left: Devotees gather for a temple fair in Solo, Indonesia, yesterday, ahead of the Lunar New Year of the Rabbit.



A woman and child walk past an installation for the upcoming Lunar New Year of the Rabbit, outside the Forbidden City in Beijing.



People walk underneath lanterns in the Chinatown section of Yokohama in Kanagawa prefecture, south of Tokyo, ahead of the Lunar New Year of the Rabbit.

China-Myanmar border towns eye revival after trauma of pandemic

AFP
Ruili, China

At a checkpoint on China's southern frontier with Myanmar, shuttered stores advertising the region's famed jade jewellery appear abandoned, driven out of business by a coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic-induced closure of the border.

The city of Ruili is slowly creaking back to life as China ditches its zero-tolerance Covid-19 strategy after years of strict lockdowns and other gruelling restrictions.

An absence of cross-border travel has haunted the trade-dependent city since April 2020, when the flow of

goods and people from Myanmar was cut off.

Yesterday a Myanmar official told AFP that the border had finally been partially reopened, with some trucks making the crossing - spurring hope for a revival of the local economy.

Two men on the Chinese side were leaning against the barrier dividing the countries when AFP visited on Friday, gazing through the gates at the Myanmar town of Muse.

"We are from Myanmar," said one. "We haven't been home in three years and really miss it."

Ruili was one of China's hardest hit cities during the three-year campaign to keep the virus at bay.

It became a key battleground in the

fight to keep imported Covid-19 cases out of China, with residents living through nearly a dozen lockdowns and prevented from travelling for most of the period.

"We were locked down so many times each year, not just once or twice - as if we were sleeping for months and months at home," Duan, a jade seller in the city's Delong jewellery market, told AFP.

Unable to operate normally, many businesses closed down, Duan said, pointing to the shuttered stalls surrounding his stand.

The city of around a quarter of a million people saw its population decline by 40,000 between 2020 and 2021, the most recent census figures show.

Huang, another jewellery seller, told AFP that she became trapped outside Ruili by a travel ban in 2020 after attending her mother-in-law's funeral in distant Shanxi province.

When the restrictions were lifted last month, she rushed back to seize her first chance in years of celebrating the upcoming Lunar New Year with her parents.

U Min Thein, vice-chairman of the Muse Rice Commodity Exchange, told AFP yesterday that China was not yet allowing people across the border.

However, people in Ruili told AFP that Chinese authorities had given the green light to reopening checkpoints and Myanmar had not yet agreed to resume travel.

In Muse, residents were worried about soaring Covid-19 cases in China.

"More than a hundred people were killed in the Covid-19 pandemic during 2021 in Muse, and so the people in the town have had a very bad experience," a water pipe seller told AFP.

He criticised what he said was inadequate testing on the Myanmar side: "If they tested properly and carefully, we would not have to be afraid."

He and others acknowledged the importance of reopening to boost people's livelihoods.

"I hope the economy will recover and be like it was before," said Soe Soe Aye, who used to work in a garment factory in China.

Tourists mingled with locals at a

night market in Ruili on Friday, sampling deep-fried pancakes and meat skewers.

Zhang, the owner of a Thai-style barbecue and hotpot stall, said business had rebounded since Covid-19 restrictions were lifted.

However, the lack of visitors from Myanmar was still being keenly felt, with multiple other stall owners saying they hoped foot traffic would pick up soon.

Still, there was relief at the lifting of zero-Covid.

"There was really so little time between us thinking that things might open up, to when it actually opened up," Zhang said. "It feels like happiness came really quickly."

Strikes in UK set to intensify as teacher ballot results are due

Reuters
London

Strikes disrupting swathes of the British economy look likely to intensify this week, with teachers ready to announce industrial action, according to the *Sunday Times*, and nurses warning their strikes could double in size next month.

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's government, which sets pay levels in the publicly-funded health and education services, is already dealing with strikes in rail and other industries as wages increases fall behind rapidly rising prices.

The result of a ballot among teachers belonging to the National Education Union is due at 1700 GMT today, but the *Sunday Times* cited union sources as saying that members in England and Wales had voted to back strikes beginning in February.

The union did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the report.

Last week, a strike ballot by a different teachers' union fell short of the required turnout threshold.

If teacher strikes are confirmed today, it would add to the disruption experienced by millions of people in Britain

over the last six months, during which train strikes have crippled transport networks and ambulances workers have on two dates so far refused to respond to all but the most serious calls.

The transport minister, Mark Harper, told Sky News yesterday that any decision to strike by teachers would be regrettable.

With inflation running at more than 10%, driven in part by sharp increases in energy costs following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the government has said that it cannot afford big wage increases and did not want to embed higher inflation in the economy through pay rises.

Nevertheless, Harper said he had given permission for rail companies to make a new offer to unions, offering tentative signs that a deal could be in the offing although he refused to set any timetable for that.

Elsewhere, the disruption looked set to continue.

The Royal College of Nursing, some of whose members walked out last month and will do so again on Wednesday and Thursday, warned that their next round of strikes could be more severe, with double the number of nurses in England to walk out in February unless a resolution is found.

India, UAE 'close' to agreement on renewable power grid link

Reuters
Abu Dhabi

India and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) are close to a "major agreement" on a renewable energy interconnection between the two countries, India's minister of power and new and renewable energy said yesterday.

Raj Kumar Singh, who is visiting the Gulf Arab oil producer for the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA)'s assembly in Abu Dhabi, of which India is currently president, told Reuters that the agreement is awaiting final approvals.

He did not elaborate on a time frame.

"There is a major agreement for an interconnection between the UAE electricity grid, and the Indian grid," Singh said, adding that this would be under the One Sun, One World, One Grid (OSOWOG) initiative by a group of countries to create renewable energy networks.

"Both sides have agreed," he said. "We believe it will come."

