



SPORT | Page 4

Dakar legend al-Attiyah targets Paris Olympics gold in shooting



FM receives phone call from Blinken

HE the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman al-Thani received yesterday a phone call from US Secretary of State Antony Blinken. During the phone call, they discussed bilateral co-operation relations between the two countries, and a number of regional and international issues, especially developments in Afghanistan and the Russian-Ukrainian crisis. (QNA)

Shura Council attends Arab Parliament meet

The Shura Council participated in the meetings of the permanent committees of the Arab Parliament, which were held yesterday, in preparation for the third plenary session of the third meeting of the third legislative term of Parliament, which is scheduled for today. The permanent committees in which the Council participated include the Social, Educational and Cultural Affairs Committee, the Palestine Committee, the Economic and Financial Affairs Committee, and the Legislative, Legal and Human Rights Affairs Committee. Page 2

US strike kills 30 Al Shebaab fighters

A US military strike has killed approximately 30 Al Shebaab militants near the central Somali town of Galdad, where Somalia's military was engaged in heavy fighting, US Africa Command said in a statement. The operation, which the US military described as a "collective self-defense strike," occurred on Friday about 260km north of the capital Mogadishu, where Somali national forces were under attack by more than 100 Al Shebaab fighters, the statement said. US Africa Command, the military arm of the American government's presence on the continent, said no civilians were injured or killed in the strike.

Lula heads to Argentina on first trip abroad

Just weeks after taking office and the major violence that ensued in the capital Brasilia, leftist President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva is making his first trip abroad today, swiftly putting in action his plan to return Brazil to the international stage. Lula will head to Argentina, the customary first stop for Brazilian presidents. The trip will also allow him to meet with a faithful ally, President Alberto Fernandez, as well as regional counterparts at the summit of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States.

Peru closes Machu Picchu due to protests

Peru has closed its famed tourist site Machu Picchu amid anti-government protests, its Ministry of Culture said yesterday, with hundreds of tourists having been left stranded near the Inca citadel amid deadly unrest. Demonstrations demanding the resignation of Peruvian President Dina Boluarte have been ongoing since early December, leaving 46 people dead. Prior to the closing of Machu Picchu, rail services to the site had already been suspended due to the track being damaged by demonstrators. At least 400 people, including 300 foreigners, are stranded at the foot of the site, in the town of Aguas Calientes, and pleading to be evacuated. Page 7

Israelis oppose Netanyahu plans

Tens of thousands of Israelis joined demonstrations yesterday against judicial reform plans by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's new government that protesters say will threaten democratic checks and balances on ministers by the courts. The plans, which the government says are needed to curb overreach by activist judges, have drawn fierce opposition from groups including lawyers, and raised concerns among business leaders, widening already deep political divisions in Israeli society.

Sheikh Thani opens Aisha Bint Hamad Al Attiyah Hospital in Morocco



On behalf of His Highness the Father Amir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, HE Sheikh Thani bin Hamad al-Thani inaugurated on Friday Aisha Bint Hamad Al Attiyah Hospital in the city of Safi in the sisterly Kingdom of Morocco. After the inauguration, HE Sheikh Thani and senior Moroccan officials toured the hospital's various facilities and listened to an explanation about the hospital's medical care and specialised treatment services for patients. The opening ceremony was attended by Minister of Health and Social Protection of the Kingdom of Morocco Professor Khalid Ait Taleb and a number of senior Qatari and Moroccan officials. (QNA) Page 2

Qatar decries Swedish permission to burn copy of Holy Qur'an

QNA
Doha

Qatar yesterday condemned and denounced in the strongest terms the Swedish authorities' permission to burn a copy of the Holy Qur'an in front of the Turkish embassy in Stockholm, stressing that this heinous incident was an act of incitement and a serious provocation to the feelings of more than two billion Muslims in the world.

In a statement, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs affirmed Qatar's total rejection of all forms of hate speech based on belief, race or religion, and the implication of sanctities in political disputes, and warned that the campaigns of hatred against Islam and the discourse of Islamophobia have witnessed a dangerous escalation with the continued systematic calls for the repeated targeting of Muslims in the world.

In this context, the ministry called on the international community to shoulder its responsibilities to reject hatred, discrimination, incitement and violence, and stressed the importance of upholding the principles of dialogue and mutual understanding.

The ministry reiterated Qatar's full support for the values of tolerance and coexistence, and its keenness to establish the principles of international peace and security through dialogue and understanding.

Reuters adds from Stockholm: Protests in Stockholm yesterday against Turkey and Sweden's bid to join Nato, including the burning of a copy of the



Protesters demonstrate in front of the Consulate General of Sweden in Istanbul after a far-right political party leader burned a copy of the Holy Qur'an near the Turkish embassy in Stockholm, yesterday.

Holy Qur'an, sharply heightened tensions with Turkey at a time when the Nordic country needs Ankara's backing to gain entry to the military alliance.

"We condemn in the strongest possible terms the vile attack on our holy book..."

Permitting this anti-Islam act, which targets Muslims and insults our sacred values, under the guise of freedom of expression is completely unacceptable," the Turkish Foreign Ministry said.

Its statement was issued after an anti-immigrant politician from the far-right fringe burned a copy of the Holy Qur'an near the Turkish embassy.

The Turkish ministry urged Sweden to take necessary actions against

the perpetrators and invited all countries to take concrete steps against Islamophobia.

A separate protest took place in the city supporting Kurds and against Sweden's bid to join Nato.

A group of pro-Turkish demonstrators also held a rally outside the embassy. All three events had police permits.

Swedish Foreign Minister Tobias Billstrom said that Islamophobic provocations were appalling.

Several Arab countries including Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Kuwait denounced the Koran-burning. "Saudi Arabia calls for spreading the values of dialogue, tolerance, and coexistence, and rejects hatred and extremism," the Saudi Foreign Ministry said in a statement. Page 11

QDB launches green financing for eco-friendly SME projects

QNA
Doha

Qatar Development Bank (QDB) launched the Clean Energy and Eco-Friendly Financing programme, also known as Green Financing for Qatar-based Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) operating in QDB-mandated sectors.

SMEs that are seeking to introduce or use clean and sustainable projects or infrastructures (green projects) to support their business operations in the reduction of their energy cost, environmental degradation, and carbon footprint are eligible to apply.

QDB Acting CEO Abdulrahman Hesham al-Sowaidi said that supporting sustainability through this and other programmes is part of the bank's strategy to support environmentally friendly projects, in keeping with the necessities of this period nationally and globally.

Al-Sowaidi indicated that the bank is moving in accordance with its institutional responsibility to support entrepreneurs in line with the country's national vision for building a sustainable knowledge-based economy.

QDB Acting CEO stressed that this financing programme is the first of its kind, and it will support SMEs operating in any of the various QDB-mandated sectors, encouraging them to benefit from the bank's programmes, indicating that the Green Financing programme will first finance 85% of a project's cost for enterprises that will



add technological solutions or environment-friendly operations to their business or their business model.

QDB offers a long-term financing repayment period of up to 15 years, including a 3-year grace period.

Al-Sowaidi added that QDB will finance 80% of a project's total cost for companies that will produce final green products with a positive and sustainable environmental impact, this time with a repayment period of up to 20 years, including a three years grace period.

The Green Financing programme enables enterprises to obtain competitive and preferential pricing with admin and profit rates to encourage them to make an environmentally friendly transformation and produce sustainable green products.

QDB encourages SMEs to achieve their environmental goals in various fields such as renewable energy, waste management, water treatment, recycling, clean and green technical innovations, and projects that promote energy efficiency and reduce carbon footprint.

Interested entrepreneurs can apply for financing on QDB's website.

Mahaseel Festival draws crowds



The ongoing Mahaseel Festival continued to draw big crowds yesterday, giving them an opportunity to buy quality local products such as vegetables, poultry, meat and dairy items at affordable prices. The festival also offers plants, flowers and gardening equipment to visitors. Through its offerings, the festival highlights the diverse range of agricultural and other products made in Qatar. PICTURE: Thajudheen Page 12

'Zero waste' competition for students launched

QNA
Doha

The Ministry of Municipality has announced the launch of a "zero waste" competition, in co-operation with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, to encourage students to participate in the "zero waste" campaign and create new ways to dispose of waste, recycle and protect natural resources.

The competition, which will run from January 22 to March 2, aims at the participation of public and private school students in the three academic stages: primary, preparatory, and secondary, to show their creativity in expressing its subject, through flexibility, originality, innovation, and creating an aware generation of the importance of waste by developing a methodol-



ogy of thinking about its management.

It also aims to educate and attract young people to volunteer work, spread the message and goals of the "zero waste" campaign so that it reaches the largest segment of society, and highlight the importance of waste disposal through recycling and use, which leads to reducing the need for the use of raw materials, with preserving the sustain-

ability of natural resources, which contributes to improving the quality of life.

In a statement yesterday, the Ministry of Municipality stated that the "zero waste" competition includes three sub-competitions in the fields of drawing and photography, including (watercolour, acrylic, pencil, various materials), the digital art competition, which includes (awareness poster, video, digital design, digital photography), and the handicraft competition (waste recycling). The ministry indicated that there are 27 awards, including nine awards for each educational stage in the three sub-competitions, and determined the financial value for each stage and its distribution, as well as the participation mechanism, controls and required technical standards.

It warned that the artwork must be based on the students' creativity and innovation, adding that a specialised internal school committee will

sort the artworks, select the best of them, and submit them for nomination and competition to win prizes.

The ministry said the details of the competition, conditions, prizes, and information about the "zero waste" campaign can be viewed through the competition website:

https://www.mm.gov.qa/static/zerowaste-comp/index.html The Ministry of Municipality recently launched the "zero waste" campaign under the slogan "less waste...more beautiful city" to reach an advanced level of community awareness of the importance of waste as part of resource sustainability and achieve several goals aimed at improving waste management, thus helping to mitigate its effects on the health and safety of society, as well as improve the quality of life to achieve the goals of Qatar National Vision 2030.



Aisha Bint Hamad Al Attiyah Hospital opens in Morocco



On behalf of His Highness the Father Amir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, HE Sheikh Thani bin Hamad al-Thani inaugurated Aisha Bint Hamad Al Attiyah Hospital in the Moroccan city of Safi on Friday. HE Sheikh Thani toured the hospital's facilities and listened to an explanation about its medical care and specialised treatment services. (QNA)



Chances of rain from Sunday evening: Met

There are chances of rain in Qatar from this evening until the end of the week, the Met department has said. "It is expected that the cloud amount will increase across the country on Sunday (January 22) with chances of light rain by Sunday evening," the weather office said in a report.

The rain is expected to intensify tomorrow, becoming light to moderate and affecting some of the eastern coastal areas. It will continue in different periods until the end of the week, and may become thundery at times, the forecast says. The winds will be northeasterly-northwesterly, ranging from light to moderate in speed, and become strong during thundery rain. The Qatar Civil Aviation Authority (Met department) has appealed to everyone to be careful and follow all safety instructions during thundery rain.

It has also urged them to obtain information from official sources and not to be led by rumours and unofficial social media accounts. Today's detailed forecast says poor visibility is expected in some places in the early hours of the day due to misty and foggy conditions. It will also be partly cloudy and there is a chance of light rain by the evening, while cold conditions are likely by night. Visibility may drop to 2km or less in some places at first. The forecast for offshore areas says partly cloudy conditions are expected and there is a possibility of scattered rain. The temperature, meanwhile, is expected to range from 16-22C in Doha today.

Shura Council attends meetings of Arab Parliament committees

The Shura Council participated in the meetings of the permanent committees of the Arab Parliament, which were held yesterday, in preparation for the third plenary session of the third meeting of the third legislative term of parliament, which is scheduled for today. The permanent committees in which the council participated include the Social, Educational and Cultural Affairs Committee, the Palestine Committee, the Economic and Financial Affairs Committee, and the Legislative, Legal and Human Rights Affairs Committee.

The Social, Educational and Cultural Affairs Committee reviewed several issues, including the social situation and the protection of societal values in the Arab world, and the establishment of a database of Arab national legislation related to social, educational and cultural affairs, women and youth. A proposal was also discussed regard-



One of the meetings.

ing the inclusion of school feeding in the budgets of Arab countries, and a review of developments in the preparation of an Arab guiding draft law to combat domestic violence.

The Palestine Committee meeting focused on developments in the situation in the Palestinian territories, especially in light of the practices of the far-right government and its violations against the Palestinian people,

and the efforts of the Arab Parliament to support the Palestinian cause, in addition to reviewing the annual report on Israeli violations, which will be presented to the plenary session for approval.

The Economic and Financial Affairs Committee dealt with the issue of preparing an Arab guiding law on promoting investment in the fields of new and renewable energy in the Arab world, in addition to reviewing the economic situation in the Arab countries for 2022.

As for the Foreign and Political Affairs and National Security Committee of the Arab Parliament, the committee dealt with the political and security developments in the Arab world during the last period, in addition to discussing the preparation of an Arab strategy on ways to achieve nuclear security in the Arab region, and Arab food security. (QNA)

Shura deputy Speaker highlights pioneering role of Qatari women in development fields

QNA
Tehran

HE the Deputy Speaker of the Shura Council Dr Hamda bint Hassan al-Sulaiti has highlighted the pioneering role of Qatari women in the fields of development and their contribution to the country's achievements at various levels.

In a speech during her participation in the 'First International Conference on Influential Women', which was held in the Iranian capital of Tehran, HE al-Sulaiti noted the pioneering role of Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser locally, regionally and globally, and her many initiatives in humanitarian work in the fields of education and health.

She recalled the struggle of Palestinian women for nearly a cen-



HE Dr Hamda bint Hassan al-Sulaiti speaking during the First International Conference on Influential Women in Tehran.

tury and their prominent role in the steadfastness of their children in the face of the occupation, noting the work presented by the journalist, Shireen Abu Akleh, in order to convey the truth to the entire world.

HE al-Sulaiti touched on the

skills, capabilities and qualities that distinguish influential women, indicating that among these qualities are possessing leadership capabilities, insightful vision, the wide culture and the ability to stimulate, and the constant focus on goals.

