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BUSINESS | Page 1

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Amir condolences with Kuwaiti 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-Ahmad al-Jaber al-Sabah on the death of Sheikh Mohamed Sabah Mohamed Sabah al-Salman al-Sabah. **(QNA)**

Amir sends greetings to Italian president

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani and His Highness the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani sent cables of congratulations to Italian President Sergio Mattarella on his country's Republic Day. HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani also sent a similar cable of congratulations to Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni. **(QNA)**

Saudi, Iranian FM's discuss boosting ties

Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan bin Abdullah discussed with his Iranian counterpart, Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, ways to enhance bilateral relations in many fields. This came during a meeting they held yesterday on the sidelines of the ministerial meeting of the Brics Friends in Cape Town, South Africa. During the meeting, they discussed steps to implement the agreement between the two countries signed in Beijing, including intensifying joint work to ensure international peace and security. **(QNA)**

Sudan fighting worsens despite US sanctions

Shelling rocked greater Khartoum yesterday, as fighting between Sudan's warring generals intensified despite US sanctions imposed after the collapse of a US- and Saudi-brokered truce. Witnesses reported "artillery fire" in eastern Khartoum and around the state television building in the capital's sister city Omdurman, just across the Nile. **Page 6**

Russian border residents flee as shelling kills two

Two civilians were killed yesterday in shelling on Russia's Belgorod region on the border with Ukraine, while Moscow's forces attacked Kyiv for a sixth day in a row. Over the past few days, thousands of residents have fled villages near Russia's southwestern border with Ukraine as shelling has intensified.

COMMUNITY

See Pages 4 & 5

Qatar abuzz with captivating displays of art, history, culture

By Joey Aguilar
Staff Reporter

Qatar is currently abuzz with a captivating display of art, history and culture as Qatar Museums (QM) presents a wide range of awe-inspiring exhibitions across various galleries and museums.

The eclectic lineup of exhibitions – from groundbreaking contemporary artworks to immersive historical reviews – cater to diverse interests, capturing the imagination of local enthusiasts and international visitors.

Qatar residents and visitors will have the opportunity to explore the exceptional artworks of renowned Panamanian artist Eduardo Navarro, displayed at the "Free Spirits of Wild Horses" exhibition until June 17 at the Fire Station: Artists in Residence.

In collaboration with the embassy of Panama, QM noted that this unique show highlights the artist's "rebellious work, featuring paintings that showcase his unique approach using multiple media to express his dynamic energy on canvas."

According to QM, Navarro's pieces capture the untamed essence of wild horses through "implied movements" and vibrant colours, attracting viewers with its fierce and captivating personalities and taking them back to the 20th-century work of Francis Bacon.

A visit to Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art in Education City provides a deeper understanding of an important chapter in Beirut's modern history with a one-of-its-kind exhibition, titled 'Beirut and the Golden Sixties: A Manifesto of Fragility'. **To Page 12**



Zwara showcases 'Pearl - A Journey of Secrets' by Farjana Salahuddin, Fatima al-Sharshani and Dana al-Mulla. *(Supplied picture)*

Strong wind and dust to continue today



Strong wind, poor horizontal visibility and blowing dust are expected today also in Qatar at places during the day, the Met office has said. The offshore forecast is poor visibility, strong wind with high sea until noon and dusty. The temperature forecast is a minimum in the range of 26-31C and maximum in the 33-41C range. Qatar experienced strong wind and slight dusty conditions yesterday as indicated by this picture. Yesterday's minimum temperature was in the 27-33C range and maximum in the 33-41C range. **PICTURE:** Shaji Kayamkulam **Page 12**

Amir, Egyptian president discuss humanitarian aid to Sudanese people

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani held yesterday a telephone conversation with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi. During the call, they discussed bilateral relations and ways to enhance them, in addition to latest regional and international developments, especially in Sudan.

The two sides emphasised the need to consider the humanitarian aspects, facilitate the flow of aid to those affected by the fighting in Sudan, and spare civilians the war consequences.

They also agreed to intensify co-ordination to provide support and assistance to the brotherly Sudanese people, and to mitigate the effects of the crisis, especially on Sudanese refugees, and for the concerned teams and committees in the two countries to start developing mechanisms and implementation plans to ensure that assistance reaches the deserving people of the brotherly Sudanese people. **(QNA)**



At least 120 dead, 850 hurt in India rail crash

AFP
New Delhi

At least 120 people were killed, more than 850 more were injured and many others are feared trapped after a grisly three-train collision late yesterday in eastern India's Odisha state, local officials said.

Images broadcast on local stations showed smashed train compartments torn open with blood-stained holes of twisted metal, and scores of passengers lying beside the tracks near Balasore, about 200km from the state capital Bhubaneswar.

"We have more than 120 deaths per the last count and the number is increasing as there are a lot of serious injuries, head injuries," Sudhanshu Sarangi, director general of Odisha Fire Services, told AFP from the accident site.

"A very sad incident and the prognosis is not good".

Odisha state's chief secretary Pradeep Jena confirmed that "about 850 injured people have been sent to hospitals"; with rescue work ongoing.

"Our top priority now is rescuing (the passengers) and providing health support to the injured," he said.

Amitabh Sharma, executive director with the Indian Railways, told AFP that two passenger trains "had an active involvement in the accident" while "the third train, a goods train, which was parked at the site, also got (involved) in the accident".

With rescuers at the crash site pulling the wounded out of the wreckage, fears mounted that the toll could still rise.

"The casualty figures from the ground or clarity on the number of injured is very difficult to assess for us at this moment," Sharma said, amid reports that many passengers were still trapped under mangled rail cars.

Anil Kumar Mohanty, a medical officer in Balasore, told AFP that "we have rushed doctors and medical staff to the accident site".

One survivor told local TV news reporters that he had sleeping when the accident happened, and woke to find himself trapped under around a dozen fellow passengers, before somehow crawling out of the carriage with only injuries to his neck and arm.

Antibiotics most common documented medication allergens: Qatar study

By Joseph Varghese
Staff Reporter

Antibiotics were the most common documented medication allergens among the patients in a tertiary hospital in Qatar, according to a study conducted on 2,431 patients last year.

"Antibiotics represented 42.1% of all reported allergies, followed by non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (20.7%) and paracetamol (5.3%)," noted the study published by Qatar Medical Journal and featured on Qscience.com.

The study was titled, 'Retrospective review of medication allergy labelling among patients admitted to a tertiary hospital in Qatar.' It included all medication allergy labelling documentation for patients admitted to Hamad General Hospital from January-December 2022 during which the study was conducted.

To realise the study, a list of patients with medication allergies was generated from the pharmacy system, which included patients' demographics, medication names, documented allergy severity, and any other comments. The list was reviewed, and medications were categorised into different classes.

A total of 2,856 allergy documentation for 2,431 unique patients were identified and included in the analyses. The study was conducted to review medication allergy labelling documentation, identify the most reported medication class, and describe allergic reactions based on the reported severity.

The mean age of included patients was 43 years old, with 73.2% (1,780) being females. Among the reported allergic reactions, 11.8% (336) were documented as severe allergic reactions, 51.1% (1,457) were moderate, and 37.1% (1,060) were mild. Of all the reported allergies, only six (0.21%) cases

had documented confirmatory allergy tests done.

Further analysis of the reported allergies revealed that 1.2% (34) of the allergies had documentation to counteract the allergy labelling through either revised patient history or re-challenging. Despite this, allergy labelling was kept in the medical profile without proper de-labelling.

The researchers of the study highlight that timely access to accurate, up-to-date drug allergy information is critical to avoid potentially life-threatening adverse drug reactions. They note that the completeness and accuracy of allergy documentation re-



main a challenge. They also point out that inappropriate allergy documentation usually necessitates alternative treatments, increases costs, and may negatively impact patients' outcomes.

The study suggests that allergy labelling documentation is a key to safe medication prescribing. "However, standardised allergy documentation

should be implemented to include a brief description and onset of the symptoms. Additionally, a safe de-labelling pathway should be adopted. Most of the allergy documentation was based on patients' or family/parents' reports, while actual allergies observed by a healthcare provider were limited," the research team has concluded.

The study was conducted by Rana M al-Adawi, Reem Elajez, Dana Bakdach, Dina Elgaily, Ahmed Karawia, Asmaa Mohamed from Pharmacy Department, Hamad General Hospital, and Pharmacy Department, Rumailah Hospital, Hamad Medical Corporation.



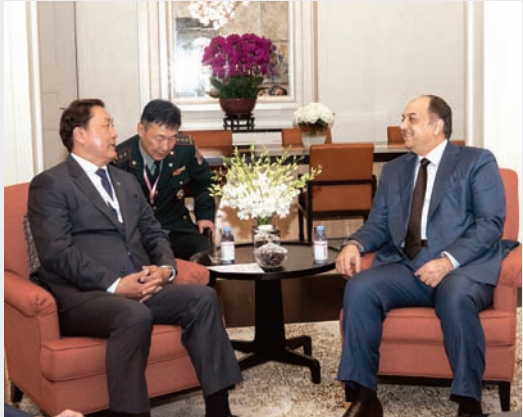
Deputy PM in Singapore meetings



HE the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defence Affairs Dr Khalid bin Mohamed al-Attiyah met with Singaporean Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance Lawrence Wong during his visit to Singapore. During the meeting, they discussed issues of common interest, the bilateral co-operation relations and ways to enhance and develop them. Qatar's ambassador to Singapore Saoud bin Jassim al-Jufairi attended the meeting. **(QNA)**



HE the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defence Affairs Dr Khalid bin Mohamed al-Attiyah met with Singaporean Minister of Defence Dr Eng Hen during his visit to Singapore. During the meeting, they discussed issues of common interest and reviewed the military co-operation relations between the two sides and ways to enhance and develop them. Qatar's ambassador to Singapore Saoud bin Jassim al-Jufairi attended the meeting.



HE the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defence Affairs Dr Khalid bin Mohamed al-Attiyah met with Mongolian Minister of Defence Gursediin Saikhanbayar during his visit to Singapore. During the meeting, they discussed issues of common interest and reviewed the military co-operation relations between the two sides, and ways to enhance and develop them. Qatar's ambassador to Singapore Saoud bin Jassim al-Jufairi attended the meeting.

Interior minister conveys Amir's congratulations to Jordan's king



On behalf of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, HE the Minister of Interior Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani extended congratulations to King Abdullah II Ibn al-Hussein of Jordan on the wedding of his son, Crown Prince Al Hussein bin Abdullah II, at Al Husseiniya Palace in Amman. He also extended congratulations to a number of members of the royal family, during the ceremony that was held in the Jordanian capital. **(QNA)**

AlKhater meets ICRC regional director



HE the Minister of State for International Co-operation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Lolwah bint Rashid AlKhater met with Regional Director for the Near and Middle East of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Fabrizio Carboni, who is visiting the country. During the meeting, they discussed strategic co-operation between the State of Qatar and the ICRC in the humanitarian and developmental fields in a number of countries, especially Sudan, Afghanistan, Yemen and Syria. HE the Minister of State for International Co-operation praised, during the meeting, the great role played by the ICRC in helping those affected in regions of disputes and conflicts. For his part, the ICRC Regional Director for the Near and Middle East expressed the ICRC's appreciation to Qatar for running an air bridge with an urgent medical and food aid to support the Sudanese people. **(QNA)**

Qatar hosts meeting of heads of GCC agencies concerned with human rights



Qatar hosted the 14th meeting of heads of government agencies concerned with human rights in the Co-operation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC). Head of the International Affairs Department at the Foreign Ministry of Oman, ambassador Sheikh Humaid Ali Alma'ani, chaired the meeting. At the outset, HE the Director of Human Rights Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dr Turki bin Abdullah al-Mahmoud welcomed the heads of government agencies concerned with human rights in the GCC countries to Qatar. The meeting discussed a number of topics on the agenda, most notably the GCC external action plan in the field of human rights in Geneva, the unified rules for prevention of domestic violence, exploitation and abuse, as well as a proposal for a memorandum of understanding between the General Secretariat and the Arab Network for National Human Rights Institutions. The meeting reflected the GCC countries' belief in the importance of human rights, their promotion and development, and continuous co-ordination in all fields. **(QNA)**

Minister meets GCC delegation



The Minister of State for International Co-operation Lolwah bint Rashid AlKhater met with a delegation from the General Secretariat of the GCC, and its human rights bodies, on the sidelines of the 14th meeting of heads of government agencies concerned with human rights in the GCC countries. During the meeting, they discussed concerted Gulf efforts to confront the issue of Islamophobia globally, and to co-ordinate visions, strategies and implementation mechanisms in promoting human rights. **(QNA)**

Qatar reaffirms commitment to South-South co-operation

Qatar reaffirmed its commitment to continuing efforts to enhance the South-South co-operation, especially within the framework of the real opportunities it generates to support the endeavours of the countries of the South to achieve social and economic recovery, and the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

This came in a speech delivered by HE the Permanent Representative of Qatar to the United Nations Sheikha Alya bint Ahmed bin Saif al-Thani during the general discussion of the 21st session of the High-level Committee on South-South Co-operation, which was held at the UN headquarters in New York.

HE Sheikha Alya praised the appreciated efforts of the UN Office for South-South Co-operation (UNOSSC) and the UN Development Program (UNDP) in supporting initiatives and activities aimed at strengthening co-operation among the countries of the South, stressing that the South-South co-operation has always been an important and vital issue for Qatar.

In this regard, she highlighted that Qatar chaired the high-level committee concerned with South-South co-operation in 2007, affirming its keenness to be a platform to enhance the horizons of this co-operation and address common challenges, and translate that in many tangible steps.

She drew attention to Qatar's hosting of the second South Summit in 2005, which resulted in the Doha Action Plan, noting that Qatar looks forward to the third South Summit to be hosted by Uganda, as an impetus to stimulate actions that are in the interest of the countries of the South.

She expressed Qatar's pride in hosting the Fifth UN Conference on the Least Developed Countries, which was a pivotal event to support the efforts of many countries of the South and help the least developed countries to build more prosperous and resilient societies and economies.

Moreover, Qatar co-organised the Ministerial Meeting on South-South Co-operation on the sidelines of the conference, which constituted an important station for renewing partnerships for workable solutions to support the implementation of the Doha Program of Action for the LDCs, she added. **(QNA)**

Qatar calls for secure digital environment accessible to all

QNA
New York

Qatar affirmed its commitment to contributing to global efforts to ensure that cyberspace is a means of progress and well-being, and to reduce the threats it may pose, and stressed the need to observe the rule of law, human rights, fundamental freedoms and the free flow of information in an open and secure digital environment accessible to all.

