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**SPORT** | Page 1

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## Amir receives phone call from Kenyan president

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani received yesterday a phone call from Kenyan President Dr William Ruto. During the phone call, they reviewed bilateral relations and aspects of their support and development in various fields, as well as issues of common concern. (QNA)

## S Africa cuts power to Nigeria consulate

The Nigerian consulate in Johannesburg has complained to the South African government after city authorities disconnected the consulate's electricity supplies over unpaid bills, a government official said yesterday. City officials on Wednesday went to the consulate, in an upmarket northern suburb, to cut off supplies over 400,000 rand (\$23,300) in outstanding charges, according to a city official. The consulate denied the officials access, describing them in a statement as "an invasion squad". Supplies were remotely switched off.

## Sunak fined for not wearing seatbelt

British police yesterday fined Prime Minister Rishi Sunak for failing to wear a seatbelt in a moving car while filming a social media video. Lancashire Police said in a Twitter statement not directly naming Sunak: "We have today issued a 42-year-old man from London with a conditional offer of fixed penalty." A fixed penalty means Sunak can pay a fine to avoid a court hearing. Downing Street said in a statement that Sunak "fully accepts this was a mistake and has apologised". Page 9

## Google cuts 12,000 jobs as tech woes bite

Google's parent company Alphabet announced yesterday it will cut about 12,000 jobs globally, citing a changing economic reality as it became the latest US tech giant to enact large-scale restructuring. Business Page 4

COMMUNITY

See Pages 4 & 5



A scene from the Night Glow event at Qatar Balloon Festival 2023 yesterday. PICTURE: Joey Aguilar Page 3

# Night Glow magic at Qatar Balloon Festival 2023

By Joey Aguilar  
Staff Reporter

Hot air balloons became colourful and gigantic light bulbs last night at Doha Port's Grand Terminal, drawing large crowds at the Qatar Balloon Festival 2023.

Spectators had the opportunity to see illuminated balloons stacked next to each other as they glowed in the dark, in tune with the festival's music.

The annual event will see more than 50 hot air balloons, from 17 different countries, taking to the skies of Doha from morning to evening until January 28.

The Night Glow is one of the festival's many unique and popular activities - providing a picturesque view and Instagramable moments for people to enjoy.

Prior to the activity, festival-goers also had the chance to witness an array of entertainment shows at the venue

such as live stage performances, dance shows, roving mascots, and kite-flying activities.

"It's good to have such an event after the World Cup. My family is so happy to be here at the Grand Terminal because they are really enjoying the shows particularly this Night Glow. The balloons are amazing and I hope I could bring them here every night," said Sachin, an Indian expatriate who was taking videos for his social media channels.

He lauded the organisers for providing residents and visitors with what he described as "a lovely and dazzling festival that fascinate us all."

The 3rd edition of Qatar Balloon Festival forms part of the 'Feel Winter in Qatar' campaign, launched by Qatar Tourism and Qatar Airways on Thursday at the Mina District.

Qatar Tourism has also lined up several other events as part of its campaign, aimed at attracting more visitors and making the country as among the favourite places to explore.

# Doha Marathon by Ooredoo a big success

● Sell-out event, 8,000 participants ● Most runner-friendly route ever ● QR1mn prize pool ● Athletes break their own records

Ooredoo, a longstanding supporter of major sports events in Qatar, announced that the 13th edition of its annual marathon, this year renamed the Doha Marathon by Ooredoo, was a roaring success yesterday.

The event was a complete sell-out, with 8,000 runners participating in a variety of distance categories, from the 1km kids' run to the full 42.2km marathon.

A host of top international athletes took part, returning some incredible run times, with some athletes breaking their own personal records. Morocco's Mohcin Outalha crossed the finish line first in the men's marathon in a time of 2:06:49, with Kenyan Gevin Kerich taking second place with 2:06:52 on the clock. Kenyan Victor Kipchirchir and Ethiopian Adane Kebede finished in joint third place, registering a time of 2:06:54.

Ethiopian Meseret Belete took top spot in the women's marathon, clocking 2:20:45, with Desi Jisa Mokonin from Brunei finishing in second place with a time of 2:20:47. Kenyan Beatrice Cheptoo placed third with a time of 2:22:28.

In the open marathon category, the men's race was won by Briton Michael Kallenberger with a time of 2:23:02, while the USA's Abigail Cember took top spot in the women's race, clocking 3:04:00.

Qatari runners were once again able to enter the AlAdaam category this year. Abdulla Fahad al-Zarra won the men's marathon with a time of 2:48:21, while Rabaa al-Musleh finished first in the women's marathon with a time of 3:50:55.

The men's half marathon was won by Morocco's Anouar El Ghouz in a time of 1:03:23, with Ukrainian Tetiana Pydyyna winning the women's half marathon in 1:08:53.

Sheikh Ali bin Jabor al-Thani, recently appointed CEO at Ooredoo Qatar, said: "As always, the event attracted some of the world's top runners and gave the opportunity for our local enthusiasts to run alongside such sporting superstars. Thanks



Ooredoo Qatar CEO Sheikh Ali bin Jabor al-Thani firing the starting gun for the Elite category of the Doha Marathon by Ooredoo yesterday. (Supplied pictures)



The event was a complete sell-out, with 8,000 runners participating in a variety of distance categories, from the 1km kids' run to the full 42.2km marathon.

to the support of our partners and sponsors, we were able to ensure an incredible and upgraded experience for both runners and spectators alike, in line with Ooredoo's commitment to promoting the importance of a healthy, active lifestyle as part of our corporate social responsibility strategy."

Mohamed Issa al-Fadallah, president of Qatar Athletics Federation, said: "We extend our thanks to Oore-

doo for once again hosting a phenomenal marathon that is consistently a highlight of Doha's sporting calendar. Events such as these demonstrate Qatar's suitability as the ideal venue for major sporting events, and this is only reinforced by the number of top international athletes who travel here to take part. We were delighted to see such an incredible turnout, and congratulate all runners on their sterling performances!" To Page 12

## Doha Port welcomes Mein Schiff 6



Doha Port yesterday welcomed the cruise ship 'Mein Schiff 6', operated by the German cruise line 'TUI Cruises' on its first call in 2022/23 cruise season, bringing in 3,278 passengers and crew to Qatar. The cruise liner, which sails under the flag of Malta, is scheduled to make nine more calls to Doha Port during the current season, Mwani Qatar explained in a tweet. The ship made its first call to Qatar shores in the 2021/22 cruise season. Commissioned in 2017, Mein Schiff 6 is 295m long, 35.8m wide, and 8m draft and offers space for up to 2,534 passengers and boasts 17,895sq m of outside decks and 1,800sq m of spa and fitness areas, besides 11 restaurants and bistros and 16 lounges. Page 2

# Study finds need for more infection control strategies

By Joseph Varghese  
Staff Reporter

A Qatar-based study has highlighted the need for more strategies in infection control to avoid healthcare-associated infections (HAI), especially the device-associated ones.

According to an article published on Qscience.com, the study was conducted at Cuban Hospital of Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC) on 155 patients with HAIs reported from 130 (85.5%) during the Covid-19 pandemic.

An increase in the incidence of HAIs, particularly device-associated infections (DAIs), was reported worldwide during the pandemic. The study was aimed to estimate the incidence of HAIs in an intensive care unit during a 10-year period and compare HAI incidence during the pre-Covid-19 and Covid-19 periods.

The study highlights that HAIs in critical patients affect the quality and safety of patient care and increase patient morbidity and mortality. Moreover, HAI decreases efficiency in the healthcare



Cuban Hospital (file picture)

system due to prolonged hospital stays, antimicrobial use and other cost-related issues.

Highlighting the findings of various reports, the study notes that before the pandemic, DAI prevention and control showed progress in reducing the incidence of DAIs and other adverse outcomes. The Covid-19 pandemic has significantly disrupted global healthcare systems. Infection prevention and control programmes have been seriously affected with increased HAI incidence and compromised staff safety and healthcare efficiency.

Originally a 75-bed public hospital, the Cuban Hospital expanded to 385 beds, after becoming part of HMC. The facility's infection control programme is guided by the corporate infection control programme. Data from infection

surveillance suggest an increase in the incidence of HAIs in the pandemic compared to the pre-pandemic period, mostly in critically ill patients.

A retrospective, observational study of HAIs in the medical-surgical ICU at the Cuban Hospital was conducted. DAIs included central line-associated bloodstream infections, catheter-associated urinary tract infections and ventilator-associated pneumonia. Data included the annual incidence of HAIs, etiology, and antimicrobial resistance, using definitions provided by the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, except for other respiratory tract infections.

The frequencies of DAIs and non-DAIs were higher during the Covid-19 period, except for Clostridium difficile infections. Species under Enterobacter, Klebsiella, and Pseudomonas dominated in both periods, and higher frequencies of Acinetobacter, Enterococcus, Candida, Escherichia coli, Serratia marcescens, and Stenotrophomonas maltophilia were noted during Covid-19 period. Device utilisation ratio increased to 10.7% for central lines and

12.9% for ventilators, while a reduction of 15% in urinary catheter utilisation ratio was observed.

The most frequently reported infection was other respiratory tract infections which were not classified as ventilator-associated pneumonia. In patients with coronavirus infection, there were two confirmed cases of bloodstream infection related to peripheral venous lines, four cases with decubitus ulcer infection, five cases of skin infection associated with tracheostomy, and one case of symptomatic urinary tract infection.

The study also found out that DAI incidence was higher during the pandemic, with risks for central line-associated bloodstream infections, catheter-associated urinary tract infections and ventilator-associated pneumonia increased by 2.79%, 15.31% and 3.25% respectively.

The study concluded that incidence of DAIs increased during the pandemic period, with limited evidence of antimicrobial resistance. It suggests that the infection control programme should evaluate strategies to minimise the impact of the pandemic on HAIs.



**QU project moots more interventions in GCC region to promote child car seats**



More interventions are ought to be implemented to promote the use of child restraint systems in the Gulf region, it has been recommended by a graduation project of a group of Public Health students at Qatar University's (QU) College of Health Sciences. The project was about assessing child restraint systems' importance among parents in the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) countries through a systematic review. The group included Huda al-Motawa, Shouq Baker and Nejoood Nashar, supervised by Dr Marguerite Claire Sendall. Their findings suggest that the use of child restraint systems in the Gulf region is influenced by a suite of different factors, including a lack of knowledge about risks and proper usage and the influence of local culture and attitudes.

**Pleasant winter weather**



Qatar yesterday experienced a pleasant winter weather with temperature in the 10-22C range. For today (Saturday), Qatar Meteorology Department has forecast a minimum temperature of 12C and a maximum of 21C. The weather is expected to be misty at the southern areas at first with scattered clouds and cold by night. A sunset scene from yesterday. **PICTURE:** Shaji Kayamkulam

**Shura Council partakes in parliamentary conference on counter-terrorism in Togo**

**QNA**  
Lome

A Shura Council delegation participated in a high-level parliamentary conference on preventing and countering terrorism and violent extremism, along with the role of African youth in this field. The two-day African parliamentary conference convened on Thursday in Lome, Togo.

The event was organised by Doha-based Office of the UN Counter-Terrorism Programme (UNOCT) on Parliamentary Participation in Preventing and Combating Terrorism, with support from the Shura Council, and in co-operation with the National Assembly of Togo, the African Parliamentary Union (APU), the Joint Parliamentary Committee of the Group of Five in the Sahel, as well as the Interparliamentary Committee of the Group of Five for the Sahel.

Attended by the national parliaments in Africa, African Parliamentary assemblies and unions, civil society organisations and the relevant UN agencies, the conference focused on the ways that enable the parliamentarians to foster youth engagement in



Delegates at the conference.

policy-making processes, raising awareness of the major role that should be undertaken by young people in Africa in preventing extremism. In his intervention during the first day of the conference, Shura Council member Saad bin Ahmed al-Misnad underlined that Qatar continues to support all UN activities, whether physically or morally, according to the directives of the wise leadership, specially the initiatives that aim to combat terrorism, extremism and eliminating their causes and

drying up their sources. This is in addition to bolstering the international security and peace as the two essential and vital prerequisites to attain the sustainable development goals, al-Misnad said. He added that the efforts made by Qatar in combating the terrorism scourge and supporting the UN initiatives received wide commendation and standing ovation from the UN in numerous occasions.

Al-Misnad underscored the critical role played by youth in

combating terrorism and preventing extremism, pointing out that young people constitute up to nearly two-thirds of the population of African countries and represent the active segments on whom the countries count in development, progress and advancing the African communities.

Countering terrorism concerns all segments, particularly the young people, he pointed out, stressing their critical role in the progress and development of communities in Africa and the

world, in addition to curbing all scourges and illnesses that pose a threat to communities. He called for the provision of all appropriate ways and means to young people to undertake a positive role in combating all risks that threaten the communities, pose a real threat to international peace and security and create major barriers to the countries' development and progress.

The Shura Council member praised the Parliamentary Counter-Terrorism Working Group for

Africa, lauding the role of UNOCT in establishing the working group. Terrorism phenomenon is certainly global and concerns all world territories, al-Misnad added, pointing out that its implications are extremely dangerous, adding that he keeps his countenance in establishing the Parliamentary Counter-Terrorism Working Group for Africa, and hopes that it will proceed with its operation to provide creative initiatives and proposals to the international efforts devoted

to eliminating terrorism and extremism.

The first meeting of the Parliamentary Counter-Terrorism Working Group for Africa was convened yesterday, which featured an Inter-Parliamentary dialogue to further comprehend the most exigent challenges concerning the prevention of extremism, and enforcing the legislations related to the protection of victims of terrorism, as well as the ways to address the increasing challenges facing the legislators at this level.

**Mein Schiff 6 docks at Doha Port**

Doha Port yesterday welcomed the cruise ship 'Mein Schiff 6', operated by the German cruise line 'TUI Cruises' on its first call in 2022/23 cruise season, bringing in 3,278 passengers and crew to Qatar. The cruise liner, which sails under the flag of Malta, is scheduled to make nine more calls to Doha Port during the current season, Mwani Qatar explained in a tweet.



**Souq Waqif Equestrian Festival registration begins**

The organising committee of the Souq Waqif Equestrian Festival has announced that registration has begun for horse owners and enthusiasts wishing to participate in the upcoming event from both within and outside Qatar. The registration runs from January 20-29.