The OSOWOG initiative, first proposed by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, aims to transfer renewable energy power through connecting grids.

Singh said the UAE has also indicated it would like to invest more in India's renewable energy projects, including solar and wind.

India and the UAE also signed a memorandum of understanding on January 13 on green hydrogen development, produced using renewable energy, India's embassy in the UAE said on Twitter on Friday.

The UAE's ministry of foreign affairs and international co-operation declined to provide an immediate comment.

Last year, the Gulf state concluded a broad trade agreement with India that aims to increase bilateral non-oil trade to \$100bn in the next five years.

Singh gave his backing to the UAE as host for the COP28 climate conference this year and also supports Sultan al-Jaber, who is head of state oil company ADNOC and the UAE's climate ambassador,

as president-designate of COP28.

"He (al-Jaber) is the point man for renewables, for climate change," the Indian minister said. "When you look at energy transition you look at the whole energy sector, the whole basket, and in the oil and gas sector too, he's been working on green initiatives."

Al-Jaber is also the UAE's minister of industry and advanced technology and helped to establish Abu Dhabi's renewable energy firm Masdar in 2006.

The UAE and other Gulf energy producers have called for a realistic transition in which hydrocarbons would keep a role in energy security while making commitments to decarbonisation.

Festive food



Women cook rice dishes along a street during a ceremony in Mumbai's Dharavi area, to celebrate the Pongal festival.

Twitter's laid-off staff told to drop lawsuit

Reuters
Washington

Twitter Incorporated has secured a ruling allowing the social media company to force several laid-off workers suing over their termination to pursue their claims via individual arbitration than a class-action lawsuit.

US District Judge James Donato ruled on Friday that five former Twitter employees pursuing a proposed class action accusing the company of failing to provide adequate notice before laying them off after its acquisition by Elon Musk must pursue their claims in private arbitration.

Donato granted Twitter's request to force the five ex-employees to pursue their claims individually, citing agreements they signed with the company.

Twitter did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The San Francisco judge left for another day "as warranted by developments in the case" whether the entire class action lawsuit must be dismissed, though, as he noted three other former Twitter employees who alleged they had opted out of the company's arbitration agreement have joined the lawsuit after it was first filed.

Last year, Donato had ruled that, Twitter must notify the thousands of workers who were laid off after its acquisition by Musk following a proposed class action accusing the company of failing to give adequate notice before terminating them.

The judge said that before asking workers to sign severance agreements waiving their ability to sue the company, Twitter must give them "a succinct and plainly worded notice".

Twitter laid off roughly 3,700 employees in early November in a cost-cutting measure by Musk, and hundreds more subsequently resigned.

In December last year, Twitter was also accused by dozens of former employees of various legal violations stemming from Musk's takeover of the company, including targeting women for layoffs and failing to pay promised severance.

Twitter is also facing at least three complaints filed with a US labour board claiming that workers were fired for criticising the company, attempting to organise a strike, and other conduct protected by federal labour law.

Death toll in Philippine storms hits 27

At least 27 people have died in storms across the Philippines this month, authorities said yesterday, as forecasters warned of continued heavy rains in the disaster-prone country.

Heavy downpours and flooding have plagued the nation's southern and central islands since the Christmas weekend, forcing hundreds of thousands to flee their homes.

Since the start of the year, at least three storms have killed 27 people across the country, the civil defence office said in a report yesterday.

Eleven people were reported injured and three are missing. The state weather forecaster PAGASA has warned of heavy rains over the Bicol peninsula and Quezon province in the southern tip of the main island of Luzon.

"Under these conditions, flooding and rain-induced landslides are likely in areas that are highly ... susceptible to these hazards," PAGASA said in an advisory.

More than 83,000 people are sheltering in evacuation centres, according to the civil defence office, and over 1,200 houses have been damaged by floodwaters and heavy rains. -AFP

London bids to turn disused rail viaduct into its own High Line

By Joe Jackson
AFP

London is on track to transform a disused stretch of elevated railway in the heart of the city into a "park in the sky", emulating similar successful schemes in Paris and New York.

Local planning officials are poised to give the first section of the Camden Highline - named after its famous Manhattan predecessor - the formal green light next week.

It follows a half-decade of dogged planning, designing and fundraising by an alliance of residents, businesses, politicians and donors to get the project off the ground.

The reimagined 1.2km (0.75-mile) viaduct will eventually link bustling Camden with the revamped King's Cross district, turning a corridor of overgrown foliage - adjacent to still-active rail lines - into a new green space and attraction.

"We're hoping to build an amazing park in the sky," Simon Pitkeathley, who is spearheading the project, told AFP, as he led locals on a regular street-level tour of the planned walkway. "It's going to be a pleasant, beautiful environment in which to move between these very vibrant parts of London."

Local architects vPPR and James Corner Field Operations, the urban design firm behind New York's acclaimed High Line, drew up the blueprints after



Vehicles are driven under a railway crossing bridge where the proposed 'Camden high line' construction project would take place, in Camden, north London.



A photograph taken on January 11 shows a pass-way and rail tracks near the proposed construction land for 'Camden High Line' project.

beating out competition from dozens of interested companies.

The US raised walkway, built on former track on the west side of Manhattan, has become a major destination since opening in 2009 and underwent a recent extension.

The forerunner to both is the lauded Promenade Plantee in Paris, which was inaugurated in 1993.

James Corner has promised that the Camden project will be a "one-of-a-kind elevated park along the viaduct that speaks to the magical symbiosis of nature, culture, arts and community".

The venture has electrified Camden, a vibrant neighbourhood just north of central London best known for its market and nightlife.

"We love the High Line in New York and (we're) very excited that the same

company are involved in this one," said resident Charlotte Tansey, checking out the route with her Dalmatian, Ziggy. "There are so many tourists going through Camden every day, it'd be great for them to have a different viewpoint, just like the one in Manhattan."

