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# GULF TIMES



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## Erdogan, Sisi to meet, says Turkish minister

Turkiye's top diplomat said yesterday President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi would meet to mark the end of a decade of estrangement between the two countries.

## Trump says he expects 'arrest' on Tuesday

Former US president Donald Trump said he expects to be "arrested" on Tuesday over hush money allegedly paid to an accuser before the 2016 election.

## Quake jolts northern Peru, Ecuador

A strong earthquake with its epicentre off Ecuador shook northern Peru and much of Ecuador yesterday, authorities said.

## Black Sea grain deal extended for 60 days

A deal allowing the safe Black Sea export of Ukrainian grain was renewed yesterday for at least 60 days - half the intended period - after Russia warned any further extension beyond mid-May would depend on the removal of some Western sanctions.

# CRA issues Blockchain Blueprint for Qatar

The initiative aims at developing the ICT sector and encouraging investments in a knowledge-based economy to achieve goals of QNV 2030



Dr Ahmed Elmagarmid



Ali al-Suwaidi



Dr Khalid Kamal Naji

The Communications Regulatory Authority (CRA) has issued the National Blockchain Blueprint for Qatar, which has been developed by CRA in collaboration with Hamad Bin Khalifa University (HBKU) and Qatar University (QU).

The initiative aims to identify and build an efficient regulatory foundation for blockchain, creating a solid basis for the government's approach in this field and creating and enabling a supportive environment for creativity and innovation.

The blueprint establishes the frame for blockchain at the national level and identifies its key elements, regulatory foundation, adoption foundation, innovation, and creativity. Further, it identifies key blockchain requirements and provides a set of recommendations for achieving the desired objectives.

Ali al-Suwaidi, Technical Affairs Department director at CRA, said: "We are pleased to collaborate with HBKU and QU to issue the National Blockchain Blueprint for Qatar. Through the blueprint, we have set the most prominent

opportunities that blockchain could bring to private and government sectors and outlined the necessities and incentives that must be provided by each sector for the technology adoption, which contributes to the development of emerging startups and pilot projects."

He added: "I would like to invite all stakeholders to review the blueprint, so that we work together towards developing the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) sector, supporting local and foreign investments and a knowledge-based economy to support achieving the goals of Qatar National Vision (QNV) 2030. I want to thank HBKU and QU for all their efforts and cooperation in developing the blueprint and we look forward to expanding our collaboration in the future."

Dr Ahmed Elmagarmid, executive director, Qatar Computing Research Institute (QCRI), HBKU, said: "We were delighted to work with the Communications Regulatory Authority and Qatar University on developing the National Blockchain Blueprint for Qatar." To Page 7



Her Highness Sheikha Moza bin Nasser toured the interactive spaces and Arabic stations at the summit. PICTURE: A R al-Baker

## Sheikha Moza attends opening of TEDinArabic Summit

Her Highness Sheikha Moza bin Nasser, Chairperson of Qatar Foundation (QF), attended the opening of the TEDinArabic Summit - the first of its kind in the Middle East, organised through a partnership between Qatar Foundation and TED that is dedicated to amplifying ideas in Arabic on a global scale.

Her Highness Sheikha Moza also toured the interactive spaces and Arabic stations at the summit, together with HE Sheikha Hind bint Hamad al-Thani, Vice-Chairperson and CEO of Qatar Foundation.

Under the theme 'The Butterfly Effect', the opening of the two-day summit at Qatar National Convention Centre was also attended by a number of dignitaries, and an audience of thousands who listened to a series of talks in Arabic from TED speakers from the Arab world, explored the event's interactive Discovery Sessions, and exchanged ideas and stories.

Giving a keynote speech on the first day of the summit, Moza AlHajri, a student at QF partner university Georgetown University in Qatar and a participant in QF's QatarDebate, said: "We meet today as people with different specialisations, cultures,

Two-day summit - organised through a partnership between QF and TED - is the first of its kind in the Middle East

identities, and dialects, with different preferences in music, literature, art, and poetry, and different political and intellectual views.

"But today, we all choose to be united by the Arabic language. We choose to listen to each other, and to search for inspiring horizons that bring us together, and for paths that we can follow to move toward a better future."

The summit's opening ceremony began with a song specially written for the event, performed by Saudi Arabian artiste Alaa al-Wardi and Qatari singer Aisha al-Zayani, and another song written by Mohamad Ali Bahri, Arabic Language Programme Co-ordinator at the Translation and Interpreting Institute, part of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences at QF's Hamad Bin Khalifa University.

Its first day also included a performance, inspired by Qatari heritage, from 12 students of QF schools, titled 'Epic Poetry in the Modern Era'.

"We are delighted to be welcoming Arabic thinkers with amazing ideas, and people who love the Arabic language, from around the world to this groundbreaking TEDinArabic Summit," said Machaille Hassan al-Naimi, Strategic Initiatives Executive Officer, Qatar Foundation.

"The two days of this event capture the essence, the spirit, and the aspirations of TEDinArabic - to provide Arabic speakers everywhere with a platform to amplify their ideas globally, and to showcase to the world how Arabic is a language of innovation, of original thought, and of new knowledge.

"This summit is a true landmark for the Middle East, and we hope that everyone who experiences its talks, its sessions, its activities, and its opportunities for accessing and exchanging ideas will find themselves being energised and inspired."

Helen Walters, Head of Curation, TED, said: "TED is thrilled to be in Doha this week for the inaugural TEDinArabic Summit." To Page 12

## Minister stresses need to achieve goal of universal health coverage

By Joseph Varghese Staff Reporter

Praising the resilience of the country's healthcare system, HE the Minister of Public Health Dr Hanan Mohamed al-Kuwari highlighted yesterday the need to continue working to achieve the goal of universal health coverage.

HE Dr al-Kuwari was speaking at the opening ceremony of the Middle East Forum on Quality and Safety in Healthcare 2023 at Sheraton Grand Doha Resort & Convention Hotel. Jointly organised by Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC) and the Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI), more than 3,000 healthcare professionals are taking part in this year's forum in person and virtually. It is the biggest event



HE Dr Hanan Mohamed al-Kuwari speaking at the event. PICTURE: Thajudheen Page 4

of its kind in the region dedicated to healthcare quality and safety.

HE Dr al-Kuwari said: "To continue facing the challenges, both known and unexpected, we must be more resilient. I look forward to an engaging discussion that will consolidate our understanding and help us progress on our previous successes and achieve our collective

goal of universal health coverage." "As with many aspects of life, we had to change the way we do things throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, and that meant delivering this important forum virtually. But Covid-19 did not stop us; we just had to adapt and do things differently. This is a wonderful example of Healthcare Resilience in Extraordinary Times; the perfect theme for this year's forum," she added. To Page 7

## Nasser al-Attiyah wins Qatar International Baja



Qatar's off-road star Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah and his co-driver Mathieu Baumel are seen on the podium after sealing victory in the car category at the end of the Qatar International Baja yesterday. Al-Attiyah and Baumel clinched victory in their Toyota GR DKR Hilux. Qatar Motor & Motorcycle Federation (QMMF) president Abdulrahman bin Abdullatif al-Mannai was also present at the podium ceremony. Sport Page 1

## SJC partakes in interactive programme for supreme, cassation courts staff in GCC

The Supreme Judiciary Council (SJC) participated via videoconferencing in the second interactive programme for staff of the supreme and cassation courts in the GCC states for 2023 with the participation of several judges of the GCC supreme and cassation courts.

During the interactive programme, the law and applications of the national address in Qatar were reviewed, as it is the latest development in the relevant judicial systems of SJC.

During his presentation, President of the Execution Court Judge Nabil Mihdhar al-Saadi stressed the added value of employing technology in supporting the methodologies and procedures of the judicial notification system and accelerating the notification process, as well



as accelerating the dynamics of litigation, its resolution and enforcement of its rulings by relying on national electronic databases and public communication technology tools and means.

For their part, the participants in the programme, including representatives of the GCC supreme and cassation courts, praised the pioneering experience of Qatar in this field, which contributed to achieving a quantum leap in

judicial procedures and accelerating the pace of adjudicating cases. Several delegations also requested consultative visits and joint bilateral meetings with SJC specialists to benefit from this experience and discuss the possibility of applying it in their courts.

The interactive programme is considered a mechanism for co-operation and transfer of experiences approved by the meetings of Presidents of Supreme and Cassation Courts in the GCC states.

It aims to provide a platform for exchanging distinguished judicial experiences and reviewing emerging and value-added judicial systems to achieve the goals of Gulf judicial co-operation and its integration with the general objectives of Gulf integration. (QNA)

## Qatar attends Yemen strategy group meeting



Qatar participated in the meeting of the Yemen strategy group, organised by the European Council on Foreign Relations, in partnership with the Swedish government in Brussels. Director of the Arab Affairs Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Nayef bin Abdullah al-Emadi chaired Qatar's delegation in the meeting. (QNA)

# Qatari women gained great support from wise leadership: al-Ahmadani

Qatar Chamber board member and chairperson of the Qatari Businesswomen Forum Ibtihaj al-Ahmadani and a number of Qatari businesswomen recently participated in the fifth Gulf Businesswomen Forum 2023 and the accompanying exhibition held in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

The two-day forum, which was held under the theme 'Gulf Woman: Between Empowerment and Leadership', was organised by the Federation of Gulf Co-operation Council Chambers, the Federation of Saudi Chambers, and the Jeddah Chamber of Commerce & Industry.

The forum was inaugurated by Prince Saud bin Abdullah bin

Jalawi, Governor of Jeddah, in the presence of Princess Lolowah bint Faisal al-Saud.

Speaking at the forum, al-Ahmadani highlighted the role of the Gulf businesswomen in economic and sustainable development, stressing that Qatar's wise leadership has provided great support for Qatari women at a global level.

She also noted that Gulf women succeeded in consolidating their position and contributing

to the development of society. Al-Ahmadani lauded the success of the Education Above All (EAA) initiative, which was founded by Her Highness Sheikhha Moza bint Nasser in 2012 to serve as an umbrella for many programmes that provide quality education to poverty-stricken communities.

She said EAA was pioneering and distinguished in terms of using education and harnessing the power of science to bring about

positive, sustainable, and comprehensive change without intellectual, religious, or racial discrimination. She expressed her sincere appreciation and thanks to Her Highness Sheikhha Moza bint Nasser for this humanitarian initiative, stressing that the political leadership paved the way for Qatari women to participate in society and occupy senior positions, which enabled her to truly become an advanced model for sustainable development.

Qatari businesswoman Nora al-Ansari praised the co-operation between Gulf businesswomen in launching joint initiatives and underscored the contribution of female entrepreneurs to creating an economic and stimu-

lating society by focusing on the permanent innovation of various goods and services.

She also stressed their roles in encouraging the youth to establish their own businesses and teaching them how to start their projects properly and encouraging the community to support entrepreneurs in providing goods and services that meet their needs with high standards.

Al-Ansari also affirmed the role of such initiatives in influencing the quality of business, highlighting the importance of establishing an integrated platform that brings together Gulf women entrepreneurs to explore cooperation vistas and benefit from various experiences.



Ibtihaj al-Ahmadani joining Princess Doaa bint Mohamed Ezzat and Nora al-Ansari during the event.

# A partnership agreement between "Sharaka Holding" and "Al Baladi Holding Group" in the food sector

The agreement was signed by Sheikh Abdulaziz bin Ahmed Al Thani, representing the "Sharaka Holding" and Mr. Mohammed bin Abdullah Al-Attayah on behalf of the "Al Baladi Holding Group", in the presence of a number of officials from the leaders of the two companies, representatives of commercial banks, businessmen and the media.

The partnership is an important step to support the local food commodities market and provide high quality products to consumers. "Sharaka Holding" and "Al Baladi Holding Group" signed a partnership agreement in the field of foodstuffs sector last Wednesday at "Velero Hotel Doha" in Lusail City. The agreement was signed by Sheikh Abdulaziz bin Ahmed Al Thani, representing the "Sharaka Holding" and Mr. Mohammed bin Abdullah Al-Attayah on behalf of the "Al Baladi Holding Group", in the presence of a number of officials from the leaders of the two companies, representatives of commercial banks, businessmen and the media.

Al-Attayah said that this partnership is an important step to strengthen and support the food commodities market in the Qatari market, provide high-quality products to consumers and ensure the flow of food commodities in our markets, especially as we are at the gates of the holy month of Ramadan.

In press statements, he stressed the importance of these commercial partnerships because they achieve high added value in our markets that supports our national economy which is witnessing great growth in all sectors.

Praising the state's efforts in providing a healthy environment and climate that supports private sector activities, national production and



building strong partnerships with the business sector, he pointed out to the great support given by the wise leadership to the Qatari private sector as a

true partner in the development process witnessed by the country. Also he stressed the importance of activating the provisions of the law regulating

partnership between the public and private sectors in all related projects, which confirms the state's keenness to enhance the participation of the private

sector in economic activity by solving the obstacles it faces in order to ensure that it plays its role in the national economy and develops business sectors in the country, encourage investment and facilitate its growth, promote the Qatari economy and define the investment climate in the country.

He praised the country's plans to adopt a number of important initiatives that are in the interest of the Qatari private sector, business sectors, and economic and commercial activities in addition to the most prominent laws and regulations that regulate the investment process and steps to facilitate the establishment of companies in line with the economic renaissance that the country is witnessing.



# Maserati GT2 takes to the track

Maserati is back. The Autodromo Varano de' Melegari was the setting for the track debut of the high-performance GT2, the car that epitomises the House of the Trident's return to racing. The shake-down at the Parma circuit is the precursor to a series of events marking the run-up to the official unveiling of the car at the end of June in Belgium, at the 24 Hours of Spa.