The festival includes the fourth Souq Waqif International Arabian Horse Show (A), taking place from February 21-23 (open for entries), the 12th Qatar International Arabian Peninsula Horse Show 2023 (S), taking place from February 25-27 (open for entries), and the Horse Auction, taking place on February 28. For more information, those interested can contact +974 55428335 or +974 44876790, send an email to swef@peo.gov.qa, or visit www.swef.qa

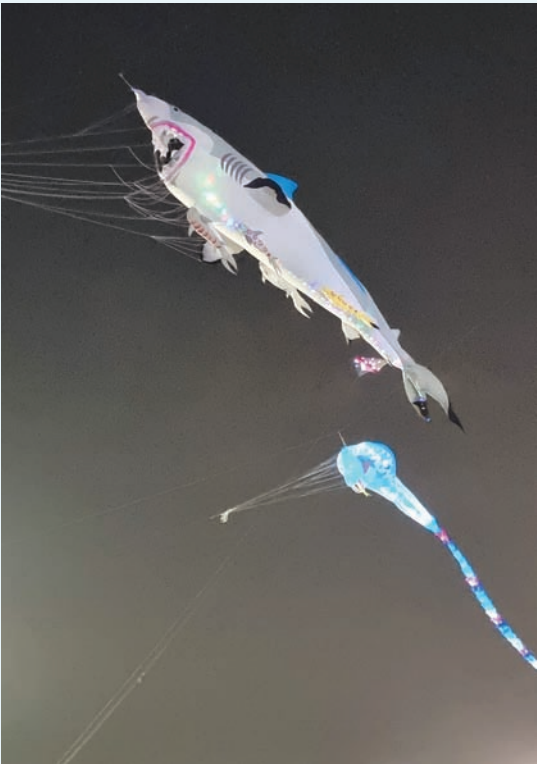
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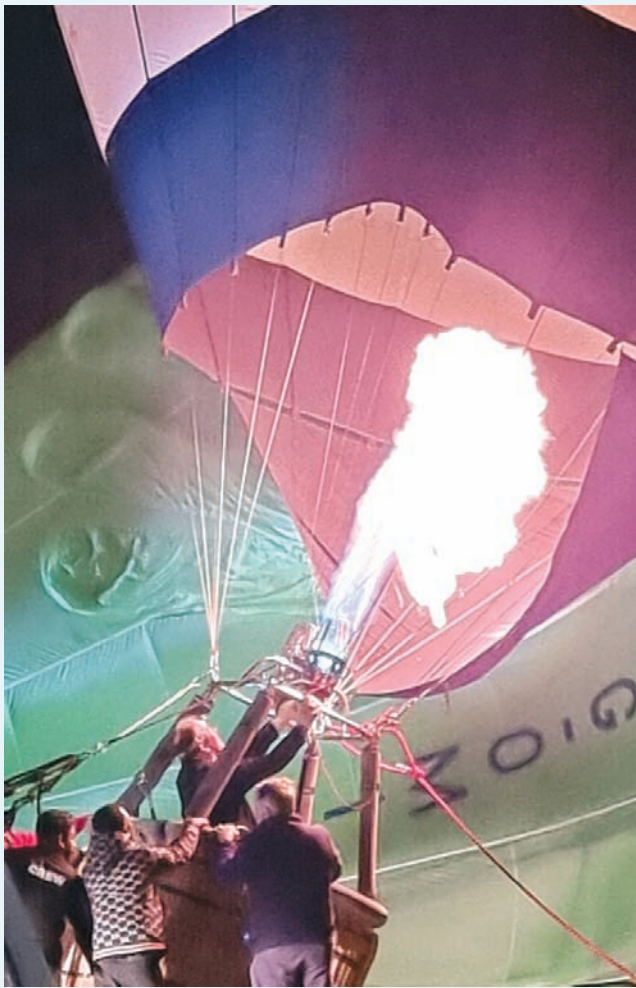




## Night Glow magic at Qatar Balloon Festival



The Qatar Balloon Festival is part of the 'Feel Winter in Qatar' campaign, launched by Qatar Tourism and Qatar Airways at the Mina District. **PICTURES:** Joey Aguilar



## Mahaseel offers fresh farm produce, entertainment

The 7th edition of Mahaseel Festival, at the southern part of Katara – the Cultural Village, continued to attract a large numbers of visitors from different nationalities.

Apart from being able to buy high-quality farm produce, they also enjoy the various entertainment and educational workshops

targeting children. The festival is open to the public from 9am until 9pm. There are 28 different local farms taking part in the festival in addition to six companies specialised in dairy products, meat, poultry, besides eight plant nurseries and a number of shops selling popular and traditional dishes. The exhibitors expressed their

thanks and appreciation to Katara for supporting the local products, and its major efforts in gathering a considerable number of Qatari farms and outlets in one place, easily accessible for all. Ali Ahmed al-Kaabi, owner of a participating farm, said that the festival gives consumers the opportunity to buy extra fresh products within just

one or two hours of being harvested from farms.

The participants stressed this initiative will further reflect positively on the agriculture and farm production in the country. The festival will continue until January 28, while the Mahseel Market will continue on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays until mid-April.



## Falcons regain winning streak at Marmi 2023

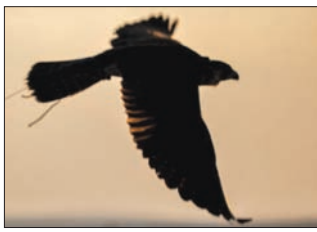
Falcons regained their winning streak over the homing pigeons yesterday (Friday) at the competitions of Haddad Al Tahadi (where the falcon has to hunt a homing pigeon within certain standards) at the ongoing 14th edition of Qatar International Falcons and Hunting Festival (Marmi 2023).

Accordingly, six falcons were able to successfully capture their prey of homing pigeons at both the morning and afternoon rounds, taking to 65 the total number of falcons qualifying for the higher round, since the start of festival.

Yesterday's competitions were witnessed by a considerably high number of spectators from among Qataris, other GCC citizens and expatriates and visitors with their families. Ali Sultan al-Kuwari, head of Haddad Al Tahadi committee, said that the peregrine falcons gave very good performance yesterday and the weather was excellent for both the falcons and pigeons, with good light and visibility. He said that both the falconers and the owner of the homing pigeons exert great efforts in training their birds and keep them fit and qualified. He added that competitions are growing stronger at the festival year after year affirming its success.

The organising committee of Marmi 2023 has been organising shooting activities from 9.30am until the end of the afternoon period, where some related competitions are held in co-operation with the Qatar Shooting Club. Shotguns are used to fire at specific targets in activities open for both professionals and amateurs. A falconry workshop is also conducted to introduce related topics and information to the visitors and show the various components and tools of the sport.

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.







## IBPC Qatar kickstarts activities for International Year of Millets

With the aim of creating awareness and increasing the production and consumption of millets, the United Nations (UN), at the behest of the Indian government, has declared 2023 as the International Year of Millets (IYoM).

To celebrate this important UN initiative, the Indian Business and Professionals Council (IBPC Qatar) and the Indian embassy in Doha have joined hands to kickstart the IYoM activities starting with a gathering of hypermarket representa-

tives and food importers in Qatar. In his opening remarks, IBPC vice-president K P Ashraf welcomed the delegates and briefly explained the agenda. Angeline Premalatha, counsellor (Political and Commerce) at the Indian embassy, explained the significance of the International Year of Millets and the desire to host various activities to raise awareness about millets in Qatar and their importance in the daily diet.

Allevia Medical Center nutritionist and dietician Re-

nitha Richard gave a presentation on the various health benefits of millets, while IBPC vice-president Hisham Abdul Raheem proposed various initiatives to promote millets in Qatar.

Later, Team IBPC also met with the management representatives of Radio Malayalam, Mirchi One and Radio Olive-Suno to kickstart the year-long public awareness campaign for millets.

More information about the IYoM is available at <https://ibpcqatar.com/> and its social media platforms.

# Students from Texas A&M's flagship campus learn about life in Qatar

Students from Texas A&M University's flagship campus in College Station, Texas (US), learned about life in Qatar during various study abroad opportunities offered by Texas A&M at Qatar (Tamuq), a Qatar Foundation partner.

The delegation met with Doha-based students and faculty, participated in cultural experiences and visited various industry sites throughout the country.

It was in December that 14 students from the Texas A&M College of Agriculture and Life Sciences participated in a study abroad programme that brought them to the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022. The Texas A&M group from the Department of Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences worked volunteer shifts at the FIFA Fan Festival, helping out in specific zones of the festival including the lost and found booth, accessibility towers, around the main stage and screens, and food and beverage outlets.

Bradley Burroughs, programme co-ordinator in the First-Year Experience Office for Student Success at Texas A&M and a doctoral student, said: "Spending time in Qatar during the World Cup was truly a once-in-a-lifetime experience. I was thoroughly surprised with how beautiful the area is and how intentional the people were to ensure we are making the most of our time here. It really has been an incredible opportunity to see this part of the world, and it has been an experience I will cherish forever."



The delegation met with Doha-based students and faculty, participated in cultural experiences and visited various industry sites throughout the country.

Earlier this month, eight students from the Mays Business School at Texas A&M also visited Qatar as a part of a faculty-led Study Abroad programme.

They visited several agricultural companies to gain a better understanding of the farming techniques and practices used in this part of the world.

Dr Cesar Octavio Malave, dean of Tamuq, said that he aims to bring around 200 students from various disciplines at the College Station campus to Doha over

the course of the academic year. "Student mobility and international exchanges are crucial for developing a broad worldview and international awareness," Dr Malave said. "These trips allow our College Station students an opportunity to get a first-hand knowledge about life in Qatar. Through this experience, they are able to meet with the local community, and participate in cultural experiences, which allows them to get a better perspective and to discard misconceptions about the region."

Students studying at the Doha campus also participate in various study abroad, research and exchange opportunities throughout the academic year. Recently, undergraduate students from Tamuq travelled to College Station for a study abroad programme as part of their intercultural communications course, where they explored and analysed the different elements for communications at several of the group stage matches of the 2022 FIFA World Cup.

## IBPC Qatar holds interactive session on India's National Education Policy

The Indian Business and Professionals Council (IBPC Qatar) recently hosted an expert-led virtual discussion on India's National Education Policy (NEP).

Initiated by IBPC vice-president Abdul Sathar, the session was well received by 500-plus members and participants from the Indian school community in Qatar as well as educationalists from other GCC countries and India.

Chief guest Sachin Dinkar Shankpal, first secretary - Culture, Education & Information at the Indian embassy, appreciated the event being held on a topic of current relevance. He added that the event was important to help professionals, students and the general public to gain insights into the National Education Policy.

Prof K K Aggarwal, former chairman of the National Board of Accreditation, spoke in his keynote address about the changes in the NEP. The old policy needed to be up-



dated to keep pace with global education standards.

Aggarwal said the new policy was adopted by the Indian government recently because of loopholes in the previous education policy. The new NEP of 2022 will pay lots of attention to students with special needs as well as to all Indian children across the nation and over-

seas at all levels, in line with the latest global trends.

In a statement, IBPC Qatar said it plans to organise more such beneficial programmes for its members and the community. More information about current and future activities is available at <https://ibpcqatar.com/> and its social media platforms.

## DPS-MIS students attend PBD live telecast

Students from DPS-MIS, Grade VIII got a chance to attend the live telecast of the inaugural ceremony of Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) recently. The event at the Indian Cultural Centre was a great opportunity for students from different schools to interact with each other and the Indian ambassador to Qatar, Dr Deepak Mittal.



## Urdu literary forum launches book

Bazm-e-Urdu Qatar (BUQ), described as the oldest Urdu literary organisation in Qatar (established in 1959), recently organised a mushaira and a launch ceremony for the Urdu prose book *Dastaan dar Dastaan* by Mohamed Sulaiman Dehlvi.

The author, a pioneer of grand international mushairas in Qatar, has been a resident since 1975, a statement said. He founded the Indo-Qatar Urdu Markaz in 1986, which initiated a series of international poetry symposiums in Qatar. He also organised six grand mushairas. The noted literary personalities of the sub-continent who were invited to Qatar by Dehlvi included Hafeez Meerthi, Kaleem Afiz, Tabish Dehlvi, Majroh Sultanpuri, Ali Sardar Jafri, Shamsur Rehman Farooqi, Saeed Shuhaidi, Akhtar ul Eman, Jagannath Azad, Malikzada Manzoor, Raza Ali Abidi, Hilal Siharvi, Hemayat Ali Shayer, Waali Aasi, Munnuwar Rana, Kaifi Azmi, Intizar Naqvi, Ghulam Rabbani Taban, Kanwar Mahinder Singh Bedi Sahar, Gulzar Dehlvi, Tabish Mehdi, Waseem Barelvi and Sudarshan Fakhr among many others.

The programme was presided over by Dr Faisal Hanif, chairman of BUQ and president of Ghazrghah-e-Khayal Forum. Visiting Indian writer and scholar Maulana Dr Sirajuddin



Nadvi and Waseem Ahmed, a key member of Bazm were chief guests. Dehlvi was the guest of honour. The evening was hosted by the BUQ president Mohamed Rafique Shad Akolvi.

The programme began with the recitation of verses from Holy Qur'an by Aslam Aziz Nadvi. BUQ general secretary Iftekhar Raghib welcomed the gathering.

In the book launching segment, Waseem Ahmed and Akolvi presented their essays highlighting the various characteristics of Dehlvi's work and personality in addition to his literary services.

Dr Hanif presented an elegant humorous character sketch which immensely delighted the audience. This sketch is also included in the book. Poets Muzaffar Nayab and Iftekhar Raghib presented their poems offering tributes to Dehlvi, who has also

made significant contributions to the promotion and preservation of Urdu literature and culture in Qatar. He instituted the annual inter-school Urdu debates in 1988 among students studying Urdu. With his efforts, the examination centre of Jamia Urdu Aligarh in Qatar was also established in 1990. He established the first Urdu library in Qatar, "Indo Qatar Urdu Library" in 1993 and the books were donated to Qatar National Library in 2019. He issued the first international Urdu literary award "Hazrat Amir Khusrro" from Qatar in 1994.

*Dastaan dar Dastaan* is a compilation of various essays Dehlvi has written about the culture and traditions of old Delhi and its people. The book is a tribute to the city that he has called home for many years.

