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SPORT | Page 1

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**SPECIAL
OFFER**

1 Jan 2023 - 4 Feb 2023

**Erdogan warns Sweden
on Nato membership**

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan warned Sweden yesterday that it should not expect his backing to join Nato following the burning of the Holy Qur'an outside Ankara's embassy in Stockholm. Erdogan's furious comments further distanced the prospects of Sweden and Finland joining the Western defence alliance before Turkiye's presidential and parliamentary polls in May. Turkiye and Hungary are the only Nato members not to have ratified the Nordic neighbours' historic decision to break their tradition of military non-alignment in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. "Sweden should not expect support from us for Nato," Erdogan said.

**Beirut port blast
probe resumes**

The Lebanese judge probing a devastating 2020 blast in Beirut port has resumed work, a judicial source said yesterday, over a year after political pressure brought the investigation to a halt. Tarek Bitar is the second magistrate to take on the sensitive case, which has pitted him against the powerful Hezbollah movement and its allies. The blast was caused by a fire in a warehouse where a vast stockpile of the industrial chemical ammonium nitrate had been haphazardly stored for years. Relatives of the victims have been holding monthly vigils for more than two years, seeking justice and accountability. **Page 8**

**UK PM orders probe
into ally's tax affairs**

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak yesterday ordered an investigation into a wealthy ally's murky tax dealings as he again vowed "integrity" in his government after Boris Johnson's scandal-plagued tenure. As well as the probe into Conservative party chairman Nadhim Zahawi, Sunak faced questions about the appointment of BBC chairman Richard Sharp, a former banker who acted as a go-between to help funnel a loan to Johnson when he was in 10 Downing Street. **Page 9**

**Lula floats shared
'trading currency'**

Brazil and Argentina are in early talks to establish a shared unit of value for bilateral trade to reduce reliance on the US dollar, Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva said yesterday, though the move is not aimed at replacing existing currencies. In Buenos Aires on his first international visit since taking office, Lula made the comments alongside Argentine President Alberto Fernandez, a leftist ally, who said there was little decided about what would be involved in such a proposal.

**Police seek motive for
US dance hall shooting**

California police, seeking to learn the motive behind one of the state's worst mass shootings, yesterday searched the home of the elderly gunman who killed 10 people in a Los Angeles area dance hall on Saturday before fatally shooting himself. Police identified 72-year-old Huu Can Tran as the suspect in the massacre, which took place during a Lunar New Year celebration at Star Ballroom Dance Studio in Monterey Park, a dance hall popular with older patrons of Asian descent. **Page 8**

**Poland seeks coalition
to send tanks to Ukraine**

Poland said yesterday it would ask Germany for permission to send Leopard tanks to Ukraine - and would send them whether or not Berlin agreed as long as other countries did too. The Kyiv government wants the German-made Leopard 2, one of the most widely used Western tanks, to help it break through Russian lines and recapture territory this year. German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock had said Berlin would not stand in Poland's way. **Page 11**

**Amir meets ace rally driver
Nasser al-Attiyah**



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani met Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah, champion of Dakar Rally, at Sheikh Abdullah bin Jassim Majlis at the Amiri Diwan yesterday. At the outset of the meeting, the Amir congratulated Nasser al-Attiyah on clinching the championship's title for the fifth time, and praised his sports accomplishments, wishing him more success in his sports career. On his part, Nasser al-Attiyah expressed thanks and appreciation to His Highness the Amir for his constant support, stressing his keenness on excellence in his future missions to contribute to raising high the name of Qatar in sports forums. **(QNA)**

Amir receives message from Algerian president



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani received a written message from President of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria Abdelmadjid Tebboune, pertaining to the strong fraternal relations between the two countries and ways to support and enhance them. The message was handed over by Boudjemaa Delmi, Special Envoy of the Algerian President for the Sahel and Africa, when the Amir met him and the accompanying delegation at Sheikh Abdullah bin Jassim Majlis at the Amiri Diwan yesterday. At the beginning of the meeting, Delmi conveyed greetings of the Algerian president to His Highness the Amir, and his wishes to the Amir of continued success, and to the people of Qatar continued progress and prosperity. For his part, the Amir entrusted the Algerian special envoy with his greeting to the Algerian president, wishing him continued success, and the brotherly Algerian people continued progress and prosperity. Aspects of co-operation between the two countries and means of developing them, in addition to regional developments, were discussed during the meeting. **(QNA)**

**Hassad launches new
plan to develop local
agricultural sector**

QNA
Doha

Hassad Food, Qatar's premier investor in food and agribusiness sectors, has announced the launch of the Agricultural Services & Inputs Programme in collaboration with the Ministry of Municipality.

The programme aims to develop the local agricultural sector and to achieve food security in the country. This comes as part of Hassad's investment strategy and the Ministry of Municipality's vision to develop local agricultural sector and achieve self-sufficiency.

In a press statement, Hassad said that the programme focuses on developing agricultural practices and services to increase the agricultural seasons duration, as well as reach the highest productivity per square metre. Mahaseel for marketing and manages the agricultural services and inputs programme, alongside the agricultural outputs programme



(marketing local produce), to support and meet the farmers needs through a unified platform, which provides integrated agricultural services.

The programme targets local farms to provide them with the needed agricultural services and inputs, as well as cooperate with the local farmers to develop the farms' infrastructure to maximise subsidy value provided by the Ministry of Municipality.

The programme's plan covers three strategic sections: knowledge & skills development, farms infrastructure development, and supporting farmers in selecting the suitable agricultural inputs.

The plan for the first section "knowledge & skills development" covers a plan to develop guidance programmes, in collaboration with the Agricultural Affairs Department



at the Ministry of Municipality, to provide the required technical advice with regards to understanding and managing soil characteristics, health, and fertility, as well as the best international practices for irrigation management and pest control, in addition to healthy alternatives to chemical pesticides, herbicides and the latest agricultural technologies.

Furthermore, the plan includes co-operation with universities and research institutions in research projects to develop agricultural practices, in co-ordination with the Agricultural Research Department at the Ministry of Municipality. It also includes developing an application that includes all resources, information and news related to the agricultural sector, to serve farmers. **To Page 3**

**'Qatar sustainable finance
offers \$75bn investment
opportunity this year'**

By Santhosh V Perumal
Business Reporter

Doha has embarked on an active drive to strengthen the domestic debt market in view of the "encouraging" potential for local bonds and sukuk, as the country offers \$75bn investments in sustainable finance this year, according to a top official of the Qatar Financial Centre (QFC).

"There is an active drive in Qatar to strengthen the domestic debt capital market to diversify sources of funding and expand sustainable finance solutions. It is a part of a broader strategy to enhance the country's capital market infrastructure and create a greener future in line with the Qatar National Vision 2030," QFC Authority Chief Executive Officer Yousuf Mohamed al-Jaida yesterday told Qatar Financial Market Forum.

Stressing that the country is increasingly attracting international investors to its growing equity market, he said "there is an encouraging potential for local bond and sukuk issuances."

In general, Qatari issuers have been accessing the international debt capital market since the inaugural sovereign issuance in 2003 of \$700mn su-



QFC Authority chief executive officer Yousuf Mohamed al-Jaida.
PICTURE: Shaji Kayamkulam

kuk, marking the first-ever sovereign sukuk issuance from the region.

Highlighting that in 2020, QNB issued the country's first-ever green bond of \$600mn, an important milestone for sustainable finance development in Qatar; he said furthermore, major banks and financial stakeholders in the country are rolling out initiatives that promote sustainable banking and financing.

In this regard, he said Masraf Al Rayan recently became the first Islamic bank in Qatar to launch a sustainable finance framework, offering environment social and governance or ESG-linked funding opportunities to investors and applying those proceeds to finance ESG-compliant sustainable projects. **To Page 4 Business Page 8**

Qatar to turn desalination waste into a useful resource

QNA
Doha

HE the Minister of Environment and Climate Change Sheikh Dr Faleh bin Nasser bin Ahmed bin Ali al-Thani stressed yesterday that the ministry seeks to expand research and scientific experiments to manage wastewater and salts discharged from desalination plants.

In statements on the sidelines of a scientific symposium on treating and managing wastewater and salts from desalination plants, which was organised by the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change, HE the minister told journalists that the research



HE Sheikh Dr Faleh bin Nasser bin Ahmed bin Ali al-Thani (centre) and Dr Mohamed Saif al-Kuwari (left) at the symposium.

related to the topic of the symposium was among the solutions sought by the ministry in co-operation with the competent authorities, with the aim of finding optimal solutions for the water that comes out of the desalination plants, extracting the salts in them, and working to benefit from them, because of their economic aspect of interest to industrial entities and companies.

He emphasised the importance of such projects and scientific research that concern all GCC countries, considering that the Gulf is a semi-enclosed marginal sea, pointing out that the salty and wastewater that occur as a result of desalination plants represents a major challenge to all the

GCC countries, because it causes a rise in temperature and an increase in concentrated salts in the Gulf waters, which affects marine life, in addition to the harmful impact on the environment in general as a result of high salinity.

The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change seeks to expand such research and experiments that have yet been proven successful on a small scale, as well as bringing together the relevant research and scientific authorities and private companies to work on applying them in a matter that serves the GCC countries, in addition to extracting hydrogen as the energy of future, HE the minister said. **To Page 6**

Shura denounces Swedish authorities over burning of Holy Qur'an copy

QNA
Doha

The Shura Council has denounced, in the strongest terms, the Swedish authorities for allowing one of the far-right members to burn a copy of the Holy Qur'an in front of the Turkish embassy in Stockholm, asserting that allowing such a blatant act provokes emotions of 2bn Muslims, and ignites hate speech and violence.

This came during the ordinary weekly session of the Shura Council that was held yesterday at Tamim bin Hamad Hall at the headquarters of the Council, under the presidency of HE the Speaker Hassan bin Abdullah al-Ghanem.

The Council confirmed that such an outrageous step contravenes the laws and charters of respect for the religious sanctities of nations, including human rights principles that underscore freedom of religion, and protect sanctities and rituals. The Council expressed its deepest astonishment over the silence of some Western and European countries towards the persistent offence against the Islamic religion, under the pretext of freedom of expression, pointing out that such a double-dealing with the concept of freedom of expression, has allowed the recurrence of infringements upon Islam, causing the growth of Islamophobia phenomenon. It also deepened the gap between the east and the west. The Council



The Shura Council in session.

warned against the menace of the growing far-right racial speech, anti-Muslim hate, involving religious sanctities in such acts, and offending them to achieve political gains, confirming that such acts would lead to more hatred, discrimination and violence, in addition to feeding terrorism and extremism. The Shura Council called on the people of Qatar, the Union of Councils of Member States of the Organisation of Islamic Co-operation (OIC), all parliaments of Islamic world and the parliamentary, Islamic and Arab federations to take essential and serious steps to further adopt a unified Islamic stance to ensure non-infringement of sanctities and never compromise them, and prevent the recurrence of such infringements.

During the session, the Coun-

cil discussed the request of holding general discussion that was submitted by a number of members on the infractions made by some individuals and companies, and their impact on the terrestrial environment. In this regard, the members of the Council pointed to the great importance Qatar places on environment, as enshrined in the country's Constitution to conserve the environment, specially the terrestrial environment, which is demonstrated in Qatar's national vision 2030, as an environmental development pillar.

They asserted that tampering with some wilderness areas by some individuals and companies significantly causes erosion of areas, in addition to degradation of their capacities to continue and sustain, specially that Qa-

tari environment is characterised by dry desert environment with little rain and vegetation. They noted the danger of encroachment on environment, meadows and wildlife through dumping construction waste, overgrazing and other detrimental practices that damage the environment, albeit the existence of laws and legislations that overtly criminalise such acts.

The Council members stressed the importance of enforcing the laws and intensifying surveillance and accountability to reduce the phenomenon of encroachment on environment, and never hesitate to impose fines and penalties on violators, emphasising the importance of sensing the spirit of responsibility towards environment and its conservation.

After discussing the request and securing everyone's confirmation on the criticality of conserving the environment, and taking all necessary actions to prevent any infraction or encroachment, the council decided to submit the request to the Public Services and Utilities Committee for further perusal, and file a report to the council accordingly.

Additionally, the Council discussed a draft law amending some provisions of Law No 18 of 2017, on public hygiene that it was submitted to the council by the esteemed government, and decided to refer it to the Public Services and Utilities Committee for further perusal, and resubmit its report thereon to the Council.



Qatar partakes in meeting of council of Arab ministers of communications

QNA
Cairo

Qatar participated in the 26th session of the Council of Arab Ministers of Communications and Information, which was held in Cairo. Qatar's delegation to the meeting was led by HE the Minister of Communications and Information Technology Mohamed bin Ali al-Mannai.

The meeting discussed the results of the reports and recommendations issued by the meetings of Arab technical committees in the communication, information technology and postal fields.

It also reviewed the activity of bodies with observer status in the

work of the council, namely the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) Arab Regional Office, the Arab Information and Communication Technologies Organisation, the Arab Regulators Network of Telecommunications and Information Technologies, and the China-Arab Technology Transfer Center at the Arab Academy for Science, Technology and Maritime Transport.

The meeting is an important step in the march of joint Arab action in the communications and information sector.

It seeks to unify efforts and goals in order to achieve digital developments in Arab societies, in addition to discussing many issues related to the digital economy and cybersecurity and review-

ing joint Arab co-operation with relevant international organisations, partners and stakeholders in the field of communications and information technology.

The council of Arab ministers of communications and information is one of the specialised ministerial councils operating under the umbrella of the Council of the League of Arab States.