"Maserati is ready to reawaken the memories that saw it feature in the exciting GT championships, with a hungry new car designed to evoke the exploits of its forerunner, the glorious and victorious MC12," a press statement notes.

The Trident's history in motorsport is a story of successes spanning almost a century, of a unique and distinctive DNA, and of a passion being rekindled by the brand's link with the potent legacy from the past and its drive towards the future, in which racing is an essential component.

The Maserati GT2 is "speed, elegance, style and innovation incarnate". A car designed to be a masterpiece of performance: extraordinary and breathtaking between the kerbs, created to celebrate Maserati's return to the circuits. A new chapter begun in late 2022 with the announcement of its participation in the 2023 ABB FIA Formula E World Championship, complemented by its inclusion in the GT2 European Series, as part of the strategy developed to bring the Trident back on track.

Conceived and designed by Maserati engineering in tandem with the Centro Stile Maserati, to ensure the aesthetic quality standards typical of the brand, the Maserati GT2 inherits the extraordinary 463kW/630CV Nettuno V6 engine from the Maserati MC20, taking it to a higher level.

The most appealing technical specifications include the all-new patented MTC (Maserati Twin Combustion) technology based on F1 engines, the ultra-light carbon fibre central monocoque – an excellent solution to have a good weight-power ratio – and the lightweight full composite bodywork, where the aerodynamic features are exploited to the limit to improve the vertical load but at the same time ensuring the best efficiency in terms of drag.

Much attention has been given to the development of the correct balance of the aerodynamic load, whereas the bottom has been developed specifically to work best in synergy with the front splitter and rear wing (adjustable) – it has quick-release removable bodywork for optimised component replacement, and the chassis features high



The Maserati shakedown at the Autodromo Varano de' Melegari.



The high-performance Maserati GT2.

torsional and bending stiffness.

The power steering is full-electric. All suspension components of the car are specific racing components – there will be adjustable shock absorbers and adjustable anti-roll bars in both the front and rear. Likewise, the electronics. The 6-speed sequential racing gearbox and steering wheel paddle shift with electrical rotary gear-shift actuator evoke adrenaline-fuelled emotions.

The carbon fibre dashboard and the 10" display integrated into the dashboard result in a futuristic, intuitive cabin, complemented in the bodywork by the Maserati Corse-specific painting and livery option (Blu Infinito). A gem of mechanics and engineering, the spearhead of innovative technical solutions, with futuristic, minimalist and sculptural interiors referring to the extreme lines of the body, the Maserati GT2 is dedicated to the racing teams and gentleman drivers due to take part in the GT2 Championships.

The Trident single-seater with covered wheels is the result of a winning synergy between Maserati men and women and the avant-garde design and style that has always distinguished the creations of the Italian brand, complemented by its unmistakable flair of luxury, even when the road becomes a track. The fierce GT2 is, therefore, getting ready to explore new horizons, to consolidate and define Maserati's racing future in the world of motorsport.

Andrea Bertolini, Maserati test driver, said: "The first few days are always quite unique, even more so for me when I was fortunate enough to bring Maserati to success at the GT1 World Championships, where I won four titles. We are now about to get back on track with yet another wonderful car. We've done lots of trial runs and early feedback is positive. Getting back behind the wheel of a GT was really exciting, and I could see everyone involved was very enthusiastic and motivated. We've focused on developing a product that not only stands up to its competitors but is also an ideal car for our gentleman drivers in terms of handling, comfort and performance. We want them to experience a unique feeling in this car."



Chairman Mr. Mohammed Rashid J SH AL Mohanadi,  
Managing Director Mr. MN Harees &  
Division Manager Mr. Mohamed Rifdy Naleer  
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## Health minister discusses bilateral ties with Egyptian, Yemeni, Somali counterparts



HE the Minister of Public Health Dr Hanan Mohamed al-Kuwari held bilateral meetings with Egypt's Minister of Health Dr Khaled Abdel Ghaffar; Yemen's Minister of Public Health and Population Dr Qassem Mohamed Bahaibah and Somalia's Minister of Health Dr Ali Haji Aden, on the sidelines of the Middle East Forum on Quality and Safety in Healthcare 2023, which is being held in Doha. They discussed relations between Qatar and each of the three countries in different health fields, in addition to the key issues addressed at the Middle East Forum on Quality and Safety in Healthcare. (QNA)

# 'Qatar adapted quickly to new models of healthcare'

By Joseph Varghese  
Staff Reporter

Qatar's healthcare system adapted quickly to new models of healthcare practices during the Covid-19 pandemic to provide the best possible care for patients in the country, a top official said yesterday.

"Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, we developed, modified and learned quickly, adopting new models to ensure that patients continued to access the best care possible. This commitment, resilience and innovation is what helped us face other challenges. This also enabled us in hosting and delivering high-quality care during the FIFA World Cup in Qatar," said Dr Abdullatif al-Khal, deputy chief medical officer and director of the Department of Medical Education at Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC).

Dr al-Khal was speaking at the opening session of the Middle East Forum on Quality and Safety in Healthcare 2023 jointly organised by HMC and the Institute for Healthcare Improvement.

"Healthcare systems have to adapt relatively quickly to the evolving situations. We have seen more examples of resilience in the face of adversity. One such example is the national healthcare and health system in Qatar where we demonstrated remarkable resilience to face and combat the pandemic.

Overcoming several obstacles, we remained steadfast in our commitment to provide high-quality care for our patients. We have seen incredible dedication and commitment of healthcare workers in our system," he explained.

Dr al-Khal noted that the experience gained during the pandemic made Qatar more prepared for delivering the services and care during the World Cup. He continued:



Dr Abdullatif al-Khal speaking at the forum. PICTURES: Thajudheen



A section of the audience.

"Most crucial aspects of healthcare is to provide high-quality care that is safe. This topic has become even more important in the face of Covid-19 pandemic that has touched all the healthcare systems around the world. Covid-19 has challenged us as never before and it has taken resilience and innovation to overcome the hurdles."

The official said that the 2023 forum is really timely and it is an important opportunity for healthcare workers to catch-up what they missed during the pandemic.

"As you know we have been running this conference for last 10 years and it helped us greatly develop the knowledge, understanding skills among health workers, doctors, nurses and allied professionals to develop the competence with more improvement. It has also enabled them to know how

they can improve the work they do and how they can reduce the harm that can happen to patients," noted Dr al-Khal.

"There is a wealth of knowledge and experience that we have developed as a result in the public healthcare, tertiary care or the primary care and we are keen to share this knowledge with all the learners from the country, the region and other parts of the world."

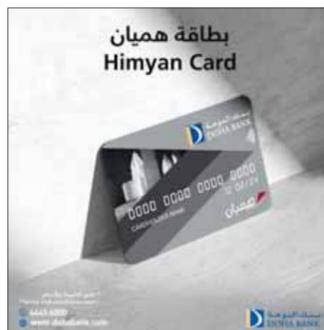
"The key theme of the conference is resilience and resilience is what made us sustain during the Covid-19 pandemic. We learned a great deal about resilience and how to make the system more resilient to face future challenges. So this will be the main theme we share but there is a long list of scientific topics, which will be on everyday patient care," he added.

## Doha Bank launches Himyan card

Doha Bank has launched Himyan card, Qatar's national payment initiative, a registered trademark of Qatar Central Bank. The launch of the card was aimed at enhancing the infrastructure of electronic banking services and transforming society into a cashless society. Himyan card is named after the traditional money bag used by ancient Arabian merchants.

The card is designed to provide customers with a secure and convenient method of managing their finances and making electronic payments exclusively in Qatar.

Himyan card does not require a minimum balance and offers several benefits to customers, including the ability to make contactless transactions, and use the card at all point-of-sale terminals, ATMs, and local online shopping websites via QPAY payment gateway. Himyan card is considered more secure since transactions are made locally via NAPS network, adding that the card allows transactions in all sale points within Qatar, contact-



less, or with chip and PIN technology. Braik al-Marri, Chief Retail Banking officer, said: "It is with great pleasure to partake in this national initiative to launch the first Qatari national payment card that provides

security and convenience for our customers while transacting using the Himyan card. We encourage all our customers to take advantage of the benefits that Himyan has to offer."

The Himyan card is a reloadable general-purpose card. Doha Bank customers can load money onto their Himyan card via Internet banking or mobile banking.

Himyan card can be used for everyday shopping at stores, cash withdrawals, and online shopping within Qatar. Doha Bank customers can apply for the Himyan card by visiting any Doha Bank branch and submitting a completed application form along with the required documentation.

The Himyan card can also be used for on-line purchases on merchants that support the QPAY payment gateway, with transactions completed securely using a combination of OTP and card ATM PIN. If a card is lost or stolen, customers can block and replace their Himyan cards through Internet banking or mobile banking or call centre agents.

## Admissions open at DeBaKey, Qatar for 2023-24

Admissions are now open at Michael E DeBaKey High School for Health Professions-Qatar (DeBaKey, Qatar) for the 2023-2024 academic year. To enrol, one has to visit <http://debakeyatqatar.org/admissions-2/> admission-procedure-2/ for admissions procedure. Registration can be done at <http://debakeyatqatar.org/register-now/> DeBaKey, Qatar is the first medical science-focused school in the Middle East. The award-winning school is considered one of the most outstanding schools in Qatar, offering a rigorous American curriculum for Grades 5 through 12, focusing on health sciences, engineering, business administration and information technology, a press statement notes. Named in honour of renowned heart surgeon and medical researcher Dr Michael E DeBaKey, DeBaKey, Qatar opened its campus in Qatar in September 2008 in Al Messila, within the vicinity of Hamad Medical Corporation, to provide a rigorous American curriculum and academic excellence in science, engineering, mathematics and medical sciences. DeBaKey, Qatar offers distinguished academic experiences including being the

only high school in Qatar that integrates medical internship in the curriculum that includes multiple collaborations and partnerships with leading medical organisations and educational institutions inside Qatar and internationally. The school offers Advanced Placement courses through College Board, providing students with the competitive edge for acceptance to local as well as international universities. Given the rigorous academic schedule class size is held at a ratio of 15:1. DeBaKey is the only private school in Qatar that has four Doctorate holders and 20 team members who hold Master's degrees. Student achievement include 100% graduation and 100% university acceptance rates. DeBaKey's 2020-2021 school year introduced a Simulation Lab (SimLab), the first of its kind for a high school in Qatar, to facilitate training of medical simulation for our health science and science students. By using life-like manikins, students learn and put into practice the patient/health care worker interaction that happens in a healthcare setting, and explore different medical subjects, illnesses, and the anatomy. Dr Virginia Parras, president/CEO of

Michael E DeBaKey High School for Health Professions-Qatar, said: "DeBaKey High School has long been the establishment propelling a new generation of innovators and disruptors in the medical and engineering fields. We keep the memory and the work of our founder alive by empowering and preparing future healthcare workers, engineers, tech and business executives with the academic excellence and disposition needed to lead and succeed in a 21st century global society." Given its history of leadership and innovation, DeBaKey High school has sustained its status as an Outstanding School and has become a model for others locally and internationally. The school is fully accredited by the WASC Accrediting Committee for Schools. DeBaKey High school's Alumni have gone on to greater heights, excelling at distinguished academic institutes, including flagship universities in the United States, England, Qatar and Canada, namely Penn State University, University of Texas-Austin, Weill Cornell Medicine, Texas A&M, Georgetown, Qatar University and Carnegie Mellon University, among other leading universities around the world.

# QS participates in two Arab meetings for standardisation

QNA  
Rabat

Qatar, represented by the Qatar General Authority for Standardisation and Metrology (QS), chaired the 16th meeting of the committee to follow up the implementation of the Arab Strategy for Standardisation and Quality 2019-2023 emanating from the Arab Organisation for Industrial Development, Standardisation and Mining.

It also participated in the 58th meeting of the Arab Higher Committee for Standardisation, which was held in the Morocco's capital, Rabat. Qatar was represented in the two meetings by engineer Nawaf Ibrahim al-Hamad al-Mana, Assistant of the Chairman of Qatar General Organisation for Standards and Metrology (QS), and Chairman of the Permanent Technical Advisory Committee in charge of following up the implementation of the Arab Strategy for Standardisation and Quality 2019-2023.

In his speech, al-Mana praised the achievements made by the Arab Organisation for Industrial Development, Standardisation and Mining, despite the current global economic conditions and



Delegates at Arab standardisation summit in Rabat.

challenges. He also congratulated engineer Adel Sagr al-Sager, Director General of the organisation, for his distinguished efforts with regard to Arab coordination, and highlighting its role in international forums.

Al-Mana praised all the organisation's employees for their efforts to highlight the pivotal role of standards, metrology and quality activities at the Arab level, and the members of the Strategy Implementation Follow-up Committee for their role in this regard. The meeting discussed a number of important issues, including following up on the implementation of the recommendations of the 15th meeting of the Committee for Follow-up on the Implementation of the Arab Strategy for Standardisation and Quality, and discussing the implementation plan for the

period 2019-2023 for the axes of specifications, technical regulations, and conformity assessment systems within the Arab strategy for standardisation and quality.

The report of the 11th recommendations of the Arab Accreditation Co-operation (ARAC) was also discussed, and the report "Progress in implementing the metrology axis work plan within the Arab strategy for standardisation and quality 2019-2023", which was submitted by the Secretariat of the Arab Accreditation Agency, was reviewed.

The meeting also discussed the draft Arab strategy for standardisation and quality, in addition to a report on the progress of implementing the action plan of the accreditation axis within the Arab strategy for standardisation and quality 2024-2028. The meeting

also reviewed the strategy's governance framework, and made a number of recommendations to implement the Arab strategy for standardisation and quality.