She emphasised that Islam preceded all civilisations in honouring women and granting them a great position in society, as they are the foundation on which the entire society is built, reviewing the biography of some pioneer women in Islamic history who had clear imprints in many fields. The Tehran conference sought to create an opportunity for communication between influential women in the world to provide a common ground for exchanging experiences and opinions, and to provide the necessary support for efforts for promoting women's role in their societies.

Your reliable business partner. Proven and trusted.

COUNTY BUS: 23 Seats

MIGHTY EX8 - Extra Long

HD45 (REEFER TRUCK)

HD65 (REEFER TRUCK)

ADVANTAGE FLEET

- UNBEATABLE PRICES
- MANUFACTURER WARRANTY
- 4 Years/150,000 Kms (whichever comes first)

Price starting from QR 74,900

- Applicable only for HD45 Single Cabin Chassis Truck
- Price for Cargo/Chiller/Reefer, extra as applicable

COUNTY BUS: 23 Seats

- Turbo Charger Intercooler • Diesel Engine

MIGHTY EX8 - Extra Long (6m Chassis)

- Turbocharger Intercooler • 155 ps @ 2900 rpm

LIGHT DUTY TRUCK - HD Series

- Single Cab Chassis & Cargo, 3 ton - 7.2 ton GVW

Official Partner

شركة السيارات الوطنية
National Car Company

Hyundai Truck & Bus
T: 44315951 M: 66253325
E: hcv@ncc-qatar.com www.hyundai-qatar.com

New book discusses sustainability aspects and challenges in Qatar

By Joseph Varghese
Staff Reporter

A new open-access book on sustainability documents by academics and researchers in Qatar discusses the sustainability challenges, efforts and accomplishments in the country. Titled 'Sustainable Qatar', the book was researched and edited by Dr Logan Cochrane, associate professor at the College of Public Policy (CPP) at Qatar Foundation's Hamad Bin Khalifa University (HBKU), and Reem al-Hababi, PhD student in the Gulf Studies Programme at Qatar University, and an alumna of the Master of Public Policy programme at CPP.

As each country is faced with its unique set of challenges in its journey towards sustainability, Qatar is no different when it comes to its efforts and aspirations towards achieving its environmental, social and economic sustainability. Thirty-nine authors from across Qatar have contributed to the book, consisting of 19 chapters that tackle sustainability issues from a variety of lenses, and expert perspectives ranging from education, carbon neutrality, water security, innovation and the broader climate change crisis.

The book came about as a result of a shared interest in sustainability and



Dr Logan Cochrane

a collaborative research opportunity between al-Hababi and Dr Cochrane, which they ultimately proposed to Springer Science+Business Media, a German multinational book publishing company, in 2021. "While there is a lot of research on sustainability available, we wanted to put all these rich viewpoints from diverse disciplines together in one place. That's how we decided to move forward with the book," Dr Cochrane said.

The authors of the book include academics and researchers from QF member Earthna and QF partner Texas A&M University at Qatar, in addition to HBKU as well as the Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy, Qatar University, and the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies. While editing and publishing a book with such a large

number of authors is always challenging, Dr Cochrane believes each of the contributions to the book was instrumental in the understanding of Qatar's sustainability landscape.

"Through this book, our aim is to not only highlight the importance of sustainability for Qatar and the region, but to additionally document the efforts made by both governmental and non-governmental actors and academics in this field, and to help us learn from the challenges they have experienced and overcome so far," al-Hababi said.

"Some of the key takeaways from the book include the importance of analysing the context when complex topics such as environment and climate-related issues are looked at; the uniqueness of Qatar's case in terms of geography, ecology, demography and economy; the challenges that result from the realities of these aspects; and the importance of an integrated, holistic approach to addressing sustainability while ensuring participation from all parts of society," she added.

Moving forward, the authors hope this book will act as a guide for future discussions and policies contributing to sustainability efforts in the region. An open-access Arabic version of the book is also under way and will be published by HBKU in the near future.

Environment ministry to hold scientific forum in Doha

The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change is organising a scientific forum in Doha tomorrow on the treatment and management of rejected brine and salts from desalination plants. The forum will be held under the patronage of HE the Minister of Environment and Climate Change Sheikh Dr Faleh bin Nasser bin Ahmed bin Ali al-Thani. It is to be moderated by Dr Mohamed bin Saif al-Kuwari, environment expert and engineering consultant

at the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change, and Dr Mohamed al-Baldawi, expert and consultant at the ministry. Accordingly, the MoECC will form a committee of scientists and experts and officials from government and other entities concerned, who will participate in the forum to present a comprehensive plan to treat and manage rejected brine and salts from desalination plants to better serve the country in this respect.

WISE to focus on youth empowerment at Doha Learning Days Festival

Under the theme ‘Youth Empowerment’, the World Innovation Summit for Education (WISE) will host the Doha Learning Days (DLD) Festival from February 1-4 at Msheireb Museums.

The fourth edition of DLD will share opportunities with young people and help expand their skills in areas such as advocacy, the arts, well-being, entrepreneurship, financial literacy, tech, science, coding and more.

WISE, Qatar Foundation's global education initiative, will offer over 50 workshops for families, youth and the wider community to engage in informal experiential learning. The festival, free to attend, will start with a ceremony on February 1 to celebrate the 2022 WISE Awards winners and their innovation in addressing pressing education issues before opening

Community festival aims to help create a local ecosystem where learning happens outside the classroom

to the public on February 2.

DLD reinforces WISE's efforts to foster a vibrant learning ecosystem locally. The festival is designed to take learning out of formal education settings and expand the understanding of where learning can happen. To achieve this goal, WISE has curated the festival programme with more than 20 multisectoral content partners who will offer interactive workshops, educational group sessions, stimulating speakers,



and other practice-based learning activities that are both experiential and innovative, a press statement notes.

Stavros N Yiannouka, CEO of WISE, said: “With our content partners, Doha Learning Days will create an engaging environment for informal learning. The festival's ideal location at Msheireb Museums in the very heart of Doha meets our vision for creating a dynamic community-based setting where youth are empow-

ered to connect their classroom learning with the skills to discover and map their strengths, talents and purpose in innovative ways.”

“The unique programme will appeal to students, educators and community members of all ages and interests who are keen to explore, create, and be challenged to learn and reflect in different ways. We invite everyone to come and be part of this exciting learning festival.” WISE Doha Learning Days 2023 is being held in partnership

with Visa, with the support of ExxonMobil as the event Platinum Partner. Strategic partners are Msheireb Museums and Swiss wealth manager Julius Baer.

Ali Mohamed al-Kuwari, acting CEO of Msheireb Properties, said: “Msheireb Museums is proud to collaborate with WISE as Strategic Partner and host this valuable learning festival to support the education and creativity capabilities of our students and community members.

This is in line with our goal to upgrade the skills and capabilities of our community and unlock their potential. We are committed to strengthening community partnerships and promoting educational programmes to further strengthen human capital development in our country.”

Carl Manlan, Visa's head of Inclusive Impact and Sustainability

for Central and Eastern Europe, Middle East and Africa, said: “WISE brings together different knowledge and content partners to upskill the next generation of leaders able to capitalise on the opportunities in the digital economy.”

“Visa is therefore pleased to be part of this exciting initiative and to support WISE in helping these young people gain the skills and knowledge they need to uplift communities both here and around the world.”

In addition to the daytime school workshops, which will invite students from across schools in Qatar to take part, the programme will also include evening and weekend sessions to encourage the wider community to participate.

DLD content partners include the Ministry of Public Health,

Ministry of Social Development and Family, Ministry of Sports and Youth, Studio 5/6 (Ministry of Communications and Information Technology), Tarsheed, Microsoft, Qatar Scientific Club, Qatar Sports for All Federation, The Learning Centre, QF International, Earthna, Qatar Academy, Generation Amazing, Maker Majlis – Hamad Bin Khalifa University, Kabuni, Kidzania, Insaniyatna, Best Buddies, HBKU Press, Al Jazeera Media Institute, Qatar Academy Doha's Activists in Action, Doha Environmental Actions Project, Injaz Qatar, ZNotes and Paint the Town. Several partners will present offshoot activities at locations across Qatar.

To learn more, visit: <https://www.qf.org.qa/events/doha-learning-days-festival-2023>. For more information about WISE, visit: <https://www.wise-qatar.org>



Glimpses from the grand opening of Valley Forge Academy Qatar. **PICTURES:** Thajudheen

Valley Forge Academy Qatar holds grand opening event

Valley Forge Academy Qatar (VFAQ) on Thursday held its grand opening at its state-of-the-art campus in Aspire Zone 2 in the presence of several dignitaries, including VFAQ functionaries and officials from the Ministry of Education and Higher Education.

A formal ribbon-cutting marked the opening and this was followed by a students' parade that demonstrated a colour guard posting the school's colours and class formations, and marching.

According to an official statement, VFAQ is the “first truly international American school for boys”. It is a collaboration between Valley Forge Military Academy (VFMA) in Pennsylvania, USA, Valley Forge Academy, a Qatar-based educational group, who also owns Durham School for Girls Doha, and Aspire Zone, the home of the school's new campus.



Valley Forge Academy Qatar will deliver an American curriculum while focusing on Qatari culture, Arabic language and Islamic teachings combined with physical excellence. Dr Paul Milward Lea IV, president of Valley Forge Academy Qatar, said: “This milestone event is an opportunity to formally welcome the founding families, their sons, and invited guests to the school facilities. We look forward to hosting those who attend to highlight both the personnel and facilities, which will help mould and support our young men.”

The founder of VFMA, General Milton G Baker, said: “The young man entering life must carry with him a high sense of honour, a recognition of the value of patriotism, and a proper respect for discipline, law and order”. “The administration, faculty and staff at Valley Forge Academy Qatar look forward to carrying this

mantra forward coupled with Islamic studies, Arabic language and Qatari history as we look forward to the next 100 years and beyond. Both schools view their role and purpose as essential to a strong future with global citizens: Send us your boys: we will return to you a man,” Baker said.

The statement noted that the selection of the date of January 19 was purposeful. The date has special significance for VFMA in that it was the date when the corps of cadets moved to its present location after a devastating fire destroyed the original school less than 36 hours earlier. This single event tested the character and will of the young men enrolled at the new school and set the stage for the future.

Now, after 94 years, VFAQ becomes the first new location that looks forward to preparing today's young Qatari men for their future.

Therefore, the opening on January 19 has significance and sets the stage for the future of VFAQ and the promise it brings as the new location is recognised.

With a total area of 420,000sq ft with a capacity of 1,700 students, VFAQ seeks to develop and produce Qatar's leaders of tomorrow across many sectors, including business, social, academic, diplomatic, sports, research, engineering and education.

It has as its guiding principles the five traditional cornerstones of academic excellence, personal motivation, physical development, character development and leadership, which have been associated with VFMA since its inception. Strong emphasis is laid on physical excellence and extra-curricular activities, including golf, fencing, martial arts, STEM, E-sports, debating, music and theatre.



Korean embassy in Doha celebrates Lunar New Year

The Korean embassy held a Lunar New Year celebration on Friday with the Korean community in Qatar. It was the first large cultural event with the Korean community held in Qatar since the start of Covid-19 pandemic, the embassy said in a statement. A large number of Korean residents participated in the event to celebrate the Lunar New Year, which falls on Sunday, January 22.

The participants had a chance to play traditional Korean games, such as Yut Nori and Jegichagi, which families and friends play during the Lunar New Year. They were also served a wide variety of traditional Korean cuisines, including Tteokguk (Korean rice cake soup), which Koreans eat on New Year's Day.

Lee Joon-ho, Korean ambassador to Qatar, welcomed the guests and wished all the best to the Korean community on the occasion of the Lunar New Year. He also extended his sincere gratitude to the community for their contributions to enhancing Korea-Qatar relations.

There are about 2,000 Koreans residing in Qatar, associated with various fields such as construction, infrastructure, accommodation and restaurants.

He also appreciated the role of the Korean community in the preparations for successful FIFA World Cup last year, so that Korean residents as well as fans from Korea could enjoy the tournament fully and safely.

“The Korean community has been deeply intertwined with



A snapshot from the event.



the World Cup. Korean companies have contributed to various infrastructure projects for the World Cup, such as highway, the Doha Metro, Al Thumama

Stadium and the iconic Lusail Plaza towers,” the statement added. Lee Joon-ho said the embassy will continue to assist the Korean community in

various ways and this Lunar New Year celebration event is a great opportunity to remind the Korean community of the true meaning of solidarity and unity.

First Al Da'aw winners announced at Marmi



The three first winners of the Al Da'aw (falcon speeding) premier championship and Saluki dog race were announced yesterday during the 14th edition of the Qatar International Falcons and Hunt-ing Festival (Marmi 2023).

From among the 25 falconers from Qatar and the other GCC countries who took part at the final round of Al Da'aw, the winners were Fahd Mohamed al-Mansuri from Saudi Arabia in the first place, Mohamed Khebab al-Nuaimi from Qatar in second and Fahd Saad al-Azmi from Kuwait in third.

Fahd al-Essari, head of the Al Da'aw Committee at Marmi 2023, said the final of Al Da'aw is considered among the strongest competitions of the festival as the results are estimated in a fraction of a second to determine the winning falcons. He stressed that it was clear that the falconers had adequately prepared their falcons and gave them the best training as the difference in determining the first three places was just some fractions of a second between each contestant.

The winners expressed their

appreciation for the good organisation of the festival and said it was a highly challenging competition, one that needed much preparation to equip falcons with enhanced skills.

Meanwhile, two participants won the Saluki dog race competition out of 15 contestants. The winner of the first place is Al Hasher team, with Nasser Saeed al-Moftah coming in second. Ibrahim Khalil al-Tamimi, member of the Saluki Dogs Race Committee at Marmi 2023, pointed out that the finals of the Saluki race are often exciting and simultaneously surprising. He said the strong and experienced dogs, which have undergone extensive speed and endurance training, usually prevail in such races. He also stressed that the participants should always make serious preparations for this race.

Meanwhile, the spectators said they have enjoyed an exceptional atmosphere of excitement and joy as they follow the heated competitions, which have been full of hard-to-predict results. Marmi 2023 has been organised by Al Qannas Qatari Society at Sbkhat Marmi in the Sealine



area, under the patronage of HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Tha-

ni, and will continue until January 28.

