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Amir congratulates Egyptian 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 President of the Arab Republic of Egypt Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, on the occasion of his country's National Day. HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani sent a cable of congratulations to Egyptian Prime Minister Dr Mostafa Kamal Madbouly, on the occasion of his country's National Day. **(QNA)**

Unesco condemns Russia strike on Odesa

Unesco yesterday condemned Russia's "brazen" attack on Ukraine's Odesa, which hit several sites in the port city's World Heritage centre. "Unesco is deeply dismayed and condemns in the strongest terms the brazen attack carried out by the Russian forces, which hit several cultural sites in the city centre of Odesa, home to the World Heritage property 'The Historic Centre of Odesa'", the Paris-based body said in a statement. The strike killed at least two people and notably damaged the Transfiguration Cathedral, originally built in 1794 under imperial Russian rule. **Page 11**

Barbie trounces *Oppenheimer*

With legions of pink-clad moviegoers swarming theatres, Warner Bros' *Barbie* conquered North American box offices in its debut weekend, raking in $155mn, Sunday estimates showed — nearly double the cash of its second-place competitor. The other half of the much-anticipated *Barbenheimer* cinematic weekend — which saw Universal's much darker biopic *Oppenheimer* released the same day and spurred hundreds of thousands to organize their own double features - brought in its own whopping $80.5mn, according to figures from Exhibitor Relations. **Page 6**

Right-wing bloc set to win majority in Spain election

Spain could have its first far-right participation in government since the days of Francisco Franco after surveys taken in the final week of campaigning showed the centre-right People's Party (PP) and the anti-Muslim, anti-feminist Vox winning enough seats in yesterday's election to form a coalition. A PP/Vox government would represent a significant ideological shift in Spain after nearly four years under a left-wing coalition of the Socialists (PSOE) with the far-left Unidas Podemos. **Page 11**

Twitter's blue bird to be replaced by an X

Twitter Inc owner Elon Musk yesterday signalled he would do more to take the social media company in a new direction with a rebranding that will replace its well known blue bird logo with an X after acknowledging advertisers have been slow to return. The change, which was not evident on the website yesterday afternoon, followed Musk's recent admission that advertising revenue remains nearly half of what it once was. And Twitter's cash flow has been negative as a result of that and its heavy debt load. "Interim X logo goes live later today," Musk said on Twitter adding that "X.com" would now redirect to Twitter's website. Musk's X Corp owns Twitter. **Page 6**

Qatar calls for measures to stop desecration of Holy Qur'an, sanctities

QNA
Doha

Qatar condemned in the strongest terms the burning of a copy of the Holy Qur'an in the Danish capital, Copenhagen, stressing that this heinous incident was an act of incitement and a serious provocation to the feelings of more than two billion Muslims in the world.

In a statement yesterday, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs warned that allowing the repeated infringement of the Holy Qur'an under the pretext of freedom of expression fuels hatred and violence, threatens the values of peaceful coexistence, and reveals abhorrent double standards.

The ministry reiterated Qatar's total rejection of all forms of hate speech based on belief, race, or religion and using sanctities in political disputes. It also warned that the campaigns of hatred against Islam and the discourse of Islamophobia witnessed a dangerous escalation with the continued systematic calls for the repeated targeting of Muslims in the world.

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

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

The Muslim World League (MWL) has condemned - in a strongly worded statement issued in Makkah Al Mukarramah- the crime of burning a copy of the Holy Qur'an, by extremists in the Danish capital, Copenhagen.

The Secretary-General of the Organisation of Islamic Co-operation (OIC) Hissein Brahim Taha has condemned in the strongest terms the burning by an extremist group of a copy of the Holy Qur'an in front of the Iraqi embassy in Copenhagen.

In a statement, Taha expressed deep dissatisfaction with the repeated incidents of transgression against Islamic sanctities, which constitute incitement to religious hatred, intolerance and discrimination, warning of their dangerous consequences.

He urged the Danish government to take the necessary measures to prevent the recurrence of such provocative acts and avoid their repercussions, pointing out that the right to freedom of expression and opinion entailed responsibilities under international law.

Reuters adds from Frankfurt: German Defence Minister Boris Pistorius has cancelled a planned trip to Iraq and Jordan, a ministry spokesperson said, citing security concerns after the Swedish embassy in Baghdad was set alight last week in a protest over Qur'an burnings.

On Saturday, several thousand Iraqis demonstrated in Baghdad over the recent burning or damaging of copies of the holy book during anti-Islam protests in Sweden and Denmark.



Amir sends message to Iranian president

● Ebrahim Raisi invited to visit Qatar

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani sent a written message to President of the Islamic Republic of Iran Ebrahim Raisi, inviting him to visit Qatar. HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Mohamed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh al-Khulaifi delivered the message during his meeting yesterday in Tehran with Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs Dr Hossein Amir-Abdollahian. **(QNA)**

Amir appoints ambassador to UAE

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani yesterday issued Amiri Decision No 57 of 2023 appointing Dr Sultan Salmeen Saeed al-Mansouri as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to the United Arab Emirates. The decision is effective starting from its date of issue, and is to be published in the official gazette. **(QNA)**

Tourists, residents flee wildfires on Greek island of Rhodes



Thousands of tourists and residents fleeing wildfires on the Greek island of Rhodes took refuge in schools and shelters yesterday, with many evacuated on private boats as flames threatened resorts and coastal villages. Fire and smoke rise from the wildfire on the island, yesterday. **Page 11**

QM to restore 6 heritage mosques

With a view to giving a facelift to old mosques and preserving heritage, the Qatar Museums (QM) has chalked out a plan to restore six such mosques across the country.

As per the plan, Al Zeghain mosque, Al Suwaihiliya and Umm Al Qahab along with Simsimah Mosque at Al Kaaban City, Faisal Bin Thani Mosque at Al Ghuwairiya and Muawiyah Bin Ayyad Mosque at AlJamiliyah will be restored through preservation works. The restoration of the heritage mosques comes within QM's vision for archaeological sites to become sources of inspiration for future generations to explore Qatar's past and learn about its history.

Cultural Heritage Conservation director Adel Abdullatif al-Moslamani told local Arabic daily Arrayah that QM has reached an agreement with Qatar Tourism and the Ministry of Endowments (Awqaf) and Islamic Affairs to restore the mosques. Al-Moslamani noted that QM has determined the technical conditions and working process for the restoration operations while preparing the engineering plans. Awqaf will allocate the fund that will be delivered next year.



Al Zeghain mosque.



Al Youssef Mosque at Old Salata.

Al-Moslamani said comprehensive periodic maintenance work will be carried out for Al Youssef Mosque at Old Salata. Numbered 130, the mosque is one of the oldest in the country and it has a distinctive architectural character with a cylindrical minaret. Due to its deteriorating condition and the precipitation of the outer layer as a result of humidity and weather factors and the presence of dense trees, a plan has been drawn up for its maintenance while cleaning the site and removing trees in co-operation with Doha Municipality.

QM is renovating mosques at residential areas as a destination for worshippers. This is with the aim of preserving its historical identity and to be a witness of the past while providing present and future generations with an ideal edifice that tells about the country's history. **To Page 2**

NHRC launches heat stress awareness campaign

QNA
Doha

The National Human Rights Committee (NHRC) announced the launch of a campaign to raise awareness about the impact of heat stress on workers' right to life and physical, mental, and psychological health.

The campaign aims to raise awareness of the importance of concerted efforts by all stakeholders, foremost of which is the commitment of employers and workers to follow the provisions approved by the state regarding the prevention and prohibition of work in high-temperature places, which protect them from heat stress, especially workers in the construction industry, and delivery service sectors, which would enhance the national progress made in the field of protecting the rights of expatriate workers.

HE the Chairperson of the NHRC Maryam bint Abdullah al-Attiyah said that over the past few years, Qatar has been able to safeguard human rights aimed at ensuring human dignity and enjoyment of the right to a decent life based on the foundations of freedom, justice, equality, and tolerance; based on its Arab and Islamic values, its social and human traditions, its belief in the rule of law, and its role in protecting human rights in its comprehensive and integrated sense, which constitutes the basic foundation for national legislation, policies, and practices capable of enabling people to improve their lives for the better, as well as achieving sustainable development that is acceptable to noble human values.



HE al-Attiyah said there is no doubt that respecting, protecting, and fulfilling human rights is one of the priorities for the NHRC, mainly since expatriates from around 195 countries, whose climatic conditions differ from Qatar, work in the country.

Al-Attiyah added that those expatriate workers share the Qatari citizens in the rights and freedoms stipulated in the permanent Constitution of Qatar, as well as in international and regional human rights conventions based on the principle of equality and non-discrimination. **To Page 2**

QATAR

Barwa Real Estate in deal to sell two land plots in Lusail

Barwa Real Estate has announced that Lusail Golf Development Company, fully owned by Barwa Group, has reached an agreement to sell two land plots in Lusail with a total area of 3.47mn sq m.

The total agreed selling price is QR6.36bn to be collected over the period from the date of completing the sale to the second quarter of 2024. The full proceeds from the sale will be used to settle financial obligations within the group.

It is targeted to complete all necessary procedures for the sale process during the third quarter of 2023. Lusail Gulf Company purchased the land plots in 2010 and 2014.

The book value of these plots is QR5,890mn as shown in the consolidated financial statements as at March 31, 2023. The group has recorded valuation losses related to the same plots amounting to QR522mn in the net fair value gain on investment properties in the consolidated financial statements of the company in 2022.

The estimated profits from the sale transaction will be announced after the completion of the sale and transfer of ownership to the buyer, in order for the group to calculate all costs and expenses related to the land.

The sale transaction is part of Barwa's strategy to divest from non-performing assets, which allows for a reduction in financial obligations and financing costs, which have recently seen a significant increase in global markets.

This will have a positive impact on the group's cash flows, financial position, and financial indicators. It also contributes to directing operating cash towards developing the income-generating investment portfolio and achieving sustainable growth in shareholder returns.

Pregnant women warned of summer heat health risks

Most women experience increase in body temperature during pregnancy and this makes them more sensitive to high temperatures. Because of this they need to take extra precautions to avoid overheating on days of extreme heat, which can make them feel unwell and can affect them more severely than the average adult, a health expert has warned.

"Several studies have suggested that during the first 12 weeks of pregnancy, developing babies can be affected by the heat. Getting hot causes a mother's blood vessels to narrow as she tries to cool herself down, reducing the amount of blood and nutrients that pass through to her unborn baby," said Dr Hussein Omran, consultant Family Medicine, PHCC's Umm Al Seneem Health Centre.


Dr Hussein Omran

Many women say they feel hotter during pregnancy. But there is limited evidence to suggest pregnant women's core body temperature is any higher than usual because of pregnancy.

Yet warmer weather can certainly make pregnant women feel hotter and more uncomfortable. Hot weather can also lead to dehydration, fatigue, heat exhaustion, fainting or even heatstroke. It is, therefore, very important to keep cool when pregnant.

Signs of heat exhaustion include dizziness, confusion, loss of appetite, feeling ill, heavy sweating, paleness, cramps in the arms, legs, and stomach, rapid breathing or pulse, and a high temperature of 38C or above, in addition to intense thirst.

"If a person shows signs of heat exhaustion, you should cool the person down and moved out into a cool place in the shade or indoors. Lay the person down and elevate the legs. Have the person sip a good amount of water to hydrate their body. Cool the person by spraying or sponging with cool water and fanning," noted Dr Omran.

To prevent heat-related illnesses, he has advised pregnant women to avoid overexertion. If a pregnant woman's body temperature rises above 39.2C in the first 12 weeks of pregnancy, her unborn baby has a slightly increased risk of developing a birth defect.

It is therefore best to avoid overexertion, particularly in the first trimester of pregnancy. If there is a sudden heatwave and it is very hot and humid, they need to take it easy and avoid exercising. Having a cool bath during a heatwave can help you feel less hot. If you are having a bath, the water temperature should not be above 32C.

Avoiding the sun can help prevent melasma also called pregnancy mask. Melasma is a common skin condition in which brown or grayish patches of pigmentation develop. It usually develops on the face. This condition is more common in women, especially during pregnancy. Up to 50% of women may be affected.

One of the most important things to prevent melasma worsening is protecting from UV radiation. It is better to avoid going out in the hottest parts of the day, as well as avoiding trips or shopping when temperatures are at their highest levels.

Al-Khulaifi meets Iranian official


HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Mohamed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh al-Khulaifi met yesterday in Tehran with Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) of Iran Ali Ahmadian. The meeting discussed bilateral relations and ways to enhance and develop them, as well as several regional and international issues of mutual interest. (QNA)

Chadian FM meets Qatar's envoy


Chad's Minister of Foreign Affairs, African Integration, International Co-operation and Chadians Abroad, Mahamat Saleh Annadif, met with Qatar's ambassador in N'Djamena, Talib bin Mohamed al-Mankhas. The meeting discussed bilateral relations. (QNA)



HMC appoints chief of scientific, academic and faculty affairs

Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC) has appointed Dr Jassim Mohamed al-Suwaidi as chief of scientific, academic and faculty affairs in addition to his current role as senior consultant, cardiology with immediate effect.

Dr al-Suwaidi started his career at HMC in 1991 after graduating from the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (Honors) and subsequently rejoined HMC in 2000 after completing postgraduate training at Mayo Clinic, USA and becoming American Board certified in Internal Medicine, Cardiovascular Diseases and Interventional Cardiology (received Mayo Clinic Outstanding Achievement Award in Cardiovascular Research 2000).

Dr al-Suwaidi has been actively involved in HMC's academic strategies and developments as executive director of Cardiovascular Research since 2013.

Dr al-Suwaidi has also been a professor of Clinical Medicine at Weill Cornell Medicine - Qatar since 2018, is past president of the Gulf Heart Association and to date has more than 300 peer reviewed publications in addition to research presentations in most of the prestigious international cardiology meetings.