On the other hand, Qatar participated in the 58th meeting of the Arab Higher Committee for Standardisation, which was also held in Rabat on March 15-16, during which the implementation of the recommendations of the previous meeting and the presentations of international and regional organisations participating in it were followed up. The meeting reviewed the report of the 4th meeting of the general committee for Arab standards, the Arab halal programme, the Arab quality award, the Arab standardisation day, and how to co-ordinate the Arab position in regional and international forums.

## Protecting children from dangers of Internet top priority: al-Mansoori

Qatar has reiterated the need to effectively prevent and respond to violence against children given the multiplicity of manifestations of that violence and its diversity through the internet and beyond, stressing that it has taken several measures to protect children against the dangers of the Internet.

This came in the statement of Qatar delivered by the third secretary of the permanent delegation of Qatar in Geneva Abdulaziz Mohamed al-Mansoori, during the interactive dialogue with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Vio-

lence against Children, within the framework of 52nd session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva.

Al-Mansoori said that despite the great benefits offered by the digital environment for children to develop their capabilities and skills and promote their integration and communication in society, the unsafe use of the Internet could result in a score of health, behavioural, and social risks, as well as immediate and future damages that threaten the welfare of children and impact the full enjoyment of their rights.

He pointed out that Qatar

considers protecting children and guaranteeing their safety on the Internet a collaborative responsibility in which individuals, society, and the state alike participate.

He added that Qatar has taken many measures to protect Internet users from dangers, especially children, including - for example, establishing a centre for combating cybercrime, enhancing legislation related to that sort of crimes, and launching the safe space website that aims to ensure that children and adolescents understand the basic rules for preserving their safety and privacy while using the Internet.

# EAA project to keep 7,000 Zambian children in quality primary education

Global education foundation Education Above All (EAA), along with its partners World Vision and with support from Qatar Fund For Development (QFFD), has launched a joint project - 'Empowering Vulnerable Children with Education'.

The programme, implemented in collaboration with the Ministry of General Education and the Forum for African Women Educationalists of Zambia, aims to increase retention, access and learning of 7,000 at-risk children in quality primary education, in Namwala district, one of the most marginalised districts in Zambia.

The project was launched in the presence of Douglas Syakalima, Minister of Education for Zambia, Fahad al-Sulaiti, CEO of EAA, World Vision director and other community members from Zambia.

The project will support children from vulnerable households who attend primary school but are at high risk of dropping out.



From the launch of the initiative.



Those considered to be most at risk of drop-out face three or more of the following risk factors: inability to attend regularly due to the long distance to school, the threat of gender-based violence; disability; or orphan status; early marriage; child labour, or learners with chronically ill parents who are too vulnerable to provide for their children. The

project will link existing child protection and education systems to develop an Early Warning System to identify at-risk children, determine how the risk factors can be mitigated, take action and monitor the situation.

The programme will mobilise Stay in School Committees to work collaboratively with the school administration to identify and monitor students at risk of dropping out. In addition to identification and monitoring, the programme identifies causes of absenteeism and monitors and offers tailored retention responses through action-oriented work plans to combat incidences of dropout. The project will use readily available school data and a register to track three key predic-

tors to intervene with respect to at-risk learners: attendance, behaviour and course performance. Leena al-Derham from EAA Foundation said: "Some children face challenges that reduce their chances of staying in school. These include; living in poverty, exposure to conflict-affected environments, suffering chronic illness, having work re-

sponsibilities (child labour) and disability. We are happy to support another joint partnership project in Zambia, together with our partner, and other supporters, we are helping children stay in school and providing them with the opportunity to learn and develop the skills they need to access a better future."

EAA's EAC programme has been active in Zambia since 2017. In partnership with Zambia Open Community Schools, a community-based organisation seeking to empower orphans and vulnerable children with primary education, the project worked to reach out-of-school children with quality primary education in 29 districts and enrolled 175,000 out-of-school children.

## QIIB's Ramadan special offer for customers with Al Meera



QIIB deputy CEO Jamal Abdullah al-Jamal.

QIIB has launched a special offer to its customers on the occasion of Ramadan, enabling them to earn double QIIB Points on their purchases from Al Meera, Qatar's national retailer, during the holy month. As part of the offer, running from March 19 to April 17, QIIB will double the number of QIIB Points earned on all purchases from Al Meera when customers use any QIIB credit card.

The offer does not require a minimum spend to earn QIIB Points and includes all products available at Al Meera without any exception.

The offer is valid for existing and new QIIB customers. On the launch of double QIIB Points offer, deputy CEO Jamal Abdullah al-Jamal said: "The offer is an appreciation of and a greeting message to all our customers on the oc-



casation of the holy month of Ramadan and reward them for their loyalty."

"We are also pleased to co-operate with Al Meera, the leading company in the field of retail business, which has the largest network of branches across the country with more than 60 branches. These large number of branches provide an easier access for our customers to avail of the offer."

He noted: "QIIB ensured that the offer is inclusive of all our customer segments. Double QIIB Points will allow our customers to benefit from this opportunity and accumulate their QIIB Points, which can be redeemed for an array of options such as flights, hotels

and car rental. Alternatively, our customers can redeem their QIIB Points for 'Avios' Points from Qatar Airways or 'Nojoom' Points from Ooredoo."

The deputy CEO expressed confidence that the offer will satisfy QIIB customer base, which is constantly expanding in virtue of the bank's good reputation among the various segments of society and the integrated and advanced services provided by the bank that complies with the best international standards.

Al-Jamal encouraged QIIB customers to avail of the special offer during the holy month of Ramadan and obtain more rewards from QIIB Points.

## ISESCO keen on enhancing co-operation with QU

The Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (ISESCO) affirmed keenness on enhancing scientific and research co-operation with Qatar University by supporting researchers, publishing their scientific works and encouraging student exchange. It noted the great role played by the ISESCO Chair in Alliance of Civilizations at the College of Shariah and Islamic Studies at Qatar University in promoting scientific research on tolerance and peace-building, and promoting the values of coexistence and civilized dialogue. During his meeting at the organisation's headquarters in Rabat with Director General of ISESCO Chair in Alliance of Civilizations Dr Ezz El Din Maamish, Director General of ISESCO Dr Salem bin Mohamed al-Malik valued the role played by the chair and its



various publications and achievements, stressing the importance of co-operation between the organisation and universities through the establishment of scientific chairs, with the aim of exchanging experiences and expertise and benefiting from the creativity and innovations in university institutions. (QNA)

## Tarsheed spreads awareness at Beach Games



The National Programme for Conservation and Energy Efficiency (Tarsheed) took part in the Qatar Olympic Committee activities for the Beach Games 2023. It presented an awareness lecture on the importance of reducing electricity and water consumption to achieve Tarsheed's goals, and also organised interactive competitions for the attendees.



## CONDOLENCES

The Management & Staff of  
**ITALIAN STYLE QATAR WLL**  
**DESIGN 2000 INTERNATIONAL Srl**  
extend their heartfelt condolences  
to the family of our beloved colleague



**MR. PUTTIYANGATTEL KARUMATHI PARAMBIL  
BASHEER AHAMED**

Technical Manager

who passed away on 14<sup>th</sup> March in Qatar

May Allah Almighty rest his departed soul in peace and give comfort to his bereaved family to bear this great loss.

إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ

# AgriteQ receives local and international praise

The 10th Qatar International Agricultural Exhibition (AgriteQ) 2023, which is organised by the Ministry of Municipality from March 15-19 at the Doha Exhibition and Convention Center, received wide praise from the public, local, regional and international exhibitors, who praised its excellence and good organisation, and the diversity of its agricultural and animal products on display.

Participants and visitors emphasised that the exhibition has been a success for Qatar, which seeks to develop its agricultural field and to achieve self-sufficiency. They pointed out that the exhibition is an effective platform for presenting innovative environmental solutions to meet current and emerging challenges. It is also an important opportunity for the exchange of international and local experiences, as more than 675 companies from 55 countries, including 152 local companies, participate in its activities, in addition to the participation of 110 Qatari farms in the market.

Meanwhile, HE the Minister of Municipality Dr Abdullah bin Abdulaziz bin Turki al-Subaie, who is also the chairman of the national committee for host-



ing Expo Doha 2023, witnessed the signing of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) be-

tween the organising committee and Hassad Food to sponsor the expo. The committee said that

the signing is an important step towards a successful hosting of the event. (QNA)



Glimpses from AgriteQ 2023.

# AgriteQ hosts workshops on climate and agriculture

The fourth day of the 10th Qatar International Agricultural Exhibition (AgriteQ) 2023 witnessed a number of workshops and lectures held as part of the scientific conference accompanying the exhibition.

According to an official press statement from the Ministry of Municipality, the exhibition yesterday hosted workshops on the national strategy for food security, and awareness of food safety and investment in agriculture, while some papers focused on the most important methods and modern technologies used globally to increase agricultural production while preserving the environment.

The speakers included Dr Masoud Jarallah al-Marri, director of the Food Security Department at the Ministry of Municipality; Mohamed Ali al-Ghaithani, general manager of Mahaseel, Hassan Issa al-Mohannadi, head of the Commercial Registration and Licences Department for the Central Region at the Ministry of Commerce and Industry



(MoCI) and Dr Nasser Ahmed, food safety adviser at the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH); along with representatives of various private entities.

Meanwhile, AgriteQ2023 continues to receive a large number of specialists and visitors who are thronging the Doha Exhibition and Convention Centre to attend various activities. The exhibition is also witnessing an international presence of exhibitors and participants. Among the most prominent with countries participating in this edition are Rwanda, Sudan, Jordan,

Ukraine, Australia, Turkey, Indonesia, Iran, Tanzania and Georgia, etc.

The exhibition reflects their great interest in attending the activities of the event, which is the widest window for exchanging experiences between those interested in agricultural and environmental solutions. Also, it provides an opportunity to learn about the latest trends and technologies. The exhibition promotes various products and hosts the signing of deals with the goal of achieving sustainable development and food security.

# Dukhan Bank reveals March draw winners of its Thara'a savings account

Dukhan Bank announced the names of the most recent round of draw winners for Thara'a, its Shari'ah-compliant savings account, at the bank's headquarters.

Bank clients Safiya al-Zeyara and Leena Kordia each won a cash prize of QR10,000.

Similarly, a cash prize worth QR5,000 was awarded to Wasmiya al-Haslan, Mohamed Shammuddin, Irfan Ali, Mahmud Elzaml, Azeema Khan, Abdalla Hammo, Safeya Askar, Shafiq Azam, Aysha Ahmed, Firas Alkhatib, Sajid Atique, Mohamed Abduzzahar, Mahmud al-Mahmoud, Ali Chaer, Waleed Alsayadi, Ayham Alrebdawi, Noora al-Sulaiti, Mohamed Mohamed, Eleen Elbatneagy, Amal al-Haddad, Jabir Pilarath, Meshal al-Abdulla, Aisha al-Motawa, Kiran Patnayakuni, Khalid al-Ansari, Mohamed Zouroup, Hassan Shaikh, Cristina Cazacu, Saiful Karim, Jamal al-Ammari, Mohamed al-Kuwari, Lolwa al-Buainain, Einas Aladhali, Ebrahim al-Tamimi, Dana al-Siddiqi, Hatem Darwish, Noora al-Marri, Khalid al-Thani, Salam Bappantaakath, Yamen Farah, Moza al-Malki, Mohamed al-Athba,



Yasir Kunnappally, Sheikh Saud al-Thani, Maher Rouhou, Mohamed Jomaa Mohamed, Aldana Fikri, Najah Alqahtani, Helmi Othman, Bashdar Mawlood, Premeu George, Hazim Babiker, Elazzoni Sulay, Saoud al-Maadeed, Shadha Alyahri, Abdelhamid Telaidjia, Khalid al-Hammadi, Suba Ebrahim and Mayson Coutinho.

The draw was conducted under the supervision of a representative of the qualitative licence and market control department at the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

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. Quarterly, there are two win-

ners per draw for the cash prize of QR25,000 each, two winners per draw for the cash prize of QR50,000 each, and yearly, one winner of the grand prize of QR1mn, rewarding 501 winners in total with cash prizes up to QR3.79mn.

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.

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

# Qatar Charity holds panel discussion to mark International Day to Combat Islamophobia

Qatar Charity (QC), in co-operation with United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT) and Hamad Bin Khalifa University (HBKU), held a high-level panel discussion titled 'Countering Islamophobia: The Role of Non-State Actors' to mark the UN International Day to Combat Islamophobia.

A good number of UN officials, academia, experts, and those concerned with countering Islamophobia attended the event.

The discussion featured HE the Chairperson of the Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue Dr Ibrahim Saleh al-Nuaimi; Director of the External Affairs Office at Qatar Charity Ahmed al-Rumaihi; Chief of the UNOCT International Hub on Behavioural Insights to Counter Terrorism, Doha Dr Aynabat Atayeva; Associate Professor of Master of Arts in Contemporary Islamic Studies, HBKU Dr Frank Peter; and Post-Doctoral Researcher, College of Public Policy, HBKU Dr Hira Amin.

The panel discussion was moderated by Associate Dean for Community Engagement, College of Public Policy, HBKU Dr Mohamed Evren Tok.

The panel discussion focused on ways to counter Islamophobia, tackle rising levels of hate crimes against Muslims and to show solidarity against hate speech and stigmatisation of Muslims worldwide.