23 teams to take part in Al-Galayel Tournament for Traditional Hunting

The 12th Al-Galayel Tournament for Traditional Hunting 2023 will kick off on Jan 30, with the participation of 23 teams, that are competing to win the tournament, which will be held in Laariq Nature Reserve until Feb 24.

Al-Galayel is considered one of the most important and exciting tournaments that reflects the sniper's skill in the inherited traditional hunting, which is known particularly in Arab and Qatari culture. In a statement to Qatar News Agency, Chairman of the Organising Committee of Al-Galayel Tournament for Traditional Hunting 2023 Khalid bin Mohamed al-Maadeed, said that this year's tournament is sponsored by the Social & Sport Contribution Fund (Daam), with the participation of 23 teams distributed into five groups. The start of the tournament will be on Jan 30, with the first group while the competitions of the second

group will begin on Friday (Feb 3). Al-Maadeed added that the third group will start its competitions on Tuesday (Feb 7) and the fourth group will join on Feb 11, and the teams will compete next day, while the fifth group will compete on Feb 15, and noted that the competitions of each group will run for four days.

All the leading teams of each of the five groups will participate on 21st in the qualified group in the tournament final, which will continue until Feb 24, and where the winners will be crowned in the final of the tournament.

Al-Maadeed explained that the tournament, which is annually sponsored by the General Organisation of the Cultural Village – Katara, is in continuous development in order to achieve its objectives in promoting the heritage of falconry and hunting. He added that Al-Galayel attracts new teams annually, and even new members in the teams, which contributes to achieving the tournament's goal of spreading and preserving the heritage sport.

He indicated that the new edition emphasises the professionalism of the snipers in Qatar, as the history of the tournament which is now 12 years reflects the extent of the Qatari snipers' ability for adventure, and pointed out that the members of the organising committee and the supporting committees are working hard to present the tournament in a manner that befits the name and reputation of Al-Galayel and its long history among the sniper tournaments.

For his part, Vice-Chairman of the Organising Committee of Al-Galayel Tournament for Traditional Hunting, Executive Director of the tournament Mohamed bin Nahar al-Nuaimi, affirmed in a similar statement to QNA that the organising committees of Al-Galayel are fully prepared for the launch of the tournament, in all technical, administrative, financial and media aspects, and added that the organising committees are working to provide all the requirements for the success of the tournament, in co-operation with the authorities concerned. The first place team will receive a cash prize of QR1mn. The second place winner will get QR700,000, and the third placed will win QR500,000. QR10,000 will also be awarded to each member of a team that qualifies for the final of the tournament, as well as a reward of QR5,000 for each participating member of a team that did not qualify for the final.

Al Shaqab team had won the Al-Galayel tournament in the previous edition. (QNA)



Doha to host meeting of Council of Arab Social Affairs Ministers

Doha will host on January 25-26, the 42nd meeting of the Council of Arab Ministers of Social Affairs, which will be preceded by a two-day preparatory meeting for senior officials.

The council's meeting will discuss important files that represent a priority for joint Arab social development work, particularly the Second Arab Decade for Persons with Disabilities 2023-2032 and the second Arab report on multidimensional poverty.

Speaking to Qatar News Agency (QNA), Technical Secretariat of Arab Social Ministerial Council's Tareq al-Nabulsi praised Qatar's efforts to prepare and arrange for this important meeting in a way that guarantees fruitful results for the social development process in the Arab region.

He pointed out that the 42nd session will discuss a number of key files that represent a priority for joint Arab social development work, particularly the continuation of the implementation of the 2030 Sustainable Development Plan, especially its social dimensions that affect the life of a Arab citizen, in addition to issues related to the marginalised and fragile groups in society, especially persons with disabilities, and ways to increase their inclusion in all fields of public life. In addition, issues related to efforts to eradicate poverty in all its dimensions.

Also, he noted that the meeting is an occasion for briefing the Arab Ministers of Social Affairs on the successful experience of Qatar in the development and social fields, and its pioneering initiatives to empower persons with disabilities, with focus on the unprecedented facilities it provided for them during the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022. Al-Nabulsi said that the outcomes of this session will be submitted to the upcoming Arab summit.

On the sidelines of this session, a co-ordination meeting will be held for the Ministers of Social Affairs of the Gulf Co-operation Council states, as well as the meeting of the 78th session of the Executive Office of the Council of Arab Ministers of Social Affairs, which includes Saudi Arabia, Oman, Egypt, Iraq, Sudan, Djibouti, and Somalia, and in the presence of Qatar as the chair of the 42nd session of the Council. (QNA)

Marine protection department sets free seized slender-billed gulls



The Marine Protection Department at the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change (MoECC) has released a number of slender-billed gulls that were seized during an attempt to bring them into the country in an illegal manner. The department has stressed that the sales or transport of all wild birds and animals is banned in Qatar without obtaining a prior permit from the ministry, and anyone who violates this will be subject to legal prosecution. The MoECC said such laws and regulations are meant to preserve the local environment and to enhance biodiversity in the country, and apply to local animals as well as those migrating or transiting through the country.

Qatar Insurance Group a sponsor of Doha Marathon by Ooredoo 2023



Qatar Insurance Group (QIC) joined other partners in the sponsorship of 'Doha Marathon by Ooredoo 2023', which took place on Friday. This year, runners were able to choose from multiple running categories including 1km, 5km, 10km, 21km, 42km making it an event that welcomed people of all ages and abilities.

QIC Group Acting Chief Administrative Officer Rashid al-Buainain said: "Qatar Insurance Group believes in the positive power of sports to bring people together towards a shared purpose. That's why we are proud to be able to lend our insurance capabilities in support of activities that align with our values, and to continue to highlight Qatar's prominent role in the world of sports."

"This sponsorship comes in recognition of the important role that QIC Group occupies and plays in the Qatari society and is part of a continued effort to find and support unique initiatives and events that are in line with our corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategy."

Rashid al-Buainain

MoI underlines importance of child safety at camping sites



The safety of children in camping sites warrants constant monitoring by family members, the Ministry of Interior (MoI) has reminded in a social media post.

The safety of Children in camping sites is a responsibility that requires continuous monitoring by family members and protection from accidents outside the camp.

For inquiries, please contact Mr. Ibrahim Al-Sheeb through the following contact details:
Email: Ibrahim.alsheeb@qewc.com
Tel: 44858572 - 55080703
Headquarters Address : Navigation Tower - next to The Gate Mall - West Bay
Building No. 11 - Street 860 - District 63 - Floor 49
Working hours are from 7:00 am to 2:30 pm.



The assistance aims to ease the economic suffering of the beneficiaries and contribute to improving their food security.



Qatar Charity offers cash assistance to flood-affected families in Pakistan province

Qatar Charity (QC), in partnership with the World Food Programme (WFP), has delivered cash assistance to thousands of households affected by the 2022 floods in Dera Ghazi Khan district of Pakistan's Punjab province, in addition to providing work opportunities for other families in the same district.

The assistance aims to ease the economic suffering of the beneficiaries and contribute to improving their food security and dietary diversity.

Under the project, 4,219 households received cash assistance for three months. Qatar Charity at-

tached significant attention to the elderly, vulnerable families, female-headed households, and other deprived persons while delivering the aid, a press statement noted.

Besides, QC provided work opportunities for the members of 5,606 families in the same district, who worked on rehabilitating unpaved paths, damaged roads, affected houses and drainage systems, in addition to managing livestock, farming and gardening.

"The 2022 floods are one of the biggest disasters, which affected millions of people," said Zaka Uddin, deputy director of the Social Welfare Department, Dera Ghazi

Khan. He highly appreciated the efforts of Qatar Charity and WFP for selecting Dera Ghazi Khan, which is a highly flood-affected district in Punjab.

Sabir Hussain Shah, additional deputy commissioner (General) of Dera Ghazi Khan district, said QC has reached the most vulnerable communities of Dera Ghazi Khan, thanking Qatar Charity and WFP for supporting deprived communities through cash assistance.

The beneficiaries expressed their happiness with the cash assistance they received from Qatar Charity. "During the recent rainfall, flash floods washed away each and every

thing, destroying all roads, which have affected adversely and hugely those working on daily wage," said Abdul Salam, a beneficiary of the aid. "My child died due to the inaccessibility of medical facilities, and we suffered from hunger," he added, thanking WFP and Qatar Charity for providing the assistance for the three months.

"Due to the flash flood, we lost our source of income," said another beneficiary, Ameera Mai. "I am very grateful to WFP and Qatar Charity for giving me the cash assistance. I have purchased medicines for my children and some household items."

Aamal Company, Ebn Sina Pharmacy open latest branch



A view of the outlet.



Officials at the opening of the pharmacy.

Aamal Company, one of the region's leading diversified companies, and its fully-owned subsidiary, Ebn Sina Pharmacy, a modern chain of pharmacies managed by Ebn Sina Medical, have announced the opening of a new pharmacy branch on the ground floor of City Center Doha.

Rashid bin Ali al-Mansoori, CEO of Aamal Company, said: "I'm pleased to announce the opening of the fifth branch of Ebn Sina's chain of pharmacies. As the first pharmacy to introduce the robotic pharmacy in Qatar, Ebn Sina Pharmacy is a well-established brand that is known for its wide range of

medicines and for providing a superior level of customer service in all aspects of general health and well-being."

He added: "This expansion is in line with Ebn Sina's business plan to grow the business and create new revenue streams by increasing its presence and accessibility

in high footfall locations to meet growing market needs.

"With an increasing population and urban expansion, Qatar has been developing its advanced transport network to the extent that expanding into cities outside of Doha is a consideration in Ebn Sina's plans."



A view from the grand opening of Cafe #999.

IN-Q celebrates grand opening of Cafe #999

New authentic Italian concept at Fire Station is curated by Groupe Ducasse Paris

IN-Q Enterprises (IN-Q), the commercial arm and wholly owned subsidiary of Qatar Museums (QM), held the grand opening of Cafe #999 at the Fire Station on January 18. The restaurant returns under the new management of IN-Q in consultation with Groupe Ducasse Paris.

Cafe #999 offers authentic Italian culinary creations as reimagined by Groupe Ducasse Paris chefs led by executive chef Jeremy Cheminade and head chef Fabio Fioravanti.

It is the third and latest Groupe Ducasse Paris restaurant to be launched in partnership with QM in Doha, a press statement noted.

The grand opening of the restaurant was celebrated with an Italian Long Table Lunch in the presence of Groupe Ducasse Paris founder Alain Ducasse; QM CEO Ahmad al-Namla and VIP guests from Qatar.

Commenting on the grand opening, Phil Lawrie, general manager of IN-Q, said: "We are proud to officially launch Cafe #999, the third outlet in our long partnership with

M. Alain Ducasse, who shares our passion for art, heritage and culture. Here we take guests on a timeless artistic and gourmet journey to Italy in a vibrant retro-pop setting. Cafe #999 is the perfect dining destination, located at the heart of the Fire Station overlooking Al Bidda Park and the stunning West Bay skyline. We can promise our guests an amazing experience."

Khalifa Ahmad al-Obaidly, director of the Fire Station - Artist in Residence, shared: "The reopening of Cafe #999 with its new menu and ambiance is an exciting moment for us. We take pride of the fact that with Cafe #999, we are able to offer our artists a delectable fusion of gastronomy and art. At Cafe #999, artists find affinity. They are welcome to collaborate and bring their art to life on the walls of Cafe

#999. This innovative concept of the restaurant is integrated into the Fire Station, bringing the community together for an inspiring experience here at Doha's art hub."

Alain Ducasse said: "Through our collaboration with QM, Groupe Ducasse Paris strives to offer Qatar new dining concepts and experiences that are of premium quality. We hold ourselves to high culinary and presentation standards while remaining casual and welcoming to Cafe #999's loyal visitors and newcomers."

Cafe #999 offers a menu that is thoroughly Italian, in technique and flavours, serving a selection of artisanal starters, main dishes and desserts highlighting great Italian classics such as caponata, risotto, pizza, tiramisu and more.

The restaurant is a celebration of culture and art, bringing an immersive artful experience to the Fire Station, merging food and art, from retro-pop tableware to creative food styling, and a dining experience that is a feast for the eyes, too, the statement pointed out.

The renovated restaurant space was designed by French designer Helen Bonte who drew inspiration from retro pop art, a true testament to the Fire Station's artistic identity merged with Italy's cultural icons. Cafe #999 promotes Qatar's local art scene by collaborating with artists to paint the walls of the restaurant.

This includes the brick oven decorated with Qatari artist Mubarak al-Malik's signature graffiti style and wall paintings by budding artist Reem Saad Abdelrahman Elnour and multi-talented graffiti artist Mehdi Mana.

"At Cafe #999, guests of Doha's art hub find the ideal place to connect and interact. Whether inside, amid the new artful interiors, or al fresco with friends and furry companions, Cafe #999 welcomes everyone," the statement added.

Cafe #999 is open from Saturday-Thursday, 9am-9pm, and on Friday from 1pm-9pm. Pets are welcome in the outdoor seating area. For reservations, call 4452 5650 or e-mail cafe999restaurant@qm.org.qa

VCUarts Qatar extends deadline to submit applications to March 1

Virginia Commonwealth University School of the Arts in Qatar (VCUarts Qatar), a Qatar Foundation (QF) partner university, has announced that the deadline for submitting applications for the 2023 academic intake has been extended to March 1.

According to Caitlin Murphy, director of Recruitment and Admissions, the extension will give all students interested in applying to the innovative art and design university more time to submit their documents and complete the application process. Murphy further added that interested students can reach out to admissions counsellors for consultations and advice. Additionally, the university's website includes application requirements, answers to frequently asked questions, and programme information. Situated in QF's Education City, VCUarts Qatar is the branch campus of VCUarts in Richmond, Virginia, a top-ranked public art and design school in the United States. The university offers four undergraduate degree programmes: Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) in Graphic Design, BFA in Interior Design, BFA in Painting + Printmaking and a Bachelor of Arts (BA) programme in Art History. VCUarts Qatar also offers a Master of

Fine Arts (MFA) in Design programme at the graduate level. VCUarts Qatar is home to the Institute for Creative Research, the country's, and one of the region's, first university-level institutes dedicated to advancing creative research. VCUarts Qatar's alumni are currently employed throughout the world in roles as varied as art and design, filmmaking, interior design and incubation development. Over the last two decades, many of them have garnered international recognition on the global stage, winning coveted awards such as the Red Dot Award, the International Property Awards, and others, a press statement noted. The creative work and projects of VCUarts Qatar's students, alumni, staff and faculty have been exhibited at prestigious exhibitions in Dubai, Paris, Moscow and Hong Kong, and on the university's home campus in Richmond, Virginia. At VCUarts Qatar, students regularly take part in world-class art and design events, and field trips to study, work and network. The university also has a state-of-the-art fabrication lab, innovative media studio, and a library with one of the largest collections of books on art and design in the region.