Dr Jassim Mohamed al-Suwaidi

Qatar takes part in GCC traffic directors' meeting


Qatar has participated in the 39th meeting of the GCC General Directors of Traffic which was held in Riyadh from July 17-23. The Qatari delegation to the meeting was headed by Acting Director-General of Traffic Brigadier Abdulaziz bin Jassim al-Thani. The meeting discussed a number of issues related to following up on the results and recommendations of the minutes of the 38th meeting. Also, it reviewed the most important results and reports of the technical teams specialised in programmes and plans for awareness and traffic safety, linking traffic violations between the GCC countries and other related topics.

QM to restore six heritage mosques

From Page 1


Al-Moslamani

QM has listed 67 mosques as ancient. Al-Moslamani added that the department has plans for immediate restoration and maintenance of any historical mosque by a specialised team.

QM has employed experts under the supervision of Qatari specialists to give training courses for workers who carry out restoration work in archaeological buildings. The QM official said traditional materials are used in the restoration of mosques and archaeological buildings to maintain the importance and authenticity of the archaeological site.

He explained QM has preserved the architectural identity of many historical buildings across the country while preserving many old mosques.

NHRC heat stress awareness campaign

From Page 1

She indicated that Qatar belongs to a geographical area whose climate is characterised by high temperature and humidity during summer.

She said that given the fact that there is a large percentage of expatriate workers who work in sectors exposed to direct sunlight or in workplaces with high temperature even if they are shaded, such as the construction, gardening and industries sectors, in addition to delivery workers, there is an urgent need to continue national efforts to protect expatriate workers from heat stress.

The Chairperson of the NHRC pointed out that the general and main objective of the campaign is to raise awareness of both employers and workers about the importance of enforcing the ministerial decree No 17 of 2021 regarding the necessary precautions to protect workers from the dangers of heat stress during the summer period, which stipulates a ban on work during peak heat hours and other measures.

This awareness campaign results in the effective application of the relevant laws and prevents the excuse of ignorance.

Regarding the sub-goals of the campaign, al-Attiyah said that the most prominent of which is securing the enforcement of legal provisions related to working conditions and protecting workers from heat stress.

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

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صدق الله العظيم

We extend our sincere condolences to

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

His Highness
Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al Thani
Father Amir

His Highness
Sheikh Abdullah Bin Hamad Al Thani
Deputy Amir

And to the brother of the late

His Excellency
Sheikh Khalid Bin Hamad Bin Abdullah Bin Jassim Al Thani

And to the sons of the late

His Excellency
Sheikh Hamad Bin Mohammed Bin Hamad Bin Abdullah Bin Jassim Al Thani

His Excellency
Sheikh Abdul Aziz Bin Mohammed Bin Hamad Bin Abdullah Bin Jassim Al Thani

His Excellency
Sheikh Jassim bin Mohammed bin Hamad bin Abdullah bin Jassim Al Thani

In the death of the late, God willing

Sheikh Mohammed Bin Hamad Bin Abdullah Bin Jassim Al Thani

Praying to Allah to rest his soul in paradise

إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ

جنغل زون
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الشركة القطرية للأسواق المركزية
QATAR CENTRAL MARKETS COMPANY

حياة بلازا
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Vodafone Qatar unveils Motorola Razr 40 Ultra



Motorola Razr 40 Ultra

Vodafone Qatar has officially launched Motorola's new Razr 40 Ultra device, and is now available in select stores and online.

The new Motorola Razr 40 Ultra has a modern, ultra-pocketable design and when closed is the thinnest flip-phone in the industry, featuring a combination of a glass frame with a matte finish or a vegan leather for the back cover.

The Razr 40 Ultra includes the powerful Snapdragon 8+ Gen 1 Mobile Platform which fuels all the unique features of the device while enabling performance boosts, such as advanced AI, fast refresh rates, 5G connections, and a professional-quality camera. Motorola has also included a long-lasting battery that is larger than the previous generation and supports ultra-fast 30W TurboPower charging and wireless charging.

Featuring Flex View Technology, this will allow users to place the device on its own at multiple angles, offering new ways to interact, capture, and create. The device can also be used as a tripod to capture stunning images and videos with hands-free recording, benefiting from the high-quality camera, AI face tracking, and previews on the large external display. The 3.6" pOLED external display, is the largest display of any flip-phone, offering high resolutions and has also been enhanced to allow users to easily respond to messages, view directions on map applications, and be constantly up-to-date with all incoming notifications, through unique features, including custom panels, customisation, games, as well as a dedicated Spotify panel.

Sharay Shams, general manager, Motorola Middle East, said: "The Motorola Razr has always been synonymous with innovation and style, and we are proud to introduce its latest embodiment in Qatar. Packed with a host of state-of-the-art features and a sleek foldable design, the new Razr represents the pinnacle of modern engineering, creating a seamless balance between design and functionality. The Motorola Razr disrupted the market as the world's first clamshell foldable smartphone, catering to consumers chasing a balanced smartphone experience at the intersection of style-driven self-expression and cutting-edge technology."

Orhan Uzal, consumer business unit director at Vodafone Qatar, commented: "We are excited to launch the all new Motorola Razr 40 Ultra to our customers. Underpinned by our super-fast GigaNet network, we always aim to deliver the latest cutting-edge technology, so that we can continue to use innovation to unlock new opportunities both at home and work." The new Motorola Razr 40 Ultra will be available in the Pantone Colour of the Year 2023, Viva Magenta, Infinite Black and Glacier Blue, and is priced at QR3,999.

LuLu Hypermarket Qatar brings back 10/15/20/30 promotion



LuLu Hypermarket Qatar has announced the highly anticipated return of the 10/15/20/30 promotion, set to take place from July 24 to August 6.

This promotion is back by popular demand, and customers can once again avail incredible discounts on more than 1,500 products across various categories, including grocery, fresh food, fruits, vegetables, household items, textiles, footwear, health & beauty products, sports goods, home decor, stationery, toys, electronics, and much more.

The specialty of the 10/15/20/30 promotion lies in its comprehensive range of products carefully selected to meet the diverse needs of our valued customers. LuLu Hypermarket Qatar is committed to offering top-quality items at affordable prices, making this promotion truly outstanding. Whether it's everyday essentials or special treats, LuLu has arranged all commodity lines to welcome back customers after their summer vacation. Additionally, the hypermarket has thoughtfully organised all back-to-school and office stationery items to cater to the needs of students and professionals alike.

A spokesperson from LuLu management expressed their excitement about the promotion, stating: "The 10/15/20/30 Promotion has always been a runaway success, and every year, we endeavour to add more product lines that are tailor-made to the regular use of our customers, to spice up the promotional campaign."

To add even more value and excitement to this promotion, LuLu Hypermarket Qatar has prepared an array of special offers. The Hot Food and Bakery sections have crafted tailor-made innovative value combo offers encompassing various cuisines such as Arabic, Western, Chinese, South Indian and North Indian, along with a wide range of bakery delights to complement the main-stream promotion.

Moreover, shoppers have the chance to win big through the "Win 1.5Kg Gold and LuLu Gift Card" promotion. For every purchase of QR 100/- or more, customers receive an E-Raffle coupon to stand a chance to win 1.5Kg Gold or a LuLu Gift Card worth QR 100,000/-. There will be 50 lucky winners for each category, making this promotion even more enticing. LuLu Hypermarkets have consistently strived to provide a wide selection of global products at the best rates, catering to the multi-ethnic community of the region. With their commitment to high-quality offerings and an organised logistics system, LuLu remains the favourite shopping destination for many.

According to the LuLu management: "We have always been dedicated to extending a better shopping experience to our valued customers, and we will continue our sustained efforts in this regard with highly innovative promotions in the future as well to keep our customers happier."

CUC Ulster University introduces bachelor of engineering in Artificial Intelligence programme

CUC Ulster University has announced the launch of a groundbreaking Bachelor of Engineering in Artificial Intelligence (AI) programme.

The programme, which stands as the only one of its kind in the area, aims to equip students with the necessary skills and knowledge to thrive in the rapidly evolving field of artificial intelligence.

Aligned perfectly with the ambitious Qatar National Vision 2030, the Bachelor of Engineering in Artificial Intelligence programme at CUC Ulster sets a benchmark for the integration of advanced technology and cutting-edge education in the region. As Qatar aspires to become a knowledge-based economy, the importance of AI cannot be overstated, making this programme a prime opportunity for students seeking to contribute to the nation's progress.

Artificial Intelligence has emerged as a transformative force, revolutionising industries across the globe. Its applications range from autonomous vehicles and smart cities to healthcare advancements and personalised recommendations. Recognising the immense potential of AI, CUC Ulster University has created a curriculum that not only imparts theoretical knowledge but also



Dr Faris Gorashi

fosters practical skills. Dr Faris Gorashi, executive dean of CUC Ulster, stated: "We are committed to providing our students with world-class education and preparing them for the future. We believe that AI is the cornerstone of technological innovation, and by offering this unique programme, we aim to position Qatar as a leader in the region's AI landscape."

The programme has been meticulously designed to equip students with a comprehensive understanding of AI concepts, algorithms, machine learning, data science, and ethics. Students will have access to state-of-the-art facilities and a faculty composed of renowned experts in the field. Practical projects and industry collaborations will provide them with hands-on experience, allowing them to apply their skills to real-world challenges.

Dr Gorashi further elaborated: "Artificial intelligence has already transformed various industries, from healthcare and finance to transportation and entertainment. Its potential for driving economic growth and solving complex problems is immeasurable. By offering this programme, we are equipping students with the tools and knowledge to harness AI's power and contribute to the ongoing advancements in Qatar and beyond."

With the launch of the Bachelor of Engineering in Artificial Intelligence programme, CUC Ulster University aims to set new standards in technological education and research. By empowering students with AI expertise, the programme seeks to unlock innovative solutions, foster entrepreneurship, and contribute to Qatar's vision of becoming a technology-driven hub.

THE TORCH DOHA

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Tender No.	Subject	Tender Fee	Closing Date
AT/C/0949/23	Supply & Delivery of Chemicals for Stewarding, Housekeeping & Laundry on call-off basis for 2 years	QR.500/-	3.08.2023
AT/C/0952/23	Supply of Casual Cleaning Labors on Call-off Basis for 2 years	QR.500/-	3.08.2023
AT/C/0953/23	Supply of Casual Kitchen Cooks on Call-off Basis for 2 years	QR.500/-	3.08.2023
AT/C/0983/23	Provision of Staff Medical Insurance for 1 year	QR.500/-	3.08.2023

The tender documents are available for collection from the Finance Department (Tel.: 44465612) of The Torch Doha upon presentation of a formal letter of authorization on Company letterhead, copy of the Commercial Registration and a non-refundable fee as specified above.

The closing time will be at 12.00 noon on the closing date mentioned above, any offer arriving thereafter will not be considered.

Tenders **(Technical and Commercial envelope separately in duplicate)** are to be submitted in a sealed envelope addressed to The Chairman, General Tender Committee, The Torch Doha and deposit in the tender box available at The Torch Doha Purchasing Office.

اللجنة الأولمبية القطرية
Qatar Olympic Committee

QATAR OLYMPIC COMMITTEE
PUBLIC TENDER ADVERTISEMENT

The Tenders and Auctions Committee at Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC) announces the issuing of the following tenders:

Tender NO #	Subject	Tender Bond QR.	Tender Documents Fee QR.	System of Tender Submission	Last Date for tender documents Collection	Closing Date
FD2024/CN /VN/013/2023	Provisioning of Network services as a Call-Off Agreement for the 21st FINA World Championships Master's Championships Doha 2024	45,000	500	2-Separate Envelopes	06/08/2023	13/08/2023
FD2024/ CN/VN/010/2023	Design, Production & Supply of WCH Medals & Trophies and WCHM Medals for the 21st FINA World Championships Master's Championships Doha 2024	15,000	500	2-Separate Envelopes	06/08/2023	13/08/2023

- Tender documents Fee: QR. 500.00 to be paid at, The Finance Department on the 14th floor of the QOC Building and is non-refundable at all cases.
- Collection of Tender Documents from the Tenders and Auctions Committee on the 6th floor on the QOC Building West Bay. (Against submission of a copy of C.R. and authorization letter)
- **Last Date for Tender Document Collection: at 12:00 on the date indicated above. No Tender Documents will be released thereafter.**
- **Closing Date: At 12:00 on the Closing Date specified above. No tenders will be received thereafter.**
- All forms and schedules attached to the Tender Document, including the Tender Form and its appendices, shall be completed, and endorsed as required and shall be returned together with the other sections of the Tender Document including the original + a copy of the same. Tenders are to be submitted following the 2-separate envelope system (technical and commercial) 1 original and 2 copies) along with 2 soft copies USB flash memory (one technical in the technical envelope, one commercial in the commercial envelope).and any tender not complying with this requirement shall be disregarded.
- A Tender Bond in the form of a provisional bank letter of guarantee from a Qatari bank or endorsed by a bank operating in the State of Qatar shall be submitted together with the Tender. The bond shall be valid for a period of 180 days after the Closing Date as indicated above and shall be in the same format attached to the Tender Document.
- The tender Bond shall be submitted in the envelope enclosing the technical bid any bidder that will not submit the tender bond with his bid on the closing date will be disqualified.
- Bidder are required to submit samples if requested as per the specification in the tender documents and any tender not complying with this requirement shall be disqualified.
- The successful Bidders shall be required to submit a Performance Bond in the value of 10% of the accepted tender value.
- The Committee shall have the right to increase or decrease the quantities up to 20% of the Contract Value.
- The Committee reserve the right to split the award of this Tender to more than one bidder, based on lowest prices submitted, maintaining compliance with required specifications and delivery dates.
- The Committee shall have the right not to accept the lowest bid without giving any reason.
- The Tender shall be valid for a period of 180 days after the Closing Date.
- Request for additional information or clarifications received less than five working days before the closing date for submission of tenders will not be processed.
- Tenders are to be submitted in sealed envelopes to the Tenders and Auctions Committee at the 6th floor on QOC Building-west Bay, along with a soft copy USB flash memory inside each envelope. You are also required to provide a single point of contact (name, email, direct phone, mobile) for any further queries regarding this tender.
- For any queries, please contact us by email to stc@olympic.qa.

OPPO launches Reno10 Series with pro-level camera

OPPO, has announced the launch of its latest Reno10 series, featuring the all-new Reno10 Pro+ 5G, Reno10 Pro 5G, and Reno10 5G.