This came in the statement of Qatar delivered by HE the Permanent Representative of Qatar to the United Nations Sheikha Alya bint Ahmed bin Saif al-Thani, during the Arria-Formula meeting of Security Council members on the responsibility and response of countries to cyberattacks on critical infrastructure. The meeting took place at the United Nations headquarters, in New York.

HE Sheikha Alya stressed that the massive acceleration in the development of information and communication technology, global digital interdependence and reliance on digital technology in various aspects of life increases the risks of the threats posed by the misuse of cyberspace, both by governmental and non-governmental actors, including terrorist and criminal groups, especially when the matter affects critical digital services and basic infrastructure, the disruption of which could lead to threatening impacts on lives, health and well-being.

She pointed out that no country is immune from these threats, which may pose a threat to regional and international

HE Sheikha Alya stressed that the massive acceleration in the development of information and communication technology, global digital interdependence and reliance on digital technology in various aspects of life increases the risks of the threats posed by the misuse of cyberspace

peace, security and stability. She added that this is a matter that deserves attention from countries and the United Nations, highlighting in that regard the UN secretary-general's prioritising the enhancement of a healthy IT and communications environment.

In the context of protecting critical infrastructure from cyberattacks, she stressed that this requires studying threats and gaps, keeping abreast of rapid technological development, and developing regional and national strategies in line with the principles of international co-operation and exchanging experiences and best practices.

She added that national strat-

egies are important for guiding action and coordinating between stakeholders.

Stakeholders, including the private sector, whose role is central to digital technology. In this regard, she drew attention to Qatar's endeavour to provide a safe and strong cyber environment at the national level, and to take vigorous measures to harness the latest technologies to maintain the security of information and infrastructure, and to develop its expertise and capabilities in areas such as preventing terrorist attacks on unauthorised targets and sports facilities.

With regard to international frameworks, she stressed that there is a need to discuss the repercussions of the misuse of cyberspace on stability and conflict prevention, and what collective efforts can be taken to promote the peaceful use of cyberspace and advanced digital technologies, and to strengthen the regional and international security environment to confront attempts to misuse these technologies.

HE Sheikha Alya stressed the need for ensuring that international law is applicable to countries' use of IT and communications, and continuing to improve the behaviour of countries in the cyberspace, in the framework of international security.

She highlighted the importance that adopting a binding international instrument for maintaining information security as well as standards, rules and principles for responsible behaviour in the use of information and communication technologies in order to reduce risks to international peace, security and stability.

Ministry of Labour employees granted status of judicial officer



A number of the Ministry of Labour employees took the legal oath to authorise them as judicial officers before HE the Minister of Labour Dr Ali bin Smaikh al-Marri, as part of the ministry's efforts to enhance the supervisory role in worksites and workers' accommodation in all regions of the country, and facilitate services provided to beneficiaries. Authorising some employees of the Ministry of Labour as a judicial officers contributes to controlling violations at worksites, and authorising the inspector to enter workplaces and workers' residences to control and issue fines in case of non-compliance, which raises the level of control over establishments with regard to labour legislation in various regions of the country. (QNA)

Algerian minister lauds initiatives of Islamic cultural centre in Doha

QNA

Doha

Minister of Religious Affairs and Endowments of Algeria Youssef Belmahdi lauded Sheikh Abdulla Bin Zaid Al Mahmoud Islamic Cultural Center's efforts in introducing the Islamic culture and Qatari heritage and providing awareness programmes to Qatar's residents and visitors in multiple languages.

The Algerian minister's visit to the centre, under the Ministry of Endowment (Awqaf) and Islamic Affairs, came as a part of his official visit to country during the past week. During his visit, Sheikh Abdulla Bin Zaid Al Mahmoud Islamic Cultural Center's General Manager Dr Saleh bin Ali al-Marri introduced the centre's departments and the nature of its work.

He also gave an introduction to the heritage hall and how it presents Qatar's heritage to visitors, as well as the main cultural hall in the centre, which presents



Minister of Religious Affairs and Endowments of Algeria Youssef Belmahdi tours Sheikh Abdulla Bin Zaid Al Mahmoud Islamic Cultural Center.

a comprehensive understanding of Islam and Muslims. He noted the importance of the cultural elements and quality of visual and spatial presentation when learning about the Islamic culture.

The Algerian Minister of Endowments appreciated the ef-

forts made by Qatar during its hosting of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 with the cultural messages that appeared at the opening and closing ceremonies and all the accompanying efforts made.

As part of the centre's initia-

tive, a program was held to visit the Imam Mohammed Bin Abdul Wahab Mosque, which was attended by 212 people from various nationalities, including English, Spanish, and Russian.

The participants learned about the mosque's landmarks, religious rituals, and its most prominent roles in the Muslim community.

Seventeen students from Virginia Commonwealth University School of the Arts in Qatar (VCUarts Qatar) visited the Sheikh Abdulla Bin Zaid Al Mahmoud Islamic Cultural Center, where they learned about the features of Islamic culture and Qatari heritage.

The centre also organised a programme to teach new converts in the presence of 199 converts in the three branches of the centre: the main headquarters, the industrial branch, and Al Khor branch, coming in line with the centre's interest to provide converts with the best programmes and knowledge that suit their needs.

Chad minister meets Qatar's envoy



HE the Minister of Foreign Affairs, African Integration, International Co-operation and Chadians Abroad of the Republic of Chad Mahamat Saleh Annadif met with ambassador of Qatar to Chad Talib bin Mohamed al-Mankhas. During the meeting, they discussed bilateral co-operation relations between the two countries. (QNA)

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The Ned Doha unveils summer offers

The Ned Doha has announced a range of summer offers across stays, spa treatments, as well as food and drink experiences, a statement said. For a one-night stay starting from QR1,400, guests can enjoy QR400 to spend on food and drinks or at Ned's Club Spa. Guests will also be treated to breakfast for two in Millie's as part of their summer stay.

The 'Stay a Little Longer' offer features three nights or more stay to receive up to 20% off their bedroom rate, starting from QR1,050. The 'Stay Even Longer' offer is where guests can stay for four nights and save 25%, creating an opportunity for an extended summer escape in one of the hotel's 1970s designed bedrooms and suites.

The 'Summer Calling' spa offer which entails 300 minutes of treatments including 5 EMS slim sessions, and a 30-minute massage is available for QR2,500. The 'SPA Buy Out' option allows ladies to treat themselves and three of their friends to 180 minutes of relaxation with four 90-minute signature massages and a High Tea experience for QR4,000.

In addition to The Ned Doha's summer offers, guests can enjoy a business lunch at Cecconi's, enjoy the flavours of Kaiseki Night and Kaia's Sushi Night, or experience the Electric Time burger offer for QR110 per person, accompanied by two pints. Guests can also join during Electric Hour, from 4-8pm, where they can enjoy

great value on selected beverages. As part of The Ned Doha's new offerings, the hotel has introduced Rock & Pop every Thursday night at Electric Diner, featuring live bands from 7-11pm. Also, Quiz Night will be on the first Sunday of each month from 7-10pm, starting on June 4 (except for July, which will be on the second Sunday, July 9).

To complete the full experience of Quiz Night, guests can gather their team, or play individually and enjoy an evening with a burger and a selection of beverages for QR110.

Prizes include vouchers worth QR500 per person for The Ned Doha for the first-place winner, dinner vouchers worth

QR300 per person in any of the hotel's restaurants for the second-place winner, and a complimentary business lunch in Kaia, Malibu Kitchen and Cecconi's restaurants for the third-place winner. The vouchers are valid for three months.

General manager Niels Kristensen, said: "Our special offers are a testament to The Ned Doha's commitment to delivering tailored experiences for our guests. Whether guests are looking to stay, play or dine at any of our food and drink outlets, there's something for all of our members and guests."

A special offer can be booked at thened.com or by calling +974 4406 1111. The Spa's offer is available on +974 4406 1100.



The Ned Doha's gym.



The Ned Doha's Malibu Kitchen.

Landmark Group founder Micky Jagtiani dies



Prominent businessman Micky Jagtiani, who founded retail giant Landmark Group, has died, at the age of 70, Landmark Group said. The Group today announced that its "eminent Founder and Chairman, Mukesh "Micky" Jagtiani, has passed away peacefully, surrounded by his loving family."

Jagtiani, originally from India, started the business in 1973 with one store in Bahrain and grew the conglomerate across the Middle East, Africa and India.

The group operates brands Babyshop, Centrepont, Home Centre, Lifestyle, Splash, Shoemart and Emax.



Four high school students triumph in WCM-Q essay contest

Four Qatari high school students have won a two-week scholarship experience in the annual Healing Hands essay competition of Weill Cornell Medicine - Qatar (WCM-Q).

Fatma Mohamed al-Abdulla (Qatar Academy, Al Wakra); Khalid Abdulrahman al-Nabti (Qatar Academy, Doha); Noora Abdulrahman al-Thani (Qatar Academy, Doha); and Sultan al-Malki (Qatar Science and Technology Secondary School for Boys) were judged to have written the best 800-word essays on the topic of regenerative medicine.

Each will receive the WCM-Q Doctors of the Future Summer Scholarship award, which allows them to travel on an educational trip to the US to spend one week at Weill Cornell Medicine in New York City and one week at Cornell University in Ithaca, upstate New York. A further 14 students were awarded Honourable Men-



Winners of the competition with WCM-Q officials.

tion certificates in recognition of the high quality of their essays.

The contest, run by the Office of Student Outreach and Educational Development at WCM-Q, is open to Qatari students in grades 10 and 11.

The programme is designed to inspire young Qatari nationals to think about careers in medicine and biomedical science. In total, 53 essays were submitted, making it the highest number of qualifying es-

says since the inception of the Healing Hands competition in 2008.

One of the highlights of the event was playing a video recorded during this year's graduation celebrations of Dr Salah Mahmoud, WCM-Q graduate of the Class of 2023, who won the competition in 2013 and later became a student at WCM-Q.

The certificates were presented by Dr Rachid Bendriss, asso-

ciate dean for foundation, student outreach and educational development programmes; Noha Saleh, director of pre-medical administration, student outreach and educational development; Dr Mohamud Verjee, associate professor of family medicine in clinical medicine; and Dr Adam Larson, assistant professor of English as a second language.

The four were members of the contest committee.

QU Biomedical Science students present graduation projects

Biomedical Science students at Qatar University's (QU) College of Health Sciences presented their research projects following four years of undergraduate studies.

The research studies covered cancer, obesity and communicable diseases, the three health sectors identified by Qatar National Vision 2030.

Students Rawdhah Mohamed and Reham Kamal conducted an Omics approach to identify the differential expressed genes for patients with colorectal cancer under the supervision of Dr Hatem Zayed, associate professor of Molecular Biology and Genetics at QU.

The approach identified and validated five hub genes - CDH3, MMP3, TGFBI, CXCL1, and MMP1, which could improve scientists' understanding of the pathophysiology mechanism and development of colorectal adenocarcinoma.

The findings of this research are ready to be published in a peer review journal.

In addition, four students studied the molecular aspects of obesity under the supervision of Dr Nasser Rizk, associate professor of Physiology. The students, Hiballa Elbasheir, and Sara Sami investigated the im-



pact of Sulphoraphane (SFN) on the extracellular matrix (ECM) and adhesion molecules in response to obesity treatment and suggested it as a potential therapeutic option for preventing and managing obesity-related insulin resistance. The other two students, Isha Javid and Mona Eltayeb extended this research and investigated the impact of SFN treatment on miR-146a-5p and found that hsa-miR-146a, in combination with sulforaphane (SFN) treatment, can be quite

useful in the anti-inflammatory and antioxidant therapeutic regimen for obesity.

Students Nouran Ahmed and Shaden Abunasser conducted a study under the supervision of Dr Gheyath Nasrallah, associate professor in Microbiology and Immunology.

The study focused on synthesising and assessing a novel hydrogel that has antimicrobial and biocompatible properties useful for skin infection treatment and wound healing.

Students, Alyaa Alajji and Mathayel al-Saad studied the association of herpes virus with autoimmune marker, under the supervision of Dr Hadi Yassine, associate professor of Virology.

Finally, Aisha al-Rumaihi and Shaikha al-Hajri made a comparative genomics study to shed light on genetic mechanisms that drive Dugong adaptation to extreme climatic challenges. The study was supervised by Dr Rozaimi Razali, assistant professor of Bioinformatics.

Over 350 students attend QU Health IPE activity



The event aimed to highlight the importance of cultivating teamwork skills among health professionals.

As many as 355 students and 43 facilitators took part in an Interprofessional Education (IPE) programme hosted recently by QU Health at Qatar University (QU), on the development of effective healthcare teams.

'Being an Effective Team Player', highlighted the importance of cultivating teamwork skills among health professionals.

The event brought together students from various health profession programmes from both QU and the University of Calgary in Qatar (UCQ). The aim was to promote an understanding of the roles and responsibilities of health professionals in a collaborative practice setting, while highlighting the benefits

of interprofessional learning.

The event also saw discussions to improve interprofessional learning and to build effective healthcare teams, while also addressing common communication breakdowns that can impact team environments and patient safety.

The students and facilitators were from QU Health colleges including the College of Pharmacy, College of Medicine, College of Dental Medicine and College of Health Sciences, and the UCQ. The event provided a space for health profession students to learn about interprofessional learning and collaborative practice and to reflect on methods to build effective teams in the healthcare setting. The

significance of the IPE activity lies in its emphasis on effective team communication and decision-making skills, and its call to recognise the importance of all health professionals in providing quality care to patients. Through activities like these, QU Health is paving the way for the next generation of health professionals to work collaboratively and improve patient outcomes.

The lead facilitator of the activity and assistant dean for student affairs at QU's College of Dental Medicine, Dr Aala Daoud, said: "I thoroughly enjoyed the interaction between the diverse mix of students, exchanging information about their professions and eliciting shared decision-making. I was really im-

pressed with students' attitudes towards interprofessional education and the quality of reflection. Overall, I strongly feel that the interprofessional education activity successfully achieved its goal of shaping communication skills, clarifying roles and responsibilities, enhancing team skills and knowledge, and promoting collaborative practice amongst healthcare profession students."

Prof Vijay Ganji, Professor of Human Nutrition at QU and a faculty facilitator, said: "Our group interacted with each other professionally and respected other students' perspectives. It was very pleasant to see how talented our students are."