In the second segment of the programme, the mushaira, lo-

cal poets including Shad Akolvi, Iftekhar Raghib, Muzaffar Nayab, Qaiser Masood, Wasi Bastwi, Raza Hussain Raza, Inam Azmi, Bijnaath Sharma Minto, and Mubasir Iman presented poems.

In the end, Dehlvi narrated some interesting incidents from his book and thanked BUQ for organising the event. Akolvi proposed a vote of thanks.

The event was attended by a diverse audience of literary enthusiasts.

Besides the distinguished guests and poets on the stage, the other attendees included Urdu enthusiasts Feroz Khan, Shamsuddin Rahimi, Ashraf Siddiqui, Asif Hussain, Afroz Dawar, Hamid Ali, Mohamed Ghiyasuddin, Sajjad Alam, Mohamed Danish, Sohail Ahmed Wafa, Siraj Alam, Sultan Ahmed, Dr Ayaz Ahmed, Dr Rizwan, Dr Faisal Nazir, Hassan Badr, Irshad, Mukhtar Ahmed and Kazem Faisal Hanif.



## RPS organises Expo 2022

With an objective to provide students an exposure to the novel scientific techniques and an experience as young innovators, Rajagiri Public School (RPS), Doha organised Rajagiri Expo-2022 recently.

Anand Victor, principal of Scholars' International School, Doha, who inaugurated the event, remarked that the expo will enable the students to discover their talents in new areas, help them to use the resources within them and be transformers rather than conformers.

RPS academics director Dr Prasanth Palakkappillil observed that such events will help to develop scientific temper and the spirit of enquiry in students.

Around 250 exhibits were put up by students of Grade 5-11, in four categories - working model, still model, charts and presentations.

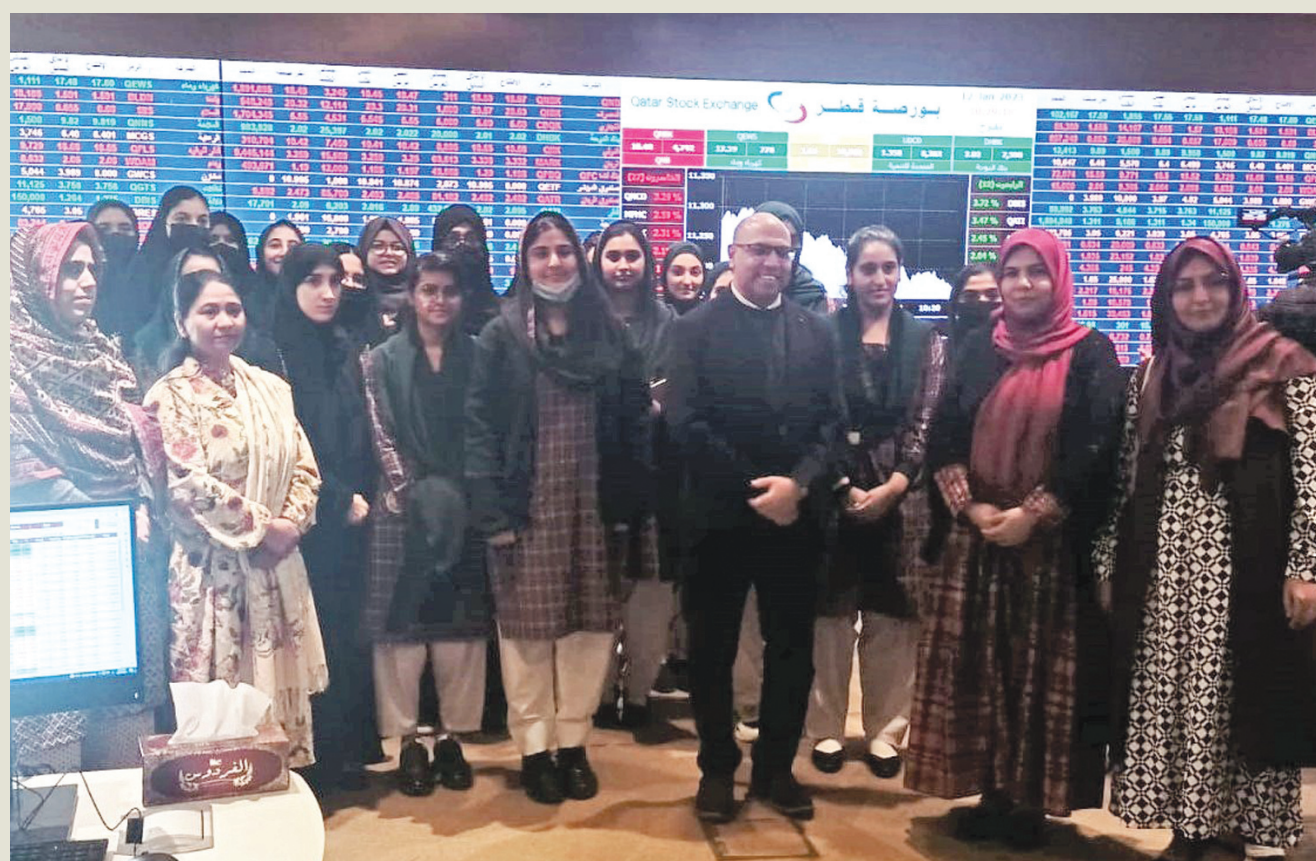
The children explained about their models



and innovations to the visitors. The Millet Stall reminded the visitors about celebrating 2023 as the Year of Millets. Harish Thalappil co-ordinated the expo with the support of all departments and parents.



## PISQ students in educational trip to Qatar Stock Exchange



As per instructions of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, an educational trip was arranged by Pakistan International School Qatar (PISQ) to Qatar Stock Exchange (QSE) recently. A group of 40 Commerce students of Senior Girls Wing, Cambridge Wing and four teachers participated. The objective was to put financial learning in practical perspective, show students the operations of QSE and create awareness about the investment and career paths available in the capital markets. A resource person shared the investment culture in Qatar along with the avenues of investments. The data portal of QSE was also shared with the students to give them a virtual platform to practice their portfolio investment and confidence to enter the financial market as an investor. The students also visited the trading floor. It was a very interactive learning experience for all the students, with many of their queries being answered, and helping them clear many myths about the financial sector.



## Renowned Indian author visits Podar Pearl School



Dr Amitav Ghosh, one of India's most celebrated writers in the English language and a recipient of the Jnanpith Award, visited Podar Pearl School on Thursday. The school president, Sam Mathew, along with the board members welcomed Dr Ghosh and said "pride and privilege to have an eminent personal-

ity who holds two Lifetime Achievement Awards and four Honorary Doctorates", a press statement noted. The students were excited to meet and greet the renowned author. He had an interactive session with Grade 10 and 11 students. While interacting with the student community, Dr Ghosh insisted on the relevance of

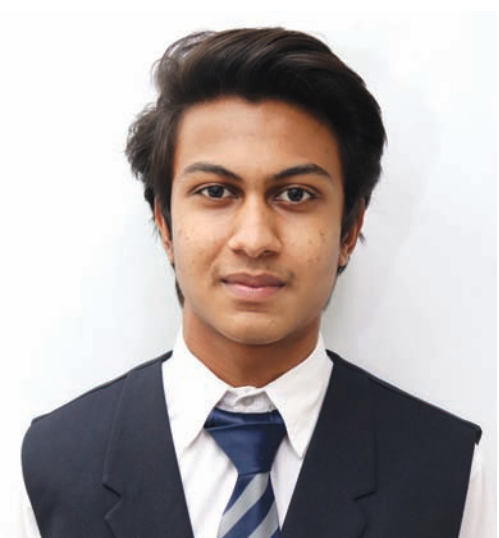
being empathetic in the contemporary world. He said: "Peer group plays a vital role in shaping one's perspective about the society as well as one's personality." He also shared his thoughts on sustainable development and spoke at length about the significance of being self-reliant to curb consumerism.

# Bhavan's team excels in SIF Qatar Children's Science Congress

Bhavan's Public School team, represented by Adithya Ajith Pillai and Ayan Mohamed Najeeb secured first position in the senior category of the Qatar Children's Science Congress (QCSC) conducted by Science India Forum (SIF), Qatar, under the patronage of Indian embassy. The theme of the project was 'Understanding Ecosystem for health and well-being'. Arunkumar Sampathu and the teachers of the science department guided the young researchers to this achievement. A total of 164 teams from 19 schools participated in QCSC - 2022 Contest and underwent three rounds of evaluation. The project evaluations were conducted by a team of scientists, professionals and technocrats. A total of 49 teams were shortlisted for the third round of the competition.

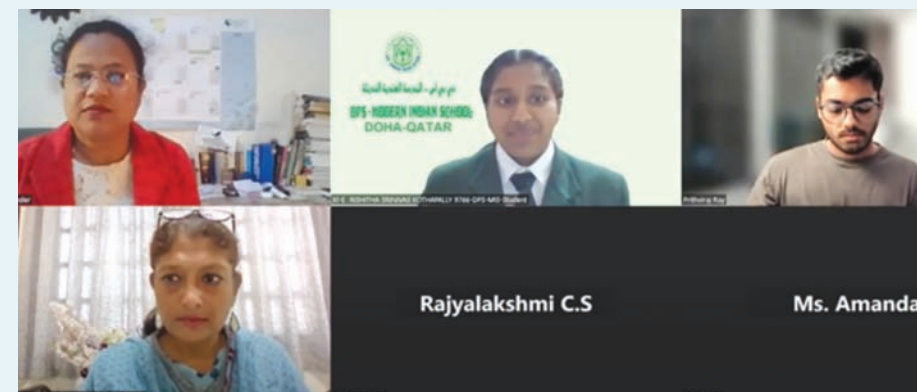


Adithya Ajith Pillai  
The winners from Bhavan's are also chosen for the National Children's Science Congress in



Ayan Mohamed Najeeb  
India, to display their project to represent Indian schools from Qatar. The principal, teachers and management have congratulated the winners.

## DPS-MIS holds alumni talk series webinar



DPS-Modern Indian School (DPS-MIS) organised another inspiring webinar 'Think, Learn, Solve' recently as part of Alumni Talk series with alumnus Prithviraj Ray. An engineering graduate from Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, he is currently pursuing MSc in Applied Biomedical Engineering along with a startup project 'Creators' which deals with personalising the care of people suffering from dementia. Ray discussed about Robotics, and the challenges encountered by students in the field of Cognitive Robotics. He gave a deep insight into his startup plan and answered all the queries related to problem-solving skills, marketing strategies, funding, and customer consistency among others. Around 200 students attended the session which taught them to think, believe, dream and dare.

## 11-year-old Indian prodigy tops in FCPL rapid chess tourney

In another exciting match up of the Filipino Chess Players League (FCPL) Qatar 2023 Rapid Chess Tournament, AIM Syed Abdul Khader ruled the 8-round Swiss format on January 13. Other winners include: Ryan Mendoza (second place) AGM Sumith K S (third), Nash Mua (fourth), and Taksh Sharma (fifth). Awards were also given to - Jayaditya Gantayet (best under-14), Mithran Krishnakumar (under-12), Nidhish

Sakthivel (under-10), Amulya Guruprasad (best women), and Tanishka Harish Kuma (top unrated). Participated by at least 60 wood pushers of ages ranging from six to 58 years, FCPL has been consistent in holding such events aimed at encouraging local expatriate communities to actively involve in honing their chess skills. In a press statement, tournament organiser Rolenson Loyola said that they plan to hold monthly tournaments in Doha.



## RPS celebrates annual sports day

Rajagiri Public School (RPS) celebrated its 7th Annual Athletic Meet at Aspire Dome, Doha, recently. Hamad al-Shaiba, sports programming specialist - Qatar Foundation and FIFA programme manager was the chief guest. Principal Sanjeev Kumar welcomed the gathering. Speaking on the occasion, al-Shaiba emphasised the importance of sports in schools and also how it benefits in the overall development of the students. A march past by the four houses - Apollo, Atlas, Hercules and Pegasus - was

followed by the flag-hoisting ceremony, lighting of the Olympic Torch by the senior athletes and an oath-taking led by the sports captain. The chief guest declared the meet open by releasing a bunch of colourful balloons. The opening ceremony also

featured cultural programmes by the students of various grades around the theme, 'I Love Qatar'. The cultural programmes concluded with a pyramid formation by the senior students which was well appreciated by the spectators as they paid tribute to the

legendary footballer Pele. As many as 830 students participated in the events. The FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 volunteers from RPS were also honoured by the chief guest on the occasion. A large crowd of parents were present to witness the event.





## Palestinians protest against new settlements



A Palestinian protester lifts the national flag during a demonstration at Israel's controversial separation barrier near Qalandia village in the occupied West Bank, yesterday, to protest plans to expand the Atarot settlement industrial zone and to construct a new settlement in the area.

# Lebanese MPs press for end to impasse

AFP  
Beirut

Two independent Lebanese lawmakers who spent the night in parliament vowed yesterday to stay until MPs elect a new president, as political deadlock hobbles the country already in deep economic crisis.

Lebanon has been without a head of state for more than two months and the government has been operating in a caretaker capacity since May as sectarian leaders fail to reach a political consensus on who should govern.

The embattled local currency, which in three years has lost more than 95% of its value, dropped to a new low Thursday against the US dollar as parliament failed for an 11th time to agree on a new president.

"We will stay in parliament, and we call on lawmakers to remember their responsibilities, carry them out and elect a president," said MP Melhem Khalaf, who together with lawmaker Najat Saliba is holding the sit-in.

"Without a government, a president, and with only a powerless parliament...Are we supposed to leave Lebanese to their fate?" he said from the parliament chamber.

An economic crisis dubbed by the World Bank as one of the worst in recent global history has plunged much of the population into poverty.

The current squabbling is mainly between lawmakers supporting the powerful Hezbollah group and those who oppose it — but neither side has a clear majority.

The two independents, Khalaf and Saliba, were elected last year on the back of protests in late 2019 against a factional elite that has dominated Lebanese politics since the 1975-1990 civil war.

"We hope that today will bring new hope to Lebanon," Saliba said in a video posted on social media yesterday.

Several other independent lawmakers visited the pair on Thursday evening as dozens of activists gathered near parliament to show their support. Videos posted on social media



Lebanese lawmaker Firas Hamdan is seen with lawmakers Najat Saliba, Halime El Kaakour and others during a sit-in at the Lebanese parliament to pile pressure on dominant factions to elect a new president, in Beirut, yesterday.

showed the MPs sitting in the dark against the light of their mobile phones, as Lebanon suffers from chronic electricity cuts of up to 23 hours a day.