The scheme will differ from its transatlantic namesake given the disused siding's proximity to live rail lines, which will be the other side of thick transparent screens.

"They're going to be quite different beasts, not least because we're right next to a real train," said Pitkeathley, noting those involved in the New York endeavour had been "very supportive".

The Camden team has agreed a long-term lease for the Victorian-era viaduct from Network Rail, which owns 20,000 miles of track and 30,000 bridges, tun-

nels and other structures, and stations.

The siding on an east-west commuter and freight route has been disused for nearly four decades.

The Highline will incorporate derelict platforms at Camden Road station and a shuttered stairway entrance to it - one of several envisaged entries along the route.

Its designers aim to "celebrate" the wild twinning of nature and ageing infrastructure, leaving bridge structures exposed and adding new planting and railway artefacts.

Set to be filled with new trees, plants and other vegetation, they also expect it will provide green space to tens of thousands of nearby residents.

The entire walkway will be built in phases and estimated to cost at least £35m (\$43m).

The first section will start in the shadow of Camden market and could open by 2025.

The remaining two parts would likely take an additional minimum of two years, if built concurrently.

However, organisers first need to find an initial £14m.

The charity formed to deliver the project has already raised and spent around £1m and hopes to turbocharge further efforts once formal planning permission is granted.

With the support of Camden Council, London Mayor Sadiq Khan and national politicians including main opposition Labour leader Keir Starmer - who represents the area in parliament - Pitkeathley insists that the money can be found.

He is targeting a combination of high-net-worth individuals, trusts and foundations, public sector organisations and commercial partners.

Fundraisers have already been held with the likes of sculptor Antony Gormley.

Residents along the route, which encompasses several public housing projects, appear enthusiastic.

However, some said the cost-of-living crisis gripping Britain could hinder efforts.

"There is an argument that if you can spend millions and millions on building walkways, what else could that be spent on?" conceded doctor Naomi Craft, 58. "But I think it's exciting."

Harry reconciliation with royal family 'possible' before coronation: report

AFP
London

Reconciliation between Prince Harry and the British royal family could take place before the coronation of King Charles III in May, a report said on Saturday, following the publication of his scorching tell-all memoir *Spare*.

A source close to the king who also knows Harry and his wife Meghan told the *Sunday Times* that they believed a meeting would take place in coming

months before the coronation on May 6.

"It's going to take flexibility on all sides, but it can be done, it's fixable," the newspaper quoted the source as saying in a report published on its website.

"It needs Harry over here, in the room with the King and Prince of Wales, a couple of other family members, some of 'his people' he trusts who always had his back, so he doesn't think he's being ambushed," the source added.

After months of anticipation and a blanket publicity blitz, Harry's book

Spare went on sale on Tuesday, clocking up a record 1.4m English language sales in its first 24 hours.

"Both sides need to hold their hands up and admit we didn't get everything right, and we got a lot wrong, and we have to say to him 'we understand the pain you've been through! The King can do it,'" the source said.

Although the royal family has not commented on the book, the source said Harry's elder brother, heir to the throne Prince William, was "burning inside" over his sibling's disloyalty.

"Not everyone here behaved well,

but Harry's got to be able to sit down and say 'we didn't behave well either! That takes a lot of academic flexibility, which Harry isn't great at,'" the source added.

Harry, who accuses his brother in the book of pushing him to the ground in an altercation in 2019, has said that he would like to be reconciled with his family but that he needs "accountability" first.

The source said time was now of the essence.

"We've got to move on it, and get it done by April. Then, we need to get the

wives in. The King needs a clear run for the coronation."

Another royal source agreed, telling the newspaper that Harry and Meghan - who quit royal life in the United Kingdom for California in 2020 - must be invited in before the historic royal event.

If that didn't happen, the spiralling feud between the brothers would become "a circus and distraction".

In his blockbuster autobiography, Harry complains bitterly of his treatment as the second son of Charles and the late Princess Diana.

The book also details a string of often petty grievances after he became engaged to Meghan who has also complained she was not supported by the royals.

Public opinion in Britain has swung against Harry in the wake of the book's publication - in the middle of the country's most serious cost of living crisis in a generation.

A YouGov survey published in *The Times* daily found only 24% of people now have a positive view of the prince - down from 80% a decade ago - with 68% critical.



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The dichotomy of the significance of lithium and rare earths and environmental concerns

When the European Union (EU) internal market commissioner Thierry Breton said last year that lithium and rare earths will soon be more important than oil and gas, he was referring to the increasing demand for the much sought after raw materials for the green transition. In her 2022 State of the European Union address, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen had forecast that EU's demand for rare earths alone will increase five fold by 2030. It is in this context that the latest news about the discovery in Sweden of Europe's largest deposit of rare earths should be analysed. Rare earths, which are used in products as diverse as mobile phones, electric vehicles, wind turbines and missile guidance systems, are not mined in Europe at the moment.

A Swedish minister hailed the find as a way of reducing the EU's dependence on China. Some 98% of rare earths used in the EU in 2021 were imported from China. Over one million tonnes are reported to have now been found in Sweden's far north. Although significant, that is a fraction of the world's 120-million-tonne reserves, according to a US estimate. The term rare earth refers to a group of 17 elements that are used to make a range of products and infrastructure which are increasingly important to everyday life. The flip side is extraction of rare earths is both difficult and potentially damaging to the environment.

Speaking at a press conference last Thursday, Swedish Energy Minister Ebba Busch said the EU was "way too dependent on other countries for these materials" and insisted a change was needed. "Electrification, the EU's self-sufficiency and independence from Russia and China will begin in the mine", she asserted referring to the new discovery. However, the newly discovered raw materials may not reach the market before 10-15 years' time, the LKAB mining company's

Since 2010 the average amount of rare minerals needed for one unit of power generation has increased by 50% due to increasing use of renewable technologies

CEO Jan Moström said. Permitting processes take time due to environmental risk evaluations.

