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BUSINESS | Page 1

South Korea ready to support Qatar's food security, says envoy

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GULF TIMES

THURSDAY Vol. XXXIV No. 12592 March 23, 2023 Ramadan 1, 1444 AH www.gulf-times.com 2 Riyals

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Amir issues law to combat concealment

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani issued Law No. 3 of 2023 regarding combating the concealment of non-Qataris practising commercial, economic and professional activities in violation of the law.

PM attends GCC ministerial meeting

HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani participated yesterday in the meeting of the 155th session of the Ministerial Council of the Co-operation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC).

Qatar Central Bank raises interest rate

Qatar Central Bank (QCB) announced yesterday a decision to raise the QCB Deposit Rate (QCBDR) by 25 basis points to 5.25%. In a statement, QCB also decided to raise the QCB Lending Rate (QCBLR) by 25 basis points to 5.75%.

At least 9 dead in Russian air strikes

Russian air strikes on Ukrainian cities yesterday killed at least nine people in attacks that President Volodymyr Zelensky said showed Moscow was not interested in peace.

Table with Ramadan prayer and fasting times: Fajr, Zuhr, Asr, Maghrib, Isha, Iftar, Imsak.

Amir exchanges Ramadan greetings with leaders of Arab, Muslim countries



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani exchanged cables of congratulations with Their Majesties, Excellencies, and Highnesses leaders of Arab and Islamic countries, on the occasion of the advent of the holy month of Ramadan.

Amir exchanges greetings with Shura speaker

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani received a cable from HE the Speaker of the Shura Council Hassan bin Abdullah

al-Ghanim on the occasion of the advent of the holy month of Ramadan, extending his greetings and greetings of members of the Shura Council on this blessed occasion.

Amir to meet well-wishers today evening

The Amiri Diwan announced that His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani will receive well-wishers on the advent of the holy month of Ramadan at Lusail Palace today evening, the first day of the holy month, immediately after Tarawih prayer.

Amir honours Algerian ambassador



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani met at Sheikh Abdullah Bin Jassim Majlis at the Amiri Diwan yesterday with ambassador of the sisterly People's Democratic Republic of Algeria Dr Mustafa Boutoura.

Qatar's first ever airspace comes into force today

Today, Qatar's airspace is established in full after the success of the completion of the second phase of ICAO's plan for a full, first-ever establishment of airspace for Qatar.

toric verdict for aviation in the Middle East. The UN special agency for aviation "ICAO - the International Civil Aviation Organisation" agreed to establish a brand new, first-ever airspace for the State of Qatar known as the "Doha FIR" - redrawing the skies of the world's airspace map for the first time in decades.

It's a milestone for Qatar, as there are no examples in the modern history of the airspace map of the world changing to include a country that had no airspace (FIR) of its own.

With a new FIR of its own, Qatar has gained much-needed airspace independence, and the country will have the ability to maximise the efficiency of air travel around Qatar to better meet the country's air travel sustainability goals. Business Page 8

AlKhater, al-Khulaifi appointed ministers of state in MoFA

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani issued yesterday Amiri Order No. 4 of 2023, appointing HE Lolwah bint Rashid bin Mohamed AlKhater as Minister of State for International Cooperation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.



HE Lolwah bint Rashid bin Mohamed AlKhater.



HE Dr Mohamed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh al-Khulaifi.

Foreign Affairs. The Amiri Order is effective starting from its date of issue, and is to be published in the official gazette. (QNA)

Sheikh Thamer bin Hamad appointed Head of International Media Office



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani issued yesterday the Amiri Decision No. 22 of 2023, appointing Sheikh Thamer bin Hamad bin Thamer al-Thani as Head of the International Media Office.

Shura approves amendments to public hygiene law

The Shura Council has approved a draft law amending some provisions of Law No. 18 of 2017 regarding public hygiene, the Cabinet was informed yesterday.

Today's GULF TIMES includes a 20-page supplement on Pakistan Day. Scan here To Read ONLINE. 23 MARCH

رمضان كريم

RAMADAN KAREEM

We extend our heartiest greetings to

His Highness
Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani
Amir of the State of Qatar

His Highness
Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al Thani
Father Amir

His Highness
Sheikh Abdullah Bin Hamad Al Thani
Deputy Amir

And to all the honorable people of Qatar on the occasion of
Ramadan

We hope for more returns of this memorable
occasion and wish that Qatar always enjoys security,
welfare and prosperity under the wise
leadership of His Highness The Amir



QATAR SHELL



Ramadan Mubarak

From

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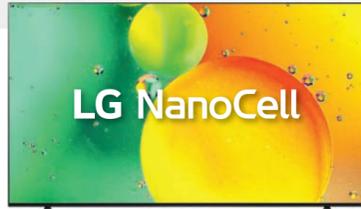


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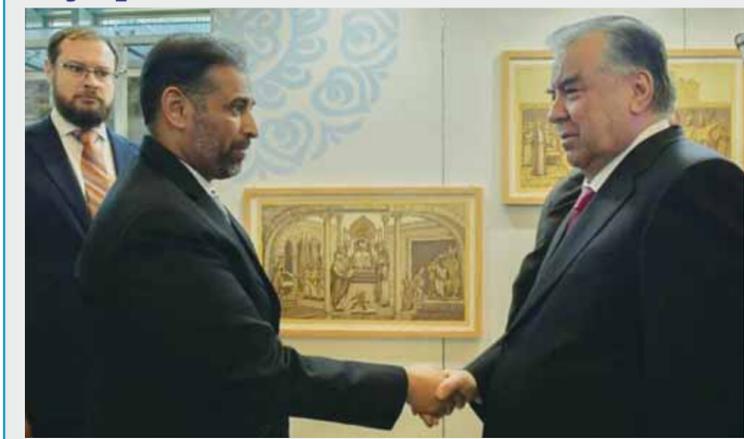
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Amir condolences with Kuwait's leader

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, His Highness the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani and HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani sent cables of condolences to the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Nawaf al-Ahmed al-Jaber al-Sabah on the death of Sheikh Mohamed Sabah Saud al-Sabah. (QNA)

Tajik president meets environment minister



Tajikistan President Emomali Rahmon met with HE the Minister of Environment and Climate Change Sheikh Dr Faleh bin Nasser bin Ahmed bin Ali al-Thani, during his visit to the "Tajikistan's Development Story" exhibition, which is organised by the Tajik government on the sidelines of the 'United Nations Water Conference - 2023' in New York from March 22-24. Qatar is participating in the conference with a high-level delegation, headed by HE Sheikh Dr Faleh. (QNA)

Health minister meets Afghan counterpart

HE the Minister of Public Health Dr Hanan Mohamed al-Kuwari met with the visiting Health Minister in the Afghan caretaker government, Qalandar Ibad. The meeting discussed bilateral relations in addition to the public health issues and challenges facing the Afghan people, especially polio. HE Dr al-Kuwari praised the progress made in the health system in Afghanistan in co-operation with the relevant international bodies, and stressed the importance of continuing co-operation between international organisations and Afghanistan to develop the health system, especially services and human resources, throughout the country. For his part, the Afghan minister lauded Qatar's important role in the development in his country calling for continued support from all partners for the development of health services provided to the Afghan people. Representatives of World Health Organisation (WHO), Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and UN Children's Fund (Unicef) attended the meeting. (QNA)

PM partakes in meeting of 155th GCC Ministerial Council Session



HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani participated in the meeting of the 155th session of the Ministerial Council of the Co-operation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC), which was held in Riyadh yesterday. The meeting discussed ways to enhance co-operation and co-ordination between the GCC states, latest developments in the region, and the latest regional and international developments. The meeting was attended by a number of heads of delegations and members of the official delegation accompanying HE the Prime Minister. Earlier, HE Sheikh Mohamed and the accompanying delegation were welcomed upon arrival at King Khalid International Airport, Riyadh, by Saudi Deputy Foreign Minister Waleed bin Abdulkarim al-Khurajji, Secretary-General of the Co-operation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC) Jassim Mohamed al-Budaiwi and Qatar's ambassador to Saudi Arabia Bandar bin Mohamed al-Attayah. (QNA)

Cabinet informed of draft proposal on public hygiene

HE the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defence Affairs Dr Khalid bin Mohamed al-Attayah chaired the Cabinet's regular meeting at the Amiri Diwan yesterday. Following the meeting, HE the Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs issued a statement giving the details of the proceedings.

The Cabinet was informed of the Shura Council's approval of a draft law amending some provisions of Law No 18 of 2017 regarding public hygiene. Among the provisions included in the draft law are the following:

■ It is prohibited to occupy squares, roads, streets, corridors, alleys, sidewalks and public parking spaces with abandoned vehicles, equipment, machinery, and temporary or fixed buildings, without a permit from the competent municipality.

■ It is also prohibited to leave marine items and any equipment used for transporting them by land or sea, any maintenance equipment, or any equipment, machinery, vehicles or parts thereof abandoned in the port or on the seashore, up to the farthest spot reached by the sea waves,

within a boundary of 10-50m inside seawater, for a period exceeding three days, without a permit from the competent municipality.

■ It is prohibited to leave, throw or pour waste, or dispose of it, in places other than those specified by the competent municipality. In the event of a violation of this, the competent municipality may remove the waste at the expense of the violator, and seize the transport vehicles used in these violations for a period not exceeding three months.

■ The competent municipality shall carry out public cleaning works in all its forms, including the collection, transportation, unloading and disposal of waste, and it may recycle and treat it to benefit from it, and may assign all or some of these operations to one or more contractors in accordance with the provisions of the law, including the producer or importer of the materials from which these wastes are generated, in accordance with the controls issued by a decision of HE the minister.

■ A committee called the Joint Committee for the Removal and Disposal of Abandoned Vehicles, Machinery and Equipment shall be established at the Ministry of

Municipality. A Cabinet decision shall issue its formation, and specify its terms of reference, work system, and rewards for its members.

The Cabinet approved, in principle, a draft law amending some provisions of the Qatar Financial Centre (QFC) Law promulgated by Law No 7 of 2005.

The amendment of the law aims to achieve prompt justice, shorten the period of litigation, speed up its procedures, and adjudicate cases before the Regulatory Tribunal and the QFC civil and commercial court.

The Cabinet also approved a draft Cabinet decision regarding the re-formation of the committee of trustees of the State appreciation and encouragement awards.

This committee, established at the Ministry of Culture, is responsible for supervising the affairs of the appreciation and encouragement awards to achieve their objectives, and in particular the following:

■ Supervising the implementation of the general policy of the two awards.

■ Announcing the two awards and setting the dates for sub-

Cabinet Ramadan greetings

At the outset of its meeting yesterday, the Cabinet sent congratulations and blessings to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani on the occasion of the blessed month of Ramadan, wishing His Highness good health and happiness, Qatar and its honourable people and residents further goodness, prosperity and development under the wise leadership of His Highness, and the Arab and Islamic nations security, peace and stability.

● HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani exchanged Ramadan greetings with heads of governments of Arab and Islamic countries.

mitting nominations.

■ Evaluating the intellectual and creative performance of the candidates for the State appreciation award, determining the winners, and announcing the final result.

■ Proposing the necessary funds for awarding the two awards.

Further, the Cabinet approved, in principle, a draft decision of HE the Minister of Municipality to amend Decision No 68 of 2011 regarding amending the geographical borders of some municipalities and regions.

The provisions of the draft

stipulate that area No 58 belongs to Al Rayyan Municipality and the geographical boundaries of Al Rayyan Municipality are determined according to the plan attached to this decision.

The meeting then approved a draft agreement between the governments of Qatar and Uganda regarding regulating the employment of workers from Uganda in Qatar.

The Cabinet reviewed the results of the 42nd session of the Council of Arab Ministers for Social Affairs and took the appropriate decision regarding it. (QNA)



Justice minister chairs Lawyers Admission Committee's meeting

Lawyers Admission Committee held on Tuesday a meeting chaired by HE the Minister of Justice Masoud bin Mohamed al-Ameri.

The committee considered the topics on its agenda, including the swearing-in of four new lawyers before the committee, and examining applications for the registration of three corresponding business owners in the list of practising lawyers. The committee reviewed the applications of a number of new lawyers whose training period has ended, interviewed a number of applicants to practice the profession, and approved the list of six under-training lawyers.

The committee also considered requests to transfer of three lawyers to the list of practising lawyers before the Court of Cassation and the Court of Ap-

The committee reviewed the applications of a number of new lawyers whose training period has ended, interviewed a number of applicants to practice the profession, and approved the list of six under-training lawyers

peal, and considered cancelling the list of three under-training lawyers. During the meeting, the committee covered a number of organisational issues and controls for the work of the legal profession, and the appropriate decisions were taken in this regard. (QNA)

Joint initiative launched to enhance students' abilities

QNA
Doha

The ministries of Education and higher education, and sports and youth have launched an initiative to enhance and co-ordinate efforts in order to achieve national development goals, in accordance with Qatar National Vision 2030, in the presence of HE the Minister of Sports and Youth Salah bin Ghanem al-Ali, and HE the Minister of Education and Higher Education Buthaina bint Ali al-Jabr al-Nuaimi, and a number of senior officials from both sides.

The co-operation initiative is aimed at exchanging experiences, best practices and optimal use of capabilities, to develop the capabilities of students, teachers, employees, parents and society, in all fields, in addition to discovering talents, exploring creative energies, investing leisure time, and enhancing skills. The initiative also encourages physical sports among students and youth, builds and enhances their self-confidence and helps them achieve all their potential, attracts and nurtures people with specific talents, raises the cultural level of young people, consolidates their national identity, in addition to increasing community participation in sports, achieving sports excellence, and promoting benefit from sports.

HE the minister of education said that the initiative reflects the level of co-operation between the two ministries to benefit from one another and exchange expertise. She added that the initiative is concerned with improving the students' skills and encourage creativity and innovation. The initiative included several areas, including organising summer activities between youth centres and schools, in a way that contributes to serving youth and students during the summer holidays, expanding the activities and programmes of the Qatar Science Club in coordination with schools, and organising periodic competitions between schools.

The areas of co-operation also included establishing traditions related to the celebration of the National Sport Day by organising sporting events and competitions, and organising introductory and educational visits for students to World Cup facilities to learn about the sustainable legacy, and to provide volunteer opportunities for school students in the events, programs and tournaments organised by the Ministry of Sports and Youth, and to facilitate schools benefit from self-defence trainers affiliated with the ministry by organising weekly classes for students in schools in this regard.

Public Announcement

**To all Ships, Fisherman and Mariners
Subsea Survey Works Offshore in Al-Khalji Fields
By the Vessel "Pacific Grouse"**

Subsea Survey Works Offshore Qatar from 25-March-2023 to 30-April-2023

In pursuant and under directives from the Department of Marine Regulations, Ministry of Transport, State of Qatar, this announcement is to inform all Vessels, Mariners and Fisherman that TotalEnergies EP Golfe intends to undertake subsea survey works by the vessel "Pacific Grouse" in Al-Khalji Field locations, bound by the coordinates and location map shown below.

Coordinates for Block 10- Al-Khalji Field				
WGS 84, UTM Projection, Zone 38 CM 91° E				
Boundary ID	Easting	Northing	Latitude	Longitude
A	666511.53	2888523.97	26° 06'22.74 N	52° 39'54.64 E
B	668538.58	2889987.31	26° 07'09.47 N	52° 41'08.28 E
C	671176.07	2886339.57	26° 05'09.83 N	52° 42'41.48 E
D	669148.01	2884876.59	26° 04'23.16 N	52° 41'27.82 E

Coordinates for Block 6- Al-Khalji Field				
WGS 84, UTM Projection, Zone 38 CM 91° E				
Boundary ID	Easting	Northing	Latitude	Longitude
A	629735.45	2839707.32	25° 40'09.85 N	52° 17'33.65 E
B	640389.38	2828667.82	25° 34'07.55 N	52° 23'51.55 E
C	681857.69	2866914.38	25° 54'33.98 N	52° 48'56.11 E
D	672144.94	2884551.59	26° 04'11.32 N	52° 43'15.49 E

All Vessels, Mariners and Fishermen are expected to keep clear of the survey locations during the operations. TotalEnergies EP Golfe takes no responsibilities for any loss or damage caused to outside parties in association with this operations following publication of this notice.