The international community has urged leaders to end the months of political paralysis and help stem the financial meltdown.

Almost 2mn people in Lebanon were food insecure in the last four months of last year, according to a study published by the United Nations and the agriculture ministry this week.

It is a huge fall for a country that once boasted the monicker "Switzerland of the Middle East" for its role as a regional financial centre. The European Union's ambassador to Lebanon

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## AGITATION Hundreds join anti-France protest in Burkina Faso capital

Hundreds demonstrated against France in Burkina Faso's capital Ouagadougou yesterday, the latest expression of growing anti-French sentiment in the insurgent-hit West African country, Reuters reported from Ouagadougou.

Hundreds gathered in central Ouagadougou yesterday, chanting anti-France slogans and wielding placards calling on the French army to "get out". Some set fire to French flags or used them to collect rubbish. "We want to show France that we no longer need her," said protester Adama Sawadogo. Relations between Burkina Faso and its former coloniser have soured following two military coups last year spurred partly by authorities' failure to protect civilians from militant activity in the arid north. Some of the tension revolves around perceptions that France's military presence in Burkina Faso has not improved security. Demonstrator Lassane Sawadogo deplored how security has steadily deteriorated in Burkina Faso since unrest began in 2015. The protest was largely peaceful and ended without incident, according to a Reuters reporter at the scene. Angry mobs have previously targeted the French embassy, cultural centre and military base. Burkina Faso's military government has also been at odds with France since it toppled the previous junta in a coup at the end of September.

## Four attacks kill dozens in Burkina Faso

AFP  
Ouagadougou

Four suspected militant attacks have left around 30 people dead in Burkina Faso, including 16 volunteers backing up the army, security sources said yesterday.

The attacks, which happened on Thursday, were the latest to hit a civilian auxiliary force supporting the military in their seven-year fight against militants in the volatile West African nation.

Since 2015, Burkina Faso has been grappling with an insurgency led by militants affiliated with Al Qaeda and the Islamic State group that has killed tens of thousands and displaced around 2mn people.

The "first attack targeted an advance party of Volunteers for the Defence of the Fatherland (VDP) in Rakoengtenga," a town in the northern province of Bam, a VDP official said on condition of anonymity.

Six auxiliaries and a woman died in the attack, he said.

Around 10 people were wounded, including some seriously, who were "evacuated to Ouagadougou for appropriate care," the VDP official said. He said the second attack killed around 10 auxiliaries and a person in Nayala province in the northwest "in the afternoon when a convoy escorted by auxiliaries and soldiers was ambushed."

Security sources confirmed two "militant attacks" but gave no precise death toll, referring only to "a number of losses."

The VDP, set up in December 2019, comprises civilian volunteers who are given two weeks of military training and then work alongside the army, typically carrying out surveillance, information-gathering or escort duties.

Two other incidents linked to armed groups were recorded on Thursday, according to other security sources.

In the north-central province of Sanmatenga, a joint military and VDP team was targeted in Zincko, one of them said.

## Yellen touts mutually beneficial US-Africa ties

AFP  
Dakar

US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen yesterday touted the fruits of a new "mutually beneficial" economic strategy towards Africa, contrasting the damage caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine and China's practices.

"The United States is all in on Africa, and all in with Africa," she said during a visit to Senegal, part of a push by President Joe Biden's administration to boost relations with a continent where the United States faces increased competition from other major powers.

"Our engagement is not transactional, it's not for show, and it's not for the short-term," Yellen, who had attended a US-Africa summit hosted by Biden in Washington last month, said the president, vice president and other cabinet secretaries would travel to African countries this year.

"The world is finally catching up to recognising Africa's contributions — past and future," she said on a visit to a business incubator in the Senegalese capital Dakar, her first stop on a



US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen (left) is welcomed by Mame Aby Seye, Director of the General Delegation for Rapid Entrepreneurship for Women and Young People, during her visit in Dakar, yesterday.

three-country tour of the continent.

She said the US had outlined a new strategy towards the continent, seeking "to modernise our relationship by focusing on what we can do together, rather than what we can do for each other". The relationship, she said, would be "based on mutual co-operation and greater ambition". Yellen cited the Covid-19 pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine as major economic headwinds for Africa.

"Let me be clear: the single best thing we can do to help the

global economy is to end Russia's illegal and unprovoked war in Ukraine," she said.

"Russia's war and weaponisation of food has exacerbated food insecurity and caused untold suffering, and the global economic headwinds caused by the actions of a single man — President Putin — is creating an unnecessary drag on" economies.

In her speech, which followed a meeting with Senegal's Economy Minister Oulimata Sarr, Yellen highlighted the continent's promising demographics.

## Drone attack hits US-led coalition base in Syria

AFP  
Beirut

A drone attack hit a US-led coalition base in southern Syria yesterday, the US military's Central Command said, with a war monitor saying it was launched by foreign-backed groups.

"Three one-way attack drones attacked the Al-Tanf

Garrison in Syria," a CENTCOM statement said.

Two of the drones were shot down by the coalition, but the third hit the compound, wounding two allied Syrian fighters, the statement added.

"Attacks of this kind are unacceptable," CENTCOM spokesperson Joe Buccino said, without specifying who carried it out. "They place our troops and our partners at risk

and jeopardise the fight against the Islamic State group." The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said it was likely that foreign-backed militants had launched the attack.

Foreign-backed forces are deployed in close proximity to Al-Tanf, a desert garrison on the strategically important Baghdad-Damascus highway, near the border with Iraq and Jordan.

## Militant attack kills seven Somali soldiers

An Al Shebaab attack killed seven soldiers yesterday at a military camp in a Somali town retaken by the army this week in a major offensive against the militant group, the government said, AFP reported from Mogadishu. The information ministry said a senior special forces commander was among those killed after the militants stormed the base in Galcad, a town in central Somalia about 375km north of the capital Mogadishu. More than 100 fighters from the Al Qaeda-affiliated group were killed, it added. The information could not be independently verified. "There was heavy fighting

there in which the (militants) were defeated," the ministry said. "Seven soldiers among them a military commander from the Danab brigade (an elite commando unit) were martyred in the fighting and the site is now under the full control of the Somali forces." Al Shebaab said it was behind the attack and claimed a large number of casualties.

"The Shabaab gunmen blasted two trucks loaded with explosives before face-to-face fighting started," Abdillahi Rage, a resident of Galcad, said by telephone.

## Gabon minister dies of heart attack ahead of cabinet meeting

AFP  
Libreville

Gabon's Foreign Minister Michael Moussa Adamo (pictured) died yesterday after suffering a heart attack while waiting to go into a cabinet meeting, the government and a presidential source said.

Moussa Adamo, 62, a long-standing ally of President Ali Bongo Ondimba, suffered a heart attack and died "despite efforts by specialists" to revive him, the government said in a brief statement. He "sat down in the waiting room" just before the start of the cabinet meeting "in the presence of some of his government colleagues and began to feel unwell", a source close to the presidential palace said.

He was taken to a military hospital while unconscious but died just after midday (1100 GMT), the source who spoke on condition of anonymity said.

Reacting to his death, President Bongo described Moussa Adamo on Twitter as "a great diplomat, a true statesman".

"To me, he was firstly a friend, loyal and faithful, on whom I have always been able



to count. It's a huge loss for Gabon," he added.

Moussa Adamo was born in the northeastern town of Makokou in 1961 and started out as a presenter on national television. In 2000, he was made chief of staff for the defence minister, who at the time was Bongo.

When Bongo was elected president on the death of his father Omar Bongo Ondimba in 2009, Moussa Adamo served as his special advisor.

After a decade as Gabon's ambassador to the United States until 2020, he became, first, defence minister and then foreign minister in March last year. Moussa Adamo held a master's degree in international relations and communications from Boston University.

He had just been reappointed foreign minister on January 9 when Bongo appointed a new prime minister, Alain-Claude Billie-By-Nze, in one of the frequent cabinet reshuffles in the oil-rich central African state.



# Biden downplays classified documents issue, says there's 'nothing there'

Reuters/AFP  
Washington

US President Joe Biden said on Thursday that he has “no regrets” about his handling of classified documents found at his home and former office and that he believes the matter will be resolved.

“I think you're gonna find there's nothing there,” Biden told reporters as he toured storm damage in California.

“I have no regrets. I'm following what the lawyers have told me they want me to do. It's exactly what we're doing. There's nothing there.”

Attorney-General Merrick Garland named last week a special counsel to investigate the matter after classified documents were found at Biden's Wilmington, Delaware, home and a Washington, DC, office he used before becoming president.

“We're fully co-operating and looking forward to getting this resolved

quickly,” the president said.

Biden said he has been doing as instructed by his lawyers after “a handful of documents were filed in the wrong place”.

He said the documents were immediately turned over to the National Archives after they were found.

The White House has largely been on the defensive since the initial revelations on January 9 that the documents had been discovered.

Biden's legal team acknowledged last

week it had found classified documents relating to his time as vice-president in the Obama administration at his Delaware home, including some in his garage.

Aides previously found another batch of classified documents at his residence and at a Washington think tank he was associated with.

Although the case is far less serious than Republican Donald Trump's hauling off of hundreds of documents from the White House to his Florida

residence after leaving office, Biden is under severe pressure from the media, Republicans in Congress and the Justice Department probe run by a special counsel.

After days of the White House going on the defensive and refusing to answer reporters' questions, Biden sought to strike back, insisting that he is acting properly in a situation that the White House argues was nothing more than an accidental misplacing of the materials.

He expressed annoyance at being asked about the controversy while touring damage from storms that raked across much of California.

“I'll answer your question but here's the deal. You know, what quite frankly bugs me is that we have a serious problem here we're talking about, talking about what's going on,” the president said.

“And the American people don't quite understand why you don't ask me questions about that.”

# Clashes in Lima amid anti-govt rallies

AFP/Reuters  
Lima

Thousands marched through Peru's capital yesterday in a large anti-government rally punctuated by clashes with police, while the death toll from over a month of violent protests climbed in the country's southern regions.

Some of the Lima protesters, who are demanding the resignation of President Dina Boluarte and fresh elections, threw stones and bottles at officers in the city centre, AFP reporters saw.

The police were forced to temporarily retreat before they dug in behind riot shields and began deploying tear gas.

At least two people were injured.

Police estimated the march at around 3,500 people, but others speculated it attracted more than double that.

Rows of police in riot gear faced off against rock-hurling protesters on some streets, and one historic building in the city's historic centre caught fire late on Thursday.

The building, on San Martin Plaza, was empty when the massive blaze ignited from unknown causes, a firefighter commander told local radio.

Canada-based miner Hudbay said in a statement that protesters had entered the site of its Peru unit, damaging and burning key machinery and vehicles.

“This has not been a protest; this has been a sabotage of the rule of law,” Prime Minister Alberto Otrola said on Thursday evening alongside President Dina Boluarte and other government ministers.

Interior Minister Vicente Romero disputed claims circulating on social media that the Lima blaze had been caused by a police officer's tear gas grenade.

Peru has been rocked by protests since the ouster of Boluarte's predecessor, Pedro Castillo, in early December –

though violent clashes have largely been isolated thus far to the country's south and east.

In the southern city of Arequipa, some 1,000 protesters tried early yesterday to storm the airport, but were also repelled by police firing tear gas, local television showed.

Peru's human rights ombudsman later announced that one person had been killed in Arequipa, adding to two other deaths resulting from clashes on Wednesday and raising the nationwide death toll to 45.

The demonstrators in Lima, who are mostly from Andean regions, set off from several points around the capital with the aim of reaching the heavily-guarded presidential palace by the end of the day.

“Dina listen, the people disown you,” they chanted, while others called for the president to be assassinated.

“We are here, fighting for our just cause. We want them to close Congress,” villager Ayda Aroni, who came from Ayacucho, 330km (205 miles) southeast of Lima, told AFP. “We are marginalised, they say we're vandals, they call us terrorists, we're demanding our rights.”

“I am in Lima to defend the country because there is too much corruption. Dina does not represent us. We're going to stay for a week to continue the demonstrations,” said Demetrio Jimenez, who came from Puno, near the Bolivian border.

Demonstrators also tried to once again take over the airport in Cusco, a popular tourist destination, though it was closed; while there were similar protests in regions such as Puno, Huanuco and Tarma.

Boluarte called for dialogue late on Thursday.

“I will not tire” of seeking peaceful ways to move the country forward, she said on state television – adding that the “acts of violence generated throughout



Demonstrators pull down a fence at the Rodriguez Ballon airport in Arequipa, Peru, during a protest against the government of President Dina Boluarte.

December and now in January will not go unpunished”.

The protesters in Lima are trying to keep up pressure on the government, defying a state of emergency declared to maintain order.

On Thursday, the emergency was extended to three more regions, bringing almost one-third of the country under the order.

“We have 11,800 police officers in the streets to control unrest, we have more than 120 vans and 49 military vehicles, and also the armed forces are participating,” police chief Victor Zanabria

announced on Thursday.

Protesters are undeterred, though.

“In Lima, the struggle has more weight. When they repress us in our regions, no one mentions it,” said Abdon Felix Flores, a 30-year-old villager from Andahuaylas in the Cusco region.

Flores said he was ready “to give my life” to ensure change”.

“We have come in an organised way to take over Lima, to paralyse Lima, to be heard,” said Jesus Gomez, an agricultural engineer from Chumbivilcas, also in the Cusco region.

Castillo was removed from office and

arrested on December 7 after attempting to dissolve the country's legislature and rule by decree, amid multiple corruption investigations.

The crisis also reflects the huge gap between the capital and the rural provinces, which supported Castillo and saw his election as revenge for Lima's contempt.

Boluarte, who was Castillo's vice-president, succeeded him.

But despite Boluarte belonging to the same left-wing party, Castillo supporters have rejected her, even accusing her of being a “traitor”.

# Trump and lawyers sanctioned \$1mn over Clinton lawsuit

AFP  
Washington

A federal US judge sanctioned former president Donald Trump and his lawyers nearly \$1mn on Thursday for a “frivolous” lawsuit claiming Hillary Clinton had tried to rig the 2016 election.

District Judge John Middlebrooks said the Republican, who is seeking to return to the White House in 2024, exhibited a “continuing pattern of misuse of the courts” and had filed the suit “in order to dishonestly advance a political narrative”.

