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SPORT | Page 1

Ronaldo-Messi rivalry set for new chapter in Riyadh

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### Lebanese central bank chief under probe

European investigators questioned witnesses for eight hours in Beirut yesterday as part of a probe into Lebanon's central bank governor Riad Saleme and his brother. Investigators from France, Germany and Luxembourg began hearing witnesses Monday as part of the case of suspected financial misconduct including possible money laundering and embezzlement. The long-serving central bank chief is among top officials widely blamed for monetary policies that have led to a Lebanese economic crisis that the World Bank has dubbed one of the worst globally in modern history.

### India set to become the most populous nation

The world's population may have shot up beyond eight billion for the first time recently, but some countries including the most populous, China, are seeing their populations shrink. And the decline is set to continue as factors including rising living costs, more women entering the workforce and having children later mean people in some countries are having fewer babies. China's population shrank last year for the first time in more than six decades, official data showed yesterday, and it is expected to be overtaken by India this year as the most populous nation.

### Thunberg detained at German mine protest

Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg was hauled away and briefly detained yesterday during a protest near a German village being razed to make way for a coal mine expansion, police said. Thunberg has been in Germany for several days to support protests against the demolition of Luetzerath, which have become a symbol of resistance against fossil fuels. On Saturday, Thunberg joined thousands of demonstrators in a large-scale protest against the demolition of the hamlet, marching at the front of a procession.

### 45 dead, 20 missing as Ukraine ends search

Rescuers called off the search yesterday for victims of the Russian missile strike in the city of Dnipro with 20 people still missing and funerals being held in the grief-stricken Ukrainian city. Ukrainian authorities said the Russian strike in the eastern city of Dnipro at the weekend killed at least 45 people including six children. The toll made Saturday's strike one of the deadliest attacks since Russian President Vladimir Putin invaded Ukraine nearly 11 months ago. **Page 11**

### Reef sharks and rays risk extinction

Nearly two thirds of the sharks and rays that live among the world's corals are threatened with extinction, according to new research published yesterday, with a warning this could further imperil precious reefs. Coral reefs, which harbour at least a quarter of all marine animals and plants, are gravely menaced by an array of human threats, including overfishing, pollution and climate change. Shark and ray species - from apex predators to filter feeders - play an important role in these delicate ecosystems that "cannot be filled by other species", said Samantha Sherman, of Simon Fraser University in Canada and the wildlife group TRAFFIC International.

### German tanks for Ukraine in sight

Ukraine came a step closer yesterday to winning the fleet of modern battle tanks it hopes could turn the course of the war against Russia, after the West's big holdout Germany said this would be the first item on its new defence minister's agenda. In Dnipro, authorities called an end to the search for survivors in the ruins of an apartment building destroyed during Russian missile attacks on Saturday.

# Qatar delegation to highlight country's World Cup legacy, energy role at WEF

QNA  
Davos

HE the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman al-Thani will preside over a high-level Qatari delegation in the 53rd World Economic Forum (WEF) annual meeting, which is being held from January 16-20, in Davos, Switzerland.

This year's forum is held under the theme 'Co-operation in a Fragmented World' with the participation of a number of ministers of economy and commerce, ministers of finance, economic leaders, executive directors, corporate CEOs, entrepreneurs, social influencers, experts, and academics.

The forum's agenda includes a number of plenary sessions on various topics ranging from geopolitical crises, globalisation, development, economic innovation, green technologies, and efforts to promote diversity. It will also witness a large number of private meetings, as well as seminars, lectures, and interviews that focus on finding solutions to problems and challenges facing the world and ways to increase cooperation between the public and private sectors to confront them.

In recent years, Qatar has made these global issues a priority, investing in new technologies and participating in international forums such as the World Economic Forum, which is a strategic partner of the Doha Forum to promote new ideas and ways of co-operation.

HE the Deputy Prime Minister

●FM chairs Qatar's delegation at World Economic Forum  
●Engagement with Taliban needed despite 'disappointing' actions, says Sheikh Mohamed

and Minister of Foreign Affairs will participate in a discussion session on geopolitical changes in the world, where he will emphasise the role of Qatar as a reliable international partner in the fields of development, international peace, and security.

The delegation will also review Qatar's efforts to diversify its economy, enhance the attractiveness of its business environment, and underline its global role in energy security and its FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 legacy. The delegation will also discuss the most prominent regional and international challenges and ways to enhance multilateral co-operation to address them.

This year's forum is the first to be held as usual in mid-January since the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic.

In an interview with CNBC Middle East on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum in Davos, HE Mohamed bin Abdulrahman al-Thani said Qatar would stand with Afghan women as they continue to face irrational restrictions by the Taliban-led administration.

Doha News quoted the minister as saying in the interview that Qatar has been reaching out to the interim government to

understand the rationale behind the restrictive policies towards women and girls.

The top diplomat said Doha cannot see such policies rationalised from either a religious or cultural perspective, and confirmed his country is currently involved in consultations with other Muslim nations to "deal" with the situation.

Speaking at a panel at the WEF, HE Sheikh Mohamed expressed his disappointment over the Taliban's decision while stressing the need to maintain dialogue, Doha News said.

"We've been trying even to reach out to Kandahar and to have a dialogue with them, until now we didn't succeed but we are in continuous consultation with other countries in the region, some Muslim countries," Sheikh Mohamed said.

Commenting on the agreement reached between the Taliban and the others, HE Sheikh Mohamed told the panel it cannot be expected to bring immediate peace, stressing that Afghanistan has been through decades of war.

"It's a difficult journey to bring parties with disagreements together to reach an agreement, but it's also more difficult to sustain the agreement," he said. **Page 2**



HE Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman al-Thani participating in a panel discussion held on the sidelines of the WEF in Davos.

## Qatar among countries with the highest demand for women's World Cup tickets

Fans in Qatar are among the biggest purchasers of tickets for the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup, according to data released by FIFA.

In a statement yesterday, FIFA announced that over half-a-million tickets have been sold to fans from more than 120 countries for the ninth edition of the FIFA Women's World Cup, taking place this July and August in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand.

The tournament moved past 500,000 ticket sales last week, with the most sought-after match of the tournament being the August 20 final at Stadium Australia in Sydney/Gadigal.

Qatar figures among the top 10 countries with the highest demand for tickets. "Ticket sales for the FIFA Women's World Cup 2023 are off to a great start and it's not just home fans in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand purchasing tickets! Fans residing in the United States of America, England, Qatar, Germany, China, Canada, Ireland and France are the top 10 purchasers of FIFA Women's World Cup 2023 tickets so far. This highlights the fantastic pull of the female game and the passion it evokes among the global football fandom, who want to be part of the FIFA Women's World Cup and see the event reach #BeyondGreatness," said FIFA secretary-general Fatma Samoura.



Ticket prices are accessible for fans with those for adults starting at \$20 and \$10 for children. Tickets can be purchased from FIFA.com/Tickets

The opening match and opening ceremony for the first-ever co-hosted women's tournament will take place on July 20 at Aotearoa New Zealand's Eden Park in Auckland/Tamaki Makaurau. Stadium Australia in Sydney/Gadigal has been selected to host the final a month later on August 20.

The first-ever 32-team FIFA Women's World Cup will be a truly global celebration of football and welcome teams qualified for the first time ever in their history from Morocco, Zambia, the Philippines, Vietnam and Ireland.

Hospitality packages for the FIFA Women's World Cup 2023 are now on sale via Hospitality.FIFA.com/FIFAWomensWorldCup2023

## Protest against pension plan



Protesters take part in a torch-lit march called by the CGT workers' union to protest the French government's pensions reform plan, on the Canebiere in Marseille, southeastern France, yesterday. France is to face strikes across different sectors on January 19 (tomorrow), as workers join a nationwide strike against a widely unpopular pension reform plan. The suggested changes, still to be debated in parliament, would raise the retirement age from 62 to 64 and increase contributions required for a full pension. Most trains will be cancelled in France tomorrow, with flights also affected and Paris' subway heavily disrupted, as part of a nationwide strike against the government's plan to make people work longer before they can retire. Opinion polls show a vast majority of French oppose the planned reform, which would see the retirement age pushed from 62 to 64, and Thursday will be a test of whether this can transform into a major headache for the government. Unions have called workers to massively walk out of their job on Jan 19 and take to the streets across France.

## Al-Shu'aa reserve in Al Khor beckons visitors

With its diverse and rich flora and fauna, Al-Shu'aa reserve in Al Khor City is beckoning visitors. The park is home to 14 species of animals and birds, including turtles, rabbits, ostriches, turkeys, chickens, doves, pigeons, geese, ducks, quails, Arabian oryx, deer, goats and horses.

Abdullah Muqalled al-Muraikhi, member of the 25th constituency of the Central Municipal Council (CMC), told local Arabic daily *Arrayah* that the reserve is a prime destination for families and other residents in the area.

"Spread across 13,000sq m, Al Shu'aa reserve is unique with its several features that make visiting an enjoyable experience for families, especially for children.

"The entry is free and many families in the area prefer to spend the evening at the park where the children can watch animals and birds and get to know them closely."

The CMC member recalled that the reserve was opened several years ago with the support of the Ras Lafan Programme for Social Communication within the framework of the Ministry of Municipality's keenness



to provide a recreational outlet for the people of the area.

There are permanent shelters for the animals and birds and constant care is provided by the authorities concerned. The green area includes dozens of trees, children's play areas and solar-powered lighting poles.

Jassim Mohamed al-Emadi, a local resident, said that the unique reserve is popular with families, whether citizens or residents. **Page 2**





**QREC completes preparations to organise Sheikh Joaan Bin Hamad Al-Thani Rifle Day**

Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club (QREC) completed preparations to hold the biggest local competition of season 2022-2023 - Sheikh Joaan Bin Hamad Al-Thani Rifle Day. The event's 1st racing will be held on Saturday at Al Rayyan Racecourse, and will see financial awards reaching \$550,000.

The racing will feature 139 of the best horses. QREC allocated high cash prizes, including \$100,000 for the eighth, ninth and tenth rounds, \$40,000 from the third round until seventh round, and \$25,000 for the first and second round. (QNA)



**Qatar participates in World Economic Forum**



HE the Minister of Finance Ali bin Ahmed al-Kuwari participated in the 53rd World Economic Forum annual meeting in Davos, Switzerland, which is being held this year under the theme "Co-operation in a Fragmented World". On the sidelines of his participation in the forum, HE al-Kuwari will hold meetings with a number of financial institutions and international banks that contribute to strengthening bilateral relations and exploring areas of co-operation. The forum engages the foremost political, business, cultural and other leaders of society to shape global, regional and industry agendas. (QNA) **Business Page 1**

**Sport City station shelter closure**



**7 | ٢٥** **مفلق** **مغلق** **3 4 5** **المدينة الرياضية Sport City**

في 18 يناير 2023،  
من الساعة 3 عصراً حتى الساعة 9 مساءً  
سيتم إغلاق المخارج 3 و4 و5 في محطة المدينة الرياضية.

On 18 Jan 2023, from 3 PM to 9 PM,  
shelters 3, 4 & 5 will be closed  
at Sport City station.

Qatar Rail has announced that shelters 3, 4 and 5 of Doha Metro's Sport City station will be closed from 3pm-9pm today.

**Al-Shu'aa reserve, an attraction in Al Khor City**



Al-Shu'aa reserve, spread across 13,000sq m in Al Khor City, is attracting more visitors. The park is home to 14 species of animals and birds, including turtles, rabbits, ostriches, turkeys, chickens, doves, pigeons, geese, ducks, quails, Arabian oryx, deer, goats and horses. The entry is free.



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## Cooler days ahead as Met forecasts drop in temperature from today



A noticeable drop in temperatures is expected in the country from today until Saturday (January 21), the Qatar Met department has said. This is due to the effect of northwesterly winds on the country, the department said in a tweet. The maximum temperature is expected to range from 18-21C during the day and the minimum from 12-16C at night in different places, dropping further in some southern and external areas, the forecast states. The detailed forecast for today says strong winds are expected in most areas as well as offshore, where high seas are also likely. It will be partly cloudy both inshore and offshore, and cold conditions are also expected. Northwesterly winds will blow at speeds reaching 35 knots offshore and 30 knots inshore, with the sea level rising to 12ft. A minimum temperature of 11C is likely in Abu Samra today, while Doha is expected to see a low of 14C and high of 20C. This will mark a significant drop in temperatures compared to the past few days. For instance, Doha (airport area) recorded a high of 28C and a low of 19C yesterday, 24C and 18C on Monday, and 22C and 19C on Sunday. Doha and other parts of the country experienced windy and dusty conditions yesterday, along with a drop in visibility in some areas, especially in the evening, according to updates by the Met department. Seen above, windy conditions in Doha yesterday. **PICTURES:** Shaji Kayamkulam

## Toyota showcases hydrogen FCEV technology at future energy summit

Toyota's environment-friendly mobility solutions are in the spotlight this week during the World Future Energy Summit in Abu Dhabi, where the hydrogen-powered Toyota Mirai Fuel Cell Electric Vehicle (FCEV) and a Fuel Cell Forklift developed by Toyota Industries Corporation are on display throughout the three-day event.

Both products utilise innovative hydrogen FCEV technology to deliver efficient performance with zero emissions, playing an important role in Toyota's multiple pathway approach toward carbon neutrality.

Toyota began work on its hydrogen FCEV technology in 1992, which converts hydrogen and oxygen into electricity to power an electric motor and produces only water as a by-product. The company's commitment to continually refine this technology can be seen in the groundbreaking Toyota Mirai, which offers best-in-class efficiency with zero emissions, says a press statement issued in Doha by Abdullah Abdulghani & Bros Co (AAB), the distributor of Toyota vehicles in Qatar.

"The pioneering FCEV delivers a class-leading cruising range of 650km and can be refuelled in under five minutes, ensuring drivers enjoy the same levels of performance and convenience associated with a traditionally-powered vehicle," the statement notes. The versatility of the Toyota Fuel Cell System has enabled a wide range of applications in areas such as trucks, buses, boats and stationary generators, including the FC Forklift. This innovative solution has a refuelling time of just 2-3 minutes, helping ensure round-the-clock availability and making the FC Forklift especially well-suited to multi-shift operations where trucks are constantly in use.