Yuan Meng, country manager, OPPO Qatar said, "Putting our customers first, the Reno series has consistently impressed with its exceptional performance, and the latest series takes user experience to new heights. With advanced camera capabilities, including the introduction of a telephoto camera, and seamless performance, we continue to push the boundaries of innovation with every launch. Our goal is to deliver products that enrich the lives of our customers, and we are eagerly anticipating the market's response to these releases."

With its Ultra-Clear Portrait Camera System, the Reno10 series provides a pro-level portrait imaging experience housed within the signature slim, lightweight, and trendy design of the OPPO Reno series.

Together with up to 100W SUPERVOOC flash charging, a powerful SoC, the Dynamic Computing Engine, ColorOS 13, and a fast-charging, safe and long-lasting battery supported by OPPO's Battery Health Engine and SUPERVOOC S power management chip, the Reno10 series delivers unrivalled all-round performance.

The Reno10 Pro+ 5G offers a remarkable Ultra-Clear Portrait


Officials at the launch event.

Camera System for professional-quality portraits.

It features a 64MP telephoto portrait camera with a large f/2.5 aperture, 25cm minimum focus distance, and a large 1/2'' camera sensor, creating an unprecedented portrait shooting experience. The telephoto portrait camera on Reno10 Pro+ 5G also boasts the highest megapixels among smartphones with telephoto cameras currently on the market.

The telephoto portrait camera is available on all three Reno10 series models.

Both the Reno10 Pro 5G and the Reno10 5G feature a 32MP telephoto portrait camera powered by an IMX709 RGBW sensor, which improves light capture by 60% and signal-to-noise by 35% compared with a standard RGGB sensor. These models offer flawless high-quality portrait images with 2-times optical zoom.

Furthermore, the Reno10 Pro+ 5G's rear camera system also includes a 50MP Ultra-Clear Main Camera with OIS and a Sony IMX890 sensor, and a 112° 8MP Ultra-Wide Camera with a Sony IMX355 sensor.

Measuring 8.28mm in thickness and weighing only 194g, the Reno10 Pro+ 5G stands out as the slimmest smartphone on the market with a periscope telephoto camera. For thinner and lighter options, the Reno10 Pro 5G and the Reno10 5G both weigh 185g and measure 7.89mm and 7.99mm respectively, giving the Reno10 series professional performance in a slim and light design that no other phones can match.

The Reno10 series are now available to pre-order across Qatar and retail at a recommended retail price of QR2,999 for the Reno10 Pro+ 5G, QR1,999 for the Reno10 Pro 5G, QR1,499 for the Reno10 5G.

Ministry recalls Bentley Bentayga, Genesis GV80 and GV70 models

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI), in co-operation with Al Wajba Motors, Qatar's Bentley dealership, has announced the recall of Bentley Bentayga, model year 2022 because the rear seat frame is not fixed properly and may move in the event of an accident.

●The Ministry of Commerce and Industry, in co-operation with Skyline Automotive, Qatar's Genesis dealership, has announced the recall of Genesis GV80 and GV70, 2019-2023 models because some vehicles may experience a malfunction in the front seat belt pretensioners, which may cause the pretensioners to slip.

The ministry said the recall campaign comes within the framework of its ongoing efforts to protect consumers and ensure that car dealers follow up on vehicle defects and repairs.

The ministry said that it will co-ordinate with the dealer to follow up on the maintenance and repair works, and will communicate with customers to ensure that the necessary repairs are carried out. The ministry has urged all customers to report any violations to its Consumer Protection and Anti-Commercial Fraud Department, which processes complaints, inquiries, and suggestions through: Call Center: 16001; E-mail: info@moci.gov.qa; The Ministry of Commerce and Industry's social media accounts; Twitter @MOCIQATAR; Instagram MOCIQATAR; The Ministry of Commerce and Industry's mobile application available on iPhone and Android devices MOCI_QATAR.

Iraq offers to mediate end to Yemen war

AFP
Baghdad

Iraq has offered to mediate between warring parties in Yemen in an effort to end the country's years-long war, Iraq's top diplomat said at a press conference yesterday.

Iraqi Foreign Minister Fouad Hussein put forward the proposal during a visit from his Yemeni counterpart.

Houthi rebels seized the capital Sanaa in 2014, before a military coalition intervened the following year on the side of the country's internationally recognised government.

Hundreds of thousands of people have died in the fighting or from indirect causes such as lack of food in what the United Nations has called one of the world's worst humanitarian crises.

A six-month truce brokered by the United Nations expired in October last year, but fighting has largely remained on hold.

"Currently, there is an unofficial truce. In practice, there is some form of ceasefire... We hope this situation leads to dialogue between all Yemeni parties," Hussein emphasised during a press conference with Yemeni Foreign Minister Ahmed bin Mubarak.

"Iraq is ready to help in this matter. We have good relations with all parties. We can use our influence for stability and security in Yemen, and we can act on a regional level," he stated.

Baghdad has consistently tried to highlight its role as a regional mediator, and hosted several rounds of relatively low-level talks between regional rivals Iran and Saudi Arabia from April 2021. In March, Riyadh and Tehran announced a resumption of diplomatic relations in a surprise deal brokered by Beijing. The reconciliation raised hopes for peace in Yemen. "Unfortunately, for now, we have not seen any direct impact of this agreement on the situation in Yemen," the Yemeni minister said in his speech.

"But we remain hopeful," he added. "We believe the time has come to put an end to this war in Yemen."

In April, Riyadh's ambassador to Yemen, Mohamed al-Jaber, travelled to Sanaa as part of a plan to "stabilise" the truce. Although no deal was struck, Jaber later said warring parties are serious about ending the conflict.

New forum aims to tackle Syria-Jordan drug smuggling

AFP
Amman

A new forum to combat drug smuggling from war-ravaged Syria through Jordan to the Gulf states held its first meeting in Amman yesterday, the Jordanian foreign ministry said.

The forum was agreed during talks between Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi and Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in Damascus earlier this month as regional concern mounts over an influx of the banned stimulant captagon from Syria.

The Syrian delegation was headed by Defence Minister General Ali Mahmud Abbas and General Intelligence Director, Major General Husam Louka. Jordan's was led by the chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff, Major General Yousef Huneiti, and General Intelligence director, Major General Ahmed Husni, the Jordanian ministry said.

The talks "went over the issue of the parties that organise, run and carry out smuggling operations across borders to Jordan, as well as necessary measures to... confront this escalating danger to the entire region", the ministry said.

Jordanian security forces have tightened border controls in recent years and occasionally announce thwarted drugs and weapons smuggling attempts from Syria.

There has been increasing regional engagement with Assad's government since its readmission to the Arab League in May, ending more than a decade of isolation since civil war erupted in Syria in 2011.

Summer boat ride, swim in Gaza City



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

Sudan conflict enters 100th day as mediation bids fail

Reuters
Dubai/Khartoum

Clashes flared in parts of Sudan on the 100th day of the war yesterday as mediation attempts by regional and international powers fail to find a path out of an increasingly intractable conflict.

The fighting broke out on April 15 as the army and paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) vied for power, since when more than 3mn people have been uprooted, including more than 700,000 who have fled to neighbouring countries.

Some 1,136 people have been killed, according to the health ministry, though officials believe the number is higher.

Neither the army nor the RSF has been able to claim victory, with the RSF's domination on the ground in the capital Khartoum up against the army's air and artillery firepower.

Infrastructure and government in the capital have fallen apart while fighting has spread westwards, particularly to the fragile Darfur region, as well as to the south, where the rebel SPLM-N group has tried to gain territory.

Over the weekend, the RSF moved into villages in Gezira State directly south of Khartoum, where the army conducted air strikes against them, according to witnesses.

In Nyala, one of the country's largest cities and capital of South Darfur, clashes have continued since Thursday in residential areas, according to witnesses. At least 20 people have been killed, medical sources say. The UN says 5,000 families have been displaced. Key facilities have been looted, residents say.



Unicef Deputy Executive Director Ted Chaiban (right) is greeted upon landing at the airport in Port Sudan, yesterday.



Employees count bills at the Central Bank in Port Sudan, yesterday.

"Bullets are flying into homes. We are terrified and no one is protecting us," said 35-year-old Salah Abdallah.

The fighting gave way to ethnically targeted attacks by militias and the RSF in West Darfur, from which hundreds of thousands of people have fled to Chad.

Residents have also accused RSF soldiers of looting and occupying wide swathes of the capital. The RSF has said it would investigate. While the two sides have shown openness towards mediation efforts led by regional and international actors, none has resulted in a sustained ceasefire.

Both sides have sent delegations to attempt to re-start talks in Jeddah that have yielded often-violated ceasefires.

But the Sudanese foreign minister said on Friday that indirect talks had not begun seriously.

SECURITY

DR Congo set to 'monitor' humanitarian firms

The DR Congo government has announced plans to "monitor" international humanitarian organisations, citing security concerns in a country plagued by armed conflict, AFP reported from Kinshasa. President Felix Tshisekedi "has received a number of reports which point to security issues surrounding certain humanitarian institutions operating in the Democratic Republic of Congo," government spokesman Patrick Muyaya, told state broadcaster RTNC. "Faced with this situation," he said, "it would be appropriate to carry out checks on non-governmental organisations carrying out their activities on national territory in order to ensure that all their activities comply with the laws and regulations in force in our country." It is "unacceptable," said Muyaya, "that there are abnormal connections either in the sources of funding or in the supervision of certain NGOs by expatriate staff with a military or paramilitary background, which gives rise to legitimate suspicion that there is a real risk that some NGOs, under the guise of humanitarian activities, will engage in or contribute to subversive actions on national territory." Muyaya mentioned no organisations by name, but said the new measures would focus in particular on changes in NGOs' activities and the areas in which they operate.

Congolese soldier guns down 13, mainly children

AFP
Bunia, DR Congo

A distraught Congolese soldier shot dead at least 13 civilians, most of them children, in a village in the northeast of the conflict-plagued country, military and local sources said yesterday.

The naval serviceman couldn't bear the fact that his child had been buried in his absence, the day before he arrived in the village of Nyakova, according to testimonies gathered by AFP.

Nyakova is a fishing village in the Djugu territory, about 65 kilometres east of Bunia, the capital of Ituri province, one of eastern DR Congo's violence hotspots, where deadly attacks are common.

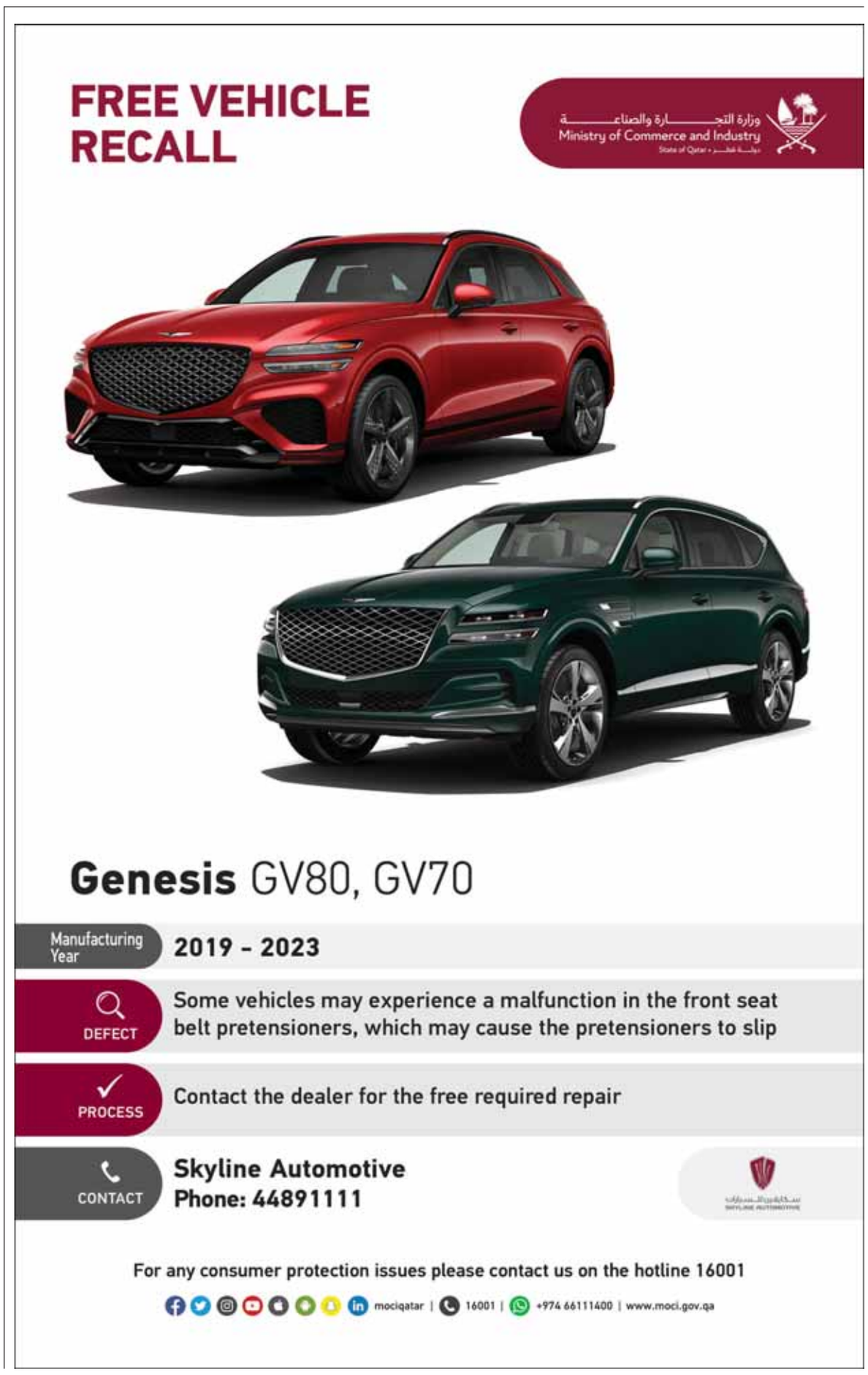
The angry soldier "fired on civilians" gathered on Saturday evening "at the place of mourning, on the grounds that... his child had died and been buried without him being informed", army spokesman Lieutenant Jules Ngongo said. The soldier had been with his unit in Gobu, 55 kilometres away.