The lawsuit, which Middlebrooks tossed out last year, claimed that Clinton, who lost the 2016 presidential election to Trump, and others had created a false narrative that his campaign had colluded with Russia.

Trump had sought \$70mn in damages.

However, the suit “should never have been brought”, Middlebrooks said in the 45-page written court order.

“Its inadequacy as a legal claim was evident from the start. No reasonable lawyer would have filed it. Intended for a political purpose, none of the counts of the amended complaint stated a cognisable legal claim,” the judge wrote.

The order also sanctions Trump's lawyer Alina Habba.

The pair are jointly and severally liable for the total amount of sanctions imposed by Middlebrooks to cover the defendants' legal fees and costs: \$937,989.39.

Middlebrooks wrote that Trump is “a prolific and sophisticated litigant who is repeatedly using the courts to seek revenge on political adversaries”.

“He is the mastermind of strategic abuse of the judicial process, and he cannot be seen as a litigant blindly following the advice of a lawyer. He knew full well the impact of his actions.”

# Argentine corn farms get their Messi 'tattoo'

After Argentina's 2022 World Cup win, fans flocked to get tattoos of the South American football team's star, Lionel Messi.

Thanks to advanced agricultural technology, one Argentine corn farm has planted its own Messi “tattoo” and shared the software so that it can be replicated.

In rural Ballesteros, about 500km (300 miles) northwest of Buenos Aires, farmer Charly Faricelli tells AFP that he planned to design Messi's face into his corn field regardless of Argentina's result in Qatar last month.

“The idea was a tribute from the agricultural world to Messi, whether he won the World Cup or not – which thank God he did!” he said.

The size of almost four football fields, the Messi face can only be seen from above, and becomes more visible as the corn grows.

“It's an agricultural ‘tattoo’,” said Faricelli.

Unlike other crop designs, where plants are chopped down to create an image, this “tattoo” is the result of different concentrations of planted seed.

Faricelli explains that “with advances in technology, the tractor knows exactly, as it goes along, how many seeds to sow in which place”.

He has invited other farmers on social media to imitate his homage and has shared the software for them to upload into their equipment.

There are 25 faces of Messi in corn fields across five different provinces, Faricelli says.

“We identify with the national team, because it suffered before winning, and the agricultural world is also suffering,” he says, alluding to a major drought impacting Argentina's fertile Pampas plains in the centre of the country. – **AFP**



Aerial view of corn fields displaying an image of the face of Argentine football star Lionel Messi, in Ballesteros (left) and Los Condores (above), both in Cordoba province, Argentina.

# Brazil police carry out raids related to January 8 assault

Reuters  
Brasilia

Brazil's federal police carried out raids yesterday against people suspected of involvement in the January 8 storming of government buildings by supporters of far-right former president Jair Bolsonaro.

A police statement said the operation was aimed at “identifying people who

participated in, funded or fostered” the protests.

It included 24 warrants covering five states and the capital Brasilia.

On January 8, thousands of backers of Bolsonaro invaded and ransacked the Congress building, the presidential palace and the Supreme Court in the worst attack on state institutions since Brazil's return to democracy in the 1980s.

Police did not disclose the names of those who were targeted by the opera-

tion but said they were being investigated for the crimes of “violent abolition of the rule of law, coup d'état, qualified damage, criminal association, incitement, destruction and deterioration of specially protected property”.

The latest warrants were ordered by the Supreme Court, police said.

A second statement said that at the same time, a separate operation was carried out in the northern state of Para against what it called “anti-democratic

extremists” also allegedly involved in the demonstrations.

The Para raids targeted six people suspected of co-ordinating or funding the actions, federal police said.

President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva narrowly defeated Bolsonaro in an October election.

The Brasilia demonstrators were protesting Bolsonaro's loss and calling for a military coup to oust Lula and restore the far-right leader.

# Human error caused airline outage: FAA

AFP/Reuters  
New York/Washington

The computer glitch that forced the temporary suspension last week of US domestic airline departures was caused by a contractor mistakenly deleting files, the country's aviation regulator said.

Damage to a database file had already been pinpointed by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) as a probable cause of the January 11 issue, which prompted flight cancellations and delays nationwide.

During the hours-long outage, pilots could not access the system known as Notice to Air Missions (NOTAM), which provides informa-

tion about hazards, changes to airport facilities and information that can affect flights.

A preliminary report showed that “contract personnel unintentionally deleted files while working to correct synchronisation between the live primary database and a backup database”, the FAA said on Thursday.

The investigation is continuing, but the agency said it has not found evidence of malicious intent or a cyber attack.

The FAA has made the necessary repairs and taken steps to make the NOTAM “more resilient” it said.

The difficulties sparked criticism in Capitol Hill and Washington of the FAA, which has had no confirmed administrator since March.

The halt also came in the wake of a large-

scale US aviation meltdown over the Christmas holiday, as a storm brought unseasonably cold temperatures and travel chaos to the majority of the country.

FAA acting Administrator Billy Nolen plans to hold a virtual briefing.

Last week, a group of more than 120 US lawmakers told the FAA that the computer outage was “completely unacceptable” and demanded the agency explain how it will avoid future incidents.

Senate Commerce Committee staff have also asked the FAA to answer questions on the outage, including: “Why were airlines put in a position where they could have the option of choosing to operate when the NOTAM system was down?”

# US deports suspect linked to 2014 missing students case to Mexico

US authorities have deported to Mexico a former police officer accused of involvement in the disappearance of 43 college students in 2014 – one of the Latin American country's worst human rights tragedies.

Alejandro Tenescalco Mejia, 41, was handed over to Mexican authorities after he entered the United States illegally by climbing over the border wall, US Immigration and Customs Enforcement said on Thursday.

“Tenescalco Mejia is one of several individuals wanted in the case (of the abducted students), according to a Mexican court document,” it said in a statement.

The suspect was wanted by Mexican authorities and Interpol for kidnapping and involvement in organised crime, Mexico's National Migration Institute said.

The students at a teacher training college had commandeered buses in the southern state of Guerrero to travel to a demonstration in Mexico City before they went missing.

Investigators say they were detained by corrupt police and handed over to a drug cartel, though exactly what happened to them is disputed.

One theory is that cartel members targeted the students because they had unknowingly taken a bus with drugs hidden inside. – **AFP**



# Race on to replace Jacinda Ardern as New Zealand prime minister

AFP  
Wellington

Jacinda Ardern's shock resignation sparked a push yesterday for New Zealand to choose its first Maori prime minister, as a small pack of candidates emerged for the top job. Ardern, a global figurehead for progressive politics, stunned New Zealand on Thursday by announcing her abrupt exit from office, less than three years after securing a second term in a landslide election win.

The 42-year-old — who steered the country through natural disasters, the Covid pandemic, and its worst-ever terror attack — said she no longer had “enough in the tank”. Ardern resigned with no clear successor and her ruling Labour Party is now scrambling to settle on a replacement. Labour members of parliament will try to elect the next prime minister on Sunday, with the winning candidate needing two-thirds of the vote. If that does not happen, it will become a drawn-out contest involving rank-and-file party members and affiliated

unions. Chris Hipkins, 44, is the early frontrunner after Ardern's deputy Grant Robertson swiftly ruled himself out of the race. Other names in the mix are Justice Minister Kiri Allan, one of Labour's senior Maori MPs, and Immigration Minister Michael Wood. None of the three has so far confirmed they will contest the ballot. Allan, a former commercial lawyer who entered parliament in 2017, has been touted as possibly New Zealand's first Maori prime minister. She was forced to take leave from parliament

in April 2021 after she was diagnosed with stage-3 cervical cancer but returned to work just three months later. Labour's 15-member Maori caucus is expected to have a significant say in picking the next leader. About 17% of New Zealand's population of 5mn identified as Maori in the country's latest census. “Obviously we'd love one day for there to be a Maori prime minister,” said influential Labour minister Kelvin Davis. Willie Jackson, a former co-chair of Labour's Maori caucus, said it was hugely important

to be involved in those discussions. “We're talking about the prime minister of our nation, so we want to play a part,” he said. Te Pati Maori, also known as the Maori Party, contests the specially reserved Maori electorates. It also said it was time for a prime minister of Maori descent. “Anything less will be taking Aotearoa (New Zealand) backwards from Jacinda Ardern,” co-leaders Debbie Ngarewa-Packer and Rawiri Waititi said in a statement. The high-profile Hipkins has handled the tough portfolios of

Covid-19 response, police and education, and is seen as a safe pair of hands. Political commentator Josie Pagani has described him as “sensible, likeable, tough and capable”. Wood is the third candidate to emerge so far. The 42-year-old was responsible for lifting New Zealand's minimum wage and has considerable backing in the union movement. A new opinion poll released on Friday, but conducted before Ardern's announcement, showed her government would struggle to hold power. Ardern

said her decision to step down was “tinged with sadness” but she had “slept well for the first time in a long time”. Political commentators have lined up to condemn the social media abuse that was increasingly directed at Ardern before her resignation. Former New Zealand Prime Minister Helen Clark said Ardern had “faced a level of hatred and vitriol” that was “unprecedented in our country”. A New Zealand pub apologised yesterday after designing a “Saying goodbye to Jacinda” poster with violent imagery.

# China plays down Covid fears with holiday travel at full tilt

Reuters  
Beijing

People across China crowded into trains and buses for one of its busiest days of travel in years yesterday, feeding fears of new surges in a raging Covid-19 outbreak that officials say has hit its peak. In comments reported by state media late Thursday, Vice-Premier Sun Chunlan said the virus was at a “relatively low” level, while health officials said the number of Covid patients in hospital and with critical conditions was on the decline.

But there are widespread doubts about China's official account of an outbreak that has overwhelmed hospitals and funeral homes since Beijing abandoned strict Covid controls and mass testing last month. That policy U-turn, which followed historic protests against the government's tough anti-virus curbs, unleashed Covid on a population of 1.4bn that had been largely shielded from the disease since it emerged in the city of Wuhan in late 2019.

Some health experts expect that more than 1mn people will die from the disease in China this year, with British-based health data firm Airfinity forecasting Covid fatalities could hit 36,000 a day next week. “Recently, the overall pandemic in the country is at a relatively low level,” Sun said in comments reported by the state-run Xinhua news agency. “The number of critical patients at hospitals is decreasing steadily, though the rescue mission is still heavy.”

She spoke on the eve of one of the most frenetic travel days in China since the start of the pandemic, as millions of city-dwellers travel to their hometowns for the Lunar New Year holiday that officially begins on Saturday. More than 2bn trips are expected



Residents shop at a supermarket in Nantong, in China's eastern Jiangsu province.



People visit a market in Lianyungang, in China's eastern Jiangsu province.

to take place across China between Jan 7 and Feb 15, the government estimates.

Excited passengers laden with luggage and boxes of gifts boarded trains on Friday, heading for long-awaited family reunions. “Everyone is eager to go home. After all, we haven't seen our families for so long,” a 30-year-old surnamed Li told Reuters at Beijing's West railway station.

But for others, the holiday is a reminder of lost loved ones. Gu Bei, a writer from Shanghai,

said on the Weibo social media platform that she had been waiting nearly two weeks to have her mother cremated and that the funeral home could not tell her when the service would be scheduled.

China's internet regulator said this week it would censor any “fake information” about the spread of the virus that could cause “gloomy” sentiment during Lunar New Year festivities. “I heard no dark and gloomy words are allowed during the new year.



Passengers wait to board a train to travel for Spring Festival ahead of Chinese Lunar New Year festivities after China lifted its Covid-19 restrictions in Beijing.

Then let me mourn my mother now,” Gu said in her post, which did not specify her mother's cause of death.

Spending by funeral homes on items from body bags to cremation ovens has risen in many provinces, documents show, one of several indications of Covid's deadly toll.

China has said nearly 60,000 people with Covid died in hospital between Dec 8 and Jan 12. President Xi Jinping said this week that he was concerned about an influx of travellers to rural areas with weak medical systems, and that protecting the elderly — many of whom are not fully vaccinated — was a top priority.

The World Health Organisation (WHO)'s immunisation director, Kate O'Brien, praised China yesterday for making quick progress on vaccinating older people with Covid shots and boosters since lifting anti-

virus controls last month. However, she added that some elderly people found it “difficult” to understand changes in its vaccination policy since they had previously been advised not to seek protection.

A WHO report on Thursday said China reported a large jump in Covid hospitalisations in the week through Jan 15, to the highest since the pandemic began. Hospitalisations rose by 70% on the previous week to 63,307, according to the WHO, citing data submitted by Beijing.

But in a news conference on Thursday, health officials said the number of Covid patients reporting to hospital had peaked with more than 40% fewer people being treated with critical conditions on Jan. 17 compared with a peak on Jan 5. While China's reopening has been chaotic, investors are hopeful that it will help revive its \$17tn economy, placing bets that have lifted Chi-

nese stocks and its yuan currency to multi-month highs.

“Markets widely anticipate a surge of pent-up demand will be unleashed from the reopening of China's economy,” Nomura analysts said in a note.

They cautioned that a fall in household wealth and a surge in youth unemployment, a hangover from years of lockdowns and travel curbs, may temper the rebound.

While international flights are in short supply, Chinese tourists, a much-missed mainstay of the world's retail and travel industry, are starting to travel again. Malls from Macau to Bangkok are aiming to lure them in with red lantern displays and special dances to mark the Year of the Rabbit — and steep discounts. Chinese spending on travel had grown to \$255bn in 2019, accounting for 33% of spending in the global luxury personal goods market, according to estimates from the Bain consultancy.

## Philippines, US in talks to resume '2-plus-2 meeting' as relations thaw

The United States and Philippines yesterday pledged to hold “2-plus-2” meetings of their top officials after a seven-year halt, underlining moves to restore ties strained by former Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte's anti-US stance. The two countries held a security dialogue on Friday and agreed to work towards resuming the talks between their diplomatic and defence chiefs, which a Philippine official said could be in the first half of the year, in Washington.

The nations are bound by a seven-decade-old Mutual Defense Treaty and various agreements that enable thousands of US troops to conduct joint exercises in the Philippines, including live fire drills, amphibious assaults and counter-terrorism drills. Those came under threat repeatedly in the past six years, however, after Duterte angrily vowed to withdraw from the security agreements, citing his mistrust and disdain for US foreign policy and intent to be closer with China. After yesterday's dialogue, Daniel Kritenbrink, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, sought to reassure the Philippines that the United States would come to its defence if under attack. “Our ironclad alliance between the United States and the Philippines has contributed to the stability of the Indo Pacific region for more than 75 years and will only grow in importance in the coming years,” Kritenbrink told a news conference.