QATARGAS OPERATING COMPANY LTD Tender Invitation

No.	TENDER NUMBER / DESCRIPTION	TENDER ISSUE PERIOD	TENDER FEE (QAR)	TENDER BOND (QAR)	TENDER CLOSING DATE
1	SUP/C/FDE/5880/22 CABLE FAILURE ROOT CAUSE ANALYSIS	22/01/2023 to 05/02/2023	0	60,000	13/02/2023


Scope of Work:

Cable failure root cause analysis is required for different types of cable (Electrical, Instrument, Cathodic Protection) covering all ranges from Low voltage to High Voltage (up to 230 KV). AC & DC. Failure analysis to be carried out using approved international standards and calibrated laboratory equipment. Soil and water testing will also be required for underground environment of the cables upon request

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

Place for Tender Collection and Bid Submission:

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



Qatar Chemical Company Limited
Al Dafna - Amwal Tower - First Floor
P.O. 24646 Doha / Qatar - Tel. 44847111 - Fax 44847695
Website: www.qchem.com.qa

ANNOUNCEMENT FOR TENDERS

No.	Document No.	Description	Tender Bond	Bid Closing Date
1.	QC/TC/SAF/3/23	INSPECTION, TESTING AND MAINTENANCE OF FM-200 SYSTEMS AT Q-CHEM, Q-CHEM II, RLOC AND DOHA OFFICE	QR 136,500/-	12:00 hrs on 22 nd February 2023
Brief scope: Contractor shall provide manpower, equipment, tools and materials for carrying out inspection, testing and maintenance of FM-200 Systems, which is limited to FM-200 Cylinders and Flexible Discharge Hoses, at our plant sites in Mesaieed (Q-Chem & Q-Chem II), Ras Laffan (RLOC) and Doha office for five years.				
2.	QC/TC/P/43/22	WATER AND PROCESS TREATMENT SERVICES FOR Q-CHEM, Q-CHEM II AND RLOC FOR FOUR YEARS	QR 1,319,500	12:00 hrs. on 12 th March 2023
Brief scope: Company is in need of a professional, qualified and experienced Contractor to carry out Water and Process Treatment services (Chemicals Supply & Services) at our plant sites in Mesaieed (Q-Chem & Q-Chem II) and Ras Laffan (RLOC). The scope of Services would involve both chemical supply & services required to monitor & maintain the required quality parameters on sustainable basis as per the set KPIs and required analysis methods.				

Tender Documents for the above description can be obtained as follows:
A. Pay to Bank and send the original receipt with authorization letter via email
For tender pay a **non-refundable document fee (cash only) of QR 1,000/-** Payable to Q-Chem, Bank Account (Contract Services - Tender) - Account Number 001-242007-003 with HSBC Bank) and submit the original receipt with an Authorization letter on Tenderer Company Letterhead with ID copy of the Tenderer representative **via email to tadvertising@qchem.com.qa** In the authorization letter Tenderer shall nominate a single focal point with contact mobile number, **official email address**, office number, fax number for the communications related to this tender for the transfer and receipt of the tender documents.
B. Date and Time of Tender documents Issuance via email
Tender documents issuance from 22nd January 2023 to 26th January 2023, 8am-12noon.
C. Proposal details
Proposals should be valid for **240 days** from the tender closing date.
Tender must be accompanied by a Bank Guarantee (Tender Bond) issued by one of the Qatari Banks or by a Bank operating in Qatar and should be valid for **240 days** from the tender closing date.
D. Submission of Proposals
Guidelines for Electronic Bids Submission is attached in the Tender documents.

Kuwait landmarks shrouded in heavy fog



This aerial picture shows a view of Liberation tower (front) amid heavy fog in Kuwait City, early yesterday.

Yellen sees path of renewal for Africa, US

Reuters
Goree Island

US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen yesterday spoke of the “unspeakable cruelty” and enduring consequences of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, but said she was heartened by signs of progress and renewal in both the United States and Africa.

Yellen visited the House of Slaves, a fort built in the late 18th century on Goree Island off the coast of Senegal as a transit point for human beings before they were forcibly transported across the Atlantic, as she continued a three-country visit to Africa.

“I take from this place the importance of redoubling our commitment to fight for our shared principles and the values of freedom and human rights where ever they are threatened – in Africa, in the United States and around the world,” she wrote in the visitor’s log.

The site, now a museum and Unesco World Heritage site, often draws high-level American visitors, including former President Barack Obama, the first US president of African ancestry, who visited with his family in 2013.

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa called the island “a place of reconciliation and hope” when he visited in December 2021, noting in the log that it was the place where the talks to end apartheid in his own country began.

Yellen, at times visibly moved, underscored the enduring ties that bind Africa and the United States. “Ultimately, Goree Island reminds us that the histories of Africa and America are intimately connected. We know that the tragedy did not stop with the generation of humans taken from here,” she said.

Goree’s mayor Augustin Senghor presented Yellen with a certificate appointing her as a lifetime ambassador of the island’s history. The former Federal Reserve chair, whose work

in economics has focused on ending historic disparities that have plagued Black Americans long after slavery was abolished in 1865, said both Africa and the United States had made tremendous strides, but more work was needed to counter the brutal consequences of the slave trade.

Under Yellen, the US Treasury has set up a racial equity task force that has drawn the ire of Republicans, and the department has worked hard to boost the economic conditions of communities of colour.

It was critical to tell the story of enslaved people, which “while full of suffering, is also full of perseverance and hope,” Yellen said, citing the important contributions of African American men and women to the US economy and democracy. “With remembrance, I believe, can come progress and renewal,” she said, highlighting what she called “signs of vibrant life around Goree – a prominent art scene, a place of education, and thousands who call this place home.”

Palestinian shot dead at West Bank farm

AFP
Sde Efraim

An Israeli civilian shot dead a Palestinian yesterday at a settler farm in the occupied West Bank after an attempted stabbing, the army said, the latest incident as violence surges in the territory.

The Palestinian health ministry said 42-year-old Tariq Maali was killed “after the occupation (Israel) opened fire on him” near the Palestinian village of Kafr Nama.

The shooting brings to 18 the number of Palestinians killed so far this month in the West Bank, according to an AFP tally which includes fighters and civilians.

An AFP photographer saw Israeli forces preventing a Palestinian ambulance from accessing the site. Mahmoud Aidi, a Palestinian medic, said first responders tried to reach the scene but there was “a strong army presence concentrated on the hill, and we weren’t permitted to reach the person killed”.

The army said an Israeli ambulance took away the body of a man who had “already dead at the scene, so there was no medical



Family members of a Palestinian man, who was killed by Israeli forces, react, near Ramallah, in the occupied West Bank, yesterday.

ical treatment to be given”. No one else was wounded in the confrontation, it added.

The farm is known as a wild-cat settlement, or an outpost not recognised by Israel, according to Israeli anti-settlement movement Peace Now.

All settlements are deemed illegal under international law, which Israel disputes.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu plans to pursue a policy of increased settlement expansion in the West Bank, and ultra-Orthodox Jewish parties in his coalition advocate the annexation of some of the territory.

The inauguration in December of the most right-wing government in Israel’s history, led by Netanyahu, has sparked fears of a military escalation in the Palestinian territory occupied by Israel since the 1967 Six-Day War.

The majority of the 18 Palestinians killed this year were shot dead by Israeli forces. Violence this month adds to a toll which saw more than 150 Palestinians killed in the West Bank last year, the highest annual figure since United Nations records began in 2005.

At least 26 Israelis and 200 Palestinians were killed across Israel and the Palestinian territories in 2022, according to an AFP tally from official sources.

The Palestinian health ministry did not provide further details on the circumstances of the latest incident, which comes nearly two years after a guard shot dead another Palestinian man at the same location.

Zulus commemorate anniversary of epic win over British in SA

AFP
Isandlwana

Wearing ceremonial animal hides, bone necklaces and brandishing spears, the Zulu warriors prepared for battle against the British redcoats yesterday in a re-enactment of one of the most humiliating defeats inflicted on colonial troops in South Africa.

At the foot of the Isandlwana hill, which gave its name to the epic battle, the rocky ground is warmed by a blazing southern summer sun.

It was in this spot in South Africa’s southeast KwaZulu-Natal province that some 20,000 Zulu warriors attacked a British garrison and crushed the rifle-wielding soldiers after hours of fierce and bloody hand-to-hand combat on January 22, 1879.

“That day, we defeated the British. That battle is a source of pride for Zulu people and that’s how we built the Zulu nation,” said Simelane Velaphi, playing a warrior.

The Anglo-Zulu War is notable for several particularly bloody battles, including an opening victory of the Zulus at the Battle of Isandlwana.

On that fateful day, there were few survivors with over

1,300 British soldiers killed with the Zulus also suffering heavy casualties.

The crowd of spectators included the Zulu king and dignitaries from the First Welsh Battalion. The war established the warrior legend of South Africa’s largest ethnic group.

The Zulus make up nearly a fifth of South Africa’s 11mn people.

A smattering of English tourists watched the re-enactment, decked in colonial hats and walking shoes, and inspected stone memorial engraved with the names of Imperial soldiers who died “for Queen and country”. Small mounds of white pebbles mark the tombs of the fallen on the battlefield, now a protected heritage site.

“The bravery of both sides must be honoured,” says British army officer John Murphy, a guest at the ceremony.

Over a century ago news of the crushing defeat of the British army, the backbone of an empire that spanned the globe, caused shock waves throughout Europe.

In the midst of the Industrial Revolution, Britain needed raw materials and labour. The discovery of diamond mines in Kimberley but also gold and coal was coveted by the English colony in Cape Town.

Iran Guards warn EU label would be ‘mistake’

Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps yesterday warned the European Union against making a “mistake” by listing it as a terror group, after the bloc’s parliament called for the measure, AFP reported from Tehran. Members of the European Parliament voted on Wednesday to include the IRGC on the 27-nation bloc’s terror list in “light of its activities, the repression of protesters and its supplying of drones to Russia”. The vote is non-binding but comes with EU foreign ministers already due to discuss tightening sanctions on

the Islamic republic next week. “If the Europeans make a mistake, they must accept the consequences,” IRGC chief Major General Hossein Salami said, according to the Guards’ Sepah News website, in his first remarks on the EU move. The European Union “thinks that with such statements it can shake this huge army”, Salami said. “We are never worried about such threats or even acting on them, because as much as our enemies give us a chance to act, we act stronger,” he added.

Tanzania’s main opposition party holds first rally after six-year ban

AFP
Mwanza

Tanzania’s main opposition party yesterday held its first mass rally since the lifting of a 2016 ban, raising hope of greater political freedom in the East African nation.

President Samia Suluhu Hassan this month lifted the ban on Chadema slapped by her hard-line predecessor John Magufuli, who was nicknamed “Bulldozer” for his pugnacious style.

Hassan, in power for 22 months, is seeking to break with some of Magufuli’s policies and has made overtures to the opposition. “Thank God that the day has come when we speak with fellow Tanzanians through this public gathering,” Chadema chairman Freeman Mbowe told the rally, attended by thousands in the lakeside city of Mwanza.

The rally marked the 30th anniversary of the party’s political registration.

The supporters sported the party colours – blue, red and white – and sang songs praising their leaders as a handful of police officers guarded the venue. “We have been silent for almost seven years but finally, our right is restored and we are ready to move ahead,” Mwanza resident Mary Dismas said.



Supporters of Tanzania’s main opposition party Chadema sing and dance during their first political rally after an imposed ban in 2016 was lifted, at Furahisha Grounds in Mwanza, yesterday.

The move was cautiously welcomed as a gain for democracy by rights groups and the country’s opposition.

Magufuli had banned political rallies early in his tenure, saying it was time for work, not politics.

But critics said the ban applied only to opposition groups, with the ruling party free to assemble. Rival gatherings were violently broken up by police and party officials jailed. There was early optimism when Hassan, Tanzania’s first woman president, reached out to rivals, reopened banned media outlets and reversed some of Magufuli’s most controversial policies.

But her presidency came under criticism when Mbowe and other sen-

ior Chadema officials were arrested in July 2021 just hours before they were to hold a public meeting seeking constitutional reforms.

Hassan, who has battled divisions in her ruling Chama Cha Mapinduzi party, has since made conciliatory gestures towards the opposition. In early 2022, she met in Brussels with Chadema deputy chairman Tundu Lissu, who was the party’s candidate in the 2020 presidential election but lives in exile in Belgium after an attempt on his life in 2017. Lissu said last week that he would return to Tanzania on January 25, expressing optimism that “2023 is an important year in the history of our country.”

ANNOUNCEMENT

I, MADHAT MOHD IDREES KHAN
holder of

INDIAN Passport No. S9834918
QID No. 28135647012

hereby change my name

from

MADHAT MOHD IDREES KHAN

to

MADHAT NADEEM

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

ANNOUNCEMENT

I, DAISY JANE CORTEL ANTONINO
holder of

PHILIPPINES Passport No. P7666545B
QID No. 28960805605

hereby change my name

from

DAISY JANE CORTEL ANTONINO

to

DAISY JANE ANTONINO MARQUEZ

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

US Supreme Court justices were questioned, cleared in leak probe

Reuters
Washington

The US Supreme Court's chief security officer said on Friday that she spoke with each of the justices in her inquiry into who leaked a draft of its ruling overturning the 1973 Roe v Wade decision that had legalised abortion nationwide, adding that the probe found no information implicating them or their spouses.

Supreme Court Marshal Gail Curley made the statement a day after the court released a 20-page report based on the eight-month investigation she led that failed to identify who leaked

the draft to the news organisation Politico.