Kei Fujita, chief representative, Middle East and Central Asia Representative Office, Toyota Motor Corporation, said: "We are pleased to showcase two of our hydrogen-powered mobility solutions at the World Future Energy Summit, a highly significant platform that contributes to a more sustainable tomorrow."

"With a fuelling time of less than five minutes, Toyota's zero-emission hydrogen FCEV technology combines greater convenience with enhanced sustainability and is one of many promising solutions we have been exploring as part of



The groundbreaking Toyota Mirai, which offers best-in-class efficiency with zero emissions.

our drive for carbon neutrality. I would like to extend my gratitude to the organisers of this important and timely event, the goals of which align closely with Toyota's ongoing drive for sustainability."

Recognised as one of the world's most influential gatherings for the energy industry, the World Future Energy Summit brings together key stakeholders with the goal of accelerating the transition toward cleaner sources of energy. Toyota's participation comes as part of its long-term commitment to developing carbon neutral mobility solutions.

The company successfully launched the Prius - the world's first mass-produced Hybrid Electric Vehicle (HEV) - in 1997 and continues to explore diverse technology options to meet the diverse needs of users across the globe. Today, Toyota offers a full lineup of sustainable mobility solutions including HEVs, Plug-in Hybrid Electric Vehicles (PHEVs), Battery Electric Vehicles (BEVs) and FCEVs, and has sold more than 22mn electrified vehicles across the globe.

Fujita explained: "At Toyota, we recognise that carbon neutrality is a goal with multiple pathways; there is no single best solution for all use cases in all parts of the world. By focusing on the development of diverse electrified powertrain options, we are contributing to greater choices for drivers that will increase the adoption of eco-friendly vehicles. We will continue to seek out new technologies that can accelerate



ate the journey toward a carbon-neutral society where people can enjoy happier, healthier, and more sustainable lives."

The hydrogen-powered Toyota

Mirai FCEV and Toyota FC Forklift are on display at the World Future Energy Summit 2023, which is taking place at the Abu Dhabi National Exhibition Centre until today.

## ARIU with University of Derby, UK launches MBA course in Qatar

Al Rayyan International University College (ARIU) in partnership with the University of Derby in the UK has added a new 'world-class' Master of Business Administration (MBA) Programme to its educational portfolio. The new MBA Global programme will start in the second week of February 2023 and offer a pathway to doctoral degrees, including PhD and DBA, a statement explained yesterday.

The programme, designed to accommodate working professionals with full-time (1-year) and part-time (2-years) options, is not only academically rigorous, but also industry relevant.

Upon successful completion of the programme, all graduates will receive a graduation certificate from the University of Derby in the UK, which is fully recognised by the educational authorities in the UK and in Qatar.

The university will extend an exclusive scholarship to all students who register for the programme before the end of January 2023. The new MBA Global programme will complement the university's current academic offerings and help the country's expansion of high-quality postgraduate education. The programme will also contribute to the development and growth of Qatar's business sector and support the country's efforts in the development of specialised education in strategically important industries.

The programme is licensed by the University of Derby and approved by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education in Qatar. It is fully based on University of Derby's curriculum, and upon successful graduation from the programme, students will be awarded with Master of Business Administration degree from the University of Derby in the UK. Dr Ivan Ninov, executive dean of ARIU with University of Derby stated: "Our academic majors are fully aligned with the core pillars of Qatar National Vision 2030 and our university offers first-class educational environment in which students are provided with unique opportunities for learning and growth. We are confi-



**The programme is licensed by the University of Derby and approved by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education in Qatar. It is fully based on University of Derby's curriculum, and upon successful graduation from the programme, students will be awarded with Master of Business Administration degree from the University of Derby in the UK**

dent that an MBA degree from the University of Derby will lead to an exciting future with numerous career opportunities and equip our graduates with the necessary skills to further progress and excel in their professional careers."

## Partnering as an Exclusive Franchise in the MENA region, Sharaka Education W.L.L. signs an agreement with Sherborne Schools Worldwide Limited



Sharaka Education W.L.L., the educational flagship of Sharaka Holdings, recently signed an agreement with Sherborne Schools Worldwide Limited, securing the exclusive rights to franchise the Sherborne brand in the MENA region.

The Chairman of Sharaka Holdings, Sheikh Abdullah bin Ahmed Al Thani, and Vice-Chairman, Sheikh Abdul Aziz bin Ahmed Al Thani, as well as Dr. Dominic Luckett, Headmaster and CEO of Sherborne UK and Dr. Ruth Sullivan, Head of Sherborne Girls UK, were present at the signing ceremony, together with Mr Amer Pares, CEO of Sharaka Holdings, Mr Nick Prowse, Principal and CEO of Sherborne Qatar.

Speaking on the partnership, Sheikh Abdullah bin Ahmed al Thani said, "Under the wise guidance of HH Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, we at Sharaka Holdings are committed to making significant contributions towards Qatar National Vision 2030. We strongly believe holistic, high-quality education is integral to empowering a sustainable nation. For more than a decade,

Sherborne Qatar has successfully educated pupils, leading them into some of the best universities. We now envisage extending our contribution into the MENA region, leading us to create Sharaka Education. We believe our partnership with Sherborne Schools Worldwide is key to realising this vision."

Dr Ruth Sullivan, Head of Sherborne Girls said "I am delighted that Sherborne Girls, along with Sherborne School, is forging this exciting partnership with Sharaka Education throughout the MENA region. I was honoured to visit Doha recently and sign this agreement to create new and inspiring educational opportunities for young people throughout the MENA region."

Dr Dominic Luckett, Headmaster and CEO of Sherborne UK said "Signing the MENA agreement with Sharaka Education was a moment of great significance for Sherborne School. We are looking forward to extending the scope of our collaboration bringing Sherborne's educational values and ethos to thousands more children and young people."

## 28 local farms to participate in Mahaseel Festival

The upcoming Mahaseel Festival will feature 28 local farms, six national companies specialised in poultry, meat and dairy, two companies producing honey and dates, eight nurseries, as well as shops selling traditional, popular local dishes, Katara - the Cultural Village Foundation has said.

The seventh edition of Mahaseel Festival will be held in collaboration with the Ministry of Municipality from tomorrow until January 28 in the southern area of Katara.

After that, the market will continue operating on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays until the end of March, from 9am-9pm. Chairman of the Mahaseel organising committee Salman al-Nuaimi said the festival has established its importance in supporting and promoting the highest quality Qatari agricultural and food products, pointing that there will also be activities and art workshops. Mahaseel Festival aims to highlight the importance of growing diverse agricultural and food products.

It also contributes to promoting Qatari farm products, which enjoy a good reputation and are available at reasonable prices. (QNA)



File picture of Mahaseel.



# HMC Engineering Dept conducts awareness programme



The programme was organised in collaboration between the HMC and the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, represented by the Academic Advising Department and Qatar University.

The Training and Development Section at the Hamad Medical Corporation's (HMC) Department of Corporate Engineering and Health Facilities Management organised an awareness and training programme for 9th and 11th grade students in Qatari preparatory and secondary schools recently.

The programme was organised in collaboration between the HMC and the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, represented by the Academic Advising Department and Qatar University.

Several HMC departments also participated in the implementation of the programme: Nursing, Medical Engineering, Ambulance, Safety and Security, and Anaesthesiology.

Hundreds of male and female students participated in the programme and were introduced to several facilities at the HMC.

The introductory lecture was on the advantages of working in the engineering field and the nature of the roles of engineers and engineering technicians in healthcare settings.

The lecture was delivered by Dhafi Rashid al-Marri, executive director of the HMC's Corporate Engineering and Health Facilities Management Department.

"We strive to encourage high school stu-

dents to consider pursuing a major in engineering for their undergraduate studies," he said. Abdulla al-Kubaisi, head of training and development at the HMC's Department of Corporate Engineering and Health Facilities Management, explained that the programme included training visits for students to a number of HMC departments and hospitals to provide them with an overview of the role of health facilities.

"Each group of the students was received for two days at the HMC's Itqan Clinical Simulation and Innovation Centre, where they attended introductory lectures about engineering professions and the roles of engineers and technicians in the medical field," he said.

"We have also organised visits for the students to several HMC departments to learn about the roles of the teams working in those departments."

Participants in the training programme expressed their overall satisfaction and said that they gained new experience and knowledge about engineering and its applications in hospitals. They also learned about the challenges that face engineering professionals in healthcare settings, how they can respond to them effectively, and how to respond to emergency situations, such as power outages.

## Transport minister meets Ethiopian counterpart

HE the Minister of Transport Jassim Seif Ahmed al-Sulaiti has met his Ethiopian counterpart Dagmawit Moges. Their meeting discussed bilateral relations in transport and civil aviation, and ways to develop them. (QNA)



## Key issues discussed at CMC meeting

The Central Municipal Council (CMC) held its regular meeting yesterday, headed by chairman Mohamed bin Hammoud al-Shafi, and discussed a number of key issues of interest.

The CMC discussed the report of its services and utilities committee regarding the recommendations about the reduction of space on street pavements.

They also discussed a report on naming a number of streets and roads across the country.

Further, the CMC discussed the recommendation regarding allowing buildings at movable ranches, and also about the specification of guarantee periods for recruited domestic helpers.



Some of the participants in the meeting.

## Families receive aid worth QR12.6mn from Zakat Fund distributed in December

A total of 420 families received aid to the tune of QR12.6mn from the Zakat Fund of the Ministry of Endowments (Awqaf) and Islamic Affairs in December 2022.

According to a statement from Awqaf, the Zakat Affairs Department distributed QR12,657,876 aid to the registered beneficiaries.

The aid provided to eligible families on a monthly basis was worth QR8,806,550,

while lump-sum, one-time aid amounted to QR3,851,326.

The administration receives Zakat funds through various collection channels, including offices and collection points spread across the country, in addition to the website of the Zakat Affairs Department as well as the express collection service on the numbers 55199990, 55199996, and the administration's accounts with banks.



## Purification and prayer course for visually impaired



The Department of Da'wah and Religious Guidance of the Ministry of Endowments (Awqaf) and Islamic Affairs has organised a course on purification and prayer for the visually impaired.

The course was organised in co-operation with the Qatar Social and Cultural Centre for the Blind, and was presented by preacher Sheikh Abdullah Muthanna al-Abara. Head of the Religious Guidance Department Youssef Hassan al-Hammadi said the two-day course addressed the jurisprudence provisions required by blind people in their life and worship, in terms of purification and prayer, and everything related to this aspect to correct the prayer and worship performance. (QNA)

## Ministry recalls Honda motorcycle models

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI), in co-operation with Domasco (Doha Marketing Services Company), has announced the recall of Honda FORZA 750 2021-22 models, due to a possible defect in the steering wheel lock, which may cause inability to drive the motorcycle.

The recall campaign comes within the framework of MoCI's continuous efforts to protect consumers and ensure that dealers follow up on vehicle defects and repairs.

The MoCI said it will co-ordinate with the dealer to follow up on the maintenance and repair work. The MoCI has urged all customers to report any violations to its Consumer Protection and Anti-Commercial Fraud Department, which processes complaints, inquiries and suggestions through the following channels: Call centre: 16001, e-mail: info@moci.gov.qa, Twitter: @MOCIQATAR, Instagram: MOCIQATAR, MoCI mobile app for android and iOS: MOCIQATAR

## QBSBAS holds 7th edition of Employment and Scholarship Day

Qatar Banking Studies and Business Administration Independent Secondary School for Boys (QBSBAS) organised the seventh edition of the Employment and Scholarship Day.

On this occasion, QBSBAS held an exhibition sponsored by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE) and Qatar Central Bank (QCB) to ensure the school's students and the participating schools are familiarised with over 45 destinations for employment and scholarship, including colleges, universities and banks.

Assistant Undersecretary for Education Affairs at MoEHE Maha Zayed al-Ruwaili hailed the efforts made by QBSBAS, and other participating entities to help students pursue the correct options for their career and academic future.

The exhibition activities saw students' engagement from 20 secondary and middle schools.


Head of QBSBAS Abdullah Ali al-Kuwari, who inaugurated the exhibition, paid tribute to the participating entities and lauded their effective role to have a successful exhibition, and wished them further excellence in serving the students. (QNA)



### NOTICE

Further to our announcement dated 27 December 2021, Unimoni Exchange L.L.C wishes to inform its valued customers that its branches located at Barwa Al Baraha & Al Khor will remain closed until further notice. Kindly contact our Customer Experience Department on +974 44365252 or visit your nearest Unimoni Exchange L.L.C branch for any queries.

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### TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Sl. No.	Tender No.	Subject	Tender Fees	Closing Date
1	AT/C/0919/23	Supply & Delivery of Fresh Fruits & Vegetables for one year on call-off basis	500.00	2.02.2023
2	AT/C/0920/23	Supply & Delivery of fresh local fish for one year on call-off basis	300.00	2.02.2023
3	AT/C/0921/23	Supply & Delivery of various food & beverage items for one year on call-off basis	500.00	2.02.2023

The tender documents are available for collection from the Finance Department (Tel.: 44465612) of The Torch Doha upon presentation of a formal letter of authorization on Company letterhead, copy of the Commercial Registration and a non-refundable fee as specified above.

The closing time will be at 12.00 noon on the closing date mentioned above, any offer arriving thereafter will not be considered.

Tenders are to be submitted in duplicate in a sealed envelope (Commercial envelope only) addressed to The Chairman, General Tender Committee, The Torch Doha and deposit in the tender box available at The Torch Doha Purchasing Office located in Al Waab Street, Aspire Zone.