It aims to co-ordinate and unify the efforts of the Council's member states to achieve close co-operation between Arab countries in the establishment and development of communications and information technology facilities and services, and to develop an Arab strategy for the communications sector.

Ministry underscores importance of schools' adherence to code of ethics

The Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE) underlined the importance of schools and kindergartens' commitment to the code of ethics that was issued in Arabic and English languages in 2022, including the key materials set forth in the charter.

This came during a meeting held by the Private Education Affairs Sector with the managers of schools and kindergartens, during which they discussed topics and themes that must be adhered to, besides raising the awareness of school community on their criticality.

During the meeting, Assistant Undersecretary for Education Affairs Omar Abdel Aziz al-Naama outlined that the most critical points schools and kindergartens must adhere to, entail the code of ethics for private schools and kindergartens that was issued in Arabic and English languages in 2022. This is in addition to the key materials of functions and duties included in the code, starting from schools' owners, managers, the administrative and teaching staff, guardians, students and all councils, al-Naama said.

He emphasised the importance of raising awareness among the school community through holding constant workshops, seminars and programmes, stressing the criticality of adherence to the Islamic and national identity values, in-



cluding the values of the Qatari community. He added that these things should be promoted through conducting a wide range of activities, programmes and lessons dedicated to students, in addition to preparing constant training workshops for the administrative and teaching crews, and raising awareness among the new teachers concerning those ethics, and other relevant matters and commitments.

Private schools in Qatar have applied the teaching of the three compulsory materials: "Arabic language, Islamic education and Qatari history", whose outcomes have been positively and remarkably demonstrated during the last three years, as well as their endeavours and keenness to execute these policies and persistently verify their outcomes, al-Naama pointed out.

He added that measures were

positive with respect to students' academic accomplishment, considering the importance of undertaking all efforts by teachers, whether for the three compulsory materials, or other curricula, outlining the importance of taking all necessary measures to ensure safety and security of school community, in addition to setting clear-eyed and approved planning for all relevant matters.

For his part, Director of Private Schools Affairs Department Rashid Ahmad Mohamed al-Ameri outlined the efforts undertaken by the education ministry in the supervision and follow-up processes conducted by the department each year. He presented a sample of some studies that were conducted via general statistics, in addition to highlighting some aspects that require adherence from schools. (QNA)

Education priority for Qatar at all levels

Countries across the world mark International Day of Education today under the slogan: 'To invest in people, prioritise education'. Education in Qatar is one of the most critical pillars of its National Vision 2030, thanks to the wise leadership that always underlines the importance of human element as a core source of development.

In addition, Qatar supports the issue of funding education both at the national and global levels, and places utmost importance on education.

This is demonstrated in its commitment to Qatari and world students by taking a conscious decision in education, because it believes in education as the pillar of social growth, specially that Qatar is part and parcel of the global environmental system.

Formal education in Qatar was established in 1952, and the pace of educational evolution has been accelerating in the country until it has encompassed all agglomerations in the country from male and female population, including all education phases until col-

lege education. Qatar launched an initiative in 2004 that advocates for development of general education in the country, under the slogan: 'Education for a New Era', which aims to provide the best education means to people, since Qatar is a key contributor in all over the world, in terms of investing in education, health and economic empowerment.

The Qatar Fund For Development (QFFD) provided roughly \$1bn in grants to educational projects in 64 states during the last decade. In a message to mark

this occasion, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres underlined that education is one of the core human rights, and a bedrock for communities and economics and potential of every single person. He warned that such potential could diminish in light of shortage of ample investment. He stressed that the time has come for all countries to embody their commitments and turn them into concrete action that ensures conducive environment that supports all students. (QNA)

Students participate in ministry's green campaign

The Wildlife Development Department at the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change carried out yesterday its first campaign to plant a number of wild trees at Rawdat Al Hashem for 2023, with the participation of 120 students from Compass International School along with a number of officials and specialists from the ministry. The students planted a number of local wild trees and cleaned the place thoroughly from all the industrial waste found there. The students planted various kinds of trees and also took part in a clean-up drive in the area. The students expressed happiness at learning about the Qatari environment and its wild plants, stressing that such visits will have a positive impact on them in terms of learning more about Qatar and its plants and animals that must be preserved.



QU professors emphasise importance of education and its role in achieving SDGs

The International Day of Education is being held today to celebrate and emphasise the role of education in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

To mark this occasion, a number of professors from Qatar University's (QU) College of Education speak about the importance of prioritising education and the role of the educated individual in building a strong and sustainable society.

Dr Mayamin Altae, professor of Educational Sciences, said: "The fourth goal of the SDGs focuses on ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all, which essentially means education is the backbone for achieving the SDGs and ensuring a secure future for generations to come. The power of education is demonstrated through preparing students to be broadminded citizens, empathetic to their peers and across borders, capable of renouncing violence and taking effective action to promote world peace. Quality education equips people with knowledge, skills and values



that enable them to live with dignity and contributes to making societies safer and stronger."

Dr Ayad Taama, professor of Art Education, said: "The strongest characteristic of education is its ability to build a promising generation that contributes to building the state. This is not exclusively the role of the state, but also starts from the home and family and the extent to which these participants interact to achieve scientific, educational and ethical goals, which is based on the sense of responsibility and benefiting from development plans of other societies in developed countries."

He added, "The importance of education in shaping society starts here, relying on the development of educational curricula and paying attention to modern studies and research and how to apply them." Dr Nasser al-Rawahi, professor of Physical Education, noted: "In light of technological developments and the explosion of knowledge and information that the world is witnessing in all fields of life, the process of developing and improving educational programmes has become a societal requirement imposed by the reality of the tremendous scientific development."



Dignitaries at the inauguration of Café Ladurée at Place Vendome mall.

New branch of Café Ladurée opens at Place Vendome mall

Sheikh Nawaf bin Nasser al-Thani has officially inaugurated a new branch of Café Ladurée in Qatar at Place Vendome mall. This was done in the presence of the founder of Café Ladurée, David Holder, Sheikh Faleh bin Nawaf al-Thani, Sheikh Jassim bin Nawaf al-Thani, Sheikh Khaled bin Nawaf al-Thani, and several business leaders, in addition to those interested in tasting delicious French cuisine and luxurious French sweets, a press statement noted.

The Place Vendome branch joins the two Ladurée branches at Villaggio Mall and Doha Festival City, which are witnessing great demand, the statement added. On the occasion, Sheikh Nawaf said the opening of a new branch of Ladurée at Place Vendome confirms the great success and high demand for Ladurée in Qatar in its two other branches at Villaggio Mall and Doha Festival City.

He added that the new branch



at Place Vendome would be a good addition to the mall, especially that Ladurée attracts those who like the French taste in Qatar.

The founder of Ladurée, Holder, expressed happiness at the opening of a new branch in Qa-

tar, praising the success achieved by Ladurée in the country over the past years, and affirming his confidence that the new branch at Place Vendome mall would live up to the hopes of lovers of delicious French cuisine, as is the case in the two branches at Vil-

laggio and Doha Festival City.

The official opening featured classical violin music and the presentation of Ladurée's signature macarons.

The Place Vendome branch also has a wonderful view of the musical fountain.

Hassad launches new plan to develop local agricultural sector

From Page 1

Field visits to successful local farms to exchange experiences and expertise is included as well in the plan.

With regards to the programme's second section "farms infrastructure development", the plan includes the development of greenhouses, such as using non-cooled net greenhouses as a substitute for plastic tunnel greenhouse, given its ability to reduce the temperature and humidity as well as increase ventilation within the green-

house. Moreover, developing the agricultural system such as the use of hydroponics in cooled greenhouses, to increase production and reduce water usage, and installing automated irrigation systems to control fertiliser distribution, and reduce the cost of fertilisation and manpower.

It also includes developing transportation plans, such as adding a cooling system to the storage unit of the vehicles, to preserve the quality of agricultural produce during the transportation stage as well as reduce waste. New water tanks and de-

veloping some of the existing tanks in a number of local farms is included in the plan to maintain the quality of irrigation water and prevent contamination or algae formation, following desalination operations or extraction from wells.

The plan also includes providing advanced spraying machines for chemical insecticides, to speed up application and homogeneity of pesticides on plants, taking into account all the necessary measures to protect the farmers, as well as working to increase the use of

organic pesticides instead of chemical ones.

As for the third section of the programme, it includes a plan to support farmers in selecting the suitable agricultural inputs, to ensure high quality produce - it is necessary to choose the suitable types of seeds for each season and soil type, whether open fields or greenhouses or hydroponics.

Genetically high-quality seeds are characterised by a high germination capacity, resistance to pests and diseases, as well as high market value.

Marmi hosts special round of hunting contest

The organising committee of the 14th Qatar International Falcons and Hunting Festival (Marmi 2023) yesterday held a special round of Haddad Al Tahadi competitions (where the falcon has to hunt a homing pigeon within certain standards) with the participation of different types of falcons and homing pigeons.

The spectators and participants enjoyed a special edition of these competition, which lasted for around four hours. The participating falcons skillfully pursued their potential preys (homing pigeons) with masterful agility.

The atmosphere was marked by amazement, joy and enthusiasm. Besides, shooting activities on the sidelines of the festival continued to attract more participants and were also popular among spectators.

Ali bin Khatem al-Mehshadi, chairman of Al Qannas Qatari Society and head of the organising committee of Marmi 2023, said the festival has continued with its success year on year and there has been a record number of qualifiers in the Haddad Al Tahadi competitions.

He noted that falcons have been successfully trained to fly longer distances and enjoy better health thanks to growing awareness among falconers and the availability of veterinary services and good nutrition systems for falcons.



This has helped in considerably enhancing the speed and performance of the falcons. Al-Mehshadi stressed that the organising committee of Marmi welcomes all relevant suggestions and recommendation to further improve the festival and study them carefully in the best

interest of all concerned. He also said the number of participants in the festival is increasing annually and there are a good number of representatives from different Arab countries as well.

Today, the regular competitions of Haddad Al Tahadi are set to continue to determine

more qualifiers for the higher rounds before the final. 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-Thani, and will continue until January 28.

Dukhan Bank declares winner of QR1mn Thara'a grand prize

Dukhan Bank has announced that Jassim Ali al-Mejali is the winner of the QR1mn Thara'a grand prize. The draw was conducted under the supervision of a representative from the Qualitative Licence and Market Control Department at the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. Thara'a, Dukhan Bank's Shariah-compliant savings account and the first in Qatar's Islamic banking sector, offers account holders the chance to benefit from cash rewards up to QR1mn.

Based on several criteria, Thara'a account holders are eligible for a number of periodic draws for cash prizes.

On a monthly basis, there are 59 winners per draw for the cash prize of QR5,000 each, as well as two winners per draw for the cash prize of QR10,000 Qatari Riyals. Quarterly, there are two winners per draw for the cash prize of QR25,000 each, two winners per draw for the cash prize of QR50,000 each, and yearly, there is one winner of the grand prize of QR1mn, rewarding 501 winners in total with cash prizes up to QR3.79mn.

Talal Ahmed al-Khaja, Dukhan Bank chief marketing & communications officer, said:



"We are delighted to congratulate Jassim Ali al-Mejali as the winner of the Thara'a QR1mn grand prize.

Thara'a has been designed to bring Dukhan Bank's customers an impressive array of features and benefits under one account that also rewards them on a monthly, quarterly, and annual basis. As always, Dukhan Bank constantly strives to bring its customers great value, excellent products, and uncompromised service through our innovative service offerings."

Coupled with cash prizes and a reward scheme, Thara'a is a product full of value-added benefits and services. Thara'a offers account holders access to Dukhan Bank's innovative banking channels, with benefits

including unlimited withdrawals and deposits, as well as free fund transfers across their accounts and through all Dukhan Bank channels.

Dukhan Bank offers an extensive variety of personal banking products and investments, as well as seven strategically located branches and a broad network of ATMs located across Qatar. Customers can access their accounts at any time through state-of-the-art online banking or via the 24/7 contact centre.

Customers may learn about the many benefits of Thara'a savings account by visiting www.dukhanbank.com or by calling 800 8555 or ask virtual assistant, 'Rashid', on the website, mobile app, or via WhatsApp on 44100888.



PHCC joins hands with Al Noor Institute for Asnani Programme

The Primary Health Care Corporation (PHCC)'s Preventive Health Directorate, in partnership with Al Noor Institute for the Blind, aims to promote oral and dental health through the Asnani Programme. Dr Najat al-Yafei, manager of Preventive and Promotive Oral and Dental Health, led the initiative, which was supervised by Dr Hamad al-Mudahka, executive director.

The event was conducted at Al Noor Institute with the attendance of Mashaal Alnuaimi, Alnoor Institute director, Ali Alshahwani, Muneera Ali Abdullah, Salah Alsendi, Ibrahim Alsharshani, Hussain Alhadad, Maysoun Turkoman, Amani Albosaidi and Hanadi Shalabi. Activities included oral health education lecture by Dr Sohair Dalol and teaching visually impaired students proper brushing technique by demonstration on large dental model to develop their skills in maintaining oral hygiene.

This was followed by dental screening with the focus on identification of oral diseases in their early stages and referral advice for parents to seek dental treatment for oral diseases.

The Mobile Dental Unit



From the initiative.

screened 32 students aged three to 13 years. Twelve students (30%) were confirmed to be teeth decay-free. The remaining kids had three or more decaying teeth on average. In addition, 20 students underwent fluoride varnish treatment as a preventive measure.

The majority of the students required some type of dental care, such as professional teeth cleaning, filling of decaying teeth, or removal of some overly retained milk teeth. Parents were

given information papers recommending them to get dental treatment for their children.