The report said that investigators interviewed 97 court employees but was silent on whether the nine justices who sat on the court at the time of the leak were interviewed, prompting calls from Democratic lawmakers and others for clarity.

"During the course of the investigation, I spoke with each of the justices, several on multiple occasions," Curley said in the statement, released by the court. "The justices actively co-operated in this iterative process, asking questions and answering mine."

"I followed up on all credible leads, none of which implicated the justices

or their spouses," Curley added.

Curley said that on that basis, she decided it was not necessary to ask the justices to sign sworn affidavits affirming that they did not leak the draft, something court employees were required to do.

The court's membership differed last May from today, with now-retired Justice Stephen Breyer still on the bench and current Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson, his successor appointed by President Joe Biden, not yet sworn in.

Conservative activists have sought to raise suspicions that one of the liberal justices or a staffer for them was responsible for the leak, just as liberal activists have sought to blame conserv-

ative justices or their staffers.

Gabe Roth, executive director of the court reform group Fix the Court, said the fact that the report initially omitted the fact that the justices were interviewed "smells fishy".

"That they were not asked to sign affidavits smells fishier," he added.

The leak represented an unprecedented violation of the court's tradition of confidentiality in the behind-the-scenes process of making rulings after hearing oral arguments in cases.

Mark Zaid, a Washington-based lawyer known for representing government whistleblowers, criticised the decision not to require sworn affidavits from the justices or their spouses, say-

ing that the court's credibility is on the line with the leak.

"Because the marshal could not even identify the leaker based on a low-level preponderance-of-evidence standard, it raises the question - at least from an appearance standpoint - as to whether a justice played a role in the leak, and that scenario remains unaddressed," Zaid said.

Chief Justice John Roberts directed Curley to investigate after Politico last May published a draft of the opinion authored by Justice Samuel Alito in the case Dobbs v Jackson Women's Health Organisation.

The ruling was formally issued in June.

Alito found himself in the middle of another leak controversy in November after the *New York Times* reported a former anti-abortion leader's assertion that he was told in advance about how the court would rule in a major 2014 case involving insurance coverage for women's birth control.

Rob Schenck, an evangelical Christian minister, told the *Times* and later a congressional panel that weeks before the ruling was issued he was informed about its contents shortly after two conservative allies of his dined at the home of Alito and his wife.

Alito has said that any allegation that he or his wife leaked the 2014 decision was "completely false".

Canada to repatriate 23 citizens from Syria

AFP
Montreal

Canada will repatriate twenty-three citizens who have been detained in northeast Syria in camps for family members of Islamic State (IS) group fighters, officials and a lawyer said on Friday.

It would be the largest such repatriation of IS family members yet for Canada, and it comes after the families challenged the government in court, arguing Ottawa was obliged to repatriate the group under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Earlier on Friday, the foreign ministry announced its decision to repatriate six Canadian women and 13 infants.

And a court later ruled that four men seeking repatriation as part of the group must also be sent back to Canada, said lawyer Barbara Jackman, who is representing one of the men.

"I've spoken to the parents and they're really, really happy," Jackman said of the court decision, adding that the judge requested that the men be repatriated "as soon as reasonably possible".

The foreign ministry said in a statement: "The safety and security of Canadians is our government's top priority."

"We continue to evaluate the provision of extraordinary assistance on a case-by-case basis, including repatriation to Canada, in line with the policy framework adopted in 2021," it said.

Up until now the government of Justin Trudeau has treated the detained IS families on a case-by-case basis, and in four years only a handful of women and children have been repatriated.

Since the destruction of the so-called Islamic State "caliphate" across Syria and Iraq in 2019, more than 42,400 foreign adults and children with alleged ties to the Islamic State group have been held in camps in Syria, according to Human Rights Watch.

Repatriating them is a highly sensitive issue for many countries, but rights groups have denounced their reluctance to bring back their own nationals from the camps, controlled mostly by Syrian Kurds.

Human Rights Watch said that around 30 Canadian citizens, including 10 infants, remain in the camps.

Farida Deif, the group's head in Canada, said Global Affairs Canada has informed a number of them by letter that they fulfil the requirements for repatriation.

However, she said, "none of the men have been notified of anything or have been part of any agreements thus far".

The authorities did not say when the 19 would come to Canada or whether any of them would face legal proceedings for their association with Islamic State.

Last October Canada brought back two women and two children from Syria.

In 2020, Ottawa allowed the return of a five-year-old orphan girl from Syria after her uncle initiated a legal action against the Canadian government.

Over 50 injured in Peru protest 'chaos'

Peru closes famed tourist site Machu Picchu due to protests

Reuters/AFP
Lima

Dozens of Peruvians were injured after tensions flared again on Friday night as police clashed with protesters in anti-government demonstrations that are spreading across the country.

In the capital Lima, police officers used tear gas to repel demonstrators throwing glass bottles and stones, as fires burned in the streets, local TV footage showed.

In the country's southern Puno region, some 1,500 protesters attacked a police station in the town of Ilave, Interior Minister Vicente Romero said in a statement to news media.

A police station in Zepita, Puno, was also on fire, Romero said.

Health authorities in Ilave reported eight patients hospitalised with injuries, including broken arms and legs, eye contusions and punctured abdomens.

By late afternoon, 58 people had been injured nationwide in demonstrations, according to a report from Peru's ombudsman.

The unrest followed a day of turmoil in Thursday, when one of Lima's most historic buildings burned to the ground, as President Dina Boluarte vowed to get tougher on "vandals".

The destruction of the building, a near-century-old mansion in central Lima, was described by officials as the loss of a "monumental asset".

Authorities are investigating the causes.

Romero on Friday claimed the blaze was "duly planned and arranged".

Thousands of protesters descended on Lima this week calling for change and angered by the protests' mounting death toll, which officially stood at 46 yesterday.

Authorities announced yesterday that yet another protester had died following demonstrations in the country's south, with the victim arriving already deceased at the local hospital in Puno.

Protests have rocked Peru since president Pedro Castillo was ousted in December after he attempted to dissolve the legislature to prevent an impeachment vote.

The unrest has until this week been concentrated in Peru's south.

In the Cusco region, Glencore's major Antapacay copper mine suspended operations on Friday after protesters attacked the premises - one of the largest in the country - for the third time this month.

Airports in Arequipa, Cusco and the southern city of Juliaca were also attacked by demonstrators, delivering a fresh blow to Peru's tourism industry.

"It's nationwide chaos, you can't live like this. We are in a terrible uncertainty - the economy, vandalism," said Lima resident Leonardo Rojas.

The government has extended a state of emergency to six regions.

Boluarte has dismissed calls for her to resign and hold snap elections, instead calling for dialogue and promising to punish those involved in the unrest.

"All the rigour of the law will fall on those people who have acted with vandalism," Boluarte said on Thursday.

Some locals pointed the finger at Boluarte, accusing her of not taking action to quell the protests, which began on December 7 in response to the ouster and arrest of Castillo.

Human rights groups have accused the police and army of using deadly firearms.

The police say protesters have used weapons and homemade explosives.

Meanwhile, Peru has closed its famed tourist site Machu Picchu amid anti-government protests, its ministry of culture said yesterday, with hundreds of tourists having been left stranded near the Inca citadel amid deadly unrest.

Prior to yesterday's closing of Machu Picchu, rail services to the site had already been suspended due to the track being damaged by demonstrators.

At least 400 people, including 300 foreigners, are stranded at the foot of the site, in the town of Aguas Calientes, and pleading to be evacuated.

"The closure of the Inca trails network and the Machu Picchu citadel has been ordered due to the social situation and to preserve the safety of visitors,"



A woman waves a Peruvian flag in front of riot police in Lima.



A riot police officer fires tear gas at demonstrators during a protest in Lima against the government of President Dina Boluarte.



Riot police officers enter the San Marcos University campus in Lima to confront and arrest rioters hiding in the premises.

the ministry of culture said in its statement yesterday.

"We don't know if a train will pick us up. All the tourists here are queuing to register" for evacuation, Chilean tourist Alem Lopez told AFP on Friday.

Tourists "cannot leave because the

railway has been damaged in different places", Tourism Minister Luis Fernando Helguero said on Friday.

"Some tourists have chosen to walk to Piscacucho, but that takes six hours or more and very few people can do it," he said.

Piscacucho is the closest village to Machu Picchu that is connected to the roads.

In December, several hundred stranded tourists were evacuated from near the site.

Buzz Aldrin marries on his 93rd birthday

AFP/Reuters
Los Angeles/Washington

Legendary Apollo 11 astronaut Buzz Aldrin, the second person to set foot on the moon, said he had married his long-time girlfriend on Friday, his 93rd birthday.

Aldrin and Anca Faur, executive vice-president of Buzz Aldrin Ventures, were wed in a private ceremony.

"On my 93rd birthday ... I am pleased to announce that my longtime love Dr Anca Faur & I have tied the knot," Aldrin tweeted along with pictures of himself and Faur, who is reportedly 63. "We were joined in holy matrimony in a small private ceremony in

Los Angeles & are as excited as eloping teenagers."

According to her LinkedIn profile, Faur earned a doctorate in chemical engineering from the University of Pittsburgh in 1996 and had previously worked for Union Carbide and Johnson Matthey before joining Buzz Aldrin Ventures.

She had also served as treasurer for the California Hydrogen Business Council.

Aldrin's three previous marriages ended in divorce.

The astronaut is the last surviving member of the Apollo 11 mission, during which he and Neil Armstrong become the first people to set foot on the Moon, on July 20, 1969.

Michael Collins, who piloted the command module while his crewmates walked

on the lunar surface, died in April 2021, and Armstrong died in 2012.

Since retiring from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (Nasa) in 1971, Aldrin has remained a strong advocate of space exploration.

A crater on the Moon near the Apollo 11 landing site is named in his honour.

The intense fame generated by the Apollo 11 mission 54 years ago overwhelmed Aldrin after he returned to Earth.

The former fighter pilot suffered from depression and alcoholism, but ultimately came to terms with his fame and has been known since for his public appearances.

He is also the author of nine books and remains an advocate for human space exploration.



This photo taken on July 17, 2019 shows former Nasa astronaut Buzz Aldrin with then-girlfriend Anca Faur. Aldrin married Faur on Friday, on his 93rd birthday.

A fifth of new cars in California in 2022 were zero-emission: data

AFP
Los Angeles

One-in-five new cars sold in California in 2022 was a zero-emission vehicle, the state said on Friday, as the largest car market in the United States charges towards its goal of electrifying its fleet.

Last year officials set ambitious targets for boosting the number of electric vehicles (EVs) and plug-in hybrid vehicles (PHEVs) on the roads, as they look to slash planet-warming gases produced by combustion engines.

The California Air Resources Board announced in August the sale of new

gasoline and diesel-powered cars would be eliminated by 2035, setting an aggressive timeline to phase them out.

On Friday the California Energy Commission said 18.8% of new cars sold in the state in 2022 were EVs, PHEVs or fuel cell electric vehicles, all of which California includes in its zero-emission category.

Ten years ago, that figure was 2%.

"California continues to lead the zero-emission vehicle revolution with groundbreaking policies and investments that drive innovation, create good jobs and expand (zero-emission vehicle) access and affordability across the state," said Governor Gavin Newsom.

"Keeping our focus on the communities that are most impacted by the intensifying climate crisis, we'll keep pushing ahead to make our clean transportation future a reality in California."

Data showed Tesla continued to dominate the market for EVs, with around two-thirds of the 346,000 zero-emission vehicles sold in the year being made by Elon Musk's company.

California already accounts for the lion's share of electric vehicles in the United States, with 1.4mn of them on the state's roads, and around 40% of all ZEV sales in the US are in the state.

Their popularity has mushroomed in the years since they were seen as little more than novelty golf carts for tree-

huggers who were content to drive no more than a few dozen miles.

Mainstream manufacturers like Ford and Mercedes are rushing headlong into the market, producing everything from small runarounds to luxury sedans to heavy duty pick-ups.

Still, the vehicles remain more expensive than their fossil fuel-powered equivalents, and critics say only federal subsidies of up to \$7,500 make them viable for many buyers.

However, supporters say the incentives are necessary short-term supports that will fade away as increased adoption boosts economies of scale and drives down prices.

As the biggest auto market in the

United States, California has an outsized influence on national standards.

Environmentalists hope that as manufacturers fall into line with California's rules and produce more attractive, cheaper EVs, opposition from less liberal states will be overcome, and America can be weaned off its addiction to gas-guzzling cars.

Human-caused global warming has already raised average temperatures around the planet, affecting weather patterns and worsening natural hazards like wildfires and storms.

Scientists say dramatic action is required to limit the damage, and point to curbing emissions from fossil fuels as key to the battle.

Three killed in shoot-out in Thailand’s troubled south

AFP
Narathiwat

Three people were killed in a jungle shoot-out between government forces and separatist rebels in Thailand’s troubled deep south, police said yesterday.

A low-level conflict has simmered in the country’s south-easternmost provinces since 2004, killing more than 7,000 people, as rebels in the region battle for

greater autonomy from the state. Thai police and soldiers on Friday trekked up a mountain in Narathiwat province, where they encountered an armed separatist group that began shooting, according to police.

“They started to shoot at us so we had to retaliate, which left three people dead,” local police chief Suthon Sukwiset told AFP. “We discovered three M16s in their possession and have confiscated them.” No police or troops were killed or injured in the op-

eration, which lasted at least five hours. Thailand’s far south - heavily policed by security forces - is culturally distinct from the rest of the Buddhist-majority country, which colonised the area bordering Malaysia over a century ago.

Representatives of the Thai government and the Barisan Revolusi Nasional rebel group met in Kuala Lumpur last year for their first in-person peace talks in about two years, though no breakthrough was achieved.