Omar Metwally, a student at

Table talk against smoking held



A table talk organised by Anti-Smoking Society Qatar has urged the community to continue awareness programmes against the harm caused by tobacco use. Dr M P Hassan Kunhi, Dr Abdul Rasheed, Dr Sabu K C, Mibu Jose, Abdul Rauf Kondotty, Dr Simi Paul, Dr Sheela Philip, Dr Hanna Moideen, Muthalib Mattannoor, Liji Abdulla, Noushad Abu, Abdulla Poyil, Shiju T K, Shafeeq Hydawi, Akhder Kudel and Reswin Ashraf were among those who spoke.

VCUarts Qatar graduate gets Indonesian scholarship

A graduate from Virginia Commonwealth University School of Arts Qatar (VCUarts Qatar) has been awarded with Indonesian Art and Cultural Scholarship (IACS), the Indonesian embassy in Doha has said.

Masha'al al-Musleh will join other 39 awardees from more than 30 countries to study and learn Indonesian arts and culture in the country for three months, ending August 18.

"Participants would study as well as blend with the community to feel and experience from first hand the richness of Indonesian culture," said Indonesian ambassador Ridwan Hassan in a press statement.

The presence of a Qatari participant in this edition of the programme is highly appreciated by the envoy since the two countries are now celebrating Qatar - Indonesia Year of Culture.

"We hope that with this scholarship, another friend of Indonesia from Qatar will be born and it could establish stronger relations between the two countries, particularly in the cultural arena," he said.

Under the IACS platform, the awardees will be sent to designated culturally-rich regions to learn Indonesian arts, languages and culture. At the end of the programme, all the awardees will be invited to Indonesia's presidential palace in Jakarta to celebrate Indonesian Independence Day on August 17.



Under the IACS platform, the awardees will be sent to designated culturally-rich regions to learn Indonesian arts, languages and culture.

"I am excited to join this programme. Through this programme, I hope I can bring more understanding about Indonesian culture as well as Qatari culture in the future," said al-Musleh.

According to Ali Murtado, the embassy's head of Division for Socio and Cultural, the scholarship was first launched in 2003 and as of now has been awarded to 1,024 alumni students from 83 countries.

Bihar Social Forum performers in spotlight at Rang Tarang



Bihar Social Forum's (BSF) star performers Shweta Kumari, Vidyabala Pathak and Slesha Trivedi led by famous choreographer and singer Smriti Trivedi hogged the limelight at the Rang Tarang 2023 organised by Indian Community Benevolent Forum recently, to mark the culmination of International Labour Day celebrations. BSF founder Irfan Ansari and president Satyendra Pathak lauded the performers.

ICC inaugurates permanent LED wall



Indian Cultural Centre (ICC), under the aegis of the embassy of India, officially inaugurated the permanent LED wall installed at the Ashoka Hall for better audio and visual provision. Indian embassy first secretary and ICC co-ordinating officer Xavier Dhanraj inaugurated the LED wall and lauded the ICC managing committee. ICC president Manikantan A P, general secretary Mohan Kumar, secretary Abraham Joseph, finance head Ashraf Ali, cultural activities head Sumaa Mahesh Gowda, school activities head Shantanu Deshpande and a number of prominent members of the community were present.

QU's College of Medicine, said: "As a senior medical student, I was very happy and enthusiastic about being a facilitator in such an important event. Not only because of how successful it was, but also because the values and morals that were being discussed throughout the event are main pillars that should be established in each member of the health team, and luckily, a lot of students realised how valuable they are after this event."

Bashaer Nasser Alyafei, a Public Health student at QU, said: "I had so much fun engaging with my colleagues from different health professions, sharing our knowledge, thoughts and opinions on how to be an effective team player. Interprofessional education is tremendously important to enhance co-operation between different professions, enhance the quality of patients, and healthcare outcomes."



At the conclusion of the programme, the teenagers were recognised for their achievements and dedication.



Vocational placement programme empowers differently-abled teens

West Bay Beach, in collaboration with HOPE Qatar Centre for Special Needs, conducted a vocational placement programme aimed at empowering differently-abled teenagers in the community.

Six HOPE Qatar students, aged between 12 and 16, got the opportunity to explore various job roles including POS (Point of Sale), Security and Floor Supervision.

The selected children who had varying challenges including Autism, Down Syndrome, and Learning Difficulties, were initially screened by the academic team at HOPE Qatar to determine their vocational interests and capabilities after which they underwent counselling and preparation to take on their new roles at the West Bay Beach facilities.

In close co-ordination with the two teams, job coaches were identified and sensitised to the unique needs of the teenagers who would be sent for placement. After a careful review



of the safety and security arrangements for each child, the programme was implemented. "The primary objective was to facilitate the integration of differently-abled teenagers into society by fostering a sense of belonging and promoting diversity," said Aidana Saparbaeva, project manager of West Bay

Beach. "By engaging them in meaningful work experiences, the programme aimed to enhance their social skills, boost their confidence, and nurture a sense of teamwork and community acceptance" she added.

The vocational programme lasting a full month saw the students being arranged in



two groups, each spending two weeks in their respective job roles. The participants were offered part-time employment and received their first monetary compensation for their contributions.

"Throughout the programme, the differently-abled teenagers were guided and

supported by dedicated mentors and trainers who provided them with the necessary skills and guidance to excel in their assigned roles," said Zainab Idrissi, public relations and communications specialist of West Bay Beach. "This holistic approach ensured that the participants received both practical job training and emotional support" she added.

"Vocational training and employability skill development programme is of high priority at HOPE Qatar Centre for Special Needs especially because we have a large number of students in the teenage and young adult age group," said founder and managing director Dr Rajeev Thomas.

"Unfortunately, many potential employers for individuals with intellectual challenges in this age group and older are still reluctant to provide the opportunity and chance for such youngsters to enter the job front. It is our mission to partner with willing companies such as West Bay Beach and

others to try to create a paradigm shift in how these very valuable segments of the employable pool are viewed. This is a very significant effort in support of the Qatar National Vision's Human Development Pillar" he added.

Speaking about the experience, Romanian national Valentin Florin Galatanu whose son Stefan David Galatanu, a HOPE Qatar student placed at West Bay Beach said his son not only liked the experience, but felt both important and useful, and also made a lot of friends. His wife and Stefan's mother, Valentin, while thanking the organisers, lauded the initiative and wished that there would be more such opportunities in the future.

Parents of the other participants, Kels Mouhammad Tariq, Domnic Wynne Incabo, Aditya Sidharth Navayath, Sadeem Tarek Ahmed, and Mohamed Omran, all HOPE Qatar students, were unanimous in their appreciation for the opportunity, joy and the sense of achievement that their children had ex-

perienced during the vocational placement programme.

At the conclusion of the programme, the teenagers were recognised for their achievements and dedication. Apart from their first financial compensation, each participant also received a personalised letter of recommendation and a certificate of appreciation, acknowledging their commitment and growth during their time in the vocational programme.

But most importantly, they completed the programme with a sense of accomplishment and self-worth for having done something they had never done before in an actual work environment, dealing with customers and other colleagues.

This collaboration between West Bay Beach and HOPE Qatar Centre for Special Needs has not only contributed to the personal and professional growth of these exceptional individuals but has also inspired hope and serves as a catalyst for more such social initiatives.



MES inducts assistant student council members



MES Indian School has sworn in as many as 180 assistant student council members for the academic year 2023-24. The inductees included assistant office-bearers, prefects, club secretaries, house captains, scouts and guides, Campus Care Force leaders and band captains. The student officials include Ahamed Faizal (assistant head boy), Sheza Fathima (assistant head girl), Ariyan Unnikrishnan and Maliha Mumthaz (assistant head prefects).

BPS-Primary II investiture ceremony held



Birla Public School (BPS)-Primary II organised the Investiture Ceremony 2023-24 and inducted the newly elected Student Council members on May 24. The positions include head boy, head girl, house captains, vice-captains and prefects. School chairman Gope Shahani, congratulated the student officials. The function commenced with the school prayer by Nelin Nelson Erumala and Aahil Anas, followed by the Qatar and Indian National Anthem. The Primary II school choir performed under the guidance of Geneikam. Academic

director - principal Harish Sanduja administered the oath to all new leaders of the Prefectorial Board. They were invested by various members of the school leadership team - vice principal Edna Fernandez, head of non-academics Vinod Kumar K V, Primary II headmistress Anu Thomas, and heads of all sections. Parents of the Student Council members were present. Florida Nixon and Jismy Joseph were the masters of ceremony. The programme culminated with the sports captain, Stera Kunjappan Ripson proposing a vote of thanks.

'Reflections' at LIS showcases creativity and innovation



Loyola International School (LIS) hosted 'Reflections', the Annual Science and Arts Exhibition on May 25 and 26 at its Al Nasr and Oasis campuses, showcasing the talents and achievements of the students, spanning across various scientific, artistic, and technological disciplines.

Indian embassy first secretary Sachin Dinkar Shankpal was the chief guest at the

inaugural ceremony at the Oasis campus while Indian Sports Centre president E P Abdurrahman and Indian Cultural Centre president Manikantan A P graced the occasion at Al Nasr campus.

The exhibition showcased a wide range of projects, from robotics and motion sensors, working models of vital organs as well as literature and languages.

Plays and art projects, selfie booths, games and food stalls were among the other attractions.

Principal Pramod Kumar Ranwaka appreciated the students' exceptional work. "Reflections has been a resounding success, encapsulating the spirit of exploration, creativity, and academic excellence that we strive for at our school," he added.



Beach outing in Gaza City



Palestinians enjoy the beach on a hot day in Gaza City, yesterday.

Libya's Tripoli govt targets more western towns with drone strikes

Reuters
Tripoli

Libya's Government of National Unity (GNU) stepped up drone strikes yesterday against what it said were smuggling gangs in western regions, attacking targets in Zawia, Zuwara, Ajeelat and Maya.

However, the strikes that began a week ago have hit factions linked with figures opposed to Prime Minister Abdelhamid al-Dbeibah, prompting outrage among critics of the GNU and fears of an escalation.

In eastern Libya, the national parliament that seeks to replace Dbeibah's government, said this week the drone strikes were aimed at "settling political scores", saying one had tar-

geted the home of a parliament member.

Dbeibah has described the drones carrying out the attacks as Libyan although the GNU was not known to possess any. On Thursday he said "those who direct these important and modern planes are Libyans".

Turkiye, which sent forces to help the government in Tripoli ward off an assault by eastern forces in 2020, has previously deployed drones from bases in western Libya. Ankara has not commented on the drone strikes.

Zawia, which has one of Libya's main refineries and petrol import terminals, has long been seen as a centre of fuel smuggling and people trafficking. Control over the city has been repeatedly contested over recent years, including by

groups that back and oppose Dbeibah.

"The situation in the city is terrible. Armoured vehicles with tinted windows are everywhere. Wedding parades happen with military cars, some carrying medium weapons. Imagine engagement parties with bombs!" said a resident who asked not to be named.

"When you enter the city you can hear gunfire. Clashes break out at any time or place. As ordinary people our life ends before sunset and then it's time for the gangs," said another resident who also requested anonymity.

Any move to restrict fuel movements through the port and refinery by groups in the town could reduce supplies to major power plants, causing electricity cuts in Tripoli.

Fighting worsens in Sudan despite US sanctions

AFP
Khartoum

Shelling rocked greater Khartoum yesterday, as fighting between Sudan's warring generals intensified despite US sanctions imposed after the collapse of a US- and Saudi-brokered truce.

Witnesses reported "artillery fire" in eastern Khartoum and around the state television building in the capital's sister city Omdurman, just across the Nile.

For nearly seven weeks, fighting between the regular army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) has gripped Khartoum and the western region of Darfur, despite repeated efforts to broker a humanitarian ceasefire.

The army announced it had brought in reinforcements from other parts of Sudan to participate in "operations in the Khartoum area".

Sudan analyst Kholood Khair said the army was "expected to launch a massive offensive" to clear the paramilitaries from the city's streets.

Washington slapped sanctions on the warring parties Thursday, holding them both responsible for provoking "appalling" bloodshed.

The US Treasury placed two major arms companies of the Sudanese Armed Forces, Defence Industries System and Sudan Master Technology, on its blacklist.

It also placed sanctions on gold miner Al Junaid Multi Activities Co and arms trader



Smoke billows behind buildings in Khartoum, as fighting between Sudan's warring generals intensified.

Tradive General Trading, two companies controlled by RSF commander Mohamed Hamdan Daglo and his family.

The State Department meanwhile imposed visa restrictions on both army and RSF officials, saying they were complicit in "undermining Sudan's democratic transition". It did not name them.

Washington announced yesterday that Secretary of State Antony Blinken will next week travel to Saudi Arabia where he will discuss "strategic co-operation on regional and global issues".

His trip follows efforts by both countries to broker a durable ceasefire in Sudan.

Analysts question the efficacy of sanctions on Sudan's rival generals, both of whom amassed

considerable wealth during the rule of long-time ruler Omar al-Bashir, whose government was subjected to decades of international sanctions before his overthrow in 2019.

So far neither side has gained a decisive advantage. The regular army, led by Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, has air power and heavy weaponry, but analysts say the paramilitaries are more mobile and better suited for urban warfare.

After the army announced it was quitting the ceasefire talks on Wednesday, troops attacked key RSF bases in Khartoum.

One army bombardment hit a Khartoum market, killing 18 civilians and wounding 106, a committee of human rights lawyers said.

The army will want to make

"some military gains before committing to any future talks, in order to improve their bargaining position", said Khair, founder of Khartoum-based think tank Confluence Advisory.

Yesterday, the army said it was "surprised" by the US and Saudi decision to "suspend the talks" without responding to an army proposal.

After its own representatives had decided to "suspend the negotiations", they had "remained in Jeddah with the hopes that the mediators will take a fair and more effective position that will guarantee commitment" to the ceasefire, an army statement said. Since fighting erupted on April 15, more than 1,800 people have been killed, according to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project.

Tanzania declares end of Marburg virus outbreak: WHO

AFP
Dar es Salaam

Tanzania yesterday declared the end of a deadly outbreak of the Marburg virus, more than two months after it was first confirmed, the World Health Organisation (WHO) said.

A total of nine cases, eight confirmed and one probable, and six deaths were recorded in the outbreak of the haemorrhagic fever in the northwestern region of Kagera, the WHO said in a statement.

The UN health agency said it was the first such outbreak in Tanzania, an East African country with a population of almost 62mn.

The last confirmed case tested negative on April 19, setting off the 42-day mandatory countdown to declare the end of the outbreak, it added.

Neighbouring Uganda, which witnessed its last outbreak in 2017 and shares a

porous border with Tanzania, had gone on high alert after Marburg was confirmed by Tanzania's health ministry on March 21.