It also outlined how non-state actors can help joint efforts to combat this growing phenomenon by creating safe



UN officials, academia, experts and those concerned with countering Islamophobia attended.



spaces for those affected and spreading awareness through media, education, and academic research, in addition to recognising, celebrating and honouring Islamic culture, heritage, beliefs and values.

In his opening remarks, Ahmed al-Rumaihi, welcomed participants and highlighted the impact of Islamophobia on the financial and geographical access of Muslim NGOs.

Dr Aynabat Atayeva said: "Recent research indicates that a large portion of Islamophobia is caused by fear and uncertainty, which in turn leads to negative stereotyping. By studying human behaviour in

relation to sensitive topics such as religion, customs and traditions and cultural biases, it is possible to understand why individuals may be more likely to participate in negative attitudes and behaviours."

For his part, Dr Ibrahim Saleh al-Nuaimi emphasised the role of non-state actors in combatting this phenomenon. He said that they must play a key role in tackling Islamophobia by strengthening religious teachings that promote peace, love, and coexistence while emphasising that the relationship of man with another is based on human brotherhood, love and peace.

He touched on the role and experience of the Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue in addressing this phenomenon, affirming its support for all efforts by all those advocating for peace.

Dr Mohamed Evren Tok said: "The International Day to Combat Islamophobia offered the perfect opportunity to scrutinise public policies that have so far failed to respond to the rights and freedoms of adversely affected individuals and communities. We had a chance to discuss and identify the role non-state actors can play in challenging the root causes of Islamophobia on a global scale."

Dr Hira Amin spoke about the role of social media in countering Islamophobia particularly from the Western media. She discussed how digital activism can be used in multiple ways such as highlighting the hypocrisy of the criticism, negating false news, and sharing positive experiences. The panel discussion concluded with a question-and-answer session. (QNA)

# Qatar News Agency's training hall inaugurated

Qatar News Agency (QNA) inaugurated yesterday the QNA Training Hall at the agency's headquarters in Al Dafna district, Doha.

The inauguration comes in line with QNA's vision to develop its cadres and raise their efficiency by offering specialised quality training programmes presented by professional trainers and experts.

Director-General of Qatar News Agency Ahmed bin Saeed al-Rumaihi inaugurated the hall in the presence of several QNA officials.

On this occasion, he stressed that comes within the framework of the QNA's plans and aspirations for a creative journalistic environment through continuous training that keeps pace with the latest developments and in accordance with

best practices in the field of media.

He added that QNA would spare no effort in providing the most qualified lecturers and trainers in various media disciplines and adhere to standards of quality, performance and excellence, in addition to employing its theoretical and practical expertise in journalism.

Training is one of the main pillars that media institutions need amid the rapid developments in the media field at the global level, in addition to keeping pace with the country's great developments in journalism and media, which requires qualifying cadres and building media capacities in various agencies, he said.

Al-Rumaihi indicated that the QNA Training Hall would train press and media graduates who wish to join QNA or media, com-



Media graduates who wish to join QNA or media, communication and public relations departments in other institutions, will be coached at QNA's Training Hall.

munication and public relations departments in other institutions across the country.

QNA seeks to make this hall a destination for journalistic and media training in the country, to contribute to building capacities

and media cadres in various institutions through professional training programmes and according to strict professional standards in a way that contributes to achieving Qatar National Vision 2030, he said.



QNA Training official Khadija Hussein Abdullah said the hall consists of two rooms, each with 20 seats for 20 affiliates and is currently designated for QNA's employees to raise their efficiency and development through spe-

cialised trainers and experts from inside Qatar.

She added that the hall is equipped with the latest equipment and technologies to provide professional courses in an integrated professional training

environment. On the sidelines of the opening, a specialised training course entitled 'Preparing financial accounts using Excel' was held for QNA's employees in co-operation with the Institute of Public Administration at the Civil Service and Government Development Bureau.

A training workshop on Artificial Intelligence was also held in co-operation with Microsoft Qatar to lecture the QNA's employees on the latest uses of robot journalism advanced technology. This technology is also used to verify information and pictures and to translate different languages, as well as its multiple uses in social media. To learn more about the quality of the training programmes offered at the QNA Training Hall, contact e-mail: Qnatrainingcenter-qna.org.qa (QNA)

# CRA issues Blockchain Blueprint for Qatar

From Page 1

“Our contribution reflects HBKU’s enduring commitment to solving challenges facing Qatar, particularly those concerning the country’s innovation and technology capacities.”  
Qatar University College of Engineering dean Dr Khalid Kamal Najj said: “We are proud to have contributed to the development of the National Blockchain Blueprint for Qatar, which

is a crucial step towards realising the country’s vision for a knowledge-based economy.

“Our collaboration with the Communications Regulatory Authority and Hamad Bin Khalifa University has allowed us to leverage our expertise in blockchain technology and promote its adoption across the public and private sectors.”

He added: “We believe that this blueprint will serve as a guide for

stakeholders and pave the way for future innovation in this field. The College of Engineering is committed to continuing its partnership with CRA and HBKU to drive the growth of the country’s digital economy and foster a culture of innovation and creativity.”

The National Blockchain Blueprint for Qatar is available through CRA’s website via <https://www.cra.gov.qa/en/document/national-blockchain-blueprint-for-qatar>

## Al-Subaie meets Djibouti minister delegate



HE the Minister of Municipality Dr Abdullah bin Abdulaziz bin Turki al-Subaie met here yesterday with visiting Minister Delegate In-Charge of Decentralisation in Djibouti Qassim Haroun Ali, who is participating in the 10th Qatar International Agricultural Exhibition. During the meeting, they discussed means to boost bilateral co-operation. (QNA)

## Food, fireworks and fun



The 12th Qatar International Food Festival continued to attract a large number of people yesterday, thanks to the wide range of delicacies on offer from around the world, fun activities and a dazzling fireworks display, among other attractions. The latest edition of the annual festivity, taking place at Al Sa’ad Plaza in Lusail Boulevard, a modern and iconic venue, features more than 80 culinary vendors and several other activations, entertainment and live cooking demonstrations. PICTURES: Thajudheen



## QM restaurants take Ramadan celebrations to artful settings

Qatar Museums (QM) restaurants operated by IN-Q Enterprises (IN-Q) in partnership and collaboration with Groupe Ducasse Paris by world renowned Michelin-starred chef Alain Ducasse, has announced their Ramadan offerings.

IDAM by Alain Ducasse, at the Museum of Islamic Art (MIA), offers a special Ramadan Suhoor carefully crafted by Groupe Ducasse Paris chefs. From desserts to main courses, the dishes are a celebration of the richness and diversity of Qatar.

The Suhoor menu will be available from 8pm with the last order accepted at 11.45pm.

Meanwhile at Jiwan, located on the fourth floor of the National Museum of Qatar (NMQ), the Ramadan five-course menu features the finest contemporary Qatari cuisine designed to tantalise senses and create an unforgettable experience from 5.30pm for Iftar until Suhoor. The last order can be placed until 1.45am.

Experience an al fresco or outdoor



Experience Ramadan with authentic Italian cuisine at Cafe #999.



IDAM by Alain Ducasse.

Italian Ramadan Long Table Iftar at Cafe #999 located at the Fire Station. Reminiscent of traditional Italian long table dining, this is a novel experience for Iftar or ghabga, with the last order accepted at 10.30pm.

“During this coming holy month of Ramadan, each of our restaurants located in the heart of the iconic museums and galleries – the MIA, NMQ and the Fire Station – offers a unique experience that will make Iftar shared with family and friends, a meaningful one,” said IN-Q director of F&B Op-



Enjoy Iftar and Suhoor at Jiwan.

erations Yves Godard. “Surrounded by art and presented with a well-crafted menu for enjoyment as one breaks the fast, our outlets aim to create moments that will make this Ramadan more special.”

## Minister stresses need to achieve goal of universal health coverage

From Page 1

HE the minister continued: “In Qatar, we are fortunate to be guided by the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, who has emphasised resilience in all our country’s plans and policies. This has meant that as a country we were well positioned to successfully face challenges such as Covid-19. And our National Vision 2030 has driven us to seek to excel in the delivery of healthcare to all those living in Qatar so that we can have a healthy thriving population.”

She commended the healthcare sector’s response to Covid-19, explaining that by working together across the healthcare system, in collaboration with the community, healthcare teams have been central to Qatar having one of the lowest Covid-19 mortality rates and one of the highest Covid-19 vaccination rates in the world. She also acknowledged and appreciated the courageous efforts and leadership of the healthcare professionals during the pandemic.

“Yet, despite these incredible achievements, we are committed to constantly moving forward,” she said.

“Throughout 2023, we will focus our efforts on implementing the new National Insurance Programme; providing fast access to care for patients; and ensuring Qatar’s healthcare system continues to be a regional leader for quality and safety in healthcare, delivering services on a par with the world’s best health systems.”

HE Dr al-Kuwari also highlighted the healthcare sector’s contribution to the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022: “After 12 years of planning and preparation under the vision and direction of Qatar’s leaders, the nation hosted a truly incredible tournament that was widely acclaimed as the greatest ever FIFA World Cup. Many sectors from across Qatar played an important role in the tournament’s success and as a healthcare system we have been at the forefront of these efforts,” she noted.

“The planning, preparation and delivery of our comprehensive FIFA World Cup strategy required a truly incredible effort from healthcare teams across the sector and I am deeply grateful to everyone who played their part in this remarkable accomplishment,” she added.

HE the minister also highlighted

several of the health sector’s key achievements since 2020, which include the opening of Aisha Bint Hamad Al Attiyah Hospital; opening of six new state-of-the-art health and wellness centres; achieving the World Health Organisation ‘Healthy City’ status for all eight municipalities; designation for HMC’s Department of Geriatrics and Long-Term Care as a WHO Collaborating Centre for Healthy Ageing and Dementia; implementing a range of telemedicine and virtual services across the public health sector; gaining Planetree International Certification for Excellence in Person-Centred Care at five HMC facilities; having four HMC hospitals and Sidra Medicine ranked among the world’s top 250 academic medical centres among others. Held under the theme ‘Healthcare Resilience in Extraordinary Times’ the opening session of the forum also heard from Dr Abdulatif al-Khal, deputy chief medical officer and director of the Department of Medical Education at HMC, and Dr Kedar Mate, president and CEO, IHI. There was also a session by Dr Don Berwick, president emeritus and senior fellow, IHI.

## Shoemart Kicks off the Ramadan Season Highlighting Their New Stylish Shoe & Handbag Collection



With Ramadan on the way, the Middle East is gearing up for a celebratory special month, and what better way to dedicate to the spirit of this time than for Shoemart to launch a stylish and modern collection for men, women, and children to wear during Iftar, Suhoor and Eid celebrations.



### Women’s Collection:

Shoemart is proud to present a collection of 289 different options with a complimenting handbag collection, in a range of structured and unstructured designs, including shiny metallics, diamante and soft satin options - all offered at competitive, customer-friendly prices.

The collection can be found in a variety of commercial heel heights across shoes and sandals, catering to a diverse customer base. Alongside the shoe collection, the brand is also presenting a range of clutches, crossbody and satchel bags made

from classic faux leather, exotic skins, diamante mesh and glossy satins. The women’s collection will include several ranges including Celeste, Haadana, Elle and Kappa.



### Men’s Collection:

The 2023 men’s collection is a complete package of comfort, fashion, trendy, and traditional embroidery, consisting of an Arabic range, casual footwear as well as casual slip-ons, with the aim to provide lightweight, comfortable, stylish footwear for all men to wear no matter their dress or fashion preferences. The men’s collection includes several ranges including Duchini, Lee Cooper, Al Waha, Kappa and Le Confort.

### Children’s Collection:

For girls, the brand focuses on providing a range that is embellished and girly. A celebration of all things that sparkle, the collection focuses

on a colour palette of high shine metallics and glitter, including rose gold, gold, and silver, alongside pastel and neutral colours which make it easy for the shoes to mix and match with all outfits. From statement ballerinas to embellished sneakers, the range offers something to make all little girl’s glitter dreams come true.



For boys, the shoe collection offers cool, modern styles with ease of wear and practicality. The colour palette consists of key neutrals including navy, khaki, and tan. Smart sneakers are elevated and updated with mesh material mixing and complement both formal and a more relaxed style of clothing, while the moccasins are made of high-quality leather and finished with tonal detailing for a subtle yet stylish finish. The kid’s Arabic sandals are a key feature in this season’s collection available in both toddler and older age groups. The brand names for the children include Mister Duchini, Juniors, Kangaroos and Al Waha for the boys and Little Missy and Juniors for the girls.



Comfort and practicality remain at the forefront of this year’s Ramadan collection, offering a wide range of stylish shoes and bags, perfect for every occasion and gathering. Shop the collection at Shoe Mart and Centrepoint stores across the Qatar, UAE, KSA, Kuwait, Bahrain and Oman.



## UN says helped Myanmar junta officials travel to Bangladesh for Rohingya return talks

AFP  
Bangkok

The United Nations refugee agency helped officials from Myanmar's junta travel to Bangladesh this week for repatriation talks with Rohingya refugees, two UN officials said, despite maintaining that conditions in the country remain unsafe for their return.

Bangladesh is home to around a million Rohingya, most of whom fled neighbouring Myanmar following a 2017 military

crackdown, now subject to a UN genocide investigation.

On Wednesday a 17-member team led by a senior official in Myanmar's immigration ministry arrived in the border town of Teknaf to interview refugees for potential repatriation to Myanmar.

A UNHCR spokesperson in Myanmar said on Thursday that UNHCR had "facilitated the transport of some officials" from Myanmar to Bangladesh "in support of interaction between the de facto authorities in Myanmar and refugees."