Thai elephant camp adds more jumbos as Chinese tourists return

An elephant camp in Thailand has purchased six new jumbos to welcome tourists and returning Chinese visitors, offering activities from elephant rides to elephant showers, the owner said. Pang Chang Kamala Elephant Camp on the resort island of Phuket is also adding programmes such as elephant care due to a rise in bookings after the Lunar New Year, camp owner Wittaya Taweeros told Reuters. “As the

number of tourists has increased, we’re ready to welcome them, also with our newly bought elephants,” Wittaya said. With 25 elephants now, the camp can receive 300 tourists per day, up from 200, he added. Wittaya said he was confident that more tourists will come. “We’ve already got 60-70% bookings after the Lunar New Year from the same agent we worked with before the pandemic,” he said. Thailand’s

vital tourism sector is seeing a quick rebound after the lifting of Covid restrictions last year, with the government is expecting 25 million foreign visitors in 2023, including five million from China as it reopens. China’s reopening raises hopes for the return of Chinese visitors, who accounted for nearly a third of Thailand’s 40mn foreign tourist arrivals in pre-pandemic 2019. — Reuters

Red-letter day



Tokyo Tower is lit up in red to celebrate the Chinese Lunar New Year in Tokyo yesterday.



Chris Hipkins speaks to members of the media, after being confirmed as the only nomination to replace Jacinda Ardern as leader of the Labour Party, outside New Zealand’s parliament in Wellington.

Hipkins vows to win poll as next New Zealand PM

AFP
Auckland

New Zealand’s incoming prime minister Chris Hipkins vowed yesterday to “get things done” and win a looming October general election after being chosen as his party’s only candidate to replace Jacinda Ardern.

The 44-year-old red-headed politician emerged as the sole nominee to lead the ruling Labour Party in a meeting of fellow members of parliament, and now faces what is seen as the mere formality of a confirmation by his colleagues today.

As leader of the party, he will take over as the country’s 41st prime minister following Ardern’s shock resignation on Thursday. Ardern said she would step down by February 7 but could do so earlier given that her

successor was chosen in barely 48 hours.

“I like to think I am pretty decisive and I can get things done,” said Hipkins, who became a household name for leading the nation’s Covid-19 crackdown for nearly two years. With his party lagging in the opinion polls under criticism over rising prices, poverty and crime rates, reporters gathered outside parliament in Wellington asked if he can win general elections to be held on October 14. “Yes,” he replied.

Ardern, a global figurehead for progressive politics, stunned New Zealand 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

said her decision to step down was “tinged with sadness” but after having made the announcement 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.

Hipkins praised Ardern as “the leader we needed at the time that we needed it”, but agreed that she had been on the receiving end of “absolutely intolerable vitriol”.

Ardern’s successor is widely seen as a safe pair of hands with more than 14 years in parliament. Hipkins told reporters he was feeling “energised and enthusiastic” about the new job. “It’s a big day for a boy from the Hutt,” he said, referring to the Hutt Valley region near Wellington.

“My parents came from relatively humble beginnings and worked really hard to provide a

good life for my brother and I,” Hipkins added, vowing to give New Zealanders the opportunities to improve their lives. The incoming prime minister said he had already spoken to Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese.

He declined to give policy or ministerial plans beyond saying that he did plan to keep Finance Minister Grant Robertson in place. Opposition leader Chris Luxon of the centre-right National Party congratulated Hipkins but said: “The reality is that he’s been a critical part of a government that has failed to get anything done.”

“Just changing the leadership of the Labour Party doesn’t do enough for the New Zealand people.”

Hipkins’ selection quashed speculation that Justice Minister Kiri Allan, one of Labour’s senior Maori MPs, might have become

the country’s first Maori prime minister. Allan praised Hipkins as decisive and said she believed he would be “an incredibly strong prime minister”.

Hipkins won plaudits for his near two-year term as the Covid response minister in a country that shut down its borders to keep the coronavirus out, only fully reopening in August last year. He conceded last year that people were fed up with the strict pandemic restrictions, describing the border closures as “tough going”.

Hipkins told reporters Saturday that he likes cycling, gardening, DIY and being outdoors but conceded: “Maybe I don’t have the best fashion sense in parliament.”

Asked about whether being a red-haired prime minister would be a historic moment, he said: “I think it was about time we had a ginger at the top.”

Wuhan markets celebrate New Year but grief remains

AFP
Wuhan

Shoppers cradled huge bouquets at Wuhan’s bustling flower market on Lunar New Year’s Eve on Saturday, three years after a once-mysterious virus plunged the Chinese city into a terrifying lockdown.

But while many stock up on colourful flowers to celebrate the Spring Festival and the arrival of the Year of the Rabbit, others have a more sombre reason: to mourn loved ones lost to Covid-19 in the recent wave. “I have friends and family who passed away during this time,” 54-year-old Mr Zhang told AFP clutching a bunch of chrysanthemums, which symbolise grief in Chinese culture.

Zhang, who did not give his full name, explained that the New Year’s Eve custom in Hubei province, of which Wuhan is the capital, is to visit the homes of people who recently died to offer flowers and burn incense.

The Beijing government lifted its stringent zero-Covid policy in December but a surge in infections has since ripped through the country, killing thousands. Wuhan, a metropolis on the banks of the Yangtze River now synonymous with Covid, reported the first cases in late 2019 of what was then a killer virus.

Authorities imposed a strict shutdown just two days before the Year of the Rat in late January 2020 to stop the spread of the virus. Deprived of New Year’s Eve festivities, its 11mn inhabitants were cut off from the world for 76 days while Wuhan became the epicentre of an epidemic that inexorably became global.

On Saturday, a few hours before New Year’s Eve 2023, the city was seemingly back to normal and gearing up for the festival that is the most important family gathering of the year.

Multicoloured lanterns and pennants adorned the city’s Jiangnan commercial district and a banner with a heart read “I love Wuhan”. An elderly man struggled to pedal his bicycle loaded with packages and food, while a couple with a toddler squeezed on to a scooter on their way back from the shops.

“Of course it’s way better after opening up,” Ms Zhu told AFP as she bought decorative flowers. “Now, since everyone has had Covid already, we can properly have a good Chinese New Year. So that makes us quite happy.”

Business is finally back on track again for flower sellers after years of struggles. “At the start of the year with Covid, we had no business,” said Ms Liu, a tradeswoman in her sixties. “Now that we’ve reopened, we have a bit more business.”

Ms Tao, another vendor, was putting the finishing touches on a floral arrangement. “During Covid, there were very few people buying flowers but these few years many people have died from Covid, so our sales for chrysanthemums have been pretty high,” she said.

“We didn’t sell any flowers we had during the lockdown that year of Covid. We threw them all away.”



A woman selling flowers along a street waits for customers on the eve of the Lunar New Year in Wuhan, in China’s central Hubei province.



People walk through a decorated food court that is part of a Spring Festival light installation ahead of Chinese Lunar New Year in Qinglonghu Park in Beijing.

China’s pet sitters back in business after Covid reopening

AFP
Beijing

At Zhou Tianxiao’s hotel in Beijing’s northern suburbs, reservations are filling up fast as the loosening of Covid restrictions in China fuels a travel boom. Zhou’s dog mansion is just one of many pet sitting services that has seen a welcome return to former levels of bookings since a semblance of normal life resumed.

Zhou, who is also an internet influencer, originally built the half-million-dollar facility for the comfort of just one dog - his own border collie Sylar - before turning it into a business.

Painted in colourful murals with a massive yard and individual video-linked pens, it’s a popular choice for Beijingers who want to leave their pampered pooches in safe hands over the Lunar New Year holiday. “During the Spring Festival, people normally need to visit their relatives and friends and usually they can’t bring their dogs with them during those visits,” Zhou explained. “And we have a swimming pool. For dogs being sent here it’s like having their own holiday,” he chuckled.

Millions of Chinese are reuniting with family for the first time since the pandemic broke out in late 2019. Included among them are thousands of clients from the pet-sitting platform Maoxiang, which means “Cat Alley” in English. “We have more orders for this Spring Festival than for the

entire year last year,” founder Yan Dong told AFP. “When the pandemic situation was severe, people just didn’t leave their homes. We were badly affected because there wasn’t much demand,” she said.

Seven Sha, a 30-year-old cat sitter based in Beijing, told AFP she expects to make about 80 home visits during the holiday’s main seven days. “My workload during the Spring Festival is saturated every day... I have to work from early in the morning to late at night,” she said.

Pet ownership in China has soared as the country’s middle class expands rapidly. In 2022, there were nearly 100mn pet-owning households. Many are devoted owners prepared to fork over their money to ensure their pets’ comfort. Media in Shanghai reported that a single night in some pet sitting establishments was priced at 1,000 yuan (\$147), well over the average price of a hotel room for a person. Sha said someone once sent her a 1,000-word document on how to look after their cat.

“Most of the clients see their cats as their family members, and they don’t care how much they spend on them,” she said. Some even prefer their furry family members over their human ones. “Personally, I’d rather spend time with the dogs here than go back home,” said Mei, a worker at Zhou’s dog hotel. “Like most families, when we first meet for the holidays it’s very happy - but as time goes on, there may be some arguments.”

US border arrests drop so far this month after new curbs, say sources

Reuters
Washington

The number of migrants caught crossing the US-Mexico border illegally in January plummeted amid a seasonal slowdown and implementation of new restrictions imposed by US President Joe Biden, a tenuous reprieve as he grapples with record crossings.

US Border Patrol agents have arrested an average of about 4,000 migrants per day in January, three US officials told Reuters this week.

That's down from an average of around 7,400 per day during the week before Christmas, one of the officials said.

At the current pace, border arrests could be the lowest since February 2021, a month after Biden took office.

However, whether the trend will hold for the rest of the month, let alone beyond, remains unclear.

Biden, a Democrat who intends to seek re-election in 2024, earlier this month expanded coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic-related restrictions that allow migrants caught at the US-Mexico border to be rapidly expelled back to Mexico.

The restrictions, known as Title 42, had previously been applied to Mexicans, some Central Americans and Venezuelans, and were extended to Cubans, Haitians and Nicaraguans after Mexico agreed to accept those nationalities.

At the same time, the Biden administration launched a new humanitarian entry programme for 30,000 Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans and Venezuelans per month if they have US sponsors and enter by air.

"The process we have created is safe, fast and only costs the price of a commercial plane ticket," a Biden administration official said. "Compared to the thousands of dollars smugglers are charging migrants for a dangerous journey, the choice is clear."

Several US officials said border arrests typically dip in late December into early January due to holidays, which likely contributed to the January drop-off.

US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

US Border Patrol agents apprehended 206,000 migrants at the southwest border in November.

December figures, which are not yet publicly available, could be higher after an increase of arrivals last month in El Paso, Texas.

Arizona dismantles 'wall' of shipping containers on border with Mexico

AFP
Hereford, US

A wall of shipping containers installed just a few months ago by the then-governor of Arizona at a \$100mn cost to US taxpayers is being dismantled.

Republican Doug Ducey ordered the huge line of shipping containers to be placed at the frontier between the US and Mexico, during the final months of his administration, in what he said was a bid to stem illegal immigration.

However, after being sued by Washington for putting the containers on federal land in the Coronado National Forest, Ducey - who has since been succeeded by Democrat Katie Hobbs - agreed in December to remove them.

"I couldn't believe that Governor Ducey thought that it was a good idea,"

said Debbie McGuire, as a truck barrelled down a dusty road carrying an empty container away.

"It's absolutely ludicrous. To put containers that weren't going to work ever to keep anybody out," she told AFP. "I just can't believe he thought it was a good idea. Ridiculous, and a total waste of taxpayer money."

Ducey's container wall effort began in the middle of 2022, and quickly ran into opposition, with critics slamming it as a cynical political move that would damage the environment and have no effect on the number of illegal border crossings.

Opponents said that the corrugated containers, which snaked like a huge cargo train for four miles (7km) through federal lands, divided an important conservation area.

They also pointed out that the terrain is so difficult to traverse that people



A truck drives away with a shipping container removed from row of those stacked to create a wall between the US and Mexico, near Hereford, Arizona.

traffickers have never really used it.

In practice, the double-stacked containers were ill-suited to keeping people out - their rigid shape means they

didn't always line up, leaving gaping holes between boxes easily big enough for a person to fit through.

"It's just political gamesmanship,"



Art and culture

People take pictures with *Gaia*, British artist Luke Jerram's huge floating Earth installation, in London's Canary Wharf.

Left: A dancer performs a fire breathing act during a procession in Amritsar yesterday.



Women dry a sari after taking a dip on the banks of the Sangam, the confluence of the Ganges, Yamuna and Saraswati rivers, as part of a ritual during the Magh Mela festival, in Prayagraj, India.



A Chinese lion dance troupe perform yesterday in London's Chinatown on the eve of the Lunar New Year.

Stagecoach founder charged after police probe into human trafficking

AFP
London

The co-founder of Britain's biggest bus and coach operator has been charged following an investigation into alleged human trafficking and immigration offences, Scottish police and her lawyer said yesterday.

Ann Gloag, who co-founded the Stagecoach bus company with her brother more than four decades ago, was charged with unspecified offences along with three other people on Thursday, according to Police Scotland.

"On 19 January, 2023, four individuals were charged in connection with an investigation into alleged human trafficking and immigration offences," the force said.

"A report will be sent to the Procurator Fiscal," it added, referring to the nation's prosecution service, which declined to comment on the case.

No further details have been disclosed by official agencies.

However, BBC News reported that 80-year-old Gloag's husband David McCleary and two other members of their family were the others charged.

All four strongly deny the charges against them, the broadcaster said.

A spokesperson for Gloag, who was made a dame in 2019 for her business and charitable work, said she "strongly disputes the malicious allegations that have been made against her, her foundation and members of her family".

"(She) will vigorously defend herself and the work of her foundation to protect her legacy and continue her work helping thousands of people in the UK and abroad every year," the spokesperson added.

Gloag created The Gloag Foundation in 2008 as a charitable trust which works to support projects that "prevent or relieve poverty and encourage the advancement of education, health and religion in the UK and overseas", according to its website.

The allegations are believed to relate to people brought to Scotland as part of the charity's work, according to the BBC.

A source close to Gloag told these accusations that the family were "victims of collusion" and had endured "a Kafkaesque nightmare for the last two years".

"Everybody is bewildered by these accusations and the level of this investigation," the source added.

Stagecoach, set up in 1980 and which went on to become the UK's biggest bus and coach operator, is now managed by DWS Infrastructure.

Gloag, previously Scotland's richest woman, retired from the firm in 2019.