The PHCC, in collaboration with Al Noor Institute, had made significant progress in developing Braille Oral Health Educational Material on a variety of topics such as brushing technique, fluoride varnish, oral hygiene tools, and the importance of saliva, which is extremely useful in educating and empowering visually impaired students to maintain good oral hygiene.

National Cyber Security Agency fetes entities and partners

President of the National Cyber Security Agency (NCSA) Abdulrahman al-Farahid al-Malki on Sunday awarded entities and partners who worked with the agency during 2022 for their efforts and dedication. Al-Malki said the agency, since its establishment, has focused on achieving its goals through intensified efforts between the agency and its partners from different sectors. "The hard work and dedication were the basis of the agency's collaboration with its partners to fulfil the agency's mission of securing the nation's cyber space. During the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, the agency witnessed exceptional work and great efforts from its employees and partners as we developed accurate and rapid plans and mechanisms to confront any danger facing various entities during the tournament, including sports facilities and critical entities."



he said. He pointed out that the World Cup was an exceptional championship, emphasising the agency's ability in achieving its ultimate goal - which was the protection of the nation's cyber space before, during and after the tournament. Al-Malki extended his thanks and appreciation to the various entities and partners for their continuous efforts and co-operation with the NCSA. He distributed

appreciation certificates and the agency's trophy to the following companies: EY, GBM, EBM, KBMG, Palantir, Malomatia, Al Mannai, Mandiant, Deloitte and Microsoft. Following the awarding ceremony, representatives of these companies expressed their thanks to the president for all the efforts in protecting the nation's cyber space. They also expressed their full commitment to support Qatar in securing its cyber space.

Al-Muraikhi meets Libya Presidential Council VP



HE the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sultan bin Saad al-Muraikhi met Libyan Presidential Council Vice-President Abdullah Hussein al-Lafi on the sidelines of the consultative meeting of the Arab foreign ministers in Tripoli. During the meeting on Sunday, they discussed bilateral relations and means to further develop them, in addition to a host of topics of mutual interest. - **QNA**

Qatar sustainable finance offers \$75bn investment opportunity this year

From Page 1

Masraf Al Rayan aligned its sustainable finance framework to the principles of the QFC's sustainable sukuk and bonds framework, according to him. Qatar Development Bank introduced a three-year grace period and 20 years of repayment with discounted interest rates if borrowers meet sustainability targets, while Dukhan Bank signed a memorandum of understanding with the Gulf Organisation for Research and Development to launch a Shariah-compliant green and sustainable real estate financing programme at COP27. Finding that by 2023, sustainable finance in Qatar is expected to offer \$75bn worth investment opportunity, al-Jaida said this trend suggests significant efforts are placed in developing the local capital market and a commitment to adhering to ESG and sustainability principles to meet the growing need for sustainable financing. Over the years, QFC and its regulator have played an integral part in Qatar's capital market development journey, he said, adding it works with key government entities, such as Qatar Central Bank and Qatar Financial Markets Authority, to ensure regulatory alignment and the effortless execution of national financial development priorities. In addition, the QFC is consistently improving its regulatory, legal and tax frameworks to attract and retain specialised financial players that both enable and complement the offerings of local banks, he said. Qatar is on the path to developing a more diversified capital market. With established regulations for the governance of existing and new financial investments and continued efforts to adopt comprehensive approaches to capital market development, the country is set to establish a niche sustainable finance market, which is expected to reach a global value of more than \$22tn by 2031.

Third annual exhibition of private associations and institutions opens

HE the Minister of Social Development and Family Maryam bint Ali bin Nasser al-Misnad inaugurated yesterday the third annual exhibition of private associations and institutions.

The exhibition is held in co-operation with the Ministry of Endowments (Awqaf) and Islamic Affairs – represented by the General Administration of Endowments, Qatar Charity (QC), and Katara – the Cultural Village Foundation.

The exhibition aims at introducing to the public the services of the non-profit organisations working in Qatar, motivating the civil community to accomplish outstanding achievements in sustainability, and encouraging collective and voluntary work as well as community participation.

Private Associations and Institutions Department director Naji Abd Rabbo al-Aji said that the exhibition will present useful products and activities to the community in partnership and support of the public and private sectors.

In a statement to the Qatar News Agency (QNA), he said that the partnership between the public and private sectors results in programmes and activities that serve the community, taking into account the diversity of the associations – professional, cultural, scientific, and/or educational.

Al-Aji said that the work of private associations is regulated by law, empowering them to carry out their work.

He added that the ministry enables associations to work freely unless they deviate from the law regulating the work of civil community organisations in Qatar.



Snapshots from the exhibition.



Al-Aji expressed the hope that the exhibition would encourage associations to organise initiatives serving the community.

HE the Director-General of the General Directorate of Endowments, Sheikh Khalid bin Mohamed bin Ghanim al-Thani, said that the exhibition aims to exchange

the expertise among various associations, and praised the efforts by the Ministry of Social Development and Family to organise the exhibition.

He said that the support and partnership of the General Directorate of Endowments for the exhibition is as an achievement of the co-operation among government authorities, support for civil institutions, and as an implementation of the slogan *Endowment is a community partnership*.

Chairperson of the Board of Directors of the Qatar Autism Society, Sheikh Jawaher Fahad al-Thani, stressed the significance of the Society's participation in the exhibition.

She said that the goal behind its participation in the exhibition lies in the right of people with autism to integrate into society.

Sheikha Jawaher said that the latest news from the Qatar Autism Society is related to the launch of robots for people with autism to share their daily activities, whether at home or out, to help them psychologically and mentally.

Under the theme *My association in service of community*, the exhibition saw competitive programmes and initiatives in all fields, and an expanded number of participants from associations and organisations to raise the awareness of private associations and their role in serving the community.

The exhibition will allow productive projects to market their initiatives and the emergence of new productive projects that serve the community and provide job opportunities. - **QNA**

Praise for schools built by Qatar Charity for orphan students in Bangladesh

Bangladesh is one of the key countries in which Qatar Charity (QC) has a clear footprint in the field of education.

During the past five years, the QC has built 38 schools that include boarding departments and other facilities, some of which were established in remote areas.

These schools have provided educational opportunities to at least 10,000 students, and Qatar Charity is currently working on building 15 schools.

Once these 15 facilities are completed, 3,000 more students will have similar educational opportunities.

The QC is currently sponsoring 3,312 orphans to ensure their future.

On the occasion of International Education Day, which falls today (January 24) every year, Qatar Charity is celebrating its achievements in the field of education around the world.

The QC operates in more than 30 countries in Africa, Asia, and Europe, as well as in areas of crises and disasters.

Hira Secondary School, which is located in the Bagerhat region of southern Bangladesh and was built by the QC in 2017, is one of the educational models that has made a big difference to the people who live in the area; it helped fill a void at the time because there was no school or educational facility there.

The school has become a source of pride for the residents whose children were deprived of education for many years, including orphans in

the Bagerhat region.

Several officials have thanked Qatar Charity for its support of education in the remote areas of Bangladesh.

School principal Zohra Begum said: "The number of students in Hira school is 700, with 300 new students accepted annually into different classes."

She added that the school contains housing, currently benefiting 200 orphan and poor students.

Orphaned students receive financial assistance from the QC to complete their studies.

Education ministry official Firoz Ahmed said: "Qatar Charity plays an important role in the education sector in Bangladesh, as it has built schools that contain various facilities that provide a suitable environment for students."

"We appreciate this achievement," he continued. "Qatar Charity has focused on remote and neglected areas where educational facilities are not available for the population, providing an appropriate educational environment and preventing thousands of children from dropping out of school."

"Its efforts have played a major role in reducing the illiteracy rate to zero in Bangladesh," Ahmed said.

Zahid al-Islam, an elected representative of the local government in the region, has praised the school.

"Hira is not just a school," he said. "It is an exceptional educational institution."



Qatar Charity is celebrating its achievements in the field of education around the world.



Reyada Medical Centre expands the Gynecology Department

'Complete care for Women' will now be available till 11 PM all days of the week including Fridays with the expansion of the Obstetrics & Gynecology department.

Reyada Medical Centre has expanded the Gynecology department to ensure the availability of experienced Specialist Doctors till 11 PM on all days of the week including Fridays. Dr. Vijaylaskmi and Dr. Srilaxmi, both Specialists – Obstetrics and Gynecology will together ensure that the best possible care is provided to women.

With more than 15 departments and multilingual doctors and staff, Reyada Medical Centre also provides radiology services, laboratory, pharmacy, physiotherapy and optical services. The medical center is open all days of the week from 7 AM until 12 Midnight.

Speaking about the expansion plans of Reyada Medical Centre, Mr. Jamsheer Hamza, Managing Director, Reyada Healthcare said, "The expansion of the Gynecology department follows that of the Pediatric and Internal Medicine departments. By ensuring the availability of Specialists on late nights as well as weekends, we endeavor to live up to our



mission of providing quality care that's affordable and accessible."

Dr. Abdul Kalam, Executive Director, Reyada Healthcare said. "Considering the fact that there is a large percentage of working women here, we aim to be able to provide the best care for them in timings that are most suited to them."

Located on C- Ring Road, Doha Reyada Medical Centre is a new-age medical center that provides accessible, affordable healthcare with a special emphasis on quality. At Reyada, the right mix of experience and clinical outcomes is driven by technological advancements in both clinical and non-clinical areas.

100,000 needy families in the Gaza Strip to begin receiving cash assistance for January from today

Qatar's Gaza Reconstruction Committee, in co-operation with the Qatar Fund for Development (QFFD), will start disbursing today the monthly (January) cash assistance to needy families in Gaza Strip. Committee chairman Mohamed al-Emadi said that about 100,000 families in the governorates of the Gaza Strip will receive \$100 each.

He said that the distribution will take place through the United Nations and more than 300 designated centres and shops in the governorates. Qatar disburses a monthly humanitarian grant in support of Palestinian families who suffer from difficult economic and living conditions caused by the Israeli blockade. - **QNA**



Mohamed al-Emadi

Texas A&M research project aims to enhance tomato yield in Qatar

A Texas A&M research project is underway to significantly enhance tomato yield in Qatar.

The project, undertaken by Texas A&M AgriLife Research, Texas A&M University at Qatar (Tamuq), a Qatar Foundation partner and Agrico, is sponsored by the Qatar National Research Fund.

The project, "Environment and hydroponic strategies to enhance tomato stress tolerance, productivity and quality in Qatar", is being conducted at the Agrico farms, located near Al Khor.

The researchers are assessing various genotypes of tomatoes from around the world to determine which ones would thrive in the environmental conditions of Qatar.

They are also investigating the impact of grafting, plant density, pest control, and bumblebee-assisted pollination.

The project team is led by principal investigator Dr Daniel Leskovar, professor at the department of horticultural sciences and centre director at the Texas A&M AgriLife Research and Extension Centre at Uvalde.

He is assisted by co-principal investigator Dr

Bing Guo, mechanical engineering associate professor at the Tamuq, and Tamuq postdoctoral research associate Dr Prosanta Dash.

"Our hydroponic tomato project is a true academic-stakeholder partnership, where we combine plant science knowledge with grower experience, and new crop management strategies within the excellent facilities and constant support provided by Agrico," said Dr Leskovar.

"The synergy of complementary research conducted at Texas A&M AgriLife Research in the area of tomato grafting physiology provides additional results to test in this project in Qatar," he said. "Together, we are committed to develop efficient, safe, and resilient food systems that will contribute to enhance food security."

"As Texas A&M University at Qatar researchers, we strive to provide solutions to real challenges faced by the country," said Dr Guo.

"In recent years there has been a pressing need to make farming more efficient in Qatar," he said. "Our preliminary experimental results show significant increase of tomato yield as compared to the current practice."



The researchers are assessing to see which kinds of tomato would thrive in the environmental conditions of Qatar.

"This is strong indication that we will reach our goal of improving the production efficiency by 25%. We are grateful to Agrico for providing the facilities to conduct this research," Dr Guo added.

"Agrico is committed to supporting Qatar attain its food security goals, and through this partnership with Texas A&M University and Texas A&M AgriLife Research, we are exploring innovative approaches to improve the product yield at our farms," said Agrico managing director Nasser al-Khalaf. "Research and development in agriculture play a key role in enhancing agricultural practices globally, and we look forward to working with Texas A&M researchers to produce the best output for our country."

QNL participates in inaugural Islamic Arts Biennale

Qatar National Library (QNL) is participating in the Al-Madar exhibition, a satellite exhibition held in conjunction with the Islamic Arts Biennale 2023, taking place in Saudi Arabia from January 23 to April 23.

The exhibition brings together individuals and institutions from around the world to showcase their collections of vibrant Islamic artistry and historical artefacts spanning over four centuries in a dedicated gallery space.

Organised by the Diriyah Biennale Foundation in co-operation with the Ministry of Culture in Saudi Arabia, the Islamic Arts Biennale 2023 is being held at the Western Haj Terminal at King Abdulaziz International Airport in Jeddah, traditionally the annual arrival point for millions of pilgrims on their way to perform the Haj in the holy city of Makkah. It will also house the AlMadar exhibition. Themed 'Awwal Bait' (The First House), the inaugural Islamic Arts Biennale interweaves newly commissioned works and never-exhibited-before historical artefacts and looks at how the Ka'aba in Makkah and the Prophet's Mosque in Madinah inspire Muslims – on both cultural and metaphysical levels – to create a sense of belonging in their own home, their own 'bait', wherever that may be.

The first edition of the AlMadar exhibition will feature two segments: 'Homage', which pays tribute to prominent figures in the Islamic arts and culture world, and 'Celebrating the Journey', in which QNL, as well as other global institutions, will showcase more than 260 objects and artefacts from their Islamic art collections.