Uganda had just emerged in January from an almost four-month-long Ebola outbreak, which killed 55 people.

The WHO said Tanzania's health authorities, with help from the UN agency and other partners, had "immediately rolled out outbreak response to stop the spread of the virus and save lives".

The Marburg virus is a highly virulent microbe which causes severe fever, often accompanied by bleeding and organ failure.

It is part of the so-called filovirus family that also includes Ebola, which has wreaked havoc in several previous outbreaks in Africa.

Fatality rates from Marburg in confirmed cases have ranged from 24% to 88% in previous outbreaks, according to the WHO.

Hezbollah pushes back after indictments in peacekeeper's killing

A Hezbollah official said yesterday there was "no justification" for linking the powerful Lebanese group to an Irish peacekeeper's killing, a day after a judicial official accused five militants of last year's attack, AFP reported from Beirut.

Private Sean Rooney, 23, was killed and three others were injured on December 14 when their UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) vehicle was attacked near the village of Al-Aqbiya, a Hezbollah stronghold in the country's south. Fadl Sawan, the investigating judge in the military tribunal for the case, had issued a 30-page indictment accusing five people of "forming a gang to commit a crime" and "intentional homicide", a judicial official said on Thursday, saying they were all Hezbollah members. The Hezbollah official said on condition of anonymity that "there is no justification for the judicial official to mention the group's name."

UN, African Union urge calm after deadly clashes in Senegal

AFP
Dakar

The UN and African Union called for calm in Senegal yesterday after an outbreak of deadly violence that prompted authorities to deploy the army.

Nine people were killed on Thursday after popular opposition politician, Ousmane Sonko, was sentenced to two years in jail, which may take him out of the running in 2024 presidential elections.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres condemned the violence and "urged all those involved to (...) exercise restraint", a spokesman said.

The African Union said its commission president, Moussa Faki Mahamat, strongly condemned the violence and urged leaders to avoid acts which "tarnish the face of Senegalese democracy, of which Africa has always been proud." The Community of West African States (Ecowas) called on all parties to



Supporters of Senegal opposition leader Ousmane Sonko clash with security forces, after Sonko was sentenced to prison in Dakar, yesterday.

"defend the country's laudable reputation as a bastion of peace and stability".

The EU and Senegal's former colonial power France also expressed concern over the violence.

Sonko was convicted for "corrupting" a young woman, in a case which has deeply divided Senegal, usually a bastion of stability in West Africa.

After some of the worst political violence in years on Thursday, tensions remained high yesterday, with sporadic clashes reported in the capital and soldiers deployed on the streets.

Sonko, who was tried in absentia, has yet to be taken into custody for his jail term, which is likely to cause further tensions.

The streets of the capital were largely deserted, AFP journalists

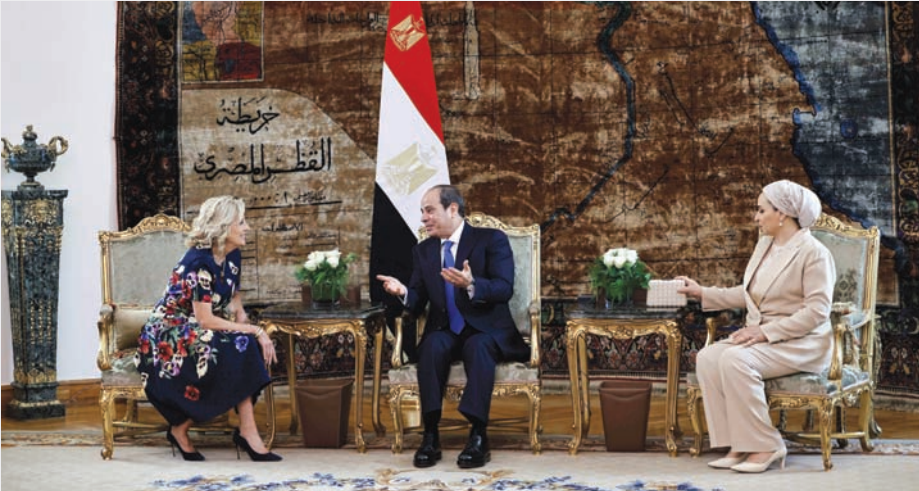
observed. The government acknowledged that it had restricted access to social networks such as Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter in order to stop "the dissemination of hateful and subversive messages". There was extensive destruction on the main university campus, where prolonged clashes took place on Thursday.

Students with suitcases lined the streets outside the university, struggling to find transportation after being told to leave campus. "We didn't expect this, political affairs shouldn't concern us," said Babacar Ndiaye, a 26-year-old student.

"But there is injustice," he added, referring to Sonko's conviction. Since 2021, when Sonko was initially arrested, around 30 civilians have been killed in unrest largely linked to his legal affairs.

The government and the opposition blame each other for the violence. Sonko was initially charged with rape and issuing death threats against an employee of a beauty salon where he said he received massages.

US first lady on Egypt visit



Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi and First Lady Entissar Amer sit with US First Lady Jill Biden in Cairo, Egypt, yesterday.

At least nine dead in DR Congo rebel attack

Suspected Islamic State group-affiliated ADF rebels have killed at least nine villagers in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo, a local monitor said yesterday, AFP reported from Beni, DR Congo.

The volatile and mineral-rich region along the border with Uganda has been wracked by increasing violence involving rebel militias that has ensnared neighbouring countries. The Kivu Security Tracker (KST), a network of observers based in DRC's restive east, said several others were missing after the attack, which

also left one person seriously injured. "The ADF are suspected," the KST said. The raid targeted Museya Kanyamutsutsa village in Beni territory, according to Delphin Maleki, a local activist, who confirmed the death toll of at least nine.

He said that in addition to the suspected hostages, the attackers took away cattle and equipment. "It all started around 8:00pm (1900 GMT). We were surprised by the ADF while we were in our houses," said village resident Socrates Mumbere. "The toll is 10 dead - six men and four women," he said.

US Congress averts historic credit default

AFP/Reuters
Washington

US senators have voted to suspend the federal debt limit, capping weeks of fraught negotiations to eliminate the threat of a disastrous credit default just days ahead of the deadline set by the Treasury.

Economists had warned the country could run out of money to pay its bills by Monday – leaving almost no room for delays in enacting the Fiscal Responsibility Act, which extends the government's borrowing authority through 2024 while trimming federal spending.

Treasury technically hit its limit on borrowing in January. Since then it has been using "extraordinary measures" to patch together the money needed to pay the government's bills.

Hammered out between Democratic President Joe Biden and the Republicans, the measure passed the Senate with a comfortable majority of 63 votes to 36 a day after it had sailed through the House of Representatives.

"No one gets everything they want in a negotiation, but make no mistake: this bipartisan agreement is a big win for our economy and the American people," Biden said in a statement posted to social media.

He said he would sign the bill "as soon as possible" and address the nation.

Democratic Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer added that the nation could "breathe a sigh of relief" after avoiding a "catastrophic" economic collapse.

"But, for all the ups and downs and twists and turns it took to get here, it is so good for this country that both parties have come together at last to avoid default," he said.

The bill – which now heads to Biden's desk to be signed into law – ended a day of intense back-and-forth between party leaders and rank-and-file members who had threatened the bill's quick passage with last-minute gripes about the details.

Democratic leaders had spent months underlining the havoc that a first default in history would have wrought, including the loss of millions of jobs and \$15tn in household wealth, as well as increased costs for mortgages and other borrowing.

The late evening drama came after a series of failed ballots on amendments sought mainly by Republicans who were threatening at one point to hold up the process, dragging it deep into the weekend.

Senators elected to offer 11 tweaks to the 99-page text, many objecting to funding levels for their pet projects – from border control and Chinese trade to taxation and the environment – and each requiring a vote.

Defence hawks upset at Pentagon spending being capped at Biden's



This picture taken on May 22 shows House Speaker Kevin McCarthy with President Joe Biden for debt limit talks at the Oval Office at the White House in Washington.

budget request of \$886bn threatened at one point to derail the bill's passage entirely.

In the end, they fell in line after being offered a commitment to a separate bill providing cash for Ukraine's defence against the Russian invasion, and promoting US national security interests in the Middle East and in the face of Chinese aggression against Taiwan.

"As currently written, this bill puts our military behind the eight ball... the first and most important dollars we allocate each year in the budget are those to protect and defend the United States and our interests," said South Carolina Republican Lindsey Graham.

While this bitter battle has ended, Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell wasted no time flagging the next budget fight.

"In the coming months, Senate Republicans will continue working to provide for the common defence and control Washington Democrats' reckless spending," he said in a statement.

McConnell was referring to 12 bills Congress will work on over the sum-

mer to fund government programmes in the fiscal year beginning on October 1, which will also carry out the broad instructions of the debt limit bill.

Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, meanwhile, issued some pointed advice saying: "I continue to strongly believe that the full faith and credit of the United States must never be used as a bargaining chip" as Republicans did over the past several months.

America spends more money than it collects through taxation, so it borrows money via the issuing of government bonds, seen as among the world's most reliable investments.

Around 80 years ago, lawmakers introduced a limit on how much federal debt could be accrued.

The ceiling has been raised more than 100 times since to allow the government to meet its spending commitments – usually without drama and with the support of Democrats and Republicans – and stands at around \$31.5tn.

Both parties see raising the debt limit as politically toxic, although they acknowledge that failure to do so would plunge the US economy into a depression and roil world markets as the government missed debt repayments.

Republicans hoped to weaponise the extension to campaign against what they see as Democratic overspending ahead of the 2024 presidential election, although increases in the debt ceiling only cover commitments that have al-

ready been made by both parties.

Kevin McCarthy, the top lawmaker in the Republican-led House, had touted the bill he spent weeks negotiating as a big victory for conservatives, although he faced a backlash from hardliners on the right who said he made too many concessions on spending cuts.

He fell one short of the 150 votes – two-thirds of his caucus – he had promised to deliver in the lower chamber as he fought to quell a right-wing rebellion, and needed Democratic help to advance the bill to the Senate.

On the other end of Pennsylvania Avenue, the vote was being touted as a major victory for Biden, who managed to protect almost all of his domestic priorities from deep cuts threatened by Republicans.

"This legislation protects the full faith and credit of the United States and preserves our financial leadership, which is critical to our economic growth and stability," said US Treasury Secretary Yellen.

The last time the United States came this close to default was in 2011.

That standoff hammered financial markets, led to the first-ever downgrade of the government's credit rating and pushed up the nation's borrowing costs.

There was less drama this time as it became clear last week that Biden and McCarthy would find a deal with enough bipartisan support to get through Congress.

Trump, DeSantis trade barbs amid 2024 campaign acrimony

Reuters
Washington

Former president Donald Trump and Florida Governor Ron DeSantis traded barbs on Thursday over who could most quickly fix the economy and reform government agencies as the battle between the top two Republican contenders grew increasingly acrimonious.

Trump, who currently holds a large lead over DeSantis in a distant second in polls on the 2024 Republican nomination, also took critical shots at other candidates lower down in the rankings, suggesting that they exit the party's primary.

Trump's comments were made to Fox News host Sean Hannity in a town hall in Clive, Iowa.

Hannity is one of Trump's strongest media allies, and he set him up to blast opponents including DeSantis, who he predicted would slip further in the polls.

"You know, I really go after the one who is second and I think the one who is second has gone down so much and so rapidly that I don't think he's going to be second that much longer. I think he's going to be third or fourth," Trump said.

Earlier on Thursday, DeSantis and Trump had exchanged insults over their plans to right the economy and reform government bureaucracy, with the Florida governor criticising Trump for not getting the job done during his time in the White House.



DeSantis greets audience members at a campaign event in Manchester, New Hampshire, on Thursday.

"Why didn't he do it in his first four years?" DeSantis quipped to reporters during an event in New Hampshire.

DeSantis argued that it was better for voters to elect someone who could serve two terms – or eight years in office – because that is how long it would take to successfully finish a task that was not fully defined by either candidate.

"If he needs eight years don't vote for him. I'll have that this country hopping in six months," Trump, who can only serve one more term, sniped back.

During the Fox News town hall, Trump was asked about what he made of the growing Republican field, including former vice-president Mike Pence and former New Jersey governor Chris Chris-

tie who are both expected to enter the race next week.

"I don't know why people are doing it. They're at 1%. Some are at zero," he said, referring to candidates with low poll numbers.

Remarking on former Arkansas governor Asa Hutchinson, Trump said: "Nobody knows who the hell he is."



Trump at a Team Trump Volunteer Leadership Training at the Grimes Community Centre in Grimes, Iowa, on Thursday.

Georgia probe of former US president expands to activities in other states

Reuters
Washington

A Georgia-based probe into whether former Republican president Donald Trump and others illegally sought to overturn his loss in the state's 2020 presidential election has expanded into activities outside of Georgia, the *Washington Post* reported yesterday.

Fulton County's prosecutor has broadened the two-year-long investigation to include Trump's campaign "hiring two firms to find voter fraud across the United States and then burying their findings when they did not find it", including issuing a subpoena to one of the companies, the *Post* reported, citing two people with knowledge of the probe.

Fani Willis has publicly indicated that her office is looking at whether Georgia's Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organisations (RICO) statute would apply and whether efforts to overturn Trump's loss in the southern US state were a far-reaching criminal scheme,

according to the *Post*.

A spokesperson for the Fulton County district attorney's office declined to comment on the report.

Willis, a Democrat, has said charging decisions are expected this summer.

As part of the probe into Trump and his allies, Willis's office has sought information from Simpatico Software Systems and Berkeley Research Group about their actions in Georgia and other US states, the *Post* said.

The companies declined to comment to the *Post* as did Willis's office and representatives for Trump.

Trump has denied any wrongdoing and called the investigation, along with others he is facing, politically motivated.

The Department of Justice is also investigating the former president's role in efforts to overturn his 2020 loss to Democrat Joe Biden.

A number of individuals under investigation in the Fulton County probe have accepted immunity deals, court records showed last month.

North Carolina's Fort Bragg renamed to Fort Liberty

Reuters/AFP
Washington

Fort Bragg, the US Army base in North Carolina that is among the world's largest military installations, was formally renamed Fort Liberty yesterday, part of a broader effort to rechristen bases named for Confederate officers.

Last year, a commission created by Congress recommended new names for nine bases that honoured Confederate officers, after the nationwide protests following the 2020 police killing of George Floyd prompted the military to re-examine its history through the lens of race.

In a video announcing the change, the Army said yesterday that the base is the only one to be named after a value, rather than a person.

"No value has proven more integral to the United States and the history of its military than liberty," the video said.