'Aquaman' warns of deep-sea mining peril

AFP
Park City, US

He is best known as hunky, sea-dwelling superhero Aquaman, but actor Jason Momoa brought a stark and sober warning about the perils of deep-sea mining to the Sundance film festival on Friday.

The Hawaiian-born A-listers narrates *Deep Rising*, a new documentary about the frenzied efforts by resource-hungry corporations to scrape valuable metals from vast swathes of the Pacific floor.

Supporters of deep-sea mining claim that pellets of nickel and cobalt - used in electric car batteries - can be conveniently scooped off the seabed, helping reduce our fossil fuel reliance.

However, conservation groups and scientists fear this could devastate poorly understood marine systems that play a crucial role in regulating the climate, and some nations have called for bans.

"There's moments where I cried and got emotional" narrating the film, Momoa told AFP, before its world premiere at the festival in Utah.

"It's very important, using your power for good. It's all the things I'm passionate about," added the actor, who took marine biology courses as a student, and is a UN



Jason Momoa at the 2023 Sundance Film Festival for the *Deep Rising* premiere.

Environment Programme advocate for the oceans.

The documentary follows key players in the fledgling industry, including the Metals Company, a Canadian group pushing to mine the Clarion Clipperton Zone - a vast expanse of seafloor near Hawaii.

The film goes behind-the-scenes as its chief executive Gerard Barron courts wealthy investors with promises that little harm will be done to "the most barren, desolate part of the planet", in contrast to the devastation that ongoing mining is causing rainforests.

However, *Deep Rising* director Matthieu Rytz told AFP that "we know so little" about the real risk to the deep ocean.

"Extraction on the seafloor, it's just a rush, because we don't have enough science to really understand what's happening there," he said.

Still, the Metals Company has said it expects to be mining 10mn tonnes of material from the ocean floor every year, starting in 2025.

And it is just one of about 20 research institutes or corporations that hold ocean exploration contracts, awaiting the go-ahead to begin commercial-scale mining.

Rytz's film argues that the energy crisis has no "silver bullet", and that the brewing race to harvest critical metals is not a solution but "the new oil", and could trigger future resource wars.

It shows meetings of the International Seabed Authority, described by Rytz as an "obscure room in Kingston, Jamaica" where delegates decide "the future of 65% of the planet's surface".

Rytz speaks in the film with scientists who argue that alternative clean, more abundant energy sources such as hydrogen should be explored for car engines, or that transport options such as high-speed rail should be expanded.

"We don't need these metals in the first place," he said. "The places we're going to be mining, it's total damage. There's no half damage. It's like clear-cutting a rainforest."

For Momoa, watching the film, "you're supposed to question things. You're supposed to sit down and have breakfast, talk about stuff and go, 'We need to rethink everything'"

People-smuggling gang boss held on return to UK

The convicted ringleader of a Kurdish people-smuggling gang, on the run when he was sentenced in absentia last month to eight years in prison, has been arrested, the National Crime Agency (NCA) said yesterday.

Tarik Namik, 45, of Oldham near Manchester, northwest England, was detained on Friday after landing at Manchester Airport on a flight from Istanbul.

Police had issued a warrant for his arrest following his no-show at Manchester Crown Court last month, when he was convicted of heading a "sophisticated, lucrative criminal enterprise" smuggling Kurdish migrants.

Working with traffickers abroad, the group is suspected of smuggling at least 1,900 migrants who were picked up in the Balkans and brought to France or Germany during a 50-day period.

The gang then offered different means for trying to enter Britain, where the migrants would claim asylum.

Kurdish groups control the

cross-Channel illegal migration routes, using both lorries and, more recently, small boats to cross the busy shipping lane, according to the NCA.

A surge in the small vessel crossings since 2017 has led to tens of thousands of migrants now arriving annually on England's southeastern coast, rather than hidden in trucks.

Alongside Namik, four other men - based in Manchester, Stoke-on-Trent and Nottingham - received sentences ranging from 16 months to nearly five years for their role in the criminal scheme.

All five had admitted the charges against them at previous hearings.

"Namik was a prolific people smuggler whose crime group put vulnerable migrants at great risk while he reaped the profits," said NCA Branch Commander Richard Harrison.

"Fugitives never come off our radar, and I'd like to thank our colleagues at Greater Manchester Police for their assistance in ensuring he was detained quickly the moment he set foot back in the UK." - AFP

CHAIRMAN
Abdullah bin Khalifa al-Attiyah

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Faisal Abdulhameed al-Mudahka

Deputy Managing Editor
K T Chacko

P.O.Box 2888, Doha, Qatar

editor@gulf-times.com

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

44350474

facebook.com/gulftimes

twitter.com/gulftimes_Qatar

GULF TIMES

Debt-service payments put biggest squeeze on economically weak countries

The eligible poorest countries that can borrow from the World Bank now seems to spend over a tenth of their export revenues to service their long-term public and publicly guaranteed external debt — the highest proportion since 2000.

A recent report by the World Bank has highlighted rising debt-related risks for all developing economies — low as well as middle-income economies.

At the end of 2021, the external debt of these economies totalled \$9tn, more than double the amount a decade ago. During the same period, the total external debt of IDA countries, or those seeking assistance from World Bank's International Development Association, nearly tripled to \$1tn.

Rising interest rates and slowing global growth risk tipping a large number of countries into debt crises. About 60% of the poorest countries are already at high risk of debt distress or already in distress.

At the end of 2021, World Bank's IDA eligible countries' debt-service payments on long-term public and publicly guaranteed external debt totalled \$46.2bn — equivalent to 10.3% of their exports of goods and services and 1.8% of their gross national income (GNI), according to the report.

Those percentages were up significantly from 2010, when they stood at 3.2% and 0.7% respectively.

In 2022, IDA countries' debt-service payments on their public and publicly guaranteed debt are projected to rise by 35% to more than \$62bn, one of the highest annual increases of the past two decades.

China is expected to account for 66% of the debt-service payments to be made by IDA countries on their official bilateral debt.

"The debt crisis facing developing countries has intensified," said World Bank Group President David Malpass.

"A comprehensive approach is needed to reduce debt, increase transparency, and facilitate swifter restructuring — so countries can focus on spending that supports growth and reduces poverty. Without it, many countries and their governments face a fiscal crisis and political instability, with millions of people falling into poverty."

In 2022, global growth had slowed sharply. Amid one of the most internationally synchronous episodes of monetary and fiscal policy tightening the world has seen in 50 years, the risk of a global recession this year has been rising.

Currency depreciation has made matters worse for many developing countries whose debt is denominated in US dollars. The 2021 debt-to-GNI improvement, as a result, is likely temporary.

Over the past decade, the composition of debt owed by IDA countries has changed significantly. The share of external debt owed to private creditors has increased sharply. At the end of 2021, low- and middle-income economies owed 61% of their public and publicly guaranteed debt to private creditors — an increase of 15 percentage points from 2010.

IDA-eligible countries owed 21% of their external debt to private creditors by the end of last year, a 16-point increase from 2010.

Also, the share of debt owed to government creditors that don't belong to the Paris Club (such as China, India, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, and others) has soared.

Obviously, these developments have made it much harder for countries facing debt distress to quickly restructure their debt.

To Advertise
 advr@gulf-times.com

Display
 44466621 44418811

Classified
 44466609 44418811

Subscription
 circulation@gulf-times.com

© 2023 Gulf Times. All rights reserved



In Mexico, media on edge

By Sarah Kinosian
Mexico City

Just after sunset on Thursday, February 10th, two men in a white Dodge Ram pickup pulled up in front of Heber Lopez Vasquez's small radio studio in southern Mexico. One man got out, walked inside and shot the 42-year-old journalist dead. Lopez's 12-year-old son Oscar, the only person with him, hid, Lopez's brother told Reuters.

Lopez was one of 13 Mexican journalists killed in 2022, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), a New York-based rights group. It was the deadliest year on record for journalists in Mexico, now the most dangerous country for reporters in the world outside the war in Ukraine, where CPJ says 15 reporters were killed last year.

A day earlier, Lopez—who ran two online news sites in the southern Oaxaca state—had published a story on Facebook accusing local politician Arminda Espinosa Cartas of corruption related to her re-election efforts.

As he lay dead, a nearby patrol car responded to an emergency call, intercepted the pickup and arrested the two men. One of them, it later emerged, was the brother of Espinosa, the politician in Lopez's story.

Espinosa has not been charged in connection with Lopez's killing. She did not respond to multiple requests for comment and Reuters could not find any previous comment she made about her role in corruption or on Lopez's story.

Her brother and the other man remain detained but have yet to be tried. Their lawyer did not respond to multiple requests for comment.

"I already stopped covering drug trafficking and corruption and Heber's death still scares me," said Hiram Moreno, a veteran Oaxacan journalist who was shot three times in 2019, sustaining injuries in the leg and back, after writing about drug deals by local crime groups. His assailant was never identified. "You cannot count on the government. Self-censorship is the only thing that will keep you safe."

It is a pattern of fear and intimidation playing out across Mexico, as years of violence and impunity have created what academics call "silence zones" where killing and corruption go unchecked and undocumented.

"In silence zones people don't get access to basic information to conduct their lives," said Jan-Albert Hootsen, CPJ's Mexico representative. "They don't know who to vote for because there are no corruption investigations. They don't know which areas are violent, what they can say and not say, so they stay silent."

President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador's spokesman did not respond to a request for comment about attacks on the media.

Since the start of Mexico's drug war in 2006, 133 reporters have been killed for motives related to their work, CPJ determined, and another 13 for undetermined reasons. In that time Mexico has registered over 360,000 homicides.

Aggression against journalists has spread in recent years to previously less hostile areas—such as Oaxaca and Chiapas—threatening to turn more parts of Mexico into information dead zones, say rights groups like Reporters Without Borders and 10 local journalists.

Lopez was the second journalist since mid-2021 to be murdered in Salina Cruz, a Pacific port in Oaxaca. It nestles in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, a skinny stretch of land connecting the Gulf of Mexico and the Pacific that has become a landing spot for precursor chemicals to make fentanyl and meth, according to three security analysts and a DEA source.

Lopez's last story, one of several he wrote about Espinosa, covered the politician's alleged efforts to get a company constructing a breakwater in Salina Cruz's port to threaten workers to cast their vote for her re-election or else be fired.

The infrastructure was a part of the Interoceanic Corridor—one of Lopez Obrador's flagship development projects in southern Mexico.

Jose Ignacio Martinez, a crime reporter in the isthmus, and nine of

Lopez's fellow journalists say since his murder they are more afraid to publish stories delving into the corridor project, drug trafficking and state collusion with organised crime.

One outlet Reuters spoke to, which asked not to be named for fear of reprisals, said it had done an investigation on the corridor, but did not feel safe to publish after Lopez's death.

Lopez Obrador's spokesman did not respond to a request for comment about corruption accusations related to the corridor.

In 2012 the government established the Mechanism for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders and Journalists.

Known simply as the Mechanism, the body provides journalists with protections such as panic buttons, surveillance equipment, home police watch, armed guards and relocation. Since 2017, nine Mechanism-protected reporters have been murdered, CPJ found.

Journalists and activists may request protection from the Mechanism, which evaluates their case along with a group of human rights defenders, journalists and representatives of non-profits, as well as officials from various government agencies that make up a governing board. Not all those who request protection receive it, based on the analysis.

At present there are 1,600 people enrolled in the Mechanism, including 500 journalists.

One of those killed was Gustavo Sanchez, a journalist shot at close range in June 2021 by two motorcycle-riding hitmen. Sanchez, who had written critical articles about politicians and criminal groups, enrolled in the Mechanism for a third time after surviving an assassination attempt in 2020. Protection never arrived.

Oaxaca's prosecutor at the time said Sanchez's coverage of local elections would be a primary line of investigation into his murder. No one has been charged in the case.

Sanchez's killing triggered Mexico's human rights commission to produce a

100-page investigation into authorities' failings. Evidence "revealed omissions, delays, negligence and breach of duties by at least 15 public servants," said the report.

Enrique Irazoque, head of the Interior Ministry's department for the Defense of Human Rights, said the Mechanism accepted the findings, but highlighted the role local authorities played in the protection lag.

Fifteen people within government and civil society told Reuters the Mechanism is under-resourced given the scope of the problem. Irazoque agreed, though he noted its staff of 40 increased last year to a staff of 70. Its 2023 budget increased to around \$28.8mn from \$20mn in 2022.

In addition to the shortage of funding, Irazoque said that local authorities, state governments and courts need to do more, but there was a lack of political will.

"The Mechanism is absorbing all the problems, but the issues are not federal, they are local," he said in an interview with Reuters.

More convictions are what Irazoque believes are most needed, saying the lack of legal repercussions for public officials encourages corruption.

Impunity for journalist killings hovers around 89%, a 2021 report from the Interior Ministry, which oversees the Mechanism, showed. Local public servants were the biggest source of violence against journalists, ahead of organised crime, the report found.

"You would think the biggest enemy would be armed groups and organised crime," said journalist Patricia Mayorga, who fled Mexico after investigating corruption. "But really it's the ties between those groups and the state officials that are the problem."

Many Mexican journalists killed worked for small, independent, digital outlets that sometimes only published on Facebook, noted Irazoque, saying their stories dug deep into local political issues.

Mexico's National Association of Mayors (ANAC) and its National Conference of Governors (CONAGO) did not respond to requests for comment about the role of state and local governments in journalist killings or allegations of corrupt ties to crime groups.

President Lopez Obrador frequently pillories the press, calling out reporters critical of his administration and holding a weekly segment in his daily news conference dedicated to the "lies of the week." He condemns the murders, while accusing adversaries of talking up the violence to discredit him.

Irazoque says he has no evidence the president's verbal attacks have led to violence against journalists. Lopez Obrador's spokesman did not respond to a request for comment.

"What type of life is this?," journalist Rodolfo Montes said, eyeing security footage from inside his home where the Mechanism, in which he first enrolled in 2017, had installed cameras with eyes on the garage, street and entryway.