For more details contact 44426038

QATAR PETROCHEMICAL COMPANY

Qatar petrochemical Company (QAPCO) invites companies & individuals to quote for the following tender:

SI No.	Tender Reference and Description	Last Date for Submission of Information & Interest in Participation	Tender publication	Tender fee (non-refundable)	Tender Bond	Bid Closing Date for Technical Offers
1	<p>Tender No. P09-06-063</p> <p>QAPCO Head Office Lease & Facility Management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The building shall be located at one of the following locations: Doha C Ring Road (from Ramada Signal to Toyota Tower signal), D Ring Road, E Ring Road, F Ring Road, Mushaireb, West Bay, Doha Corniche and Al-Wakra. Minimum area shall be 8,900 Sqm Minimum parking slots shall be 222 dedicated and shaded. The Premises shall be handedover to QAPCO fully fitted with all necessary modifications, licenses & certifications latest by 28-Feb-2024. 	27th March 2023, 12:00pm	27th March 2023	QAR. 1,000 (QAR one thousand)	N/A	10th April 2023 12:00 Noon Doha LT

Further to our previous publication dated 21 and 22 February 2023 on the daily newspapers Gulf Times and the Peninsula, please be advised that partial buildings will be acceptable exclusively in West Bay or Doha Corniche areas provided that the part offered for lease shall comprise complete and consecutive floors. For the other areas stated above, the premises must be a standalone building in a decent location.

- Interested bidders shall communicate their willingness to bid and send contact details to "procurement@qapco.com.qa" latest by **27th March 2023** indicating Tender Reference No. & Description as stated above, tenderer name, address, telephone, name of focal person and official email to be used for receipt of the Tender Document through E-mail.
- Non-refundable tender fees are payable to QAPCO QNB account # 0013-001688-060 at any QNB branch maximum by **27th March 2023**.
- Tender Document be sent to the participant's E-mail only after submitting proof of Tender Fees payment by e-mail to procurement@qapco.com.qa.
- All necessary instructions and guidelines about the bid submission shall be provided in the Tender document.

For any clarification on the tenders, please send your queries addressed with the reference and description to email procurement@qapco.com.qa.

Amir meets ambassadors of Costa Rica, India

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani met separately at Sheikh Abdullah Bin Jassim Majlis at the Amiri Diwan yesterday with Costa Rican ambassador Alvaro Mariano Segura Avila and Indian ambassador to Qatar Dr Deepak Mittal who called on him to greet him on the occasion of the end of their tenure in the country. The Amir wished the ambassadors success in their future duties and the relations between Qatar and their countries further progress and development. For their part, the ambassadors expressed their thanks and appreciation to the Amir and the State's officials for the co-operation they received, which contributed to the success of their work in the country. (QNA)



QFFD signs agreement with Afghan ministry to support 30,000 students

QNA
Doha

Qatar Fund for Development (QFFD) has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Afghanistan's Ministry of Education for new commitments to support the out-of-school children (OOSC) education project in Afghanistan.

This came during a meeting between HE the Director-General of QFFD, Khalifa bin Jassim al-Kuwari, and Afghan Education Minister Habibullah Agha Haqqani. The projects aim to enrol 30,000 out-of-school primary children, 50% of those children are girls, in several provinces across Afghanistan.



The joint three-year project: "Providing Access to Learning Opportunities to OOSC in Afghanistan," - targets the most out-of-school children in need, including girls and students with disabilities. It will work with community-based education schools to construct

and refurbish classrooms and improve wash facilities.

It will also provide training for community-based educators and aim to recruit more teachers and engage key stakeholders in the enrolment and retention of students.

HE al-Kuwari said: "We believe that education is one of the most important pillars toward the prosperity of the LDCs. Unfortunately, 3.7mn children are out-of-school in Afghanistan today, and 60% are girls. And through this MoU, we are targeting 30,000 OOSC in Afghanistan, 50% of whom are girls. This is part of our vision to support fair access to education for all."

CEO of Education Above All, Fahad al-Sulaiti, added: "The signing represents a significant landmark for the children of Afghanistan. These projects will have a positive impact on the opportunities for marginalised children in and enable them to attain a brighter future for themselves and their families."

Director-General of QFFD meets Afghan Minister of Health



HE the Director-General of Qatar Fund for Development (QFFD), Khalifa bin Jassim al-Kuwari, with Afghan Minister of Public Health Qalandar Ibad. The meeting dealt with co-operation and issues of joint interest. (QNA)

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QATAR

Probe launched into Bin Derham building collapse

The Ministry of Interior (MoI) said investigation teams have begun working to ascertain the causes of the building collapse in the Bin Derham area of Central Doha yesterday, Qatar News Agency reported. One person was killed and seven others were injured in the collapsed that occurred around 8.30am yesterday.

In an update late last night, the MoI said the search-and-rescue team was able to pull out two women alive. They were shifted to hospital for the necessary medical treatment.

Also, preliminary investigations indicated that maintenance work was going on in the building at the time of its collapse. The relevant authorities have taken measures to ensure that the parties responsible for the maintenance work had the necessary permits and to determine whether their actions had any impact on the building's collapse.

Earlier yesterday, the Ministry of Interior announced that the Civil Defence and other relevant authorities rescued seven persons after the four-storied



From the site of the building collapse. (Pictures courtesy of Arrayah)

building in the Bin Derham area collapsed, while one person who was inside the building died. Efforts were under way to ensure that no one was trapped inside the building, an MoI statement said.

Director of the MoI's Public Relations Department Brigadier Abdullah Khalifa al-Muftah told QNA that the injuries were minor to medium in nature, and the survivors were receiving the necessary treatment. He also

pointed to the continuation of search-and-rescue operations at the site.

The official said specialised teams evacuated families from the adjacent buildings "as a precautionary measure"

and transferred them to a hotel "where they were receiving appropriate psychological support from the Community Police". Speaking to Qatar TV, Brigadier al-Muftah wished the victims a speedy recovery. He

said the Civil Defence, Rescue Police (Al-Fazaa) and Traffic Police, along with ambulances, rushed to the spot soon after the incident was reported.

Meanwhile, Commander of the Qatar International Search



Brigadier Abdullah Khalifa al-Muftah

and Rescue Group Lt-Col Mubarak Sherida al-Kaabi told Qatar TV that the rescue operations were continuing and have already succeeded in saving seven survivors. "There is another group that the team is working on to secure their exit. The rescue team operating in the Bin Derham area is highly trained and was in Turkiye in February to help rescue those affected by the earthquake that struck southern Turkiye," he noted.

He added the search team sprung into action with the necessary equipment. The team uses an advanced set of equipment such as sensors and thermal cameras, in addition to trained dogs, to spot survivors.

Second edition of Katara Prize for Arabic Poetry launched

The Cultural Village Foundation - Katara announced yesterday the launch of the second edition of the Katara Prize for Arabic Poetry (Mothers of the Believers) - its theme is Aisha bint Abi Bakr Al Siddiq.

Participation in the Katara Prize for Arabic Poetry is open to all from around the world as of the first day of Ramadan and the last day to receive entries is the 30th of Ramadan this year. Participant's CV, a personal photo, a passport copy, and the text



of the poem in the form (Word) and (PDF) without putting the name of the participant or the country on it should be sent to the e-mail: umma-

hatqwpf.org The total value of the Katara Prize for Arabic Poetry, 'Mothers of the Believers' is about QR120,000 distributed over three categories - the first prize is QR60,000, the second prize is QR40,000, and the third prize is QR20,000. Katara Prize for Arabic Poetry (Mothers of the Believers) is one of the competitions organised by Katara such as the annual Holy Qur'an memorisation and recitation competition for children, and Katara Prize for Prophet's Poet, among others. (QNA)

Assalamu Alaikum Wa Rahmatullahi Wa Barakatuh

As the world prepares to welcome this noble guest, the month of Ramadan, I take this opportunity on behalf of the Embassy, Government and People of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana to extend to His Highness Amir Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani, His Highness Father Amir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani and the Government and people of the State of Qatar, Ramadan Kareem. The month of Ramadan is a time during which the rituals of fasting and prayer remind us of the values we all



share and of our common brotherhood. Ramadan marks a new beginning for each individual - a reason to celebrate and express gratitude. So, as we gather for Iftar and the night prayers, I pray that Almighty Allah bestow his blessings on His Highness and the people of the State of

Qatar so that this month can be one of security, peace and stability and allow all of us to welcome this month of revelation with renewed hope. May Allah accept all of our good actions that are performed in this most noble month so that we achieve the goal of this month, which is closeness to HIM.

Aspetar gives guidance on Ramadan fasting, exercise

As the holy month of Ramadan starts today, Aspetar, the leading sports medicine hospital in Qatar, is encouraging all to follow the essential guidelines for exercising safely during the fasting period.

To facilitate healthy habits, Aspetar recommends using its clinical guideline on Ramadan fasting and exercise for healthy individuals as a reference in their daily activities during Ramadan.

The guideline, launched in 2021, is the fruit of extensive collaboration amongst specialists in Qatar and international experts, representing various scientific and educational institutions worldwide. Aspetar affirms that the document is regularly reviewed and updated with the current best evidence and expert opinions from all relevant specialists and athletes involved with training and competing during Ramadan. The Ramadan fasting and exercise guideline covers various topics related to exer-



cising and healthy practices during the month of Ramadan. Among them, the guideline emphasises the importance of timing the exercise routine and recommends the most suitable time to train before or after Iftar. The guideline discusses key principles, including repetition, intensity, time, and type of exercise for optimal training. It also touches upon critical aspects such as nutrition, hydration, and cooling strategies, while considering the psychological and spiritual effects, as well as the social and cognitive aspects of exercising during this sacred month.

Aspetar is committed to promoting healthy habits during Ramadan, and the hospital has initiated a yearly campaign about fasting and exercising. The hospital is a leader in fasting research and regularly conducts studies to better understand the impact of fasting on the human body. The hospital's experts have vast knowledge and experience in helping individuals maintain their fitness levels during Ramadan while adhering to the principles of fasting.

Aspetar urges all to be mindful of the guidelines for exercising during the fasting period. Advising the community to use its Ramadan fasting and exercise guideline, Aspetar is providing individuals with the necessary knowledge and tools to maintain their fitness levels while observing the principles of fasting, ensuring they remain healthy and active throughout the month. The full guideline is available at: <https://www.aspetar.com/ramadan>

Embodying the authenticity of Local hospitality Souq Al Wakra Hotel reveals its Ramadan Offers



Souq Al Wakra Hotel, nestled in the historic Al Wakra Souq, offers an exclusive experience of Qatari hospitality with its exquisite Ramadan offers. As the Holy month approaches, the hotel is excited to present a bundle of curated offers designed to provide guests with a memorable Ramadan experience.

The Ramadan tent near the fountain area and Emshoot restaurant is the perfect place to break your fast with friends and family. Guests can indulge in a delectable assortment of soups, baked goods, salads, hot and cold mezzah, appetizers, and a selection of international main courses. The grill station offers a succulent BBQ, while the dessert station serves mouthwatering sweets and Ramadan beverages.

On Thursdays and Fridays, guests can enjoy the exquisite Suhour buffet from 9.30 pm to 1.00 am, while on other days, visitors can relish a specially curated set menu from 9.30 pm to 1.00 am. Kids under six years can dine for free, and those below 12 will get a 50% discount.

For those looking for a relaxing experience, Souq Al Wakra Hotel's Ramadan Spa offer is a must-try. Guests can avail themselves of a 60-minute and 90-minute facial massage by professional experts to soothe and rejuvenate their senses.

To complete the Ramadan experience, Souq Al Wakra Hotel has introduced a special stay offer from March 22 to April 20. Guests can enjoy Iftar and Suhour for two with the ability to upgrade their rooms for free (subject to availability). The offer also includes a 20% discount on spa treatments, early check-in, and late check-out (subject to availability).

To ensure that everyone can enjoy their delicious Ramadan cuisine, Souq Al Wakra Hotel's Iftar and Suhour will also be available through Talabat and Snoonu apps, allowing guests to enjoy their meals in the comfort of their homes.



Al Meera celebrates Ramadan with offers, rewards

Al Meera Consumer Goods Company has announced a wide array of Ramadan special promotions, offers, competitions and other activities across its more than 60 branches.

Al Meera is selling over 900 items at discounted prices as per the directive from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry during the holy month. The company has also introduced promotional prices for more than 500 items in high demand since the last week of February and through the month of Ramadan.

The campaign, covers various products such as flour, dairy products, juices, chicken, rice, oil, water and other frequently

needed products during the fasting season. The company will continue to announce all Ramadan special prices and offers through its social media and in-store platforms. Al Meera has also launched Fawazeer Al Meera, an online competition running throughout the holy month, for customers to get the chance to win daily prizes of QR1,000 in Meera Rewards points. In addition, Al Meera will also introduce two weekly activations 'Find the Crescent' and 'Ramadan Recipe' through which customers can win prizes such as TVs and other electronic gadgets. To take part in the campaigns for a chance to win, customers can



follow Al Meera on Facebook (@AlMeeraQATAR) and Instagram (@AlMeeraQATAR) daily. Sharing the joy of the blessed month with the less privileged people and low-income earners,

Al Meera has collaborated with Qatar Charity (QC) on the 'Shop and Donate' campaign through which a share of revenue from more than 2,000 products will be donated to QC to support its hu-

manitarian activities during the month. Al Meera has also distributed over 1,000 gift vouchers to QC for families in need in Qatar.

Al Meera has made gift vouchers available in 22 branches. In its usual tradition, Al Meera has made Ramadan boxes available a month in advance for customers to purchase or to drop off at QC stations in select Al Meera branches for onward distribution to the beneficiaries.

To ensure an uninterrupted supply of large quantities of high-quality products throughout the holy month, the company has prepared its strategic stock in co-ordination with its local and international suppliers.

AlKhatier meets Canadian official



HE the Minister of State for International Co-operation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Lolwah bint Rashid AlKhatier met with the visiting Canadian Assistant Deputy Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship for Afghanistan Jennifer Macintyre. The meeting touched on prospects for co-operation between the two countries in improving the quality of life for refugees in countries of common interest. They considered ways to provide support to the Afghan people in education, especially girls. They also discussed the progress in the plan to develop the health field in Afghanistan, and the results of the roundtable meeting hosted by Qatar between a delegation from Afghanistan and two delegations from the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the UN Children's Fund (Unicef), in addition to the latest developments in Afghanistan. (QNA)

Last-minute shopping rush



Hectic activity was seen at hypermarkets and souqs yesterday as people made last-minute preparations for the holy month of Ramadan. Pictured are people shopping for various kinds of food and other items at Souq Waqif and a leading hypermarket in Doha. **PICTURES:** Shaji Kayamkulam and Noushad Thekkayil



Vodafone Qatar announces launch of new Samsung Galaxy S23 series

Vodafone Qatar has announced the launch of the new Samsung Galaxy S23 series with an opportunity for customers to trade in their current handset for store credit towards the purchase of the new Galaxy phone series, including Samsung Galaxy S23, S23+, and S23 Ultra. The widely popular Vodafone Trade-in Programme is an easy, safe, and secure way to get the latest Galaxy smartphones, a statement said.

Customers will also receive an additional QR364 discount off their purchase of the latest Samsung S23 devices, making prices start from QR2,735 when they trade in their old smartphones, regardless of the model. Customers who wish to purchase one of the new Samsung Galaxy S23 models may trade in up to three older smartphones and the final sale price will be determined by factors, including smartphone model, functionality, battery life, and screen intactness. The Trade-in Programme is available at the following Vodafone retail stores for evaluation: Villaggio Mall, City Center Mall, Mall of Qatar, Landmark Mall, Doha Festival City, Place Vendome, Tawar Mall, Lulu D-Ring road, and Lulu Al Khor. To trade in their smartphones safely and securely, customers should log out of iCloud, remove their SIM or memory card, delete all personal information, and reset the device to factory settings. For more information on the new Samsung models, visit <https://www.vodafone.qa/>



Kia Qatar launches generous offer for Ramadan

- Zero down payment and 3-month grace period options for customers purchasing through First Finance.
- Free shopping vouchers and other added value incentives highlight the exclusive offer.
- Promotion covers all retail customers – purchasing through cash or bank



activations. "We are happy to announce the start of the offer of Kia Qatar this year for the local market during the holy month of Ramadan. This is a gesture of our appreciation for our clients, for their continued preference for Kia as a stylish, modern and reliable family car," remarked Mohammad Maali, CEO of AMTC.

Showing remarkable and steady progress, Kia has been cited globally in recent months for not only its head-turning product offerings but the brand as a whole. Prestigious

organizations had awarded Kia such as Topgear.com as 'Manufacturer of the Year' during its 2022 awards and J.D. Power as the 'number one mainstream brand' in the 2023 U.S. Vehicle Dependability Study - the third consecutive year for such the award.

Interested parties can visit Kia Qatar's website, www.kiaqatar.com, to know more about the wide range and award-winning cars that are available to choose from. Personalized test drives are possible as well and customers can book a request via the Kia Qatar website or social media pages.