The death toll is "13, including his two children. The soldier is on the run and is wanted" for trial, he added.

The Kivu Security Tracker (KST), a respected conflict monitor, confirmed the circumstances of the tragedy and said the death toll included "10 children and two women who were said to have taken part in the funeral of his son, who died in his absence".

12 die in Cameroon building collapse

At least 12 people were killed and 21 injured, five seriously, yesterday when a building collapsed in Cameroon's business hub Douala, firefighters and local authorities said, AFP reported from Yaounde. The four-storey block collapsed onto another residential building around 1:00am (0000 GMT) in the north of the city, a senior fire brigade official said on condition of anonymity. Charles Elie Zang Zang, a Douala municipal councillor, added rescue services were searching through the rubble for survivors. Douala's Laquintinie hospital stated it had taken in 13 patients and said two – a girl of three and a young woman of 19 – had died.
It added three other children among those injured were receiving emergency paediatric treatment. Five people died in similar circumstances in Douala in 2016 when authorities blamed poor state of repairs and apparent violations of building regulations. In June that year, local authorities identified 500 buildings in danger of collapse.



WORLD

‘Barbenheimer’ frenzy gives sluggish summer box office a major boost



This picture taken on July 12 shows actress Margot Robbie at the European premiere of *Barbie* in London.

AFP
Los Angeles

Warner Bros’ *Barbie* conquered North American box offices in its debut weekend as it raked in a stunning $155mn, while the other half of the movie-going event of the summer, the dark biopic *Oppenheimer*, also scored big with $80.5mn in revenue, industry estimates reported yesterday.

Legions of pink-clad moviegoers swarmed theatres to give *Barbie* the biggest opening weekend of any film this year – and the biggest ever for a female director – said industry monitor Exhibitor Relations.

The much-anticipated “Barbenheimer” cinematic weekend, during which *Barbie* and Universal’s *Oppenheimer* were both released, spurred hundreds of thousands of people to take in both flicks, organising their own double features.

The coincidental same-day release of the two starkly different but highly anticipated films – one following an iconic doll ready to paint the world pink and the other about the scientist who helped invent the atomic bomb – created a bottom-up pop-culture phenomenon that transcended the individual marketing for either.

Together, they also provided a shot in the arm for theatres hit hard by the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic as well as the rise of streaming services.

“The subtext of the joke of ‘Barbenheimer’ is that these couldn’t be two more different movies,” David Gross of Franchise Entertainment Research told AFP.

At the same time, he added, “the movie industry has a very healthy record of accommodating two big pictures. Moviegoers go when there are hot movies”.

In a note yesterday, Gross wrote that the opening for *Barbie* was “record-shattering”.

“No comedic film of any kind has opened higher than $85.9mn over a three-day weekend,” he wrote. “Barbie has become what we call a zeitgeist movie. It seems to be hitting a chord.”

Oppenheimer, for its part, saw a “superb opening”, Gross wrote.

According to industry estimates, some 200,000 people were thought to have purchased tickets to both films on the same day.

Emma McNealy, 35, was one of them.

“I had heard online people were planning to do it and it sounded funny to me,” the account manager told AFP. “At first I wasn’t planning to because I didn’t feel like anyone else would want to spend the whole day doing this for the bit, but luckily a friend was in.”

While both films fuelled interest in the other, it was *Barbie* that pulled her in to try the double feature.

“I am sure I would have watched (*Oppenheimer*) eventually, but not on opening weekend,” she said. “I think many women like that a Barbie is getting more layers in this telling, it’s not just candy-coated fluff.”

Millions more were likely to catch both films on separate days.

“This was a phenomenal experience for people who love movies on the big screen,” president and chief executive of the National Association of Theatre Owners Michael O’Leary said in a statement yesterday, adding: “It was a truly historic weekend.”

The “Barbenheimer” films together left a massive gulf between the weekend’s top two box office spots and the number three slot, occupied by *Sound of Freedom*.

The controversial action thriller from Santa Fe Films and Angel Studios, which critics say plays into QAnon conspiracy theories, brought in $20.14mn.

Fourth and fifth place saw the sort of franchise sequels that have come to dominate box office recently.

Paramount’s *Mission: Impossible – Dead Reckoning Part One*, the latest in the long-running series starring Tom Cruise, brought in $19.5mn.

Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny, from Disney, brought in $6.7mn. This “Indy” episode, likely the last, again stars Harrison Ford as a whip-cracking archaeologist.

Flooding in Canada leaves four missing

AFP/Reuters
Montreal

Four people in Canada, including two children, were reported missing on Saturday in flooding triggered by torrential rains in Nova Scotia, police said.

The children were in a car that was submerged, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) said. The three other people in the car managed to escape.

In a separate incident in the eastern province, a youth and a man were reported missing under similar circumstances, the police agency said.

Heavy rains falling since Friday in Nova Scotia have cut off roads and flooded homes.

Premier Tim Houston told a news briefing that the province had received some 25cm (10”) of rain – the equivalent of three months’ rainfall – in less than 24 hours.

He declared a state of emergency in several areas of the province and urged residents not to join the search for the missing as “conditions remain dangerous”.

He estimated that it would take several days for the water to recede.

“We have a scary, significant situation,” said Houston, adding that at least seven bridges would have to be replaced or rebuilt.

“The property damage to homes ... is pretty unimaginable,” he said, adding that the province would be seeking significant support from the federal government.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau told reporters in Toronto that he was very concerned about the floods and promised that Ottawa “will be there” for the province.

People in the Windsor region got evacuation orders in the middle of the night because of the danger that flooding would cause the breach of a dam.

Relief valves were opened early on Saturday to reduce pressure and the situation is now under control, said Windsor Mayor Abraham Zebian.



A vehicle is stuck in a damaged road following flooding, in West Hants Regional Municipality, Nova Scotia, Canada.

News footage and images on social media showed roads that looked like rivers and many cars abandoned in the water.

Environment Canada’s weather service said heavy rain was expected into the evening in the eastern part of the province.

The flooding was the latest weather-related calamity to pound Canada this year.

Wildfires have already burned a record number of hectares, sending clouds of smoke into the United States. Earlier this month, heavy rains caused floods in several eastern US states.

Washington state wildfire threatens homes, farms, and gas pipeline

A fast-growing wildfire forced residents to evacuate a rural stretch of southern Washington state’s Klickitat County on Saturday, after it burned more than 30,000 acres in less than 24 hours.

The Newell Road Wildfire has already destroyed several structures in the area and is threatening homes, farms, crops and livestock, solar and wind farms and a natural gas pipeline, county emergency officials said.

The fire was also moving toward the Yakama Indian Reservation, Allen Lebovitz, a spokesperson for the state’s Department of Natural Resources, said in an interview in Bickleton, a community of about 80 people about 120 miles (190km) east of Portland, Oregon.

“It’s very difficult terrain to fight fire,” Lebovitz said. “We are under a red flag warning. That’s a firefighter’s worst nightmare because the humidity is dropping precipitously. The winds are picking up. And so the fire carries extremely fast.”

Firefighters from across the area have descended on the blaze that is burning just north of the Columbia River, which marks the state’s border with Oregon. ***– Reuters***

30% chance of cyclone formation over Caribbean, Gulf of Mexico

A tropical wave over the Caribbean Sea and the Gulf of Mexico has a 30% chance of becoming a cyclone in the next two days, the US National Hurricane Centre (NHC) said yesterday.

“Although environmental conditions are only forecast to be marginally conducive for some gradual development, this system could still become a tropical depression during the next few days,” the Miami-based forecaster said. ***– Reuters***



Twitter’s corporate headquarters building is seen in downtown San Francisco.

Twitter to change logo and bid adieu to ‘all the birds’

Reuters/AFP
San Francisco

Twitter owner Elon Musk has signalled that he would do more to take the social media company in a new direction with a rebranding that will replace its well-known blue bird logo with an X after acknowledging advertisers have been slow to return.

The change, which was not evident on the website yesterday afternoon, followed Musk’s recent admission that advertising revenue remains nearly half of what it once was.

And Twitter’s cash flow has been negative as a result of that and its heavy debt load.

“Interim X logo goes live later today,” Musk said on Twitter adding that “X.com” would now redirect to Twitter’s website.

Musk’s X Corp owns Twitter.

The billionaire said in a post yesterday that he wanted to change Twitter’s logo and polled his millions of followers whether they would favour changing the site’s colour scheme from blue to black.

Musk posted a picture of a stylised X against a black outer space-themed background.

“And soon we shall bid adieu to the twitter brand and, gradually, all the birds,” he said.

The company said it would be commenting on the changes later.

Under Musk’s tumultuous tenure since he bought Twitter in October, the company has changed its business name to X Corp, reflecting the billionaire’s vision to create a “super app” like China’s WeChat.

In April, Twitter’s legacy blue bird logo was temporarily replaced by Dogecoin’s Shiba Inu dog, helping drive a surge in the cryptocurrency’s market value.

The company came under widespread criticism from users and marketing professionals when Musk announced early this month that Twitter would limit how many tweets per day various accounts can read.



Elon Musk

The daily limits helped Meta Platforms-owned rival service Threads, which crossed 100mn sign-ups within five days of its July 5 launch.

Twitter, founded in 2006 and whose name is a play on the sound of birds chattering, has used avian branding since its early days, when the company bought a stock symbol of a light blue bird for $15, according to the design website Creative Bloq.

Twitter is thought to have around 200mn daily active users but it has suffered repeated technical failures since the tycoon bought the so-called bird app for $44bn in 2022 and sacked much of its staff.

Since then, many users and advertisers alike have soured on the social media site thanks to charges introduced for previously free services, changes to content moderation and the return of previously banned right-wing accounts.

Pence says Trump conduct around 2021 Capitol attack ‘reckless but not criminal’

Reuters
Washington

Former US vice-president and Republican presidential candidate Mike Pence said yesterday that he felt former president Donald Trump’s words and actions leading up to the Capitol attacks on January 6, 2021, were reckless though not likely criminal.

“While his words were reckless, based on what I know, I am not yet convinced that they were criminal,” Pence told CNN’s *State of the Union*.

Trump said on Tuesday that he had received a letter saying he is a target of a grand jury investigation into efforts to overturn his 2020 presidential election defeat.

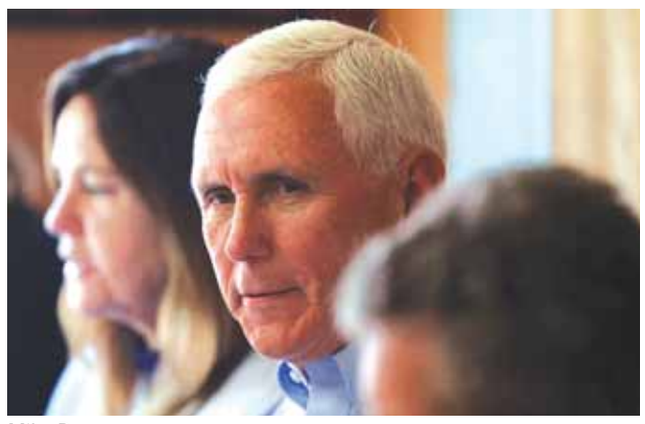
The letter represented the clearest sign to date that Trump, the front-runner for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination, may face federal criminal charges around his efforts to remain in power after losing the election to Democrat Joe Biden.

“I hope it does not come to that,” Pence said on a potential Trump indictment over efforts to overturn the 2020 election.

He said that it should be left to the American public to determine whether Trump was responsible.

“His actions were reckless,” Pence said. He added: “I don’t honestly know what his intention was” on January 6, 2021.

Ahead of the 2021 Capitol attacks by Trump supporters, the then-president repeatedly lambasted Pence for refusing to try to prevent Congress from certifying Biden’s win in the 2020 election.



Mike Pence

Pence said yesterday that Trump was wrong in thinking the former vice-president could overturn the outcome of the election.

Some rioters chanted “hang Mike Pence” during the riots.

“I know I did my duty that day,” Pence said.

Separately, Trump was indicted in June on charges that he unlawfully kept national security documents when he left office and lied to officials who sought to recover them. He has pleaded not guilty.

He was recently also charged with falsifying business records to conceal a hush money payment to an adult entertainment star.

Wounded US veterans accept new mission ... of healing coral reefs

By Gerard Martinez
AFP

Billy Costello walks the deck of a ship wearing his scuba gear and fins, as well as a prosthetic right leg, before dropping into the sea.

He’s part of a group of US Army veterans wounded in combat who are planting coral in a reef off the southern tip of Florida.

The mission is twofold: save coral that is threatened by disease and rising sea temperatures, and help veterans heal wounds – physical and emotional.

A total of 31 veterans were joined by six divers from the Mote Marine Laboratory in Key West on a recent July morning to render their services planting coral at a reef called Higgs Head.

Since 2011, the lab and the nonprofit Combat Wounded Veteran Challenge (CWVC) have teamed up for a week annually to help restore coral reefs, a key ecosystem for marine life.

Costello, 41, is in his element as a former diver for the Army’s 3rd Special Forces Group.



A member of the CWVC, Billy Costello, who has a prosthetic leg, gets ready to descend into the water to plant corals in a reef.

In 2011, as he passed along a road in Afghanistan, a bomb exploded, ruining his right leg. In the following months, he learned about the CWVC and joined its activities.

Now, on this Florida morning, he is swimming to a site chosen by Mote scientists, about half a mile (800m) offshore.

The CWVC puts wounded veterans in challenging environments, partnering with researchers who observe and gather information on them to help improve treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder, head trauma and other conditions.



A US Army veteran plants microfragments of coral of the same genotype on a reef, in order for it to fuse and become a colony, off the coast of Key West, Florida.

“I have climbed mountains with them, and I have scuba dived to the depths of the ocean,” Costello told AFP. “They have been instrumental in my recovery, helping me learn what I was going to be able to do after losing my leg.”

Mote President Michael Crosby is proud of the partnership.