The transport had been facilitated by both UNHCR and the World Food Programme in Myanmar, who had provided boats for the junta officials to travel in, a senior UN official in Bangladesh said on Friday.

"I can confirm that UNHCR and WFP provided boats to junta officials to come," the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

This month Johannes van der Klaauw, UNHCR's representative in Bangladesh, said there was "no prospect for a safe, dignified and sustainable return in

the immediate future," for Rohingya seeking to come back to Myanmar.

The Rohingya are widely viewed in Myanmar as interlopers from Bangladesh and rights groups say those still in the country are denied access to healthcare and education, and require permission to travel.

Junta chief Min Aung Hlaing, who was head of the armed forces during the 2017 crackdown, has dismissed the Rohingya identity as "imaginary". The UNHCR spokesperson said the decision was made "within the

framework" of a non-binding memorandum of understanding signed with Myanmar in 2018, aimed at "creating the conditions conducive to the voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable repatriation of Rohingya refugees."

UN agencies were not involved in the discussions that took place in Bangladesh, the spokesperson said.

The spokesperson did not give details on how many boats had been provided, or whether members of the Myanmar military, police or security forces

had ridden in the boats.

The UN provided boats for the journey to Bangladesh after a "very firm request" by junta officials, and the UN markings were removed prior to the journey, according to a leaked e-mail from UNHCR's resident co-ordinator in Myanmar seen by AFP.

The UNHCR spokesperson did not elaborate on the nature of the "very firm request" from the junta for the boats.

The delegation from Myanmar had planned to interview more than 700 Rohingya to assess the suitability of their return to My-

anmar, an official from the commission said.

A Myanmar junta spokesman confirmed to AFP the trip was taking place but would not give details. A repatriation plan agreed by Myanmar and Bangladesh in 2017 has failed to make any significant headway in the years since, partly over concerns the Rohingya would not be safe if they returned.

Progress ground to a complete halt during the coronavirus pandemic and after the military ousted Myanmar's civilian government in 2021.

## Indonesia's Merapi volcano erupts, spews hot lava

AFP  
Jakarta

Indonesia's Mount Merapi, one of the world's most active volcanoes, erupted late Friday and continued to spew hot ash and other volcanic material yesterday.

Footage of flaming lava pouring out of the crater and a tall column of hot cloud rising 1,300 metres into the air was taken by the government-run Merapi Volcano Observatory on Friday night.

The volcano continued to spew hot ash and hot lava was visible yesterday.

"Residents should anticipate the disruption due to the volcanic ash from Mount Merapi eruption and please be on alert for the danger of volcanic mud-flow, especially when it rains around Merapi," the country's volcanology agency said in a statement yesterday.

Merapi also erupted last week, sending volcanic material 9,600 feet (3,000 metres) above the summit. Volcanic ash rain blanketed at least eight villages near the volcano after last week's eruption.

Volcanologists said last week



Mount Merapi volcano spews lava from its crater as seen from Sleman in Yogyakarta early yesterday.

the volcano is experiencing its most active phase since 2021. Merapi has been at the second-highest level alert since 2020 following increased volcanic activity and authorities estab-

lished a restricted zone of seven kilometres from the summit. The volcano's last major eruption in 2010 killed more than 300 people and forced the evacuation of some 280,000

residents. It was Merapi's most powerful eruption since 1930 when about 1,300 people were killed.

An eruption in 1994 left about 60 people dead.

## Japan, Germany pledge closer ties as Scholz visits Tokyo

AFP  
Tokyo

Japan and Germany pledged closer defence ties and cooperation on diversifying supply chains as Chancellor Olaf Scholz and Prime Minister Fumio Kishida met in Tokyo yesterday.

Scholz is on his second trip to Japan in less than a year, and came with six ministers for government-to-government talks as Berlin works to boost its profile in the Asia-Pacific region, and ahead of the G7 summit being hosted this May by Japan in Hiroshima.

There were few concrete results outlined by the leaders, but both stressed the need to strengthen and diversify supply chains hit by everything from the pandemic to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

"In our conversations about economic security, we talked about beefing up supply chains," said Kishida.

Both nations want to strengthen "their influence in strategic sectors, including mineral resources, semi-conductors and batteries, and share best practices to address risks," he said. Bitten by its reliance on Russian energy since the invasion of Ukraine, Germany has been battling to pivot away from other economic dependencies, in particular on



German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida attend a press conference after a summit meeting at the prime minister's official residence in Tokyo yesterday.

China. It has also been ramping up overtures to Asian nations including Japan, Indonesia and India, as it tries to diversify its supplies and exports alike.

Scholz said relations with Japan had been raised to a "new level" in Saturday's talks and that both countries were keen to learn the "right lessons" from the economic dependencies revealed by pandemic disruptions and the war in Ukraine.

Kishida, who is in the midst of a diplomatic blitz including talks with the leaders of South Korea and India, said the war in Ukraine had made it all the

more important for Japan and Germany to step up security cooperation.

A joint statement issued by the defence ministers of both countries said they would work on new deployments by Germany's military in the region, as well as joint exercises.

They also pledged "a legal framework facilitating joint activities" by both militaries.

Scholz said the German military would carry out a tour of the Asia-Pacific region "in coming years". German and Japanese fighter jets carried out joint exercises in Japan last September.

## Low dissolved oxygen levels behind mass fish death

Reuters  
Sydney

Low levels of oxygen in Australia's second longest river were to blame for a mass fish die-off recently in a remote part of New South Wales state, environmental authorities said.

Thousands of dead fish have been found this week in the Darling River near the town of Menindee, around 1,000km west of the state capital Sydney.

It follows fish deaths in the same area in 2018 and 2019 where up to a million fish died from poor water flow, poor water quality, and sudden temperature changes.

The NSW Department of Planning and Environment's water division said on Twitter that "dissolved oxygen levels remain

a concern for fish health" in the area.

"There is a large number of fish deaths (predominantly Bony Herring) in the Darling River between Lake Wetherell and Menindee township," the agency said on Friday.

Hundreds of thousands of dead fish had been found in the river, and state fisheries officers had been sent to the area to assess the issue, the Australian Broadcasting Corp reported yesterday.

Footage posted to Twitter by SBS showed a boat navigating through thousands of dead fish blanketing the entire surface of the river. The state planning and environment agency warned river oxygen levels could fall further this weekend as temperatures rise, before cooler conditions return next week.



This image grab from a video taken on March 17, 2023 shows dead fish clogging a river near the town of Menindee in New South Wales.

## UK interior minister visits Rwanda to discuss deportation plan

Reuters  
Kigali

British interior minister Suella Braverman visited Rwanda yesterday to discuss a deal under which the east African country will accept migrants who arrive in Britain without permission, if British courts confirm that the proposals are legal.

Britain's government wants to send tens of thousands of migrants more than 6,400km to Rwanda as part of a £120m (\$146m) deal agreed with Rwanda last year. No deportations have taken place while campaigners challenge the legality of the policy in the courts.

Many charities say the proposal is costly and impractical, and will criminalise thousands of genuine refugees who have very few routes to seek

asylum in Britain without entering the country. More than 45,000 people entered Britain last year by crossing the Channel in small boats from France, mostly young men from Albania, Afghanistan, Iran and Iraq, according to British government data.

Braverman met Rwanda's foreign minister, Vincent Biruta, yesterday and told reporters in Kigali that she had agreed extra support for migrants who are sent to the country.

"Many countries around the world are grappling with unprecedented numbers of illegal migrants and I sincerely believe that this world-leading partnership...is both humanitarian and compassionate and also fair and balanced," Braverman said at a news conference with Biruta. Biruta said the proposals "offer better opportunities for migrants and Rwandans alike" and would help with the Brit-

ish government's goal to disrupt people-trafficking networks. Braverman is expected to meet Rwanda's President Paul Kagame today.

The partnership was announced in April 2022, but the first deportation flight was blocked by an injunction from the European Court of Human Rights. London's High Court then ruled it lawful in December but opponents are seeking to appeal that verdict in April and it could yet go to Britain's Supreme Court later in the year. "I'm not going to preempt the decision of the judiciary, but if we are successful, we will envisage delivering the substance of our agreement as quickly as possible," Braverman said.

Braverman has previously described her opponents as "naive do-gooders". Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has said that finding a solution is one of his top priorities for 2023.

## Nigeria counts local election votes in shadow of contested poll

AFP  
Lagos

Vote counting started following local elections in Nigeria yesterday, three weeks after the ruling party won a presidential poll that the opposition said was marred by fraud.

With President Muhammadu Buhari stepping down in May after two terms, many hoping for change were disappointed in the way elections were conducted last month, a sentiment which could impact the local poll.

Africa's most populous nation is electing more than 900 state assembly lawmakers and

28 governors, with a particularly competitive contest in the commercial capital Lagos.

Election observers Yiaga Africa noted "a marked improvement in the management of election logistics" yesterday despite some "incidences of voter intimidation and harassment". Both the Labour Party (LP) and the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) of the opposition are contesting the victory of the All Progressives Congress (APC) in the February 25 election in a legal battle that could extend over several months.

They claim that technical mishaps allowed for ballot manipulation, which the electoral

commission, INEC, denied.

After a day of relatively peaceful voting in Lagos, many people kept watch as election officials proceeded to count ballots manually before they were to be uploaded online.

"I am pleased with the counting so far. The election has been free and fair. I hope INEC will do what is normal and declare the rightful candidate as the winner," said 25-year-old nurse Bimpe Adepaju.

Earlier in the day, heavy security was seen deployed across the city of some 20m people. Considered the fiefdom of president-elect Bola Tinubu, outsider Peter Obi of the LP caused



Officials of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) count votes after the gubernatorial election in Lagos yesterday.

a stir last month by winning the most votes in Lagos state thanks to widespread support from Ni-

geria's youth. One of Obi's supporters who showed up to vote on Saturday in the Agidiigbi

Ikeja area was Damilola Adisa, a 20-year-old economics student.

While her candidate lost the presidential race, the first-time voter said she sees "this election too as an opportunity for a change".

Governors are powerful positions in Nigeria, with some controlling state budgets that are larger than those of several African nations. Most states are currently governed either by the APC or the PDP, whose leader Atiku Abubakar came second in the presidential elections.

Whether the growing popularity of Obi, who came third after Abubakar, will translate at the governorship and local as-

sembly levels remains to be seen.

Tinubu is a former governor of Lagos and remains highly influential in the state where his party's candidate Babajide Sanwo-Olu is running for re-election against Gbadebo Rhodes-Vivour (LP) and Olajide Adediran (PDP). Other hotly contested races took place yesterday in southern Rivers and northern Kano, while northeast Adamawa could see the election of Nigeria's first woman governor.

A decisive factor in these local elections will be turnout — though more than 93m Nigerians are registered to vote, just over 24m cast a ballot in February.

# Trump expects 'arrest' on Tuesday, calls for protests

AFP/Reuters  
New York

Former US president Donald Trump said he expects to be "arrested" on Tuesday over hush money allegedly paid to an entertainer before the 2016 election, calling on his supporters to protest.

With signs mounting that prosecutors are moving closer to indicting Trump, the 76-year-old billionaire took to his Truth Social platform yesterday morning, saying: "Leading Republican candidate & former President of the United States of America will be arrested on Tuesday of next week. Protest, take our nation back!"

Trump chose to use his own social media platform to make the announcement, despite being reinstated on Facebook and YouTube on Friday, more than two years after he was banned over the US Capitol riot.

The indictment would make Trump the first former US president to be charged with a crime and would send political shock waves as he tries to secure the Republican nomination for the 2024 presidential election.

Already, Republican House Speaker Kevin McCarthy reacted with fury, accusing New York prosecutors of pursuing "political vengeance" against Trump and saying he would launch a congressional probe of the matter.

The investigation led by Manhattan district attorney Alvin Bragg, an elected Democrat, centres on \$130,000 paid weeks before the 2016 polls to stop Stormy Daniels, whose real name is Stephanie Clifford, from going public about an affair she says she had with Trump years earlier.

Trump's lawyer told CNBC on Friday evening that his client would surrender to face criminal charges if he was indicted.

A spokesman for Trump said the former president had not been notified of any arrest.

Trump has denied having an affair with Daniels and has dismissed the investigation as politically motivated.

In his Truth Social post, written in capital letters, Trump referred to "illegal leaks from a corrupt & highly political Manhattan district attorneys office" and said the investigation was "based on an old & fully



Trump took to his Truth Social platform to say that he would be arrested on Tuesday, and called for protest actions.

debunked (by numerous other prosecutors!) fairytale?"

Trump provided no evidence of leaks from the district attorney's office and did not discuss the possible charges in his post.

Hours later, Trump doubled down in another all-caps post, assailing his successor as "crooked" and urging his followers to "Protest, Protest, Protest!!!"

Trump's lawyer Susan Necheles indicated that his posts were based on media reports and not on any fresh action taken by prosecutors.

"Since this is a political prosecution, the District Attorney's office has engaged in a practice of leaking everything to the press, rather than communicating with president Trump's attorneys as would be done in a normal case," Necheles said in a statement to AFP.

A grand jury in New York, a citizen panel which examines evidence presented by prosecutors to decide if a charge is warranted, has been hearing from witnesses in Trump's case.

On Monday, jurors heard from Trump's former lawyer and fixer Michael Cohen, who made the payment to Daniels.

Cohen was sentenced to three years in prison in 2018 on federal charges related to the payment.

He pleaded guilty but said he had been carrying out Trump's orders.

Daniels herself met prosecutors on Wednesday and "agreed to make herself available as a witness, or for further inquiry if needed", according to her lawyer Charles Brewster.