Intent on sharing good will for all customers in this special season, Al-Attiya Motors and Trading Co. (AMTC) has launched its offer for Ramadan for Kia models in the Qatar market. Looking to reward its valued customers, incentives include free shopping vouchers worth up to QAR 7,500, periodic services for the 1st year or 7,500 km., and registration.

The offer is valid for individual customers with purchasing through cash or bank. As an extension, customers can also avail of zero down payment and 3-month grace period options from First Finance. The offer comes after an eventful past year that saw Kia Qatar engaged in the launch of the in-demand Sportage SUV and versatile Carens family car, as well as the memorable World Cup

Marsa Malaz Kempinski, The Pearl-Doha reveals its Ramadan offerings

Marsa Malaz Kempinski, The Pearl-Doha has announced its palatial Ramadan offerings.

For the duration of the Holy Month, Doha's iconic destination will bring together the finest traditions in a setting of outdoor grandeur with unparalleled culinary and staycation experiences, a statement said.

The mesmerising and idyllic setting of The Pearl Oasis returns this Ramadan and guests are invited to embark on memorable evenings under the stars by the pool and beachside.

Iftar and Suhoor buffets will feature bespoke dishes from exceptional dining venues - El Faro, Al Suфра, Public House, Toro Toro, Nozomi, Lobito de Mar, Maya and Zengo.

Guests can relish a blend of local and international dishes along with other dishes inspired by Qatari, Middle Eastern, and other cuisines, in a joyful atmosphere with daily world-class entertainment.

The awe-inspiring view of the outdoor pools and private stretch of pristine beach are the main features of The Pearl Oasis experience while blending the Palace's luxury setting with the traditional and upscale Ramadan



For the duration of the Holy Month, Doha's iconic destination will bring together the finest traditions in a setting of outdoor grandeur with unparalleled culinary and staycation experiences.



decor and private majilis.

The culinary offerings feature a wide selection of live cooking sections, including traditional Qatari food station, shawarma station, Asian and Turkish stations, as well as a selection of healthy salads, appetisers and

main courses from cuisines around the world, along with handcrafted desserts, served to the sounds of a live traditional band. The Iftar buffet is available from sunset until 8pm, while the Suhoor buffet is available from 9pm until 1am.

Marsa Malaz Kempinski, The Pearl-Doha is also offering a perfect dining experience from the comfort of home throughout Ramadan, with a tailor-made menu.

Guests can book online at www.kempinski.com/marsamalaz and take advantage of the Ramadan room packages with Iftar or Suhoor included. More information on the Ramadan palatial experience can be had from www.kempinski.com/marsamalaz/ramadan. Reservations are available from +974 40355011, WhatsApp +974 74790864 or e-mail: restaurants.marsamalaz@kempinski.com

Offers galore in Ramadan edition of Qatar Calendar

The current edition of Qatar Calendar (www.qatarcalendar.com) from Qatar Tourism (QT) gives a detailed summary of the exciting roster of events, promotions and festivities taking place throughout the country during the holy month of Ramadan.

Many of Qatar's leading hotels will be hosting Iftar and Suhoor feasts throughout Ramadan. The Sultan's Tent at W Doha, the private majilis at The Ned Doha, and the Mondrian Doha's Wonderland tent are among the venues. Al fresco diners are also in for a treat. The Iftar and Suhoor offering at the Katara Towers

Terrace at Raffles Doha will see guests treated to magnificent views of Lusail and the Arabian Sea, while Al Messila Resort & Spa's daily spreads will take place in the resort's beautiful Scented Garden. Staycations during Ramadan are available at hotels including the Hilton Salwa Beach Resort & Villas and The Ritz-Carlton Doha. Until April 21, residents and visitors can enjoy a world of family-friendly fun throughout the month. On April 5, Tawar Mall's famous Garangao evening will offer live Arabic music, and a range of creative activities for the little ones. In Katara - the Cultural Village, a variety of

lectures, exhibitions and cultural events will be on offer, including the Qatar Artists Exhibition 2023, where some of the country's most talented artists will showcase their work. Shoppers can also enjoy the vibrant authentic Ramadan ambience in Msheireb Downtown Doha and Lusail Boulevard, where various seasonal activities will be taking place. The Eid festivities will run from April 16-30. Mega Park Carnival in Al Bidda Park will offer 15 days of fun with around 250 different vendors providing everything from games, restaurants, shows and a dedicated area for the Mega Park Theatre.

Ramadan essentials 'now available from talabat Mart'

A wide variety of Ramadan essentials are available from talabat Mart, 'providing customers with a reliable and convenient everyday experience at the push of a button to be delivered 30 minutes or less', a statement said.

"Whether it's icy cold beverages like Vimto Fruit Cordial and Tang Juices, Switz Samosa Sheets, Foster Clark's Custard Powder or Qbake's Crepe Original, talabat Mart has got you covered, with all of these and more," it was explained.

In addition to basics like Quaker White Oats, Punjab Basmati Rice, and Knorr Soups, treats including Foster Clark's Strawberry Jelly or Doha Dates Khalas Singles and fresh varieties of poultry, vegetables and dairy products are also



available from talabat Mart.

Commenting on the occasion, talabat Mart's general manager, Carla Ferreira said: "By continuously bringing a reliable and convenient everyday experience to customers, we hope to give them more time back to focus on Ramadan and spending time with their families and loved

ones. Ramadan Kareem!?"

Products to add the finishing touch to the Ramadan-themed decor are also on talabat Mart, be it Rankoussi cushions or Ramadan lanterns and lights. Customers can download talabat on the iOS App Store, Google Play Store and Huawei App Gallery.

QF TV series Siraj to launch special Ramadan edition for children

Qatar Foundation's animated edutainment TV series *Siraj* is set to launch a special Ramadan edition for children in Qatar and the Arab world.

The new episodes will air throughout Ramadan - on Friday and Saturday of each week - and can be watched on Qatar TV. Each episode will also be posted on the *Siraj* YouTube channel.

Characters Rashid and Noura will take children on a journey full of moral, good values and engage them in a fun and interactive learning experience that aligns with the spirit of Ramadan.

The series seeks to educate children about various Islamic values through storytelling with eight episodes showcasing the stories of the Prophets, and aiming to promote the Arabic language, local culture, and Islamic values.

The series will cover a range of topics. Each episode will highlight a specific moral value, such as helping others, tolerance, animal welfare, patience, responsibility, honesty, humil-



The series seeks to educate children about various Islamic values through storytelling.

ity, and justice. "Through *Siraj*, viewers can expect to be transported into the world of the Prophets and learn about important moral values such as honesty, patience and responsibility," said Sara al-Hajri, associate director, Culture, Heritage and Identity in the Education Development Institute of Qatar Foundation's Pre-University Education.

Philips launches Ramadan campaign with premium domestic appliances



Philips Domestic Appliances has recently launched its latest premium range of domestic appliances at the Doha Festival City, solidifying its position as the top choice for millions of consumers worldwide. The new product line, which embodies the Philips brand's core value of 'turning houses into homes,' promises customers a stress-free experience during the upcoming festive Ramadan season.

The campaign showcases an array of products, such as the Smart Chef XXL Air Fryer, All-in-one cooker, Philips 5400 Series Fully automatic espresso machine, Philips SpeedPro Max Vacuum, Philips Air Purifier 3000i, and Philips All-in-One 8000 Series ironing device.

"Managing a household can be a time-consuming responsibility, and while it can be fulfilling, Philips Domestic Appliances is committed to providing assistance that helps consumers streamline their home management. Our goal at Philips is to enhance people's lives, which is why our products are designed to simplify and facilitate daily tasks," May

Buhaisi, Category Lead at Philips Middle East, commented.

By introducing these new products, Philips has made day-to-day life more enjoyable and effortless for the whole family. "At Philips, we assist people in transforming houses into homes. With a remarkable history of over 132 years, our innovation has benefited consumers worldwide. By integrating Philips engineering, design, and technology into Domestic Appliances, we have earned the loyalty of millions of consumers," Akriti Bhatia, Consumer Marketing Manager of Domestic Appliances-Philips, said.

Perfect cooking

This Ramadan, Philips can help families enjoy big gatherings with their Smart Chef XXL Air Fryer. The innovative Smart Sensing technology automatically adjusts the time and temperature, ensuring that the food is cooked just the way it should be. This simplifies the cooking process by removing any uncertainty.

In addition to the Air Fryer, Philips has also launched an All-

in-one cooker with an innovative Taste Control System and Automatic pressure technology. The All-in-one cooker can cook a variety of delicious meals in under 30 minutes with over 35 pre-set cooking options.

For dessert, people can take their baking to the next level with the new Philips Kitchen machine with ProKnead Technology, which creates perfect bakes from the very first try.

To expand their menu, customers can use the exclusive NutriU app, where they can find up to 1,000+ recipes, cooking tips, and shopping lists. The NutriU app is available for download on both iOS and Android devices.

Delight guests with café-style coffee at home with the touch of a button, thanks to the new Philips 5400 Series Fully automatic espresso machine. The intuitive digital display allows customers to choose from 12 delicious fresh bean coffee varieties, customized to their taste. The 100% ceramic grinder brings out the full flavour and aroma of their favorite coffee beans, while the LatteGo milk

system delivers silky smooth foam.

Perfect home

The new ground-breaking Philips SpeedPro Max delivers the fastest cordless cleaning experience with 360 degree suction nozzle. It has been engineered to mimic human behavior, so it cleans from all sides of the nozzle, the LED lights on the nozzle reveals hidden dust to ensure your home is spotless for your guests.

Staying healthy during Ramadan by managing food and sleep is extremely important. However, another vital area to our wellbeing is the air we breathe. One of the main factors that affects our health is air pollution, which can have a detrimental impact on our bodies. To combat air pollution at home, the Philips Air Purifier 3000i has a 3-layer filter that removes 99.97% of airborne allergens which can protect you and your family from all the respiratory problems by keeping the air indoor clean.

Look your best

During Ramadan, gatherings are a special occasion, and looking and feeling one's best matters. Philips Domestic Appliances, the leading brand in garment care, understands the importance of looking sharp and feeling confident. They believe an ironing device is a fashion accessory and have introduced the new Philips All-in-One 8000 Series to help customers reimagine the way they iron.

The Philips All-in-One 8000 Series comes with patented Optimal temp technology that guarantees No Burns, providing an innovative mix of absolute precision and powerful



performance. The combination of steam and iron technology makes ironing more efficient and effective.

Designed with ease of use in mind, the modern and intuitive design of the Philips AiO 8000 Series features an

integrated multi-angle board for those hard-to-reach areas. The professional Dual Heating technology generates strong continuous steam to ensure fast, high-quality results on every type of garment.

With more outfits ready to

wear, customers will be inspired to express their true selves every day. The Philips All-in-One 8000 Series helps customers look and feel their best, making it the perfect fashion accessory for any occasion, including Ramadan gatherings.

Fast to attain piety

Throughout the Noble Qur'an, Almighty Allah ordered us to be conscious and fearful of Him, for might and honour lie in fearing Him. Only the people of piety and righteousness are the people of joy and pride. Piety is a great treasure of this life and of the life to come.

Allah, The Most Exalted, Says (what means): "... And take provisions, but indeed, the best provision is fear of Allah." [Qur'an 2: 197] Almighty Allah made having piety a condition for the acceptance of deeds through the verse (which means): "Indeed, Allah only accepts from the righteous [who fear Him]." [Qur'an 5: 27] We are promised forgiveness and reward for having piety, for Allah Says (what means): "and whoever fears Allah - He will remove for him his misdeeds and make great for him his reward." [Qur'an 65: 5] The people of piety and righteousness are the people of high rank in the Hereafter as well as in this life. Allah Says (what means): "That home of the Hereafter (Paradise) We assign to those who do not desire exaltedness upon

the earth or corruption. And the [best] outcome is for the righteous." [Qur'an 28: 83]

Fasting and piety:

The blessed month of Ramadan is here - a month which Allah has made obligatory upon us to fast so that we might become righteous, pious, fearful and conscious of Allah. The objective of fasting is to enhance the state of our piety which is represented by our fear of Allah, working in accordance with His revelation and being satisfied with whatever little he provides - as well as our preparation for the day of departure. The particular type of piety that we will try to gain in Ramadan is the very sensitive type. The fasting person can only acquire this, because he/she gives up what he desires to avoid that which he is fearful of - the punishment of Allah Almighty. A fasting heart draws closer to Allah by obedience and humble submission to Him. It fully admits the responsibility of performing all the obligations of Islam as well as refraining from all the acts prohibited by Allah. This type of heart sincerely

worships Allah alone. Lusts and desires do not distract it nor does greed divert it. This is a strong and pious heart whose fasting, prayer and all other actions are purely for the Sake of Allah. In fact, the whole of its life and death are for Him. The Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "He who fasts the month of Ramadan out of sincere belief and seeking Allah's reward of its fasting, will be forgiven for all the sins he has committed prior to it". [Al-Bukhaari and Muslim] If the heart is rectified then the limbs will be likewise rectified. They will follow the lead shown by the heart, be obedient to Allah and stay away from His prohibitions. Not being constantly full of food weakens or even prevents Satan from having a stronghold on such a person. Regarding this, the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "Satan runs in the veins of the son of Adam just like his blood" [Al-Bukhaari & others]. Not having a constantly full stomach enables

the limbs to do good deeds with ease. It softens the heart and makes it easy for tears of piety to be shed, which reduces the effect of Satan.

Miserable people:

Indeed, those who make Ramadan a month of over-eating and excessive spending are wretched, miserable people. They do not realise anything but hunger - hunger that their stomachs cannot handle and thirst which their veins cannot tolerate. What kind of piety and how much resistance exists in these people? These people are the people of no resistance or determination in the face of hunger. Their hearts become harder the more they eat, resulting in oversleeping and laziness. Those who only desire to eat and dress well - those who surrender in defeat - in a battle against a few bites, where they have to abstain from for a few hours, such people are not worthy of an exalted and honourable life.

Behaviour of the pious:

Allah has ordained fasting to purify us and distinguish between the pious and the impious. He who starts his day abstaining from food, drinks and sexual intercourse with his objective being the pleasure of his Beloved - Allah - gets the reward stipulated in the following Qudsi narration: "Fasting is for me and I shall reward it". [Al-Bukhaari and Muslim] Those who fast and have piety are those who are always alternating between prayer, recitation of the Qur'an, remembrance of Allah, keeping good relationships with their relatives and being kind to others - this is whilst they continue in their everyday work and other duties. Righteous people who are fasting have to search amongst their relatives and neighbours for the poor and needy amongst them. They should also search for the strangers amongst their brothers, be good to them and make them

share their provisions. We must remember the hunger and thirst of our poor fellow Muslims, remember the tears of the miserable ones and the situation of those who have no dwellings, remember too the loneliness of those who are away from their families. We should also supplicate for them in the month of piety and accountability. The correlation between fasting and piety is stated in the verse (which means): "O you who have believed, decreed upon you is fasting as it was decreed upon those before you that you may become righteous - (Fasting for) a limited number of days. So whoever among you is ill or on a journey (during them) - then an equal number of days (are to be made up). And upon those who are able (to fast, but with hardship) - a ransom (as substitute) of feeding a poor person (each day). And whoever volunteers excess - it is better for him. But to fast is best for you, if you only knew. The month of Ramadan (is that) in which was revealed the Qur'an, a guidance for the people and clear proofs

of guidance and criterion. So whoever sights (the new moon of) the month, let him fast it; and whoever is ill or on a journey - then an equal number of other days. Allah intends for you ease and does not intend for you hardship and (wants) for you to complete the period and to glorify Allah for that (to) which He has guided you; and perhaps you will be grateful." Ahead of us is a great month full of virtuous days and nights. So we should do well and utilise them, take advantage of them in the same way that the Salaf, may Allah be pleased with them, did. They did not prepare for Ramadan by preparing and consuming more food and drinks, rather they prepared with acts pleasing to their Lord, such as acts of worship and generosity. They were obedient servants to their Lord and generous and kind towards their fellow Muslims. The best example for all of these acts was their leader, Prophet Muhammad, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, who used to be most generous during Ramadan. Article source: <http://www.islamweb.net/emainpage/>

Comprehensive traffic management plan for Ramadan

The General Directorate of Traffic has revealed its comprehensive plan to manage traffic during the holy month of Ramadan, which will include various awareness programmes to enhance road safety.

In a statement to Qatar News Agency (QNA), Director of the Traffic Awareness Department Brigadier Dr Mohamed Radi al-Hajri said that the General Directorate of Traffic has been developing a comprehensive traffic plan for Ramadan that responds to the nature of movement in this month, adding that this plan aims to protect all road users, and ensure the flow of traffic by stationing traffic patrols all over the country throughout the day, with a focus on peak times.