The Philippines, a former US colony, is among several countries at odds with China over its conduct in the South China Sea, with Manila furious over the constant presence of vessels in its exclusive economic zone that it says are manned by Chinese militia.

Duterte's administration had expressed doubts that the United States would come to the Philippines' defence in a future confrontation at sea with China's military.

The Philippine ambassador to Washington, Jose Manuel Romualdez, earlier on Friday confirmed in a text message the two countries were working to hold “2-plus-2” talks as early as March. — Reuters

# S Korea evacuates 500 over Gangnam fire

AFP  
Seoul

A massive fire broke out inside one of the last remaining slums in South Korea's capital yesterday, forcing 500 people to flee their homes ahead of the Lunar New Year holiday, authorities said.

Video posted online showed flames tearing through Guryong village, a shantytown in the shadows of high-rise luxury towers in Seoul's Gangnam district, which was made famous by rapper Psy's global hit “Gangnam Style”.

The blaze, which began at around 6:30am, is believed to have burned down around 60 homes, but was extinguished by around noon, according to authorities.

No casualties have been reported and the cause of the fire is still unknown, they added. “We are thinking of carrying out an additional investigation into the case,” Choi Jae-young, an official from the Seoul Metropolitan Fire and Disaster Headquarters, told AFP.

Residents said they were not surprised by the blaze. “There have been a lot of safety concerns in the community when it comes to fire, and it looks like



Firefighters try to extinguish a fire at the Guryong village, one of South Korea's last remaining slums, in southern Seoul yesterday.

they were never acknowledged properly” by authorities, Lee Woon-chul, 65, who has lived in the village for 30 years, told AFP.

“The houses are very old, and the electric wires are dangerous and have been poorly managed. Sparks inside houses have been common,” he said. Since 2012, the village has been hit by at least eight fires, Seoul's Gangnam district office, the local authority which oversees the area, told AFP. The settle-

ment was formed around 1988 by squatters evicted from other areas of Seoul in the nation's push to develop its capital prior to hosting the Olympics. There were around 550 households remaining in Guryong as of last year, according to data from the state-run Seoul Housing and Communities Corporation, with many believed to be living with little or no proper sanitation.

The village is about as far removed as possible from the

**The blaze, which began at around 6:30am, is believed to have burned down around 60 homes, but was extinguished by around noon, according to authorities**

opulent, glitzy world of Gangnam — an upscale district known for its luxury boutiques and apartments.

South Korea is trying to tackle social disparity, and last year moved to ban the cramped basement flats made famous by Oscar-winning movie “Parasite” after four people drowned in their underground homes during flooding.

“There have been many fires in the past, but it is the first time houses have actually burned down,” Lee told AFP.

“I'm not sure if those who lost their homes will be allowed to build once again, as the structures were unlicensed shacks to begin with.”

## Taiwan president thanks military in new year's message

Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen thanked the armed forces for defending the island in her Lunar New Year message on Friday, saying the government had safeguarded peace in the face of China's military drills and pressure. “The military holds fast to their

posts, fully protecting national security, defending our common homeland. I want to thank the labours of our brothers and sisters in the military,” Tsai continued. “In the new year, the government will continue to go all out for the economy and recovery, protect

sovereignty and safeguard peace.” Tsai did not directly offer New Year greetings to China, simply extending best wishes to “friends” around the world celebrating the festival, which is also observed in countries such as Vietnam and South Korea.

## Protest in Sri Lanka



Trade unions stage an anti-government protest to propose tax reforms against Sri Lanka's economic crisis in Colombo yesterday.



# Indian judges worried as government seeks bigger role in judicial appointments

Reuters  
New Delhi

Senior officials in India's government have said they want to have a bigger role in choosing judges, a demand several lawyers and judges say threatens the independence of the judiciary.

Judges for the Supreme Court and the 25 high courts across India are appointed through a quarter-century-old mechanism that involves both sitting judges and government officials.

A group of senior judges, known as the collegium, puts up candidates' names to the Law and Justice Ministry, and these names are approved if they clear security checks.

A senior official in the ministry said the government is seeking a role in selecting the candidates and was not satisfied with being involved only at the concluding stage.

The official declined to be named because he was not authorised to speak to the media.

The government has recently held back on approving several candidates, without giving a reason.

On Thursday, the Supreme Court made public the government's reasons for rejecting the names of five candidates as judges of several high courts, and reiterated its recommendation for their appointment.

The court cited as a reason for one of the rejections that the candidate was critical of the government.

It gave no reason as to why it had made the decisions public.

Officials in the Law Ministry were not immediately available for a response to the court's action.

Retired judges and lawyers welcomed the top court's move to make such details public.

"For the first time we are being told the reasons of the government for rejecting the recommendations and the public can themselves judge the merits of the reasons," said Sanjoy Ghose, a senior lawyer.

Law Minister Kiren Rijiju said in parliament last month that 165 high court judges were appointed last year against 331 vacancies.

The government recently told the Supreme Court that 44 more judges

were likely to be appointed this month.

Rijiju has said the current system of appointing judges is opaque.

"I am not critical about the judiciary or the judges, but I state a fact which is the reflection of the thinking of the common people of India," he told a news channel.

Rijiju's office said this week that the minister was waiting for a response from the chief justice, the country's highest judge, to the government's demand to review the structure of the collegium.

A bill passed by parliament to change the process was rejected by the Supreme Court in 2015.

The dispute has exacerbated a shortage of high court judges and a backlog of cases.

Official data shows that four out of every 10 judicial seats are currently unoccupied, and there are over 70,000 cases pending before the Supreme Court and over 5.9mn cases before the high courts.

Several lawyers and retired judges told Reuters that they believed the government is seeking to influence the judiciary.

"We are seeing the legislative authority trying to become the supreme power," said N Santosh Hegde, a former Supreme Court judge and a former solicitor-general.

"The collegium system may not be completely perfect but it is not unfair," he added.

Two lawyers affiliated with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ruling party

said the government is trying to end favouritism.

The lawyers declined to be named because they were not authorised to speak to the media since the law minister, a member of the ruling party, is already addressing the issue.

One of the candidates who was not approved, lawyer Nagendra Ramachandra Naik, told Reuters that he was rejected four times for a seat on the high court in the state of Karnataka.

"I don't have a criminal record and my 30 years of work as a lawyer qualifies me for the position of a judge," he said.

Asked about Naik's case, a senior law ministry official said the government's decisions about appointments are confidential.

# Mass death of crab leaves experts baffled

AFP/Reuters  
London

What caused the mass death of crustaceans off the coast of northeast England in late 2021? Dead and dying crabs and lobsters began washing up en masse at beaches in the Teesside region of northeast England in October 2021, drawing national attention as local fishing communities suffered and some feared a mass poisoning linked to the area's industrial past.

Fishing groups said decades-old toxic chemicals could have been released by dredging activity and were sceptical of an initial investigation by the environment department which suggested the deaths were likely caused by a natural but devastating algal bloom.

A new finding brought relief to the government, which is developing a flagship new "freeport" in the region.

The customs-free zone in Teesside is one of several planned that are aimed at showing off Britain's "post-Brexit freedoms" in trade, according to the government.

Some in parliament called this week for dredging at that and other freeport sites to be suspended in case it was the cause of a die-off of crabs, lobsters and other crustaceans from October to December 2021.

A first study by government scientists into the mystery phenomenon blamed a "naturally occurring harmful algal bloom" stretching from the towns of Hartlepool to Whitby.

Then, a study by academics backed by the fishing industry

pointed to an industrial pollutant called pyridine, possibly linked to the dredging.

Teesside has historically been associated with heavy industry.

However, the latest government-commissioned study by independent experts said it was "as likely as not that a pathogen new to UK waters" was the cause of the deaths, with symptoms such as twitching in dying crustaceans.

"We've ruled things out, but we've not been able to confidently rule things in," panel member Tammy Horton, a researcher at the National Oceanography Centre, told an online press briefing. "We've come up with probably more questions than answers."

"A disease would account for the longer duration of this incidence, the wider geographical spread of the incident, and the twitching of course," the experts added.

The report found that an algal bloom was "unlikely" and it was "very unlikely" that pyridine or another toxic pollutant caused the crab deaths.

Maintenance dredging, required to keep the port open, was also "very unlikely" as the cause, failing to generate enough pyridine or other toxic chemicals to kill the crabs.

"Many of those sediments do contain persistent organic pollutants" from heavy industry in the past, Crispin Halsall, professor of environmental organic chemistry at Lancaster University, told the briefing.

However, he emphasised that "There's no evidence that those chemicals will be released at concentrations which are going to cause acute toxicity".

# Sunak fined for not wearing seatbelt

Reuters/AFP  
London

British police issued Prime Minister Rishi Sunak with a fine yesterday for travelling in the backseat of a car without wearing his seatbelt while filming a social media clip, a potentially embarrassing blow as he tries to revive his party's fortunes.

Sunak, who apologised on Thursday for what he called a "brief error of judgement", filmed a video in the back seat of his car while travelling in the north of England, without wearing a seatbelt.

This is the second penalty that Sunak has received from the police – last year they found him to have been in breach of coronavirus (Covid-19) lockdown rules, along with then-prime minister Boris Johnson.

The fine represents a new challenge for Sunak, whose Conservative Party trails far behind the opposition Labour Party in the opinion polls, ahead of an election due by January 2025 at the latest.

"The prime minister fully accepts this was a mistake and has apologised. He will of course comply with the fixed penalty," a spokesman from Sunak's Downing Street office said in a statement.

Lancashire Police said in a Twitter statement not directly naming Sunak: "We have today issued a 42-year-old man from London with a conditional offer of fixed penalty."

A fixed penalty means Sunak can pay a fine to avoid a court hearing.

Sunak becomes the second prime minister after Johnson to have been fined in such a manner.

The BBC reported that the fine for not wearing a seat belt as a car passenger would be £100 (\$124).

If the case went to court, Sunak could pay £500.

In Thursday's video, produced for dis-

tribution on Sunak's social media channels, the beltless Conservative leader speaks from the back seat of a moving car about his policies for boosting growth during a trip to Lancashire in England's north.

Sunak apologised soon after the video came out on Thursday, according to Downing Street, and it has been removed from Instagram.

Sunak's transportation habits were already a talking point in the United Kingdom.

His political rivals have taken aim at his use of a private jet to make multiple short flights in recent days.



Plastic rotten apples left by members of the domestic violence charity 'Refuge' are seen outside New Scotland Yard during a protest in London.

# London police face 'rotten apple' protest

AFP/Reuters  
London

Campaigners dumped a basket of 1,071 rotten apples outside the headquarters of Britain's biggest police force yesterday, in protest at officers accused of domestic abuse and violence against women and girls.

Refuge, a British domestic abuse charity, placed the imitation red and green apples outside the Metropolitan Police's New Scotland Yard building in central London, alongside a sign saying: "1071 bad apples. How many more?"

The Metropolitan Police said this week that 1,071 officers had been or are under investigation after one of its officers pleaded guilty to 24 rapes and a string of other sex offences.

That came less than two years after another serving officer with the London force kidnapped, raped and murdered a young woman, rocking public confidence in the police.

"We've been told time and time again that it's just one bad apple here and there, but this is actually a fundamental problem right across policing," said Ruth Davison, head of Refuge, which organised the protest.

"It has to be called out now because women's lives are at risk," she told AFP.

"How have these perpetrators of abuse been allowed to enter and remain in positions of power for so long?" Davison said. "What happens next must change the culture of policing for good. A force which breeds violent misogyny is not a force which can even begin to protect women and girls."

She called for any officer facing formal allegations to be suspended while an investigation takes place.

"At the moment, as women and girls, how can we – if we experience a crime – feel confident to go the police knowing that the person we speak to may be a perpetrator?" she said.

The protest outside New Scotland Yard follows comments by the head teacher of

a leading private London girls' school, who said pupils now had to be warned not to approach police officers.

Fionnuala Kennedy, head of Wimbledon High School, said the failings of the Met Police to "stand between the vulnerable public and these officers wielding unchecked power" left her "breathless with anger".

She wrote on her school blog that teachers now had to tell pupils "Don't allow a lone policeman to approach you, at any time".

Both David Carrick, who pleaded guilty this week, and Wayne Couzens, who murdered Sarah Everard in 2021 and was jailed for life, served in the Met's armed unit protecting MPs and foreign diplomats.

Carrick will be sentenced next month.

After his court appearance on Monday, Met Police's Assistant Commissioner Louisa Rolfe said his case was "sickening and horrific" and acknowledged that it had "far-reaching consequences" for policing.

"I can't believe that we are operating in a context where we tell our children you may not be safe to approach the police," said Davison.

"Trust and confidence is at an all-time low in the police. David Carrick was able to say to people 'I'm a police officer. No one will believe you, it'll be your word against mine' ... which is why we have to have a zero-tolerance approach," she said.

Refuge has called for "urgent and radical change" and advocated for fast-track legislation to improve vetting and disciplinary standards across police forces and mandatory training for all officers on issues concerning violence against women.

A Met spokesperson said the force was aware of yesterday's protest, and its officers had engaged with those involved to facilitate a peaceful demonstration.

It said the protesters left at 1000 GMT and took the apples with them.

# Indian haute couture master dreams the 'impossible'

By Laurence Thomann, AFP  
Noida, India

As he stitches together the final threads of his latest Paris Fashion Week collection, acclaimed Indian fashion designer Rahul Mishra is taking inspiration from France – and a fellow master from another era.

"I want to achieve the impossible, I want to paint air," he told AFP, quoting the 19th-century impressionist painter Claude Monet.

Both men are known for their artistic urge to depict nature – Monet on canvas, and Mishra on his extravagant haute couture gowns, feted for their bursts of embroidered floral colour and petal-shaped ornamental flourishes.

Mishra's creations are a regular staple of the world's leading fashion magazines where they are modelled by film stars including Cate Blanchett and Michelle Yeoh.

Dozens of designers, tailors and crafters have been hard at work in his new workshop near India's capital New Delhi, putting the finishing touches on the "Cosmos" line he will debut on the Parisian catwalk on Monday.