"Celebrating the Journey" will also aim to explore the movement of artefacts, people, and ideas. In addition, institutions from various countries, including Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, Egypt, Tunisia, Mali, Greece,



Islamic photographs.



Dials and astrolabes.



Qur'anic manuscripts and books on astronomy.

Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan, will participate by lending significant pieces for the exhibition.

AlMadar aspires to become a global reference and repository for thought-provoking dialogue, exchange of practices, and innovative research around arts and culture from the Islamic world through this edition of the exhibition and future ones.

Hind al-Khulaifi, director of Strategic Planning and Projects at QNL said: "We are honoured to participate in the inaugural edition of the Islamic Arts Biennale through the AlMadar exhibition. This is a great opportunity for QNL to showcase the rich Islamic arts and cultural heritage that we have in our collection. By participating in this exhibition, we not only promote the appreciation and understanding of Islamic arts and culture but also foster the exchange of knowledge and ideas across the Islamic world.

"We invite the public to join us in this exhibition and take part in the programmes that we have planned for people to gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of Islamic arts and culture."

QNL will be participating in the AlMadar exhibition for three months and will loan 12 items from the Heritage Library, representing Islam across

different parts of the world during the 17th to 19th century. These will include Qur'anic manuscripts from China and other regions, dials, astrolabes, photographs and books on astronomy, among others.

QNL also plans to hold programmes for families, librarians, experts and historians, and the general public, including those with special needs. The programmes will aim to be both physical and online and in different formats such as lectures and workshops.

Centara West Bay celebrating 4th anniversary with guest satisfaction survey feat

Centara West Bay Hotel & Residences Doha, which brought Thai hospitality to Qatar with its opening in February 2019, is celebrating its fourth anniversary.

Within a span of four years, Centara West Bay has provided guests with "exceptional service, luxurious accommodation and exquisite culinary offerings". "Since the hotel started its operations, we managed to achieve very good ratings in all major online booking engines and managed to maintain and improve our rating with other major online reputation score (GRI). The hotel's successes have resulted in Centara West Bay achieving the number one overall balance scorecard for Centara Hotels & Resorts 2022 and achieved GSS (Guest Satisfaction Survey) at 96.9%, with the Hotel Breakfast Satisfaction Score at 94.9%. The TripAdvisor rank is #13/221 hotels with five bubbles and an excellent 5.0 rating," said Sean Spinks, general manager of Centara West Bay Hotel & Residences Doha.

"Over the past four years, we - as a team - have performed together beyond expectations to win numerous accolades and deliver Hotel KPI goals/GOP/NR. We thank and appreciate our guests for their support and our exceptional employees for making Centara West Bay the special place to be in. As we look forward to this fabulous year and the future, we will continue to provide excellent hospitality services in the years to come."

To celebrate this special occasion with guests, Centara West Bay is providing an exclusive culinary offer, which includes the following:

- Dalchini Restaurant - Thali Lunch Set Menu (Come 4 and the 4th is on us): take a midday break and head to Dalchini where you'll get the taste of South Indian Thali for QR88, specially curated for vegetarian and non-vegetarian customers. Call 4009 5520.
- Thai Kitchen Night - (Come 4 and the 4th is on us): experience a culinary journey inspired by the region around Thailand.



Orchid seaview penthouse.

Featuring live somtam and salad station, authentic tom yum soup, northern Khao Soi and more, curated by Thai chefs and their team. Every Thursday from 6.30pm-10.30pm. Call 4009 5530.

- The Mezza House - Happy Hour from 4pm-7pm: stylistically designed trendy Lebanese Restaurant in the heart of West Bay. Features a range of traditional favourites, from the mezze platters to mouthwatering grills and crafted drinks. Call 4009 5515.
- Bondi Burgers & Biryani Box free delivery on talabat on all Pro orders above QR60: call 4009 5530.

Further, the hotel has curated a unique offering - the Celebrate at Centara Package at QR4,444. "Whether it's an

unforgettable anniversary, birthday party or special occasion, our expert team will tailor your special day to your desire at the Sapphire Room. The package includes foods for 30 people, complimentary one-night stay in the Junior Seaview One Bedroom with in-room breakfast for two, 10% off on extra room bookings and more! Book now until June 2023," a press statement notes.

Centara West Bay is centrally located in Doha's vibrant financial & business district, with easy access to the finest shopping, cultural sights and tourist attractions. For further information, call 4009 5555, e-mail cwq@chr.co.th or visit www.centarahotelsresorts.com/centara/cwq/

Katara holds training course on art of negotiation

Katara Public Diplomacy Centre (KPDC), in collaboration with the Diplomatic Academy, yesterday held a training course on the art of negotiation, at the Cultural Village Foundation - Katara.

Presented by president of the Diplomatic Academy, Rashid al-Hajri, the lecture brought together 24 professionals from seven governmental, cultural and media agencies in the country. It is due to run through Thursday.

The course covered several subjects, including 'defining the art of negotiation, its strategies and theories', 'techniques and the mechanism of their use', 'types of negotiation in various diplomatic, military and economic situations', 'types and phases of conflicts', and 'ways to build peace amid international conflict'. It also discussed some negotiation theories in commerce to be used by trainees in their administrative work and leadership positions.

Al-Hajri said the course allowed participants to learn about negotiation strategies and techniques, most notably those applied by the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) in the Pact of Al Hudaibiyah, which will be taken as a graduation project for the trainees.

He also highlighted the exercises, activities, discussions, tests and working papers in order for the participants



to reach the optimum training and practical practice.

The course outputs enhance key administrative values to boost the participants' productivity, and motivate them to acquire time management, negotiation and problem-solving skills, al-Hajri said.

CEO of KPDC, Darwish Ahmed al-Shaibani, said the course would contribute to enhancing all participants' knowledge and culture relating to the art of negotiation, whether within their families, societies or workforce.

It also allows them to develop their practical persuasion and negotiation skills, and master their requirements and techniques, by the practical ap-

plication of the negotiating communication process, and following the best strategies to save time and effort, and to achieve actual gains on the ground, he said.

The course is part of the KPDC's training plan for Qatari public diplomacy - January 2023, which includes a series of lectures, training courses, and televised interviews to attract, qualify distinguished national cadres and enhance their public diplomacy, communication and negotiation skills to further learn about the cultures, history and policies worldwide, enhance pan-peoples communication and understanding, and strengthen Qatar's relationship with the world. (QNA)

Al Faleh Educational Holding Q.P.S.C. is delighted to announce that its Doha Academy Al Waab and Salwa Branches have been awarded full and immediate international accreditation by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges ("NEASC").

Doha Academy, a wholly owned subsidiary of Al Faleh Educational Holding Q.P.S.C., has been admitted to NEASC membership and recognized as a fully accredited group of schools with immediate effect. This follows the schools' success in gaining Qatar National Schools Accreditation ("QNSA") earlier in 2022.

NEASC is an independent, voluntary, nonprofit membership organization that works with public, independent, and international schools in over 85 countries worldwide to assess, support, and promote high quality education for all students through accreditation, professional assistance, and pursuit of best practices.

Gaining full international accreditation follows an intensive 14-month period at Doha Academy, including substantial investment and staff training. NEASC's "Foundation Standards" cover all aspects of a school's operational and strategic activities. Equal evaluative focus is placed during the visits on learning and teaching, governance and leadership, health and safety, finance and resources, and ethical practices.

Following the inspections from mid to late October 2022, Doha Academy has been informed by the Association that its schools not only meet all of NEASC's five exacting "Foundation Standards" but are also eligible to follow its "ACE Learning" protocol. NEASC provides a differentiated accreditation pathway, with ACE Learning being the highest and only recommended to schools NEASC believe have the capacity, commitment and competency to develop even further.

Doha Academy Al Waab and Salwa are now preparing hard for the first stage of the ACE Learning pathway. As part of this preparation, which culminates in follow-up external evaluations in early 2024, the schools are especially focused on language support and technology use in the classroom.

Upon receiving the news of the accreditation, Doha Academy's Principal Mr. Edward Cooper said: "This success is testament to our team's ability to accurately self-evaluate, plan



Dr. Sheikhha Aisha Faleh Al-Thani, Founder and Chairperson of Al Faleh Educational Holding

and implement change, and to work collaboratively to achieve goals in a relatively short timeframe."

Mr. Cooper added: "Our achievement with QNSA demonstrated that our schools were already functioning at a high level. However, there are aspects of international accreditation that are not necessarily expectations or requirements of national accreditation. Therefore, the schools have come a long way over the last 14 months. We've hit the ground running in January in preparation for the

follow-up visits in just over 12 months' time.

"What's particularly effective about working with NEASC is the conversation about the 'impact of our input' - in other words, they expect us to think about the desired impact of or our work and investment, and how these link to our Vision, Mission and understanding of what high-quality learning in our context looks like. It's also great for Doha Academy that our work with NEASC is regularly scheduled and reviewed, so our ongoing development is validated and benefits more members of our community more often."

Dr. Sheikhha Aisha Faleh Al-Thani, Founder and Chairperson of Al Faleh Educational Holding, stated: "The accreditation marks a culmination of the team's hard work. We aim to help learners reach their academic goals and equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge to fulfil their future endeavors with God's will."

Sheikha Anwar Al Thani, CEO of Al Faleh Educational Holding, expressed her gratitude to everyone that made this achievement possible. She also unveiled news of two more schools added to the group very soon that carry the quality associated with Al Faleh Educational Holding. She also promised expansion of the Holding higher education arm.



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MoCI announces recall of Ford F-150, 2022 model

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI), in co-operation with Almana Motors Company, Qatar's Ford dealership, has announced a recall of Ford F-150, 2022 model, as all affected vehicles received a label on the vehicle indicating that they are equipped with the stop/start feature, instead of a label that indicates stop/start deletion.

In a statement, the MoCI said the recall campaign comes within the framework of its ongoing efforts to protect consumers and ensure that car dealers follow up on vehicle defects and repairs.

The ministry will co-

ordinate with the dealer to follow up on the maintenance and repair works, and will communicate with customers to ensure that the necessary repairs are carried out.

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry has urged all customers to report any violations to its Consumer Protection and Anti-Commercial Fraud Department, which processes complaints, enquiries and suggestions through the call centre: 16001; e-mail: info@moci.gov.qa; Twitter: @MOCIQATAR; Instagram: MOCIQATAR; and the ministry's mobile application available on iPhone and Android devices: MOCI_QATAR

The institution supports the capabilities of its students and staff to use English in research, by providing intensive academic English courses to develop the general competence of its students and to support their linguistic and cultural abilities, as well as to benefit from international intellectual production in their fields of specialisation.

(ONA)

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Iraqis protest over burning of copy of Holy Qur'an



Iraqi riot police prevent demonstrators from storming the Swedish embassy in Baghdad, yesterday. An Iraqi policeman and seven protesters were injured yesterday during the rally outside the embassy following the burning of a Holy Qur'an in Stockholm, a security source said.

Suspected militants kill 23 in east DR Congo attack

AFP
Beni

Suspected Allied Democratic Forces fighters have killed at least 23 people in eastern DR Congo, local officials said yesterday, in the latest violence in the turbulent region claimed by the Islamic State group.

The attack occurred overnight on Sunday in the village of Makugwe, in the Beni area of North Kivu province, said local civil society figure Roger Wangeve, who put the death toll at 24. "The ADF surprised 17 people in a small bar, and executed them," he said.

A Congolese army spokesman in the region put the death toll at 24 with 10 people missing. Wangeve added that militants also looted and torched

several homes and shops in the village and carried off several villagers into the bush.

Provincial deputy Saidi Balikwisha, who was in Makugwe during the attack, said 23 were killed and three others are missing. He urged an increased military presence in the area to better anticipate armed attacks. IS, which has designated the ADF as its central African affiliate, claimed responsibility for the attack yesterday, saying on messaging app Telegram that its militants attacked Makugwe and burned down several houses.

AFP was unable to independently confirm the death toll from the attack. Colonel Charles Omeonga, the Congolese military administrator of Beni territory, told AFP soldiers were "in pursuit of the enemy", who he said were hiding among

the local population.

The ADF is one of the deadliest groups in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, a volatile region which has been plagued by militia violence for decades. The ADF has been accused of slaughtering thousands of Congolese civilians and carrying out bomb attacks in Uganda. In 2021, the United States officially linked the ADF to IS and added it to its list of foreign terrorist organisations.

On January 15, suspected ADF operatives detonated a bomb in a church in North Kivu, killing at least 14 people and injuring another 63. Congolese President Felix Tshisekedi placed North Kivu and neighbouring Ituri province in a "state of siege" in 2021, replacing civilian administrators with military and police personnel to stem the violence.

Beirut port blast probe resumes after 13 months

AFP
Beirut

The Lebanese judge investigating the deadly 2020 Beirut port blast has resumed his work, a judicial official said yesterday, after a 13-month suspension due to political pressure.

The probe into the cause of the August 4, 2020 blast, one of history's largest non-nuclear explosions, had been stalled since December 2021 as a series of complaints against the judge obstructed his work.

No state official has yet been held accountable over the explosion, which killed more than 215 people and destroyed swathes of the capital.

Authorities said hundreds of tonnes of ammonium nitrate fertiliser haphazardly stocked in

a port warehouse since 2014 had caught fire, causing the explosion.

"Judge Tarek Bitar has decided to resume his investigation," the official said.

The official said that Bitar had ordered the release of five of 17 detained suspects, and pressed charges against eight other people, setting dates for their questioning.

Among those charged were Abbas Ibrahim, General Security director general, State Security agency chief Tony Saliba, and other security officials, politicians and judges.

Bitar had previously sought permission to question both Ibrahim and Saliba.