He explained that during Ramadan, traffic patrols will manage and prevent traffic congestion, especially in commercial streets, surroundings of shopping and public places, mosques,



Brigadier Dr Mohamed Radi al-Hajri

as well as Ramadan activity and event locations, including during Garangao and Eid celebration.

Brigadier Dr al-Hajri noted that the holy month of Ramadan is an occasion to promote to society members correct traffic conduct, and raise community awareness of traffic laws in order to preserve property and lives, noting that the Directorate prepared an awareness programme

under the theme of Ramadan and safe driving.

He also indicated that the programme's workshops and lectures will target all road users including vehicle drivers, cyclists and pedestrians, and will include the distribution of free Iftar meals throughout Ramadan.

Regarding the Directorate's efforts to control the movement of delivery motorcycles, the Director of the Traffic Awareness Department highlighted that the traffic plan includes all road users, and are not related to a specific group, calling on everyone to adhere to traffic laws and controls for general safety.

Brigadier Dr al-Hajri drew attention to the Directorate's regulations and conditions for delivery motorcycles, announced last year, informing that the percentage of companies' commitment to these regulations and conditions reached more than 90%, enhancing road safety. (QNA)

QRCS launches 2nd Khairkum Sabeq charitable initiative

Under its Ramadan Campaign for 1444 AH, 'Humanity First: Give to Charity', Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS) has launched the second Khairkum Sabeq initiative, sponsored by Ooredoo and supported by a number of companies and shopping centres.

The initiative is aimed at supporting poor families in Qatar, improving their food security during the holy month of Ramadan, and strengthening the bonds of solidarity and compassion among rich and poor people.

To that end, Ramadan baskets are prepared with food-stuffs of various types and sizes, including canned food, dairy products, juices, meat and poultry. The boxes are available at the participating supermarkets for customers to purchase by making payments via QRCS's website or while shopping at any branch of LuLu Hypermarket, Spar, Souq Al Baladi, Widam Food, Family Food Centre and Mega Mart.

The signatories are as follows: Faisal Mohamed al-Emadi, acting secretary-general of QRCS; Al-Nubi Salem al-Marri, CEO of Widam Food; Ali Hassan al-Khalaf, chairman of KTM; Shanavas Padiyath, regional manager of LuLu Hypermarket; Kobus Lombard, general manager of Spar; Hani al-Sayadi, CEO of Souq Al Baladi; Parmopolat Payoril Jamal, general manager of Family Food Centre; and Lalchand Pagarani, retail manager of Mega Mart.

The signing ceremony was attended by Hussein Aman al-Ali, director of the Volunteer



Signing the agreement with LuLu Hypermarket.

LuLu Hypermarket, Al Khalaf Trading and Marketing (KTM), Spar, Widam Food, Souq Al Baladi, Family Food Centre and Mega Mart.

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The signing ceremony was attended by Hussein Aman al-Ali, director of the Volunteer



Signing the agreement with Widam Food.

ing and Local Development Division; Dr Mohamed Salah Ibrahim, director of the Relief and International Development Division; Mohamed Rashid al-

Marri, director of Communication and Public Relations; and Youssef Mohamed al-Awadi, director of the Resource Mobilisation Department.

Qur'an memorisation contest for children to kick off on Saturday

The examination phase of the early childhood branch (boys and girls) of the 28th session of the Sheikh Jassim bin Mohamed bin Thani Holy Qur'an Contest will kick off on Saturday, the Ministry of Endowments (Awqaf) and Islamic Affairs announced yesterday.

The contestants, both na-

tionals and residents, will compete in memorising one of the last five sections of the Holy Qur'an.

Boys will be tested in Imam Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab Mosque, with residents examined on March 25-28 and nationals on March 29-30.

Girls will be tested in Al Waab district, with residents exam-

ined on March 25-27 and nationals on March 28-29.

The contest organising committee said that the evaluation process would utilise an electronic system launched by the ministry's Information Systems Department several years ago. Valuable cash prizes will be awarded to all winners, it said.

(QNA)

Mina District to host Souq el Mina during Ramadan



Mina District in the Old Doha Port area is all decked up for Ramadan, and will host Souq el Mina during the holy month. Last-minute preparations for the souq were seen yesterday. The souq will be open from 7pm until 2am, it is learnt. **PICTURES:** Thajudheen



PHCC provides fasting tips for heart patients

The Primary Health Care Corporation (PHCC) has offered healthy tips for heart patients to fast safely during Ramadan. Lower food intake; abstaining from smoking; and the stress-reduced atmosphere associated with the holy month of Ramadan; will reduce heart disease risk in general, and also have a positive impact on people with heart conditions, a statement said.

Studies have shown that a heart patient with stable heart conditions who have no recurrent symptoms, such as chest pain or shortness of breath can fast normally during Ramadan. However, heart patients should consult their doctor on how their medication should be administered during Ramadan.

"Some categories of heart patients must not fast for some health reasons, such as frequent chest pain and those ischaemic heart failure who suffer from fatigue, shortness of breath, as they need to take diuretics constantly. Patients cannot usually fast during the



Dr Musa Basheer

six weeks following the occurrence of a heart attack," explained Dr Musa Basheer Mansour, consultant family medicine, PHCC's Umm Ghuwallina Health Centre.

Open heart surgery patients should not fast within the six weeks following surgery, as well as patients where the heart's aortic valve is narrowed or inflamed, heart patients who are on blood thinners or anti-coagulants, patients on malignant arrhythmia medications, and patients with heart con-

ditions that require constant professional observation.

Dr Mansour advised patients with heart problems to perform regular exercise as it helps them enjoy a better physical and mental health and fight disease by boosting immunity and reducing the risk of high blood pressure and heart attacks. He recommended walking for 30 minutes a day, preferably at least two hours after eating, and exercising for 10 minutes three times a day, while avoiding violent sports.

Lack of exercise, however, leads to higher levels of blood sugar and cholesterol, fat metabolism disorder, weight gain, strokes, muscle weakness, osteoporosis, back and joint pain, weak immunity, low oxygen absorption, poor digestion, bronchial obstruction, chest congestion, and loss of vitality and energy.

Dr Mansour also advised patients to avoid staying up late, quit smoking, take medicine as prescribed, avoid stress, and make sure to follow a healthy diet.

Qatar Charity's Ramadan projects kick off for 1mn people in 40 countries

Qatar Charity (QC) has begun implementing its Ramadan projects under the 'Ramadan: Leave Your Mark' campaign in 40 countries through its field offices and local partners.

The projects worth nearly QR31mn are expected to benefit more than 1mn people globally. These projects focus on disaster and crisis-hit countries like Syria, Turkiye, Somalia, Bangladesh (including Rohingya refugees), and Palestine, in addition to attaching significant attention to those most in need in poor communities.

Nawaf al-Hammadi, CEO's assistant for the international operations and programmes sector at QC, said that there are three main projects - Feed the Fasting (Food Packages, Iftar Meals, and Iftar Tables), Zakat al-Fitr, and Eid Clothing.

The 'Feed the Fasting' project will continue throughout the holy month, while the other two projects are expected to be implemented soon.

The project consists of either ready-to-eat Iftar meals or essential food packages for a family for the whole month of Ramadan. The project worth nearly QR21.3mn is expected to benefit 452,400 people.

The official noted that the 'Zakat al-Fitr' project aims to help underprivileged families and share the joy of Eid with them. The project worth nearly QR8.2mn is expected to benefit 542,200 people.

Al-Hammadi mentioned that the 'Eid Clothing' project, worth more than QR1.4mn, aims to benefit some 7,065 orphans. On behalf of QC, he thanked the philanthropists for their continued trust, for their support to its projects throughout the year, and for generously donating to its previous Ram-



The projects worth nearly QR31mn are expected to benefit more than 1mn people globally.



adan drives. He urged them to support the 'Ramadan: Leave Your Mark' campaign through QC's website (qcharity.org/en/qa), app (qch.qa/appen),

branches and collection points located in malls and commercial centres, in addition to requesting for a "Home Collector" and dialling 44920000 to donate.

Benefactors can donate to the projects of the 'Ramadan: Leave Your Mark' campaign through QC's website (qcharity.org/en/qa), app (qch.qa/appen),

HMC announces working hours during Ramadan

Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC) has announced the Ramadan operating hours for a number of services.

All emergency and inpatient services across HMC's network of hospitals including Paediatric Emergency Centres will continue to operate as normal, 24-hours a day, seven days a week. The changes to operating hours affect a number of services delivered remotely via the National Healthcare Helpline number: 16000.

National Healthcare Helpline number - 16000 - will be operational 24 hours a day, seven days a week during Ramadan. People can access the service by calling 16000, select language and select number

according to the service required.

HMC Nesma'ak Customer Service helpline, 16060 will continue to operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Outpatient Department Clinics will run as usual and in conjunction with the Urgent Consultation Service between 9am and 2pm, Sunday to Thursday.

HMC Urgent Consultation Service will work from 9am to 2pm (Sunday-Thursday). People can access the service by calling 16000, select language, select three for HMC Urgent Consultation. Mental Health Helpline will continue to operate 8am to 8pm seven days a week and people can access the service by calling 16000 and select the

language and select 4 for Mental Health Helpline.

HMC Pharmacy Medication Delivery works from 9am to 2pm, Sunday to Thursday. New Blood Donor Centre in the West Energy Centre works from 8am to 1pm (for non-Muslim donors) and 6pm to 12 midnight from Sunday to Thursday. It remains closed on Fridays and on Saturdays, and it is operational from 6pm to 2am. The Satellite Blood Donor Centre next to Surgical Specialty Centre has permanently been closed.

Clinical Imaging Call Centre will operate as usual from Sunday to Thursday from 8am to 6pm, and on Saturdays from 8am to 2pm. Patients can call or WhatsApp this service on 44393377.

PHCC reveals Health Centres' work schedule

The Primary Health Care Corp (PHCC) has announced the working hours of its health centres during the holy month of Ramadan.

Most of its 31 centres will work in two shifts, morning and evening. Family Medicine and Support Services in 25 health centres will operate seven days a week from 8am to 1pm, and from 4pm to 12am.

Al Wakra Health Centre will work continuous-

ly from 8am to 12am. Dental care services will operate in these centres during the weekdays in two shifts - morning from 8am to 1pm, and evening from 7pm to 12am.

The PHCC has designated the Rawdat Al Khail Health Centre for examining and quarantining suspected Covid-19 cases during the weekdays around the clock. The hotline 40277077 operates to book vaccination appointments in two shifts, from 8am to 1pm, and 4pm to 12am. (QNA)

MoI notifies official work hours

The Ministry of Interior (MoI) has set official working hours for a number of its departments during the holy month of Ramadan.

The working hours for the General Directorate of Passports and its affiliated departments, and the Directorate of Nationality and Travel Documents, will be from 8:00am until 1:00pm. The General Traffic Department, the Technical Examination Department will be operational from 6:00am to 4:00pm, while the Drivers' Licensing Department in driving schools will work



from 5:30am to 10:30am.

The Car Plate Workshop Division in Ain Khaled area will work from 8:00am to 5:00pm, while the work in the Traffic Investigation Department will be around the clock.

The Criminal Evidence and Information Department will

work from 9:00am to 2:00pm, with the working hours in departments of security being around the clock. Trucks will be prohibited during the peak hours of Ramadan which are from 7:30am to 10:00am, 12:30pm to 3:00pm, and 5:30pm to 12:00am, the MoI said. (QNA)

QCB sets Ramadan working hours

Qatar Central Bank (QCB) has announced the official working hours for it and its

affiliated institutions and centres during the holy month of Ramadan. In a statement on

its website, QCB said that the working hours would be from 9am until 2pm. (QNA)

QIB announces Ramadan working hours

Qatar Islamic Bank (QIB) has announced the working hours of its branches during Ramadan to ensure that customers have access to its services at convenient hours throughout the month. Starting from today, QIB's mall branches at Al Gharafa (Q Mall), Dar Al Salam, Doha Festival City, City Center, Place Vendôme, and Mall of Qatar will operate from Saturday to Thursday from 10:00am to 2:30pm, and 9:00pm to 11:30pm, and evening time only on Fridays.

Tawar Mall and Al Mirqab Mall branches will continue to serve customers from Saturday to Thursday only from 10:00am to 3:30pm. The corporate branch at Grand Hamad Street as well as branches at Al Fanar, Old Airport Street, Al Rayyan, Al Sadd, C-Ring Tamayuz Center, Al Khor, Salwa Road, Al Wakra, Ministry of Health, Mesaieed, Industrial branch, Al Shahaniya, Al Jazeera Media Network, and QatarEnergy will be open from Sunday to Thursday from 9:00am to 2:00pm and will be closed on Fridays and Saturdays.

The corporate and SME (small and medium enterprises) customers will continue to be serviced at Grand Hamad Street branch from Sunday

Branches			Timing	
Corporate - Grand Hamad Street	Salwa Road		Sunday to Thursday	Friday & Saturday
Al Fanar	Al Wakra		Morning Shift:	Closed
Old Airport Street	Ministry of Health		9:00 AM to 02:00 PM	
Al Rayyan	Mesaieed			
Industrial	Al Shahaniya			
Al Jazeera Media Network	C-Ring Tamayuz Center			
Al Sadd	QatarEnergy			
Al Khor				
Mall Branches			Timing	
Al Gharafa (Q Mall)			Saturday to Thursday	Friday
Dar Al Salam			Morning Shift:	
Doha Festival City			10:00 AM - 2:30 PM	
City Center			Evening Shift:	9:00 PM - 11:30 PM
Mall of Qatar			9:00 PM - 11:30 PM	
Place Vendôme				
Tawar Mall	Al Mirqab Mall		Morning Shift:	Closed
			10:00 AM - 3:30 PM	

to Thursday from 9:00am to 2:00pm, and Salwa Road and Al Rayyan branches for all cash and cheques transactions at the same timings. The service centres in C-Ring Road, and Al Fanar and the Wage Protection System (WPS) Center will be welcoming customers from Sunday to Thursday from 9:00am to 2:00pm, and the C-Ring Centre will be open in the evening as well from

8:00pm to 11:00pm. All the service centres will be closed on Fridays and Saturdays. Retail and corporate customers are invited to also utilise QIB's retail and corporate Internet banking platforms and mobile applications as well as the Call Center on 4444 8444, virtual assistant "Zaki", and the 178 ATMs and cash deposit machines spread across the country.

Qatar Museums reveals Ramadan operating hours

Qatar Museums (QM) has announced its Ramadan operating hours of all its facilities: Saturday to Thursday 10am to 2pm and 8pm to 12midnight and Friday 8pm to 12midnight.

All QM facilities will be closed on the first day of Eid al-Fitr.

QM has also invited members of the community to participate in a series of creative activities for children and families in celebration of Ramadan. The Museum of Islamic Art (MIA) will hold a family day, about the performance of the ritual prayer and artefacts related to prayer at the MIA.

Activities and events during the holy month include: A series of lectures hosted by the MIA and the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, storytelling and writing sessions that accompany the exhibition "Lusail Museum: Tales of a World Bringing Us Together" at Qatar Museums Gallery - Al Riwaq, magazine design and photography sessions on the sidelines of the Qatar Photo Festival, "Tasweer", a painting workshop for children at Mathaf and workshops on social media and content creation accompanying the "Discover the Island" exhibition at the Fire Station:



Artists' Residence. Liwan Design Studios & Labs will also host Liwan for Good - an event that brings together local charities and artists for an evening of giving.

QM has recently revealed many new exhibitions and installation artworks. Among them five new exhibitions that come within the framework of the Qatar Image Festival: Photography 2023 which opened in different locations, is Doha Friday Fashion and an opportunity to breathe in M7, And Mashael Al-Hijazi: The House of My Mother Luwa in the Council of Barahat al-Jufairi, and Hadeer Omar: As for after, in Al-Kut Castle, and I am the Trave-

ler and the Road in Mathaf: The Arab Museum of Modern Art.

Also opening last week at Mathaf was Beirut The Sixties: The Golden Age, a multidisciplinary exhibition that highlights a turbulent time in the development of modernity in Beirut from the Lebanon Crisis of 1958 to the outbreak of the Lebanese Civil War in 1975.

Desert Embraces Imagination, Olafur Eliasson's first solo exhibition in the Gulf region, brings together dozens of artworks created in outdoor spaces near the island of Qurum near Al Thakhira in northern Qatar, and an extensive show in the galleries of the National Museum of Qatar showcasing artworks dating back to different periods of the artist's career. Picnic '88, a solo exhibition by Kuwaiti/Qatari artist Anfal al-Kandari, presents a reimagined scene of a picnic she took when she was six years old in 1988.