Some sit on mats in front of embroidery looms sewing flower motifs onto delicate sheer fabric in a painstaking enterprise that stands testament to the force of Mishra's creative vision.

"I dream a lot, I am often lost in a new world, in a kind of fantasy," said the casually dressed 43-year-old, striding in Nike trainers between workbenches to introduce the work of his colleagues. "I come back and share it with my team, I speak to them, talk to them ... and then that dream becomes a common dream, everybody starts believing in this idea."

Mishra's fantasies have materialised into hot property in the years since he won the International Woolmark Prize – one



A model showcases a dress from the 2022 'Tree of Life' haute couture collection at Indian Fashion designer Rahul Mishra's store in New Delhi.



of the fashion world's top accolades – in 2014.

The French Fashion Federation included his work on the Paris ready-to-wear runway the same year, and in 2020 he became the first Indian to feature in its haute couture programme.

Nature has been Mishra's most enduring source of inspiration, beginning at the age of 10 when he felt compelled to sketch the blooming flowers and natural scenery of his rural hometown.

With no mentor and a doctor father who pushed him to pursue a more steady career, Mishra almost abandoned his couture dreams before breaking off his university science studies.

He enrolled at the National Institute of Design, India's premier creative arts academy, before studying in Italy's fashion capital Milan.

His recent artistic triumphs show how little he has strayed from his roots.

A highlight of his "Tree of Life" collec-

tion last year is a sleeveless floral gown bursting with a cornucopia of 120 colours in the couturier's embodiment of spring.

"This must be the most colourful piece I have ever done," he said, adding that each floor-length dress represented 5,000 hours of labour.

Items from the collection sold for up to €12,500 (\$13,500) once they went on sale.

"There are hardly 200 artists across India who are able to manage this kind of multicolour work," he added. "It is more difficult to replicate the original piece than to create it."

Mishra now has his sights set on building a global presence and in March, will launch a new ready-to-wear collection in Europe.

His first European boutique will open in London later this year thanks to a joint venture with Indian conglomerate Reliance, a key distributor of luxury brands which has exclusive tie-ups with Balenciaga and Armani.

However, his ambitions ultimately rest on building a "fairly serious" alternative to fast fashion giants like Uniqlo and Zara, utilising India's seemingly bottomless pool of textile talent.

"Now is the right time," he said. "My biggest goal is that one day we'll be able to provide employment for more than a million people around the world."

Like many artists, each one of Mishra's finished endeavours is a reflection of the torment and doubt that come with habitual agonising over minute details – an emotional struggle that is also a wellspring of creative inspiration.

"We celebrate mistakes, we celebrate when we fail," he said.

"The beauty of trying something new, the excitement and the intent to do something new is always celebrated," the fashion designer said.

"I think more than the final fashion show ... what excites me most is the process."

# Regulator fines Air India \$37,000 for last year's unruly passenger incident

Air India has been fined 3mn Indian rupees (\$37,000) for its handling of an unruly passenger on one of its flights in November, India's aviation regulator said yesterday.

The licence of the pilot-in-command on the New York-New Delhi flight, where the incident took place, was also suspended for three months while a penalty of 300,000 rupees was imposed on Air India's director-in-flight services, the regulator added.

The ruling on the Tata group-owned airline followed from an incident on a November 26 flight in which a male passenger, while apparently inebriated, allegedly urinated on a female passenger. - Reuters



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TIMES

# Under PM Anwar, Malaysia can ‘do better’ on climate

To help Malaysia head off frequent floods and choking air pollution caused by forest fires, new Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim should tap more global green funding to protect nature and tackle the effects of warming, climate change experts say.

Ending a decades-long wait to lead the southeast Asian nation, largely ruled by one coalition since independence, Anwar, 75, formed a government with rival political blocs after last November's election, hampered by flooding, produced a hung parliament.

So far, Anwar has focused on corruption and the rising cost of living but has said little on how he will bolster Malaysia's green credentials — aside from merging the energy and natural resources ministry with the environment and water ministry.

“It’s still early days... (but) I am hopeful the Anwar government can be much more proactive on the climate and biodiversity agenda,” said Meena Raman, president of Friends of the Earth Malaysia.

“Recognising the climate emergency, recognising the importance of adaptation and loss and damage — there is a lot that can be done,” she said in an interview.

She urged the new government, for example, to curb flooding not just by building grey infrastructure like drainage tunnels, but also by channelling money into conservation and restoration of upstream forest and wetlands.

**Malaysia is hit regularly by the impacts of extreme weather and rising temperatures**

Like many countries in the region, Malaysia is hit regularly by the impacts of extreme weather and rising temperatures — whether choking haze linked to regional forest fires, water shortages, droughts or severe floods.

Flooding that started in late 2021 caused nearly \$1.5bn in losses and displaced more than 120,000 people.

Meanwhile, despite being one of the world's 17 countries with mega-rich biodiversity, Malaysia is also a major producer of palm oil, timber and timber products — which many environmentalists have blamed for high deforestation rates.

While chalking up a fifth year of declines in forest losses in 2021, Malaysia still ranked ninth among the top nations for tropical deforestation, according to Global Forest Watch.

Henry Chan, head of conservation at WWF-Malaysia, said the government should seek to develop the country's natural resources sustainably — or risk losing them.

“Let’s strengthen current political resolve and commit to meet our net-zero and other climate and biodiversity targets,” he urged.

Although Malaysia often suffers monsoon-season flooding — which forests can help mitigate — climate change and the environment were largely absent in last year's election.

Voters were more concerned with the economy, healthcare, political stability, corruption and the cost of living.

Yet, despite Covid-19 and recent political turmoil, Malaysia was among more than 140 nations pledging to halt deforestation by 2030 at the 2021 UN climate summit in Glasgow.

It also endorsed a landmark global deal to boost nature protection agreed last December.

Friends of the Earth's Raman said budget pressures from the economic impacts of the pandemic and inflation meant Malaysia should make a bigger push to access international green funding to help bankroll its climate action.

After the severe floods in late 2021, for example, Malaysia sought \$3mn from the donor-backed Green Climate Fund to develop a national plan to adapt to climate change.

Malaysia has a goal of reaching net-zero emissions by 2050, and the previous government's 2022 budget earmarked 100mn ringgit (\$23mn) to help states protect forests and marine areas, up from 70mn ringgit previously.

Raman said greater financial incentives were needed for states whose economies largely rely on plantations of crops like durian, to help them stem forest loss.

“Malaysia needs to do much more — it can do better in many (climate) fields,” she added. — Thomson Reuters Foundation

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# The second green revolution will be digitised



By **Maximo Torero**  
Rome

Farming is one of the world's oldest and most far-reaching endeavours. Meeting the growing food demands of the global population — projected to reach 10bn by 2050 — amid accelerating climate change presents an unprecedented high-wire act that requires human ingenuity, good governance, and technology.

The last time the agriculture sector went through a seismic shift like this was when new technologies, such as high-yielding wheat and rice seeds, chemical fertilisers, and irrigation technologies, kicked off the Green Revolution in the 1960s. In the following three decades, cereal production in famine-prone Asia doubled, and wheat and rice became cheaper, even though the population increased by 60% during this period.

Unfortunately, the Green Revolution brought with it a host of environmental costs. Lax regulations and generous subsidies made fertilisers and pesticides cheap, and farmers, with no training, used them excessively, leaving soil damaged and waterways polluted. As new crops took over, traditional plant varieties were lost, contributing to biodiversity loss.

The rise of robotics and artificial intelligence might help usher in a second, even greener Green Revolution. Robots are already harvesting crops, weeding, and collecting data to improve soil management. Soon, they will

be as common in farm pastures and greenhouses as they are in medical labs or Amazon warehouses. The hope is that AI can help meet food and climate goals by adding more precision to agriculture, thus allowing farmers to grow more and waste less.

AI-powered programs, like IBM's Watson, combine data on weather patterns, crop yields, and market prices to advise farmers regarding the best time to plant, the precise amount of fertilisers to use, and when to harvest for peak ripeness. Researchers at Microsoft and Wageningen University in the Netherlands are growing cucumbers with the help of algorithms, combining the efforts of humans and AI to boost yields while using fewer natural resources.

In California, a state that grows irrigated fruits and vegetables at a large scale, such technologies mean real savings in seasonal labour requirements. For example, a \$150,000 “grape-gobbling robot” can sort two tons of grapes in 12 minutes, replacing 15 human workers — as well as reducing the use of fertilisers, pesticides, and water, while producing higher yields.

In the past, agricultural automation was characterised by large industrial farms using heavy machinery to boost yields. Mechanisation on this scale increased producers' dependence on fossil fuels and the unbridled use of chemicals. The steep cost also meant that small farmers, especially in poorer countries, lacked access, creating an uneven playing field.

Digital technologies are changing this to benefit both large-scale and small-scale farms. Farmers have taken a page from ride-sharing apps like Uber, using GPS tracking devices and fleet-management software that allows small producers to share assets required for agricultural mechanisation. Some companies, like TROTRO Tractor in Ghana and Tun Yat in Myanmar, allow small farmers to share the cost of renting a tractor they could not afford alone.

Digital support can also upgrade traditional mechanisation, even if it is not advanced technology. For example, GPS devices that track cattle (“smart collars”) and transmit data about animals' health and movements can determine the amount of feed to dispense and automate the feeding process, improving productivity.

The great advantage of robotics is its potential for cost-effectiveness, allowing small farmers to compete with their larger counterparts. Like computers and smartphones, these machines, once manufactured in large volumes, should become much less expensive, thus paving the way for wider use.

But robotics and AI-based tools, which favour highly skilled farmers over low-skilled ones, have the potential to deepen existing inequality. They could further alienate the world's poorest people, especially those who live in rural areas and eke out a living on a small plot of land without access to markets or financial services.

To ensure that agricultural automation,

from tractors to drones, is inclusive, governments should invest in essential infrastructure, including electricity and broadband connectivity in rural areas. They should also provide training on these digital tools to create a new class of skilled farmers who can operate more advanced technologies — and can create new, high-skill opportunities for rural youth.

To be sure, technology alone will not right the world's wrongs when it comes to delivering food more sustainably or making farming more efficient and equitable. Nor can it transform agriculture overnight. From California to Kenya, robotics and AI are still expensive and tend to favour larger farms over smaller ones. Moreover, greater use of robotics could encourage the expansion of monoculture farming systems, as robotic machines require uniformity to function efficiently. That would lead to a loss of genetic diversity.

Robotics and AI in agriculture are still at an early stage of development. Thoughtful policy and rigorous impact assessments of its adoption are required to realise the Second Green Revolution's full potential.

Robots are not substitutes for human farmers. But in a future with billions of extra mouths to feed, they can make food more sustainable, available, and cheaper to produce. It's high time to give machines a chance. — Project Syndicate

● *Maximo Torero is Chief Economist of the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations.*

# Central bankers’ green lines

By **Howard Davies**  
London

Climate change has come to represent a major challenge for central banks. How much should their monetary policy and approach to banking supervision be influenced by it?

On one hand, there is growing evidence that global warming, particularly through its effect on agriculture, may create inflationary pressures. And there is even stronger evidence that the physical and transition risks created by climate change are having, and will continue to have, a major impact on the value of financial assets and financial firms, which those responsible for the stability of the financial system cannot ignore.

On the other hand, policies to increase energy costs and lower emissions are hugely controversial, especially in the United States. A proactive approach might lead the central bank into a political war zone, vulnerable to attack from both sides.

So far, central banks have tended to see this as territory they cannot avoid. A group of them, principally Europeans, pushed for a new coalition of the willing, and the Network for Greening the Financial System was established at the end of 2017. The US Federal Reserve was initially a wallflower but became a full member after President Joe Biden's election. The People's Bank of China was there from the start, and for a time it seemed that a consensus on central banks' appropriate posture would emerge.

That is no longer the case. Two camps have formed, and they seem likely to



Fed Chair Jerome Powell.

drift further apart.

In the brown corner, so to speak, we find Fed Chair Jerome Powell. At a conference in Stockholm earlier this month he nailed his colours to the mast. “We are not, and will not be, a ‘climate policy-maker,’” he asserted. Integrating climate-change considerations into monetary and banking supervision policies “would have significant distributional and other effects on companies, industries, regions, and nations.” Powell, no doubt influenced by the fact that one of Biden's nominees for the Fed Board had to withdraw in the face of congressional opposition to her views on climate change, insists that the Fed should not go there.

Others in the brown camp include Mervyn King, the former Bank of England governor, who argues that taking on climate responsibilities “would put at risk central-bank independence.” No greater risk to human life can be imagined. Otmar Issing, the European Central Bank

(ECB)'s first chief economist, has also weighed in. “There can be no such thing as a ‘green’ monetary policy,” he insists.

But there are doughty fighters in the green corner, too. Mark Carney, an enthusiast since he led the Bank of England, encourages central banks to “examine how to revise their ... monetary-policy operations to be more consistent with the legislated climate objectives.” ECB President Christine Lagarde herself has described climate change as “mission critical.” Frank Elderson, the responsible ECB board member, has engineered a “tilt” in the bank's bond-purchase schemes away from firms with high carbon emissions, in favour of more climate-friendly companies and industries. He describes the bank as a “prudent realist,” rather than “an environmental activist” (though some bankers supervised by the ECB would probably disagree). “Banks will be at the forefront of the energy and climate transition, whether they want to be or not,” he says, and the supervisor's role is to encourage banks to manage their loan portfolios with that in mind.

On the monetary-policy front, Isabel Schnabel, the German ECB Board member, recently described how and why the bank would incorporate climate-change considerations in its approach. In addition to “removing the existing bias towards emission-intensive firms,” the ECB plans to make “climate-related disclosures compulsory for bonds to remain eligible as collateral in our refinancing operations.” Tough love.

The ECB seems unconcerned by Powell's argument that climate policy is not for the central bank, and it justifies its approach by noting that the bank's statute requires it to support the

European Union's economic policies, in addition to maintaining price stability. But critics warn that the ECB may soon be challenged in court for overstepping its mandate.

The British seem to be positioned in the middle of the Atlantic, as is often the case. The Bank of England did, in fact, conduct a climate stress test on British banks. It was an illuminating exercise: the risks to banks were greatest if governments delayed effective action on carbon pricing, and if the necessary adjustments to achieve the new net-zero objective for emissions were sudden and disruptive. That understanding has driven change by banks themselves. But the UK regulators have so far set their face against the idea of manipulating capital requirements to raise the cost of lending to high carbon emitters (the so-called brown penalising factor) or to incentivise green lending (the green supporting factor). There is more enthusiasm for such manipulation in the eurozone, where the Banque de France is in favour.