### Invitation to Tender

In accordance with the following conditions:

Tender / Auction Number	Subject	Tender / Auction Document Fees (Non-refundable)	Tender / Auction Bond	Tender/Auction Offer	Closing Date
AL-AWALIA/TD/2023/03	Supply of Spare Parts for Hyundai Cranes Trolley Drive Station for Qatar Primary Materials Company ("Supplies")	500 QAR	70,000 QAR	Two Bids (Technical & Commercial)	25 Jan 2023 01:00 PM
AL-AWALIA/TD/2023/04	Call-off agreement for Supply and Installation of Weighbridge Equipment for the RCA Operation Sites for Qatar Primary Materials Company ("Works")	500 QAR	50,000 QAR	Two Bids (Technical & Commercial)	25 Jan 2023 01:00 PM
AL-AWALIA/TD/2023/05	Call-Off Agreement for the Supply of Gabbro Aggregate (FOB) for Qatar Primary Materials Company ("Supplies")	2000 QAR	1,000,000 QAR	Two Bids (Technical & Commercial)	25 Jan 2023 01:00 PM
AL-AWALIA/TD/2023/06	Consultancy Services for Compensation, Benefits and HR Policy Review for Qatar Primary Materials Company ("Services")	500 QAR	12,000 QAR	Two Bids (Technical & Commercial)	25 Jan 2023 01:00 PM

1. Tender Documents can be collected from our head office located at Al-Saad, Suhaim bin Hamad St., Qatar First Bank Building, 10th Floor (Sunday, Thursday) between 08:00 to 13:00.

2. Bids are to be submitted in two sealed (in red wax) envelopes (Technical & Commercial) and addressed to Tenderers and Auction Committee, Tender reference number and subject are to be clearly written on the envelopes, provided that the last date for submitting bids is one o'clock in the afternoon on the closing day. Any bids submit after this date will not be accepted.

3. Tender Documents will be released only after delivery of Deposit Slip Stamped by Commercial Bank along with Authorization Letter to the delegated person signed by authorized person as per Computer ID, Copy of commercial Registration (CR), Business License and Computer ID.

4. Tender Fees are nonrefundable and can be transferred online to Account of Qatar Primary Material Company- Bank A/C (4050-65111-006) at Commercial Bank of Qatar. IBAN No. (QA 18 CBQA 0000 0000 4050 65111 006). Tender reference number and subject are to be written on the deposit slip.

5. Tender Bond (Bank Guarantee/ Manager Cheque) must be valid for 120 days after closing date and must be submitted in separate & sealed envelope along with technical bid and a photocopy is to be attached with commercial bid. Bids without tender bond will be rejected.

6. Bids must be valid for 90 days after closing date and are to be submitted in two copies (Original & Duplicate).

7. Any queries relating to the Tender Documents must only be raised in writing, preferably by email, to the address specified in the respective Tender Document. Any response issued by Qatar Primary Material Company will be in the form of a question and answer and will be distributed to all tenderers without revealing the identity of the originator of the query(ies) in the Form of Tender Bulletins. Queries must be received at the address specified in the respective ITT Documentation at least five (5) calendar days prior to the tender closing date. Any queries received after such date will be ignored.

8. The amount of the Performance Bond to be provided by the awarded bidder is (10% of the contract value) and its validity period, must remain valid under the contract implementation period and the guarantee period according to the terms of the tender.

9. The Technical Bids shall be opened within one week from the closing date.

10. Qatar Primary Material Company has the right, during the contract period, to request an increase or decrease in the amounts of the items, works or services by a percentage not exceeding (20%) of the contract value with the same conditions and prices, provided that the increase is of the same type of contracted items, works or services.

11. Qatar Primary Material Company's tendering terms and conditions apply.

For further Inquiry, please send your queries at Fax Number: 44479559 or email to [tender@qpmc.qa](mailto:tender@qpmc.qa) or visit Qatar Primary Material Company website at [www.qpmc.qa](http://www.qpmc.qa)



# Vodafone Qatar provides Mowasalat with big data service



Vodafone Qatar, in partnership with Mowasalat (Karwa), provided a customised Smart SMS service through Vodafone's big data platform to further elevate customer experience during events that took place in the country until the end of last year.

This service was aided by a managed data science service to generate analytics and data to send targeted and customised SMS, based on passenger location, date and time, and demographic data.

The service provided by Vodafone helped to promote Mowasalat's Karwa Taxi services to all visiting fans in Qatar during the biggest sporting event in the country.

By using Vodafone's big data SMS plat-

form and Vodafone's data science expertise, Karwa communicated useful information to its customers, while allowing fans to stay connected with friends and family from the moment they arrived in Doha.

Vodafone Qatar Enterprise Business Unit director Mahday Saad al-Hebabi said: "This strategic partnership was a testament to the strong collaboration we promote across sectors to deliver a world-class digital experience in line with Qatar National Vision 2030."

"Our customised big data solution and data science expertise enabled Mowasalat to strengthen the customer's experience while on the move," the official said. "We also enabled our partners to use our reliable and seamless network to leverage and enhance

their operations, manage their business, and more importantly deliver the highest standard of service and experience to fans and residents alike during the biggest event in Qatar's history."

Additionally, Karwa was a key distribution partner for Vodafone Qatar and enabled all fans using Karwa taxis to receive a free Fan SIM, bundled with a dedicated fan offer.

The Fan SIM offered unlimited data and thousands of local minutes and SMS valid to be used over two days.

Users were able to self-activate their free SIM card on My Vodafone App as soon as they were on board any Karwa car by connecting to the taxi's Wi-Fi service, all powered by Vodafone's network.



## QSFA organises 2023 Family Running Race

The Qatar Sports for All Federation (QSFA) has organised the 2023 Family Running Race, a first-of-its-type competition that comes as a continuation of the family race series that amounted to six races in 2022.

Held at Al Rayyan Park in collaboration with Al Rayyan municipality, the race covered distances of 3km and 5km.

It brought together 70 male and female participants of different age groups, including 30 children.

Following light warm-up exercises, the participants were involved in a range of sports activities such as tug-of-war, tennis, badminton, football shooting, tele-match games, fitness, speed, flexibility, jumping, and softball, with the aim of involving children in group challenges within competing teams.

Among the activities were fitness sessions under the supervision of specialised trainers, to guide participants to perform exercises correctly.

Following the race, the participants who finished the two race distances were awarded



Snapshots from the QSFA event.

medals and other encouragement prizes.

The QSFA has a busy calendar that offers a variety of events and sporting activities for citizens and residents, whatever their age and sports interests, in a bid to achieve the federation's message of creating a broader base of sport participation. - QNA



Youth participating in the 'My Environment is My Trust' campaign.

## 'My Environment is My Trust' campaign continues in Al Khor

Within the framework of social responsibility and under the supervision of the Youth Affairs Department at the Ministry of Sports and Youth, and with the aim of increasing environmental awareness in the community, the Youth Committee of Al Khor Sports Club organised a planting and cleaning campaign with the slogan *My Environment is My Trust*.

Scouts from the Abdullah bin Ali al-Misnad Preparatory School for Boys participated in the campaign at parks in the municipality of Al Khor and Al Thakira, local Arabic daily *Arrayyah* reports.

Abdullah Mohamed al-Muhannadi, head of Al Khor Sports Club's youth committee, said that the campaign to plant and clean the Al Farkiya area comes as a continuation of the "My Environment is My Trust" campaign launched by the club seven years ago.

Saleh al-Obaidly, supervisor of youth activities at the club, praised the enthusiasm displayed by the youth participating in the campaign.

# CRA conducts benchmark study on prices of retail telecom services

The Communications Regulatory Authority (CRA) has conducted a benchmarking study on the prices of retail telecom services in Qatar, comparing the averages in the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), with the objective of monitoring the state of the telecommunications market in Qatar.

The study is based on the Arab Regulators Network of Telecommunications (AR-EGNET) study and the five OECD price baskets: fixed voice, fixed broadband, mobile voice and data, mobile broadband, and leased lines.

The study's main findings are that prices for telecom services in Qatar are typically below or on par with the GCC average, while typically above the OECD average.

It also shows that since 2017 prices for fixed broadband and mobile voice and data services in Qatar have decreased, while



prices for fixed voice, mobile broadband, and leased lines services have largely remained static.

To develop the necessary regulatory instruments, the CRA conducts studies and monitors the state of the telecom market in Qatar in comparison with similar markets at the regional and international levels.

This helps the CRA regulate the telecom sector towards its development for the benefit of both the service providers and telecom consumers.

The *Telecom Price Baskets Benchmarking Study for Qatar, GCC, and OECD Averages* is available at <https://www.cra.gov.qa/en/document/telecom-price-benchmarking-study-for-qatar-gcc-and-oecd-averages>

## Plant nurseries report good turnout of customers

Plant nurseries across the country have started to report a considerably good turnout of customers who want to enhance their home gardens with vegetables, fruits and seasonable flowers.

Local Arabic daily *Arrayyah* reported that sellers at these nurseries observed that thanks to the cooler weather, more and more people want to increase their home gardening activities, with special focus on vegetables such as tomato, okra, eggplant, zucchini, mint leaves, and parsley, besides seasonal flowers of different types and some specific types of rose.

Customers who have big space at their home garden often prefer to buy seedlings of lemon, guava, mango and pomegranate trees.

There has also been an increase experienced in the sales of tools for gardening, soil, insecticides, fertiliser, and planting basins and containers.

The prices for seasonal flowers can be very low and cheap, encouraging some to buy many of these in different colours to decorate their home gardens.

The prices of tree seedlings vary according to their types and sizes; for instance, the price of lemon tree seedlings could range from QR50 to as high as QR150, depending on the size of the tree, while an orange tree seedling ranges from QR80-150.



## Qatar Red Crescent – Medical Affairs Division

### Tender Announcement :-

Sr. #	Tender No.	Description	Temporary Tender Bond	Documents Fees (Non-Refundable)	Closing Date
1	QRC/WHC/01 -2023	Smart Protection for Endpoints (Renew) -Trend Micro Vision One Credits	Non	Non	09/02/2023

The documents can be collected from Medical Affairs Division, Ain Khalid Area, Sunday to Thursday from 07:00 am to 02:00 pm till the closing date.

### Required Documents:

1. Authorization letter to receive tender documents + ID copy of the person will be receiving the documents.
2. Company's Commercial registration copy.

For more information: please call: (50044554), or Email [whc.tenders@qrcs.org.qa](mailto:whc.tenders@qrcs.org.qa)



# Qatar Charity projects benefit 70,000 in Kosovo

Qatar Charity (QC) implemented more than 350 humanitarian and development projects in Kosovo last year, benefiting more than 70,000 people, it was announced yesterday.

More than 140 wells were dug, and 148 projects implemented in the field of economic empowerment and food security. More than 54 projects were implemented in education, health, and social housing, in addition to eight in the relief field.

Last year, QC continued the sponsorship of 3,600 people, including orphans, students, people with special needs, and poor families. It trained more than 400 students on different linguistic and IT skills through its 'Qatar Training Centre'.

Besides, QC began implementing qualitative development projects, which include an Islamic centre in the Lipjan municipality, and an emergency centre in the Podujeve municipality, in addition to a health centre in the Gjilan municipality.

QC has implemented all its development and humanitarian projects with a high level of coordination with the authorities concerned in Kosovo through the conclusion of more than 20 executive agreements. The increase in QC's programmes for Kosovo exceeded 25% in 2022 compared to 2021.

QC has been working in Kosovo for 22 years in the development and humanitarian fields. It signed more than 150 agreements with the authorities concerned in the country and was highly praised for the impact of various projects.



More than 140 wells were dug, and 148 projects implemented in the field of economic empowerment and food security.



## QPO concert to celebrate new year with Scheherazade

The Qatar Philharmonic Orchestra (QPO) is set to celebrate the new year with an all-time favourite - Scheherazade, A Musical Masterpiece - with its shimmering music evocative of 1001 Symphonic Tales on January 21 at Katara - the Cultural Village's Opera House. The concert, which kicks off at 7.30pm, features Karl-Heinz Steffens conducting the QPO to

the amazing works of Strauss such as Roses from the South, Egyptian March, Pizzicato Polka, Tritsch Tratsch Polka, Thunder and Lightning Polka and many more. Performers also include Joo Young Oh (violin), Taoufik Mirkhan (qanoun) and Rania Shehab (narrator). Part of the programme includes Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov: Scheherazade, Op. 35; Franz von Suppe: Overture

to Leichte Kavallerie (Light Cavalry); Johann Strauss II: Rosen aus dem Suden (Roses from the South) Op. 388; Overture: Zigeunerbaron (Gypsy Bar); Pizzicato Polka; Emile Waldteufel: Etudiantina; Johann Strauss II: Egyptischer Marsch (Egyptian March) Op. 335; Tritsch - Tratsch Polka, Op. 214; and Unter Donner und Blitz (Thunder and Lightning Polka), Op.324.

## Qatar to attend Sharjah International Crafts Forum

The Ministry of Culture, represented by the Department of Heritage and Identity, will participate in the 13th session of the Sharjah International Traditional Crafts Forum (SITCF), which starts today. Seventeen Arab and foreign countries will participate in the two-day forum, which is being held under the slogan 'Carpet and Textile'. Head of the Department of Heritage and Identity, Abdulaziz al-Mutawa, said Qatar will present its experience in preserving and developing traditional Bedouin Al Sadu weavings, adding that some Al Sadu pieces and heritage books issued by the Ministry of Culture will also go on



display during the forum. The forum contributes to enhancing awareness of the Gulf, Arab and international heritage by educating people about various elements and components of heritage and working to preserve them, al-Mutawa said. (QNA)

# QSTSS opens registration for its academic year

Qatar Science and Technology Secondary School for Boys (QSTSS) has started receiving registration applications from students currently enrolled in the eighth grade who will join the 9th grade in academic year 2022-23.

The Ministry of Education and Higher Education explained that students can be registered and transferred from government and private schools to QSTSS until Feb 9.

The registration requirements include that the student is a Qatari citizen, with no less than 80% in the last academic report, with 80% or above in mathematics, science, and English, and that they should pass the admission test in English, mathematics, mental ability, and meet other admission requirements.



QSTSS is a governmental, specialised scientific school that adopts an integrated educational approach in the teaching of science, technology, engineering and mathematics. (QNA)

## The Land of Storytellers novel by Dr Hanan al-Fayadh released

A novel by the academic Dr Hanan al-Fayadh, faculty member at Qatar University, titled *The Land of Storytellers* (Al-Haka'een), was released recently. Published by Arab Institute for Research and Publishing in Beirut, the 344-page novel raises several problems faced in the Arab social reality, such as social stratification and the multiple restrictions of social life



Qatar News Agency (QNA), Dr al-Fayadh said the novel raises

such as fear of people's gossip, the fear of envy, which are inherited to form a social and cultural legacy. In a statement to

many social issues in the Arab world by imagining life 70 years later for a group of Arabs who left their country and wanted to settle on an island on the outskirts of South Asia, to establish their state. Then this land develops in science, urbanisation, and technology, while its people who work in the "storytellers" profession remain prisoners of their social legacy which restrict their human relations. (QNA)

ANNOUNCEMENT

I, PATRICIA KHALIL ELIAS KATEB  
holder of

LEBANON Passport No. LR2620288  
QID No. 29942200035

hereby change my name

from

PATRICIA KHALIL ELIAS KATEB

to

PATRICIA KHALIL CHAKRA KATEB

Any objection, please contact  
THE PERMANENT COMMITTEE FOR  
NATIONALITY AFFAIRS  
within 15 days from the publication of this notice.