Lebanon's former head of customs, Shafiq Merhi, was one of those released.

Despite the surprise decision, Bitar continues to face immense

pressure, which lawyer and activist Nizar Saghieh said there was "no doubt" would persist "to halt his work".

"Bitar is waging a battle against the policy of impunity", Saghieh said. Bitar was forced to suspend his probe after a barrage of lawsuits, mainly from politicians he had summoned on charges of negligence. They include several ex-ministers, two of whom were hit with arrest warrants after they failed to show up for questioning.

"Bitar conducted a legal study that led him to decide to resume his investigations despite the complaints filed against him," the official said.

Lebanon's powerful group Hezbollah had repeatedly demanded he step down on the grounds of political bias.

Hussein el-Khalil, the political adviser of Hezbollah chief

Hassan Nasrallah, told reporters yesterday that Bitar's investigation was a "black stain" on Lebanese justice.

The group and its ally Amal called for demonstrations to demand his dismissal in October 2021, with seven people dying in gun battles during the rally.

Foreign countries and international bodies have called for the probe to resume.

Bitar met last week with two French judges to discuss the investigation, a judicial source said at the time, adding he did not share any information with them. France had launched its own probe into the blast, which killed two of its citizens and wounded 93.

In Lebanon, state institutions have been reluctant to co-operate with the domestic probe, which began the same month as the explosion. In February 2021,

Bitar's predecessor as lead judge was removed from the case after he had charged high-level politicians. Parliament has refused to lift immunity granted to lawmakers, and Bitar's requests to interrogate top security officials have been turned down.

The interior ministry has also failed to execute arrest warrants issued by Bitar, further undermining his quest for accountability. The victims' families have been holding monthly vigils for more than two years, seeking justice and accountability.

"It was time for judge Bitar to resume his work," said Tatiana Hasrouty, whose father died in the blast. "We are ruled by a mafia, and all those charged by Bitar are part of that mafia," she said, saying she expects more hurdles in questioning officials.

Reuters
Monterey Park, Calif

California investigators scrambled yesterday to pin down why an elderly gunman killed 10 people in a Los Angeles-area dance hall popular with older patrons of Asian descent before fatally shooting himself hours later.

Police identified 72-year-old Huu Can Tran as the suspect in Saturday night's massacre, which took place over the Lunar New Year, one of the most festive holidays in Asian cultures.

Los Angeles County Sheriff Robert Luna said on Sunday that "everything is on the table" in terms of motive for the shooting, which also wounded 10 others.

"We don't know if this is specifically a hate crime defined by law, but who walks into a dance hall and guns down 20 people?" Luna said.

Officials worked into yesterday trying to identify the 10 people Tran allegedly killed at the Star Ballroom Dance Studio in Monterey Park, about 11km east of downtown Los Angeles.

Ten people were wounded in the attack, and seven of them were still hospitalised late Sunday.

Tran's rampage could have been worse.

About 20 minutes after the shooting in Monterey Park, he entered the Lai Lai Ballroom & Studio dance club in the neighbouring city of Alhambra.

There, Brandon Tsay, who operates the family-run dance

hall, wrestled a weapon away from the shooter before he could get a shot off.

"That moment, it was primal instinct," Tsay told the *New York Times*, saying that the gunman fled the scene after a 90-second struggle. "Something happened there."

I don't know what came over me."

About 12 hours later, police officers in Torrance, 20 miles southwest of Monterey Park, approached a white cargo van that Tran was driving.

As officers neared the van, they heard a single gun shot from inside as Tran killed himself.

Luna did not identify any of the victims but said the five men and five women appeared to be in their 50s, 60s and beyond. The Los Angeles Coroner's Office said 65-year-old My Nhan and 63-year-old Lilan Li, both women, were among the dead.

ABC News identified one of the deceased as dance instructor Ming Wei Ma.

A candlelight vigil was scheduled for the evening at Monterey Park's City Hall to honour the victims.

Luna said the pistol that Tran used was likely illegal in California, having a magazine whose capacity exceeded the state limit of 10 rounds.

Local police have obtained a warrant to search Tran's home in Hemet, California, about 80 miles east of Monterey Park, CNN reported. The Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department declined to comment, and Hemet Police dispatch could not confirm the report.

Venezuela public sector workers march for better salaries

Reuters
Caracas

Hundreds of public sector workers including teachers, nurses and retired police officers took to the streets in Venezuela yesterday to demand better salaries and pensions at a time when the government of President Nicolas Maduro faces growing inflation.

Workers in Venezuela's education and health sectors have held three peaceful demonstra-

tions in a dozen cities so far this year to demand more money.

Venezuela's minimum wage of 130 bolivars a month - around just \$6 - was last adjusted in March 2022, when year-on-year inflation closed at 305%, according to non-governmental groups that monitor economic indicators in the absence of official data.

The government says that US sanctions have made it impossible to control consumer price growth.

"Hunger doesn't know fear,



Demonstrators including teachers, health workers, workers' union members and members of the opposition march to demand better salaries, in Caracas, yesterday.

when hunger arrives fear disappears," said teacher Nancy Her-

andez, 60, during a march in Barquisimeto, referring to pos-

Sudan's prized gum trees ward off drought but workers wither

AFP
Demokaya

A vast belt of trees vital for global production of fizzy drinks helps Sudanese farmers adapt to climate change, but in the harsh drylands many are reluctant to take up the trade.

Gum arabic, golden blobs of resin tapped from thorny acacia trees, is an emulsifying agent virtually irreplaceable for global industry.

The ingredient is used in everything from soft drinks to chewing gum and pharmaceuticals.

Sudan, in northeastern Africa, is among the countries hardest hit by climate change but is also the world's largest producer of the raw gum.

"It's an important tree to fight desertification as it is drought resistant - and also increases the soil fertility, essential to increasing crop production," said Fatma Ramly, co-ordinator of the Gum Arabic Farmers' As-

sociation, which counts 7mm members.

To harvest the amber-coloured resin, farmers must suffer the same climatic extremes as their trees.

"We work for hours on end under a burning sun," said Mohamed Moussa, who collects resin at the state-owned Demokaya research forest, about 30 kilometres from the North Kordofan state capital, El Obeid.

Moussa faces a constant struggle with the shortage of water in largely desert Sudan.

His earnings from the trees barely "provide enough money to buy water to cover us until the autumn" rainy season.

Recorded temperatures in Sudan's Kordofan region have increased by almost two degrees Celsius in less than three decades, more than double the global average, according to the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO).

"Water scarcity is one of the key challenges for people" living in the acacia zone, said Madani



Sudanese men harvest gum arabic sap from an acacia tree, in the state-owned Demokaya research forest some 30km east of El-Obeid, the capital city of the central wilayet (state) of North Kordofan. **Right:** Gum arabic sap is pictured at the tip of a "sunki", a long wooden handled-tool with a sharp metal edge, in the state-owned Demokaya research forest.

Ismail, of the state-run Agricultural Research Corp Farmers also have to contend with wide fluctuations in the price of gum on world commodity markets.

Forty-five kilograms (100 pounds) of raw gum can fetch 22,000 to 25,000 Sudanese pounds (\$43), depending on the day's price.

The return barely covers the cost of production for Abdelbaqi Ahmed, 52, who owns a 28-hectare (70-acre) plot of

acacia trees in Botei, North Kordofan. He cultivates other crops to help boost his income from the trees, whose bark he cuts with a "sunki" - a sharp blade attached to a long wooden shaft able to reach up high in the tree.

"It is a laborious task," said Ahmed, who sometimes hires others to help with the tapping. "So it doesn't usually pay off."

Others can't be bothered at all. Some cut down the trees for

building materials or firewood.

Many work in the nearby gold mines, like four of Ahmed's five sons. For Abdallah Babiker, who also works in Demokaya, it's the same. His three sons would rather prospect for gold than tend acacia trees. "They want work that earns more," said Babiker, 72. Since South Sudan broke away a decade ago, taking with it its large oil reserves, gum arabic has been one of Sudan's main foreign currency earners.



Exports totalled 88,000 tonnes in 2021, earning \$110mn, according to central bank figures. That income has become all the more important since international donors cut aid following a 2021 coup led by army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan.

Sudanese exports account for 70% of global gum supplies, according to AFD, the French agency for development.

Their importance to the world economy earned them a special exemption from the US trade embargo imposed during the three-decade rule of now-outdated ruler Omar al-Bashir.

Efforts have been made to counter deforestation by boosting farmers' incomes. "We have been trying to replant trees in areas that experienced deterioration, and to prevent the gum arabic belt from receding," Ramly said.

Sudan's gum arabic belt covers about 500,000 square kilometres from Gedaref in the east through Kordofan to Darfur on the border with Chad.

All but one university raid protesters released in Peru

All but one of almost 200 protesters arrested at a Lima university where they were staying in order to take part in anti-government rallies have been freed, the public prosecutor said yesterday, AFP reported from Lima. Security forces had used an armoured vehicle on Saturday to smash down the gate to the San Marcos University campus before arresting 193 people staying there. All have since been questioned by police and the provincial prosecutor's office said in the early hours of yesterday that "192 people have been freed, one person remains in detention." Thousands of people had converged on Lima last week from poor Andean regions to take part in the protests demanding the resignation of President Dina Boluarte, the dissolution of parliament, fresh elections and a new constitution. Hundreds of protesters found accommodation in hostels, political party headquarters and two city centre universities.

POLICY
Tackling birth rate crisis ‘cannot wait’: Japan PM

Japan's low birth rate and ageing population pose an urgent risk to society, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said yesterday, pledging to address the issue by establishing a new government agency. Birth rates are declining in many developed countries, but in Japan the issue is particularly acute because it has the world's second-highest proportion of people aged 65 and over, after the tiny state of Monaco, according to World Bank data. "The number of births dropped below 800,000 last year, according to estimates," Kishida told lawmakers. "Japan is standing on the verge of whether we can continue to function as a society," he said.

COMMENT
War with China not an option: Taiwan president

Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen has written to Pope Francis to say that war between Taiwan and China is not an option and only by respecting the Taiwanese people's insistence on sovereignty and freedom can there be healthy ties with Beijing. The Vatican is Chinese-claimed Taiwan's sole European diplomatic ally, and Taipei has watched with concern as Pope Francis has moved to improve relations with China. In the letter, sent in response to the Pope's World Day Of Peace message on January 1, Tsai said war in Ukraine has made the world appreciate the value of peace and that maintaining regional security has become an important consensus.

OFFBEAT
China gamers bid farewell to ‘World of Warcraft’

Chinese players of roleplaying epic 'World of Warcraft' bade a sad farewell to the land of Azeroth yesterday, with the game set to go offline after a dispute between US developer Blizzard and local partner NetEase. Massively popular worldwide, particularly in the 2000s, "World of Warcraft" is an online multiplayer role playing game set in a fantasy-Medieval world where good battles evil. Blizzard's games have been available in China since 2008, through collaboration with Internet giant NetEase. But after 14 years and millions of players in China, the two firms announced in November that talks over renewing their operating contract had failed to lead to an agreement.

RECOMMENDATION
UK ‘must consider social tariff for household energy’

Britain should consider launching a social tariff for household energy which would see those most vulnerable and least able to pay charged a lower price for their power, the country's energy regulator said yesterday. British energy prices hit record highs last year, forcing the government to subsidise costs for all households and issue extra payments for the most vulnerable. Even with this help, "there are many households that simply cannot pay their energy bills", Ofgem chief executive Jonathan Brearley said at an Institute of Government event. The government has guaranteed to keep average household energy bills below £2,500 a year until the end of April.

INDUSTRIAL ACTION
UK ambulance workers strike as unions call for talks

Thousands of ambulance workers held another strike across England and Wales yesterday, in escalating industrial action as unions called the government to hold talks on improving pay and conditions. Ambulance workers began strike action on December 21 last year and further dates are planned for February. Nurses have also launched unprecedented strike action, reflecting widespread discontent in the state-funded National Health Service whose staff are struggling with soaring living costs. Yesterday's industrial action comes ahead of mass simultaneous strikes planned for February 6 by unions representing both nurses and ambulance staff.

Man found guilty of robbing cycling star Cavendish

AFP
London

A man was found guilty yesterday of robbing British cycling star Mark Cavendish and his wife Peta of their high-value watches in a knife-point attack at their home.

Intruders wearing balaclavas broke into the property about 40kms northeast of London in the early hours of November 27, 2021, and threatened to stab the athlete, a jury at Chelmsford Crown Court was told.

They took items including two Richard Mille watches with a combined value of £700,000 (\$864,000).

Romario Henry, 31, of south-east London, denied the charges but was found guilty on two counts of robbery by a majority verdict of 10 jurors to two, after more than 14 hours of deliberation.

His co-defendant, Oludewa Okorosobo, 28, who gave an address in south London, denied two counts of robbery and was cleared by the jury.

Ali Sesay, 28, admitted two counts of robbery at an earlier hearing, and the trial was previously told that his DNA was found on the phone of Peta Cavendish, which was discovered outside the property.

Mark Cavendish jointly owns the record for stage wins at the Tour de France, with 34 victories to his name, and also won an Olympic silver medal on the track at the 2016 Rio Games.

Earlier this month, the 37-year-old rider signed a one-year contract with Astana, which as a World Tour team are slated for the Tour de France in July.

Cavendish told the court during the trial that he woke to the sound of voices and that Peta went to investigate.

"I got up to follow her out (of the bedroom) and as I was stepping out of the room is when she started to come back up (the stairs)," Cavendish said yesterday. "She shouted 'get in!'

India Republic Day parade rehearsal



Indian soldiers march during the full dress rehearsal for the upcoming Republic Day parade, in New Delhi yesterday.