The Art Mills exhibition in the warehouse of the Qatar Flour Mills Company and the Al Baraha Heritage House No 15 continues until March 30. The exhibition highlights the museum's vision, and the architectural design of the future museum that embodies modern international art and contemporary.

The 'Harnessing the Roots' exhibition at the National Museum of Qatar (NMQ), part of a series of travelling "Hermes Heritage" exhibitions, runs until April 1. So does the Valentino Forever exhibition.

The World of Football exhibition at the 3-2-1 Qatar Olympic and Sports Museum takes visitors on a journey through the beginnings and history of football and the origins of the FIFA World Cup. Tales of a World Bringing Us Together at Qatar Museums Gallery - Al Riwaq (running until April 29), seeing the new Lusail Museum and displaying a world-class art collection.

A look at the Qatar Auto Museum project is a special exhibition in the Mawater Gallery of the NMQ, until January 20, 2024.

The permanent collection galleries at the NMQ, 3-2-1 Qatar Olympic and Sports Museum, the MIA, and Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art will also open at the same working hours as announced during the holy month of Ramadan. A schedule of new exhibitions, workshops, tours and events, are available at <https://qm.org.qa/en/stories/all-stories/visiting-qatar-museums-during-ramadan/>

Silatech's Ramadan nationwide fundraising campaign commences

To celebrate the spirit of the holy month of Ramadan, Silatech is running a nationwide fundraising campaign under the theme "Your Generosity is a Path to Livelihood" aiming to support the world's most vulnerable and marginalised young people by providing them with employment and economic opportunities for which they are in urgent need.

The campaign intends to raise funds to support Silatech's projects across the world with a specific focus on the Mena supporting youth in its countries of operations including Yemen, Morocco, Ethiopia, and Somalia. According to the latest report from the International Labour Organisation (ILO), global unemployment is projected to stand at 208mn in 2023 while



high inflation rates eating into wages. In the Mena region, the situa-

tion is dire, with a youth unemployment rate of 26%, which is the highest in the world.

Through its network of partners, Silatech has been working to economically empower young people globally through job placements and enterprise development to overcome the challenges of unemployment, poverty, and exclusion by providing them with innovative and technical skills, training, and access to finance needed to start their own enterprises, enter the

workforce, and contribute to the growth and development of their communities. Silatech is committed to tackling the global youth unemployment crisis with its partners by reaching over 5mn young people.

Silatech Head of Partnership and Resource Mobilisation Fahad Malik said: "During the holy month of Ramadan, Silatech invites all communities to join us

and actively participate in our Annual Ramadan Fundraising Campaign and be part of changing the lives of millions of young men and women for a better future."

"We believe that change can only happen if we work together, and we call upon everyone to support our mission to ensure all young people have access to decent work and sustainable livelihood," he added. (QNA)

Qatar Armed Forces conclude 'Stormy Waves 1' exercise

Qatar Armed Forces have concluded the Stormy Waves (I) joint exercise with the US, attended by various units of the Armed Forces, the General Directorate of Coasts and Borders Security and the Civil Aviation Authority. Held under the supervision of the Training Authority, the exercise aimed at raising the efficiency of staff officers and combat officers in commanding and managing this type of exercises, integrating the concept of operations between forces and corps, in addition to enhancing co-operation with friendly forces. The exercise's conclusion was attended by HE the Chief of Staff of Qatar Armed Forces Staff Lieutenant General (Pilot) Salem bin Hamad al-Nabit and a number of senior commanding officers of the Armed Forces. (QNA)



EAA launches project to reach all out-of-school children in The Gambia

The project aims to enrol 66,765 OOSC in quality primary education by raising public awareness, improving infrastructure, and developing a flexible learning system

The global education foundation, Education Above All (EAA) and its partner Unicef, with support from Qatar Fund for Development (QFFD), and in collaboration with the Gambian government, launched a groundbreaking project to ensure that every child under the age of 18 who has missed out on primary education is enrolled in school, and is receiving quality education.

The launch took place in the presence of Fatoumatta Bah Barrow, The First Lady of The Gambia, Claudiana Ayo Cole, Gambia's Minister of Basic and Secondary Education, Dr Mary Joy Pigozzi, Executive Director of EAA's Educate A Child programme, and Dr Shahid Mahbub Awan, Unicef The Gambia Acting Representative.

EAA's Educate A Child programme partnered with Unicef in The Gambia to enrol and retain 66,765 out-of-school children



The goal of this project is to ensure that all the remaining OOSC in the country are enrolled in quality primary education.

dren (OOSC) and adolescents into quality primary education and the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education will implement the three-year project across the country.

The goal of this project is to ensure that all the remaining OOSC in the country are enrolled in quality primary education, thus helping the country achieve Zero Out-of-School Children.

The project will employ several innovative strategic interventions including community engagement to drive demand for

education services, cash transfer programmes both as an incentive and to ease financial burdens, and the provision of bicycles to students who have to travel long distances to school, to encourage attendance.

The Zero Out-of-School Children in The Gambia project, the latest to join EAA's Zero OOSC: Educate Every Child initiative, will also ensure that adolescents who missed primary school have another opportunity to return to school through non-formal alternative learning pathways

that lead to certification and transition to upper primary school. After achieving its goal of educating 10mn out-of-school children, EAA's Educate A Child programme continues its commitment to OOSC by adding another strategy to find creative ways that enable every child to realise their right to quality primary education.

Zero OOSC is working with governments and other partners in countries with small numbers of remaining OOSC to ensure that no child is left behind when it comes to education. (QNA)

Mannai's Heavy Equipment Group marks 40th anniversary



From the HEG 40th anniversary celebration.

Heavy Equipment Group (HEG) of Mannai Trading Company, a member of Mannai Corporation, celebrated its 40th anniversary at Sharq Village & Spa with a ceremony attended by many eminent businessmen and representatives of major international companies, in addition to HEG clients and Mannai management and officials.

On this occasion, Khaled Youssef, HEG's senior general manager, affirmed the company's continuation of the path of development and success that it started 40 years ago. He said, "Today, we celebrate the 40th anniversary of the launch of Mannai

Heavy Equipment, which has become a major player in the Qatari market, with its major brands that have greatly contributed to the development of its business."

Speaking about the company's progress, Youssef said: "HEG, a part of Mannai Automotive Group, was established in 1982 and currently has 16 world-renowned brands, each of which played a prominent role in HEG's successful and glorious journey over the past four decades.

"Mannai has played a major role in supporting Qatar's development and booming economy. HEG was also instrumental in supplying Doha

Municipality with the necessary equipment to perform projects related to FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022."

He reassured that HEG will constantly pursue to deliver superior economic benefits to its customers, partners, employees and the community. Furthering the above cause, the company also announced the launch of a range of new equipment, in addition to the new car dealership of Foton, the giant transport solutions company in China, manufacturing transport vehicles of all kinds, trucks (light, medium as well as heavy-duty), buses, coaches, pick-ups, vans and various kinds of machinery.

Ramadan Book Fair to be held from March 30 to April 5

Under the patronage of HE the Minister of Culture Sheikh Abdulrahman bin Hamad al-Thani, the Ministry of Culture announced yesterday the organisation of the Ramadan Book Fair in its 2nd edition from March 30 to April 5 at Darb Al Saai headquarters in Umm Salal, with the participation of 79 publishing houses and bookstores from within Qatar and abroad.

Out of its keenness to expand the benefits of the Ramadan Book Fair and to be in pace with the atmosphere of the holy month, the Ministry of Culture in co-operation with the Ministry of Endowments (Awqaf) and Islamic Affairs, the Ministry of Social Development and Family, and Qatar Reads Ini-



tiative, is organising a number of events and accompanying activities, including a series of cultural and religious lectures and seminars, an exhibition of productive projects, artistic and heritage activities for children and adults, and celebrating the Garangao night.

In a statement marking the occasion, HE Sheikh Abdulrah-

man said that the fair is a new episode in a cultural season full of events throughout the year. He noted the immense success of the Seminar Series in its second edition which enriched the cultural scene and the constructive intellectual space around historical and contemporary issues.

He added that the Ramadan Book Fair draws its objectives from the ministry's vision which aims at strengthening the efforts of localising books and the publishing industry in Qatar, highlighting book creativities in various fields while honouring its author, and opening broader aspects for co-operation between writers and publishers, in a way that supports

book marketing and expands its circle of readers.

He stressed that such fairs contribute to reviving people's interest in books, shed light on the importance of reading and its role in people's lives, in addition to its extended impact on the cultural and literary movement in Qatar.

Assistant Undersecretary for Cultural Affairs Dr Ghanem bin Mubarak al-Ali al-Maadeed said the Ramadan Book Fair aims to invest the atmosphere of the holy month in developing the religious, social, and cultural knowledge, in addition to allowing the visitors to choose books suitable for various age-groups in various branches of knowledge. (QNA)

Six-month closure of Rabiha bin Eissa Intersection



The Public Works Authority (Ashghal) has announced the closure of Rabiha bin Eissa Intersection from March 26 for six months, while keeping the right turn lanes and straight lanes on Zekreet Street open to traffic. The closure in co-ordination with the General Directorate of Traffic is to complete infrastructure works. Road users of Izghawa Street wishing to turn left or continue straight will have to turn right then make a U-turn at the next roundabout. Road users of Zekreet Street wishing to turn left, will have to follow the same directions to reach their destinations. Ashghal will install road signs advising motorists of the temporary closure and has requested all to follow and abide by the speed limit to ensure safety.

Aspire Zone Foundation opens registration for events for this year's Ramadan Sports Festival

Aspire Zone Foundation (AZF) has unveiled eight "exciting and fun-filled" events taking place during this year's 12-day Ramadan Sports Festival (RSF), which begins on March 28 at AZF facilities.

Running until April 8, from 9.30pm to midnight, the events are as follows:

■Football Competition for Men: March 28-April 8, Al Bayt Stadium

■Basketball 3x3 Competition for Men: March 29-30, As-

pire Dome, Multipurpose Hall 1

■Football 4x4 Competition for Men: March 28-April 4, Aspire Football 5-a-side Pitch

■Ladies competitions in co-operation with Sports Lab Academy:

■Volleyball Competition for Ladies: March 28-April 2, Aspire Dome, Volleyball Hall

■Futsal Competition for Ladies: March 28-April 2, Ladies Sport Hall (closed event)

■Basketball 3x3 Competition for Ladies: April 3-4, Ladies Sport Hall

■Padel for Aspire Zone Ladies staff: April 2-3

■Special Needs competition in co-operation with Qatar Paralympic Committee:

■Special Needs Table Tennis Competition: April 1, Aspire Dome, Multipurpose Hall 1

The event is sponsored by Vodafone Qatar, Ibn Ajayan Projects Real Estate, HBJ Trading and Contracting, Sports Corner and Al Jassra Group & RC Al Mana. For more information and registration, visit: www.aspirezone.qa

Key role of Qatar in WHO to develop policies highlighted

Qatar National Health Strategy lead for Healthy Ageing, Dr Hanadi al-Hamad, hailed yesterday the country's important role within the World Health Organisation, which had a positive impact on many global health policies and plans.

Dr al-Hamad, also Medical Director of Rumailla Hospital and Qatar Rehabilitation Centre at Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC), said in a statement to Qatar News Agency (QNA) that Qatar's many initiatives in various disciplines and health programmes as part of the co-operation with the WHO in recent years contributed to the development of the health sector locally and globally.



Dr Hanadi al-Hamad

Based on its belief and confidence in Qatar's positive role at the international level, the WHO appointed many Qatari medical leaders in a number of its committees to contribute their ideas and experiences in enriching international health work, and to play key roles in formulating ad-

vanced health policies that will have a significant impact on further developing the health sector globally, Dr al-Hamad said.

The co-operation with the WHO is not a spur of the moment, she added, pointing out that the health and care of the elderly in Qatar has been a focus of attention for years, as the goal was to provide them with comprehensive care at the latest level reached by the world.

She highlighted that her appointment as Qatar National Health Strategy lead for Healthy Ageing came after communicating with the WHO and seeing the national efforts made in caring for the elderly and after reviewing the international agenda and international standards for the

care of the elderly and within the national strategy of the Ministry of Public Health.

The efforts focused on the conformity with the WHO's requirements and standards, al-Hamad said, highlighting the co-operation between a team from the Ministry of Health and the Elderly Administration at Hamad Medical Corporation regarding the work of the national plan for dementia in 2018. She also highlighted the efforts in co-operation with the WHO to create a national plan for healthy ageing, and the communications amid the Covid-19 pandemic to face the challenges facing the elderly, as well as the exchange of local and global experiences. (QNA)

Qmic launches Innovations Showcase

Qatar Mobility Innovations Centre (Qmic) has launched its first Innovations Showcase, demonstrating how its home-grown digital platforms and solutions are serving national strategies and mega projects.

In line with the country's strategy to create a comprehensive knowledge-based economy, Qmic is positioning this showcase as an opportunity to connect with many national stakeholders and strategic partners in order to discuss areas of synergy and mutual benefits.

The Innovations Showcase at Qmic's offices in the Qatar Science and Technology Park (QSTP) was inaugurated by HE the Minister of Communications and Information Technology Mohamed bin Ali bin Mohamed al-Mannai, in the

presence of Qmic's chairman Abdulla Zaid al-Talib and other executives from Qmic and QSTP.

As one of the first innovation centres in the region, Qmic has developed and launched several large-scale digital platforms since its inception in 2009. Many of these solutions contributed directly to numerous mega projects in Qatar such as the construction of the Qatar Rail network, supporting Qatar's Intelligent Transport and Road Safety strategies, 2021 FIFA Arab Cup, and the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022.

Additionally, Qmic's solutions were adopted by many key national stakeholders, large enterprises, and SMEs to help in enhancing and automating their operations, deliver new services, or achieving strategic targets. These decade-long achievements were re-



HE the Minister of Communications and Information Technology Mohamed bin Ali bin Mohamed al-Mannai along with other dignitaries.

flected in this Innovations Showcase, highlighting the real impact of locally developed smart solutions and services. The showcase focused on present-

ing Qmic's solutions and application in six keys domains: Transport and Infrastructure, Road Safety, Events and Tourism, Smart Spaces, Environment

and Energy, and Defence and Security.

Each domain was shown under a dedicated station which included a quick overview of Qmic's deployed solutions and ones which are in a pilot-ready stage, as well as a live demonstration of the solutions. This allowed visitors to spend more time on the domains that interest them, while getting a quick snapshot of Qmic's applications in other domains.

Dr Adnan Abu-Dayya, Qmic's executive director (CEO), commented: "Our innovations showcase delivers a comprehensive and user-centric view about the many smart systems and applications Qmic has developed in the last few years.

Inviting national stakeholders and potential partners to experience our live systems can undoubtedly demonstrate

the progress made in Qatar to translate R&D into market-ready solutions and services. This will also set the stage for forging new partnership to fully benefit from our home-grown platforms and solutions especially in the areas of Intelligent Mobility and Smart Cities."

Omar Mohamed al-Jaber, director, Strategic Partnerships and Outreach, said: "Qmic will continue to host the live Innovation Showcase for few weeks in order to give the chance for many stakeholders to experience first-hand Qmic's existing platforms and learn about our innovation development strategies in support of key market sectors and future mega events in Qatar."

Entities interested in experiencing the showcase can contact Qmic to book an appointment at: business@qmic.com or call at 4459 2700.

Healthcare Resilience in Extraordinary Times



A panel discussion during the forum.

Qatar's world-class health system showcased at region's largest healthcare conference

Nearly 3,000 healthcare professionals from Qatar and around the world gathered virtually and in-person last weekend for the region's largest healthcare quality improvement and patient safety conference.

Under the theme "Healthcare Resilience in Extraordinary Times", the Middle East Forum on Quality and Safety in Healthcare was held over four days, including pre-conference workshop sessions and practical excursions followed by a two-day intensive scientific sessions and plenaries by renowned leaders in quality improvement.

The forum highlighted the resilience of the quality and safety aspects of the world-class healthcare services across Qatar's health system, especially over the challenging last few years.

The event now in its 10th year, is organised by Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC) in collaboration with the Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI).

There were more than 15 exhibitors at the event, including the Ministry of Public Health, HMC's Hamad Healthcare Quality Institute (HHQI), Primary Health Care Corporation, Itqan Simulation Centre, Qatar Red Crescent, Sidra Medicine,

Qatar University, and the World Innovation Summit for Health, who showcased improvement efforts and initiatives within their respective organisations.