“Every year I make sure I’m here with these men and women who have sacrificed so much for the country,” he said. “Now they’re on a new mission with our laboratory to restore these coral reefs that are the rainforests of the sea.”

During the excursion, the veterans listen in the water for directions from a Mote lab employee who dives ahead of them, map in hand, to a depth of about 14’ (4m).

The scientists leave boxes on the seabed divided into square compartments, each containing a coral fragment.

The divers grab wire brushes, scraping areas of the reef clean of algae and debris, and coat them with epoxy resin. Then they carefully take the coral pieces and glue them on.

In little more than an hour the veterans and institute staff plant 1,040 stony corals from six different species.

The specimens have been lab-grown and chosen because they have shown greater resistance to dangers such as increasing water temperature, ocean acidification and disease, explained Crosby after participating in the dive.

The method of repopulating the reef involves planting coral microfragments of the same genotype in a small space.

As they grow, their tissues fuse and become a colony capable of increasing in size 40 times faster than normal coral.

“In two years, three years, we will have created (the equivalent of) a 50-year-old coral that then will be able to spawn on its own,” said Crosby, who is confident that the specimens will survive for a long time.

Back at port, Costello is glad to have participated in the dive.

“This is such a blessing, because we get a chance to help these guys to restore the reefs,” he said.

Although his prosthesis, which he likens to an anchor, makes it difficult for him to move underwater, he enjoys the dive nonetheless.

“It’s great for the heart and the soul,” he said. “Especially when you’re around a group of veterans that have gone through very similar situations and have beat the odds and recovered in such a positive way.”

POLITICS

Thais show support for Pita after PM bid blocked

Hundreds of pro-democracy protesters in Thailand gathered yesterday in a show of support for Pita Limjaroenrat, the leader of the Move Forward party, after conservative opponents thwarted his latest attempt to become prime minister.
The parliament has twice blocked the Harvard-educated Pita, 42, from becoming prime minister - once last Wednesday and previously the week before - which his supporters say was due to unfair rules. "We will keep fighting ... no matter how many months we have to support democratic principles," an activist said on stage drawing cheers from the crowd at a busy intersection in central Bangkok. "Pita! Pita! Pita!" the crowd chanted.

OFFICIAL

Chinese diplomat proposes talks with Japan, S Korea

Top Chinese diplomat Wang Yi proposed high-level talks between China, Japan and South Korea in a meeting with the Japanese foreign minister in Indonesia this month, Kyodo news agency reported yesterday. The proposal is seen as signalling a willingness to resume talks among the three countries and Japan would accelerate preparations to make it happen by the end of the year, Kyodo reported, citing unidentified diplomatic sources. US allies Japan and South Korea are wary of China's increasing military assertiveness and of growing tensions between China and the US over a range of issues including trade and Taiwan.

TREND

Support for Japanese cabinet 'slips to 28%'

Public support of Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's cabinet has fallen nearly 20 percentage points to 28% over the past two months, the *Mainichi Shimbun* reported yesterday, citing a poll it conducted. Kishida, who took office in October 2021, saw his approval plummeting in some polls late last year, but numbers began to edge up with a thaw in ties with South Korea and a trip to Ukraine in March. He got a boost in May when he hosted a G7 leaders' summit in Hiroshima but the cabinet's support has plummeted 17 percentage points since then, to just 28%, dropping below 30% for first time since February, the newspaper said.

DISASTER

Five dead after heavy rains in eastern China

Five people died and two were missing, after heavy rain burst a river bank in a village near eastern China's Hangzhou city on Saturday, flooding houses and carrying away people and their belongings, state media reported. Muddy water gushed through streets in a village in Dayuan township, pouring into houses and turning over cars, pictures published by the Beijing Youth Daily showed. China typically sees heavy rain in late July, but storms have become more intense and unpredictable in recent years. Torrential rain also submerged parts of China's northeast on Saturday, damaging dozens of houses and ruining crops in the region known as the nation's breadbasket.

CRIME

Three hurt in Japan train stabbing attack

Three people were hurt in a knife attack on a train in western Japan yesterday, with police saying they had arrested a man for allegedly carrying out the stabbings. The victims - a train conductor in his 20s and two male passengers aged in their 20s and 70s - were taken to hospital with non-life threatening injuries, Tetsuya Sakagami from a nearby fire department said. The 37-year-old male suspect was armed with three knives when he was arrested at Rinku Town station in the Osaka region, local police said. He was arrested for attempted murder and has already admitted to carrying out the attack yesterday morning, police said.

Hong Kong golfers gird up for battle as housing policy threatens course

Reuters
Hong Kong

Golfers have stepped up their fight to stop the Hong Kong government from taking back land in a 100-year-old golf course for public housing, saying that the move scheduled for September 1 could hurt the Chinese-ruled city's international image.

The government is set to repossess a fifth of the 425 acres Fanling golf course land in the city, which has one of the world's most unaffordable housing markets, and use nine hectares to build 12,000 public homes.

Hong Kong's leader, John Lee, has repeatedly said he is determined to follow statutory procedures and enforce the plan that was decided by the previous government.

But the city's golfers are up in arms at the proposal, citing the financial hub's international image and environmental conservation as reasons to preserve the exclusive club that hosts annual golf tournaments. They count prominent pro-government and business figures as backers of their viewpoint.

In a latest move, the Hong Kong Golf Club applied for a judicial review to challenge an environmental impact assessment that granted the basis for the authorities to go ahead with the redevelopment plan.

In June, golfers, historians and environmental experts presented their views at a public hearing on the redevelopment plan, while non-profit organisations supporting the working class protested on the streets.

Sources close to Lee said he is eager to be seen as siding with the working class rather than with the elite and has been surprised by the mounting opposition to the government's plan.

"John Lee is riding a tiger," said Simon Yau, professor of Urban Studies at Lingnan University of Hong Kong.

"He never expected the elite could mobilise so much lobbying effort ... It shows that even though the political climate has changed, policy implementation is not without obstacles and the elite do not always co-operate."

Speculation that the Chinese central government had given direction on the fate of the golf course was shrugged off by a source, who said it was solely up to Lee to decide.

The Development Bureau, responsible for land use planning, was persistent in the reclamation, the person added, worried that any change of stance would signal weakness and make future land reclaiming more difficult.

Lee's office said it does not comment on "speculative questions". It reiterated his previous remarks that the matter should be dealt with according to statutory procedures, and that they will consider the final decisions and suggestions made by the Town Planning Board.

The Development Bureau said in its response it is obliged to take forward land supply projects as "vigorously" as it can to address the acute housing problem, adding the housing development within the Fanling golf course is one of the important sources of public housing supply within the next 10 years.

Regarding the judicial review application, the bureau said it will not affect the government taking back the 32 hectares on September 1, nor affect the statutory planning procedures.

In a controversial move, however, the government in June re-categorised the site as "undetermined" from "residential", saying more time was needed to conduct an environmental impact assessment.

The rare measure drew criticism from NGOs who questioned whether the golf course would be redeveloped as planned by 2029.

In addition, the government said in the hearing it had identified land to build 360,000 public housing units in the next 10 years, 59,000 more than the estimated demand during the same period. Some believe that could be grounds to scrap the redevelopment.

NGOs say only a small number of people enjoy the golf course while many of the city's 7.3mn people live in cramped spaces.

"If it (government) overturns its decision after so many consultations and evaluations, it'd be against its integrity and a great setback to the public housing policy," said Sze Lai Shan, deputy director of the Society of Community Organisation.

Opponents of the plan say the location lacks the infrastructure for an influx of habitants, and increased land supply in the area in the last few years has made the redevelopment plan unnecessary.

They also say the golf course is home to wildlife and plants, including one of Asia's last remaining groves of the critically endangered Chinese swamp cypress, and most of all, Hong Kong will lose its allure as an international financial centre.

In a latest effort, the Hong Kong Golf Club applied for the 2023 Unesco Asia Pacific Cultural Heritage Conservation Award for the Fanling course in early July to reaffirm its historical and nature conservation value. The application is still being processed.

Hong Kong has eight 18-hole courses, compared to Singapore's 14. Three of these courses are in the Fanling golf course located close to the border with mainland China. Opened for play in 1911, it is the oldest championship course in Asia.

Taking away 32 hectares would mean eight holes will fall under the management of the government, a change that had initially led the Saudi-backed Aramco Team Series (ATS) to reconsider hosting the event in the city in October.

It confirmed on Wednesday it would go ahead as planned after the government last week agreed to temporarily lend the 32 hectares back to the golf club, although the fate of Hong Kong's bid to host LIV Golf early next year as well as future golfing events is unclear.

Amr El Henawy, a former Egyptian Consul General who has lived in Hong Kong since 2020, said if the city fails to keep its international golf tournaments it could lose out to other Chinese and Asian cities at a time when it strives to rebuild its image after Covid and a China-imposed national security law. "If you see the aggressiveness of the branding by other countries, Hong Kong is really under the gun. Do not hurt the brand, continue to work on the soft power," El Henawy said.

Ronny Tong, a senior government adviser and a member of the golf club, wrote in a recent newspaper column that the redevelopment plan was a concession to "populist thinking" by the previous administration, a decision the current government does not need to follow blindly.

"The government absolutely should not allow populism and antagonism against the wealthy to spread," Tong said.



Hun Manet, commander of the Royal Cambodian Army and eldest son of Prime Minister Hun Sen, shows his finger after he casts his vote at a polling station in Phnom Penh yesterday.

Cambodia PM's party claims landslide election victory

Reuters
Phnom Penh

The ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP) declared a landslide victory in a one-sided election yesterday, clearing the path for a historic leadership transition and the end of the reign of one of the world's longest-serving premiers.

The contest was effectively a one-horse race, with Prime Minister Hun Sen's CPP, a political behemoth with a vast war chest, facing no viable opponent after a ruthless, years-long crackdown that has seen hundreds of its rivals flee into exile.

The CPP was leading in ballot counting late yesterday, with a turnout of 84%, according to the election committee, with 8.1mn people voting in a lopsided contest between the CPP and 17 mostly obscure parties.

"We've won in a landslide ... but we can't calculate the number of seats yet," CPP spokesperson Sok Eysan said.

Self-styled strongman Hun Sen, who has ruled Cambodia for 38 years, had brushed off Western concern about the election's credibility, determined to prevent any obstacle in his carefully calibrated transition to his anointed successor and eldest son, Hun Manet.

No timeframe had been given for the handover until Thursday, when Hun Sen, 70, signalled that Western-educated military general Hun Manet "could be" prime minister next month.

A National Assembly seat would makes him eligible, if backed by the house. Party spokesperson Sok Eysan said it was "very clear" Hun Manet won a seat.

Hun Manet has given few media interviews and no clues over his vision for Cambodia and its 16mn people.

He earned a master's degree at New York University and a doctorate at the University of Bristol, both in economics, and attended the West Point military academy, helping him rise through the ranks of Cambodia's military to army chief and deputy armed forces commander.

Major powers will be watching closely for signs of whether Hun Manet will maintain the authoritarian status quo of his father or pursue greater liberalisation and a more Western style of democracy.

After casting his vote yesterday, Hun Manet ducked questions about becoming premier and whether he would rule differently from his father.

"No comment please. I've just come to vote," he said in English, smiling. Analysts had expected the transition to come mid-term, giving Hun Manet time to earn legitimacy with the public and political elite. A key focus will be if he seeks to steer Cambodia out of the orbit of China and patch up ties with the US that have perennially been strained by his father's iron-fisted approach.

A CPP rout was never in doubt after preemptive strikes by authorities that included disqualifying the CPP's only meaningful rival, the Candlelight Party, over a paperwork technicality.

Former Khmer Rouge guerrilla Hun Sen has been accused by activists of publicly threatening rivals and inciting violence, which led to Meta Platforms' oversight board recommending his suspension from Facebook. The government has denied persecuting opponents.

Lanka on alert as activists commemorate anti-Tamil riots


Army soldiers stand guard during a protest by Sri Lankan rights activists outside the main cemetery in Colombo yesterday.

Sri Lanka tightened security yesterday as activists lit oil lamps in the capital Colombo commemorating the hundreds killed in the 1983 anti-Tamil riots that fuelled a deadly civil war.
"Let's not forget the slaughter of Tamils," read a banner carried by members of North-South Solidarity, a group of rights defenders from the country's majority Sinhalese and minority Tamil communities.
Several dozen activists lit coconut oil lamps and candles outside Colombo's main cemetery, where the inter-communal violence started 40 years ago.
The then-government attempted a mass burial at the cemetery for 13 Sinhalese soldiers killed in a Tamil rebel land mine attack on July 23, 1983.
Relatives demanded individual funerals for the soldiers and clashed with police, before turning their attacks on Tamils and Tamil-owned shops in the area.
What began as a spontaneous backlash against Tamils degenerated into state-led deadly violence that lasted six days.
Official estimates place the riot death toll between 400-600, but Tamil groups say the actual number is in the thousands.
There have been no prosecutions, even though some members of the then-government were seen leading the Sinhalese mobs.
At yesterday's commemoration, authorities deployed a heavily armed troops that outnumbered demonstrators, while journalists saw police kicking and stomping on oil lamps placed along the pavement just outside the cemetery.
Sri Lanka's President Ranil Wickremesinghe has cracked down on dissent since he came to power last year.
His United National Party was in power when the 1983 riots broke out.
The then-president Junius Jayewardene, Wickremesinghe's uncle, is widely accused of not doing anything to prevent the violence.
A Tamil insurgency demanding a separate state for their ethnic minority developed into a full blown civil war that eventually claimed the lives of at least 100,000 people, before the rebel leadership was defeated in May 2009.