# Media Majlis exhibition explores evolution of Arab drama

The Media Majlis at North-western University in Qatar (NU-Q) explores the growing popularity of Ramadan television drama culture in the Arab world and the forces shaping it in its new interactive exhibition for spring 2023, *The World is Watching Musalsalat*.

The exhibition, which opens today (Jan 18) discusses how the business of musalsalat, (which is Arabic for serialised television dramas made for and shown during Ramadan), has changed over the past two decades, and its impact on viewers, writers, composers, costume designers, directors, and producers. Data on advertising during musalsalat is also examined, with opportunities for visitors to give their feedback on how they consume this type of media.

"From the first Ramadan drama series in 1978 to the era of video-on-demand in the 1990s and on-

line streaming today, dramas continue to be watched, debated, and dissected by millions, especially during the primetime television Ramadan season," said Pamela Erskine-Loftus, director of The Media Majlis.

"The World is Watching Musalsalat looks at forces contributing to the rise of Ramadan serial television dramas and how they are shaping local cultures across the region."

Shahnawaz Zali, manager of digital content at The Media Majlis at NU-Q, said the exhibition has been designed to immerse visitors in the various elements shaping the serialised drama landscape in the Arab world. "As musalsalat evolve into a global cultural force, the exhibition engages visitors in an immersive experience that exposes them to the forces making up this lucrative industry and the many political and financial stakes that often go undiscussed



when talking about Arab drama." An interactive installation in the north zone of the exhibition introduces audiences to historical visual content from the region

on the development of musalsalat. Visitors engaging with the installation learn about the key players who shaped the development of the industry, first in Egypt, Syria, and Kuwait and later in Saudi Arabia and the UAE after the satellite television boom of the 1990s.

Another installation, *The Streaming Age*, allows visitors to examine the rise in international streaming services such as Netflix and Shahid in the 2010s and their effects on promoting Arab culture. Other installations in the exhibition explore how the growing popularity of dubbed Ramadan dramas from Latin America, Turkey, Korea, and India, have shaped Arab viewers' attitudes toward ideas of love, family life, and other social issues.

In highlighting the impact of the exhibition, Marwan M Kraidy, dean and CEO of NU-Q, explained how it will help encourage academic and research exploration

into one of the most significant contemporary media developments in the region.

"Today streaming platforms have rejuvenated drama production, circulation, and consumption around the world. Arab musalsalat now have to contend with Turkish, Korean, and Latin American serialised drama. From NU-Q, a community of scholar-teacher-learners focused on evidence-based storytelling on the Global South. The World is Watching Musalsalat will inspire faculty and student researchers all over the world to conduct further inquiry into the fast-changing landscapes of patterns and trends in the creation of, production, and consumption of musalsalat and their encounters with global television trends."

The Media Majlis is open Saturday-Wednesday from 10am-5pm. The current exhibition will run until May 13, 2023.

ANNOUNCEMENT

I, NUR NUBI OHIDER RAHMAN  
holder of

BANGLADESH Passport No. EK0570042  
QID No. 27605003521

hereby change my name

from

NUR NUBI OHIDER RAHMAN

to

NUR NOBI MILON

Any objection, please contact  
THE PERMANENT COMMITTEE FOR  
NATIONALITY AFFAIRS  
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ANNOUNCEMENT

I, MOHAMED NAWFER AHAMED DEEDAT  
holder of

SRILANKAN Passport No. N8075633  
QID No. 29114407502

hereby change my name

from

MOHAMED NAWFER AHAMED DEEDAT

to

AHAMED DEEDAT MOHAMED NAWFER

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ANNOUNCEMENT

I, MARINA RAJA ALCHAKRA  
holder of

LEBANON Passport No. LR2643448  
QID No. 27642200022

hereby change my name

from

MARINA RAJA ALCHAKRA

to

MARINA CHAKRA

Any objection, please contact  
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NATIONALITY AFFAIRS  
within 15 days from the publication of this notice.

ANNOUNCEMENT

I, ELIE KHALIL ELIAS KATEB  
holder of

LEBANON Passport No. LR2643447  
QID No. 29942200036

hereby change my name

from

ELIE KHALIL ELIAS KATEB

to

ELIE KHALIL CHAKRA KATEB

Any objection, please contact  
THE PERMANENT COMMITTEE FOR  
NATIONALITY AFFAIRS  
within 15 days from the publication of this notice.





# Palestinian fighter shot dead

AFP  
Halhul

Israeli soldiers shot dead a Palestinian man yesterday after he allegedly fired at troops in the occupied West Bank, medical and military officials said.

The Palestinian health ministry said Hamdi Abu Dayyeh, 40, was killed "by Israeli occupation bullets" in the southern town of Halhul.

An AFP photographer saw the body of a man beside a military tower at the northern entrance to the town, before it was covered by soldiers.

A Palestinian woman said she was in a car with her family when gunfire erupted.

"We were on the road, people were moving around nor-

mally...the army kept firing, we got down under the seats," said Umm Amir Taqatqa, a resident of nearby Beit Fajjar.

The Halhul shooting raises the toll of Palestinians killed this month in the West Bank to 15, including civilians and fighters, according to an AFP tally.

The majority have been killed by Israeli forces, which have occupied the West Bank since the 1967 Six-Day War. A surge in violence in 2022 made it the deadliest year in the West Bank since United Nations records began in 2005.

At least 26 Israelis and 200 Palestinians were killed across Israel and the Palestinian territories last year, according to AFP figures. The majority of the fatalities were in the West Bank, while 49 Palestinians were killed in a three-day conflict in Gaza.

# Tunisia president's former top aide jailed in absentia

AFP  
Tunis

Tunisian President Kais Saied's former chief of staff was sentenced in absentia yesterday to prison over audio recordings critical of him, local media reported.

Nadia Akacha had been a key aide to Saied until she quit in January last year, citing "fundamental differences of opinion" over the national interest.

Some three months later, 11 audio recordings appeared online featuring a woman, purportedly Akacha, relating details from private meetings since the president's July 2021 power grab.

In some, the woman criticised the president and staff members or shared gossip about his in-laws. Akacha has denied being the woman in the recordings, describing them as fakes aiming to undermine her former boss.

Yesterday, a Tunis court sentenced Akacha in absentia to 14

months in jail, local media reported, adding that the sentence was in relation to a suit filed by the president's sister-in-law.

Prosecutors had opened an investigation in May to determine the recordings' authenticity.

Akacha left the country after her resignation. Tunisian media have reported she has since been living in France.

A constitutional lawyer like the president, she was appointed as Saied's legal adviser in late 2019 before becoming his chief of staff in January 2020, travelling widely with him domestically and abroad. Her departure was a blow to Saied six months after he suspended parliament and sacked the government in a shock move against the political system that had emerged from the country's 2011 revolt.

Many Tunisians initially welcomed his moves but others have accused him of seeking to reinstall an autocracy in the birthplace of the Arab Spring uprisings.

**Iran hails thaw in Turkiye's ties with Syria**

Iran yesterday hailed the resumption of the first direct ministerial talks between Ankara and Damascus since the outbreak of the Syria civil war more than a decade ago, AFP reported from Ankara.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan refused to recognise the Syrian leader's rule previously. But Damascus ally Russia managed to arrange the first direct meeting between the Syrian and Turkish defence ministers since 2011 in Moscow in December.

More meetings are tentatively being planned for the coming weeks aimed at paving the way for a landmark peace summit

between Erdogan and Assad. Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian — whose government also strongly backs Assad — said Tehran fully supported the reconciliation efforts.

"We are very pleased by the fact that relations between Damascus and Ankara are undergoing change," Amir-Abdollahian told reporters after talks in Ankara with his Turkish counterpart Mevlut Cavusoglu. "We believe any positive development in relations between Ankara and Damascus will benefit our region and our countries," the Iranian foreign minister said.

# Medical shortages add to suffering of cancer patients

Reuters  
Sanaa

Ali Jabri cradles his sobbing son Ayoub ahead of chemotherapy treatment at Yemen's largest cancer hospital in the capital Sanaa where an eight-year war has led to shortages in life-saving medicine and equipment.

The 12-year-old is one of 81,000 patients registered with the National Oncology Center (NOC) from across Yemen seeking free treatment, which has increasingly been limited by shrinking funds and restrictions on flow of goods in the import-reliant country.

"He is getting worse," said Jabri breaking down in tears as he stood by the bed where Ayoub, who began treatment for neck cancer three years ago, received an intravenous drip.

"The hospital gives the medicines they have but the expensive medicines you have to go and buy them outside...we can't afford these medicines," Jabri said, pleading for help from well-wishers to send his son abroad for treatment.

The NOC in Sanaa is funded by the de facto Houthi authorities in North Yemen.

The internationally recognised government finances two parallel centres in the south where it is based after being ousted by the Houthis from Sanaa in 2014. Jabri, a father of six, ekes out a living as a daily farm hand in the western province of Hodeidah and is able to take his son to Sanaa thanks to charity Al Shafaqa Foundation which is housing and feeding them during the treatment.

The foundation is funded by local, Gulf Arab and international charities as well as local businesses. The conflict between a military coalition that intervened in Yemen against the Houthis in 2015 has devastated the economy and basic services including healthcare and left 80% of the popula-



Ayoub Jabri, who suffers from neck cancer, looks at his father at the Al-Shafaqa foundation housing them in Sanaa, Yemen.



An employee of the National Oncology Center stands next to medicines in Sanaa, Yemen.

tion in need of aid. Dwindling foreign exchange reserves and coalition sea and air restrictions on Houthi-held areas

hampered imports.

Ali al-Mansour, deputy director of NOC said the centre had received between 6,000-

6,500 new cancer patients each year since 2015 compared with some 4,000 in 2014 - with the increase due in part to

fewer being people able to access treatment abroad.

He said the centre listed some 130 cancer drugs as crucial but that only around 50% are available. "Many suppliers are reluctant to submit bids for medicines due to the...lengthy transportation process and the risks and high cost of transportation," he said. NOC's radiotherapy unit has two machines, one of which no longer works. Patient Belal Abdulaziz said he sometimes spends the entire day waiting for his five-minute session. "Why should I wait all day while I am sick?," he said.

The Houthi movement blames the coalition and the sea and air blockade for the shortage of medical and other supplies such as fuel. The movement has faced criticism from humanitarian organisations for impeding humanitarian movement.

# Militants launch deadly attack on Somali military base

AFP  
Nairobi

Al Shebaab launched a deadly attack on a Somali military base yesterday, just a day after the government claimed a "historic victory" over the militants with the capture of a strategic coastal town.

There were conflicting reports about the death toll after the fighters stormed the camp in the town of Hawadley north of the capital Mogadishu.

Army chief Odowaa Yusuf Rage said on national radio that five soldiers including a senior officer had died in the attack claimed by the Al Qaeda-allied militant group.

A clan militia commander near Hawadley, which lies in the central Hirshabelle state, said 11 soldiers had died.

The militants detonated a car packed with explosives outside the camp 60 kilomet-

res north of Mogadishu before gunmen stormed the compound, witnesses and security officials said.

Al Shebaab, which controls swathes of countryside in Somalia, claimed responsibility for the attack via its communication channels.

In recent months, the army and local clan militias have retaken chunks of territory from the militants in Galmudug and Hirshabelle states in an operation backed by US air strikes and an African Union force.

But despite the gains, Al Shebaab has demonstrated the ability to strike back with lethal force against civilian and military targets.

The Hawadley base had only been recaptured from Al Shebaab in October last year by the Somali National Army (SNA) and allied militias.

Prime Minister Hamza Abdi Barre on Monday proclaimed a "historic victory" over Al Shebaab after the army took

control of the strategic city of Haradhere in central Galmudug state without a fight.

"The brave members of the national armed forces...have destroyed the enemy of the nation and liberated the strategic port town of Haradhere," he said in a statement.

Haradhere had been a key supply route for Al Shebaab for both people and goods after it seized the port in 2010, dislodging local militias and pirates. Yesterday's attack "demonstrates Al Shebaab's continued ability to produce explosive devices and deploy them within Hirshabelle state, where the offensive originally began," said International Crisis Group's senior analyst for eastern Africa, Omar Mahmood.

"The group has mounted a number of similar assaults recently, likely an attempt to distract the government by attacking multiple locations," he said in a message. On Satur-

day, eight people were killed in a roadside bombing claimed by Al Shebaab in central Somalia, police said.

Earlier this month, 19 people were killed in twin car bombings in Mahas, a town in Hiran district in Hirshabelle.

Rage said the army had repelled the assault in Hawadley and was pursuing the militants who got away. "Five members of the army were martyred, including a senior military officer," he said, adding that the army had killed 21 Al Shebaab fighters.

Ahmed Mohamud, an SNA military commander in the nearby town of Balcad, said more than 10 people had died, but added that it was not clear how many were martyred and that the toll was provisional. He said the army was "in full control" of the area.

President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud had declared "all-out war" on the militants after taking office in May last year.

## PREPARATIONS Nigeria 'will not postpone presidential vote'

The head of Nigeria's electoral commission said it will not postpone next month's presidential vote despite worries over widespread insecurity including attacks on election officials, Reuters reported from London. Mahmood Yakubu, speaking at London's Chatham House think tank, said the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) was well prepared to facilitate voting in Africa's most populous nation despite the challenges. "The commission is not contemplating, let alone planning, to postpone the 2023 general election," he said. "We are going ahead to conduct the election as scheduled." Nigerians are set to choose a new president on Feb 25, a vote that could have implications across the continent. Current President Muhammadu Buhari is constitutionally term limited after serving two terms. Nigeria has some 200mn citizens and Africa's largest economy and its battle against insurgents in the northeast has led many to view it as crucial to regional stability. But Nigeria itself is facing unprecedented insecurity that has seen the INEC itself targeted by violence, including when attackers bombed the headquarters of the electoral commission in Imo state last month.