Trump has also received an invitation to testify, which legal experts say is a sign that an indictment is near.

Trump declined the offer, a person familiar with the matter said.

The payment to Daniels, if not properly accounted for, could result in a misdemeanor charge related to falsifying of business records.

That might be raised to a felony if the false accounting was intended to cover up a second crime, such as a campaign finance violation, the *New York Times* has reported.

Trump is facing several criminal probes at state and federal level over possible wrongdoing before, during and after his term in office that threaten his new run at the White House.

In Georgia, a prosecutor is investigating Trump and his allies' efforts to overturn his 2020 election loss in the southern state.

The grand jury in that case has recommended multiple indictments, the forewoman revealed last month.

The former president is also the subject of a federal probe into his handling of classified documents as well as his possible involvement in the January 6, 2021, assault on the US Capitol.

Facebook and YouTube, where Trump has millions of followers, benched him days after the attack, arguing that his posts incited unrest.

Some observers believe an indictment bodes ill for Trump's 2024 chances, while others speculate that it could on the contrary serve as a huge boost.

"The arrest secures the nomination for Donald Trump," tweeted Rick Wilson, a political strategist who quit the Republican Party in protest over Trump. "The base will rally politically, and possibly physically. (Let me know how that goes.)"

Tech billionaire Elon Musk, a self-described libertarian who has increasingly aligned with Republican positions and who overturned the Twitter ban on Trump in the name of free speech, went even further.

"If this happens, Trump will be re-elected in a landslide victory," Musk said in a tweet.

Trump called a new campaign rally in Texas on March 25.

Trump leads his early rivals for his party's nomination, holding the support of 43% of Republicans in a February Reuters/Ipsos poll, compared with 31% for his nearest rival, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, who has not yet announced his candidacy.

# Putin can't use Iraq as justification for actions on Ukraine, says Blair

By Jitendra Joshi, AFP  
London

Former UK prime minister Tony Blair is by turns pensive and defiant as he reflects on the upcoming anniversaries of two events that arguably defined the best and worst of his decade in power.

Monday marks 20 years since Blair joined US president George W Bush in launching an invasion of Saddam Hussain's Iraq, without a UN mandate and in defiance of some of the biggest demonstrations ever seen in Britain.

For its many critics, the war was exposed as a reckless misadventure when no weapons of mass destruction were found, and hampered the West's ability to stand up to the rise of autocrats in Russia and China.

However, Blair rejects the notion that Russian President Vladimir Putin profited by defying a weakened West with his own aggression against Ukraine, starting in 2014 and extending to last year's full invasion.

"If he didn't use that excuse (Iraq), he'd use another excuse," Britain's most successful Labour leader, who is now 69, said in an interview with AFP and fellow European news agencies Ansa, DPA and EFE.

Saddam, Blair noted, had initiated two regional wars, defied multiple UN resolutions and launched a chemical attack on his own people.

Ukraine in contrast has a democratic government and posed no threat to its neighbours when Putin invaded.

"At least you could say we were removing a despot and trying to introduce democracy," Blair said, speaking at the offices of his Tony Blair Institute for Global Change in central London.

"Now you can argue about all the consequences and so on," he continued. "His (Putin's) intervention in the Middle East (in



Former British prime minister Tony Blair speaks during an interview in central London.

Syria) was to prop up a despot and refuse a democracy. So we should treat all that propaganda with the lack of respect it deserves."

Fallout from the Iraq war arguably hampered Blair's own efforts as an international envoy to negotiate peace between Israel and the Palestinians, after he left office in 2007.

Through his institute, Blair maintains offices in the region and says that he is "still very passionate" about promoting peace in the Middle East, even if it appears "pretty distant right now".

However, while there can be no settlement in Ukraine until Russia recognises that "aggression is wrong", he says the Palestinians could draw lessons from the undisputed high point of his tenure: peace in Northern Ireland.

Under the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, pro-Irish militants agreed to lay down their arms and pro-UK unionists agreed to share power, after three decades of sectarian strife had left some 3,500 people dead.

Blair, then Irish premier Bertie Ahern and an envoy of US president Bill Clinton spent three days and nights negotiating the final stretch before the agreement was

signed on April 10, 1998. The territory is mired in renewed political gridlock today.

However, a recent deal between Britain and the European Union to regulate post-Brexit trade in Northern Ireland has cleared the way for US President Joe Biden to visit for the agreement's 25th anniversary.

Reflecting on the shift in strategy by the pro-Irish militants, from the bullet to the ballot box, Blair said "it's something I often said to the Palestinians: you should learn from what they did".

"They shifted strategy and look at the result," he added, denying that he was biased towards Israel but merely recognising the reality of how to negotiate peace.

"There are lots of things contested and uncontested," he added, dwelling on his tumultuous time in 10 Downing Street from 1997-2007.

"I suppose the one uncontested thing is probably the Good Friday Agreement," he said. "The thing had more or less collapsed when I came to Belfast and we had to rewrite it and agree it... it's probably been the only really successful peace process of the last period of time, in the last 25 years."

# Protesters slam UK govt plan to halt Channel crossings

AFP  
London

Protesters marched to Downing Street in London yesterday to demonstrate against the government's contentious new plan to halt cross-Channel migrant crossings by barring arrivals from applying for asylum.

Around 2,000 protesters, many carrying signs reading "no human being is illegal" and bearing trade union logos, said the demonstration was partly a response to the government's "inhuman" and "illegal" migration bill.

"People in this country are decent ... and they're willing to open their arms to people who are fleeing terrible circumstances," the protest's planning officer Mark Daly told the PA news agency.

"The government is trying to make these people not only unwelcome but illegal," he said. "We cannot classify people as illegal, it's a racist policy from a racist government."

The Conservative government intends to outlaw asylum claims by all illegal arrivals and transfer them to "safe" third countries, such as Rwanda, in a bid to stop thousands of migrants from crossing the

Channel on small boats.

The bill proposes detaining people who have arrived in the country illegally from seeking asylum before having them sent to a third country deemed safe.

Exceptions would be made for minors, but only if they were unaccompanied.

More than 45,000 migrants arrived in the UK last year by crossing the English Channel on small boats.

The UN children's agency said last week that it was "deeply concerned" about the bill's potential impact on minors.

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak told the House of Commons earlier this month that stopping the boats was the "people's priority".

The interior minister, Suella Braverman, is currently visiting Rwanda to reaffirm her commitment to the government's policy to deport migrants there.

Braverman has insisted that the government is within its rights to stop the migrants crossing the Channel, who she said could total 80,000 this year.

"We're not breaking the law," she told Sky News, claiming support from the "vast majority" of the British public.

The government, Braverman said, is in compliance with its international law obligations.



Protesters demonstrate against the government's anti-refugee bill outside Downing Street in London.

# Tories could pull off 'shock' election win

By Jitendra Joshi, AFP  
London

Tony Blair came to power as leader of Britain's Labour party in the years after it suffered a paralysing defeat to the Conservatives that few saw coming.

While praising current Labour chief Keir Starmer, Blair says that in the next general election, a shock win cannot be ruled out for Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's Tories - even if the party currently trails badly in the polls.

However, on one thing regarding UK politics, the 69-year-old elder statesman is sure: Britain will not rejoin the European Union in the coming years.

"Whether and how the UK rejoins the EU will be for a future generation. I think that's the reality," Blair said in an interview with AFP and fellow European news agencies Ansa, DPA and EFE.

The former prime minister vocally opposed Brexit in Britain's 2016 referendum, even travelling to Northern Ireland with ex-Tory leader John Major to warn of its likely impact on the delicate peace there.

Following his surprise win over Labour in 1992, Major laid the foundations of peace talks with pro-Irish militants, which Blair went on to build into a landmark agreement in 1998.

Major's election win accelerated Labour's conversion from a flirtation with the far-left in the 1980s to electoral respectability, and Blair won a landslide five years later.

Then, the Conservatives were rebuilding after the political demise of Margaret Thatcher.

Today, under Sunak, they are trying to rebuild after political and economic tumult under Boris Johnson and Liz Truss.

Starmer's Labour has a commanding lead in opinion polls, averaging 20 points, ahead of the next election likely to take place in 2024.

However, Sunak personally polls better than his rival, drawing media comparisons to

the 1992 contest between Major and his Labour opponent, Neil Kinnock, who voters decided was not ready to be prime minister.

Asked if Sunak could pull off a repeat upset, Blair said: "In politics, you should never talk of certainties, because there aren't any."

Sunak, whose presentation style has been compared to Blair, was "repairing the damage that has been done" to the Conservative brand by Johnson and Truss, he said.

However much Sunak improves the party's standing, voters will still be taxed higher and receiving less in public services come the next election.

"And I also think that Keir is a very sensible guy. He's someone who looks like he can lead the country," Blair added. "In the immortal words of Sir Rod Stewart, it's time to give the other lot a go, or whatever he said."

The British rock crooner, a lifelong Conservative, said in January that "I've never seen it so bad ... change the bloody government" and let Labour in.

While both Blair and Starmer campaigned to keep Britain in the European Union, the current Labour leader has ruled out rejoining the bloc's single market as a compromise step after Brexit.

"I think right now, the debate in the UK is the degree to which we want to re-establish a strong relationship with Europe, which I think we should and which I believe Labour will also do," Blair said.

Britain and the EU had much to talk about in energy and climate, science and research, and defence and security after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, he said.

"I think there's a strong case for trying to co-operate on technology," Blair added.

"Because otherwise, Europe, including the UK, is going to be pinned between two technology giants in the US and China, and possibly a third in India," he said. "And so I think there's a massive amount we can do together."

## Mexico president calls for a big rally

Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador has called for a big political rally in Mexico City this weekend aimed at energising his supporters ahead of key elections next year.

The gathering is seen as the left-wing populist's riposte to opponents of a controversial new election law that he promoted. The rally is Lopez Obrador's "response to the opposition coming out to protest against his electoral reform", political analyst Jose Antonio Crespo told AFP.

Tens of thousands of Mexicans demonstrated on February 26 against a new law reducing the size and budget of the National Electoral Institute (INE), the independent body that oversees elections.

Critics see the changes - which were approved by the ruling party-controlled Congress last month - as an attack on democracy ahead of the 2024 presidential election. - AFP

## Indigenous Peruvians seize oil station

Indigenous Peruvians have occupied an oil pumping station deep in the Amazon and prevented 41 workers from leaving the installation, state-owned oil firm Petroperu said on Friday.

The Indigenous activists are demanding that Petroperu clean up areas damaged by an oil spill decades ago. "Petroperu has been developing all possible actions to achieve the release of the 41 people who remain deprived of their rights at the Morona Station of the Northern Peruvian Oil Pipeline," the company said activists from the Fernando Rosas community had arrived at the site on Wednesday.

By occupying the site, the activists have denied workers the "right to free transit" and have also forced them to stay outdoors, including overnight, the statement added. - AFP

# India: Situation with China fragile, dangerous in the Himalayan front

Reuters  
New Delhi

The situation between India and China in the western Himalayan region of Ladakh is fragile and dangerous, with military forces deployed very close to each other in some parts, Indian Foreign Minister S Jaishankar said yesterday.

At least 24 soldiers were killed when the two sides clashed in the region in mid-2020, but the situation has been calmed through rounds of diplomatic and military talks.

Violence erupted in the eastern sector of the undemarcated border between the nuclear-armed Asia giants in December but did not result in any deaths.

"The situation to my mind still remains very fragile because there are places where our deployments are very close up and in military assessment therefore quite dangerous," Jaishankar said at an *India Today* conclave.

India-China relations cannot go back to normal, he said, until the border row is resolved in line with the September 2020 in-principle agreement he

reached with his Chinese counterpart.

"The Chinese have to deliver on what was agreed to, and they have struggled with that," he said.

Although forces from both sides have disengaged from many areas, discussions are proceeding over unresolved points, Jaishankar said.

"We have made it very clear to the Chinese that we cannot have a breach of peace and tranquillity, you can't violate agreement and want the rest of the relationship to continue as though nothing happened," he stressed. "That's just not tenable."

Jaishankar said he discussed the situation with China's new foreign minister, Qin Gang, on the sidelines of a meeting of the foreign ministers of the G20 nations hosted by India this month.

Regarding India's presidency of G20 this year, Jaishankar expressed hope that New Delhi can make the forum "more true to its global mandate".

"The G20 should not be a debating club or an arena only of the global north. The entirety of global concerns need to be captured. We have already made that point very forcefully," he added.

Two G20 ministerial meetings in India in the last three weeks have been overshadowed by Russia's 13-month invasion of Ukraine.



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**GULF TIMES**

## GCC banks more resilient to US banks' distress, but can't let guard down

Credit Suisse, one of the largest banks on the planet, has been bailed out in all but name by the Swiss government to the tune of £44bn, with the promise of more to come if needed.

For much of the last week, the Swiss giant had been hammered by speculation over its future after its management was forced to admit on Tuesday that its earlier accounts contained "material weaknesses".

A few days before, the California-based Silicon Valley Bank (SVB), a smaller-scale provider of banking services to the state's huge tech industry, had failed, prompting a rush to bailout this bank by the US government.

Speculation has since swirled around USA's smaller, regional banks, with financial market traders believing that the combination of rising interest rates and (potentially) poor management choices that did for SVB may also now be afflicting other banks.

Another, smaller institution, specialising in cryptocurrency lending — Signature Bank, had failed a few days previously. Smaller banks, like SVB and First Republic, had their regulations substantially relaxed in 2018, allowing them to take greater risks with their assets.

**Bank bailouts need not indicate yet another global financial crisis. But if history is anything to go by, they should still have us all worried!**

This, analysts say has left them especially exposed as interest rates have increased, and their customers are withdrawing money to place it in larger institutions.