UK premier orders probe into ally's tax affairs

AFP
London

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak yesterday ordered an investigation into a wealthy ally's murky tax dealings as he again vowed "integrity" in his government after Boris Johnson's scandal-plagued tenure.

As well as the probe into Conservative party chairman Nadhim Zahawi, Sunak faced questions about the appointment of BBC chairman Richard Sharp, a former banker who acted as a go-between to help funnel a loan to Johnson when he was in 10 Downing Street.

The allegations surrounding well-off individuals threaten to become a political distraction for Sunak as he battles to restore the Conservatives' standing in the polls in the midst of Britain's worst cost-of-living crisis in decades.

Opposition Labour leader Keir Starmer accused Sunak of extending Johnson's dismal record of scandal instead of helping people "struggling with their bills, struggling with their jobs, struggling with all of the pressures that come about because of 13 years of (Tory) failure".

But Sunak refused to accede to opposition demands to fire Zahawi, who reportedly settled a seven-figure demand from tax authorities with a fine for late payment when he served briefly as chancellor of the exchequer last year under Johnson.

The prime minister instead commissioned a probe by his newly appointed ministerial ethics adviser, Laurie Magnus, conceding that "clearly in this case,



The allegations surrounding well-off individuals threaten to become a political distraction for Sunak as he battles to restore the Tories' standing in the polls

there are questions that need answering".

Sunak appointed Zahawi as party chairman, and cabinet minister without portfolio, when he entered Downing Street in October.

He deflected questions about Zahawi's activities prior to then, as concerns mounted about whether Johnson knew of the tax investigation when he appointed the Iraqi-born politician as chancellor and head of the UK's tax authority.

Zahawi welcomed the probe and insisted he did nothing wrong in the tax case, which stems from his co-founding of the successful polling company YouGov in 2000.

But opposition parties have pointed to his shifting explanations as more details have emerged in newspaper reports, and to his prior threats of libel lawsuits against journalists and a

tax consultant who had been digging into the affair.

Sunak has faced questions himself about his family's tax affairs after it emerged that his Indian wife Akshata Murty had for years enjoyed "non-domicile" status, which shielded her from paying UK taxes on her overseas income from her family's Infosys business group.

And yesterday he reiterated apologies for receiving his second police fine, after he was filmed not wearing a seatbelt in the back seat of a moving car.

As chancellor under Johnson, Sunak was fined along with the then prime minister for attending an illegal workplace party during a Covid lockdown.

The "partygate" scandal was one of several that brought down Johnson.

On entering Number 10 in October, Sunak vowed "integrity, professionalism and accountability at every level of the government".

He reiterated that pledge yesterday, but was also forced to defend Johnson's appointment of Sharp to one of Britain's most high-profile roles as chairman of the BBC.

According to the *Sunday Times*, just before he became the chairman, Sharp was involved in securing a private credit line for up to £800,000 (\$990,000) for the then-PM from Sam Blyth, an old friend of Sharp who is a distant cousin of Johnson.

Downing Street yesterday defended the BBC appointments process as "rigorous". But Sunak asked the government's commissioner for public appointments, William Shawcross, to review the recruitment competition.

India ‘expected to cut’ gold import duty

Reuters
New Delhi/Mumbai

India is expected to slash the import duty on gold to undercut smugglers who have been offering hefty discounts as illicit imports boom after Covid-19, denting the market share of banks and refiners, government and industry officials said.

A cut in the import duty by the world's second-biggest consumer could lift retail sales by making gold cheaper ahead of peak demand season and support global prices. It could also revive operations of domestic gold refiners, who have seen their business wither over the past two months as they are unable to compete with grey-market operators.

"The government is aware of problems created by the higher duty structure and they will be fixed soon," said one government official, who declined to be identified, in response to a question about the possibility of a cut

in the import duty. Grey market operators, who smuggle gold in from overseas and sell it for cash to avoid duties, got a boost in July when the government raised the basic import duty on gold to 12.5% from 7.5% to bring down the trade deficit and support the rupee.

The effective duty is now 18.45%, which includes the 12.5% import duty, 2.5% agriculture infrastructure development cess and other taxes.

Another official said the government was considering bringing the effective rate down to below 12%, adding: "We will take a final call soon."

The finance ministry declined to comment while the trade ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

An official at the ministry of commerce said it was in favour of cutting the import duty on gold and had asked the finance ministry to do so. "Smuggling is going up," said the commerce ministry official, adding that the duty could be cut in an upcoming budget.

The July increase in the duty on gold was a welcome boost for the smugglers, who were largely sidelined in 2020 and 2021 because of travel restrictions imposed to contain Covid-19.

The grey market operators are now offering a more than \$40 per ounce discount on official domestic prices, which no bank or refiner can match, said James Jose, managing director of refiner CGR Metalloys.

"Substantial reduction in the duty is the only solution to stop smuggling," Jose said.

Customs and other agencies seized 3,083.6kg of gold illegally brought in last year up to November, the highest in three years. Indian gold prices jumped to a record Rs56,850 per 10 grams last week.

The increase in smuggling has contributed to a decline in legal imports in December by 79% from a year earlier to the lowest level in at least two decades for the month, the commerce ministry estimated.

Congress rally



India's Congress party leader Rahul Gandhi (centre) takes part in the 'Bharat Jodo Yatra' march in Jammu yesterday.

Industrialist faces arrest for Gujarat bridge crash

Reuters
Ahmedabad

Police in India aim to arrest the boss of a clock-making company that managed a colonial-era footbridge in a small industrial town in Gujarat until it collapsed last year, killing at least 135 people, two senior police officials said.

The 145-year-old suspension bridge in the town of Morbi was packed with sightseers when it collapsed on October 30, plunging hundreds of people into the Machchhu river below.

The victims were largely women and children who died due to drowning.

Nearly three months later, police have issued an arrest warrant for Jaysukh Patel, the managing director of Oreva Group, best known for making clocks and electrical products, said Ashish Bhatia, head of police in Gujarat, the western state which is also Prime Minister Narendra Modi's home state.

A look-out circular has also been issued to prevent Patel

from leaving the country, Bhatia added.

Patel's mobile phone remained switched off yesterday and messages from Reuters did not get delivered to him.

Staff at Oreva Group's offices in Ahmedabad city and Morbi declined to respond to telephone queries.

The company did not immediately respond to a query over e-mail.

The warrant was issued after Patel did not respond to multiple police summons and could not be found at his residential addresses in Ahmedabad and Morbi, a senior police official said.

"We have strong evidence that points to Patel being responsible for the bridge collapse," said the official, who did not wish to be named as he was not authorised to speak to media.

"The evidence also points out that the cables of the bridge needed repairs; they had not been repaired since the bridge was constructed during colonial times, and this is one of the main reasons for the collapse."

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GULF TIMES

Western military aid girds Kyiv for counterattacks

Billions of dollars in new Western military aid, including infantry fighting vehicles — though no German tanks — will gird Ukraine for counterattacks to foil Moscow's efforts to revive its faltering invasion.

But Kyiv needs other weapons systems to win decisively and, while Russia is readying for a protracted war, it is unclear if defence production — in Europe at least — can keep up military aid at a high level, military analysts said.

The United States and Finland announced new packages of \$2.5bn and €400mn (some \$430mn) in military aid ahead of Friday's Ramstein Air Base talks, which failed to break the deadlock on the idea of supplying German-built Leopard tanks to Ukraine.

The latest US aid includes 90 Stryker armoured personnel carriers (APC) and 59 Bradley fighting vehicles with powerful canons — adding to 50 Bradleys pledged earlier this month along with French and German infantry fighting vehicles.

"It will definitely have a tactical impact on the battlefield," Poland-based defence analyst Konrad Muzyka said by phone, pointing to the contingent of more than 100 Bradleys.

A group of nine European states, including Britain and the Baltics promised on Thursday to deliver heavy artillery, air defence, ammunition and infantry fighting vehicles and battle tanks sought by Kyiv.

The Ramstein talks were dominated by wrangling over whether Germany would approve the re-export of Leopard tanks used by Nato armies. There was no breakthrough on Friday on the issue, which is sensitive for Berlin for historical and political reasons.

Former Ukrainian defence minister Andriy Zagorodnyuk told Reuters he believed it was just a matter of time until Berlin did approve tank supplies, an assertion echoed by Andriy Yermak, head of the Ukrainian president's office on Telegram.

"We are getting stronger. Everything we haven't received yet, we will receive," Yermak said, in a clear reference to the tanks.

Zagorodnyuk said he believed infantry fighting vehicles were a clear endorsement of Kyiv's counterattack plans, also noting the importance of large donations of ammunition.

"The expenditure rate of ammunition is huge. It's unprecedented, probably since World War Two. We also see APCs, Bradleys and Strykers, which are of course an indicator that the allies believe in our counteroffensive," he said.

Invaded last February, Ukraine fought back Russian forces from around its capital, its north, northeast and a swathe in the south, maintaining the battlefield initiative for much of the 11-month invasion.

Fearing that Russia could use the cold winter weather — which has slowed down fighting on the front — in order to regroup, rearm and launch a major new offensive, Ukraine has itself wanted to launch its own counterattacks.

Zagorodnyuk said he believed Russia was not able — for now — to launch anything more than localised offensives. He speculated that Russia — under the command of newly appointed General Valery Gerasimov — might be using the winter pause to redesign its war campaign to wage a long war.

"For us, that is categorically not interesting. I don't think time works for us at all. I think we need to finish most of the effort this year," he said.

But a senior Biden administration official said on Friday that senior officials were urging Ukraine to hold off on a major counteroffensive on Russian forces until the latest supply of US weaponry is in place and training has been provided.

Berlin said earlier this month that it would send 40 Marder infantry fighting vehicles before the end of March; Paris said it would send AMX 10-RC armoured combat vehicles, which are seen as tank destroyers.

Muzyka said the first combat vehicles would only arrive in March or April in an optimistic scenario.

In an interview with the Economist in December, Ukraine's top general, Valeriy Zaluzhnyi said he needed 300 tanks, 600-700 infantry fighting vehicles and 500 howitzers to help his forces push back the invaders.

"I know that I can beat this enemy. But I need resources," he said.

— Reuters

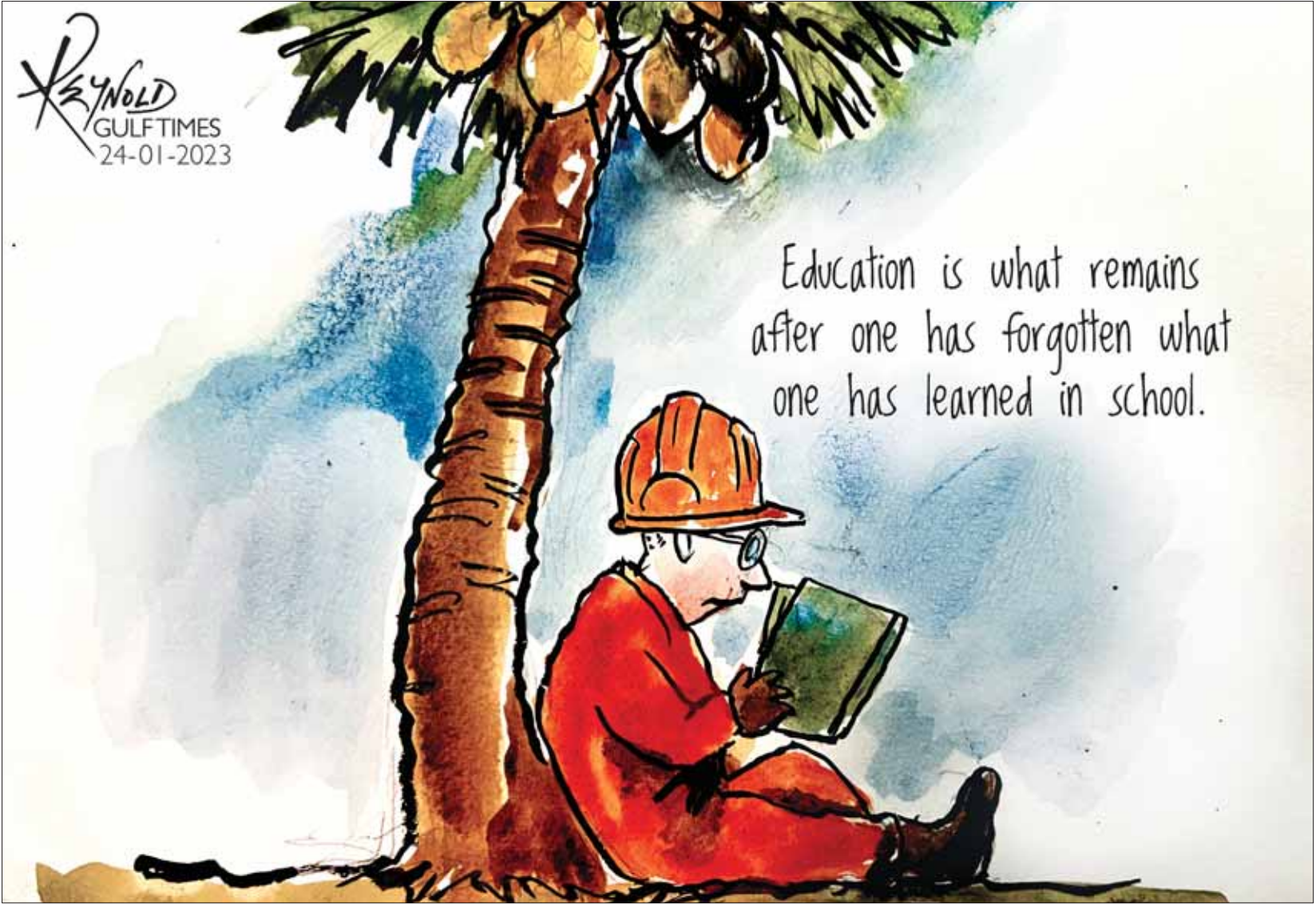
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Seeds of change: Nepal's local crops raise food security hope



Farmers encouraged to sow indigenous and traditional seeds



Demand for local produce is rising due to health benefits



Experts say effort can boost resilience to climate change

By Mukesh Pokhrel
Kathmandu

At his shop in Nepal's capital, Tilak Dhakal sells traditional crops that have vanished from many of the country's markets: sorghum, millet, buckwheat flour and mustard, among others.