The International Monetary Fund, in a document released last year had predicted that three billion tonnes of rare metals could be needed to make the energy transition a reality and suggested this demand may exceed current global supply. Demand for electric vehicles, for example, is expected to grow by at least 30 times by 2040, with each vehicle requiring batteries which use lithium as a crucial component. Plants producing renewable solar and wind power require minerals such as copper and cobalt in higher quantities than carbon or gas-based plants. In addition to these metals, nickel, manganese, graphite and aluminium are among many 'critical minerals' that have all been recognised as strategically important for a low-carbon future by countries around the world.

In 2016, China identified 24 strategic minerals needed to safeguard its future. In 2017, the EU published its own list of 27 critical raw materials "at risk of supply shortage". In 2019, the US published a federal strategy to ensure secure and reliable supplies of critical minerals and Australia also published its own critical mineral strategy. These national strategies grapple with a common theme: supplies of rare metals are frequently concentrated in limited geographical areas. For example, 90% of global lithium production currently happens in Australia, Chile and China; 80% of cobalt in the Democratic Republic of Congo; 55% of nickel in Indonesia, the Philippines and Russia; and half the world's copper is produced in Chile, Peru and China.

Since 2010 the average amount of rare minerals needed for one unit of power generation has increased by 50% due to increasing use of renewable technologies. Looking to the future this figure is likely to increase further, especially as countries strive to reach more ambitious climate goals. A collective and responsible approach is essential to ensuring these targets can be met.

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Brazil turns facial recognition on rioters despite racism fears

● **Cameras are unreliable, invasive and racist, say experts**
● **Surveillance spreads fear in favelas**

By **Leonardo Coelho**
Rio De Janeiro

Police in Brazil plan on using facial recognition to identify protesters who rampaged through government buildings, escalating state surveillance in a move that has alarmed privacy and human rights experts. Thousands of protesters vandalised Brazil's Supreme Court, Congress and presidential offices in Brasilia last Sunday, seeking to oust leftist President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, who narrowly defeated incumbent Jair Bolsonaro in October's vote. Police have arrested about 1,000 people, and said on Tuesday they would use biometrics "to identify those responsible for acts of vandalism". Facial recognition operates in 21 of Brazil's 27 states, be it for monitoring urban transport or tracking school attendance.

Rights groups say their rollout was opaque, with no public consultations or clarity on how the data is used and protected. While authorities justify the surveillance on security grounds, technology experts worry about privacy violations and the potential for profiling and discrimination, particularly of Black and indigenous people. Since 2019, 90% of people arrested using facial recognition in Brazil were

Black, according to Panoptico, a project that monitors facial recognition use in Brazil.

"As a tool of mass surveillance, facial recognition is an expedited patchwork solution that demonstrably fails time and time again at meeting the security objectives it purports to enable," said Matt Mahmoudi, a researcher at Amnesty Tech, an arm of Amnesty International that counters digital repression.

"It also erodes fundamental rights. Historically, marginalised communities are at particular risk; as is the privacy of Brazilians at large," he added.

For residents in Rio de Janeiro's Jacareizinho favela, facial recognition could soon be an everyday hazard.

Already, Jamila worries whenever her 23-year-old son steps out of their modest home, fearing he may be stopped by the police — or encounter something worse.

Her sprawling shantytown in Rio de Janeiro's north, home to about 60,000 mostly Black and poor residents, has endured decades of violence between criminal gangs and the police.

Last year, authorities said they would install nearly two dozen surveillance cameras in the favela, exacerbating Jamila's fears for her son.

"I worry that these cameras will be used against the young men in the favela — many are already frequently targeted by the police on false grounds," said Jamila, 57, who asked that her last name not be used because she feared retaliation.

"My son spent 30 days in juvenile detention in 2016 when he was mistaken for a criminal due to a false photo identification. I fear that it may happen again with these cameras," she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

The Rio police did not respond to a

request for comment.

Global use of facial recognition has grown rapidly, despite its poor track record identifying women and people with darker skin.

Aside from solving crimes, accessing apps or policing borders, it is also used to target dissidents and activists from as far afield as Iran to China.

Bolsonaro signed a pair of decrees in 2019 aiming to create a centralised database collating the personal and biometric information of Brazil's population of more than 200mn.

Thereafter, Rio de Janeiro's former governor Wilson Witzel rolled out facial recognition tools, saying they would help curb the city's rampant crime rate.

Dozens of cameras were deployed in Copacabana during Carnival, then expanded to other neighbourhoods.

But the pilot project in Copacabana showed no reduction in crime, according to Panoptico.

The cameras also misidentified suspects in more than half of arrests, Panoptico said, citing police data.

After a 2021 shootout in Jacareizinho left at least 25 people dead, police stepped up their use of surveillance, tracking license plate numbers and faces throughout the favela.

Last year, hundreds of heavily armed police occupied the Jacareizinho neighbourhood in a renewed security crackdown.

Facial recognition is part of the federal government's plan for increased security in the favela, but there is little transparency about how the data will be used, said Dani Monteiro, president of the Human Rights Commission at Rio de Janeiro's state assembly.

"We searched in official diaries, government websites and could find nothing on them," she said. "The programme

came in overnight, and only in the fine print did they mention the cameras."

A spokesperson for Rio Governor Claudio Castro said they had appointed a committee to oversee the cameras' use, but did not say if they were addressing the concerns of civil rights groups.

Worldwide, there is growing pushback against facial recognition, with several US and European cities banning its use, and the United Nations high commissioner for human rights calling for a moratorium until safeguards are set.

Last year, a court in Sao Paulo ruled that the city's metro must stop using facial recognition, handing a victory to rights groups who had argued that it hurt vulnerable citizens, especially Blacks, due to its "algorithmic discrimination".