Established in 1918, the North Carolina base was originally named for General Braxton Bragg, who served in the Confederate Army during the 19th-century US Civil War.

Bragg was an inept Confederate general who was relieved of command after his defeat in the 1863 Battle of Chattanooga.

The base houses the Airborne and Special Operations Forces and is home to 53,700 troops,



A sign is seen after a ceremony renaming Fort Bragg as Fort Liberty, near Fayetteville, North Carolina.

according to its website.

The first renaming took place in March. Fort Pickett in Virginia was renamed Fort Barfoot in honour of a decorated Native American soldier, Colonel Van T Barfoot, a World War II Medal of Honour recipient.

That base was previously named for Confederate Major-General George Pickett, whose failed assault on Union troops during the 1863 Battle of Gettysburg became known as "Pickett's Charge".

In the National Defence Authorisation Act for 2021, Congress required the establishment of a commission to

plan for the removal of Confederate-linked "names, symbols, displays, monuments, or paraphernalia" from Defence Department property, and gave the Pentagon chief three years to carry out its recommendations.

Former president Donald Trump opposed the renaming effort, tweeting in 2020 that his administration "will not even consider" changing the names of the bases.

He vetoed the defence bill in December 2020, but Congress overrode it in a blow to Trump, who by then had lost his re-election bid to Joe Biden.

US ends investigation of Pence documents with no charges

Reuters
Washington

The US Department of Justice has closed its investigation into former vice-president Mike Pence without filing any charges related to classified documents found in his Indiana home, a department official said yesterday.

The department notified Pence through a letter, the official added.

Representatives for Pence, who served under former Republican president Donald Trump, did not immediately respond to a re-

quest for comment to the latest news.

After revelations of classified material found at Trump's Florida residence after he left office, the National Archives called on former presidents and vice-presidents to make checks for any material that should be in the government's possession.

A lawyer for Pence had notified authorities about the discovery of records with classified markings, prompting a Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) search for records at his Indianapolis residence this year.

NBC and CNN reported the closing of the probe earlier yesterday.

Pence's spokesman has said the former



Mike Pence

vice-president has "fully co-operated" with the probe and Pence himself has publicly acknowledged what he called a mistake.

A Justice Department special counsel, Jack Smith, is investigating Trump's handling of classified materials since leaving office in January 2021.

A separate special counsel was appointed to conduct an investigation after US President Joe Biden reported finding some classified material in his possession.

Both Biden and Trump are seeking the presidency in the 2024 election.

Pence is expected to announce his candidacy next week.

Thousands told to flee advancing wildfires in Quebec

Some 10,000 people have been ordered to evacuate from a city in the Canadian province of Quebec in the face of advancing wildfires, officials said.

Steeve Beaupre, mayor of Sept Iles on St Lawrence River declared a local state of emergency and announced a mandatory evacuation after nearby wildfires "advanced very quickly" overnight.

Residents were told in the morning to vacate their homes by 4pm local time (2100 GMT yesterday).

Stephane Lauzon, a member of Parliament from Quebec, told a news conference in Ottawa that as many as 10,000 residents or one-third of the population of Sept Iles would be displaced.

This followed the evacuation



An aerial view of the wildfire in Shelburne County, Nova Scotia, is depicted in this social media handout image released on May 31.

on Thursday of 500 residents of Chapais in the north of the province.

"The situation is quickly changing in Quebec," Lauzon said, adding that about 100 fires, "many more than yesterday", were burning in the province, including about 20 out of control.

Across Canada more than 210 fires were still burning after scorching more than 2.7 hec-

tares. A total of 29,000 people had been evacuated before yesterday's order.

After major flare-ups in the west of the country in May, notably in the Prairies provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan, firefighting shifted in the past week to Nova Scotia on the Atlantic coast, following hot, dry weather.

Officials hoped rain and cooler weather forecast for the weekend

following a record-breaking heat wave will bring relief.

Almost 1,000 firefighters from Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and the United States also arrived or were en route to bolster firefighting efforts, and Ottawa has started to deploy the military in Nova Scotia to help out, according to Emergency Preparedness Minister Bill Blair.

"This is a scary time for many people from coast to coast," Prime Minister Justin Trudeau told reporters.

In Halifax, the largest city in Nova Scotia, busloads of suburban residents were taken on tours for a first glimpse of devastated neighbourhoods.

About 200 homes have been destroyed and nearly 20,000 residents have been displaced by wildfires in Nova Scotia. – **AFP**

FALLOUT
Australia hikes minimum wage as living costs surge

Australia will raise the minimum wage by 5.75% from July 1 as families grapple with soaring living costs, a decision that businesses and some economists say risks further stoking inflation and interest rates. The independent Fair Work Commission (FWC) yesterday decided on a 5.75% pay rise for workers on awards with wages linked to movement in the minimum wage. It also made a technical reclassification for the national minimum wage, which the union says will take the increase to 8.6% for the lowest-paid employees, about 0.7% of the workforce. In total, the determination from the FWC would affect wages for more than 2mn workers.

WARNING
Asia synthetic drug trade surging, says UN

Trafficking of synthetic drugs in East and Southeast Asia is surging, with new smuggling routes for methamphetamine emerging and ketamine production expanding, the UN said yesterday. High volumes of methamphetamine continue to be produced in Shan State, Myanmar and trafficked from there through Thailand and Laos as well as new routes through central Myanmar, the UN Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) said in a report. “Traffickers have continued to ship large volumes through Laos and northern Thailand,” said Jeremy Douglas, UNODC Regional Representative for Southeast Asia and the Pacific.

WEATHER
Southern China swelters under heatwaves

Heatwaves tormenting parts of southern and eastern China are set to persist through June, putting power grids under strain as air conditioners are turned on full blast at homes, offices and factories in mega-cities like Shanghai and Shenzhen. In the next three days, most of southern China is expected to suffer temperatures of more than 35C, with temperatures in some areas exceeding 40C, national forecasters said yesterday. Extreme hot weather beset China, like many part of Asia in recent weeks, even before summer arrived. In the southern city of Shenzhen, it was 33C yesterday, but the humidity made it feel far hotter

COMMENT
Lanka economic recovery remains challenging: IMF

Cash-strapped Sri Lanka’s economy showed “tentative signs of improvement” but recovery remains challenging and Colombo must pursue painful reforms, the IMF said yesterday. The International Monetary Fund (IMF)’s deputy managing director Kenji Okamura said the country was emerging from its unprecedented crisis thanks to reforms including the doubling of taxes, spending cuts and the scrapping of subsidies. A currency crisis since late 2021 led to severe shortages of food, fuel and medicines and triggered months of protests that led to the toppling of former president Gotabaya Rajapaksa in July.

DECISION
S Korea slaps sanctions on North’s hacking group

South Korea yesterday announced new sanctions against a North Korean hacking group, Kimsuky, it accused of being involved in the North’s latest satellite launch attempt. The US and South Korea also issued a joint advisory saying the group conducts “large-scale” cyberattacks at think tanks, academic institutions and news outlets. The hackers are known to conduct spearphishing campaigns posing as real journalists, academics, or other individuals with credible links to North Korean policy circles, Seoul’s foreign ministry said. On Wednesday North Korea launched its first spy satellite into space, but that ended in failure with the booster and payload plunging into the sea.

Vietnam officials detain climate activist on tax evasion claims

AFP
Hanoi

Vietnamese authorities have detained a prominent climate activist for alleged tax evasion, her husband said yesterday, adding to a list of environmentalists facing the accusation. Hoang Thi Minh Hong, the founder of now-defunct NGO CHANGE, which aimed to tackle some of the country’s most urgent environmental issues, was taken into custody in Ho Chi Minh City on Wednesday. “I can confirm Hong has been under temporary detention since May 31 with the accusation of tax evasion,” Hoang Vinh Nam said. Hong founded CHANGE in 2013, focusing on mobilising Vietnamese, particularly young people, to take action against pressing environmental issues including climate change, the illegal wildlife trade and pollution. She announced last year that CHANGE would close after Vietnam’s authoritarian government handed down prison terms for tax evasion to four environmental human rights defenders, Nguy Thi Khanh, Mai Phan Loi, Bach Hung Duong and Dang Dinh Bach. The US yesterday expressed concern over the detention of Hong and other CHANGE staff. “These detentions by Vietnamese authorities are part of a concerning pattern of arrests of local environmental and civil society advocates,” state department spokesman Matthew Miller said in a statement. “Vietnam’s selective use of its vague and flawed tax law to target environmentalists and climate change activists with politically motivated prosecutions is a new, extremely troubling development,” said Phil Robertson, the deputy Asia director of Human Rights Watch. “Leading environmental activist Hoang Thi Minh Hong is the latest victim in this accelerating crackdown.” Hong, 50, has been widely recognised for her work: she joined the Obama Foundation Scholars programme at Columbia Uni-

versity in New York in 2018 and was listed by Forbes among the 50 most influential Vietnamese women in 2019. The UN’s human rights body said it was “deeply troubled” by the detention. “The chilling effect of such cases brought under tax laws is palpable among civil society in Vietnam, and risks stifling debate on issues of importance to society as a whole,” said Marta Hurtado, spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. Khanh, a globally recognised climate and energy campaigner who won the Goldman Environmental Prize in 2018, spent nearly a year in jail before she was released last month. Founder of Green ID, one of Vietnam’s most well-known environmental organisations, Khanh had been among the few in the nation challenging the government’s plans to increase coal power. Dang Dinh Bach, a community lawyer and NGO worker, worked to inform people whose health and livelihoods were threatened by coal projects and other dirty industries. He was sentenced to five years in prison. The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention has determined that his imprisonment is unlawful. Vietnam has committed to reaching net-zero carbon emissions by 2050, and a group of rich nations last year pledged to raise at least \$15.5bn to help get the country off fossil fuels. Ben Swanton, co-director of Project 88, a non-profit organisation advocating for human rights in Vietnam, said Hong’s arrest demonstrated that “contrary to its propaganda, the Vietnamese government does not respect the rule of law and does not want civil society to participate in the country’s energy transition” In response questions on Hong’s arrest, Nguyen Duc Thang, deputy spokesperson for the foreign ministry, said: “Vietnam has always affirmed its strong commitment in environmental protection and coping with climate change, green and sustainable development.

Tree-planting initiative



A tourist group plants mangrove trees at Angke Kapuk Nature Reserve Park in Jakarta, Indonesia.

US, China defence chiefs ‘speak briefly’ at Singapore summit

AFP
Singapore

US and Chinese defence chiefs spoke briefly yesterday, as the Australian prime minister called on both powers to reopen “reliable and open channels of communication”. US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin and his Chinese counterpart Li Shangfu spoke briefly at a security forum in Singapore, the Pentagon said, after Beijing had declined an invitation for a formal meeting. Austin and other US officials have been working to shore up alliances and partnerships in Asia to counter China, but there

have also been tentative signs the two sides are working to patch their relationship. The US had invited Li to meet Austin on the sidelines of the Shangri-La Dialogue security forum in the city-state, but China declined. Austin and Li “spoke briefly at the opening dinner of the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore. The two leaders shook hands, but did not have a substantive exchange,” Pentagon spokesman Brigadier General Pat Ryder said in a statement. Ryder added that the Pentagon believed in maintaining open lines of communications, “and will continue to seek meaningful military-to-military discussions at multiple levels to

responsibly manage the relationship”. Li was sanctioned by the US government in 2018 for buying Russian weapons, but the Pentagon has said that does not prevent Austin from conducting official business with him. A senior US defence official said it was good for the two to speak, but “a handshake at dinner is no substitute for sitting down and having a meaningful exchange”. “The next time they see each other, it should be for serious and substantive dialogue – and Secretary Austin will have more to say about why this matters when he speaks at the Dialogue’s first plenary session today.” Ties between Washington

and Beijing are frayed over several issues including Taiwan, which China regards as its territory, and the shooting down of an alleged Chinese spy balloon that flew over the US this year. Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese used a keynote speech at the forum yesterday to urge both powers to maintain communications to prevent incidents from spiralling out of control. He said Australia supports “the renewed efforts” by US President Joe Biden “to establish reliable and open channels of communication” between both governments. Albanese added that the “alternative, the silence of the

diplomatic deep freeze only breeds suspicion, only makes it easier for nations to attribute motive to misunderstanding, to assume the worst of one another”. “If you don’t have the pressure valve of dialogue, if you don’t have the capacity at a decision-making level to pick up the phone, to seek some clarity or provide some context, then there is always a much greater risk of assumptions spilling over into irretrievable action and reaction.” He also warned that “the consequences of such a breakdown, whether in the Taiwan Strait or elsewhere, would not be confined to the big powers” but “would be devastating to the world”.

Japan hit by heavy rains as tropical storm nears

Reuters
Tokyo

Parts of Japan were slammed by torrential rain yesterday as Tropical Storm Mawar neared, with authorities advising more than a million people to evacuate, many flights and other transport were cancelled and power outages hit thousands of homes. One person was seriously injured and seven people had minor injuries in the southern prefecture of Okinawa, as of early yesterday afternoon, according to the Fire and Disaster Management Agency. Mawar, which wreaked havoc on Guam earlier this week, has weakened to a tropical storm from its earlier super typhoon status. The bulk of the storm was expected to pass south of the main island of Honshu as it moved into

the Pacific, but forecasters said humid air from the storm could feed into a seasonal rain front, touching off heavy localised rains. Nearly 1.3mn people across the country were advised to evacuate, the fire and disaster management agency said, with the largest number in areas of western Honshu such as Wakayama prefecture. Just over 300 flights were cancelled as of noon yesterday, along with 52 ferries, the transport ministry said. The Shinkansen bullet train service was halted from Tokyo to Osaka, western Japan, as well as some other parts of the nation, NHK public broadcaster reported. About 8,900 households were hit by power outages, the report said. Toyota Motor suspended work at its two factories in Aichi prefecture, central Japan, for yes-

terday night to ensure employees were safe. Television footage showed several rivers close to the top of their banks by mid-afternoon and there was a report of flooding in Shizuoka prefecture in the evening. The JMA issued flood and landslide warnings for the western parts of Shikoku and Honshu islands, with forecasts of 13.8 inches of rain in parts of western Honshu in the 24 hours up to today morning. Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsumoto said people living in areas where heavy rainfall was expected should pay attention to evacuation notices and the latest weather information. Similar weather patterns have caused flooding and landslides in the past, most notably in the summer of 2018, when more than 200 people were killed in western Japan.



Pedestrians holding umbrellas make their way in the heavy rain in Tokyo, Japan, yesterday.