With products sourced from around rural Nepal, the shop is part of a drive to promote local crops that could not just help boost food security and improve people's health, but build the country's resilience to worsening climate change impacts.

"We have given priority to indigenous crops, which (have been) produced in Nepal ... for hundreds of years," said Dhakal, founder of the 'Raithane Koseli Ghar' initiative, which loosely translates as 'Indigenous Souvenir Shop' in Nepali.

"We are not just doing business. Our priority is also to conserve indigenous crops, knowledge, and seeds," added the 61-year-old, a retired conservationist.

Launched four years ago, the project not only procures and sells such produce but provides technical support to farmers to grow traditional crops — with the support of local government — and raises awareness among both consumers and agriculturalists.

It now has nearly 50 backers and \$2.5 million in investment — with support from environmentalists, businesses and banks — and is fast gaining growers and buyers, according to Dhakal.

Demand for local crops is rising in cities from Bhaktapur to Kathmandu, he said, due to the perceived health

benefits and superior quality and flavour compared with commercial hybrid crops, grown with seeds bred from differing varieties.

About 20 shops such as Dhakal's selling produce native to Nepal have opened in the capital in recent years, he added.

Kathmandu resident Tara Ghimire said she buys buckwheat and millet flour from Dhakal's shop — and was happy to pay the premium — because she believed local crops were better for her.

"Local crops are tasty and healthy," the 45-year-old said. "Money is nothing compared to health."

Despite the growing popularity, local crop varieties are scarce across Nepal as farmers tend to favour hybrid varieties that are more productive in good conditions and therefore more profitable.

Traditional knowledge about local seeds — and efforts to protect them — have waned in many rural communities, according to several residents.

About 40% of Nepal's local seed varieties have disappeared from the country's mountain region, where many indigenous crops from barley to buckwheat were once common, said Ram Prasad Mainali, a scientist at the National Agriculture Research Center.

However, as the farming sector increasingly suffers weather shocks — from worsening drought to rising heat — agriculture experts say investing in native crops could act as a buffer and ultimately ensure the country's food supply is more sustainable.

"Local and traditional crop varieties are more resilient to changing environmental conditions as they have developed over time through natural selection and adaptation," said Sabnam

Shivakoti, joint secretary at the agriculture ministry.

However, there is hardly a widespread desire to return to farming traditional crops, in a country where 80% of the population of 28mn rely on agriculture to make a living.

In Nepal's Rupandehi district, in western Lumbini province, two farmers said that local varieties of rice — like Basmati and Saro — had been completely replaced by hybrid varieties.

"We want productivity and return on our investment, and local crops don't give a return," said farmer Ramesh Sharma.

Sharma said he previously harvested about 240kg of rice a year using native seeds, but had more than tripled his annual yields since switching entirely to hybrid seeds in 2022.

About 125km away — in Arghakhanchi district — farmer Nirmala Pandey explained how she used to grow local varieties of crops such as corn, cucumber and okra at home until 15 years ago.

Now, those seeds have become extinct in the area, she said.

"The seeds of all crops can be bought in the store and so we started planting hybrid crops of which the seeds come from outside Nepal," Pandey added.

Losses of indigenous crops across Nepal have also been fuelled by internal migration from rural areas to cities, with large swathes of previously fertile land once sown with local seeds now left barren, conservation officials said.

Between 25-40% of cultivated land in the country is barren, according to the government's Center for Crop Development and Agro Biodiversity Conservation.

The growing scarcity of native crops

has raised concerns about food security and possible food shortages, or even crises, in the future.

Pitambar Shrestha, project manager at Local Initiatives for Biodiversity, Research and Development (LI-BIRD) — an NGO — said that if India and other nations were to stop exporting seeds to Nepal, it could struggle to grow enough crops for its people.

"If we depend on imported seeds, we may be in a crisis in the future," he said.

"For example, we are facing a crisis of chemical fertiliser due to the war between Russia and Ukraine."

Nepal in 2007 set up the Genebank to conserve local seeds, and now has more than 6,170 different varieties including rice, barley and wheat, according to its head Balakrishna Joshi.

Seeds in the Genebank can germinate for 200 years, he said, adding that it was vital to "conserve local crops for upcoming generations and researchers" and for the benefit of Nepal's economy.

Dhakal of Raithane Koseli Ghar said it was "very difficult" to find indigenous crops across rural Nepal, and that the project had to "collect on a small scale from various places".

Yet Dhakal said that since the opening of his Kathmandu shop he had seen a growing trend of villages planting local seeds.

He highlighted a farmer in Nuwakot district who increased his native rice output more than eightfold — to 2,500kg — in 2021 after Dhakal had paid a premium for it the year before.

"I visited 50 districts in rural areas and I heard the same from everyone: they do not benefit from local crops," he said. "But if they get a good price, they will plant local crops."

— Thomson Reuters Foundation



Farmer Radha Pokhrel tends to her crops in Arghakhanchi, Nepal, yesterday.

How long can a healthy human live?



OLDEST NO MORE: Lucile Randon

The death of the world's oldest person at the age of 118 has reignited a debate that has divided scientists for centuries: is there a limit on how long a healthy human can live? After French nun Lucile Randon died last week, Spanish great-grandmother Maria Branyas Morera, 115, has assumed the title of the oldest living person, according to *Guinness World Records*.

Back in the 18th century, French naturalist Georges-Louis Leclerc, known as the Comte de Buffon, theorised that a person who had not suffered an accident or illness could live for a theoretical maximum of 100 years. Since then, medical advancements and improving living conditions have pushed the limit back by a couple of decades. A new milestone was reached when Frenchwoman Jeanne Calment celebrated her 120th birthday in 1995. Calment died two years later at the age of 122. She remains the oldest person ever to have lived — that has been verified, at least. According to the United Nations, there were an estimated 593,000 people aged 100 years or older in 2021, up from 353,000 a decade earlier. The number of centenarians is expected to more than double over the next decade, according to the Statista data agency. The Comte de Buffon might also have been surprised by the rise of supercentenarians — people aged 110 or over — whose numbers have been increasing since the 1980s.

Natural limit at 115?

So how far could we go? Scientists disagree, with some maintaining that the lifespan of our species is limited by strict biological constraints. In 2016, geneticists writing in the journal *Nature* said there had been no improvement in human longevity since the late 1990s. Analysing global demographic data, they found that the maximum human lifespan had declined since Calment's death — even though there were more elderly people in the world. "They concluded that human lifespan has a natural limit and that longevity is limited to around 115 years," French demographer Jean-Marie Robine told AFP. "But this hypothesis is partly disputed by many demographers," said Robine, a specialist in centenarians at the INSERM medical research institute. Research in 2018 found that while the rate of death increases with age, it slows down after 85. Around the age of 107, the rate of death peaks at 50-60% every year, the research said. "Under this theory, if there are 12 people aged 110, six will survive to be 111, three to be 112, and so on," Robine said.

A numbers game

But the more supercentenarians, the higher chance a few have to live to make it to record ages. If there are 100 supercentenarians, "50 will live to be 111 years old, 25 to 112," Robine said. "Thanks to a 'volume effect', there are no longer fixed limits to longevity." However Robine and his team are publishing research this year which will show that the rate of death continues to increase beyond the age of 105, further narrowing the window. Does this mean there is a hard ceiling on how long we can live? Robine will not go that far. "We will continue to make discoveries, as we always have, and little by little the health of the oldest people will improve," he said. Other experts are also cautious about choosing a side. "There is no definitive answer for the moment," said France Mesle, a demographer at the French institute of demographic studies (INED). "Even if they are increasing, the number of people reaching very old age is still quite small and we still cannot make any significant statistical estimate," she told AFP. So it might be a matter of waiting for rising numbers of supercentenarians to test the "volume effect". And of course some future medical breakthroughs could soon upend everything we know about death. Eric Boulanger, a French doctor specialising in the elderly, said that "genetic manipulation" could allow some people to live for 140 or even 150 years.

Alleged German Hells Angels boss goes on trial in Spain

A German went on trial in Spain yesterday for allegedly running a chapter of the Hells Angels motorcycle gang on the holiday island of Mallorca that was involved in prostitution, drug trafficking and other organised crime. Frank Hanebuth, suspected of being of a top European member of the US-based biker group, is in the dock alongside 46 other suspected members and collaborators. Wearing blue jeans and a black coat, he sat with his hands in his lap at the court in San Fernando de Henares, near Madrid, as the judge read the charges. Spanish prosecutors accuse Hanebuth of founding the Hells Angel chapter in Mallorca and then appointing its members, who are suspected of crimes including pimping, extortion, drug trafficking and acquiring illegal firearms. According to the prosecutor's indictment, prostitution was one of the chapter's "main sources of income", with women "coerced" into working at brothels owned by the gang. "Those women were the property of the organisation and had to comply with its rules or face various sorts of sanctions," the indictment said. The gang allegedly paid for some of them to undergo cosmetic surgery "for the sole purpose of making women 'more productive' and obtaining a bigger profit," it added. Spanish prosecutors are seeking a 13-year prison sentence for Hanebuth on charges of membership in a criminal organisation, money laundering, making threats and illegal possession of arms, as well as a fine of €4.2mn (\$4.6mn). Other suspected members of the gang are charged with drug trafficking and running a prostitution ring, and face up to 38 years. The gang is believed to have operated in Mallorca between 2009 and 2013, when Hanebuth was arrested in Spain along with 24 other suspects in a series of raids.

Pakistan begins restoring power after countrywide blackout

Reuters
Islamabad

Pakistan's government began restoring power to millions of people yesterday after a breakdown in the grid triggered the worst electricity outage in months and highlighted the weak infrastructure of the heavily indebted nation. An inquiry has been launched into the outage, which began at around 7am local time and has so far lasted more than 12 hours during the peak winter season. As evening drew on and homes were without electricity in the dark, Energy Minister Khurram Dastgir wrote on Twitter that authorities had started restoring power across the country. Dastgir had told reporters earlier: "We have faced some hurdles but we will overcome these hurdles, and will restore the power." The outage, which the minister had said was due to a voltage surge,

is the second major grid failure in three months, and adds to the blackouts that Pakistan's nearly 220mn people suffer on an almost-daily basis. Power was beginning to return in parts of the capital Islamabad and the southwest province of Balochistan, said Dastgir. Pakistan's largest city and economic hub Karachi is likely to see electricity restored in the next three to four hours, a spokesperson for K-Electric Ltd, the southern city's power provider, said. Analysts and officials blame the power problems on an ageing electricity network, which like much of the national infrastructure, desperately needs an upgrade that the government says it can ill afford. The International Monetary Fund has bailed out Pakistan five times in the last two decades. Its latest bailout tranche, however, is stuck due to differences with the government over a programme review that should have been completed in November.

Pakistan has enough installed power capacity to meet demand, but it lacks resources to run its oil-and-gas powered plants. The sector is so heavily in debt that it cannot afford to invest in infrastructure and power lines. China has invested in its power sector as part of a \$60bn infrastructure scheme that feeds into Beijing's "Belt and Road" initiative. "We have been adding capacity, but we have been doing so without improving transmission infrastructure," said Fahad Rauf, head of research at Karachi brokerage Ismail Iqbal Industries. The outage occurred on a winter's day where temperatures are forecast to fall to around 4 degrees Celsius (39°F) in Islamabad and 8 degrees Celsius (46°F) in Karachi. Many people also have no running water due to a lack of power for the pumps. Earlier, Dastgir told Reuters the grid should be fully functioning by 10pm. The outage hit Internet and mo-

bile phone services. Several companies and hospitals said they had switched to back-up generators, but disruptions continued across the board. Thousands of mobile phone towers also went offline across Pakistan due to the power cut, an industry source told Reuters. The disruption hit the country's approximately 40,000 telecommunication towers. The telecommunication industry source raised fears that if power was not switched back on soon, it could lead to a communications blackout as mobile phone towers run out of backup fuel and batteries. He added that service degradation had begun in some parts of the country as some towers went offline. Some social media users in Pakistan complained of mobile signals disappearing in major cities of the country, including Islamabad. "No signals at the Karakoram apartments, Diplomatic Enclave,

Islamabad," former Senator Sehar Kamran said on Twitter. Separately, the country's telecommunications regulator, the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA), warned of outages. "Due to country wide power outage, users may face service disruptions," PTA said in a statement. It said operators have been instructed to inform subscribers and to do their utmost to refuel backup power on the maximum number of mobile tower sites. A spokesperson for PTA did not respond to a question on how many of Pakistan's telecommunication towers were offline. Global Internet monitoring group Netblocks said on Twitter that metrics showed telecommunications in most regions of the country had been impacted by the country-wide power outage and that there had been a significant decline in Internet access. Pakistan has 194mn cellular subscribers and 124mn broadband subscribers, according to PTA.