From banks' perspective, these divergences of view are a concern. There is a clear danger that different approaches to climate risks in different jurisdictions will create competitive distortions. So, bankers hope that some convergence of view develops, and soon. Mixing brown and green paint together typically creates a darker, duller green: forest green, it is often called. That could be an appropriate solution. But for the time being the Fed seems determined to stay out of the woods. — Project Syndicate

● *Howard Davies, a former deputy governor of the Bank of England, is Chairman of NatWest Group.*



# Macron reveals plan to boost France’s defence spending by a third

Reuters/AFP  
Paris

France will boost military spending by more than a third in coming years, President Emmanuel Macron said yesterday, as he unveiled ambitions to transform the French army to deal with the great “perils” of this century.

Acknowledging the end of the “peace dividend” of the post-Cold War era, Macron said the planned 2024-2030 budget would adapt the military to the possibility of high-intensity conflicts, made all the more urgent since Russia’s

invasion of Ukraine 11 months ago.

The budget for the period will stand at €413bn (\$447bn), up from €295bn in 2019-2025, which will mean that by 2030, France’s military budget would have doubled since he took power in 2017, Macron said.

“After repairing the armed forces, we are going to transform them,” he told soldiers at the southwestern air base of Mont-de-Marsan. “We need to do better and do it differently.”

We need to “privilege rapid action and increasing power because we won’t choose the conflicts we will have to wage”

“As war is changing, France has and

will have armies ready for the perils of the century,” said Macron. “We need to be one war ahead.”

He added France would invest massively in drones and military intelligence, areas where French officials say recent conflicts had exposed gaps, and that the military should pivot towards a strategy of high-intensity conflict.

Macron’s speech came as defence ministers from the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato) and other countries were meeting at the Ramstein Air Base in Germany amid warnings that Russia will soon re-energise its invasion, in which it has seized parts of Ukraine’s east and south.

Although France is the world’s third-biggest arms exporter and the EU’s sole nuclear power, it has come under criticism for not sending more weapons to Kyiv.

Macron has stepped up supplies since last summer, sending Caesar truck-mounted howitzers and promising AMX-10 RC tank destroyers, but French officials say operations in Africa and years of chronic under-investment had made it impossible to do more immediately.

Macron did not announce new support for Ukraine, but said France had to be ready for a new era, with an accumulation of threats.

Some were old wars, others more unprecedented, “between sophistication and brutal simplicity,” he said.

He also said France would beef up its capacity to respond to cyber-attacks and would increase by near 60% the budget for military intelligence.

Last year, the head of French military intelligence resigned just a month after Russia launched what it calls its “special military operation” against Ukraine over what officials said was a failure to predict the invasion.

The president also said France wanted to increase its air defences by 50%.

Macron also said France would pay particular attention to its military pres-

ence in overseas territories, especially in the Indo-Pacific, where new threats were emerging.

France’s needs are not the same as Ukraine’s, the French presidency has said.

“France is not Ukraine. It doesn’t have the same security interests, and doesn’t have a border with Russia,” it has said. “We have nuclear weapons and we belong to the European Union and Nato.”

However, it does need to be able to respond rapidly within a European framework, with or without Nato, which would mean deploying 20,000 troops at short notice.

## Protesters demand ‘climate justice’ in Davos

AFP/Reuters  
Davos

Greta Thunberg and other young climate activists held a small protest yesterday, accusing the global elite at the World Economic Forum in Davos of doing little to save the planet.

Some 30 protesters gathered in freezing temperatures down the road from the WEF congress centre, holding signs reading “SOS” and chanting “What do we want? Climate justice! When do we want it? Now!”

“One thing I don’t think we realise and feel and comprehend in places of such wealth and power and greed is that planet Earth around us is in immense, immense pain,” said Pakistani campaigner Ayisha Siddiqi, who attended WEF panels this week.

“The delusion of this event is so absolutely ridiculous. It’s horrendous,” said Siddiqi, whose country was hit by devastating floods last year that killed more than 1,700 people and caused tens of billions of dollars of damage.

Thunberg, who was briefly detained by police in Germany earlier this week during a protest against a coal mine expansion, did not speak during the Davos demonstration.

She participated in a panel discussion on the sidelines of the WEF on Thursday, where she accused the global political and business elite attending the forum of “fuelling the destruction of the planet”.

The 20-year-old Swedish activist stuck to her stance against all new oil, gas and coal developments during the fringe event, that was not part of the official conference agenda.

International Energy Agency (IEA) executive director Fatih Birol, whose agency makes policy recommendations, said new investments in oil fields would take years to become operational.

They would be too late to allay the energy crunch, but would contribute to the climate crisis.

He praised Thunberg’s efforts and thanked her for the invite to speak with activists.

At yesterday’s protest, Vanessa Nakate from Uganda, who was also in the discussion with Birol, said leaders needed to listen to the science and stop all investments in coal, oil and gas.

“The IEA has made it very clear we cannot have any new fossil fuel investments if we are to live with global temperatures below 1.5° Celsius,” she told the crowd.

Thunberg and fellow activists have presented a “cease and desist” notice to oil and gas executives, which protesters brandished during the demonstration yesterday in Davos.

The oil and gas industry, which has been accused by activists of hijacking the climate change debate in the Swiss ski resort, has said that it needs to be part of the energy transition as fossil fuels will continue to play a major role in the energy mix as the world shift to a low-carbon economy.

In 2019, the then 16-year-old Thunberg took part in the main WEF meeting, famously telling leaders that “our house is on fire”.

She returned to Davos the following year.

See also Business Page 4

# Allies fail to agree on tanks for Ukraine

AFP/Reuters  
Ramstein Air Base, Germany

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said yesterday that there is “no alternative” but for the West to give Ukraine heavy tanks, as Germany failed to say whether or not it would provide its much sought-after Leopards.

Expectations had grown ahead of a crucial US-led meeting on boosting military aid to Ukraine that the allies would agree to send German-made Leopard tanks, amid mounting pressure from several European countries.

US Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin underlined the urgency of the situation with Ukraine expected to mount a counter-offensive against Russia in the coming weeks.

“We have a window of opportunity here between now and the spring ... whenever they commence their operation, their counteroffensive,” Austin said.

Chancellor Olaf Scholz, whose Social Democrat party is traditionally deeply sceptical of military involvements and wary of sudden moves that could cause

Moscow to escalate further in Ukraine, insists that Germany will only move in concert with allies, a position echoed by new Defence Minister Boris Pistorius.

“There are good reasons for the (tank) deliveries and there are good reasons against, and in view of the entire situation of a war that has been ongoing for almost one year, all pros and cons must be weighed very carefully,” Pistorius said, without elaborating on the reasons. “There clearly is no unified view. The impression that has occasionally arisen, that there is a closed coalition and Germany was standing in the way, this impression is wrong.”

He said Germany would start preparing tanks so they were ready to go if allies did agree to send them.

It was unclear whether any country other than Germany opposes the move.

Ahead of the meeting, proponents of sending tanks had hoped that recent moves such as Britain’s decision to send 14 of its main battle tanks would open the door for Germany to make similar moves.

Kyiv wants the powerful Leopard tanks to press offensives against Russian troops, but the Kremlin has warned that their delivery by the West would

amount to an “extremely dangerous” escalation.

The Kremlin’s spokesman added that Western countries supplying additional tanks to Ukraine would not change the course of the conflict and that they would add to the problems of the Ukrainian people.

Germany’s hesitation on supplying the tanks has led to fierce criticism of Berlin from other countries such as Finland and Poland, which have their own stocks of Leopards but would need German approval to send them.

The meeting’s host, Austin, defended Germany against criticism that it is not doing enough to help Kyiv.

“We could all do more,” Austin said, emphasising that Berlin is a “reliable ally”.

Zelensky renewed his plea yesterday for Western allies to “speed up” arms deliveries to Ukraine in a video address to the conference, which gathered representatives from 50 countries.

Partners needed “not to bargain about different numbers of tanks but to open that principal supply that will stop evil”, he said.

He returned to the subject later.

“Yes, we will still have to fight for the

supply of modern tanks, but everyday we make it more obvious that there is no alternative that a decision about tanks must be made,” he said.

National Security Council spokesman John Kirby told reporters that the US would not pressure Germany, but that Washington backed sending tanks to Ukraine.

Germany’s Leopards were more suitable than the complex US-made Abrams, he argued.

“We do believe that there is a need for armoured capability, including tanks, inside Ukraine, and the Leopard tank is a terrific system,” he added.

Kirby also announced yesterday that the US had designated Russia’s Wagner group as a “transnational criminal organisation”.

He showed US intelligence photographs of North Korea supplying arms to Wagner for its Ukraine operations, and said the private army had become a rival to the formal Russian military.

Ahead of the Ramstein meeting, Western allies had offered a flurry of new arms shipments.

The Pentagon offered \$2.5bn worth of supplies for Ukrainian forces including Bradley fighting vehicles, armoured

personnel carriers, air defence systems and tens of thousands of rockets and artillery rounds.

However, it did not include the ATA long-range missiles sought by Ukraine.

Western partners fear Kyiv could use the weapons to hit deep inside Russian territory or in Crimea, the peninsula Moscow annexed in 2014.

The Netherlands defence ministry said yesterday that the country would help Ukraine equip itself with the Patriot air defence system to protect itself against drone and missile attacks.

It is also studying the possibility of sending heavy tanks to Kyiv.

Ahead of Friday’s Ramstein meeting, the Kremlin accused the West of harbouring a “dramatic delusion” that Ukraine could win on the battlefield, adding that the conflict was “developing in an upward spiral”.

The meeting offered a sombre assessment of progress on the front.

US Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman Mark Milley said: “From a military standpoint I still maintain that for this year it would be very, very difficult to militarily eject the Russian forces from all, every inch of ... Russian-occupied Ukraine.”



### Eye-catching

A man walks by a damaged car on a damaged street in Skenderaj following heavy rain in Kosovo.

Left: Men ride their donkeys to fetch drinking water from a hillside on a cold winter day in Fayzabad, Badakhshan province, Afghanistan.



A Ukrainian army anti-aircraft cannon is seen not far from the town of Bakhmut in Ukraine's Donetsk region.



Chinese artist Kong Ning poses as an art installation Love Energy during the World Economic Forum (WEF) 2023, in the Alpine resort of Davos, Switzerland.

### Blast derails train in Pakistan

At least fifteen people were injured when a bomb blast derailed a passenger train in the southwestern Pakistani province of Balochistan yesterday, a provincial government official said.

The attack - which was claimed by the Baloch Liberation Army, a regional separatist group - derailed eight carriages including the locomotive, Deputy Commissioner Bolan Agha Samiullah told Reuters.

He said a rescue team was facing difficulties as the site was in a mountainous area.

The Baloch Liberation Army (BLA)'s stated aim is complete independence for Balochistan, an arid mountainous province that is Pakistan's largest by territory but smallest by population.

Pakistani security forces have been the separatist militants' main focus, although they have also targeted Chinese interests, given Beijing's increasing economic footprint in the region.

-Reuters

### Dutch look to ban designer pets

The Netherlands wants to ban pets such as flat-faced dogs and cats with folded ears, which look sweet but suffer “miserable” health problems, the government said yesterday.

Dutch Agriculture Minister Piet Adema said he would seek to outlaw the ownership of the designer breeds and to ban photos of them in advertising or on social media.

“We make life miserable for innocent animals, purely because we think they are ‘beautiful’ and ‘cute,’” he said in a statement.

“That is why today we are taking a big step towards a Netherlands where no pet has to suffer from his or her appearance.” -AFP

# Brazil government begins first operations to protect Amazon

AFP  
Rio de Janeiro

Brazil began this week the first operations against Amazon deforestation since veteran leftist Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva took office, the Ibama environmental agency said yesterday.

On the campaign trail before his October election victory - when he de-

feated far right climate change sceptic Jair Bolsonaro - Lula promised to end deforestation by 2030.

The Amazon rainforest suffered during Bolsonaro’s four-year presidency as the former army captain repeatedly enacted laws favouring agriculture and mining in the forest at the expense of that critically important ecosystem.

Reducing deforestation is key to slowing climate change.

“The deployment of teams for the

start of inspection operations began on January 16, 2023,” Ibama told AFP.

Average Amazon deforestation soared by 75% during Bolsonaro’s presidency, compared with the previous decade.

“The environmental team put in place by the federal government has, since the beginning of the transition period, been working to build a plan capable of inverting the rate of deforestation seen these last few months,” added Ibama.

On Wednesday, Lula told the Globo

News television channel that he wanted to create a federal police force to “act in a stronger manner” to protect forests.

He also said he wanted to arrange a meeting with the other South American countries that share the Amazon to discuss a continental preservation policy.

Lula said he would fight deforestation “by any means” and added: “I will need the armed forces, I will need the federal police force.”

Since taking office on January 1, Lula

has signed a series of decrees pertaining to the protection of the Amazon.

He also reactivated an Amazon protection fund that had been frozen since 2019 due to a disagreement between the Bolsonaro government and major donor countries Norway and Germany over how to spend the money.

And Lula has also revoked a Bolsonaro decree authorising mining exploitation in Indigenous areas and protected zones.





# Doha Marathon by Ooredoo a big success

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A total prize fund of QR1mn was on offer across all categories, with event sponsor Q-Auto also offering a Volkswagen T-Roc as a raffle prize to one lucky winner drawn from all those who finished their race in the 5km category and above. Sheikh Ali bin Jabor al-Thani fired the starting gun for the Elite category and honoured winners with their medals. Sabah Rabiah al-Kuwari, Director PR at Ooredoo, joined QAF president al-Fadala to present medals to winners in the other categories. Spectators were able to enjoy the electric atmosphere from the many vantage points along the runner-friendly route, with the race village offering several food and beverage options and plenty of fun for all. The platinum sponsors for the Doha Marathon by Ooredoo 2023 were Qatar Tourism, Q-Auto and Holding Group, with Qatar Airways and Seashore as gold sponsors and Al Rayyan Water, Aspetar, QIC and Qomunication silver sponsors. In line with Ooredoo's commitment to supporting the community, all funds generated from registration fees for the 2023 Doha Marathon by Ooredoo will be donated to charitable organisations.