Australia’s war memorial mulls changing war hero display

Australia’s War Memorial said it was considering “additional content and context” for displays about its most decorated soldier, Ben Roberts-Smith, after a civil court ruling that found it was true he was involved in the murder of six Afghans. Roberts-Smith, 44, was previously seen as a national hero, winning top military honours including the Victoria Cross for his actions during six tours in Afghanistan, but on Thursday lost a defamation lawsuit against three newspapers that accused him of murdering Afghan civilians on tour. Roberts-Smith, who quit his television executive job yesterday, has not been charged with any offences. Australian civil courts require a lower threshold to prove accusations than criminal courts do. Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, noting it was a determination in a civil proceeding, told reporters yesterday: “That didn’t involve the government, and it would

be inappropriate to comment on the detail of that, given the potential that is then there for future action that the government might be a party to.” Australia has established an Office of the Special Investigator to work with federal police to examine allegations of criminal offences by defence force members in Afghanistan from 2005-2016. A four-year investigation known as the Brereton report found in 2020 that Australian special forces had allegedly killed 39 unarmed prisoners and civilians in Afghanistan. Australia referred 19 current and former soldiers for potential criminal prosecution as a result. Albanese confirmed his government would act on the findings of the Brereton report. The Australian Federal Police declined to comment yesterday on whether Roberts-Smith was among the cases under investigation, and referred questions to the special investigator’s office, which did not immediately respond.

LAW AND ORDER

British teen jailed over ‘imminent’ terrorism plot

A British teenager who detectives believe may have been just hours away from launching an attack on police or soldiers, was yesterday sentenced to a minimum of six years in jail for terrorism offences. Matthew King, 19, had scoped out military barracks and a police station, and posted an image online of officers guarding a courthouse with the caption “target acquired”. He had also discussed a desire to torture and kill a US or British soldier, said commander Dominic Murphy, head of London police’s Counter Terrorism Command. King, who pleaded guilty to preparing terrorist acts in January, was given a life sentence at London’s Old Bailey.

APPOINTMENT

Elan Closs Stephens named BBC acting chair

Britain yesterday appointed BBC board member Elan Closs Stephens as the public broadcaster’s acting chair, replacing Richard Sharp who resigned in a cronyism row involving his links to former prime minister Boris Johnson. Closs Stephens, a member of the BBC’s governing body since 2010, will remain acting chair from June 27 for a year, or until a new permanent chair has been appointed, the British government said. “When she takes over, Dame Elan will provide stability in the leadership of the BBC while a process to appoint a new permanent chair is run,” Culture Secretary Lucy Frazer said, using Closs Stephens’ honorific title.

FALLOUT

Scandal-hit UK business lobby plans job cuts

Britain’s biggest business lobby group confirmed plans to cut jobs after allegations of sexual harassment triggered an exodus of members. The Confederation of British Industry (CBI) has been mired in a scandal since the claims were made public this year, with reports earlier this week claiming the group could fold without major streamlining. “In light of the recent loss of some of our revenue, the CBI has to take some difficult decisions,” it said in a statement yesterday. “We need to reduce our salary cost base by a third among other likely cost saving measures going forward.” The CBI employs about 300 staff and is reportedly expected to offer voluntary redundancy in a bid to cut jobs.

PEOPLE

Birmingham Six member Callaghan dies aged 93

Hugh Callaghan, one of six men wrongly convicted for pub bombings in the city of Birmingham that killed 21 people in 1974, died this week at the age of 93, his lawyer said. The “Birmingham Six” were Irish men living in England who were rounded up after the bombings of the crowded Mulberry Bush pub and The Tavern. They spent 16 years in jail until they were exonerated and released in 1991. The bombings were the deadliest attack on the British mainland during “The Troubles” — 30 years of conflict between mostly Catholic nationalists, who favoured Northern Ireland’s unification with the Republic of Ireland, and mostly Protestant unionists wanting to stay in the United Kingdom.

DECISION

UK civil servants’ unions to consider new pay offer

British trade unions representing civil servants said yesterday they would review a new pay offer from the government following several days of strikes this year in a long-running dispute. The government said its one-off payment of £1,500 (\$1,878) for non-senior staff was part of the highest pay increase for the civil service in 20 years. “This is both fair to the taxpayer and a recognition of the financial pressures civil servants have faced over the last year,” Cabinet Office minister Jeremy Quin said in a statement. Trade unions including PCS, Prospect and FDA welcomed the offer, saying in separate statements after a meeting with Quin that they would review the details in the coming week.

Harry to become first British royal in 130 years to give evidence in court

Reuters
London

Prince Harry will become the first senior British royal to give evidence in court for 130 years when he testifies next week in his lawsuit against a newspaper group he accuses of unlawful behaviour.

Harry, King Charles’ younger son, will appear in the witness box at London’s High Court as part of the case he and more than 100 other celebrities and high-profile figures have brought against Mirror Group Newspapers (MGN), publisher of the Daily Mirror, Sunday Mirror and Sunday People.

It will be the first time a senior royal has given evidence since Edward VII testified as a witness in part of a divorce case in 1870 and 20 years later in a slander trial over a card game, both before he became king.

Harry, who is fifth-in-line to the throne, has barely been out of the headlines in the last six months over his legal rows with the British press and the release of his memoir and Netflix documentary series in which he accused other senior royals of colluding with tabloid newspapers.

His appearance in court is likely to attract worldwide attention.

David Yelland, a senior communications adviser and a former editor of Rupert Murdoch’s Sun tabloid newspaper - a publication Harry is also suing - said the royal family had long sought to avoid court cases, because they were not in control of the situation.

“These cases are often a case of mutually assured destruction. I don’t think anyone will get out looking great,” he said.

More than 100 people are suing MGN, with Harry and three others selected as test cases.

The trial, which began last month, has been told MGN journalists or private investigators commissioned by them carried out phone-hacking on an “industrial scale”, and committed other unlawful acts to obtain in-

formation about the prince and the other claimants.

This was done with the knowledge and approval of senior editors and executives, the claimants’ lawyer David Sherborne has said.

MGN is contesting the allegations and says senior figures denied knowing anything about hacking and had any wrongdoing concealed from them.

The court was told by a journalist and biographer of Harry that one of those who knew about hacking was former editor Piers Morgan, now one of Britain’s most high-profile broadcasters and an outspoken critic of the prince and his wife Meghan.

Morgan, who has denied any involvement in unlawful behaviour and has accused Harry of invading his own family’s privacy, left his job as a presenter on a TV breakfast show after making outspoken remarks about Meghan.

“It’s hard to escape the notion that he’s using the courts, because he knows that when he is in the witness box, he will be believed,” Yelland said. “It is the ultimate interview to be cross-examined by a hostile barrister in the witness box.”

At the start of the trial, MGN, now owned by Reach, apologised in court documents and admitted that on one occasion the Sunday People had unlawfully sought information about Harry and that he was entitled to compensation.

But it has rejected his other allegations, saying he had no evidence for his claims. Instead, Buckingham Palace is likely to feature prominently in Harry’s cross-examination, with MGN arguing that some information had come from royal aides.

MGN’s documents say one story about Harry came when his father’s former deputy private secretary and Morgan were having “regular meals and drinking sessions together”.

Harry has said that his family and their aides had been complicit in leaking negative stories to protect or enhance their own reputations. The palace has not commented.

Telangana Formation Day celebration



Telangana state’s New Secretariat building is seen illuminated with the colours of the Indian flag on the occasion of Telangana Formation Day in Hyderabad yesterday.

Indian PM to address joint meeting of US Congress

Reuters
Washington

US congressional leaders yesterday invited Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to address a joint meeting of the House of Representatives and Senate on June 22, one of the highest honours Washington affords to foreign dignitaries.

“During your address, you will have the opportunity to share your vision for India’s future and speak to the global challenges our countries both face,” House Speaker Kevin Mc-

Carthy, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell, and House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries said in a letter to Modi.

The speech would be Modi’s second to a joint meeting of the US legislature, a rare honour for a leader once denied a visa to enter the US over human rights concerns.

President Joe Biden is eager to deepen ties with the world’s largest democracy as part of his bid to win what he has framed as a contest between free and autocratic societies, especially China.

The White House announced last month that Modi was invited for an official state visit, despite advocacy groups’ concerns over what they see as a deteriorating human rights situation under his Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party. The state department’s annual report on human rights practices released in March listed “significant human rights issues” and abuses in India.

New Delhi has frustrated Washington by participating in military exercises with Russia and increasing purchases of the country’s crude oil, a source of funding for the war

in Ukraine. Washington has been pushing New Delhi to do more to punish Russia for the Ukraine invasion.

Addresses to joint meetings of Congress are generally reserved for the closest US allies or major world figures. The last was by South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol in April. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy addressed the House and Senate in December.

Several Indian leaders have made such addresses. Modi last did so in 2016. The first was Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru in 1949.

Modi’s relationship with

Washington has evolved since 2005, when the administration of then-president George W Bush denied him a visa under a US law barring entry to foreigners who have committed “particularly severe violations of religious freedom.” That stemmed from the killing of more than 1,000 people, mostly Muslims, in sectarian riots in the Indian state of Gujarat shortly after Modi became its chief minister. Modi denied wrongdoing.

In their letter, McCarthy, Schumer, McConnell and Jeffries said the address would celebrate the enduring friendship between the US and India.

TV streaming services ‘look to fight’ India tobacco rules

Reuters
New Delhi

Streaming giants Netflix, Amazon and Disney yesterday privately discussed a possible legal challenge and other ways to stall India’s new tobacco warning rules, amid fears they will need to edit millions of hours of existing web content, sources said.

The pushback is the latest headache for streaming giants in India, a top growth market. Companies often face legal cases and police complaints their content sometimes hurt religious sentiment, and many have self-censored content over the years.

As part of India’s anti-tobacco drive, the health ministry this week ordered streaming platforms should within three months insert static health warnings during smoking scenes. Also, India wants at least 50 seconds of anti-tobacco disclaimers, including an audio-visual,

at the start and in the middle of each programme. In first signs of industry distress, executives of the three global streaming companies, and India’s Viacom18 which runs billionaire Mukesh Ambani’s JioCinema app, held a closed-door meeting, where Netflix said the rules would hit customer experience and push production houses to block their content in India, according to two sources familiar with the discussions. Executives in India also discussed ways of a possible legal challenge to assert that other ministries — IT and information & broadcasting — have powers over streaming giants, and not the health ministry, said one of the sources.

The companies, and India’s health ministry, did not respond to a request for comment.

Already, all smoking and alcohol drinking scenes in movies in India’s cinemas and on TV, under the law, require health warnings, but so far there were no regulations for the stream-

ing giants, whose content has become increasingly popular. In 2013, Woody Allen starred his film, Blue Jasmine, from being screened in India after learning about mandatory anti-tobacco warnings would be inserted into its smoking scenes.

Activists have welcomed new anti-tobacco rules by India, the world’s second largest producer of tobacco that kills 1.3mn people each year in the country. India also has stringent cigarette pack warning rules.

Truth Initiative, a public health non-profit group, in March said 60% of the 15 most popular streaming shows among 15- to 24-year-olds it analysed contained depictions of tobacco, “effectively exposing 25mn young people to tobacco imagery” in 2021.

But in India, companies from Netflix to Amazon to Disney, also have popular Hindi content which often shows Bollywood actors smoking, something activists say encourages tobacco use.

Official visit



Britain’s King Charles III is welcomed by Romanian President Klaus Iohannis at the Cotroceni Presidential Palace in Bucharest, yesterday. Charles’ trip to Romania is his first abroad since he was crowned king on May 6.

India asks Germany to return two-year-old girl in foster care

India yesterday urged Germany to send back a two-year-old Indian girl who has been in its foster care system for more than 20 months, saying it is an infringement of her social, cultural and linguistic rights. The child, Ariha Shah, was taken away from her Indian parents by German authorities in Berlin in September 2021 when she was seven months old. Her father was working in Germany at the time, but the parents have since returned to India. Shah’s parents, according to Indian media reports, said she was accidentally injured by her grandmother who was visiting them from India, and authorities placed the girl in the custody of Germany’s Youth Welfare Office when they took her to a hospital. Her custody has since become a diplomatic issue, with New Delhi taking it up with Germany’s foreign minister during a visit to India in December. “We urge German authorities to do all that is necessary to send Ariha to India at the earliest, which is also her inalienable right as an Indian national,” Indian foreign ministry

spokesperson Arindam Bagchi told reporters yesterday. “Ariha’s continued placement in German foster care and infringement of her social, cultural and linguistic rights is of deep concern to the government of India and the parents,” he said. Bagchi said the child’s best interests can be fully realised when she is in her home country where her socio-cultural rights can be safeguarded. He said India has a robust child welfare and protection system, and there are potential foster parents in India who are willing to bring up the child in her own socio-cultural milieu if necessary. Germany’s foreign ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment. During a visit to India in December, German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said the child was well and its “well-being is the first priority”. She also said Germany was “bearing in mind the cultural identity of each child that is taken care of by the youth offices in Germany”.

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GULF

TIMES

Risk of downgrade still on the cards despite US debt deal

While a US default on its debt has been averted, the possibility of another credit rating downgrade remains, as 11th-hour debt ceiling negotiations have become an almost regular feature in recent US history.

The US Senate on Thursday passed bipartisan legislation backed by President Joe Biden that lifts the government's \$31.4tn debt ceiling, following months of bickering between Democrats and Republicans.

"The risk of a downgrade is exacerbated every time Congress flirts with the debt ceiling," said Calvin Norris, portfolio manager & US rates strategist at Aegon Asset Management, who sees another downgrade as still a risk.

Rating agencies could look at the way the negotiations around the government's borrowing cap were handled, in addition to fiscal considerations, analysts have said.

"The risk of a downgrade is exacerbated every time Congress flirts with the debt ceiling"

There is a precedent: in the 2011 debt ceiling crisis, rating agency Standard & Poor's stripped the US of its coveted AAA rating a few days after Washington narrowly averted a default, citing heightened political polarisation and insufficient steps to adjust the nation's fiscal outlook.

Economic damage from the 2011 and 2013 debt ceiling battles had a chilling impact. Without that political uncertainty, by mid-2015 GDP would have been \$180bn higher and there would have been 1.2mn more jobs, according to a 2021 Moody's Analytics study.

The US Government Accountability Office said delays in raising the debt limit in 2011 led to an increase in the Treasury's borrowing costs of about \$1.3bn that year.

"A second downgrade would matter, and perhaps more than even the first downgrade," said Wendy Edelberg, director of The Hamilton Project at the Brookings Institution.