Regulators have to close down these US regional banks following mass withdrawals of customer deposits from them.

Clearly, the events have shaken investor

confidence and will likely lead to tightening liquidity across global debt markets. Still, the impact will likely be limited for most rated banks in Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) countries, according to Moody's Investor Service.

This, it said is due to structural features including their broad franchises and large government presence across the banks' balance sheets.

Also, GCC banks are not materially exposed to the failed US banks and are not as susceptible to large losses from held-to-maturity debt securities. The spillover effects of the US bank distress are still developing, however.

Banks in the six nations of the (GCC) generally have broad franchises across retail and corporate banking. GCC banks are strongly interlinked with their respective sovereigns.

For the most part, the footprint of governments in the region can be found right across banks' balance sheets — as borrowers, depositors and as main shareholders, creating a supportive and interlinked operating environment. Most GCC governments are highly rated. They maintain equity stakes in the banking systems, both directly and indirectly through public-sector institutions, pension funds and companies.

They anchor the banks' funding profiles through inflows of stable deposits, which have increased thanks to higher oil-related government revenues in 2022, Moody's noted.

Governments also provide lending opportunities to GCC banks that are playing a pivotal role in implementing the governments' economic diversification agendas in the non-oil parts of the economy — where they conduct bulk of their lending activities — which are supported by government spending.

All these factors ensure GCC banks remain core to the regional economies and will protect them against sudden market shocks.

Bank bailouts need not indicate yet another global financial crisis. But if history is anything to go by, they should still have us all worried!

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A sign of Credit Suisse is seen behind a clock at the headquarters of Switzerland's second-biggest bank in Zurich yesterday. Switzerland's largest bank, UBS, is in talks to buy all or part of Credit Suisse, according to a report by the *Financial Times*. Credit Suisse came under pressure this week as the failure of two US regional lenders rocked the sector. (AFP)

# Lessons from SVB collapse

By **Lucrezia Reichlin**  
London

**D**oes Silicon Valley Bank's collapse reveal a fundamental weakness in the current financial-stability framework, or does it merely point to a localised failure of supervision?

By jeopardising many prominent, high-growth companies in the tech sector, the bank's failure certainly put significant political pressure on the US Federal Reserve. But the Fed's emergency weekend intervention — when it provided a comprehensive deposit guarantee and extended loans to other banks, valuing their collateral of US Treasury bonds at par — suggests that it was genuinely concerned about financial contagion, too. And now, the recent scare around Credit Suisse has forced European banking regulators to mull the same questions.

Obviously, there was a failure of supervision. SVB's insolvency came about because of its entirely foreseeable exposure to rising interest rates. It had used customer deposits to fund investments in a portfolio of US Treasuries that were poised to decline in value when the Fed started tightening its monetary policy a year ago. The problem was neither credit risk nor liquidity risk; rather, it was an obvious form of market risk. The Fed's usual stress tests might have spared supervisors the embarrassment,

except that SVB was exempted from this requirement, owing to a 2018 legislative change that increased the threshold for participation from \$50bn in assets to \$250bn. SVB had \$209bn in assets when it failed.

This gap suggests that there may indeed be a deeper problem with the financial-stability framework. Since the 2008 global financial crisis, regulators on both sides of the Atlantic have attempted to strengthen financial-sector regulation and supervision within the confines of a broadly consistent framework. The two key features are enhanced supervisory powers and capabilities, with a particular focus on institutions identified as being "systemically significant" and partial deposit-insurance schemes, which are designed to protect deposits up to a certain amount per depositor.

SVB was not deemed systemically important. Yet not only was the Fed forced to mount an extraordinary emergency intervention to head off systemic risks introduced by its collapse. It also effectively acknowledged that the FDIC's partial deposit insurance regime (alongside new rules on bank resolution) was inadequate for reassuring depositors; nothing less than comprehensive deposit insurance would do. Given that these conclusions were reached after the fact, it is worth asking whether we ever would have come to them in the

absence of a sudden crisis. Of course, the "systemic importance" logic of the post-2008 regime may have had more to do with the difficulty of unwinding massive institutions like Lehman Brothers than with concerns about their greater propensity to cause crises. After all, financial crises can start with institutions of all sizes, and one of the areas where there has been the most progress since the financial crisis has been in establishing more detailed and robust rules for bank resolution.

But the SVB saga suggests that the post-2008 reforms — strengthening capital-adequacy requirements, establishing rules for bank resolution (with bail-ins for bondholders), drawing up "living wills" for banks — were not enough. Comprehensive deposit insurance must also be part of the picture, and it is clearly better to have such a system in place before the fact.

To be sure, it looks as though the Fed's intervention was primarily motivated by a concern about financial contagion, rather than by the need to protect corporate depositors in a strategically important sector. But in the case of SVB's subsidiary in the United Kingdom, the reverse appears to be true. Although no taxpayer money was spent to rescue depositors (SVB UK was purchased by HSBC for £1), one still might ask whether this is the best way to implement an industrial policy or to protect a critical sector.

In the case of the United States, we

have witnessed yet another episode in which the central bank has been called upon to use its balance sheet to protect the financial system. Although the crises of the last decade may have had different origins, the central bank fix has been similar. In all cases, the government is effectively acting as the insurer of last resort.

This may be inevitable, and even desirable, in the sense that it provides the public good of financial stability. But the government's expanded role forces us to ask whether it would not be more efficient to bypass the banks altogether by allowing depositors — both retail and corporate — to keep their funds at the central bank, through the issuance of a central bank digital currency. That would be a comprehensive form of deposit insurance ex ante.

More broadly, if some sectors of the economy are going to be protected no matter what, we should establish a framework for doing that ahead of time, rather than bailing out uninsured depositors after the fact. These are among the most important lessons that policymakers should take from this latest crisis. — Project Syndicate

● *Lucrezia Reichlin, a former director of research at the European Central Bank, is Professor of Economics at the London Business School and a trustee of the International Financial Reporting Standards Foundation.*

## It's all about the banking regulations

By **Antonio Foglia**  
London

**D**o more bank "bailouts" amount to more proof that capitalism doesn't work?

Some commentators seem to think so. But what capitalism are they talking about? It has been a long time since there was any trace of market discipline or capitalism in banking, one of the most heavily regulated industries of all. Coming on the heels of the travails of Banco Popular and other banks, the failure of Silicon Valley Bank is another case of an institution collapsing overnight without breaching any of the many prudential regulations by which it was governed.

The 2008 global financial crisis exposed the horrendous mistakes that banking regulators had made in the preceding years. But rather than correcting them and developing a robust understanding of why these errors were committed and how they could be avoided in the future, politicians and the public at the time demanded that supervisory authorities simply double down on regulation. So, that is what they did, and we are now seeing the results.

The main mistake in contemporary banking regulation is the requirement of only a razor-thin capital cushion. This is an artifact of a previous era. It is based on the capital that Japanese zombie banks had in the mid-1990s, reflecting the desire among those writing the Basel rules (the international banking regulation framework) not to embarrass their colleagues at the Bank of Japan.

After the global financial crisis, it was

**AFTER THE GFC, CAPITAL REQUIREMENTS WERE NOT MEANINGFULLY RAISED!**

US (all FDIC insured banks)			
(\$ bn USD)	Total Assets	Total Equity	Eq/TA
End of 2007	10,733	766	7.14%
End of 2022	22,528	2,112	9.25%
			30%

Eurozone (All ECB monitored banks)			
(€ bn EUR)	Total Assets	Total Equity	Eq/TA
End of 2007	29,494	1,681	5.70%
End of 2022	39,017	2,452	6.20%
			19%

again too embarrassing to recognise the extent of this mistake, so policymakers and regulators settled on a more gradual approach. As a result, since 2007, capital as a share of total assets has risen by less than 30% in Europe and the United States. True, Tier 1 ratios (the ratio of equity and reserves to risk-weighted assets) improved by more, but that was largely achieved by tweaking the rules for calculating the numerator and the denominator. Capital would have tripled if banks had been required to carry the same ratio that hedge funds carry voluntarily for the same level of risk.

Look at SVB. It had \$200bn in assets, \$86bn of which was in residential mortgage-backed securities that are not due for at least ten years, and which are carried on a held-to-maturity basis. At fair value, though, this paper was worth only \$71bn, implying a \$15bn loss. That amount was more than enough to wipe out the bank's \$12bn in capital, and it was written clearly in the bank's 2022 financial statements.

In practice, the prevailing "prudential" regulations allowed

SVB to leverage its capital more than tenfold on that book of risky securities. Given the volatility of the assets, that is insane. Even an aggressive hedge fund would not have leveraged such a book by more than threefold. But SVB was allowed to operate and publish a Tier 1 ratio of 12%, well within the "prudential" limits.

That brings us to the second major uncorrected mistake of banking regulation: solvency is assumed to rest on a held-to-maturity basis. Even "conservative" banking experts such as John Vickers, a former chief economist of the Bank of England, seem to accept this. But would Vickers leave a deposit with a bank that is insolvent on a mark-to-market basis? No, he would not, and nor did SVB's depositors. When they finally realised what should have been clear for many months, they tried to withdraw their money as fast as they could.

This problem would seem to apply only to the US. In Europe, we have regulated liabilities (through the net-stable-funding ratio) and assets

(through the liquidity-coverage ratio), so this kind of mismatch should not happen. But as comforting as this arrangement may be, it also means that the authorities have regulated the interbank lending market out of business — and probably the banks as well. Who will leave a deposit at a bank that can achieve only yields below those of the high-quality liquid assets in which the banks and depositors themselves can invest? Banks will remain confined to the payments business, at least until central bank digital currencies arrive, and transfer that business to the central bankrupters too.

Do we want capitalism or not? If we do, we need to get rid of the failed regulations (and regulators), and end the status quo in which central bankers preside over monetary policies with long, variable, and lagging effects, and hence have an impact on future economic conditions that they cannot predict.

We also need to stop thinking that bank deposits are the only financial asset whose price is fixed at par and guaranteed by the nanny state. If banks financed themselves through traded certificates of deposit, crises like the current one would not happen. SVB's CDs might be priced at 85%, owing to the uncertainty surrounding a liquidation or a recapitalisation, but there never would have been a run on the bank. The runs happen only because the first 85% of people in line would get par, while only the last 15% would get zero. — Project Syndicate

● *Antonio Foglia, a board member of Banca del Ceresio, is a member of the Global Partners' Council of the Institute for New Economic Thinking.*

# Islamabad court drops arrest warrant against ex-PM Khan

AFP/Reuters  
Islamabad

A judge has dropped an arrest warrant against former prime minister Imran Khan yesterday, his lawyers said, after the ex-cricketer star, who had skipped several hearings, travelled to court.

The 70-year-old has been tangled in a slew of court cases since he was ousted in a no-confidence motion last year and has been pressuring the fragile coalition government which replaced him to hold early elections.

Earlier this week Khan's supporters fought pitched battles with police sent to arrest him in the eastern city of Lahore after he failed to appear in court over graft charges, citing security concerns.

"The court has cancelled the arrest warrant after marking Imran Khan's attendance. The hearing has been adjourned till March 30," one of Khan's lawyers, Gohar Khan, told AFP.

After days of legal wrangling, Khan travelled more than 300km from Lahore to the Islamabad court complex, but was unable to get out of the car.

Around 4,000 supporters mobbed the complex, pelting stones and throwing bricks at police officers who fired back with tear gas.

The Islamabad police chief told Geo News that Khan's supporters attacked police near the court and fired tear gas shells, prompting police to fire more tear gas back.

Given the chaos around the complex, Khan was unable to physically enter the courtroom, and was allowed by the judge to sign his presence from his vehicle.

Khan's aide Fawad Chaudhry told Reuters that the former premier's presence had been recorded officially by the court and he had left to return to his home in the city of Lahore.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif took to



Supporters of former prime minister Imran Khan sit atop his vehicle outside a court in Islamabad.

Twitter to criticise Khan, saying he was using people as human shields and was attempting to intimidate the judiciary.

The case has been brought by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), which has accused Khan of not declaring gifts received during his time as premier, or the profit made from selling them.

Khan claims authorities want to throw him in jail so he is unable to campaign for upcoming elections.

He says he followed legal procedures in acquiring the gifts.

Some 4,000 security officials including elite police commandos, anti-terrorism squads and paramilitary rangers have been deployed around Islamabad with hospitals put on high alert.

Police meanwhile raided his house in a

plush Lahore neighbourhood after blocking nearby roads and suspending mobile services in the area.

Many of Khan's supporters had stayed back to guard the former prime minister's home as he left for Islamabad yesterday.

The police chief for Punjab province, Usman Anwar, told a media conference in Lahore that officers went to Khan's house to intercept people who had been involved in earlier clashes with police and had arrested 61 people, including for throwing petrol bombs.

Khan's party shared with journalists footage that appeared to show police in the garden of the Lahore home beating his supporters with batons.

Khan said his wife was alone in the house during the raid.

Pakistani Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah told Geo News the police recovered weapons from the premises outside Khan's home and had a warrant to carry out the search.

Sanaullah said law enforcement personnel did not enter the residence, remaining in the garden and driveway.

As the political drama unfolds, Pakistan is in the grip of a stark economic downturn, risking default if help cannot be secured from the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

The security situation is also deteriorating with a spate of deadly attacks on police, linked to the Pakistan Taliban.

Last year Khan was shot in the leg during a political rally, an assassination bid he blamed on Prime Minister Sharif.