The Knowledge Zone also featured activities showcasing the healthcare sector partners' pivotal role in the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 alongside the milestones of the Qatar National Health Strategy 2018-2022.

The event, opened by HE the Minister of Public Health Dr Hanan Mohamed al-Kuwari, featured nearly 100 scientific posters on quality and safety and healthcare improvement.

Nasser al-Naimi, deputy chief of quality and director of HHQI and Middle East Forum co-chair, explained how this year's forum tracks and focus on healthcare resilience were reflected in the popular Knowledge Zone area of the event.

"There are so many interdependencies that need to be managed to initiate sustainable quality improvement and with our exhibits, we wanted to give delegates the opportunity to learn, reflect, be inspired, and share knowledge with other professionals - all in an exciting and fun environment," said al-Naimi.

Dr Abdullatif al-Khal, deputy chief medical officer, director of medical education at HMC and Middle East Forum co-chair

said: "This was a great opportunity for all healthcare professionals to participate in an international conference of a very high calibre without having to travel far. Many attendees who have been delegates at one of our previous forums presented their own work on quality and safety. A majority of our speakers and presenters came from Qatar and the region, which is a real testimony to the progress we have made in quality improvement understanding and application since we held our first Middle East Forum a decade ago." Forum co-chair and HMC's chief quality officer, Prof Abdul Badi Abou Samra noted: "The programme this year had many new and innovative topics in the field of quality and safety and it provides an opportunity for participants to network with leaders in this field."

IHI CEO Dr Kedar Mate added: "One of the key accomplishments of our partnership is the establishment of the Hamad Healthcare Quality Institute which is dedicated to the kind of knowledge sharing that we believe is essential for lasting, sustainable change. Crucially, HHQI uses a comprehensive approach that everyone, from system leaders to point-of-care staff, needs support through mentorship and training."

Land Rover Defender, Dodge, Jeep, Polaris models recalled

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI), in co-operation with Alfordan Premier Motors, has announced the recall of Land Rover Defender 130 3.0i6 X 400PS, Defender 110 3.0i6 X 400PS, Defender 90 3.0i6 X 400PS, Defender 130 3.0i6 SE 400PS, Defender 110 3.0i6 S 400PS, Defender 130 3.0i6 HSE 400PS, and Range Rover Sport 3.0i6 Autobiography 400PS, 2023 model, as the cam carrier oil gallery hasn't been fully drilled, causing oil channel blocking, leading to accumulation of oil against the pressure control valve rubber membrane, and subsequently an external oil leak or increased oil carryover into the air intake system.

The MoCI, in co-operation with United Cars Almana, announced the recall of Dodge Ram 1500, 2022 model and Jeep Wrangler, 2021

model, as the micro gas generator of the front seat belt retractor may have been incorrectly welded, which leads the seat belt preparation device not to work as efficiently required. The MoCI, in co-operation with Protech Powered Sports Co, announced the recall of Polaris RZR Pro XP 4, 2021 model, due to a possible fuel leakage from the fuel pump assembly joint, which may lead to a fire.

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

The MoCI said it will co-ordinate with the dealers to follow up on the maintenance and repair works and communicate with customers to ensure that the necessary repairs are carried out.

Difi participates in open dialogues on effects of Covid at UN

Changes to family life and well-being post Covid-19 and the role played by NGOs in supporting the employment challenges families face were the focus of two side events organised by the Doha International Family Institute (Difi) at the 61st session of the Commission for Social Development.

Both events were held in partnership with the Permanent Mission of Qatar to the United Nations in preparation for the 30th anniversary of the International Year of the Family in 2024.

The Doha Briefing event, organised in partnership with Permanent Mission of the League of Arab States to the UN, was held under the theme "Recovery from Covid-19: consequences on employment and decent work among Arab families and its implications on achieving SDG8 in the Arab world".

It focused on changes caused by Covid-19 which have affected the health, social, economic, physical, and psychological well-being of families, while experiences were exchanged on new evidence and innovations targeted at families.

Ambassador Majid Abdel Fattah Abdel Aziz, permanent observer for the League of Arab States to the UN, in his opening remarks, said:

"The Covid-19 pandemic has left a profound effect on our Arab society, and we are now dealing with these intertwined crises, especially the chal-

lenges facing families in the Arab world and the social impacts on children."

Ambassador HE Alya bint Ahmed bin Saif al-Thani, permanent representative of Qatar to the UN, said: "We want to empower families in order to continue to thrive, which is why it is important to continuously participate in international platforms such as the Committee on Social Development at the UN."

Dr Sharifa Noaman al-Emadi, executive director, Difi - a member of Qatar Foundation - presented evidence and findings of the institute's studies, including a study conducted in 2020 on "Overcoming Crises: The Impact of the Coronavirus on Family Cohesion in Qatari Society", saying:

"Producing and advocating for evidence is critical in supporting families in dealing with work challenges, especially post-pandemic."

Dr Nader Kabbani, director of research, Middle East Council on Global Affairs, said: "The Covid-19 pandemic increased awareness of the critical role that families play in promoting the social, economic, and psychological resilience and well-being of their members."

The second side event, held under the theme "Towards full and productive employment and decent work for all families: The role of NGOs", was also in partnership with the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the World Family

Organisation, and the International Federation for Family Development. Speakers addressed the best practices implemented by non-governmental organisations during Covid-19 and the impact made on productive parental employment on households, livelihoods, and the well-being of workers and their families.

Speaking on the role of NGOs, Dr al-Emadi addressed the importance of presenting evidence to develop family-friendly employment policies:

"There are important interlinkages between NGOs and governments. Difi is on many committees that support policies for families - for example, Qatar Foundation used Difi's policy recommendations first, before recommendations were made to advocate for implementation within our community. We also do research with cost benefit analysis and provide evidence that shows what will benefit the country for an improved work-family balance."

Noted outcomes of the role of NGOs included more attention being paid to family-oriented policies at international, regional, and national levels through the production of further research and evidence on employment and decent work, while the Doha Briefing recommended the need to work on developing strategies capable of resilience to face any future pandemics, with increasing the role of regional and international organisations.



Global proteomics experts convene for research conference

Leading researchers in the field of proteomics convened at Qatar National Library for a two-day conference organised by Weill Cornell Medicine - Qatar (WCM-Q).

Researchers from Qatar, Switzerland, Germany, Spain, Sweden, the US, Canada and South Africa were in attendance at the 2nd WCM-Q Proteomics Conference to discuss the latest discoveries in proteomics, a branch of molecular biology that studies the set of proteins expressed by the genome of an organism.

Proteomics is considered an important field because it helps researchers understand the roles played by proteins in healthy and unhealthy cells, giving insight into fundamental biological processes.

Proteomics has many potential applications, including in personalised medicine, biomarker discovery to aid diagnosis of diseases, identifying potential targets for development of new drugs, and characterising complex molecular pathways that lead to disease, among other uses.

Proteomics has also played a key role during the Covid-19 pandemic, providing tools for researchers to analyse and understand



Dr Javaid Sheikh speaking at the event.

the characteristics of Covid-19 and the Sars-CoV-2 virus at the molecular level, which aided vaccine design.

The conference began with welcoming remarks by Dr Javaid Sheikh, dean of WCM-Q, and Dr Mohamed Jarrah, senior scientific expert at the Qatar Research, Development and Innovation (QRDI) Council.

The main sponsor of the conference was Qatar National Research Fund. There were also introductory remarks by the conference organisers, Prof Dr Frank Schmidt, associate professor of biology and director of the proteomics core, and Dr Karsten Suhre, professor of physiology and biophysics and director of the bioinformatics core, both of WCM-Q.

Dr Sheikh said: "It is extremely gratifying to welcome so many eminent researchers in such an important field of discovery to Qatar to share their expertise in proteomics. We are very grateful to QNRF and the QRDI Council for sponsoring this conference, as we are to Qatar Foundation and the leadership of Qatar for their stalwart support for our mission to conduct cutting-edge biomedical research in Qatar. We believe this area of research offers huge potential for enhancing healthcare and improving our understanding of biology at the fundamental level."

In addition to providing updates of important advances in proteomics, the conference also presented an opportunity for researchers to meet and discuss potential collaborations on future research projects.

QU's NSPP students share research experience

Students from the second cycle of Qatar University's (QU) National Science Promotion Programme (NSPP) have shared their research experience.

Launched by QU's Young Scientists Centre (YSC) in alliance with the Office of the Vice President for Research and Graduate Studies, NSPP aims to provide an exceptional opportunity to high school and undergraduate students by involving them in research grant projects.

The student participants rated NSPP as highly beneficial, saying it offered them a unique environment to build and refine their research, metacognitive, critical, and design thinking skills to continue a bright career in research and the country's welfare.

They experienced being part of high-priority national research pertaining to the green energy generation from poly(lactic acid) fibre nanocomposites (under the supervision of Dr Deepalakshmi Ponnammma, College of Arts & Sciences), a novel treatment for sepsis-induced cardiac inflammation (under the guidance of Dr Zaid Hussain Hassan, College of Pharmacy), environment-friendly leaf ethanolic extract



Three students from the second cycle of QU's NSPP.

against penicillium infections in citrus fruits (under Prof Mohamed Abu-Deiyeh, College of Arts & Sciences), design and development of a dynamic vibration absorber (under

Dr Asan Abdul Muthalif, College of Engineering), mapping the biodiversity of ants fauna in Qatar (under Dr Fatima al-Khayat, College of Arts & Sciences), investigation on the development of atherosclerosis (under Prof Hesham Korashy, College of Pharmacy).

Most of them shared their viewpoints regarding the skills attained during NSPP. "We have gained many sophisticated technical skills while working on the projects, such as personal protective equipment safety, instrumentation skills like using micropipettes, centrifuges, incubators, etc., which we could have never learned before entering university," a student said.

"Research is a trial and error method, and I have understood that patience during research is the key to success," said another. "I am not sure if I will opt for STEM disciplines or perform research in my future, but this experience has definitely helped me perceive things from a divergent perspective, to better comprehend the challenges we face, and conquer them with a logical, practical, research approach," a third participant observed.

Besides the experiences shared by the high school students, undergraduates were also delighted with NSPP.

They not only participated in the research project but were also involved in near-peer mentoring and assessment of high school students, acting as their secondary mentors. Correspondingly the research mentors (PhDs) of these students also testified that they could see a huge difference in the students' attitudes and most of them had already started to "think like a researcher."

The research mentors highly endorsed continuing the programme for the benefit of high school students and undergraduates.

In this context, YSC director Prof Noora Jabor al-Thani said: "I am glad that this programme is highly recommended by the research community and our team believes in the programme's capability to create a more equitable, inclusive, and leakproof STEM pipeline."

Dr Saeed Almeier, director of Research Support (Grants & Contracts) also praised the students' dedication, research capabilities, and creativity throughout the programme.

CRACKDOWN
Tear gas fired at angry protest in crisis-hit Lebanon

Security forces in crisis-hit Lebanon's capital fired tear gas at a protest against deteriorating living conditions, as the currency plummeted to new lows against the dollar. The country's economic meltdown, described by the World Bank as one of the worst in recent history, has plunged most of the population into poverty according to the UN. Many of the hundreds who protested in Beirut were retired servicemen whose army pensions have lost most of their value, and depositors locked out of their savings by cash-strapped banks. "I used to make around \$4,000, now my pension is worth \$150," retired general Khaled Naous, 70, said. "We're unable to secure basic necessities."

ECONOMY
Lanka leader warns hard times to follow IMF bailout

Sri Lanka's president yesterday warned of more economic pain to come for the crisis-hit nation, with strict austerity measures needed to restore its ruined finances after an IMF bailout deal. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) approved its long-delayed rescue package on Monday after China, the South Asian island's biggest bilateral lender, offered debt relief assurances. President Ranil Wickremesinghe lauded the deal in a speech to parliament as a milestone in Sri Lanka's recovery from last year's unprecedented economic crisis. But he also told lawmakers that the bailout was only the first step in more difficult structural reforms.

SUSPICION
Rohingya sceptical of Myanmar offer

Rohingya refugees said they doubted Myanmar was offering a genuine return to their homeland, as a spokesman for the country's military junta said it would begin welcoming back members of the persecuted minority. A delegation from Myanmar's junta was in Bangladesh this week to interview candidates for return, more than five years after a military crackdown drove Rohingya out of their homes. The visit jumpstarted a repatriation agreement between the two countries that has languished for years. But Rohingya interviewed by the delegation said none of their queries about security or recognition of their right to citizenship in Myanmar had been answered.

PEOPLE
UK appeals for help finding family of black WWII veteran

UK government leaders yesterday appealed for relatives of one of the country's last black veterans of World War II to come forward after he died alone and apparently childless. Born in 1926 in Jamaica, Flight Sergeant Peter Brown was one of many who signed up for the British armed forces from the country's imperial territories. Aged only around 17, he trained in Canada and joined the Royal Air Force in September 1943, serving as a wireless operator and air gunner in Lancaster bombers, according to The Sun newspaper. Brown died alone in his flat in London at the end of last year, and appeals have gone out for any surviving relatives in Jamaica or elsewhere to attend his funeral next week.

DISCLOSURE
UK premier paid over £1m in tax over three fiscal years

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak yesterday published details of his personal tax filings, showing he had paid more than £1m in tax in the three financial years to April 2022. According to his filings, the British leader received almost £330,000 last year from his prime ministerial salary, and interest and dividends from savings and investments. A further £1.6m was received from a US-based investment fund, said the document, compiled by financial services firm Evelyn Partners and titled 'Personal Tax Returns' which was published by the government. Sunak first pledged to publish his tax return during his failed leadership campaign against Liz Truss in summer 2022.

Ex-UK premier tells lockdown party hearing 'I did not lie'

Reuters
London

Boris Johnson said "hand on heart" he did not lie to parliament over rule-breaking Covid-19 lockdown parties as the former British prime minister fought for his political career at a hearing with lawmakers yesterday.

Parliament's committee of privileges is investigating whether Johnson, who was ousted from Downing Street in September, intentionally or recklessly misled the House of Commons in a series of statements about the gatherings.

If the committee finds Johnson deliberately misled lawmakers, then he could be suspended.

Any suspension longer than 10 days could prompt an election to remove him from his parliamentary seat and end his political career.

The former leader, who considered an audacious bid for a second stint as prime minister last year, launched a lengthy defence at the hearing, saying statements he made to parliament had been done in good faith.

"I'm here to say to you, hand on heart, that I did not lie to the House," said a defiant Johnson, who has accused the committee of bias. "When those statements were made, they were made in good faith and on the basis of what I honestly knew and believed at the time."

The so-called Partygate scandal contributed to the ultimate downfall of Johnson, after months of reports that he, alongside other senior government figures, had been present at gatherings in Downing Street during 2020 and 2021 when much of the rest of Britain was forced to stay at home.

Britain had one of the highest coronavirus death tolls in the world with more than 175,000 deaths by the time Johnson said he would step down as prime minister.

Johnson was fined by police for attending an event to celebrate his birthday in Downing Street in June 2020, making him the first prime minister found to have broken the law while in office.

The outcry and repeated allegations of lying over the over parties eventually prompted the resignations of most of his top team of government ministers, including the current Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak.

Harriet Harman, the chair of the committee, stressed the importance of ministers telling the truth, saying this went to the heart of the way Britain's parliamentary system functions.

At the start of the hearing, Johnson was made to swear an oath to tell the truth before giving his evidence.

He said the inquiry had not found any evidence he deliberately misled parliament and said he was banned by the committee from publishing a "large number of extracts" he relied on in his defence.

Asked about events in May and November 2020 when he was pictured talking to colleagues who were partying, Johnson said he felt his presence was necessary to thank staff for their hard work during the pandemic.

"People who say that we were partying in lockdown simply do not know what they are talking about," he said, crossly.

Earlier yesterday, the committee published 110 pages of evidence, showing that some Downing Street officials said Johnson must have known that parties had taken place despite his denials.

In that evidence, the cabinet secretary Simon Case said he had never given Johnson any assurances that Covid rules had been followed in Downing Street — and that he did not know any officials who did either.

Another Downing Street aide said Johnson had the opportunity to "shut down" the parties, but he instead joined in making speeches and celebrating with staff.

Multiple injuries after ship topples

Twenty-one people were taken to hospital and 12 others were treated for injuries on the quayside yesterday after a ship tipped over in high winds at a dry dock in the Scottish capital. Research vessel the Petrel was left listing at a 45-degree angle at the Imperial Dock in the Leith district in the north of Edinburgh. The Scottish Ambulance Service said it took 21 patients to hospital and treated and discharged a further 12 at the scene after dispatching five ambulances, an air ambulance, three trauma teams and other units. The local National Health Service (NHS) provider said it was "on standby to receive a number of patients" at Edinburgh Royal Infirmary from the scene and urged others not to attend unless in an emergency.