Rio is pushing ahead with new surveillance, installing smart streetlights fitted with Wi-Fi and cameras. Of the 10,000 cameras, 40% have facial recognition, according to officials.

In Jacareizinho, four of the 22 cameras planned for the neighbourhood will carry facial recognition capabilities.

Many residents are unaware their every move may be recorded, said Pablo Nunes, a co-ordinator of Panoptico.

The Rio police are among the deadliest in Brazil, according to official data, and Black people make up the majority of those killed by the police nationwide.

So the cameras are a volatile — and futile — addition to an already fraught environment, said Nunes.

"In their own studies they (police) state that they wish to use these cameras in order to help defend police officers in lawsuits," he said.

"There's no indication that they help reduce crime, or that they improve daily policing," he said. — Thomson Reuters Foundation



In this file photo taken on January 8, 2023, members of the Federal Legislative Police stand next to a vehicle that crashed into a fountain as supporters of Brazilian former president Jair Bolsonaro invade the National Congress in Brasilia. The office of Brazil's prosecutor general moved Friday to include Bolsonaro in an investigation of people suspected of "instigation and intellectual authorship" of the January 8 ransacking of government buildings in Brasilia. (AFP)

Dozens feared killed in Russian attack in Dnipro

Reuters
Dnipro

Ukraine saw little hope of pulling any more survivors from the rubble of an apartment block in the city of Dnipro yesterday, a day after the building was hit during a major Russian missile attack, with dozens of people expected to have died.

The regional governor's adviser, Natalia Babachenko, said 30 people were confirmed dead so far and more than 30 were in hospital, including 12 in a serious condition. Between 30 to 40 people could still be trapped under debris, she said.

Emergency workers said they had heard people screaming for help from underneath piles of debris from the nine-storey apartment block in the east-central city and were using moments of silence to help direct their efforts. Freezing temperatures added to rescuers' concerns.

A group of firefighters found a lightly-dressed woman still alive more than 18 hours after the attack. They carried her to safety in their arms. Dozens of grim-faced residents, both young and old, watched in horror from the street.

A body was retrieved by firefighters and lifted from the ruins on a stretcher using a crane.

"The chances of saving people now are minimal," Dnipro's Mayor Borys Filatov told Reuters. I think the number of dead will be in the dozens."

Ukraine's Air Force said the apartment block was struck by a Russian Kh-22 missile, which is known to be inaccurate and that Ukraine lacks the air defences to shoot down. The Soviet-era missile was developed during the Cold War to destroy warships.

Filatov said two stairwells including dozens of flats were destroyed.

Russia fired two waves of missiles at Ukraine on Saturday, striking targets across the country as fighting raged on the battlefield in the eastern towns of Soledar and Bakhmut.

Moscow, which invaded last February, has been pounding Ukraine's energy infrastructure with missiles and drones since October, causing sweeping blackouts and disruptions to central heating and running water.

In a statement yesterday about its previous day of strikes, the Russian defence ministry did not mention Dnipro as a specific target.

"All assigned objects were hit. The targets of the strike have been achieved," it said.

Rescuers toiled through the night searching for survivors. Yesterday morning, they could



Emergency workers carry a woman released from debris at the site where an apartment block was heavily damaged by a Russian missile strike in Dnipro yesterday. (Reuters)

be seen punching and kicking through heaped mounds of smashed concrete and twisted metal.

"Two rooms on the second floor remain practically intact but buried," Oleh Kushniruk, a deputy director of the regional branch of Ukraine's State Emergency Service, said on television.

A spokesperson for Ukraine's southern command said Russia had fired only half of the cruise

missiles it had deployed to the Black Sea during Saturday's attacks. "This indicates that they still have certain plans," said the spokesperson, Natalia Humeniuk. "We must understand that they can still be used."

In his nightly address after the strike, Zelensky called on Western allies to supply more weapons to end "Russian terror" and attacks on civilian targets.

Saturday's attack came as

Western powers consider sending battle tanks to Kyiv and ahead of a meeting of Ukraine's allies in Ramstein in Germany next Friday, where governments will announce their latest pledges of military support.

In Ukraine's eastern Donbas region – the focal point of Russia's drive to capture more territory – Ukraine's forces were battling around the small salt-mining town of Soledar.

3 dead, 16 hurt in ammo explosion near Ukraine

An ammunition explosion caused by "careless" handling of a grenade in Russia's Belgorod region on the border with Ukraine killed three soldiers and injured 16, Russian news agencies reported yesterday.

The blast occurred in a cultural centre repurposed for Russia's armed forces to store ammunition, state news agencies reported, citing local emergency services for the toll.

Another eight service personnel were still reported missing as of Sunday evening, the Interfax news agency reported.

"As a result of the unintentional detonation of a hand grenade by a sergeant in a dormitory ... a fire broke out. Sixteen servicemen, including the culprit, have been taken to hospital. Three more died," local emergency services said in a statement cited by news agencies.

The TASS news agency said local officials said "careless handling" of the grenade caused it to explode.

The 112 and Baza Telegram channels, linked to Russia's law enforcement agencies, said the dead and injured were conscripts called up to fight in Ukraine under a mobilisation drive. Reports did not say when the incident took place.

Serhiy Cherevatyi, spokesperson for Ukraine's eastern command, told Ukrainian television that Russian forces had shelled the area around Soledar and Bakhmut 234 times in the past 24 hours.

The Washington-based Institute for the Study of War said it was highly unlikely that Ukrainian forces still held positions within Soledar itself.

Reuters could not immediately

verify the situation in the town.

Putin said what he calls the special military operation was showing a positive trend and that he hoped Russian soldiers would deliver further gains after Soledar.

"The dynamic is positive," he told Rossiya 1 state television. "Everything is developing within the framework of the plan of the Ministry of Defence and the General Staff."

Paris to hold referendum on e-scooter rental services

Parisians will be invited to vote on whether to allow electric scooter rental services to continue operating in the city as authorities weigh banning the controversial for-hire vehicles, the capital's mayor has said.