WORLD

Rare submarine visit reminds North Korea of US nuclear missiles out of sight, in range

When a US ballistic missile submarine (SSBN) surfaced for a rare visit to South Korea last week it was a blunt reminder that Washington always has nuclear-tipped missiles deployed within close striking distance of North Korea, analysts said.
Having nuclear weapons out of sight in the seas off the Korean Peninsula was a potentially stronger deterrent to the North, according to some analysts, than installing them in South Korea, as Washington had done from 1958 to 1991. "Placing nuclear weapons offshore and on submarines is actually a stronger deterrent in many ways," said Duyeon Kim of the Center for a New American Security. "Deterrence is strengthened when the location of American strategic assets is unknown to the adversary as long as the adversary knows that these weapons exist."
The USS Kentucky Ohio-class SSBN arrived in South Korea's southern port of Busan on Tuesday and was still docked as of Friday, said Colonel Isaac Taylor, a spokesman for the US military in Korea. The submarine got Pyongyang's attention. On Thursday, its defence minister said the mere presence of such weapons in South Korea could meet the criteria for the North to use its nuclear weapons, and warned the US against sending any more nuclear-capable assets.
The Kentucky's visit to South Korea was the first by an SSBN since the 1980s, and it follows an increasing debate in recent years over whether the US should return tactical nuclear weapons to the South or whether Seoul should develop its own arsenal.
Giving reassurance of its commitment to defend the South, Washington has responded by stepping up displays of nuclear force and create a new group for war planning. China, the North's most important ally, has not commented on the submarine's visit, but Beijing has accused the US of increasing tensions in the region with its military deployments.
Because US SSBNs rely on secrecy and stealth to ensure their survival and preserve their ability to launch nuclear missiles during a war, they rarely make public stops in foreign ports.
SSBNs are the most survivable delivery platform of all the US' nuclear weapons, essentially guaranteeing overwhelming nuclear retaliation in the event of an enemy first strike, said Vann Van Diepen, a former US government weapons expert who now works with the 38 North project. The US Navy fields 14 SSBNs, often referred to as "boomers". An Ohio-class submarine carries 20 Trident II D5 missiles, each of which can deliver up to eight nuclear warheads to targets as far as 12,000kms away.
"US SSBNs anywhere from the US West coast westward can strike targets in North Korea," Van Diepen said.
North Korea has a large but aging submarine force whose primary mission is to defend its coastline, but is looking to develop its own arsenal of missile submarines.
It has conducted launches from a test submarine, and has been seeking to build an operational conventionally powered missile submarine since at least 2016, Van Diepen said.

Support for Indonesia minister grows ahead of elections

Reuters
Jakarta

Indonesian Defence Minister Prabowo Subianto retains an early lead ahead of the 2024 presidential election, with an opinion poll yesterday showing support for the ex-special forces commander is particularly strong among young voters.

The Indikator poll, which focussed on canvassing the views of young voters, showed Prabowo with a slim to sizeable lead based on various scenarios.

Conducted between June 20 and 24, the poll surveyed 1,220 people across the world's third-largest democracy, with more than 60% of respondents aged below 42.

Around 107mn, or more than half of voters registered for the February 2024 poll, are under 40, according to electoral data.

In a match-up among the top three presidential contenders, the poll showed Prabowo with 36.8%, narrowly ahead of Central Java governor Ganjar Pranowo with 35.7% and former Jakarta governor Anies Baswedan with 21.5%. The poll had a margin of error of 2.9 percentage points.

In a two-way race Prabowo had a clear lead over Ganjar, 49.5% to 40.9%.

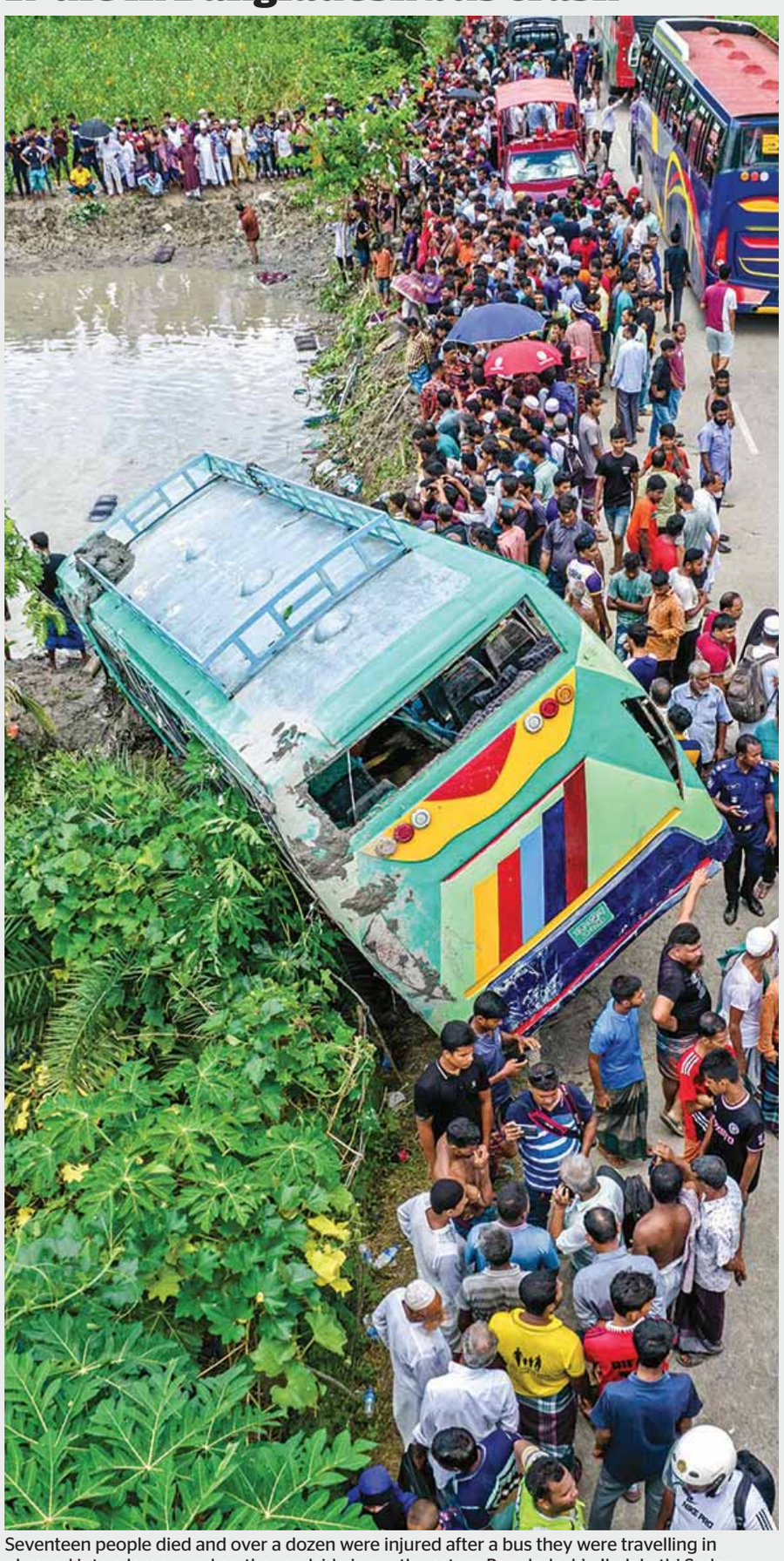
This is the third poll since May that has shown the fiery former general emerging as an early and unexpected frontrunner, with the latest survey showing he has strong support among Gen Z, Millennials and Baby Boomers.

Prabowo, a controversial former general accused of human rights abuses that he has always denied, lost in consecutive bids to become president in 2014 and 2019.

Gaining legitimacy as defence minister and embarking on a rebranding campaign that has included reaching out to young people through a sophisticated social media presence, Prabowo is now gaining momentum.

The tacit support of President Joko Widodo, who commands an approval rating above 80%, has also helped boost his popularity, analysts say.

17 die in Bangladesh bus crash



Seventeen people died and over a dozen were injured after a bus they were travelling in plunged into a large pond on the roadside in southwestern Bangladesh's Jhalakathi Sadar district. The bus, carrying 60-70 passengers, was on its way to Barishal from Bhandari.

Bangladesh banks on green loans to help fight climate change

Thomson Reuters Foundation
Natore, Bangladesh

For many years, Banolata Refractory, a brick manufacturer in northern Bangladesh, had wanted to start making environmentally-friendly bricks and cut its carbon emissions, but it lacked the funding to build a greener and cleaner kiln.

That changed in early 2020 when the company discovered that Bangladesh Bank, the country's central bank, was offering low-interest loans for sustainable and green projects.

Banolata received a loan of $462,000 – at a 6% interest rate instead of the usual 10% – to build a Hybrid Hoffman Kiln (HHK), which uses less coal than traditional ovens – resulting in less pollution and planet-heating emissions, the business said.

"Now, (the company) is a leading brick-maker providing the majority of bricks ... in the northern part (of Bangladesh)," said Shahidul Islam, a factory operations manager at Banolata in the South Asian nation's northern Natore district. "HHKs use only half as much coal as fixed chimney kilns ... we are reducing up to 70% carbon," Islam added.

Green finance is growing fast in Bangladesh, official data shows, with the central bank and private banks boosting efforts to encourage companies from brick-makers to textile mills to invest in technology and solutions that tackle climate change.

Considered one of the most climate-vulnerable countries – due to impacts like worsening flooding, river and coastal erosion and storms – Bangladesh has been exploring a range of financial innovations, from green loans to climate-related insurance and microfinance.

Former central bank governor Atiur Rahman, who helped to develop the nation's sustainable and green finance policies more than a decade ago, said the ripple effect of "pioneering green banking in Bangladesh has been phenomenal" – at home and abroad.

China's and Indonesia's central banks have followed the example of Bangladesh on sustainable finance, while Thailand and Uganda have recently sought its advice on the issue, he said.

"Other central banks are now transforming into more inclusive developmental regulators with forward-looking policies to encourage banks over green initiatives so the private sector feels reassured to go for sustainable investment," Rahman added.

Yet some analysts say progress in Bangladesh is hindered by limited capacity at the central bank and private banks, and are calling for greater development of green financial instruments – such as green bonds – in order to help the market go mainstream.

"Commercial banks sometimes misuse funds in the name of green finance due to their lack of knowledge on technical aspects of green projects," said Monzur Hossain, research director at the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies. Bangladesh Bank launched its green and sustainable finance policy in 2012 – providing loans with interest rates between 2-4% lower than standard lending, and longer repayment terms.

However, the push was not initially popular – due to a lack of awareness – and the central bank changed its policy in 2020 in a bid to boost uptake, according to Chowdhury Liakat Ali, director of Bangladesh Bank's sustainable finance department.

The central bank has made it mandatory for financial institutions to disburse at least 15% of their loan budgets to sustainable projects, and 5% or more to green initiatives.

Sustainable finance, according to Bangladesh Bank, covers investments geared towards environmental, social, and governance (ESG) targets and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), while green finance is focused solely on the environment.

At least $12bn of sustainable finance and more than $1.1bn in green finance was invested by banks and financial institutions last year – increases of 58% and 69% respectively from 2021 – data from Bangladesh Bank shows.

There are now more than 117 such financing products on offer in Bangladesh – up from 68 last year – including for solar home systems and solar parks, biogas and wind power plants, waste management and recycling, and organic farming, for example.

Bangladesh Bank has also started giving awards for the best performers on sustainable finance – and every bank now has a dedicated green or sustainable department, according to Ali.

"We are now thinking about a sustainable climate change policy," he said, explaining that it would factor in climate adaption and mitigation efforts, as well as loss and damage.

"We believe Bangladesh could be a pioneer at green and sustainable finance," Ali added. "One day we might stop financing projects which are harmful for the environment." In addition to banks, insurance brokers and microfinance institutions are also playing a role – offering small loans and insurance for agriculture, for example – while the SAJIDA Foundation last year issued the nation's first green bond.

Housing prices drive young Chinese into RV living

AFP
Shenzhen, China

With its open kitchen, bathtub and electric piano, Chinese e-commerce worker Twiggy He's home is the envy of her colleagues – even if it is located in their office carpark.

The cheery yellow refitted van, named "YOLO" (You Only Live Once), gives He a commute of two minutes from bed to desk, and has saved her thousands of yuan a month in tech hub Shenzhen, one of China's most expensive cities.

The 28-year-old is one of a growing number of young people in major cities who have taken one look at sky-high real estate prices and sought an alternative arrangement.

"I find living in an RV to be very freeing," He, who moved in four months ago, said.

"It doesn't give me any anxiety about buying a house or make me feel I need to settle down... Maybe I'll even move to a new city in a few years."

Her monthly expenses have plummeted from when she rented an apartment, from around 2,500 yuan ($350) a month to 600 yuan, with parking only 20 yuan a day.

She does, though, have to rely on public facilities to use the toilet.

For Zhang Xi, who started living in an RV with his partner last May before opening a van renovation workshop, cost was the main push factor.

"Shenzhen's property prices are beyond the reach of ordinary folks like me," he said.

A recent survey by a property research institute suggested Shenzhen's rent-to-income ratio has reached up to 49%, and buying is even worse.

On average, second-hand flats fetch 65,000 yuan per square metre – nearly nine times the city's average monthly salary in the private sector.

Zhang and his wife plan to live in the van while they don't have children, saving around 3,000 yuan a month in rent and commuting.

They hope to put that money towards a down payment for a flat in a lower-tier city.

The walls of office worker Li Conghui's homey white van are lined with bunk beds, and drawings and photographs of his children, who live with their mother in a different city.

His wider family disapprove of his unconventional living situation.

"My wife is the only one who isn't against it," Li said. "But others don't understand where I'm coming from, they think it's too unusual."

Li has worked in Shenzhen for over a decade, but despite that "still couldn't get a sense of belonging" in the city.

"When I was living in a rented room, I didn't feel at home each time I went back," he said.

"But the RV is different. When I am inside this private space, I feel a sense of belonging."

Zhang agreed.

"It's felt just like a home to us," he said. "It's truly a place that belongs to us in Shenzhen."

Military exercise



Philippine and US marines link arms during the closing ceremony of US-Philippine marines joint exercise dubbed Marines Aviation Support Activity 23 (MASA) at the marines headquarters in Taguig City, suburban Manila.

USS Canberra personnel parade in Australia capital

The events coincide with the Talisman Sabre military exercises, held every two years between the US and Australia

Reuters
Sydney

US Navy personnel from a newly commissioned US combat ship paraded through Australia's capital yesterday, as the two allies carry out war games amid China's military build-up in the region.