"So much of the guidance that people take from ratings is the average rating across the three major rating agencies... The single downgrade didn't really have any bite in terms of changing the average," Edelberg said, referring to investment vehicles which are ratings sensitive.

The three major rating agencies – Fitch, Moody's, and S&P Global Ratings – rate US sovereign debt AAA, AAA, and AA+, respectively. Fitch and other smaller agencies recently placed their US credit ratings under review.

William Foster, senior vice-president at Moody's Investors Service, said the bipartisan debt deal met the agency's expectation of a resolution ahead of the so-called X-date.

With the debt limit suspended until January 1, 2025, the main drivers of the US rating returned to be "economic, institutional and fiscal fundamentals," he said.

Fitch yesterday said its rating will remain on negative watch despite the debt deal, as repeated political standoffs and last-minute debt limit suspensions lower "confidence in governance on fiscal and debt matters."

Investors use credit ratings as one of the metrics to assess the risk profiles of governments and companies. Generally, the lower a borrower's rating, the higher its financing costs.

A Moody's Analytics report from May said a downgrade of Treasury debt would set off a cascade of credit implications and downgrades on the debt of many other institutions.

Andy Sparks, head of portfolio management research at MSCI, said another downgrade by a major rating agency could have repercussions on investment portfolios that hold top-rated securities, but the impact on the Treasuries market would likely be marginal. "The reality is it is hard to find substitutes for Treasuries," he said.

A downgrade could push some money from Treasury funds into government funds or from government funds into prime money market funds, which have a broader credit exposure, according to money market fund expert Peter Crane, President of Crane Data.

"But I think anyone would take a single A Treasury over AAA commercial paper," he added. – Reuters

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In deforestation fight, can Brazil and Colombia lock in progress?

Deforestation falls in Brazil and Colombia

Law enforcement seen key to further progress

Criminal groups hold heavy sway in Amazon regions

By Anastasia Moloney & Fabio Teixeira
Bogota/Rio de Janeiro

Brazil and Colombia have put the brakes on Amazon deforestation during the last year, but must now tackle criminal groups and bolster law enforcement to lock in tentative progress to protect the world's largest rainforest, researchers say.

Deforestation in Brazil fell 68% in April from the previous year – a significant decline since President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva took office in January after pledging to reverse surging Amazon destruction under his predecessor Jair Bolsonaro.

"There's absolutely a Lula effect on the rates of deforestation, which has scared off some of the financiers of large deforestation operations," said Bram Ebus, a Bogota-based consultant with the International Crisis Group, a think-tank.

In Colombia too, nationwide tree clearance is forecast to have fallen 10% last year from 2021, with significant decreases in the country's Amazon region, according to Environment Ministry estimates.

But Ebus and other experts say addressing long-standing governance issues and targeting criminal groups should now be a priority for both Lula and Colombia's Gustavo Petro, a fellow leftist who has ramped up efforts to curb deforestation for farming, illegal gold mining and timber since becoming president in August 2022.

Without persistent efforts to do that, they could struggle to consolidate recent gains.

"The (Lula) government, no matter how good it is, won't be able to reverse four years in four months," said Marcio Astrini, head of environmental group Climate Observatory.

Spanning nine countries in South America, the Amazon is a key buffer against catastrophic climate change because of the vast amounts of planet-heating carbon dioxide it absorbs.

Lula has said it is urgent for Brazil to show the international community his government is committed to protecting the environment and on its way to fulfil a commitment to end deforestation by 2030.

He has empowered environmental agencies Ibama and the Chico Mendes Institute for Biodiversity Conservation (ICMBio) by boosting their budgets and rolling back policies introduced under Bolsonaro, who weakened the agencies by cutting their spending and staff.

In Brazil, deforestation is largely driven by forest being converted into pasture for cattle and soya, but also by illegal logging and mining involving organised crime gangs.

Bolsonaro had promoted more commercial farming and mining in the Amazon region, a policy Lula's

FILE PHOTO: A deforested and burnt plot in Jamanxim National Forest in the Amazon, near Novo Progresso, Para state, Brazil.

government is changing.

Government agencies launched an armed operation in February to fight wildcat mining by destroying machinery used by illegal gold miners and expel them from Brazil's largest Indigenous reserve, home to the Yanomami people.

But law enforcement operations tend to only temporarily halt illegal mining in a particular area. Mines soon spring up elsewhere in what is known as the "balloon effect" – squeezing mining out of one area can make it expand in others.

That means Brazil cannot rely solely on targeted operations but must focus on rooting out the criminal networks funding illicit activities across the Amazon, said Paulo Moutinho, senior scientist and co-founder at the Amazon Environmental Research Institute, IPAM.

"To deforest, you need a lot of money. There's someone financing this, and we need to cut (the financing)," he added.

To cut off finance, the government needs to build intelligence on the people behind the grabbing of public lands, which are the Amazon areas most vulnerable to deforestation, said Moutinho.

In the medium to long term, Brazil needs to set publicly owned forests for conservation, while investing in a plan to promote socioeconomic development in the Amazon to create a sustainable bioeconomy.

Next door in Colombia, Environment Minister Susana Mohamed attributes a drop in deforestation to a change in government strategy.

Deforestation fell between 15% and 25% last year in three Amazon provinces, Environment Ministry data showed in May.

In 12 of the country's national parks in the Amazon, deforestation during the first quarter of 2023 plunged to 398 hectares (3.98sq km), from 9,260 hectares (92.6sq km) in the year-earlier period.

Petro's government has sought to promote dialogue and agreements with poor farming communities to help preserve the forest and steer them away from illegal gold mining and coca growing run by organised crime groups, while bringing state services to remote rural areas.

But Petro's government will only be able to carry out such initiatives if the state increases its presence and control of the Amazon, which is currently either limited or non-existent, experts say.

"What we see right now is that it is not the state that is in control of the Amazon but rather non-state armed groups," Ebus said.

The issue of deforestation is on the negotiating table as part of exploratory peace talks between the government and more than a dozen criminal groups that aim to bring an end to six decades of bloodshed, including with dissident guerrilla groups.

Guerrilla commanders, including dissident members of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Farc), restrict forest clearance as a way to gain leverage during talks, to show their control over an area and population and for strategic reasons.

"The Farc dissidents want to show some good will. They know... that restricting deforestation strengthens their hand with any talks with the Petro administration," Ebus said.

Regions controlled by dissident guerrillas coincide with those areas that show a decline in deforestation, highlighting their influence.

Guerrilla groups also restrict forest clearance in certain areas for strategic reasons as they need forest cover to help them move around undetected.

Farmers living in areas controlled by dissident groups say they face a fine of 20mn pesos (\$4,484) for each hectare logged without permission from guerrilla commanders, Ebus added.

Deforestation could be the decreasing price for coca used to make cocaine – with potential profits being outweighed by the political leverage gained from stemming deforestation.

Yet it is still too early to tell if falling deforestation in both Brazil and Colombia is linked to government action and part of a sustained trend, some experts cautioned.

The decrease in deforestation rates recorded in April might simply reflect a declining trend before the dry season when forest fires are more common, typically peaking in August and September, said Moutinho.

During these months, after loggers extract valuable wood, ranchers and land grabbers set fires to clear the land for agriculture.

While falling deforestation in Colombia and Brazil show positive signs that years of surging destruction of the Amazon are starting to be reserved, tree clearance still happens on a huge scale.

In Brazil, April deforestation data is "a victory," said Astrini but he noted "the average is still bad." – Thomson Reuters Foundation

Globalisation's warring narratives

By Harold James
Warsaw

Globalisation brings the world together through the movement of people, things, ideas, money, and much else. But talk of globalisation has become increasingly divisive, with competing assessments of the process now splitting the globalised world itself.

While middle-income countries – emerging markets – remain gung-ho about tapping into global markets and globalisation-driven dynamism, and while many low-income countries see opportunities to leapfrog to greater prosperity with new technologies, the rich world is generally unhappy with the state of things.

In mature industrial societies like the US, the very idea of globalisation is met with suspicion, if not outrage. In keeping with the mood, BlackRock Chairman and CEO Larry Fink struck a chord last year when he proclaimed the end of globalisation, and politicians across the Western world have been touting "friend-shoring" and other forms of decoupling from China.

Most of these descriptions are new variants of an old mantra: Stop the world – I want to get off. Yet for all its power, the rhetoric about global fragmentation does not correspond to reality. The concept of deglobalisation may be everywhere in political speech, but it is not borne out by the statistics. Not only is world trade still expanding, but so, too, is US-China trade. Internet communications and data flows continue to grow exponentially, and, post-pandemic, people are once again moving across borders.

It is rich countries' unhappiness that makes contemporary debates so acrimonious. As globalisation's allure fades, it becomes more tempting to see the world economy as a zero-sum game: If you are winning, I must be losing; but if I can ensure that you are losing, I will be winning. Hence, the US strategy is to preserve a technological lead over China, not least by depriving it of the most advanced semiconductors. Even globally minded intellectuals who like the idea of competition now insist that the US can prevail in this race.

Yet this fixation on being "number one" naturally triggers a confrontational response, especially from other large economies that aspire to catch up to and overtake the US. The belief that the US will do anything to stop

China from becoming number one leads China to adopt zero-sum rhetoric of its own. Diplomats stop being diplomatic and become braying "wolf warriors."

Moreover, although China does not traditionally engage in alliances, the sense that it is under threat has led it to cultivate closer ties with Russia, another nuclear-armed country with an anti-Western stance. In the current context, a closer relationship with Russia looks like a potent way to augment China's own bid for global dominance.

The decoupling narrative thus creates a yo-yo effect in which both the US and China try to pull away, only to realise that they are both still dependent on the globalised economy – and each other. After making waves last year with her call for friend-shoring, US Secretary of the Treasury Janet L. Yellen (and National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan) is now backpedalling somewhat in an effort to repair the broken process of mutual engagement.

India, meanwhile, is experiencing a softer version of the same anxiety. Even though Indians appreciate the strength of their economic and personal ties with the US and see these as a foundation for effective development, they worry about the West's motives.

In India, as in most other emerging economies, this outlook reflects anti-colonialism (or decolonisation). Globalisation becomes a form of revenge for the abuses of empire, and rich former colonial powers' attempts to decouple or halt globalisation are viewed as new versions of the old colonial oppression. The struggle over the future of globalisation is a clash over historical legacies.

Disagreement about whether globalisation is

good or bad makes managing it much more difficult. The old institutions that were supposed to co-ordinate policies are under strain. The World Trade Organisation was crippled over a decade ago by the failure to achieve further global reduction of trade barriers, and then Donald Trump rubbed more salt in its wounds with his aggressively nationalistic trade policies. Similarly, while the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) are still vital, they now must work with a multitude of new, smaller, and narrowly focused co-operative institutions.

Around the turn of the century, politicians and economists debated whether the IMF should reinvent itself as an international lender of last resort. Then came the 2008 financial crisis, when it positioned itself as part of a structure comprising regional institutions and alternatives that China and Europe had developed (the 2000 Chiang Mai bond initiative, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the European Stability Mechanism, and so forth). Now, managing international money is about co-ordinating an ever-denser network of regional bodies. That task requires effective communication, but such dialogue is often obstructed and frustrated by disputes over the language and political valence of globalisation.

Is there a way out of the impasse? Can we rid ourselves of the suspicions preventing stronger global co-operation? One prerequisite is for everyone to recognise that the combination of new technology and enhanced interconnectedness has fundamentally unknowable (and thus uncontrollable) implications. No one can ever accurately predict which country will end up as number one.

The linked processes of globalisation and technical change can easily lead the world into a trap. Not only are outcomes uncertain, but the uncertainty is paralyzing. The task of government is thus to provide some assurance. The more effective it is in doing so, the less cause there will be for suspicious minds, and the less the world will be divided by anxiety about "winning" and "losing" – Project Syndicate

● Harold James, Professor of History and International Affairs at Princeton University, is the author of The War of Words: A Glossary of Globalisation (Yale University Press, 2021).

Italian coastguard detains two NGO migrant ships

Reuters/AFP
Rome

Italy has impounded two rescue ships run by German charities for breaching tougher migration rules introduced by the country's right-wing government, the Italian coastguard said yesterday.

The MareGo organisation said it disobeyed instructions to take 36 migrants it picked up on Thursday to the Sicilian port of Trapani, taking them instead to Lampedusa island, saving itself hours at sea.

The rescue ship is blocked for 20 days in Lampedusa, the non-governmental organisation (NGO) in a statement, adding it would also "likely face a fine" for breach of new legislation sponsored by Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni.

The Italian coastguard confirmed that it had impounded that vessel as well as a second ship, the Sea-Eye 4, which had docked in the coastal town of Ortona in eastern Italy, with 49 migrants on board.

The Sea-Eye 4 had picked up 17 people in the Libyan search and rescue zone, followed by a further 32 migrants in Italian waters, the coastguard said.

The Italian law, approved by parliament in February, requires charity-run ships to head to port immediately after a rescue, preventing them from carrying out multiple operations at sea.

Italian authorities have also started instructing ships to head to more distant ports, not just in Sicily but further up the Italian peninsula, in some cases hundreds of kilometres away.

Meloni said in December that the clampdown on charity ships was needed to stop them from acting as "ferry boats" for migrants, going "back and forth with human traffickers to shuttle people from one country to the other".

Her government's new rules, however, have failed to curb sea migration inflows.

Around 50,400 landings have been recorded so far this year, up from around 19,700 in the same period of 2022, according to the interior ministry.

US says more nuclear arms not needed to deter Russia, China

Reuters/AFP
Washington

The United States does not need more nuclear weapons to deter the combined forces of Russia and China because of its advanced military capabilities, US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said yesterday.

He also said that Washington will abide by the limits on strategic nuclear weapons set in the 2010 New START treaty until the pact's 2026 expiration as long as Russia does the same, and it is eager for arms control talks with both Moscow and Beijing.

His speech to the Arms Control Association advocacy group represented the latest US overture to its main geopolitical rivals to help repair what he called "major cracks" in the decades-old global system designed to avert nuclear war.

Moscow and Beijing have so far

spurned those overtures.

China, in a tense standoff with the United States over Taiwan as it expands its nuclear arsenal, has declined to engage in a conflict risk reduction dialogue with Washington and this week refused talks between their defence ministers.

The Pentagon says that China is likely to more than triple its nuclear arsenal to 1,500 warheads by 2035.

Russia, which has threatened to use nuclear weapons in its war against Ukraine, said in February that it was suspending participation in New START, a move denounced by Washington as "irresponsible and unlawful".

On Thursday, the United States ended notifications required by the pact halted by Russia earlier this year.