# Police demolish trader stalls in Congo capital ahead of Pope visit

Reuters  
Kinshasa

Before dawn, sanitary police armed with crowbars and a bulldozer set about demolishing makeshift trader stalls crowding downtown streets in the capital of Democratic Republic of Congo ahead of a four-day visit by Pope Francis starting Jan 31.

Officials say Kinshasa, a vast impoverished city of 17mn people, is getting a facelift not just to honour the Pope but to make its streets and pavements more tidy and orderly even after he's gone home.

But evicted small traders protest that their livelihoods are being destroyed in the process.

"The clean-up we are doing just now is not only because the Pope is coming," George Ya Lala, Kinshasa city coordinator for the campaign said, add-



A member of the Kinshasa sanitary police brigade reacts as he dismantles informal market stalls as part of an effort to clean up the Congolese capital ahead of Pope Francis' visit, scheduled for late January in Democratic Republic of Congo.

ing the operation would continue even after the Pope went home.

Asked for comment on the evictions of traders, the Apostolic Nunciature,

Vatican's diplomatic representation in Kinshasa, told Reuters in a text message that it was not aware of the clean-up operations and had no part in them.

It said the Vatican had only requested that preparations for Francis' visit be done "in the most sober way. We obviously want the reception sites to be able to accommodate the greatest number of faithful in a secure way and for roads to be secure."

Standing to one side with a swollen face after he fell while scuffling with police in an unsuccessful effort to save his wares, telephone accessories seller David Mbemba, 19, said he had lost around 100,500 Congolese francs (\$50) worth of goods.

Other sellers like Jean Mbuyu said they had lost everything because they had no prior warning of the clean-up. Ya Lala disputed this, saying traders had been warned several times to relocate before the police moved in, leaving a chaotic trail of wreckage as they

smashed stall after stall, with crowds of traders, family and friends watching in dismay.

The livelihoods of the so-called informal sector of the economy — street stalls, kiosks and hawkers selling a cornucopia of items including food and other basic household goods.

"I am a widow. I have to pay my rent, school fees of my children...I will now starve to death," said Marth Kayunga, a vendor in the informal market on one of the side streets off Lumumba Boulevard targeted by the sanitary police brigade.

"We knew this operation was to clean up Lumumba Boulevard ahead of the Pope's visit that we are all waiting for," said Jesus, a hardware shop owner who gave only his first name.

"We are surprised the police are coming into the smaller streets because they told us they were just go-

ing to remove debris from the main avenue. It's not fair," he said, adding that his shop was also torn down.

A spokesperson for the police said only that they were working under the directives of Kinshasa's regional governor and city authorities such as Ya Lala, who was with the police on the ground directing the operation.

Lumumba Boulevard is the main thoroughfare leading to the airport, where a gala welcome will be staged for Pope Francis. Authorities had warned that development works would be carried out on sites where the Pope will be received.

But Catholic Church priest Father Victor Ntambwe said authorities could have planned better and longer for the occasion. "Did we have to wait for the Pope's visit to do something like this? I'm not sure that we needed to wait for the Pope's arrival to start clearing the avenues and chase away street sellers," Ntambwe said.



# Japanese firm defends Van Gogh artwork ownership after lawsuit

**AFP**  
Tokyo

A Japanese company has defended its ownership of Van Gogh's 'Sunflowers', obtained at auction in 1987, after the family of its former owner filed a US lawsuit demanding its return.

The artwork - one of five original versions of the famous still life - was purchased by the predecessor of insurance firm Sompō Holdings at Christie's in London for \$40mn, making it briefly the world's most expensive painting.

It has been on display in Tokyo at Sompō's art museum for

35 years, but recently became the subject of a legal battle centred on a previous sale in Germany prior to World War II.

The family of the painting's former owner, Jewish banker Paul von Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, filed a lawsuit in Illinois last month demanding the return of the artwork and hundreds of millions of dollars in damages. They say Sompō's predecessor, Yasuda Fire & Marine Insurance, acquired the painting "in reckless disregard of its provenance, including Mendelssohn-Bartholdy's forced sale of the painting in Nazi Germany in 1934".

"Sompō Holdings wrongfully

has employed the Painting to reap billions of dollars of unjust enrichment through a sophisticated branding strategy," the lawsuit said.

"Defendants have commercially exploited as a corporate emblem what they long have all but known was a Nazi-tainted artwork"

But Sompō Holdings defended its ownership of the painting in a statement to AFP on Tuesday, saying it "categorically rejects the complaint's allegations of wrongdoing".

The company "intends to vigorously defend its ownership rights in 'Sunflowers'", Sompō added.

It is not the only artwork that the heirs want returned. They have filed similar lawsuits elsewhere, and in 2020, the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC returned a Picasso drawing to the family.

At the height of Japan's bubble economy in the 1980s and 90s, rich business people rushed to buy paintings as investments. Paper tycoon Ryoei Saito also bought a Van Gogh - 'Portrait of Dr Gachet' - in 1990 for \$82.5mn. Saito famously sparked outrage when he said he would have his expensive canvases put in his coffin and cremated with him when he died. He later recanted.

## New Year hues in Jakarta



Women shop at a street market selling decorations ahead of the Lunar New Year in Jakarta, Indonesia.

# 'Alarming' rise in Rohingya refugees lost at sea, says UN

**AFP**  
Geneva

The UN decried Tuesday the "alarming" rise in the number of Rohingya refugees lost at sea fleeing their Myanmar homeland or Bangladesh last year, warning more would die without concerted action. More than 3,500 Rohingya attempted sea crossings in 2022, representing a huge increase on the year before, when some 700 people made similar journeys, said UNHCR, the United Nations' refugee agency.



In a file picture, evacuated Rohingya from Myanmar sit on the shorelines of Lancok village, in Indonesia's North Aceh Regency, after some 100 including 30 children were rescued from a wooden boat off the coast of Indonesian island of Sumatra.

"UNHCR has recorded an alarming rise in the death toll. At least 348 individuals died or went missing at sea in 2022, making it one of the deadliest years since 2014," spokeswoman Shabia Mantoo told reporters in Geneva. She said that 3,040 Rohingya who attempted to flee by sea disembarked last year, primarily in Myanmar, Malaysia, Indonesia and Bangladesh. Nearly 45% of those who did so were women and children.

"Most boats departed from Myanmar and Bangladesh, highlighting the growing sense of desperation amongst Rohingya in those two countries," Mantoo said. "Those who have disembarked report that they

undertook these dangerous sea journeys in an effort to find protection, security, family reunification, and livelihoods in other countries," she said. "Among them are victims of trafficking, unaccompanied and separated children, and survivors of sexual- and gender-based violence."

A military crackdown in Myanmar in 2017 sent hundreds of thousands of Muslim-minority Rohingya fleeing into neighbouring Bangladesh with harrowing stories of murder, rape and arson.

Myanmar is facing genocide accusations at the UN's top court following the mass exodus. Mantoo said calls by UNHCR to

maritime authorities to rescue and disembark people in distress have gone unheeded, with many boats adrift for weeks.

"The current crisis in the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea is a crisis of solidarity," she said. UNHCR is calling for a full regional response, addressing human trafficking, search and rescue efforts and support in countries where Rohingya refugees disembark.

It also wants to see efforts to address the root causes of why Rohingya are fleeing Myanmar. Mantoo said that without such a response, "more people will die on the high seas" as people undertake dangerous journeys in search of safety.

# Vietnam president resigns amid major anti-graft purge

**AFP**  
Hanoi

Vietnam President Nguyen Xuan Phuc has resigned, state media said yesterday, after days of rumours he was about to be sacked as part of a major anti-corruption drive that has seen several ministers fired.



Nguyen Xuan Phuc

The sudden departure is a highly unusual move in communist Vietnam, where political changes are normally carefully orchestrated, with an emphasis on cautious stability. Only one other Communist Party president has ever stepped down, and that was for health reasons.

"The resignation of President Nguyen Xuan Phuc is an unprecedented move in the history of the party," said Nguyen Khac Giang, research fellow at the Vietnam Centre for Economic and Strategic Studies (VESS). State media said the Communist Party had ruled he was responsible for wrongdoing by senior ministers under him during his 2016-2021 stint as prime minister, before he became president.

Two deputy prime ministers were sacked this month in an anti-corruption purge that has led to the arrest of dozens of officials, with many of the graft allegations relating to deals done as part of Vietnam's Covid

pandemic response. Phuc "took political responsibility as leader when several officials, including two deputy prime ministers and three ministers committed violations and shortcomings, causing very serious consequences", state news agency VNA said, quoting the party central committee's official statement. Earlier this month, the country's National Assembly removed Pham Binh Minh and Vu Duc Dam from their positions as deputy prime ministers.

Minh was a minister of foreign affairs while Dam was in charge of the country's handling of the Covid-19 pandemic. At least 100 officials and businesspeople, including Dam's assistant, have been arrested in connection with a scandal involving the

distribution of Covid-19 testing kits. Thirty-seven people - many of them senior diplomats and police - have also been arrested in an investigation over the repatriation of Vietnamese during the pandemic. After closing its borders to slow the spread of the coronavirus, Vietnam organised nearly 800 charter flights to bring citizens home from 60 countries and territories.

But travellers faced complicated procedures while paying exorbitant airfares and quarantine fees to get back to Vietnam. Phuc, 68, was elevated to the largely ceremonial role of president in April 2021 after winning plaudits for the country's broadly successful handling of the pandemic.

Authoritarian Vietnam is run

by the Communist Party and officially led by the party general secretary, president and prime minister, with key decisions made by the politburo, which now numbers 16.

Le Hong Hiep, a fellow at the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute in Singapore, said Phuc's resignation may also be linked to political infighting. "It's mainly related to corruption investigations but we cannot rule out the possibility that his political rivals also wanted to remove him from his position for political reasons," he told AFP. Communist Party leader Nguyen Phu Trong, the architect of what is Vietnam's largest-ever anti-corruption drive, is due to step down in 2026.

"Some politicians will try to get the (top) prize, and because of the competition from their rivals - in this case Mr Phuc is one of them - they may want to remove him to clear the way for the other candidate to get the top job."

Among the candidates to replace Phuc is To Lam, the current minister of public security, said Hiep, adding that the change would likely not have significant consequences for the direction of the country.

"In Vietnam, policies are made collectively by the politburo so I don't think his departure will lead to major policy changes or any problems with the political system."

## Taiwan to allow women into reservist training for first time

Taiwan's military announced plans yesterday to include women in its reservist training for the first time this year, as the island tries to bolster its forces.

Self-ruled, democratic Taiwan lives under the constant fear of a Chinese invasion, as Beijing claims the island a part of its territory to be taken one day, by force if necessary. China's claims

have intensified in recent years under President Xi Jinping, and Russia's invasion of Ukraine has further deepened worries in Taiwan that Beijing might move similarly.

Taipei's defence ministry said it would allow around 200 discharged female soldiers to enrol in voluntary reservist trainings from the second quarter

of this year, as part of efforts to boost the overall back-up force. "This is the first year to include women in the reservists training so this year will be a trial programme," said Major General Yu Wen-cheng from the ministry's All-Out Defence Mobilisation Agency. "We will plan the training capacities according to the number of applicants."

# China's population shrinks for first time in more than 60 years

**AFP**  
Beijing

China's population shrank last year for the first time in more than six decades, official data showed yesterday, as the birth rate slows in the face of mounting financial pressures and shifting social attitudes.

The world's most populous country is facing a looming demographic crisis as its workforce ages, which analysts warn could stymie economic growth and pile pressure on strained public coffers.

Analysts point to the soaring cost of living - as well as a growing number of women in the workforce and seeking higher education - as reasons behind the slowdown. "Who dares to have kids?" a Shanghai resident in his 30s said yesterday. "The unemployment rate is so high, Covid destroyed everything, there's nothing we can do. Next year we'll have declining growth again." The mainland Chinese population stood at around 1,411,750,000 at the end of 2022, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) reported, a decrease of 850,000 from the end of the previous year.

The number of births was

9.56mn, the NBS said, while the number of deaths stood at 10.41mn. The last time China's population declined was in the early 1960s, when the country was battling the worst famine in its modern history, a result of the disastrous Mao Zedong agricultural policy known as the Great Leap Forward. China ended its strict one-child policy - imposed in the 1980s owing to fears of overpopulation - in 2016 and began allowing couples to have three children in 2021. But that has failed to reverse the demographic decline for a country that has long relied on its vast workforce as a driver of economic growth. "The population will likely trend down from here in coming years," Zhiwei Zhang of Pinpoint Asset Management said. "China cannot rely on the demographic dividend as a structural driver for economic growth," he added. "Economic growth will have to depend more on productivity growth, which is driven by government policies."

The one-child policy meant Chinese people got used to smaller families, Xujian Peng, a researcher at Australia's University of Victoria, told AFP. And for those who were only children as a result of the policy, "there's a lot of pressure when it comes to tak-



Children play outside a cafe in Beijing. China's population shrank last year for the first time in more than six decades, official data showed yesterday, as the world's most populous country faces a looming demographic crisis.

ing care of your parents and improving your quality of life in the future", a young woman in Beijing told AFP. For those who do have children, balancing work and child-rearing can be an impossible task.

"For many women, having a child means that they have to give up on a lot of things they wanted to do," Nancy, a 32-year-old e-commerce worker, explained.

News of the population decline quickly trended on China's heavily censored internet. "Without children, the state and the nation have no future," one comment on the Twitter-like Weibo service read. "Having children is also a social

responsibility," another comment from a well-known "patriotic" influencer read. But others again pointed to the difficulties of raising children in modern China. "I love my mother, I will not be a mother," said one. "No one reflects on why we do not want to have (children) and do not want to get married," another said.

Independent demographer He Yafu also pointed to "the decline in the number of women of childbearing age, which fell by five million per year between 2016 and 2021" - a consequence of the ageing of the population - as a reason for the low birth rate. Many local authorities have al-

ready launched measures to encourage couples to have children.

The southern megacity of Shenzhen, for example, now offers birth bonuses of up to 10,000 yuan (around \$1,500) and pays allowances until the child is three years old.