The issue is "extremely divisive", mayor Anne Hidalgo told the weekend edition of *Le Parisien* newspaper, with critics saying riders show only cursory respect for the rules of the road. They often defy bans on riding on pavements, or park without consideration, while some abandon the scooters in parks or even toss them into the Seine river.

Fans meanwhile praise the zippy fleets – totalling 15,000 scooters operated by companies Lime, Dott and Tier – as a fast, non-polluting alternative to cars or crowded public transport. Hidalgo said Paris residents would be asked "a very simple question" in the referendum planned for April 2: "Do we or don't we continue with free-floating rental scooters?"

The mayor said she herself was leaning towards a ban but would "respect Parisians' vote".

A ban would make Paris an exception among major cities. In September, the capital already threatened the three operators with non-renewal of their licences, which expire in March, if they failed to limit reckless riding and other "misuses".

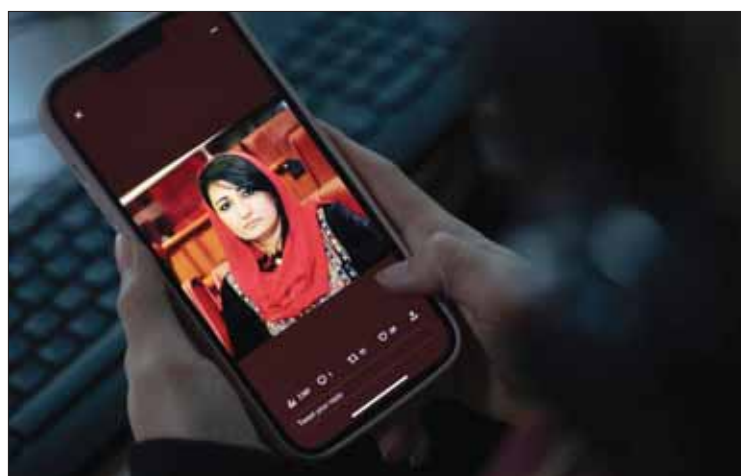
The operators in November came up with a number of suggested improvements, including equipping the scooters with licence plates that would allow easier tracking of riders running a red light, or travelling in pairs on the single-person vehicles – both common violations.

30,000 marchers demand end to healthcare cuts in Madrid

Tens of thousands of people marched through central Madrid yesterday to demand an end to the cutbacks and privatisation affecting the region's crisis-hit public healthcare services.

Banging drums and chanting slogans, the protesters packed the main boulevard running past the city's El Prado museum as part of a so-called Marea Blanca, or 'white tide' demonstration that drew 30,000 people, according to a regional government spokesman.

Primary care services in the Madrid area have been under huge pressure for years due to a lack of resources and staff, forcing more people to turn to hospital emergency departments which are now overwhelmed with patients in a situation with echoes across Spain. This week, the SEMES emergency service workers association said Madrid's A&E departments had seen a "10 to 20%" increase in patients while the ADSP, which also represents health professionals in Madrid, said 300 people were waiting in corridors for a bed.



A woman looks at a picture of Mursal Nabizada on her mobile phone yesterday. (AFP)

Gunmen shoot dead 'fearless' Afghan woman ex-lawmaker

Gunmen shot dead an Afghan former lawmaker and one of her bodyguards in the capital Kabul in a night-time attack at her home, police said yesterday. Mursal Nabizada had been a member of parliament in the US-backed government that was overthrown by the Taliban in August 2021.

"Nabizada, along with one of her bodyguards, was shot dead at her house," Kabul police spokesman Khalid Zadran said.

"The security forces have started a serious investigation into the incident," he said, adding that a brother of the former lawmaker was also wounded in the attack, which took place during the night between Saturday and yesterday.

Nabizada was a "fearless champion for Afghanistan", former lawmaker Mariam Solaimankhil said on Twitter.

"A true trailblazer – strong, outspoken woman who stood for what she believed in, even in the face of danger," she wrote.

"Despite being offered the chance to leave Afghanistan, she chose to stay and fight for her people," she added.

Nabizada, 32, hailed from the eastern province of Nangarhar, and had been elected as a member of parliament from Kabul in 2018.

"I am sad and angry and want the world to know!" tweeted Hannah Neumann, a member of the European parliament, in response to the killing.

"She was killed in darkness, but the Taliban build their system of gender apartheid in full daylight."

Women had worked in prominent positions across Afghan society in the two decades since the US-led invasion of Afghanistan, with many becoming judges, journalists and politicians. Many women in such professions have fled the country, however, since the Taliban returned to power.

Punjab assembly dissolved, advice for caretaker CM

AFP
Lahore

The provincial assembly in Pakistan's most populous province, Punjab, was dissolved late Saturday, in a move orchestrated by former prime minister Imran Khan as part of a bid to force early general elections.

The country has been gripped by political instability since Khan was ousted in a no-confidence vote and replaced last April by a shaky coalition led by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.

The South Asian nation is also battling a severe economic crisis. It is drowning in debt, facing galloping inflation and dwindling foreign exchange reserves as the economy tries to claw to recovery from last year's devastating monsoon floods.

Punjab Governor Baligh Ur Rehman on Saturday signed a letter ordering the appointment of a caretaker chief minister, replacing Khan's coalition partner Chaudhry Pervez Elahi's government.

Elahi had advised the governor to dissolve the assembly earlier this week, with Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party seeking a provincial election.

Khan's party continues to command popularity, and is expected to also dissolve the provincial assembly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, where it holds power in a coalition government.

Fresh elections to the Punjab assembly

– which governs vital services for roughly half of Pakistan's 220 million citizens – must now be held within 90 days.

Provincial polls in Pakistan have historically been held at the same time as general elections, although the synchronicity is not constitutionally mandated.