Personnel from the Independence-class littoral combat ship — named after a Royal Australian Navy cruiser that was sunk while supporting the US Marine landings on Guadalcanal in 1942 — marched through Canberra yesterday, cheered by locals.

"It's such an honour and a privilege to be able to do this," Captain of the USS Canberra Blue Crew, Will Ashley, told ABC television.

"It's a culmination of not just the ship naming, of honouring the city, but the previous HMAS Canberra that was lost in World War II."

The Australian Capital Territory "Freedom of Entry" parade came after a commissioning ceremony for the USS Canberra on Saturday at an Australian naval base on Sydney Harbour.

The events coincide with the Talisman Sabre military exercises, held every two years between the US and Australia, seen as a show of force and unity as China increasingly asserts power in the Indo-Pacific region.

The exercises, also involving 11 other nations, are taking place across Australia over two weeks and include mock land and air combat, as well as amphibious landings.

An Australian government review concluded in April that rivalry between the US and China was defining the region and that the major-power competition had "potential for conflict".

Under the AUKUS project announced in March, the US and Britain have agreed to help Australia acquire a fleet of nuclear-powered submarines.

Harley-Davidson, Triumph gear up to fight Enfield's India dominance

Reuters
Bengaluru

US big-bike maker Harley-Davidson and British rival Triumph have revved up India's premium motorcycle market with aggressively priced models that analysts said could dent the over half-century dominance of local champion Royal Enfield.

The duo surprised the industry this month by unveiling their cheapest models globally in the largest motorbike market by sales, where their expensive imports have long struggled for market share.

This time, they are making the bikes in India with domestic partners to bring prices below Rs233,000 ($2,841).

"These are aspirational brands," said Kotak Securities auto analyst Rishi Vora. "For people who were thinking of buying a Harley or Triumph earlier, the price points weren't accessible. Now, they are."

The similar, near-simultaneous change in approach by two of the industry's most storied brands represents one of the biggest challenges to Royal Enfield's virtual monopoly in high-end motorcycles, coming at a time of rising spending in India in premium segments across categories as varied as mobile phones and cars.

The new models mark a return to India for Harley-Davidson and a huge step up for Triumph, but they are up against Royal Enfield's large number of showrooms, strong after-sales service network and entrenched fan base for a 100-plus-year-old brand

Such is the threat, the back-to-back launches pushed Royal Enfield maker Eicher Motors' stock price down as much as 12.5% and prompted brokerages to flag earnings risk for at least two years – even though Harley-Davidson and Triumph sales currently pale in comparison to those of Royal Enfield.

The pricing and brand cachet of the Harley-Davidson X440 and Triumph Speed 400 could cut Royal Enfield's share of India's 250cc-plus segment to 75% from over 90%, Kotak said.

Royal Enfield's nearest model is the Classic 350 starting at Rs193,000. Eicher declined to comment ahead of its quarterly earnings announcement. Harley-Davidson did not respond to a request for comment. Triumph said it would significantly increase its dealer network to around 100 dealers over the next 12 months.

The new models mark a return to India for Harley-Davidson and a huge step up for Triumph, but they are up against Royal Enfield's large number of showrooms, strong after-sales service network and entrenched fan base for a 100-plus-year-old brand.

"Is there going to be a challenge to Royal Enfield? Yes. Is it going to be a major one? It can't be immediately," said Shubhabrata Marmar, co-founder of automotive content platform MotorInc.

"Royal Enfield built the community, and have been iterating their showrooms to be ever classier places that have the feel of an international, retro, cool, chic brand."

Rival heritage brands have made little inroads against Royal Enfield, such as Mahindra & Mahindra's Yezdi and Jawa or BMW's eponymous brand that the German automaker manufactures with local partner TVS Motor.

"Once you buy the vehicle, everything else disappears. The pricing and the showroom disappear. It's you, your motorcycle and those trips to the service centre," said Varun Painter, editor of motorcycle content at PowerDrift.

Harley-Davidson spent a decade importing its ultra-premium motorcycles before exiting the market and shuttering most of its dealer network in 2020. It sold fewer than 30,000 motorcycles – less than the number of bikes Royal Enfield sells each month.

It then partnered with Hero MotoCorp, the world's largest motorcycle maker, to develop and sell a range of Harley-Davidson branded bikes in India, starting with the X440.

Triumph was selling about 1,200 motorcycles annually in India when, also in 2020, it tied up with Bajaj Auto to build mid-capacity bikes, with Bajaj handling distribution.

Triumph said it has received orders for over 14,000 Speed 400 bikes, exceeding its total India sales of the past decade.

The premium segment accounts for under 10% of sales in a country where most people opt for cheaper means of transport to navigate heavy traffic and skirt rising fuel prices. Still, the frenzy over the new models is reflected in the surge in Google searches about Harley-Davidson and Triumph in India.

"The reviews and the stunning price pushed me to make an instant decision to book the Triumph," said Sathish Rao, a software professional and member of a motorcycle club.

Improved financing options is also encouraging lower-income buyers to consider premium bikes, said HDFC Securities analyst Aniket Mhatre. "Our starter bikes are usually like a 100cc to 200cc max. I think that's going to change now. I feel like people are going to go straight to a 400cc," said motorcycle content creator Priyanka Kochhar, who has ridden both the new bikes.

Modi urged to rethink gaming tax decision

Reuters
New Delhi

Tiger Global, Peak XV and Steadview Capital are among 30 foreign and domestic investors asking Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to review a 28% gaming tax, saying the levy would adversely impact $4bn in prospective investments, a letter showed.

India last week announced the tax on the funds that online gaming companies collect from their customers.

Games such as fantasy cricket have become increasingly popular in recent years, but have also raised concerns about addiction among players.

The tax decision "has caused shock and dismay, (and) will substantially and meaningfully erode investor confidence in the backing of this or any other sunrise sector in the Indian tech ecosystem," said the letter, signed by the investors.

The decision will "adversely impact prospective investments to the tune of at least $4bn in the next 3-4 years and hence the growth of the gaming sector in India," added the letter, the first instance of direct lobbying by investors against the tax move. Modi's office did not respond to a request for comment. The tax proposal is pending parliament's approval.

Tiger Global and Peak XV, previously known as Sequoia Capital India, have invested in Indian gaming companies such as Dream11 and Mobile Premier League.

Despite industry's pleas, India's government has said many ministers in the government tax panel viewed bets on online gaming platforms as a "social evil", and there was no need to further consult the gaming industry on the matter.

Over 100 gaming firms wrote a letter recently to the finance ministry with a similar request, saying the tax will stifle foreign investment and put $2.5bn already invested in the sector at risk.

Heavy rains in London



A woman walks in the rain past former telephone boxes in a park in Chiswick, London. As Europe sweltered in a heatwave, London experienced rain storms and temperatures around 20 degrees.

India govt 'aims to trade power with southeast Asia'

Reuters
Bambolim, India

India is considering trading power with southeast Asian countries through Myanmar and Thailand, five sources briefed on the matter said, as New Delhi looks to use its growing renewables capacity to boost regional diplomatic engagement.

The grid linkages, which an industry official said could take at least four years to complete, follow India's effort to begin trading power with Middle Eastern countries such as the UAE.

The sources, who also include four power ministry officials, declined to be identified as the previously unreported plan has not been made public. India's federal power ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government has been trying to promote closer political and economic ties with its neighbours, pushing back against China's growing regional influence.

Indian energy officials are holding separate and group discussions with some countries on advancing regional power grid interconnections at ongoing Group of 20 (G20) ministerial meetings in the Indian state of Goa, the power ministry officials said.

Support from G20 members is seen as key to winning backing from bankers and developers in making investment decisions, one of the ministry officials said.

India has engaged France's EDF to prepare a regulatory framework that would address key challenges including pricing, the industry official said. EDF is expected to complete the report by the end of this year, the official added.

EDF did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

"Once we are able to connect India's national grid to Burma (Myanmar), we should be able to strengthen the grid there and further transmit to Thailand and even Asia's east," the industry official said.

While cross-border grid linkages have drawn investment and government interest in regions from Europe to southeast Asia, the rising cost of building subsea cables, surging prices of raw materials needed to upgrade grids and geopolitical tensions have raised questions about the viability of such projects.

Members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) have been trying for decades to form a regional grid to facilitate multilateral power trade, but progress has been limited to bilateral deals between countries.

India plans to boost its renewable and big hydropower capacity to 500 gigawatts (GW) by 2030, from 177GW currently. Solar parks are expected to account for much of the new capacity.

US condemns Manipur sexual assault case

A US State Department spokesperson called the incident "brutal" and "terrible" and said the US conveyed its sympathies to the victims

Reuters
Washington

The US yesterday said it was deeply concerned by reports of viral videos showing two women paraded naked in India's northeastern state of Manipur, a sexual assault case that enraged the country.

The assault took place over two months ago, but it captured national and global attention as the video went viral on social media in the past week. Police have made some arrests.

A US State Department spokesperson called the incident "brutal" and "terrible" and said the US conveyed its sympathies to the victims.

The assault was reported by the victims aged 21 and 19 in May during intense ethnic clashes between the tribal Kuki people and majority ethnic Meitei over potential changes to economic benefits given to the Kuki.

The trouble was quelled after New Delhi rushed thousands of paramilitary and army troops to the state of 3.2mn people. But sporadic violence and killings resumed soon afterwards and the state has remained tense since.

At least 125 people have been killed and more than 40,000 have fled their homes since the violence erupted in Manipur.

The US encouraged a peaceful and inclusive resolution to the Manipur violence and urged authorities to respond to humanitarian needs while protecting all groups, homes and places of worship, the state department spokesperson said.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday condemned the assault as "shameful" and promised tough action.



People take part in a protest march against the ongoing ethnic violence in India's northeastern state of Manipur, in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, yesterday.

UK sees improved momentum in latest round of India trade talks

Talks between Britain and India on a free trade agreement (FTA) have gained momentum but further work is needed on services and tariffs to secure a deal, a British source close to the negotiations said.

Britain began free trade talks with India in January last year as it looks to establish its credentials as an independent trading nation after leaving the European Union and is seeking an Indo-Pacific tilt to its foreign policy.

Talks had seemed stuck earlier this year, with the two sides struggling to make progress in a number of key areas amid concern there could be further political complications if talks drag on. Elections are expected in both countries next year.

However, momentum has improved following the conclusion of the eleventh round of talks last week, the source said, allowing negotiators to turn to more commercially sensitive topics that are likely to be some of the most difficult to resolve.

"The talks certainly kicked up a gear during the last round, and gained momentum, but there is still a long way to go, such as on services or tariffs for various goods," the source said.

"It's not about a race to the finish – it's about driving home an ambitious deal that will benefit us both in the years and decades to come."

After the ambitious timelines of former prime minister Boris Johnson slipped, current British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has emphasised that his government will take time to strike the right deal.

In a sign of the political impetus in the talks, India's Trade Minister Piyush Goyal and Commerce Secretary Sunil Barthwal both visited London during the round.

The Indian government has said the talks are at a critical stage, and that ministerial engagement during the round had helped to overcome obstacles in talks. The next round is expected to commence in August.

COMMENT

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GULF TIMES



Rewetting German marshes to blunt the impact of climate change

Amid the fields of northern Germany a vast expanse of bulrushes has been planted to form one of Europe's largest reclaimed marshes.

Just four years ago, the 10-hectare plot close to the town of Malchin was a simple field.

Like 98% of Germany's historic wetlands, the area slowly dried up over centuries as its peat was harvested and the soil cultivated for grain or keeping livestock.

Now, the land has been rewetted and planted with rushes that rise up to two metres (seven feet) high.

With rubber boots that go up to her knees and a GPS navigation device in hand, biologist Meline Brendel wades through the marshes' stagnant waters.

"Marshes cover 3% of the Earth's surface and trap twice as much CO2 as all forests," says Brendel.

Left alone, such bogs are massive sinks for carbon locked into the peat and prevented from escaping as gas by the water that covers the ground.

Once dry, however, the earth releases the stored carbon when it comes into contact with oxygen.

"In this region, marshes therefore emit more CO2 than all forms of transport put together," says the scientist.

Over a year, one hectare of drained marshland produces as much CO2 as a car travelling 145,000km, according to the Greifswald Mire Centre.

In Germany, current and former wetlands cover some 5% of the country's land area — although the overwhelming majority has been drained.

To keep these emissions in check, the government-financed Paludi-PROGRESS project funded the rewetting of the former marshland.

The land was criss-crossed with trenches, flooded and planted with bulrushes.

The country last year launched a €4bn plan of action to 'improve the general state of ecosystems'

Today, the area is habitat to a multitude of birds, fish, insects, spiders and amphibians. The bulrushes are cut each year and used for household insulation, among other practical applications.

Her eyes glued to the GPS, Brendel navigates her way through the wet maze, sinking a spike into the peat as she goes to measure the level of the water.

"The problem is that projects like ours are still just pilots. The plants cannot yet be used on an industrial scale" as material for roofing or insulation, she says.

The German government, which aims to make Europe's top economy carbon neutral by 2045, last year launched a €4bn ($4.5bn), four-year plan of action to "improve the general state of ecosystems" in the country.

Half of the programme's funds will go toward protecting marshes.

A new law encouraging such efforts within the EU was recently adopted by the European Parliament. However, the programmes have run into opposition from farmers.

For Brendel, the point is not to "force the rewetting of fields on farmers", but to convince them of its importance for the climate and the possibility to make a living from cultivating wetland.

The 28-year-old scientist concedes that farming marshes is currently "not recognised as agriculture and farmers therefore don't have access to organic farming subsidies".

"We need to make it more accessible and less bureaucratic to turn drained land back into marshes and to share what we have learned."

Twenty years ago, Bavarian farmer Lorenz Kratzer opted for an intermediate solution: keeping livestock on marshland that is slightly less wet than normal and giving his animals plenty of land to roam.

On a hot summer's day in Freising in southern Germany, 20 or so of his cows seek the shade of the trees and bushes growing on his marshland used for grazing.

As the soil dries out due to climate change, the 64-year-old says it "would be a very good thing... to let the marshes return to nature, to flood them again".

"The creation of pastures goes along well with this. You can see that the grass is growing better," he said.