But analysts argue much more needs to be done. "A comprehensive policy package that covers childbirth, parenting, and education is needed to reduce the cost of child-raising," researcher Peng told AFP. "Women's job insecurity after giving birth should be addressed particularly."

The Chinese population could decline each year by 1.1% on average, according to a study by the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences that was updated last year and shared with AFP. China could have only 587mn inhabitants in 2100, less than half of today, according to the most pessimistic projections of that team of demographers. And India is set to dethrone China this year as the most populous country in the world, according to the United Nations. "A declining and ageing population will be a real concern for China," Peng said.

"It will have a profound impact on China's economy from the present through to 2100."

**Business Page 2**

## Various factors turn Chinese off parenting

Weary parents in China say the difficulties of juggling work and childcare in a costly and ultra-competitive society with little help from the state are at the root of the country's dwindling birth rate. Beijing reported yesterday that the population shrank last year for the first time in over half a century, deepening a demographic crisis that experts warn could stymie economic growth and pile pressure on public coffers. Local authorities across China have unveiled a series of measures to encourage child-bearing, including monthly stipends of several hundred yuan for new parents and one-off "birth bonuses". But those already with kids told AFP that balancing work in China's cut-throat corporate world with a desire to give their offspring the best in life was dissuading many from having multiple children. "Many households find it extremely difficult to raise one child and can't handle it very well," said Wenjing, a parenting blogger in her late 30s who decried "flimsy" government support. "With the pandemic, a lot of households really suffered financially. Under these hard circumstances, many people decided not to have any more kids," she said.

"I think whatever policies released now will be very insubstantial." China ended its draconian one-child policy in 2016 and then in 2021 allowed couples to have up to three children. Major cities including Beijing and Shanghai have extended maternity leave to up to 158 days, while health authorities last year rolled out guidelines requiring local governments to provide nurseries, albeit for a fee. But many obstacles remain, with no breastfeeding facilities at most workplaces and unmarried women barred from freezing their eggs. A place in a private kindergarten can cost anywhere between 5,000 yuan (\$740) and 20,000 yuan a month in Beijing, according to the Asia Society Policy Institute. Many urban youth also live far from their extended families, cutting off a traditional source of childcare. For Nancy, a young Beijing mother in her early 30s who works in e-commerce, managing work and childcare is a Herculean task. "I can't balance it at all," she told AFP. "If you want to breastfeed the child then you basically have to give up work," she said. "But because of our situation, we cannot give up our jobs." Social expectations about how children should be raised also play a role, she said, with ambitious parents keen to make sure their kids get the best. Women were often forced to choose between the ideal of what good parenting means in modern China and having a career.



# UK train drivers announce strike next month in co-ordinated move

Reuters  
London

Thousands of British train drivers will stage a fresh two-day walkout next month over a pay dispute, the country's main transport workers' unions announced yesterday in a co-ordinated move that will cause

further disruption to travel. The ASLEF union said that roughly 12,500 train drivers will participate in strikes planned for February 1 and 3 after rejecting a pay offer, while the RMT union said that a few hundred of its members at 14 rail operators will be taking industrial action on the same dates. Railway employees have been strik-

ing regularly since last summer as they seek better pay to cope with rising prices. Their last round of action during the Christmas holiday season impacted sales at some hospitality firms. With Britain facing its most serious period of industrial unrest in decades, teachers and 100,000 other public sector workers, including border force

staff, are also due to walk out on February 1 in pay disputes. Earlier this month, rail industry body the Rail Delivery Group (RDG) said it had offered ASLEF an improved pay offer in exchange for reforms to how the railways are run. ASLEF general secretary Mick Whelan said yesterday that the proposal was "not and could not ever be acceptable".

"They want to rip up our terms and conditions in return for a real-terms pay cut," he said, adding that the union was willing to engage in further discussions. A spokesperson for the Rail Delivery Group said it was disappointing the offer had not been put to the union's members. "Rather than announcing further

unnecessary strikes, we ask ASLEF to recognise the very real financial challenge the industry is facing and work with us to deliver a better railway with a strong long-term future," the spokesperson said. RMT, which has more than 80,000 members in various transport sectors, also said it will continue its talks with rail operators.

## California rainstorm death toll rises to 20

AFP/Reuters  
San Francisco

US President Joe Biden will travel to flood-hit areas of California tomorrow, the White House said, as the country's most populous state cleans up from a devastating and lethal series of storms. Biden will tour storm-hit communities, "survey recovery efforts, and assess what additional federal support is needed", the White House said in a statement on Monday. Nine successive storms have rolled in from the Pacific Ocean, hitting California and other western regions in three weeks of extreme weather that has cost 20 lives.

The president had already issued an emergency declaration on January 8 to free up federal aid and then on Saturday authorised disaster assistance for Merced, Sacramento and Santa Cruz counties.

The White House has yet to reveal the areas Biden will visit. The storms have forced thousands of people to evacuate, according to an executive order signed on Monday by California Governor Gavin Newsom.

Damage estimates from the series of storms already top \$1bn. Even as scattered sunny skies were predicted yesterday, there would not be much of a respite for relief workers in California hustling to clear landslides, shovel mud from roads and remove fallen trees.

About 15,300 homes in the state remained without power early yesterday, according to PowerOutage.us.

Sodden cities in northern California reported staggering accumulated quantities of rain. A report from the National Weather Service (NWS) for the Bay Area said more than 18" (45cm) of rain have fallen on San Francisco since December 26.

"It's the wettest 22-day period since January 14, 1862," the NWS office said in a tweet.

In the Central Valley, the fertile region that produces 40% of US fruits, Modesto reported more than 1" of rain on Monday, beating an old record set in 1950, and Stockton had 1.2" of rain, surpassing a record set there in 1973, the NWS office in Sacramento tweeted.

The relentless winter storms have largely passed over the state and are now hitting Rocky Mountain and Great Plains states.

An NWS short-range forecast said "heavy snowfall" was expected in mountainous parts of Colorado, New Mexico and Utah "through Tuesday before advancing east into the Central Plains" today.

While California is seeing some relief, a new storm system looms off Washington state to the north.

"There will be a new storm system arriving across the Pacific Northwest by Tuesday night and advancing inland by Wednesday," the NWS forecast said. "This will bring a new surge of Pacific moisture and a round of heavy rainfall for especially the coastal ranges and the foothills of the Cascades."

While damaging, the storms also helped mitigate a historic drought, as much of the state has already received half or more its average annual rainfall.

However, with more than two months to go in the rainy season, officials are urging Californians to continue conserving water.

The US Drought Monitor still shows almost the entire state under moderate or severe drought conditions.

Reservoir levels were still below average for this time of year, officials said.

# Hundreds of London cops face sacking

Reuters/AFP  
London

Hundreds of officers in London are likely be sacked for sexual and domestic abuse offences, Britain's most senior police officer said yesterday as he sought to regain public trust after an officer admitted being a serial rapist.

London's Metropolitan Police ("the Met"), which has been rocked by scandals in recent years, was plunged into further crisis after David Carrick, 48, admitted carrying out 24 counts of rape over almost two decades while serving as a police officer while his colleagues missed chances to stop him.

The case follows a series of revelations of serious wrongdoing at the force, Britain's biggest with more than 43,000 officers and staff and responsibility for leading the country's response to terrorism and issues such as extradition.

London Commissioner Mark Rowley, brought in four months ago to lead

the clean-up, said that investigations are underway into about 800 officers over 1,000 sexual and domestic abuse claims.

Many jobs will be lost as part of the process, he said.

"I've got tens of thousands of fantastic men and women, but I've got hundreds who shouldn't be here. I'm going to sort it out," Rowley told the BBC yesterday. "We're systematically reviewing every member of police staff and police officer who we have any historic flags against, for being involved in incidents involving domestic abuse or sexual violence."

Public confidence in the Met has been hit by revelations of its culture of corruption, racism and misogyny.

In recent years, one officer was jailed for the rape and murder of a woman that he abducted as she walked home and the courts then ruled heavy-handed policing at a vigil in her honour was unlawful.

A serving officer was convicted of being a member of a neo-Nazi group, two

more were jailed for sharing pictures from a crime scene after the murder of two sisters, while an inquiry into one unit found discussions about beating women, with one officer messaging a female colleague to say that he would rape her.

The interior minister, Suella Braverman, told parliament that she was encouraged by the Met's action so far.

"There is still some way to go to ensure that the force can command the trust of the people that it serves," she said. "It is vital that the Metropolitan Police and other forces double down on their efforts to root out corrupt officers. This may mean more shocking cases come to light in the short term."

The Met has been the subject of an independent review since 2021, with initial findings concluding "radical" reform was needed in relation to dealing with allegations of misconduct against officers.

The case of Carrick, one of Britain's most prolific sex offenders who pleaded guilty to 24 counts of rape between 2003

and 2020, prompted questions about the failure to spot what he was doing.

He had previously come to police attention over nine incidents including accusations of harassment, assault and rape between 2000 and 2021 but was not charged with any offence.

Carrick had used his position of power to control and intimidate his victims, telling them that no one would believe their word against that of a serving officer.

A day after Carrick's admission, Met Assistant Commissioner Louisa Rolfe said that his case was "sickening and horrific" and had "far-reaching consequences" for policing.

"I truly hope to never see its like again," she told an internal disciplinary hearing.

Carrick had been suspended from his job in an armed unit protecting MPs and foreign diplomats since the allegations came to light in late 2021.

Police misconduct hearings are typically held after the conclusion of criminal proceedings against an officer.



### Open and shut

A child walks on a tightrope on the crowded Marina beach on the occasion of the Hindu harvest festival of Pongal in Chennai.

Left: An abandoned car lies partially submerged in San Diego, California.



Prince William takes part in a cooking lesson during his visit to the 'Together As One' (Aik Saath) youth-led charity in Slough, Britain.



Aerial view of a line of vehicles waiting at a blocked road in the village of Humay, Peru, after the police stopped a convoy of members of the Chanca ethnic group heading to Lima to participate in a major demonstration against President Dina Boluarte.

## Mum and baby among six dead in California shooting

Six people including a six-month-old baby cradled in the arms of her 17-year-old mother were shot dead at a home in California's main agricultural valley on Monday in what authorities called a targeted attack and "horrific massacre".

Tulare County Sheriff Mike Boudreaux linked the killings to the illegal drug trade, saying that deputies had conducted a drug-related search warrant at the same home last week.

"We believe this was a message being sent," Boudreaux told reporters at the scene. "We believe that this was a targeted family."

Two suspects remained at large, he said.

Police said they believed two people attacked the home around 3.30am on Monday, firing multiple shots.

A neighbour called the police, who arrived seven minutes later to find dead and dying people both inside and outside the home.

One victim was alive and wounded when authorities arrived but later died at a hospital, Boudreaux said.

The attacks occurred in Goshen, a farm community of 5,400 people about midway between Los Angeles and San Francisco.

The bodies of the infant and 17-year-old mother were located in a ditch outside the home, Boudreaux later told the *Los Angeles Times*.

Both had gunshot wounds to the head.

Several others were shot in the head, including an elderly woman.

Two women survived by hiding in a trailer on the property.

The newspaper reported that last week's search warrant resulted in one arrest and the seizure of guns, marijuana and methamphetamine. - **Reuters/**

**AFP**

# Peru girds for new rally in Lima despite state of emergency

AFP  
Lima

Lima braced for a new rally against Peruvian President Dina Boluarte this week as thousands of demonstrators mobilised towards the capital following weeks of deadly unrest.

Protesters from all over the country have been heading to Lima since the weekend in a bid to maintain pressure on authorities, even as a state of emergency was declared to try to maintain order.

At least 42 people have died in five

weeks of clashes between protesters and security forces, according to Peru's human rights ombudsman.

Supporters of ousted president Pedro Castillo - who was arrested and charged with rebellion amongst other offences after trying last month to dissolve parliament and rule by decree - have set up burning roadblocks, attempted to storm airports and staged mass rallies.

Demonstrations took place on Monday in the popular tourist city of Cusco and the southern town of Ilave near Puno, where angry protesters were demanding what many Castillo supporters have been calling for: Boluarte's resignation, the closure of Congress and fresh elections.

The ultimate destination for many, though, is Lima.

"We're going to be in the capital to make our protest voice heard," Jimmy Mamani, an Aymara indigenous leader from the Puno region, told AFP.

Mamani, the mayor of a small village near the border with Bolivia, said peasants from all over Peru had arranged to meet up in Lima for a "peaceful" demonstration.

However, he compared the protest to a massive three-day march that in July 2000 led to the fall of the autocratic re-

gime of Alberto Fujimori.

Smaller protests have already occurred in Lima, including a march through a residential area Sunday night.

More protesters are set to defy a state of emergency in the capital in the coming days.

"It's not right that the executive cannot listen to our demands, they turn a deaf ear," said Mamani, who ruled out dialogue with authorities.

At least 3,000 protesters from Andahuaylas in southeastern Peru were heading for Lima on Monday in a caravan of trucks and buses.

And in Cusco province, dozens of

peasants were organising themselves to leave for the capital.

The government extended by 30 days a state of emergency from midnight Saturday for Lima, Cusco, Callao and Puno, authorising the military to back up police actions to restore public order.

The order also suspended constitutional rights such as freedom of movement and assembly, according to a decree published in the official gazette.

In protest epicentre Puno, the government declared a night-time curfew for 10 days, from 8pm-4am.

Almost 100 stretches of road remained blocked on Monday.



**CHAIRMAN**  
Abdullah bin Khalifa al-Attiyah

**EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**  
Faisal Abdulhameed al-Mudahka

**Deputy Managing Editor**  
K T Chacko

P.O.Box 2888, Doha, Qatar

editor@gulf-times.com

44350478 (News),  
44466404 (Sport),  
44466636 (Home delivery)

44350474

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**GULF TIMES**

# Europe avoids energy breakdown, but faces challenges galore

In Europe, mild temperatures, more diversified supplies and efforts to cut consumption have eased much of the pressure unleashed when Russia attacked its neighbour almost a year ago.

If Russia intended to paralyse Europe's energy system by slashing exports of gas to the continent, it hasn't worked for now. Gas inventories are far higher than the last five years' average and prices have recently traded below pre-war levels.