Years earlier, a cartel rolled a bullet under the door as a threat, and he has been on edge ever since. An entire archive box of threats spread over a decade sat in the corner. Looking down at his phone after a cartel threatened his 24-year-old daughter just a few days before, he said, "I'm living, but I'm dead, you know?" — Reuters



Marilu Sanchez holds a framed picture of her late husband Gustavo Sanchez, a journalist killed by assailants while riding his motorcycle with his son, at her home in Morro de Mazatan, in Oaxaca state, Mexico, on October 18, 2022. (Reuters)

Right leads mass protest against Spanish govt

Thousands of people protested in Madrid yesterday against Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez's leftist government in a rally held in a key election year in Spain that was backed by far-right party Vox. Participants waved red and yellow Spanish flags and called on Sanchez to resign. Some held up signs with a photo of the Socialist premier calling him a "traitor". Around 30,000 people gathered in Madrid's Cibeles Square for the rally, according to the central government's delegation in the Spanish capital. Organisers said some 700,000 people had taken part. The protest was called by dozens of mainly right-leaning civil society groups and backed by conservative parties including the main opposition conservative Popular Party (PP) and Vox. The right is angered by the government's decision to abolish the crime of sedition, of which nine separatist leaders were convicted over their role in the Catalonia region's abortive secession bid in 2017. It was replaced with an offence carrying a lower prison sentence. Conservatives are also angered by a flagship law against sexual violence that toughened penalties for rape but eased sentences for other sexual crimes. This has set some convicts free after their jail terms were reduced. Speaking to reporters at the start of the rally, Vox leader Santiago Abascal denounced "the worst government in history" which "has divided Spaniards and freed rapists and coup leaders". "We need a permanent and massive mobilisation until the autocrat Pedro Sanchez is expelled from power," he added.



People protest against the government of Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez at Cibeles Square in Madrid yesterday. (Reuters)

Retired accountant Antonio Orduna, 67, told AFP said he was upset the government was "letting those who want to break up Spain off the hook." He cited the abolishment of the crime of sedition and Sanchez's

2021 decision to pardon the Catalan separatists initially sentenced to between nine and 13 years in prison for their role in the failed secession bid. Catalonia's attempt to become

an independent state sparked Spain's worst political crisis in decades, with then-Catalan leader Carles Puigdemont and several others fleeing abroad to escape prosecution.

PP leader Alberto Nunez Feijoo, who has tried to push the formation to the centre since becoming its leader in April, was not at the rally but encouraged party supporters to attend.

Most polls suggest the PP would win a general election expected at the end of the year but would need the support of Vox to govern. Before that, Spain will vote in May in regional and local elections. One of the main dilemmas facing Feijoo is whether to continue pursuing political alliances with Vox as it has in some region or to freeze them out to try to widen the PP's base. Vox splintered off from the PP in 2013 and is now the third-largest force in parliament. Lacking a parliamentary majority, Sanchez's government has been forced since its formation to negotiate with Basque and Catalan separatists to pass bills, which has angered many on the right. Conservatives accuse Sanchez of having eliminated the crime of sedition to assure the continued support of Catalan pro-independence party ERC in tight parliamentary votes. "All he cares about is remaining in power," said Rosa Torosio, a 44-year-old housewife at the rally. The government argues sedition is an antiquated offence that needed to be replaced with one better aligned to European norms. Sanchez defended his record, telling a Socialist party rally in the northern city of Valladolid yesterday his government had to take steps to defuse the conflict in Catalonia. The separatist bid which happened under the watch of the previous PP government had left Spain standing "before the abyss," he added. Sanchez also recalled that his government has ramped up social spending to help Spaniards deal with high inflation, for example by increasing pensions and civil servant salaries.

Turkiye cancels Swedish minister's visit

Move follows Qur'an burning demo in Stockholm

Reuters
Stockholm

Turkiye yesterday cancelled a visit by a Swedish minister seeking its help for Nato membership following provocative protests outside its embassy in Stockholm where a far-right politician also burned a copy of Holy Qur'an. The protests in Stockholm sharply heightened tensions with Türkiye at a time when the Nordic country needs Ankara's backing to gain entry to the military alliance. "We condemn in the strongest possible terms the vile attack on our holy book ... Permitting this anti-Islam act, which targets Muslims and insults our sacred values, under the guise of freedom of expression is completely unacceptable," the Turkish Foreign Ministry said. Its statement was issued after an anti-immigrant politician from the far-right fringe burned a copy of the Qur'an near the Turkish embassy. The Turkish ministry urged Sweden to take necessary actions against the perpetrators and invited all countries to take concrete steps against Islamophobia. A separate protest took place in the city supporting Kurds and against Sweden's bid to join Nato. A group of pro-Turkish demonstrators also held a rally outside the embassy. All three events had police permits. Swedish Foreign Minister Tobias Billstrom said that Islamophobic provocations were appalling. "Sweden has a far-reaching freedom of expression, but it does not imply that the Swedish Government, or myself, support the opinions expressed," Billstrom said on Twitter. The Qur'an-burning was carried out by Rasmus Paludan, leader of Danish far-right political party Hard Line. Paludan, who also has Swedish citizenship, has held a number of demonstrations in the past where he has burned the Qur'an.

In the permit he obtained from police, it says his protest was held against Islam and what it called Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan's attempt to influence freedom of expression in Sweden. Several Arab countries including Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Kuwait denounced the Qur'an-burning. "Saudi Arabia calls for spreading the values of dialogue, tolerance, and coexistence, and rejects hatred and extremism," the Saudi Foreign Ministry said in a statement. Sweden and Finland applied last year to join Nato following Russia's invasion of Ukraine but all 30 member states must approve their bids. Türkiye has said Sweden in particular must first take a clearer stance against what it sees as terrorists, mainly Kurdish militants and a group it blames for a 2016 coup attempt. Police said the situation was calm at all three demonstrations. Earlier yesterday, Türkiye said that due to lack of measures to restrict protests, it had cancelled a planned visit to Ankara by the Swedish defence minister. "At this point, the visit of Swedish Defense Minister Pal Jonson to Türkiye on January 27 has become meaningless. So we cancelled the visit," Defence Minister Hulusi Akar said. Jonson said separately that he and Akar had met on Friday during a gathering of Western allies in Germany and had decided to postpone the planned meeting. Akar said he had discussed with Erdogan the lack of measures to restrict protests in Sweden against Türkiye and had conveyed Ankara's reaction to Jonson on the sidelines of a meeting of the Ukraine Defence Contact Group. "It is unacceptable not to make a move or react to these (protests). The necessary things needed to be done, measures should have been taken," Akar said, according to a statement by Turkish Defence Ministry. Türkiye's Foreign Ministry had already summoned Sweden's ambassador on Friday over the planned protests.

Thousands protest in Lisbon for animal rights

Dog owner Sandra Almeida made a long journey to the Portuguese capital Lisbon yesterday to join thousands of people who took to the streets to give animals a voice as the constitutional court ponders if mistreating pets should be classed as a crime. "The justice (system) cannot turn a blind eye to the evolution of times," Almeida, 52, said as people whistled and shouted slogans. "Many animals are today part of our families and nothing justifies horrible crimes." Almeida, who has five rescue dogs, travelled nearly 250km from the northern Portuguese city of Aveiro for the demonstration, which was organised by the Animal Intervention and Rescue (IRA) group. Portugal's public prosecutors had on Wednesday asked the constitutional court to declare unconstitutional a law that criminalises with a fine or jail time those who mistreat their pets. According to public prosecutors, the court has already made decisions that pointed to the alleged unconstitutionality of the legislation. On one occasion, a dog owner who threw his puppies into a rubbish bin was initially convicted but later acquitted. The court argues the country's constitution cannot protect pets as if they were humans, *Expresso* newspaper reported.

TV channel Russia Today's France operation closing

The French arm of the Russian state-owned RT television network said yesterday it was shutting down after authorities used European Union sanctions to freeze its bank accounts. Late last February, shortly after Russia invaded Ukraine, the European Union said it would ban Russia Today on the grounds it had been spreading disinformation about the war. RT (Russia Today) France appealed the ban but lost. Xenia Fedorova, the head of RT France, tweeted that French authorities had cited a ninth EU package of sanctions agreed last December. "The funds of RT France are frozen at the request of the general directorate of the Treasury ... our channel can no longer continue its activity," she said. In March, the European Union's Court of Justice on Wednesday rejected a RT France bid for a temporary reprieve.

'Global indecision' killing more of our people: Ukraine

Germany conditions offering tanks to US doing the same

AFP
Kyiv

Ukraine yesterday blasted the "global indecision" of its allies after Germany refused to supply its vaunted Leopard tanks to bolster Kyiv's fighting capacity in the nearly year-long war with Russia. On Friday, some 50 nations agreed to provide Kyiv with billions of dollars' worth of military hardware, including armoured vehicles and munitions needed to push back Russian forces. But German Defence Minister Boris Pistorius said that despite heightened expectations, "We still cannot say when a decision will be taken, and what the decision will be, when it comes to the Leopard tank." "Today's indecision is killing more of our people," Ukrainian presidential adviser Mykhailo Podolyak tweeted. "Every day of delay is the death of Ukrainians. Think faster," he said. Several allies echoed Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in saying the tanks were essential to Ukraine's fight with its much larger neighbour. In a joint statement, the foreign ministers of the three Baltic states urged Germany "to provide Leopard tanks to Ukraine now. "This is needed to stop Russian aggression, help Ukraine and restore peace in Europe quickly," said a message tweeted by Latvian Foreign Minister Edgars Rinkevics and endorsed by his Estonian and Lithuanian counterparts. "Germany as the leading European power has special responsibility in this regard." In Berlin, hundreds of people demonstrated outside the Federal Chancellery building calling for Germany to send tanks to Ukraine. Berlin has been hesitant to send the Leopards or allow other nations to transfer them to Kyiv. Reports earlier in the week indicated Germany would agree to do so only if the US provided its tanks as well. Washington has said providing its Abrams tanks to Ukraine is not feasible, citing difficulties in training and maintenance. But expectations had grown ahead of Friday's Ukraine Contact Group meeting of around 50 US-led countries that Germany would at least agree to let other countries operating Leopards transfer them to Kyiv's army. US Senator Lindsey Graham, a Republican from South Carolina who is currently



visiting Kyiv, called on both countries to supply the machines. "To the Germans: Send tanks to Ukraine because they need them. It is in your own national interest that (Russian President Vladimir) Putin loses in Ukraine." "To the (US President Joe) Biden Administration: Send American tanks so that others will follow our lead," he said. The pleas came as the Russian army said its troops had launched an offensive in Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia region, where fighting intensified this week after several months of an almost frozen front. In its daily report yesterday, Moscow's forces said they had carried out "offensive operations" in the region and claimed to have "taken more advantageous lines and positions". Russia also said it had held a training exercise on repelling air attacks in the Moscow region, using an S-300 anti-aircraft missile system. Ukraine's defence ministry reported 26 air strikes and 15 attacks from multiple-launch rocket systems yesterday. "The enemy does not abandon its aggressive plans, focusing its main efforts on attempts to fully occupy the Donetsk region," on Ukraine's border with Russia, it said. In Kyiv, Zelensky attended the funeral of his interior minister and other officials killed in a helicopter crash outside the capital Wednesday. The seven coffins were hoisted into the echoing hall in central Kyiv by military

ballbearers in full ceremonial dress, to the sound of a lone trumpet and a snare drum. Denys Monastyrsky, one of Zelensky's top aides, is the highest-ranking Ukrainian official to die in the war that Russia launched on February 24, 2022. Zelensky and his wife Olena Zelenska wore all black and carried floral tributes. "Ukraine is losing its best sons and daughters every day," Zelensky said in a statement later. The cause of the crash that killed him and 13 others when the chopper fell near a kindergarten is still being investigated. US officials said Ukraine still faced an uphill battle against Russian forces who occupy one-fifth of the country 11 months after invading. But they spoke of a possible Ukrainian counter-offensive in the coming weeks to retake parts of its territory. US Joint Chiefs Chairman General Mark Milley pointed to the substantial amount of equipment — much of it armoured vehicles and artillery — that Ukraine was being pledged at Ramstein, as well as the large-scale training of its forces by allies. "I do think it's very possible for the Ukrainians to run a significant tactical or even operational-level offensive operation to liberate as much Ukrainian territory as possible," Milley said. But the Kremlin warned on Friday that Western tanks would make little difference on the battlefield.



Snapshots from the Mahaseel Festival yesterday.
PICTURES: Thajudheen



Mahaseel Festival highlights diverse Qatari products

By Shafeeq Alingal
Staff Reporter

The ongoing Mahaseel Festival continued to draw big crowds yesterday, offering quality local products, such as vegetables, poultry, meat and dairy items, at affordable prices. The festival also offers flowers and gardening equipment to visitors. Through its offerings, the festival highlights the diverse range of agricultural and other products made in Qatar. “The quality, range and prices of vegetables are among the major attractions, and we enjoy the atmosphere here while walking through the festival site and visiting the stalls,” one of the visitors told *Gulf Times* yesterday. Varieties of organic and farm-fresh products such as eggplant, tomato, cabbage, cauliflower, mushroom, cucumber, capsicum, broccoli, courgette, beans, gourd, peas, and chilli are available at the stalls. They also sell different types of locally produced honey along with dates and date syrup. “Indeed, Qatar is witnessing good progress in vegetable production,” said another visitor. “The festival reflects the passion of local farmers and highlights the diversity of the local vegetable production.” The stalls selling flowers and ornamental plants are evoking a good response from visitors.

These offer bouquets of roses and a variety of other flowers and ornamental plants, along with vegetable and fruit seedlings. They also sell agriculture equipment required for the upkeep and beautification of farmland and gardens. There were many buyers for different types of rose bouquets and ornamental shrubs to decorate houses and offices. Visitors, including families, could be seen taking pictures amid the green spaces at the festival site, decorated with flowers. There are a number of accompanying attractions in this year’s Mahaseel Festival, such as art workshops and different activities, providing an opportunity for the family to shop and spend quality time together. The workshops help to educate children and adults about the importance of agriculture. Children can also enjoy the rides at the venue, while the eateries offer tea and coffee along with traditional Qatari beverages and breads. The seventh edition of the Mahaseel Festival is being held in the southern area of Katara. The festival has been organised by Katara – the Cultural Village Foundation in collaboration with the Ministry of Municipality and the Qatari farmers’ forum. It will run daily from 9am-9pm until January 28, followed by the Mahaseel Market that will be held on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays every week until mid-April.