# Putin in Crimea on ninth anniversary of annexation

AFP  
Moscow

Russian President Vladimir Putin visited Crimea yesterday to mark the ninth anniversary of the peninsula's annexation, a day after the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued an arrest warrant against him over the Ukraine conflict.

Turkiye meanwhile announced the extension of a deal that has allowed Ukraine to export grain following Russia's offensive, but Kyiv and Moscow disagreed if the agreement was prolonged for 60 or 120 days.

Putin's surprise visit to Crimea was his first to the peninsula since he sent troops to Ukraine on February 24 last year, apart from when he drove across the bridge linking the territory to mainland Russia last December.

He was shown visiting the Black Sea port city of Sevastopol, accompanied by the local Moscow-appointed governor Mikhail Razvozhayev, according to images broadcast by Russian state TV.

Razvozhayev said on the messaging app Telegram that Putin had been expected to take part in the opening of a children's art school by video link.

"But Vladimir Vladimirovich came in person. Himself. Behind the wheel. Because on such a historic day, the president is always with Sevastopol and the people of Sevastopol," he said.

Russia annexed Crimea from Ukraine in 2014 following a referendum that was not recognised by Kyiv and the international community.

Speaking at the Davos forum in January, President Volodymyr Zelensky said Ukraine aimed to take back Crimea, "our land".

Moscow has refused to include it in possible peace talks.

Putin's visit came a day after the ICC issued an arrest warrant against him over the "deportation" of Ukrainian children.

More than 16,000 Ukrainian children have been deported to Russia since the start of the conflict last year, according to Kyiv, with many allegedly placed in institutions and foster homes.

ICC prosecutor Karim Khan told AFP on Friday that Putin is now liable for arrest if he set foot in any of the court's more than 120 member states.



This handout photograph taken and released by the Russian presidential press office in Sevastopol shows Russian President Vladimir Putin with Sevastopol Governor Mikhail Razvozhayev listening to Metropolitan Tikhon Shevkunov (right), chairman of the Patriarchal Council for Culture, as he visits the Chersonesos Taurica historical and archaeological park on the 9th anniversary of the referendum on the state status of Crimea and Sevastopol and its reunification with Russia.

# Funding shortfall forces ration cuts for millions

The UN World Food Programme (WFP) has been forced to cut rations to 4mn Afghans this month, it said in a statement late on Friday, due to a funding shortfall in the midst of the country's severe humanitarian crisis.

"Due to funding constraints, at least 4mn people will receive just half of what they need to get by in March," the statement said, adding that the UN food agency urgently needs \$93mn in funding to reach 13mn people in Afghanistan in April.

Since the Taliban took over in 2021 the already poor country has plunged deeper into crisis and foreign governments cut development funding and enforced sanctions on the banking sector.

Some officials, including from the United Nations, have expressed concerns that donors would pull back on the country's huge humanitarian aid programme after a series of restrictions on women the Taliban administration put in place last year, including barring most Afghan female non-government organisation staff from work in December.

The reason for the WFP's March funding shortfall was not immediately clear.

The drop in rations comes at the end of a particularly harsh, deadly winter when many families have depleted their food stores and before the next harvest season around May.

The United Nations estimated that around 90% of Afghans cannot afford enough food. - Reuters

# Protests resume amid anger at Macron's pension reform

Reuters/AFP  
Paris

Refinery strikes persisted in France yesterday and more demonstrations were taking place throughout the country amid anger at the government pushing through a rise in the state pension age without a parliamentary vote.

The growing unrest, combined with rubbish piling up on the streets of Paris after refuse workers joined in the action, has left President Emmanuel Macron with the gravest challenge to his authority since the so-called "Gilets Jaunes" (Yellow Vests) protests of December 2018.

Some 37% of operational staff at TotalEnergies' refineries and depots - at sites including Feyzin in southeast France and Normandy in the north - were on strike yesterday, a company spokesperson said.

Meanwhile rolling strikes continued on the railways.

Riot police clashed with protesters on Friday evening in Paris as a demonstration took place at the capital's Place de la Concorde, near the Assemblée Nationale parliament building, resulting in 61 arrests.

This led the Paris Prefecture yesterday to ban rallies on Place de la Concorde and the nearby Champs-Élysées.

A further rally was however slated for later on Place d'Italie in southern Paris.

Elsewhere in the French capital, a group of students and activists from the "Revolution Permanente" collective briefly invaded the Forum des Halles shopping mall, waving banners calling for a general strike and shouting "Paris stand up, rise up"; videos on social media showed.

Ariane Laget, 36, was among some 200 people demonstrating in the small southern town of Lodeve.

"We're fed up. We feel like we're being trampled on and no one is listening," she said.

Large crowds also took to the streets in the western city of Nantes.

"Death to the king," read one placard, in an apparent reference to the president.

BFM television also showed images of demonstrations underway in cities such as Compiègne in the north, Nantes in the west and Marseille in the south.

In the southeastern city of Lyon, demonstrators tried to break into a town hall and set fire



A police officer attempts to extinguish flames at the entrance of the town hall of the 4th arrondissement (district) of Lyon, which was vandalised during riots following a demonstration after the French government pushed a pensions reform using the article 49.3 of the constitution.

to the building, said police, who reported 36 arrests.

"There is no place for violence. One must respect parliamentary democracy," Digital Transition and Telecommunications Minister Jean-Noël Barrot told Sud radio.

A broad alliance of France's

main unions has said it would continue to mobilise to try to force a U-turn on the changes.

A day of nationwide industrial action is scheduled for Thursday.

While eight days of nationwide protests since mid-January, and many local industrial actions, have so far been largely peaceful,

the unrest over the last three days is reminiscent of the Yellow Vest protests which erupted in late 2018 over high fuel prices, and which forced Macron into a partial U-turn on a carbon tax.

Macron's overhaul raises the pension age by two years to 64, which the government says is essential.

Opposition lawmakers have filed two motions of no confidence in the government, which are to be debated in parliament tomorrow afternoon according to parliamentary sources.

They hope to garner enough support to topple the cabinet and repeal the law to raise the retirement age.

Opinion polls have shown around two-thirds of French people oppose the reform, which is also to require people to work longer for a full pension.

The government has said it is necessary to avoid the system from slipping into deficit, and bring France in line with its European neighbours where the legal retirement age is typically higher.

However, critics say the changes are unfair for people who start working at a young age in physically tough jobs, and women who interrupt their careers to raise children.

# UN aviation council votes to hear MH17 case against Russia

Reuters  
Montreal

The UN aviation council has voted to hear a case against Russia over the 2014 downing of Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17, the foreign ministers of Australia and the Netherlands said.

Australia and the Netherlands initiated the action over MH17 last year at the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO).

The passenger jet was struck over rebel-held eastern Ukraine by what international investigators and prosecutors say was

a Russian-made surface-to-air missile, killing all 298 people on board.

Australia has said Russia was responsible under international law and that taking the matter to the ICAO would be a step forward in the fight for victims who included 38 Australians.

The ICAO upheld its jurisdiction to hear the matter during a session on Friday, Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong said in a written statement.

"This decision is an important step in our collective efforts to hold to account those responsible for this horrific act of violence," she said.

Dutch Foreign Minister Wopke Hoek-

stra called the decision to hear the case "an important step towards establishing the truth, justice and accountability".

"Together with Australia, we will continue to do everything in our power to find closure for the loved ones of the 298 victims of flight #MH17," he tweeted.

Russia has denied involvement in the incident, and Russia's ICAO delegation was not available for comment.

While the outcome at the ICAO is uncertain, experts said the move may be seen as a further way to force Russia into negotiations over the incident.

The technical talks by the ICAO's 36-member governing council come as

Moscow is facing mounting rebukes over aviation-related actions following its invasion of Ukraine.

In October, Russia failed to win enough votes at the ICAO's triennial assembly to keep its council seat.

The council also called out Russia for the dual registration of commercial aircraft, which the body argued is at odds with parts of a key agreement that sets out core principles for international aviation.

Montreal-based ICAO lacks regulatory power but holds moral suasion and sets global aviation standards overwhelmingly adopted by its 193-member states, even as it operates across political barriers.

# Greece sacks police chief following train tragedy protests

Greece has sacked its national police chief, days after clashes between security forces and demonstrators broke out in the wake of the country's deadliest train tragedy.

The Prime Minister's Office said police chief Constantinos Skoumas had been discharged less than two months after being confirmed at the post.

No specific cause was given for prompting the change, which comes as police face widespread public criticism for their handling of protests over the February 28 tragedy in which 57 people were killed when two trains collided.

In the latest protest on Thursday, a riot police squad was filmed baton charging and striking peaceful demonstrators at the central Syntagma Square in Athens.

A police tow truck was also filmed ramming a group of demonstrators trying to block an Athens street with garbage bins, sending one demonstrator flying to the ground.

The train disaster has sparked weeks of angry and occasionally violent protests, and has piled major pressure on the conservative government of Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis ahead of elections expected in May. - AFP

# QATAR



Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser with HE Sheikha Hind bint Hamad al-Thani and other dignitaries. **PICTURE:** A R al-Baker



Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser toured the interactive spaces and Arabic stations at the summit, together with HE Sheikha Hind bint Hamad al-Thani. **PICTURE:** A R al-Baker



Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser touring the summit. **PICTURE:** Aisha al-Musallam



Snapshots from the summit and accompanying activities.



Right: HE Sheikha Hind bint Hamad al-Thani touring the TEDinArabic Summit.



## Sheikha Moza attends opening of inaugural TEDinArabic Summit

From Page 1

“Our three-year partnership with Qatar Foundation (QF) has established a platform to showcase the brilliance and innovation of Arabic speakers throughout the region,” Walters said. “We could not be more proud of the diverse lineup of speakers, reflecting as it does TED’s long-time curation philosophy celebrating the power and beauty of interdisciplinary thinking and unexpected connections.”

TED speakers who shared their stories on the first day included physicist and poet from Lebanon Mahdi Mansour, journalist and women’s advocate from Oman Rafia al-Talei, writer and accessibility specialist from Iraq Ahmad Habib, climate justice advocate from Egypt Amr Ramadan,

and Belal Khaled, a Palestinian artist and activist.

Over the course of the summit, which continues today, its international audience are exploring activities, workshops, experiences, and talks – all in Arabic – on themes including creativity, language, science, and discovery, as well as artistic performances.

Reflecting the QF and TED’s emphasis on inclusivity, talks at the TEDinArabic Summit come with Arabic sign language, as well as English translation.

The summit is being held with the support of partners including Qatar Museums’ Years of Culture initiative – which provided a grant enabling young people from across the Arab world to attend the event – Tasweer, Alif Stores, the Doha Film Institute, Geekdom, the QF’s Doha De-



bates, the Generation Amazing Foundation, Enbat, QINWAN, and Al Jazeera Media Network’s AJ+ platform.

It is a milestone in a three-year partnership between the QF and TED which has provided a platform for new and inspiring ideas in Arabic to be shared with the world, and which aims to nurture a culture of idea generation in the Middle East and North Africa.

TEDinArabic regional events have also been held in Qatar, Jor-

dan, and Morocco, while a digital vault of TEDinArabic content that includes blogs, videos, and TED Talks has been created.

For more information about the TEDinArabic Summit, and to register to attend its talks and sessions, visit <https://tedin-arabic.ted.com/en/summit2023>.

To find out more about TEDinArabic – which is TED’s first initiative in the Arabic language – visit <https://tedin-arabic.ted.com/en/>

## Qatari designer advocates sustainability at TEDinArabic Summit

By Tawfik Lamari  
Staff Reporter

Under the theme *The Butterfly Effect*, borrowed from a verse by Palestinian resistance poet Mahmoud Darwish – “The butterfly effect is not seen and the butterfly effect does not go away” – the opening of the two-day TEDinArabic Summit, featuring speakers from the Arab world, kicked off in Qatar yesterday.

The event provides Arabic speakers everywhere with a platform to amplify their ideas globally, and to showcase to the world how Arabic is a language of innovation, of original thought, and of new knowledge.

This landmark summit has achieved its goals by energising and inspiring those who experienced its talks, sessions and the exchange of ideas.

Among the speakers was Qatari fashion designer Mashaal al-Naimi, who inspired the audience with her unique experience as a fashion designer turned environment sustainability advocate.

She depicted her personal experience of an unaware shopper who used to buy clothes in large quantities and come back from her trips abroad with loaded suitcases of fashion items, which remained hanging in wardrobes.

Then, during a trip to East Asia, she visited a factory where people with special needs were weaving and dying cloth from natural fabric and natural pigments.

This experience changed her way of thinking completely and made her give up her old shopping habits.

She has since experimented with natural fabrics and traditional dye and materials, such as henna and saffron,



Mashaal al-Naimi during her presentation, wearing a designer dress made from handwoven natural cloth and dyed with natural tea and saffron.

to produce designer dresses in Doha.

Al-Naimi recalled how she started painting with henna on silk and, thanks to her success in transforming ordinary henna to permanent henna dye, she is now calling on people to opt for wearing clothes made from natural fabrics, “100% organic and sustainable clothes and feel comfortable, proud and happy in them and with them.”

She is also exploring new techniques to adopt them in her creations.

Al-Naimi is advocating sustainability through her use of natural fabrics and leading by example.

“I am wearing, during my talk, a designer dress made by myself from handwoven natural cloth and dyed with natural tea and saffron,” she said. “This is reality, whatever little we

can do is important, is essential, it is for you, for your children, your grandchildren,” she added. “To be sustainable is to be doing the right thing.”

“There are plenty of natural techniques that can be used to dye natural cloth and make them a labour of love. Sustainability is a local effort that should be supported by each and every one,” al-Naimi concluded.



A dress by Mashaal al-Naimi.