A countrywide general election is due in October 2023, and Khan's manoeuvre heaps financial and logistical headaches on Sharif's administration.

PTI spokesman Fawad Chaudry previously told AFP the dissolutions were planned as "a huge pressure tactic".

Khan was ousted from office as the economy began to backslide and he lost the support of Pakistan's military, which has ruled the country for roughly half of its 76-year history and continues to wield control over major aspects of governance and policy.

Since then, Khan has staged a series of huge and rousing rallies, touting a claim that he was ousted by a US-led "conspiracy". The US State Department and Sharif's government have denied the allegations.

In November, Khan was shot at a party rally, an assassination bid he blamed on Sharif and a senior army intelligence officer, without providing evidence of his allegations.

Sharif's government is resisting early elections, holding out hope of reviving an IMF bailout and securing additional loans to engineer an economic turnaround and boost its popularity.

AI, do my homework! How ChatGPT pitted teachers against tech

By Jules Bonnard, AFP
Paris

Know-it-all chatbots landed with a bang last year, convincing one engineer that machines had become sentient, spreading panic that industries could be wiped out, and creating fear of a cheating epidemic in schools and universities. Alarm among educators has reached fever pitch in recent weeks over ChatGPT, an easy-to-use artificial intelligence (AI) tool trained on billions of words and a ton of data from the web.

It can write a half-decent essay and answer many common classroom questions, sparking a fierce debate about the very future of traditional education.

New York City's education department banned ChatGPT on its networks because of "concerns about negative impacts on student learning".

"While the tool may be able to provide quick and easy answers to questions, it does not build critical-thinking and problem-solving skills," said the department's Jenna Lyle.

A group of Australian universities said they would change exam formats to

banish AI tools, regarding them as straight-up cheating. However, some in the education sector are more relaxed about AI tools in the classroom, and some even sense an opportunity rather than a threat.

That is partly because ChatGPT in its current form still gets stuff wrong. To give one example, it thinks Guatemala is bigger than Honduras. It isn't.

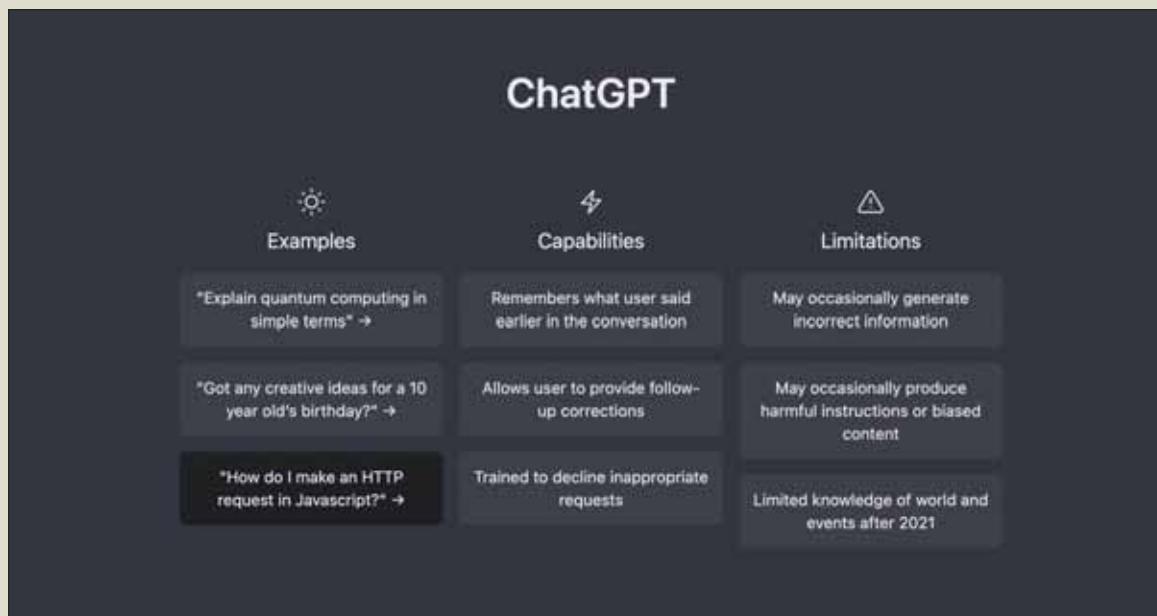
Also, ambiguous questions can throw it off track. Ask the tool to describe the Battle of Amiens and it will give a passable detail or two on the 1918 confrontation from World War I.

But it does not flag that there was also a skirmish of the same name in 1870. It takes several prompts to realise its error. "ChatGPT is an important innovation, but no more so than calculators or text editors," French author and educator Antonio Casilli told AFP.

"ChatGPT can help people who are stressed by a blank sheet of paper to write a first draft, but afterwards they still have to write and give it a style."

Researcher Olivier Ertzscheid from the University of Nantes agreed that teachers should be focusing on the positives.

In any case, he told AFP, high school



Screenshot from ChatGPT website.

students were already using ChatGPT, and any attempt to ban it would just make it more appealing. Teachers should instead "experiment with the limits" of AI tools, he said, by generating texts themselves

and analysing the results with their students. But there is also another big reason to think that educators do not need to panic yet. AI writing tools have long been locked in an arms race with

programs that seek to sniff them out, and ChatGPT is no different. A couple of weeks ago, an amateur programmer announced he had spent his New Year holiday creating an app that could analyse texts and decide if

they were written by ChatGPT. "There's so much chatgpt hype going around," Edward Tian wrote on Twitter. "Is this and that written by AI? We as humans deserve to know!" His app, GPTZero, is not the first in the field and is unlikely to be the last. Universities already use software that detects plagiarism, so it does not take a huge leap of imagination to see a future where each essay is rammed through an AI-detector.

Campaigners are also floating the idea of digital watermarks or other forms of signifier that will identify AI work.