Sunak wins post-Brexit trade vote in parliament

Reuters
London

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak won the backing of parliament yesterday for a key element of a reworked post-Brexit deal on Northern Ireland despite opposition from the province's biggest unionist party and some of his lawmakers.

Sunak has tried to end years of wrangling over Brexit by revisiting one of the trickiest parts of the negotiations — to ensure smooth trade to Northern Ireland without creating a hard border with Britain or with European Union-member Ireland. He agreed with the EU to in-

troduce the "Stormont brake", aimed at offering Northern Ireland more control over whether to accept any new EU laws, as part of the so-called Windsor Framework of measures.

But in yesterday's vote in the lower house of parliament, those he most wanted to win over — Northern Ireland's Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), some Conservative eurosceptics in the European Research Group (ERG) and his two predecessors, Boris Johnson and Liz Truss — rebelled by voting against the brake.

Despite the opposition, Sunak won the vote by 515 to 29, managing to contain the size of the rebellion but with a substantial

number of Conservatives abstaining.

Opposition parties voted in support of the brake.

Sunak's ministers welcomed the vote.

"I welcome parliament voting today to support the Windsor Framework," Britain's Northern Ireland minister Chris Heaton-Harris said on Twitter.

"This measure lies at the very heart of the Windsor Framework which offers the best deal for Northern Ireland, safeguarding its place in the Union and addressing the democratic deficit."

The brake enables Britain to prevent new EU laws applying to goods in Northern Ireland if asked to do so by a third of

lawmakers in the province's devolved legislature.

The ERG has described the measure as "practically useless" and the DUP complains that it does not apply to existing EU law.

The new agreement was hammered out by Sunak, in office since October, after Johnson's former government threatened to renege on the original deal it had struck with the EU.

A hard border risked endangering the Good Friday Agreement which largely ended three decades of armed conflict in Northern Ireland involving militants seeking a united Ireland, "loyalists" wanting to remain part of the United Kingdom, and

British security forces.

The US has said that any threats to the agreement could hurt the possibility of a US-British trade.

Sunak hailed securing the deal last month as a "decisive breakthrough" but by alienating the DUP he has failed in restoring the power-sharing government in Northern Ireland.

The DUP, at odds with opinion polls suggesting 45% of voters in the province support the framework versus 17% opposed, has said the brake does little to ease its concerns over the post-Brexit trading arrangements, saying it did not deal with the fundamental issue — the imposition of EU law.

China firm wins tender for Solomon Islands port works

Reuters
Sydney

The Solomon Islands has awarded a multi-million-dollar contract to a Chinese state company to upgrade an international port in Honiara in a project funded by the Asian Development Bank, an official of the island nation said yesterday.

The China Civil Engineering Construction Company (CCECC) was the only company to submit a bid in the competitive tender, Mike Qaqara of the infrastructure development ministry said.

"This will be upgrading the old international port in Honiara and two domestic wharves in the provinces," Qaqara said.

Responding to concerns the port could be deepened for Chinese naval access, he said there would be "no expansion".

The Solomon Islands struck a security pact with Beijing last year, prompting concern from

the US and its allies, including Australia, New Zealand and Japan, over China's ambitions to build a naval base in the region.

The Solomon Islands and China have denied the security pact would allow a naval base, however.

Delegations from China and the US are visiting Honiara this week, competing for influence in the strategically-located Pacific islands nation. Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare met the vice chairman of the China International Development Cooperation Agency, Tang Wenghong, on Tuesday and signed on to Beijing's Global Development Initiative, his office said in a statement.

The Chinese aid agency has funded infrastructure projects since Sogavare switched diplomatic recognition to Beijing from Taiwan in 2019, and development co-operation with China would be strengthened, the office added.

Sogavare also held "strategic dialogue" with a visiting US delegation, at which Kurt Campbell,

the Indo-Pacific coordinator of the National Security Council, "reiterated our support for a free, open, secure, and prosperous Solomon Islands", the US embassy in Honiara said in a statement.

The port reconstruction deal is part of a \$170m project funded by the ADB to upgrade roads and wharves, which saw CCECC awarded the roads component in 2022, the government of the Solomon Islands said.

"This will see the rehabilitation of the old Honiara international port and construction of the Honiara domestic port and two provincial ports," the government said in a statement.

Samoa's Prime Minister Fiamē Naomi Mata'afa, who was among 10 Pacific island leaders who declined to sign a regional security and trade pact with China in June, told reporters in Australia "this is a commercial port, although I think the fears are it might morph into something else...dual purpose."

Epic journey

Rens Goede, a gardener from Amsterdam began a 30,000km bicycle trek from London to India yesterday as part of a campaign to raise awareness about soil degradation. Goede's roundabout journey to the city of Coimbatore in southern India, in support of the "Save Soil" movement, will see him travel across 30 countries and will last an estimated two years. "I just decided I can do more. I love to cycle, so I thought: do something crazy, get on the (bi)cycle and just do it," the 31-year-old said.

Kashmir gets first foreign investment from Dubai's Emaar

Kashmir is to get its first foreign investment, with Dubai's Emaar Group due to build a \$60m shopping and office complex, as the Indian government looks to stabilise a region where separatists have for years battled the government. The Rs5bn (\$60.50m) development will include a shopping mall and multi-purpose commercial tower in Srinagar, the capital of the Himalayan region. Emaar announced at an investment summit in the city. The announcement of what the region's government said was its first foreign investment comes after the central government said last week that Jammu and Kashmir had received record investment of Rs15bn (\$181m) in the first 10 months of the 2022-23 (April-March) fiscal year. Governments have long tried to woo investors, both domestic and foreign, but with little success due to the three-decade insurgency in a region. Emaar Properties CEO Amit Jain told reporters that the investment would have a ripple effect. "This is the start, we should inspire people, people should aspire to

follow us. This is a 1m square feet mall with 500 shops and will generate around 7,000 to 8,000 jobs," Jain said after the ground-breaking ceremony for the "Mall of Srinagar". Emaar, builder of the world's tallest tower, the Burj Khalifa, is Dubai's largest listed developer. The Dubai government owns a minority stake in the developer through its sovereign wealth fund. Top administrator Manoj Sinha said the project had infused confidence in foreign investors and would boost the region's economy. In August 2019, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government split the state of Jammu and Kashmir into two federally administered territories as part of an effort to tighten its grip over the region and to integrate it more closely with the rest of the country. The reorganisation was enacted with a communications blackout and a security clamp-down. Many of those restrictions have been eased and the Kashmir Valley, known for its snow-topped mountains and scenic lakes, attracted more than 16m tourists in 2022.



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GULF TIMES

Social media-driven bank runs burden regulators with a bigger problem

The speed at which depositors fled Silicon Valley Bank this month – withdrawing \$42bn in 24 hours – has left authorities confronting a new risk: the social media-driven bank run.

Gone are the days when lines of people outside banks served as the defining image of a lender on the brink. In today's turbocharged digital age, customers can withdraw cash through a few taps on their phone.

Reports on social media during the week of March 6 that some venture capital firms, including influential investor Peter Thiel's Founders Fund, were advising companies to pull cash from tech-focused SVB snowballed into a stock rout and sent customers scrambling for the exit. Authorities shut SVB on March 10.

Switzerland's Credit Suisse, which on Sunday had to be rescued by archrival UBS in a government-engineered takeover following a collapse in investor confidence, knows only too well the dangers of social media. Last year it breached liquidity requirements at some of its entities after an unsubstantiated social media report sparked client exits.

"The fact that people can communicate so much more quickly ... (has) changed the dynamic of bank runs and perhaps changed the way we have to think about liquidity risk management," said Todd Baker, a senior fellow at Columbia University's Richmond Center.

Billionaire hedge fund manager William Ackman warned a few days after SVB's collapse that "no bank is safe from a run" in a world with online bank accounts and social media unless the government gives depositors an explicit guarantee of "complete access" to all of their cash.

Regulators know they are battling against the potential for bank runs to unfold faster than ever, although how they can specifically address the risk of Twitter-fueled panic is unclear.

Some depositors across the globe are taking no chances even when they believe their bank is fundamentally sound

In the US, the decision to insure all bank deposits after SVB was shuttered surprised many. Experts said it showed authorities were sufficiently concerned about depositors withdrawing cash from other lenders.

"It's possible that the issue is that deposits have never moved so fast and that is what formed the basis of this decision – the outflows at SVB were without equivalent," said Nicolas Veron, senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics in Washington.

Some in the banking industry play down the risks of another SVB-style downfall.

They point to SVB's unique vulnerability to a social media-driven bank run, given its highly concentrated customer base of technology and venture capital entrepreneurs who mingled in the same circles.

"This was a centre of influence, and that was concentrated in this ecosystem, unlike it is in other areas," said Randell Leach, chief executive officer of California-based Beneficial State Bank.

Still, some depositors across the globe are taking no chances even when they believe their bank is fundamentally sound.

One biotech investor in Germany who banked with Credit Suisse and spoke before Sunday's rescue deal said he had shifted his personal deposits to another institution even though he thought Credit Suisse was a "good bank." SVB had shown how quickly deposits can disappear, the investor said.

Dan Awrey, a law professor at Cornell University, blamed the fallout from SVB on an "absence of a communications strategy."

Between the Friday morning SVB collapsed and the end of the weekend regulators should have explained the bank had a unique business model and other lenders were not as risky, he said.

Failure to do this caused depositors elsewhere to worry their funds were in danger, exacerbating stress in the system, Awrey said.

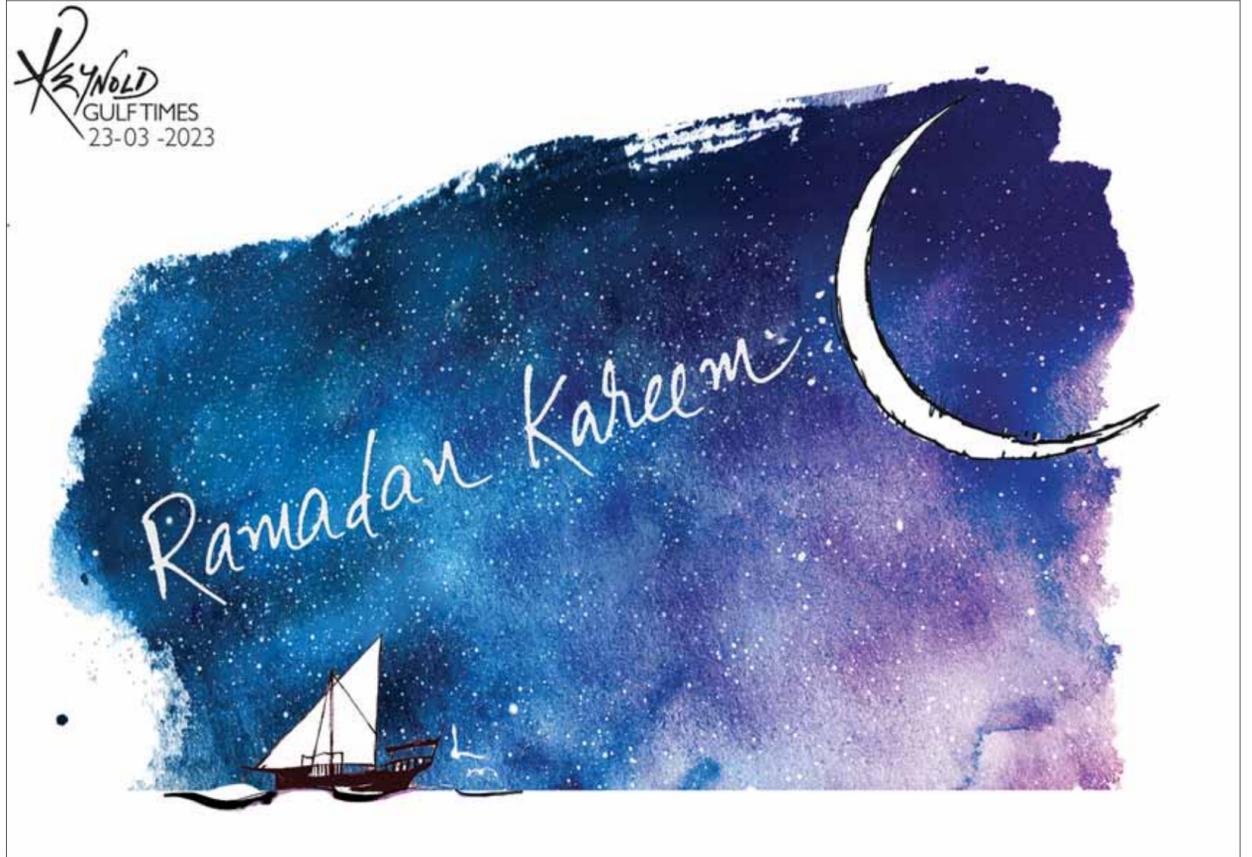
"All of that was just lacking between Friday morning and Sunday in a way that allowed the Twittersphere to really take hold of the information dynamic and the narrative," he added.

Other US regional banks have since come under pressure, with First Republic Bank's share price diving 47% on Monday on concerns about its liquidity.

The SVB saga and nonstop social media speculation could eventually lead to banks providing round-the-clock service, including on weekends, said Jez Mohideen, CEO of Laser Digital, the cryptocurrency arm of Japanese bank Nomura.

Regulators will also need to monitor social media and develop a set of protocols to guide how they respond, according to Patricia McCoy, a law professor at Boston College.

"They need to be looking for any signs of unsubstantiated rumours, panic starting to mount on social media, and they've got to do it around the clock," she said. — Reuters



Price stability vs financial stability?

By Willem H Buiter
New York

When a market liquidity and/or funding liquidity crisis occurs at a moment when inflation is above-target, tension between the objectives of central banks – price stability and financial stability – is inevitable. In such cases, I believe that financial stability must come first, because it is a precondition for the effective pursuit of price stability.

But this does not mean that the central bank should cease or suspend its anti-inflationary policies when threatened with a banking crisis or similar systemic stability risk. The conflict between the objectives of price stability and financial stability should be manageable by using the central bank's policy rate to target inflation, and by using the size and composition of its balance sheet as a macro prudential policy tool to target financial stability. Credible communication is essential to achieve both objectives.

Financial stability in a large advanced economy is not materially impacted by a 50-basis-point increase in the risk-free short nominal rate of interest. It is impacted by the interrelated liquidity and credit risk premia and the vanishing would-be purchasers and lenders in illiquid financial markets – when credit rationing rules the roost. The Bank of England (BoE) got this right last year when, during a period of monetary-policy tightening brought on by then-prime minister Liz Truss's incoherent policies, it engaged in temporary

purchases of long-dated UK government bonds and postponed quantitative tightening through Asset Purchase Facility gilt sales.

The asset purchases, which lasted from September 28 until October 14, were needed to counter material dysfunctionality in the longer-dated gilt markets. At its first Monetary Policy Committee meeting following the purchases, on November 3, the BoE signalled its continued commitment to the inflation target by raising the policy rate by 75 bps, from 2.25% to 3%. Two further 50 bps rate hikes followed on December 15 and February 2. The prudential nature of its temporary asset purchases would have been even clearer if they had been sterilised.

The European Central Bank (ECB) also got it right this month when it raised its policy rates by 50 bps, despite the financial kerfuffle that had blown over from the United States following the insolvency of Silicon Valley Bank (SVB). Headline HICP (Harmonised Index of Consumer Prices) inflation in February was 8.5%, with the core HICP inflation rate (which strips out volatile energy and food prices) at 5.6%. The ECB addressed the financial-stability concerns by stating that its "policy toolkit is fully equipped to provide liquidity support to the euro area financial system if needed and to preserve the smooth transmission of monetary policy." Moreover, "the Transmission Protection Instrument is available to counter unwarranted, disorderly market dynamics that pose a serious threat to the transmission of monetary policy across all euro area countries."

What will the Federal Reserve do at its upcoming meeting? I believe that the financial stability concerns following the demise of SVB and Signature Bank were addressed effectively by ensuring that all deposits in these two badly managed institutions would be made whole. De facto, this means that all deposits in US banks are henceforth insured. This no doubt contributes to moral hazard, because incompetent or reckless bank management will not be punished through a loss of informed depositors. But it is the unavoidable price of ruling out the systemic threat posed by bank runs. Moral hazard was contained by letting the banks go bust and exposing the shareholders and unsecured creditors (and presumably even secured creditors if the losses are large enough) to whatever the banks' mismanagement cost.