The last US-Russia strategic arms control accord, New START capped the number of strategic nuclear warheads the sides can deploy at 1,550.

It also limits the number of land- and submarine-based missiles and bombers

to deliver them at 700.

Sullivan noted that for years, rival nations would hive off from other contentious issues "strategic stability" talks to reduce the risks of nuclear confrontation.

The US is pursuing "new strategies" to deal with the new era, he said, including modernising its nuclear forces and developing cutting-edge conventional weapons like hypersonic missiles "that will sustain our military for decades".

With China's expanding nuclear arsenal, the United States for the first time may confront two major nuclear-armed rivals where it had faced only Russia.

However, Sullivan said advanced US military capabilities and strengthened alliances could deter conflict with both.

"The United States does not need to increase our nuclear forces to outnumber the combined total of our competitors in order to successfully deter them," he said.

"Nor does the United States need to

deploy ever more dangerous nuclear weapons to maintain deterrence," he continued. "Rather, deterrence means we have a 'better' approach, not a 'more' approach."

The United States is eager to begin without preconditions conflict risk reduction talks with China and discussions with Russia on a strategic arms limitation pact to replace New START when it expires in February 2026, he said.

"While claiming to suspend New START, Russia has also publicly committed to adhere to the treaty's central limits, indicating a potential willingness to continue limiting strategic nuclear forces through 2026. We agree," Sullivan said.

Saying that "an open-ended competition" in nuclear arms is in neither's interests, he said Washington is "prepared to stick to (New START's) central limits as long as Russia does".

"Rather than waiting to resolve all

of our bilateral differences, the United States is ready to engage Russia now to manage nuclear risks and develop a post-2026 arms control framework," Sullivan continued.

That pact, however, would have to take account of China's growing nuclear arsenal, he said.

"The type of limits the United States can agree to after the treaty expires will, of course, be impacted by the size and scale of China's buildup," he said. "That's why we're also ready to engage China without preconditions."

A US official told reporters that the China factor not only involves the need for Washington to manage the threat directly but to consider the ripple effects created for US nuclear allies Britain and France, whose own smaller arsenals are largely directed at countering Russia.

Agreements with China "of course will affect our ability to come to some sort of accord with the Russians," the official said.

Nato membership 'impossible' amid ongoing war: Zelensky

AFP/Reuters
Kyiv

President Volodymyr Zelensky acknowledged yesterday that Ukraine would not be able to join the Nato before the end of the Russian invasion.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February last year has galvanised the Western military alliance, set up almost 75 years ago, to face off against the Soviet Union.

However, members of the military bloc are split over Ukraine, with Nato chief Jens Stoltenberg saying that all members agree to stick by a 2008 pledge that Ukraine will become a member at some undefined point.

"We are reasonable people and we understand that we are not going to drag a single Nato country into a war," Zelensky said during a briefing along Estonian President Alar Karis.

"Therefore, we understand that we will not be members of the Nato while this war is going on. Not because we don't want to, but because it's impossible," he added.

Ukraine is a candidate to join both the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato) and the European Union but some European capitals are wary of setting a formal timeline for membership as Russia's invasion continues.

Joining the Nato would mean Ukraine would be covered by the alliance's Article 5 collective defence clause that obliges all members to help defend it if attacked.

Yesterday's comments were a rare admission by the Ukrainian president, who



Zelensky and Estonian President Alar Karis after a joint press briefing in Kyiv.

has stepped up pressure on the Nato and the European Union to open their doors to Ukraine since the beginning of Russia's invasion in February last year.

On Thursday, Zelensky told a summit in Moldova that any doubts European leaders show before admitting Kyiv into the Nato alliance will embolden Russia to attack more countries.

An option being weighed is major powers offering Ukraine bilateral secu-

urity assurances in the years before it becomes a full Nato member.

Meanwhile, the British defence minister, Ben Wallace, has said that Britain supports adding Ukraine to the Nato and "that path is open" to them, although political realities may slow the process.

He added yesterday on the sidelines of the Shangri-La Dialogue security meetings in Singapore that it is not possible to add members in the middle of a war, and

that the way forward is to continue aiding and arming Ukraine for both short- and long-term security.

"The best thing we can do to help Ukraine is now to help them defeat Russia," Wallace said in an interview. "After that is to make sure they're ready and capable and resilient."

Ukraine's membership of the Nato is on the agenda for the group's July summit in Vilnius, Lithuania.

Hanna Shelest, director of Ukrainian Prism, a think tank specialising in foreign policy and international security, said in Singapore that Nato membership would be a political decision.

"We are not expecting to see a strong decision (about Ukraine's membership) at Vilnius," said Shelest, who is based in Ukraine. "But at a minimum we are hoping for a detailed roadmap."

Britain has, alongside other Western allies, provided Ukraine with billions of dollars' worth of assistance and weapons after Russia's invasion, which Moscow calls a "special operation".

Most recently, London supplied Storm Shadow cruise missiles, which Wallace said had been 100% successful in striking targets.

Security assurances for Ukraine are also in play, Wallace said, noting that such guarantees could range from mutual defence pacts to providing arms and ammunition.

There were few downsides to doing so, he added.

Wallace, whose has been mentioned as a possible successor to Nato Secretary-General Stoltenberg, said that he "wouldn't say no if he was offered it", but that it was up to members to decide.

Kosovo PM accuses Serbia of planning clashes

AFP
Pristina

Kosovo's prime minister has accused Serbia of orchestrating clashes between ethnic Serbs and Nato-led peacekeepers amid intensified Western pressure on both Belgrade and Pristina to ease tensions.

More than 80 people, including 30 peacekeepers, were injured in a north Kosovo town on Monday when North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato)-led KFOR troops clashed with ethnic Serb protesters who threw rocks, bottles and Molotov cocktails.

"The escalation of the situation on May 29 was planned, well-organised and had an author," Kosovo Prime Minister Albin Kurti told the lawmakers in parliament. "The author is official Belgrade."

Kurti accused Serbia of having "mobilised criminal groups" to provoke the clashes and said many Kosovo Serbs were "forced (by Belgrade) to serve as human shields for such criminal attacks".

Kosovo's ethnic Serb minority boycotted April local elections in the volatile north, allowing ethnic Albanians to take control of local councils despite a turnout of less than 3.5%.

Many Serbs are demanding the withdrawal of Kosovo special police forces as well as the ethnic Albanian mayors they do not consider as their true representatives.

Since Monday's clashes in Zvecan, hundreds of ethnic Serbs have gathered daily in front of the town hall which is sealed off with barbed wire and encircled by KFOR troops in full riot gear.

Kurti estimated that the rallies are held upon orders from Belgrade.

He did not announce any concrete measure to ease tensions.

On Thursday, French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said after meeting Belgrade and Pristina leaders on the sidelines of a summit that they had urged Kosovo to allow fresh elections in four disputed municipalities.



A woman with her child stands outside the Zvecan town hall in northern Kosovo yesterday as tensions remained high after clashes earlier this week.

United States Secretary of State Antony Blinken also urged both Pristina and Belgrade to dial down the tensions, warning they were putting their aspirations of European integration at risk.

Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic said he had talked with EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell about the "irresponsible behaviour of Pristina institutions".

"We want peace, not tear gas and shock bombs" and "We are not criminals, we just want freedom", read some of the banners carried by the protesters yesterday in front of the Zvecan town hall.

Municipal employees want Kosovo special police to immediately leave the town

hall so that they can return to work, the protesters' representative Natasa Aksentijevic told reporters.

"We want peace to reign here ... and that the fake mayor does not come to our Zvecan since we didn't elect him," she told reporters.

Serbs, who make up around 6% of Kosovo's majority-ethnic Albanian population, have remained largely loyal to Belgrade, especially in the north where they are a majority.

Kosovo declared independence from Serbia in 2008, but Belgrade - along with allies China and Russia - still do not recognise the move.



People chant slogans while carrying banners to demand the release of human rights activist and lawyer Jibran Nasir, during a protest in Karachi.

Human rights activist abducted in Karachi

Prominent Pakistani human rights activist and lawyer Jibran Nasir was abducted late on Thursday night in the southern city of Karachi, his wife said, prompting widespread outcry in the country.

No law enforcement agency has confirmed that Nasir is in their custody, but his abduction comes as the country is mired in a fresh bout of political turmoil.

Mansha Pasha, Nasir's wife, said the two were driving home when they were intercepted by a white pickup truck and a sedan.

"After that, at least 15, probably more men in civilian clothing came and told Jibran to get out of the car," Pasha, a well-known actor, told Reuters yesterday, adding that all the men were armed, some with automatic weapons.

She said they gave no explanation as to why Nasir was being taken.

Pasha said that she tried filing a case with the police, but they were reluctant to register it officially.

A spokesman for the provincial government of Sindh did not respond to a request for comment.

Nasir, who contested the 2018 elections as an independent candidate, has been an outspoken critic of multiple human rights violations in the country and represented victims as a lawyer in a number of prominent cases.

Lately, he has criticised the mass arrests of leaders from former prime minister Imran Khan's party and the move to try them in military courts following violent protests earlier this month.

Leading journalists have been abducted in similar circumstances, and Pakistan's powerful intelligence services are often suspected of intimidating critics in this way, though their involvement has rarely been proved. - Reuters

Mexico police find 45 bags with human remains

AFP
Mexico City

At least 45 bags with human remains were found in a ravine in the western Mexican state of Jalisco during a search for eight people reported missing last week, local authorities said on Thursday.

"Forty-five bags with human remains have been extracted that belong to both" males and females, the state prosecutor's office said in a statement.

The gruesome discovery was made on Tuesday at the bottom of a 40m (120') ravine in the municipality of Zapopan, a suburb of Guadalajara, a large industrial hub.

The authorities had launched a search for two women and six men, all aged around 30 years, who had been reported missing since around May 20.

The missing person reports for each one had been made separately on different days, but investigators found that they all worked at the same call centre.

The call centre was in the same area where the human remains were discovered.

Forensic experts have yet to determine the number of victims or their identities.

Initial inquiries suggested the call centre could have been involved in illegal activities, and local media reported that the authorities had found marijuana, a cloth and a cleaning rag with apparent blood stains as well as documents on possible commercial activities.

However, relatives of the missing accused the authorities of seeking to portray the victims as criminals.

In recent years, human remains have been found in bags or unmarked graves in different areas of Jalisco.

In 2021, in the municipality of Tonala, in Jalisco, about 70 bags with the remains of 11 people were found.

And in 2019, the bodies of 29 people were found in 119 bags in an unpopulated area of Zapopan.

Another case that sparked numerous protests in Jalisco was the disappearance in March 2018 of three film students, whose remains were dissolved in acid.

Also in 2018, media reported that three Italians disappeared, allegedly handed over by police to the Jalisco New Generation cartel, to whom they had allegedly sold faulty machinery.

The Italians have not been found despite searches by state and federal law enforcement.

According to local media, in the first two months of this year alone, the remains of 33 people were found in five makeshift graves in the Guadalajara area.

The Jalisco New Generation cartel operates in the state and is one of the most powerful organised crime groups in Mexico.

Mexico has recorded more than 340,000 murders and some 100,000 disappearances since the launch of a controversial military anti-drug offensive in December 2006.



Doha Fashion Fridays by Aparna Jayakumar.



Farid Aouad's *Metro scene*, 1960-1970. ('Beirut and the Golden Sixties: A Manifesto of Fragility' exhibition) **PICTURES:** Qatar Museums



Eduardo Navarro's *Twisted Sister*.



Dil Kayas' work for "I Am The Traveler And Also The Road" exhibition.



A Chance To Breathe by Azimul Hasson.



'I Am The Traveler And Also The Road' exhibition displays the work of Omal Khair.



A visit to Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art in Education City provides a deeper understanding of an important chapter in Beirut's modern history.

Qatar abuzz with displays of history, art and culture

From Page 1

The exhibition, running until August 5, showcases a diverse array of paintings, sculptures, multimedia works, and archival materials of 37 artists and offers a compelling glimpse into the development of modernism in the city.

Tracing "a brief but rich period of artistic and political ferment", the QM noted that the exhibition delves into "a romanticised era of global influence in Lebanon's capital to highlight how collisions between art, culture and polarised political ideologies turned the Beirut art scene into a microcosm of larger regional tensions".

The exhibition explores the impact of the Lebanese banking secrecy law of 1956, which saw the influx of foreign capital into the city.

This led to the flourishing of commercial galleries, independent art spaces, and museums, making Beirut a thriving hub of artistic expression.

However, underneath the surface of prosperity, simmering tensions eventually erupted into a 15-year civil war, the QM added.

Also running at Mathaf until August 5 is the "I Am The Traveler And Also The Road" exhibition, which puts together the perspectives of 12 extraordinary photographers working in West Asia and North Africa (Wana) region.

Each of the photographers featured in the exhibition

was a recipient of the prestigious Sheikh Saoud Al-Thani Project Award in 2021 and 2022.

This annual grant, created by Tasweer Photo Festival Qatar, empowers photographers living in the Wana region to develop or complete their photographic projects.

Another thought-provoking QM exhibition is the "Olafur Eliasson: The Curious Desert", in two locations: the National Museum of Qatar (until August 15) and the desert near the Al Thakhira Mangrove in northern Qatar serving as an open-air artistic laboratory.

Twelve temporary pavilions present site-specific installations that seamlessly integrate the forces of nature.

Harnessing the power of wind, water, and sunlight, these captivating artworks embark on a perpetual journey of transformation, continuously evolving throughout the day and the duration of the exhibition.

A unique QM programme, Zwara, has also been attracting design enthusiasts as it welcomes visitors to navigate a series of ongoing exhibitions, archives, and collections at M7, Msheireb Downtown Doha.

Running until September 10, this initiative provides a unique opportunity to witness the vibrant and innovative creative landscape of Qatar firsthand.



Simone Baltaxé Martayan's *The Workers*, c. 1950-1959. ('Beirut and the Golden Sixties: A Manifesto of Fragility' exhibition)



The exhibition, running until August 5, showcases a diverse array of paintings, sculptures, multimedia works, and archival materials of 37 artists.



Windy and dusty today in Qatar

Qatar experienced strong wind and slight dusty conditions yesterday, with minimum temperature in the 27-33° Celsius range and maximum in the 33-41C range. Today's forecast is also strong wind, poor horizontal visibility and blowing dust, according to the Met office. The offshore forecast also adds high sea until afternoon. The temperature forecast for today is a minimum in the range of 26-31C and maximum in the 33-41C range. Pictured here is the situation on the Doha Corniche yesterday. **PICTURE:** Shajji Kayamkulam