And OpenAI, the company that owns ChatGPT, said it was already working on a "statistical watermark" prototype. This suggests that educators will be fine in the long run.

But Casilli, for one, still believes the impact of such tools has a huge symbolic significance. It partly upended the rules of the game, whereby teachers ask their pupils questions, he said.

Now, the student questions the machine before checking everything in the output.

"Every time new tools appear we start to worry about potential abuses, but we have also found ways to use them in our teaching," said Casilli.



Italian cruise ship 'Costa Toscana' arrives

Italian Cruise Ship, 'Costa Toscana,' the flagship vessel of Costa Cruises, arrived at Doha Port yesterday as a part of its maiden tour of the Arabian Gulf.

Offering 3-7-day cruise itineraries around the region, the ship can accommodate around 6,500 passengers and features its own waterpark, 13 swimming pools and hot tubs, 13 restaurants and 19 entertainment lounges.

Costa Toscana makes its debut as part of Qatar Tourism's 2022-2023 cruise season, which kicked off in December 2022 with the arrival of French cruise ship 'Le Bougainville,' and runs until April 2023. The season will see a grand total of 58 world-class cruise ships and four cruise liner maiden calls make their way to Qatar.

Commenting on this occasion, Maryam Saoud, head of Tourism Product Support at Qatar Tourism, said: "Our cruise season is off to a solid start with the latest expansion in our portfolio of cruise liners a testimony to our growth and diversification. This is also an LNG-powered cruise ship to Qatar, which highlights our commitment to sustainability in the development of the cruise sector. We look forward to welcoming thousands of visitors and delighting them with the warmth, hospitality and range of experiences Qatar has to offer."

Qatar's cruise sector, which was established in 2016, has helped position Qatar as a popular destination for maritime tourism in the region. The growth of the industry supports Qatar's economy through increased tourist spending, employment and business opportunities.

Since its return in 2021-2022, the cruise industry has driven significant growth to Qatar's tourism sector. In December 2022, Doha Port welcomed a total of 8,000 visitors, mostly from Italy and Russia. The 2021-22 cruise season welcomed a total of 100,500 passengers

Qatar's new Grand Terminal will accommodate up to 12,000 people a day. Its strategic location in the heart of Doha



makes it just minutes away from some of the city's most popular attractions in-

cluding the National Museum of Qatar, the Doha Corniche and Souq Waqif.

Vietnam embassy marks Lunar New Year

The embassy of Vietnam held a celebration of Xuan Que Huang for the Vietnamese Community in Qatar to celebrate the Lunar New Year 2023 on Saturday. A large number of Vietnamese living, working and studying in Qatar took part in the ceremony, in addition to the embassy officials and employees and other guests.

Speaking on the occasion, ambassador Tran Duc Hung briefed the community about some outstanding economic and social achievements in Vietnam during 2022. He stressed that in 2022 Vietnam faced many challenges as a consequence of the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the Covid-19 pandemic. However, thanks to the efforts of the political system under the leadership of the Communist Party, Vietnam maintained political stability, economic growth and its international integration have been promoted effectively. Vietnam is one of the few countries with impressive growth of 8.02%, trade volume up 9.5%, reaching \$ 732.5bn, foreign direct investment of \$22.4bn. More than 3.6mn international tourists travelled to Vietnam.

Regarding Vietnam-Qatar relations, the ambassador assessed that 2022 has seen positive changes. Political relations continued to be consolidated through regular contacts. Deputy Foreign Minister Pham Quang Hieu visited Qatar in July 2022. HE the Qatar's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister



Vietnam's ambassador Tran Duc Hung inaugurating the embassy's Traditional Room.

visited Vietnam in August 2022. Trade-investment relations were resumed right after the end of the pandemic when a number of enterprises of the two countries actively conducted market surveys and looked for opportunities to promote co-operation. The tour operators of the two countries actively organise tourism promotion activities. About 2,000 Vietnamese tourists came to Qatar to attend the FIFA World Cup. Bilateral co-operation represents momentum for the ministries, agencies and businesses of the two countries to promote ties. The envoy highly appreciated the role of the community in promoting Vietnam-Qatar relations. It was a Vietnamese company that completed part

of the steel structure of Lusail stadium. He lauded those community members who opened the first Vietnamese restaurant in Qatar. Ambassador Tran Duc Hung said that Vietnam and Qatar will celebrate the 30th anniversary of establishing diplomatic relations during 2023 (February 8, 1993-February 8, 2023). The two countries plan to hold a number of activities to welcome this event in Hanoi and Doha. The envoy also inaugurated the embassy's Traditional Room to pay tribute to generations of officials and employees working there. This is considered the first in a series of activities to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Vietnam and Qatar.



Ambassador Tran Duc Hung with members of the Vietnamese community and guests at the embassy on Saturday.

More falcons qualify at Marmi 2023

A total of 54 falcons have qualified for the higher rounds of the Haddad Al Tahadi (where a falcon has to hunt a homing pigeon within certain standards) competitions, in the ongoing 14th edition of Qatar International Falcons and Hunting Festival (Marmi 2023), with seven more birds qualifying yesterday (Sunday).

The falconers reiterated their dedication to continue training their birds for the intense competitions in the upcoming rounds. Abdulla Fakhro, an owner of the homing pigeons, stressed he has prepared his birds well. He noted that the pigeons that escape the hunt often fly back to their towers at Umm Ebairiya and he would return them to the race after two or three days as each successful race improves their strength and skills.

Today (Monday), the final of Al Da'aw (falcons speeding) Local championship will be held for five different categories of falcons. A total of 15 falcons of different categories will qualify for the premier final match next Saturday.

Marmi 2023, organised by Al Qannas Qatari Society at Sabkhat Marmi in the Sealine Area, under the patronage of HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, will continue until January 28. The event has drawn more local, regional and international attention as one of the major festivals in its category, pioneered by Qatar to maintain and develop such heritage traditional sport.