Russia has been one of the world's biggest exporters of gas, and Europe was its top customer. Russian gas used to be attractive to Europe because it was usually cheaper, easy to transport and almost always available.

As coal and nuclear plants across the bloc were shuttered in recent years, Germany and some other countries became even more reliant on the giant pipelines carrying gas from Siberia.

In fact, even before Russia launched its invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Europe's energy system was under strain. Demand for power had soared as economies bounced back from pandemic lockdowns and a long, harsh winter boosted demand for heating.

The result: power prices more than tripled in the second half of 2021. By September 2022, Russia had halted all supplies through a key pipeline to Germany. The euro tumbled as investors priced in the expected hit to Europe's economy.

**Goldman Sachs and Bank of America have dropped expectations that the eurozone will suffer a winter recession**

How did, then, Europe avoid an energy breakdown?

Firstly, by consuming less. As electricity and gas prices rose to at least four times above historical norms, home and business owners cut their energy use to make bills affordable.

The crisis entrenched what French officials called "energy sobriety," with Morgan Stanley forecasting that Europe's gas usage would be about 16% below its five-year average throughout 2023.

Norway supplanted Russia as the region's biggest gas supplier, with exports gaining 8% in 2022.

Looking ahead, the more favourable energy situation is making economists more bullish.

Goldman Sachs and Bank of America recently dropped expectations that the eurozone will suffer a winter recession, saying lower gas prices will probably quicken the retreat in inflation.

Such views were bolstered by data last week showing that Germany's economy probably avoided a contraction in the final three months of 2022.

Despite all the positive cues, the crisis may not be coming to an end.

Europe got hit by roughly \$1tn (calculated by Bloomberg from market data) from surging energy costs in the fallout of Russia's war in Ukraine, and the deepest crisis in decades is only getting started.

After this winter, the region will have to refill gas reserves with little to no deliveries from Russia, intensifying competition for tankers of the fuel.

Even with more facilities to import liquefied natural gas coming online, the market is expected to remain tight until 2026, when additional production capacity from the US to Qatar becomes available.

The European Union will have to reduce its energy needs to avoid running out of gas next winter, according to the International Energy Agency.

IEA executive director Fatih Birol said that while the EU has made "significant" progress on reducing its reliance on Russian gas, "it is not yet out of danger".

European officials have for long talked about the need to reduce this dependency. But since both sides benefited, and gas delivered by pipeline was often cheaper than other energy sources, little action was taken.

As a matter of fact, Europe's energy policies for long have taken cheap Russian gas for granted. If anything, Europe should learn from its experiences to shape a sustainable energy security policy.

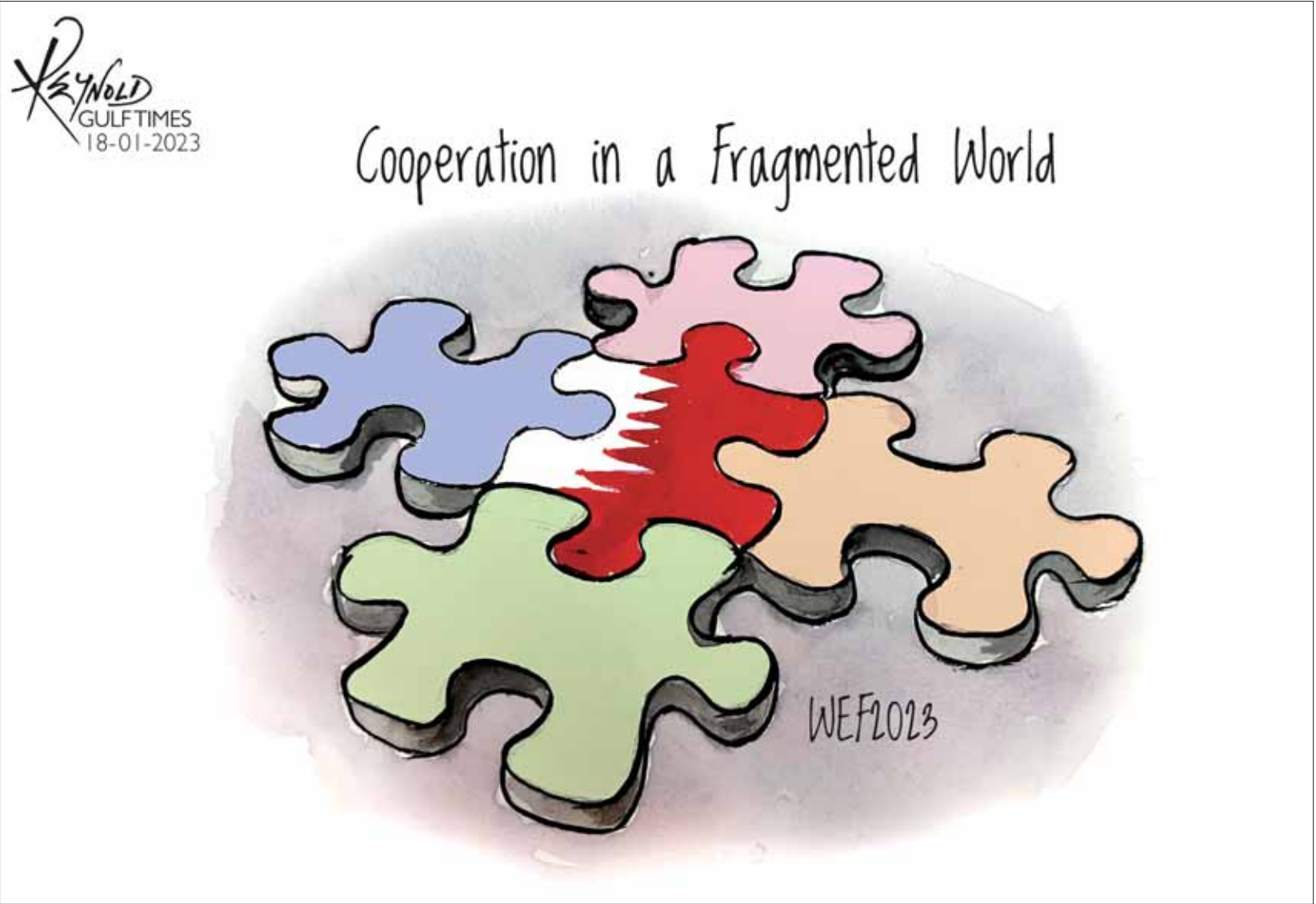
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# Strengthening S Korea's new strategic posture

Yoon Suk-yeol wants to position it as a pivotal player in maintaining international order

**By Yoon Young-kwan**  
Seoul

The geopolitical terrain in Northeast Asia is shifting, and, fortunately, the region's two great democracies, Japan and South Korea, are moving in a similar direction. If prudent, strategic leadership prevails in both Tokyo and Seoul, the two countries' historical enmity may finally be consigned to the past, and security across the Indo-Pacific region will be enhanced.

The catalyst for reducing the bilateral diplomatic friction – a problem that dates to the pre-World War II era – was Yoon Suk-yeol's (no relation) inauguration as president of the Republic of Korea last May. With Yoon's arrival in the presidential office, the pursuit of a chimerical "balance" in relations with China and the United States – previously a central focus of South Korea's foreign policy – has given way to a more clear-eyed assessment of the country's security needs.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine was a rude awakening for Yoon, and for many South Koreans across the political spectrum. With China and others effectively backing Russian President Vladimir, the war has called into question the entire international security architecture. Add the mounting North Korean nuclear threat, the intensifying Sino-American rivalry, and the risk that China will mimic Russia's invasion with a similar move against Taiwan, and Yoon had more than enough evidence that South Korean

national security requires closer ties with both the US and Japan.

But while the US and Japan have assumed a more prominent position in the minds of South Korean strategists, Yoon's government has not turned its back on relations with China. On the contrary, his administration remains focused on limiting tensions and securing China's assistance in reining in North Korea's wayward leader, Kim Jong-un. But, unlike his predecessor, Moon Jae-in, Yoon does not think that South Korea needs to create a false sense of distance from the US in order to foster ties with Chinese President Xi Jinping.

For Yoon, recognising South Korea's new national-security needs has meant embracing a more active and outward-looking diplomatic posture. He wants to position South Korea as a pivotal player in maintaining the international order, rather than as a small regional power concerned only with relations on the Korean Peninsula.

One problem for Yoon, whose margin of victory over his more left-wing opponent was just 0.74%, is the level of domestic political support for a major foreign-policy shift.

Given South Korea's winner-takes-all political system, in which presidents are limited to a single five-year term, many worry that any major foreign-policy changes could be summarily reversed as soon as 2027. With the next presidential election not due until then, Yoon has time to secure such a consensus if he works hard at it.

So, as significant as South Korea's strategic reorientation under Yoon

appears to be, it will remain on shaky ground without more formal institutionalisation, both in South Korea and among its allies, particularly Japan and the US. That is why Yoon's government, instead of waiting for Japan to make the first move (as is typical of South Korean diplomacy), has been reaching out and seeking to revive the warm ties that typified the relationship between South Korean President Kim Dae-jung and Japanese Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi from 1998-2000.

One must hope that this effort bears fruit soon. But the strength of the bilateral relationship ultimately depends on the trilateral relationship between Japan, South Korea, and the US, and there are many more things that these three countries could be doing to deepen their ties. Specialists at a trilateral conference organised by the Mansfield Foundation last summer proposed dozens of policy recommendations. For example, meetings of the three countries' defence and foreign ministers ("2+2+2 summits") could be held regularly to build trust, improve policy coordination, and develop more effective responses to shared risks, such as the security threat posed by North Korea.

Joint trust-building initiatives could also be pursued in strategic research and development sectors such as next-generation semiconductors, aerospace technology, 5G and 6G communications, artificial intelligence, and quantum computing. The US National Science Foundation, the Japanese New Energy and Industrial Technology Development Organisation, and the National Research Foundation

of Korea could all co-ordinate their efforts in these domains.

Equally important are deeper people-to-people ties among the three countries. For example, exchange programmes – especially for young people, media figures, and other "influencers" – could help to create a shared community and build greater public support for a deepening trilateral alliance.

More broadly, South Korea also will need to strengthen its participation in multilateral institutions and networks, so that it can work with other countries to provide international public goods, mitigate supply-chain problems, and address other global issues. Perhaps the most important body that South Korea should seek to join is the group of Indo-Pacific democracies known as the Quad, comprising Australia, Japan, India, and the US.

While Quad members currently lack the political will to expand, the opportunity to tie South Korea to it should not be missed. South Korea should also actively pursue membership in other vital multilateral international networks such as the G7; US President Joe Biden's Indo-Pacific Economic Framework initiative; the proposed Chip 4 Alliance (US, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan), intended to strengthen control of and access to semiconductor production; and the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, the vast trans-Pacific trading bloc.

Strong, forward-looking South Korean and Japanese leadership will be needed to seize these opportunities, and to mobilise broader regional and global networks. But, as is often the case, US leadership is needed to maintain today's current momentum.

The 2022 US National Security Strategy calls for investment in US national power and alignment with allies and partners to out-compete China and constrain Russia. But the Biden administration does not yet have an effective plan for uniting allies and like-minded countries behind shared security goals.

One reason for this is the traditional US failure to consider the impact of its domestic policies on its foreign-policy interests. For example, France, South Korea, and others have been complaining loudly about being excluded from new US industrial policies (such as the Inflation Reduction Act's tax credits for US-produced electric vehicles).

While Biden has pledged to address these concerns, he must do so quickly. Alliances, after all, are built on trust. And trust will be the essential ingredient in shaping a security alliance worthy of Asia's great democracies.

— Project Syndicate



South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol attends a ceremony of disbanding his presidential election camp at the National Assembly Library in Seoul last March. (Reuters)

● Yoon Young-kwan, a former minister of foreign affairs of the Republic of Korea, is Professor Emeritus of International Relations at Seoul National University.



## Boris Pistorius named new German defence minister



**NEW ROLE:** Boris Pistorius

Chancellor Olaf Scholz yesterday picked little-known Boris Pistorius to be Germany's new defence minister, putting him in charge of steering the armed forces through an era of momentous change.

The appointment follows the resignation of Christine Lambrecht at a crucial time for the ministry, with Germany under intense pressure to send battle tanks to Ukraine. Pistorius, 62, who is a member of Scholz's Social Democrats (SPD) and interior minister of Lower Saxony state, is a surprise choice for the post. Much better-known politicians had been thought to be in the running, such as Eva Hoegl, the parliamentary commissioner on the armed forces, and Labour Minister Hubertus Heil.

But the chancellor insisted Pistorius was the right man for the job at a time when Germany is looking to overhaul and revive its armed forces in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Scholz called Pistorius "an extremely experienced politician" who "has been involved in security policy for years and, with his competence, assertiveness and big heart, is exactly the right person to lead the Bundeswehr (armed forces) through this era of change". Pistorius himself said he found the appointment "very surprising".

However, he pledged to do his utmost to tackle the "new situation that has arisen with the Russian attack on Ukraine".

"The troops can rely on me to be there for them whenever necessary. I want to make the Bundeswehr strong for the time that lies ahead of us," he said.

The appointment, which will officially take effect tomorrow, ends a streak of three female defence ministers, and upends a promise by Scholz when he became chancellor in 2021 to keep his cabinet gender-balanced.

Pistorius has a huge task ahead of him at a time of sweeping change for the Bundeswehr and just as Germany faces a crunch moment in its policy towards the conflict in Ukraine.

## Dairy giant vows to slash planet-warming methane

French food giant Danone said yesterday it would slash planet-warming methane emissions by 30% by 2030, vowing to change the way the cows it uses are raised and milked.

Methane is responsible for roughly 30% of the global rise in temperatures to date. It is released from the oil and gas, waste and agriculture sectors as well as through natural processes.

Cattle farming is a major driver, since cows expel methane by burping. Their manure also releases the harmful gas. Agriculture and livestock generate about 40% of the methane linked to human activities, with the rest coming mainly from the gas sector.

Danone said yesterday it would seek to cut its methane emissions by using cow breeds that emit less methane, improving cow diets, prolonging their milking periods and capturing emissions from manure to be used for biogas, for example.

"We will see how we can improve practices in general on farms," spokeswoman Jeanette Coombs-Lanot told AFP.