But this prudential response was not optimal, because the new Bank Term Funding Program created by the Fed, which offers one-year loans to banks with the collateral valued at par, should have been made available only on penalty terms. With market value well below par for many eligible debt instruments, the lender of last resort has become the lender of first resort – offering materially subsidised loans. The same anomaly (valuing collateral at par) now applies to loans at the discount window.

At the end of 2022, US banks had about \$620bn of unrealised losses on securities they planned to hold to maturity. Raising the policy rate will most likely further depress the market value of long-duration securities. So be it. We don't know how much of

this duration risk was hedged by the banks (and who the counterparties to such hedging are). But we do know that bank losses (in orderly markets) due to mistaken investment decisions are part of the healthy Darwinian mechanism that sustains a market economy, as is the orderly resolution of bankrupt institutions. The central bank must be ready, as lender of last resort and market maker of last resort, to discharge its financial-stability responsibilities should illiquidity, bank runs, or other market failures pose a systemic threat.

With core personal-consumption-expenditures inflation still at 4.7% in January, the Fed should raise its policy rate target zone by 50 bps at its upcoming meeting. But I fear it may stop at 25 bps, owing to an erroneous concern about the financial stability implications of a larger rate hike. Financial stability in the US is best served in the short run by the Fed standing ready to intervene as lender and market maker of last resort. In the medium and long run, the original Dodd-Frank regulations, repealed for small and medium-sized banks in 2018, should be reimposed, and perhaps limits on banks' proprietary investment activities should be restored – or maybe fractional reserve banking should be abandoned altogether. More assertive and competent supervision wouldn't hurt, either. — Project Syndicate

● Willem H Buiter, a former chief economist at Citibank and former member of the Monetary Policy Committee of the Bank of England, is an independent economic adviser.



Signs explaining Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) and other banking policies are shown on the counter of a bank in Westminster, Colorado. (Reuters)

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Trump escapes for now as jury fails to meet

AFP
New York

A New York grand jury did not meet after all yesterday, US media reported, delaying a decision on whether to charge ex-president Donald Trump over hush money paid to a porn star.

The panel, which operates in secret, usually gathers on Monday, Wednesday and Thursday afternoons, leading to speculation that a vote on a historic indictment of a former president was imminent.

Yesterday's session was called off, however, unnamed law enforcement officials told multiple US outlets without giving a reason for the pause. *The New York Times* reported that interruptions in grand jury proceedings are not unusual.

Insider, which broke the news of the cancelled meeting, quoted one source as saying the panel may not gather again this week, meaning that the earliest a decision might come is Monday.

With barricades outside Trump Tower and police on high alert, New York has been holding its breath over the expected indictment for days, particularly after Trump claimed at the weekend that he would be arrested on Tuesday. He wasn't.

The 76-year-old Republican would become the first former or sitting president to ever be charged with a crime if the panel votes to indict.

The unprecedented move would send shockwaves through the 2024 election campaign, in which Trump is running to regain office. It would also raise the prospect of a former leader of the free world being arrested, booked, fingerprinted and possibly handcuffed.

Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg formed the grand jury in January following his investigation into \$130,000 paid to Stormy Daniels in 2016.

Grand juries operate behind closed doors to prevent perjury or witness tampering before trials, making it virtually impossible to follow their proceedings.

A spokesperson for Bragg told AFP that she "can't confirm or comment on grand jury matters."

Even once the panel takes a decision, it is unclear when Bragg would announce any charges. Legal experts have suggested it could take some time before Trump — currently at his Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida — is arraigned before a Manhattan Criminal Court judge.

The hush-money payment was made weeks before the 2016 election, allegedly to stop Daniels from going public about a liaison she says she had with Trump years earlier.

Trump denies the affair and has called the inquiry a "witch hunt." His ex-lawyer-turned-adversary Michael Cohen, who has testified before the grand jury, told Congress in 2019 that he made the payment on Trump's behalf and was later reimbursed.

The payment to Daniels, if not properly accounted for, could result in a misdemeanour charge for falsifying business records, experts say.

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, which is punishable by up to four years behind bars.

Humanity has 'broken water cycle' warns UN chief

AFP
United Nations

The future of humanity's "lifeline" — water — is under threat across the planet, the UN secretary-general warned yesterday at the opening of the first major UN meeting on water resources in nearly half a century.

"We've broken the water cycle, destroyed ecosystems and contaminated groundwater," Antonio Guterres said at the three-day summit in New York, which gathers some 6,500 participants, including a dozen heads of state and government.

"We are draining humanity's lifeline through vampiric overconsumption and unsustainable use, and evaporating it through global heating," Guterres told the conference.

A report by UN-Water and Unesco released Tuesday warned of too little or too much water in some places and contaminated water in others — conditions that it said highlight the imminent risk of a global water crisis.

"If nothing is done, it will be a business-as-usual scenario — it will keep on being between



In this file photo taken on February 24, 2023 a sign warns home and property buyers about the water situation in Rio Verde, an unincorporated community in Maricopa County, outside of Scottsdale, Arizona. (AFP)

40% and 50% of the population of the world that does not have access to sanitation and roughly 20-25% of the world will not have access to safe water supply," report lead author Richard Connor told AFP.

With the global population increasing every day, "in absolute numbers, there'll be more and more people that don't have access to these services," he said.

At the UN conference, gov-

ernments and actors in the public and private sectors are invited to present proposals to reverse that trend and help meet the development goal, set in 2015, of ensuring "access to water and sanitation for all by 2030."

The last conference at this high level on the issue, which lacks a global treaty or a dedicated UN agency, was held in 1977 in Mar del Plata, Argentina. Some observers have al-

ready voiced concerns about the scope of commitments and the availability of funding to implement them.

"There is much to do and time is not on our side," said Gilbert Houngbo, chair of UN-Water, a forum for coordinating work on the topic.

The report also warned that water "scarcity is becoming endemic" due to overconsumption and pollution, while global warming will increase seasonal water shortages in both areas with abundant water as well as those already strained.

"About 10% of the world's population lives in a country where water stress has reached a high or critical level," the report says.

According to the most recent UN climate study, published Monday by the IPCC expert panel, "roughly half of the world's population currently experience severe water scarcity for at least part of the year."

Those shortages have the most significant impact on the poor, Connor told AFP.

"No matter where you are, if you are rich enough, you will manage to get water," he said.

The report noted the impact of existing water supplies be-

coming contaminated due to underperforming or non-existent sanitation systems.

"At least 2bn people (globally) use a drinking water source contaminated with faeces, putting them at risk of contracting cholera, dysentery, typhoid and polio," it said.

That high number does not take into account pollution from pharmaceuticals, chemicals, pesticides, microplastics and nanomaterials.

To ensure access to safe drinking water for all by 2030, levels of investment would have to be tripled, the report said.

Freshwater ecosystems — which in addition to water, provide life-sustaining economic resources and help combat global warming — "are among the most threatened in the world," the report warned.

"We have to act now because water insecurity is undermining food security, health security, energy security or urban development and societal issues," Henk Ovink, the Dutch special envoy for water, told AFP.

"It's now or never as we say — a once in a generation opportunity."

Parliament's ruling sought over ex-PM Khan's party

Pakistan's Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah yesterday sought a parliament ruling to empower authorities to tackle former prime minister Imran Khan's party's alleged involvement in violence.

The ruling was asked for in a joint session of parliament convened over the instability caused by the crisis over Khan. Sanaullah told the House nearly 68 security personnel were injured in clashes and 16 arrested Khan aides will be tried on terrorism charges.

The clashes erupted after Khan's supporters prevented police and paramilitary forces from arresting him in a case in which he is accused of unlawfully selling state gifts during his tenure as premier from 2018-2022. He denies any wrongdoing.

The minister requested the house give "guidance" to the government about the violence stoked by Khan's supporters, who he said included "miscreants, armed groups, and terrorists".

"It is required that the security forces should be given authority and other measures to deal with this issue," he said, adding that Khan's agenda is "chaos and anarchy." Khan has rejected the allegation, saying that the government wanted his party out of politics.

Macron driven by 'long-term' interest on pension reform

AFP
Paris

French President Emmanuel Macron yesterday defiantly vowed to push through a controversial pensions reform, saying he was prepared to accept unpopularity in the face of sometimes violent protests.

Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne, acting on the president's instructions, last Thursday invoked an article in the constitution that adopted the contentious reform without a parliamentary vote.

The government on Monday narrowly survived a no-confidence motion but the uproar has spawned the biggest domestic crisis of the second term for Macron, first elected in 2017 with pledges to radically reform France.

Another day of national strikes and protests against the pension changes, in particular pushing back the minimum retirement age from 62 to 64, is planned for today.

In Paris, garbage continues to pile up in the streets due to stoppages by municipal rubbish collectors who have vowed to continue a rolling strike until Monday.

The tensions have also raised questions over whether France can host the UK's King Charles III when he arrives Sunday for his first foreign state visit as monarch.

While France's Constitutional Court still needs to give its last word on the reform, Macron told the TF1 and France 2 channels in an interview that the changes needed to "come



French President Emmanuel Macron is seen on a screen during an interview on national television to outline plans after the pension reform was adopted in Paris yesterday. (Reuters)

into force by the end of the year." "The longer we wait, the more it (the deficit) will deteriorate. This reform is necessary, it does not make me happy. I would have preferred not to do it," he added in his first public comments after days of silence on the crisis.

Macron, who is barred by the constitution from seeking a third consecutive term, said he was prepared to "accept unpopularity" over the reform.

"Given a choice between opinion polls in the short term and the general interest of the country, I choose the general interest of the country," Macron said.

A survey on Sunday showed Macron's personal approval rating at just 28%, its lowest level since the height of the anti-government "Yellow Vest" protest movement in 2018-2019.

Philippe Martinez, head of the hard-line CGT union,

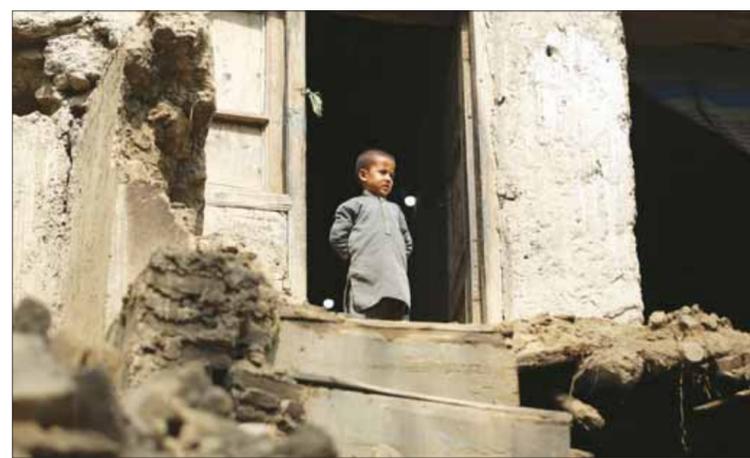
said that Macron's comments showed "disdain for the thousands of people who have been protesting".

Socialist Party chief Olivier Faure added: "It's amazing, he is in absolute denial. I'm afraid he just put more fuel onto an already well-lit fire."

Marine Le Pen, the leader of the far-right in parliament, said Macron had merely "reinforced the feeling of contempt" felt by the French.

New clashes broke out between protesters and security forces in Paris late on Tuesday, in a repeat of scenes over the last days that have seen hundreds arrested and accusations of heavy-handed tactics by police.

Forty-six people were arrested overnight in the latest clashes around Place de la Republique, while police used tear gas to disperse protests in other cities including Rennes and Nantes.



A boy looks out from his damaged home in Miya village, in Alishing District of Laghman Province yesterday following an overnight earthquake. (AFP)

13 dead in Afghanistan, Pakistan earthquake

AFP
Jurm (Afghanistan)

At least 13 people were killed in Afghanistan and Pakistan by a strong earthquake felt across thousands of kilometres, but the region appeared yesterday to have dodged the mass casualties usually associated with a tremor of such scale.

The United States Geological Survey said the magnitude 6.5 quake was centred near Jurm in northeastern Afghanistan, but the depth of 187km mitigated extensive damage. The quake, which struck around 9:30pm Kabul time on Tuesday and lasted more than 30 seconds, was felt from central Asia to New Delhi in India — more than 2,000km away.

"It was a powerful earthquake and we feared maximum damage due to the intensity — that's why we issued an alert," Bilal Faizi, a spokesman for Pakistan's emergency Rescue 1122 service in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, told AFP. "But fortunately our fears proved wrong. Residents panicked due to the magnitude of the earthquake, but the damage was minimal."

The region is frequently hit by quakes — especially in the Hindu Kush mountain range, which lies near the junction of the Eurasian and Indian tectonic plates. In Jurm district, near the epicentre, a resident of one village reported no casualties de-

spite the proximity. "We are about 2,000 to 3,000 people in our village and we all spent the night outside under the sky," said Inamullah, reached by telephone.

"We were all scared and stayed awake the entire night." Some 50 houses had collapsed in the village located in the snow-capped mountains, an AFP correspondent who arrived in the area reported.

Panicked residents of cities and towns in Afghanistan and Pakistan also fled their homes to seek safety away from buildings — with many too scared to return. "We stayed the night in our courtyard... it was cold outside, but we preferred to stay out rather than go back," 24-year-old student Neda Raihan told AFP in Kabul.

Khudadad Heights, a vast multi-storey residential block in the Pakistan capital, was evacuated after huge cracks appeared in the building.

More than 55,000 people were killed by an earthquake that struck southeastern Turkey and parts of Syria last month, heightening fears across the region.

"The children started shouting that there is an earthquake. We all ran out. The horrors of the earthquake in Turkey and neighbouring countries had a strong effect on our nerves," said Ikhlaiq Kazmi, a retired professor in the Pakistani city of Rawalpindi. Officials in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, north of Islamabad, said nine people had been killed in the quake, including two women and two children.

Zelensky visits frontline; Russian strikes hit school, flats

President Volodymyr Zelensky said yesterday that he visited military positions near the frontline town of Bakhmut in eastern Ukraine, as a Russian strike battered a residential building leaving dozens injured.

At least one person was killed and 32 more injured in the block of flats in Zaporizhzhia, a city near the frontline, just before Zelensky announced his visit to the front, the mayor said.

And officials announced the death toll from a separate overnight drone attack by Russia on a school south of the capital Kyiv had risen to seven, with another nine injured.

During the visit to the front near Bakhmut

— the longest and bloodiest battle of Russia's invasion — Zelensky recognised the troops had a "difficult" task. "I am honoured to be here today to award our heroes. To shake hands and thank them for protecting the sovereignty of our country."

Video released by Zelensky's office showed him meeting servicemen in a warehouse and handing out state decorations.

Russian and Ukrainian forces have invested heavily in the battle for Bakhmut, even though analysts say the city carries little strategic value.

Kyiv says the battle for the industrial town, which had a pre-war population of around

80,000 people, is key to holding back Russian forces along the entire eastern front.

In a separate post, Zelensky said he also visited troops being treated for frontline injuries, and video showed him touring a hospital with doctors and greeting recovering soldiers.

The Ukrainian leader visited Bakhmut late last year, just ahead of a historic trip to the United States, his first trip abroad since the start of Russia's invasion last February.

But Russian forces have posted steady gains towards capturing Bakhmut in the months since. An aide to the Russian-appointed head of the eastern Donetsk region in Ukraine

said Wednesday that Russian forces were close to cutting off Ukraine road links to the city.

"We can say that the city is practically blocked," the aide, Yan Gagyn, said in comments carried by Russian news agencies.

Yevgeny Prigozhin, the head of Russia's Wagner mercenary group, which claims to be spearheading Moscow's offensive for the town, said this week that his forces control some 70% of Bakhmut.

Zelensky also distributed images of the strike on Zaporizhzhia, showing a projectile smashing into the residential building and a large plume of black smoke rising over a building.



President Volodymyr Zelensky (centre) taking a selfie with servicemen after meeting them in a warehouse and handing out awards near Bakhmut. (AFP)

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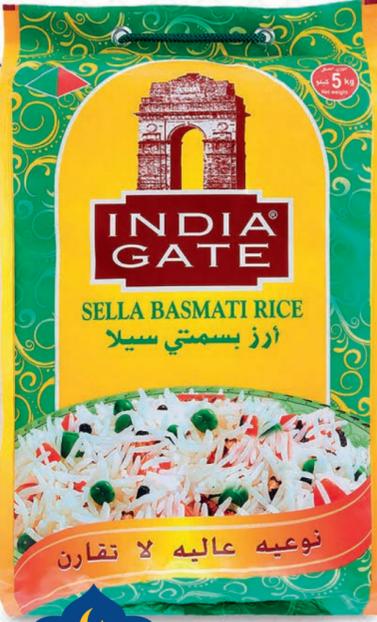


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