An aerial view shows Islamabad during a nationwide power outage yesterday. (AFP)

Court acquits police over shopkeeper killing

A Pakistan court yesterday cleared more than a dozen police officers of the 2018 killing of a Karachi shopkeeper, his family lawyer said, a shooting which caused national outcry over police abuse. Rights groups have long accused Pakistan's police of orchestrating so-called encounter killings, staging shoot-outs with suspects in order to pursue extrajudicial executions. In January 2018, Rao Anwar — a senior superintendent with a string of allegations against him — led a raid on a suspected Pakistani Taliban hideout in the port city of Karachi. Four men were killed, including 27-year-old Naequebullah Mehsud, whose family rejected claims of militant links and said he was working in retail while pursuing his dream of modelling. Soon after his death, Mehsud's modelling portfolio went viral on social media sparking protests in several cities led by thousands of members of his Pashtun ethnic group.

The nation's chief justice intervened in what was a rare case of accountability. Yesterday, an anti-terror court convened in Karachi's central prison "acquitted all the accused including Rao Anwar", Salahuddin Panwar, the Mehsud family lawyer, told AFP. In total 18 people, all law enforcement officials, were on trial. Panwar pledged to challenge the verdict in a higher court. Speaking to domestic media after his release, Anwar said "a false case has today reached its logical end". The southern city of Karachi, home to more than 15mn, was once a hive of militant activity. But a police crackdown starting in 2013 led to a dramatic downturn in violence. Still, in 2022 Human Rights Watch said: "Pakistan law enforcement agencies were responsible for grave human rights violations, including detention without charge and extrajudicial killings". "The government continued to do little to hold law enforcement agencies accountable for torture and other serious abuses," it said.

Five Germans charged over coup plot

Five Germans have been charged with treason over a far-right plot to overthrow the government that included plans to abduct the health minister, prosecutors said yesterday. The four men and a woman were arrested in recent months over the plot, with Health Minister Karl Lauterbach — unpopular among far-right groups because of anti-Covid measures — confirming that he was targeted. They were charged on January 16 and face counts ranging from founding a domestic terror group to preparing a treasonous act and violating

weapons laws, the federal prosecutors' office said. The group aimed to "trigger civil war-like conditions in Germany by means of violence... to cause the overthrow of the government and parliamentary democracy," it said in a statement. The suspects accepted that fatalities could result from the attempted overthrow, it added. It said the group's ideology was "shaped" by the woman charged — identified only as Elisabeth R — and was centred on the belief that the modern German state was not legitimate.

Will they, won't they? Tanks of contention

Poland seeks German permission to send Leopards to Ukraine but says will do so anyway if others did, too

Reuters
Warsaw/Kyiv

Poland said yesterday it would ask Germany for permission to send Leopard tanks to Ukraine — and would send them whether or not Berlin agreed as long as other countries did too. The Kyiv government wants the German-made Leopard 2, one of the most widely used Western tanks, to help it break through Russian lines and recapture territory this year. Germany, which must approve re-exports of the Leopard, has held

back, wary of moves that could cause Moscow to escalate, and says other Nato countries have yet to formally ask to re-export them. On Sunday, German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said Berlin would not stand in Poland's way, but Warsaw's call for a coalition signalled any transfer was still some way off. Western countries have committed billions of dollars in new military aid to Ukraine in recent days: yesterday, European Union foreign ministers agreed to release their latest tranche, worth €500mn (\$545mn), three sources said. But at both yesterday's EU talks

in Brussels and last week's meeting of Western defence ministers in Germany, the issue of battle tanks dominated discussions. "At this point there are no good arguments why battle tanks cannot be provided," Latvian Foreign Minister Edgars Rinkevics said. "The argument of escalation does not work, because Russia continues escalating." Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki, whose country, like Latvia, neighbours Ukraine, said Warsaw would ask Germany for permission to re-export the tanks to Kyiv. "Even if we did not get this approval... we would still transfer

our tanks together with others to Ukraine. The condition for us at the moment is to build at least a small coalition of countries," he said. Poland has said it would provide a company of Leopards — around 14 — but Morawiecki said a transfer only made sense as part of a brigade — a variable but much larger number. Some 20 countries operate the tank, including Canada, Denmark, Finland, Netherlands, Norway, Austria, Spain, Sweden and Türkiye. Ukraine says Western tanks would give its ground troops the mobility, protection and firepower to break through Russian defensive

lines and resume their advance. "We need tanks — not 10-20, but several hundred," Zelenskyy's chief of staff Andriy Yermak wrote on Telegram. "Our goal is (restoring) the borders of 1991 and punishing the enemy, who will pay for their crimes." Arriving in Brussels yesterday, Germany's Baerbock declined to say if she had been speaking for the whole ruling coalition when she said Berlin would not prevent Poland re-exporting the tanks. Chancellor Olaf Scholz's Social Democrat party has expressed concern Russia might escalate or even retaliate.

Billions still exposed to toxic trans fat: WHO

AFP
Geneva

Efforts to eliminate industrially-produced fat have a long way to go with five billion people exposed to toxic fat added to many food products, the UN health agency said yesterday. The World Health Organisation (WHO) called in 2018 for harmful trans fatty acids to be wiped out by 2023. They are thought to be responsible for around 500,000 premature deaths from coronary heart disease each year. Although 43 countries with combined populations of 2.8bn people have now implemented best-practice policies, most of the world remains unprotected, it said.

WHO acknowledged in an annual progress report that the goal was still out of sight. Industrially-produced trans fat is often used in packaged foods, baked goods, cooking oils and spreads. "Trans fat has no known benefit, and huge health risks that incur huge costs for health systems," WHO director-general Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said. "By contrast, eliminating trans fat is cost effective and has enormous benefits for health," he said. "Put simply, trans fat is a toxic chemical that kills, and should have no place in food. It's time to get rid of it once and for all." The WHO said that nine of the 16 countries with the highest estimated proportion of

coronary heart disease deaths caused by trans fat intake were not implementing best-practice policies. They include Australia, Azerbaijan, Bhutan, Ecuador, Egypt, Iran, Nepal, Pakistan and South Korea. Francesco Branca, the WHO's nutrition and food safety director, told reporters that trans fat elimination policies were in place in 60 countries, covering 3.4bn people or 43 percent of the world's population. Of those countries, 43 are implementing best practice standards. Best practice means either a mandatory national limit of two grammes of industrially-produced trans fat per 100 grammes of total fat in all foods; or a national ban on the production or use of partially-hydrogenated oils, which are a major source of trans fat. "WHO and partners call on countries with a high burden such as Egypt, Iran, Pakistan and South Korea to take urgent action," he said. "There are some regions of the world which do not believe the problem is there," he said, insisting that it is "easy for them to take action to prevent these products being dumped onto them." Tom Frieden, president of the non-profit organisation Resolve to Save Lives, which partnered with the WHO to produce the report, agreed. "There's simply no excuse for any country not taking action to protect their people from this artificial toxic chemical," said Frieden, a former director of the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

AIDAcosma on second visit to Doha



Doha Port received yesterday the German cruise ship *AIDAcosma* on its second call during the 2022/23 cruise season, arriving with 3,726 tourists and 1,395 crew members on board. Owned by AIDA Cruises, a subsidiary of Carnival Corporation & plc and sailing under the flag of Italy, *AIDAcosma* is one of the largest cruise ships within the AIDA fleet, with a length of 345m, width of 54m and draft of 8.6m, according to Mwani Qatar. The two-year-old *AIDAcosma* has 20 decks and over 2,700 rooms, and can accommodate up to 6,600 passengers in addition to its crew of 1,636 members. The ship had earlier arrived in Doha on January 16. **PICTURES:** Joey Aguilar

Qatar’s crowd-puller events to make it a winter to remember

By Joey Aguilar
Staff Reporter

Following the recent launch of the Qatar Balloon Festival, the country is set to host a series of exciting and crowd-puller events this winter, such as Qatar Live 2023, *Disney Princess – The Concert*, the Doha Jewellery & Watches Exhibition, the Qatar International Food Festival, and Shop Qatar, among others.

Qatar Tourism (QT), together with Qatar Airways, recently launched the “Feel Winter in Qatar” campaign, unveiling a series of events and festivals, starting with the third edition of the Qatar Balloon Festival.

Scheduled from January 26 and lasting through the season, the newest edition of Qatar Live will feature live

performances from renowned local, regional and international artistes, according to the QT.

The highly successful event was also held throughout the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, witnessing performances by world-renowned names such as Black Eyed Peas, Robbie Williams, Jason Derulo, Armin Van Buuren, Tiesto, Major Lazer Soundsystem, and Paul Van Dyk.

“We look forward to attracting additional world-class performances following the hugely successful Qatar Live during the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 – with 18 major events taking place that attracted record crowds of more than 100,000,” Qatar Tourism Chairman and Qatar Airways Group Chief Executive HE Akbar al-Baker said at a recent press conference. “Qatar Live is now firmly established as a strong brand for

leading performances in Qatar.”

The QT and Qatar Airways, in partnership with Disney Concerts and Broadway Entertainment Group, will present an exciting production of the world-renowned *Disney Princess – The Concert*, starting on January 26 at the Katara Amphitheatre.

The QT noted that some of Broadway and the West End’s most celebrated artists will perform live for three nights, along with the Qatar Philharmonic Orchestra until January 28.

“February will see the return of the Doha Jewellery & Watches Exhibition, which will run from February 20-25,” HE al-Baker said.

“During this highly anticipated event, attendees can see rare and priceless pieces up close from over 500 brands, meet some of the region’s most respected designers, participate in in-

teractive workshops, and much more,” he added. “We are expecting to see a great attendance with 30,000 visitors from over 175 countries.”

One of the most-awaited events, the 12th edition of the Qatar International Food Festival (QIFF) is set to take place from March 1-11 at the Hotel Park.

Previous editions of the QIFF featured special culinary experiences at scenic outdoor locations, a host of globally renowned chefs, live cooking shows, cooking competitions, master-classes and other activities.

Other upcoming events include the Qatar GKA Freestyle Kite World Cup 2023 from January 31 to February 4 at Fuwairit Kite Beach, Qatar TotalEnergies Open (tennis) from February 13-18 at Khalifa International Tennis and Squash Complex, Qatar ExxonMobil Open (tennis) from February 20-25



The Qatar Balloon Festival has been drawing big crowds.

(also at Khalifa International Tennis and Squash Complex), Al Shaqab events from February 23-25 at the Longines Outdoor Arena and Longines Indoor Arena at Al Shaqab, Shop Qatar from March 1-18, and Ramadan Bazaar.

Shop Qatar celebrates the country’s wide range of retail, beauty and entertainment options and unfolds around popular Doha shopping malls.

“As we continue to achieve our long-term goal of welcoming 6mn visitors a year by 2030, we look forward to the

year ahead and the new and exciting chapter for tourism,” HE al-Baker said.

He noted that the introduction of a variety of new openings, including hotels, shopping malls and public beaches, among others, in the build-up to the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 strengthened and diversified the country’s hospitality, leisure and tourism landscapes.

“Our country captured the attention of the world and is now one of the most desirable destinations in the global tourism industry,” he added.



Some of the artworks at the second edition of the Acrylic Pouring Exhibition.



Right: Officials and dignitaries at the second edition of the Acrylic Pouring Exhibition.

2nd edition of Acrylic Pouring Exhibition kicks off at Katara

The Acrylic Pouring Exhibition 2 kicked off on Sunday evening at Katara – the Cultural Village in partnership with the Rassem Centre for Creativity.

The opening ceremony was attended by HE the Minister of State and Qatar National Library President Dr Hamad bin Abdelaziz al-Kawari, Katara general manager Prof Khalid bin Ibrahim al-Sulaiti, and a number of artists and media professionals.

The artworks range from realistic to abstract, in warm colours.

Rassem Centre artist and director Mona al-Sada said that the exhibition’s paintings are the results of an art workshop organised by the centre, in which participants were introduced to the art of acrylic pouring.

Acrylic pouring depends on the smoothness and spread of different acrylic colours, using different mediums to mix colours without blending them, resulting

in varied results depending on the technique.

Al-Sada said that the exhibition presents more than 40 artworks of 17 artists, including herself and Kuwait’s Dr Walid Sarab.

The rest are the works of 15 female artists who participated in the workshop.

Al-Sada said that she seeks to highlight the works of talented artists and that whenever a sufficient number of artwork is collected from these workshops, she

organises an exhibition to encourage the artists.

The Rassem Centre for Creativity was established two years ago.

It organised the first edition of the Acrylic Pouring Exhibition last year, which saw the participation of 12 male and female artists, and produced 30 artworks.

The second exhibition is open to the public at Gallery 2, Building 18, Katara. – **QNA**



Mahaseel continues to evoke good response



The seventh Mahaseel Festival continues in the southern area of Katara, attracting a large number of visitors.

According to a press statement by the organisers, the stalls there are seeing good response from visitors while the artistic activities are a big draw among children.

These include drawing/colouring workshops as well as workshops aimed at raising awareness on agriculture.

Representatives of Qatari farms and companies expressed happiness at participating in the festival and highlighted its success.

Their participation comes through the display of local products such as vegetables, honey, dates as well as sheep, cows, poultry and milk.

On the other hand, visitors to Mahaseel Festival get the opportunity to buy a range of local products of the highest quality.

The festival has been organised by Katara – the Cultural Village Foundation in collaboration with the Ministry of Municipality and the Qatari farmers’ forum.

It runs 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.

The festival serves as a unique destination for displaying and selling national products of various kinds, and is being attended by 28 local farms, eight nurseries and six companies specialised in poultry, meat and dairy production.

Children can also enjoy the rides at the venue, while the eateries offer tea and coffee along with traditional Qatari beverages and breads.

The festival also offers flowers, ornamental plants and gardening equipment.