It said it would reduce emissions by 30% by the end of the decade compared to 2020 levels.

The target covers all fresh dairy products, such as yoghurt, made from milk that Danone purchases directly from 58,000 dairy farms in 20 countries. The company's milk production accounts for 70% of the firm's methane emissions.

It does not include powdered formula, which it purchases from third-party intermediaries.

# Ukraine ends tower-block search with 20 missing

AFP  
Dnipro

Rescuers called off the search yesterday for victims of the Russian missile strike in the city of Dnipro with 20 people still missing and funerals being held in the grief-stricken Ukrainian city.

After the carnage, the Ukrainians pressed ahead with talks to obtain more Western weapons, and Ukraine's army chief Valery Zaluzhny met Mark Milley, Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, for the first time in person in Poland.

Ukrainian authorities said yesterday the Russian strike in the eastern city of Dnipro at the weekend killed at least 45 people including six children.

The youngest victim was 11 months old, officials said.

One of the bodies recovered from the rubble yesterday was that of a child.

The toll made Saturday's strike one of the deadliest attacks since Russian President Vladimir Putin invaded Ukraine nearly 11 months ago.

The Kremlin denies responsibility for the strike that also injured 79 people, including 16 children.

In Dnipro, several hundred residents gathered to pay their last respects to Ukrainian boxing coach Mykhaylo Korenovsky.

"He gave many a start in life," said Taras Ivanov, whose son trained with coach Korenovsky.

"This loss has affected our family," the father told AFP, calling Korenovsky a "legend." "Everything inside me is shaking."

Artem Biryukov said Korenovsky was like a "second father" to him. "Thanks to him I became who I am now," he said.

Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelensky reiterated his pledge that everyone who had "caused this terror" would be found and held to account.

Municipal workers clearing out the partially collapsed Soviet-designed housing block removed more than 9,000 tonnes of construction debris and over 40 damaged cars since the rescue work began on Saturday.

At 1pm, emergency services said the search and rescue operations at the site of the rocket attack were completed.

"Twenty people are still missing," the emergency services said.

In Moscow, a few residents laid flowers in the snow in memory of those killed in the weekend strike, at the monument to the famous Ukrainian poet Lesya Ukrainka.

Kyiv has called for more weapons to defend itself, and at the weekend received pledges of British tanks. Yesterday the head of Ukraine's armed forces, Zaluzhny, said he had met Milley, the top US general, for the first time in person in Poland.

"I outlined the urgent needs of the armed forces of Ukraine," he said.

"They discussed the unprovoked and ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine and exchanged perspectives and assessments," said Joint Staff spokesperson Dave Butler.

"The chairman reaffirmed unwavering support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity."

Germany announced on January 5 that it was following the United States in sending one of the advanced missile defence batteries to Ukraine.

Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte signalled his "intention" yesterday during a meeting with President Joe Biden to follow Germany in its delivery of US-made Patriot air-defence



Relatives grieve as they look at the photo of Mykhaylo Korenovsky, a Ukrainian boxing coach, who died following a missile strike last week on a residential building, during his funeral in Dnipro, eastern Ukraine, yesterday. (AFP)

missiles to Ukraine.

"We have the intention to join what you're doing with Germany on the Patriots project, the air-defence system,"

Rutte told Biden in the White House.

Putin warned more armaments would only intensify fighting and the Kremlin vowed to burn the materiel.



President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen speaks during a session of the World Economic Forum annual meeting in Davos yesterday. (AFP)

## Sharif makes conditional talks offer to India

Reuters  
Islamabad

Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has made a conditional offer to his Indian counterpart to open talks on all outstanding issues between them, including disputed Kashmir, which he believes could be facilitated by the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

"My message to the Indian leadership and Prime Minister Narendra Modi is let's sit down at the table and have serious and sincere talks to resolve our burning issues, like Kashmir," Sharif said in an interview with Al Arabiya news channel, telecast by Pakistan's state run TV yesterday.

However, a statement issued by Sharif's office after the interview aired added that such talks would only be possible if India restored the autonomous status in the part of Kashmir it rules that was revoked in 2019. "Without India's revocation of this step, negotiations are not possible," it said.

The Indian foreign affairs ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

New Delhi has ignored such calls from Pakistan on Kashmir's status in the past.

In the interview, Sharif said he had taken up

the issue with UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed on his recent visit to the Emirates.

"He's a brother of Pakistan. He also has good relations with India. He can play a very important role to bring the two countries on the talking table," Sharif said.

The two nuclear powers have fought three wars since independence from British rule in 1947. Two of the wars were over Kashmir, a disputed Himalayan region, which both the nations claim. Each controls half of the region.

The two neighbours came close to war again in 2019, when India launched an air strike inside Pakistan to target what New Delhi said was a militant training facility. Pakistan retaliated with a strike of its own after capturing an Indian air force pilot when his jet crashed, but released him as a gesture of goodwill.

Tensions were again inflamed when India unilaterally revoked the autonomous status of its part of Kashmir later in 2019, which Sharif said resulted in "flagrant" human rights violations.

India has faced a decades-long insurgency in its part of Kashmir which is accuses Pakistan of stoking — an accusation Islamabad denies.

Official talks between the two countries have been suspended since then.

# How Italian mafia hunters captured fugitive boss

AFP  
Rome

Betrayed by his cancer, Italy's most wanted fugitive, Sicilian mobster Matteo Messina Denaro, has been caught after 30 years on the run.

Here's how the mafia hunters tightened the net.

**Wiretaps**

Investigators looking for mass murderer Messina Denaro had been combing the Sicilian countryside for possible hide-outs for years, arresting those believed to be protecting him and slowly reducing the circle of people he could trust.

Members of his family and his friends were then heard on wiretapped conversations discussing the medical problems of an unnamed person who suffered from cancer, as well as eye problems.

Detectives were sure they were talking about Messina Denaro, 60, who was believed to have undergone an eye opera-

tion in the 1990s.

"We had unequivocal information that the fugitive had health problems... that he was attending a health facility in order to treat his illness," special operations commander Pasquale Angelosanto told a press conference Monday.

"So we worked to identify... those who had access to treatment for the suspected pathologies," he said.

**National database**

Investigators knew Messina Denaro would be going under a false identity, but they used a national health system database to search for male patients of the right age and medical history.

"We were narrowing down the list, ticking people off, until we had only a few individuals left," Angelosanto said.

"A few days ago we identified someone who had booked a specialist visit" for Monday" at the Maddalena health facility in Palermo.

The man had booked in as



Carabinieri forensics officers taking notes in front of the house of Italy's top wanted mafia boss Matteo Messina Denaro in Palermo, in his native Sicily island, after 30 years on the run. (AFP)

Andrea Bonafede, the nephew of a close friend of Messina Denaro's father, Italian media reported.

Bonafede's medical record showed he had been to an ophthalmologist for problems with his left eye, the *Open* online newspaper said.

He had also undergone two operations for colon cancer, one

in 2020 and another in 2022, it said. But when detectives dug further, they found Bonafede appeared to have been in two places at once.

Council surveillance footage from his hometown of Campobello di Mazara on the date in question in 2022 showed the real Bonafede out walking the dog at the moment he was al-

legedly under the knife.

**Special ops**

When the man going by the name of Bonafede booked an appointment for Monday at the upscale Palermo clinic, police readied a task force of 150 special ops to capture him.

Footage released by police later showed him arriving with his face barely visible underneath a hat, Covid-19 mask and tinted glasses.

Once he had checked in at the clinic they locked down the surrounding area and began checking the identity of everyone present.

Unaware of the closing net, the so-called Bonafede, dressed in his brown leather jacket with a fleece lining, lined up for the centre's obligatory Covid-19 nose swab, before heading back outside, perhaps to get a coffee, the *Corriere della Sera* said.

He likely realised then what was going on.

When asked "who are you?" by a law enforcement officer, the Cosa Nostra boss replied:

"You know who I am. Matteo Messina Denaro?"

**The doctor**

Palermo's chief prosecutor Paolo Guido said Messina Denaro may have been undergoing treatment for serious illnesses, but he "appeared to be in good health. He didn't look fragile or in difficulty to us".

He may thank his doctor Alfonso Tumbarello, who is now being investigated by police.

He had been treating Messina Denaro as Bonafede, despite having been the real Bonafede's doctor for years, according to the *Messaggero* daily.

Police are also questioning others at the clinic, from those who shared chemotherapy sessions with Messina Denaro to a nurse who snapped a selfie with him, media reported.

Guido said the clinic was not itself under suspicion, adding that it was the mobster's health that was his undoing.

"It was what forced him to come out into the open," the prosecutor said.



# Double delight as cruise ship, superyacht arrive at Doha Port



Officials after the arrival of *Le Bougainville*.



*Le Bougainville* at Doha Port yesterday.



*Emerald Azzurra* at Doha Port yesterday.

Doha Port continued to be a hub of activity yesterday as more ships docked there.

Cruise ship *Le Bougainville* arrived at the port on its fourth call during the 2022/23 cruise season, with 267 passengers and crew members on board, according to Mwani Qatar.

Operated by French cruise line Ponant Cruises, *Le Bougainville* was launched in 2019 and is currently sailing under the flag of France.

It is 131m long, 18m wide, and has a 4.6m draft, Mwani Qatar said in a tweet.

The ship features innovative and environment-friendly equipment, elegantly designed cabins and spacious suites spread over five guest decks.



*Le Bougainville* and *Emerald Azzurra* can be seen docked at Doha Port.

Earlier yesterday, Doha Port received superyacht *Emerald Azzurra* as part of its tourism programme that includes a number of ports in the region.

The ship arrived with 138 visitors, including crew members.

Sailing under the flag of the Bahamas, *Emerald Azzurra* is operated by Emerald Cruises, part of the Australia-based Scenic Group.

The superyacht is 110m long and 16m wide, with a total carrying capacity of 5,175 tonnes.

On Monday, German cruise ship

*AIDAcosma* arrived at Doha Port with 3,624 passengers and 1,385 crew members.

Mwani Qatar said that the ship's maiden call to the port is one of 13 scheduled voyages during the 2022/23 cruise season, which started in December last year and continues until April.

*AIDAcosma* is operated by AIDA Cruises and has 20 passenger decks and 2,700 staterooms.

It is one of the largest cruise ships within the AIDA fleet, with a capacity

of more than 6,600 passengers and 1,636 crew members.

For the 2022/23 period, Doha Port will witness a total of 58 world-class cruise ships and four cruise liner maiden calls, in addition to welcoming around 200,000 visitors until the end of April.

Doha Port received Italian cruise ship *Costa Toscana* – the flagship vessel of Costa Cruises, which can accommodate around 6,500 passengers – on Sunday during its maiden tour of the Arabian Gulf.

# All set for Qatar Balloon Festival

More than 50 hot air balloons will take to the skies of Doha from tomorrow until January 28 to mark the third edition of Qatar Balloon Festival, taking place at the Old Doha Port's external green area (behind the Grand Cruise Terminal).

The 10-day festival is expected to draw 4,000-5,000 visitors daily, who will have the opportunity to witness a one-of-its-kind spectacle, featuring balloons of various shapes, sizes and designs, according to the organisers.

Like the event's second edition, the organisers noted that the latest version of the festival will feature "sunrise balloon launches" for people to see and enjoy either from their homes or while commuting.

The event's website, <https://qatarballoonfestival.com/>, says visitors, who may be having their snacks or playing in a gaming zone, will also have "the opportunity to see a hot air balloon professionally tethered and anchored to the ground while floating just above you".

At night, people can revel while watching "illuminated balloons stacked next to each other ... in perfect rhythm accompanied by the festival's musical events from the main stage, creating a lovely vibrant atmosphere and an experience like no other".

The festivities include dance and music shows with a variety of performers, bands, DJs and singers, in addition to magic shows, mascots and jugglers, among others, aimed at providing unique entertainment and enhancing "the overall



The latest version of the festival will feature 'sunrise balloon launches'. **PICTURE:** <https://qatarballoonfestival.com>

all festival experience for visitors".

Among the participants are balloonists from Qatar, the Czech Republic, Belgium, France, Poland, Italy, Lithuania, Macedonia, Slovenia, Norway, Slovakia, Türkiye, the United Kingdom, Brazil, the

United States, Germany, and Hungary.

Apart from hot air balloons, the event offers an array of games and attractions for children at a special arena, which will host carnival and team games, football, football darts, VR and other electronic games,

themed jumping houses, and slides.

A wide range of cuisines offered by several kiosks and food trucks spread across the venue await foodies at the festival, which forms part of Qatar Tourism's "Feel Winter in Qatar" campaign.



## Transportation tips for Qatar Balloon Festival

Sila, the brand that brings together Qatar's public transport modes into an integrated network, has shared transportation tips for Qatar Balloon Festival visitors.

More than 50 hot air balloons will soar across the skies of Doha from tomorrow until January 28 to mark the third edition of Qatar Balloon Festival, taking place at the Old Doha Port's external green area (behind the Grand Cruise Terminal).

Visitors taking the Doha Metro can alight at Souq Waqif metro station on the Gold Line and take a 30-minute walk to the Old Doha Port. Alternatively, they can take a Karwa taxi to get to the destination directly.

All travel updates are available on the Sila app that can be downloaded at <http://sila.qa/appdownload>

# Most pigeons evade falcons at Marmi 2023

Only two falcons qualified for the next round yesterday at the ongoing Haddad Al Tahadi competitions (where the falcon has to hunt a homing pigeon within certain parameters) at the 14th edition of Qatar International Falcons and Hunting Festival (Marmi 2023).

The forenoon and afternoon sessions saw a majority of pigeons escaping the falcons and returning safe to their coops at Umm Ebairiya.

The participating falconers, including those from Egypt and Kuwait, highly appreciated the excellent organisation of the festival.

The owner of the homing pigeons, Abdulla Fakhr, stressed that his birds have started to regain their strength and balance while the falconers continued to use the most sophisticated methods to

train their falcons, which gives the championship a real feel of an exciting competition.

Souq Waqif Falcon Hospital has maintained an active presence among the falconers at the festival.

Hospital director Misnad bin Ali al-Mohannadi stressed the facility's keenness to co-operate with Marmi 2023 and other related activities and exhibitions.

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 been drawing 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.



Snapshots from the events at Marmi 2023 yesterday.