Kratzer sells his organic meat locally, showing that it's possible to combine agriculture and marshland protection.

Back in Malchin, across the way from the reclaimed marsh, a herd of cows grazes peacefully in a field.

"You can't see it but carbon is escaping from the ground" dried to make pastures for livestock, says Brendel, who dreams of a world where "there are no more dry marshes". — Reuters

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For migrants, the Darien Gap is testing; for tourists, a magnet

By Laura Gottesdiener and **Daina Beth Solomon**
Mexico City

Deep in the Panamanian jungle, Venezuelan migrant Franca Ramirez was scrambling to reach higher ground as a rushing river broke its banks, he said, when something caught his eye: a group of young men, snapping photos of the landscape.

The former police officer, who says he fled imprisonment and torture in Venezuela, was surprised.

They were more than a day's journey into the Darien Gap. The notorious stretch of jungle in Panama has become a treacherous part of the journey for tens of thousands of people trekking across the Americas, hoping ultimately to reach the United States.

"I asked if they were migrants," Ramirez said last month, after making it to Mexico. "They said no, that they were creating content and sightseeing in the jungle."

The encounter was a rare moment of two different worlds colliding in one of the planet's wildest places.

The jungle has long attracted hard-core adventurers. It is known as the 'gap' on Panama's Darien isthmus because it is the only missing section, running about 60 miles, on the Pan-American highway that stretches from Alaska to Argentina.

For decades, only the most intrepid of travellers ventured into this once impenetrable forest - dodging guerrillas and bandits; hunting for rare orchids or the great green macaw; and seeking the thrill of being one of the few brave enough to enter the wilderness where the road ends.

As adventure tourism has gained popularity worldwide — from climbing Mount Everest to riding a submarine to view the Titanic — tour agencies have also organised group excursions to the remote jungle.

"Tourism has been on the slow burner for decades in the Darien," said long-time Panamanian tour guide Rick Morales. "The jungle is special because it's powerful and humbling."

In recent years, parts of this jungle have become the site of humanitarian catastrophe. Hundreds of thousands of migrants from across the world, including as far as Afghanistan, and parts of Africa, cross the perilous terrain en route to the US border.

Blocked by visa restrictions from entering countries closer to the United States, a quarter of a million people traversed the lawless region last year.

At least 137 migrants died or went missing, including at least 13 minors, according to the UN's International Organisation for Migration (IOM).

In addition to its lack of infrastructure, the Darien poses security challenges: the migrant routes in particular are controlled by criminal groups.

"The real number of migrants who have died and disappeared in the jungle is much, much higher," the IOM said in a statement to Reuters.

Tourists and migrants rarely meet face to face; the routes are almost always separated by dozens of miles. The migration routes hug the Darien's northern coast on the Caribbean Sea, which offers the most direct path to traverse the roadless jungle. The vast majority of tourism occurs closer to the Pacific Ocean.


Tourists hike during an excursion through the Darien Gap region, Panama, last January. (**Reuters**)

Trip advertising does not mention the humanitarian crisis. Depending on the type of trip, tourist packages can range from a few hundred dollars to a few thousand dollars per person for a package that can include medical care, satellite phones, appropriate equipment and a cook.

Marco Wanske, a 31-year-old German who went on a 12-day jungle trek in January, said everyone in his group sustained minor injuries such as "jungle rot," a fungus that affects the feet, and one person had to be carried out by the group on the last day because she was unable to walk.

Migrants, at the mercy of smuggling gangs, often receive far less for their money.

Kisbel Garcia, a migrant from Venezuela, said she paid over $4,000 to a guide who promised to lead her and her four children and mother-in-law safely through the jungle. But instead of tourist-style protection, Garcia's guide abandoned them two days into the trek.

The family wandered six days through the mountains, passing corpses as they ran out of food, she says, and relying on scraps of blue cloth tied to trees by migrants to help mark the path for those who followed.

They survived.

"We migrants have to fight against all the risks without any kind of help," she said. "The Darien is hell."

The global adventure tourism market is booming, experts say, with its expenditures topping $680 billion, according to a 2021 report from the Adventure Travel Trade Association.

Social media has helped fuel the interest in visiting some of the world's most remote, inaccessible places, as travellers increasingly show off the risk and exclusivity of their journeys through selfies and TikTok videos.

Panama's government hopes to turn the Darien National Park into "the main eco-tourism destination in Central America," according to the country's 2020-2025 master plan for sustainable tourism.

Many naturalists and bird watchers are drawn to the park, which was named a Unesco World Heritage site in 1981 due to its biodiversity, dramatic scenery and indigenous communities.

Even some migrants recognize the paradox of the jungle's attractions. "As I travelled, my heart was suffering, but my eyes were in delight," said Alejandra Peña, from Venezuela, who traversed the jungle with her three children, partner, and elderly parents last year while en route to the US border.

But some humanitarian aid groups have criticised adventure tourism in the Darien, saying marketing trips as if they were a test of survival skills is in bad taste and distracts from the suffering of migrants.

"The Darien is a humanitarian crisis zone, not a place for vacation," said Luis Eguiluz, who leads Doctors Without Borders (MSF) in Colombia and Panama.

The intersection of these worlds has prompted questions around ethical responsibility, experts say.

"For people who want to go to places that are more wild, what is our obligation?" said Lorri Krebs, an expert on tourism and sustainability at Salem State University in Salem, Massachusetts. "We need standards, we need the ethical or moral components in our tourism endeavours."

In written responses to Reuters' questions about the ethics of such tours, the Tourism Ministry defended its efforts to boost international travel to the region, saying Panama "is blessed with sprawling jungles, mighty rivers, mountain peaks, endless coastlines, and diverse cultures." At the same time, it acknowledged a "catastrophic humanitarian crisis" in a separate part of the Darien due to migration.

Under pressure from the US government, Panama says it has stepped up efforts to stop migrants from crossing the jungle, including a campaign announced with the US in April. Even so, the numbers of migrants in the Darien has continued to rise.

The US State Department tells travellers to not enter a wide swath of the jungle that it says is commonly used by criminals and drug traffickers, and where emergency services are scarce.

Some tourists are already grappling with these kinds of questions.

"The migration crisis in this region was a big question mark for me before the trip," said German tourist Mark Fischer, who initially worried that the 100km trek would be like "crossing the Mediterranean sea on a rubber dinghy for fun," alluding to another part of the world experiencing a migration crisis. His concerns were assuaged when he was told the trail would not overlap the migrants' route.

From the beaches of Greece to Texas' Big Bend National Park, which abuts the US-Mexico border, sunbathing and hiking often happen in areas where other people are risking their lives, Morales, the tour guide, said.

But in nearly 25 years of taking people into the Darien, he has never encountered migrants and said he plans his routes to keep these worlds apart.

"Personally, I could not put food in my mouth, or lie in my hammock protected from the elements, knowing that just a few hundred meters down the trail there is a hungry mother and a child spending the night sitting on the bare ground with no shelter from the rain and the insects," he said.

He added that trekkers often ask how they can help local communities.

Some indigenous people in the Darien — whose name, according to some experts, derives from the Spanish pronunciation of the original indigenous name for a local river — rely on tourism to bolster the economies of their local communities.

Travel Darien Panama is an Indigenous-owned tour operator that says on its website it aims to help fund schools and improve living conditions in their village. "We have been living here for decades, and these forests are literally our home," it says.

The firm's co-founder, Carmelita Cansari of the Darien's Embrera community, says part of the company's aim is to share their way of life: "We offer what we have in our community," she said. "Caring for nature, our culture, and dance."

Nina Van Maris, a 32-year-old outdoor enthusiast from Luxembourg, said she was unaware of the migration situation in the Darien when she signed up for an excursion run by German tour operator Wandermut.

She had seen an advertisement on Instagram while recovering from a debilitating rare illness that had left her temporarily unable to walk. The trip became motivation to fully recover.

"I thought to myself: when I can do that, I can do everything," Van Maris said.

In 2021, she traversed the jungle over ten days, from a village on the Balsas River in the heart of the Darien before ending at the Pacific Ocean.

"When I saw the beach, I thought to myself: I made it. I was crying, it was so emotional for me," she said. "The jungle gave me my life back." — Reuters

Spain eyes shift from left to right



This combination of pictures shows (From Left) Spanish Prime Minister and Socialist Party candidate for re-election Pedro Sanchez, the leader and candidate of conservative Partido Popular (People's Party) Alberto Nunez Feijoo, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Labour and Social Economy and candidate of the radical-left alliance Sumar, Yolanda Diaz and the president of far-right party Vox Santiago Abascal casting their ballots during Spain's general election, in Madrid, yesterday. (**AFP**)

AFP
Madrid

Voting closed in Spain's closely watched snap election yesterday which was expected to oust the left and bring in the right-wing Popular Party, which will likely need support from the far-right to govern.

The vote took place just three weeks after Spain took over the rotating presidency of the European Union, and the expected shift to the right would deal a fresh blow to the European left.

Polls closed at 1800 GMT and although Spain does not publish exit polls, figures from a last-minute Sigma Dos poll taken in the days before the vote, suggested Alberto Nunez Feijoo's PP would win 145-150 seats, falling short of the 176-seat absolute majority required to govern alone.

Three other polls carried out just before the vote, whose results cannot be legally be published until after voting closes, all showed the PP winning, but without an overall majority, suggesting it would need support from the far-right Vox to form a government.

The results are expected to start trickling in after 1900 GMT.

Two hours before the close, turnout stood at 53.12%, nearly 4.0 percentage points lower than the previous 2019 election, with many voting earlier in the day to avoid the scorching heat.

Spain has never previously held an election at the height of summer and in parts of the south, temperatures were touching 40 degrees Celsius.

"Spain can begin a new era," said Feijoo as he cast his ballot, while Socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said it was a "very important" moment, "not only for us but for Europe and the world".

Were Vox to enter government, it would be the first time the far-right had hold a share of power in Spain since the Franco dictatorship ended in 1975.

Vox is part of a Europe-wide trend that has seen far-right parties taking power, either alone or in coalition, in places like Hungary, Italy and Finland.

Sanchez warned that a PP-Vox government would take Spain into "a dark time warp that will leave us who knows where".

Among its election pledges, Vox wants to overturn laws on gender violence and euthanasia as well as outlawing separatist parties and defending traditions such as bullfighting.

In an op-ed in France's *Le Monde*, former British premier Gordon Brown called Vox's agenda "chilling", warning its entry into government "would push Europe one step further into a right-wing abyss".

Since the vote took place at the height of summer, many people were on holiday and so a record 2.47mn people casting their vote by post.

Sanchez, 51, called the snap poll after his Socialist party and its far-left allies were heavily defeated in local and regional elections at the end of May.

Despite a strong economic performance on his watch, Sanchez's standing has suffered due to the political deals his minority coalition has had to make to push through legislation.

Since Sanchez became premier in 2018, Spain's economy has outperformed most of its EU peers, growing by 5.5% last year, with inflation dropping below 2.0%, a rarity in Europe.

He has also introduced a sharp rise in the minimum wage, higher pensions and free commuter rail travel.

But his government's reliance on Catalan and Basque separatist parties to pass legislation has hurt his standing, as has his occasional deals with Bildu, the heir of the political arm of the disbanded Basque separatist group ETA.

Another major blow was a botched rape law that let more than 1,000 convicted sex offenders secure a reduction in their sentences. Feijoo, 61, has vowed to overturn many of Sanchez's laws, including one allowing anyone 16 and over to change their ID card gender on the basis of a simple statement.

If the PP and Vox fall short of a working majority, that would give the Socialists a chance to form another government because they have more options to create alliances.

Analysts could not rule out the possibility that neither side could secure a working majority, which would force a repeat election, as happened in 2019.

"With an absolute majority or not, we need a government from this," 30-year-old advertising agent Daniela Fite told AFP.

Fans, swimwear and sweat: Spaniards brave heat to vote

By Aislinn Laing
Madrid

Spaniards got up early, voted in swimwear and turned ballot papers into fans to beat sweltering heat yesterday as they took part in an election that many saw as ill-timed in the middle of summer.

By midday, long queues were reported outside polling stations, where staff installed fans, set up portable air conditioning machines and gave out bottles of water to keep voters and polling staff cool.

One polling station in Mallorca moved eight of its nine voting tables outside after the room became "unbearably hot", RTVE state television reported. There were sporadic reports on local media of elderly people fainting as they went to vote.

Some 40.5% of votes were cast by 2pm compared to 37.9% in the last election in November 2019. Another 2.47mn people — about 7% of those eligible to vote in Spain voted before Sunday by post.

Commentators on local media remarked on long queues building earlier than usual. Most voters said their motive was to beat the heat.

"I've always voted early," one elderly man told RTVE. "Less heat, more coffee!" In a video posted on Twitter, one man showed up to vote in southern Malaga in a snorkel, flippers and Hawaian shirt in protest at being asked to vote at a time when about a quarter of Spaniards are habitually on holiday.

In Barcelona, some arrived in swimming trunks and flipflops. "The beach can wait," Jose, an office manager who did not want to give his last name, told Reuters. "I'm going there now because I have already voted, and feel calmer." "Spaniards will vote freely... Despite the weather conditions and against all adversity, we will show the world that Spain can overcome the temperatures, the disruption and holidays," said a flushed-looking Alberto Nunez Feijoo, of the conservative frontrunners, the People's Party, as he voted in Madrid.

He has vowed to make it illegal to hold elections at the height of summer.

Meterological agency AEMET issued high temperature alerts for yesterday, with the hottest areas in Andalusia, Navarra and Aragon where temperatures could touch 40 Celsius, and up to 39C in provinces including the capital Madrid. Spain endured the hottest and second-driest spring since records began in 1961, and higher than average temperatures are likely to continue this summer, with two heatwaves already baking the country in June and July.

— **Reuters**



Fans are placed to cool off as people queue during a general snap election at a polling station in Barcelona yesterday. (Reuters)

Tourists flee wildfires on Greek island

Reuters
Rhodes

Thousands of tourists and residents fleeing wildfires on the Greek island of Rhodes took refuge in schools and shelters yesterday, with many evacuated on private boats as flames threatened resorts and coastal villages.

Thousands spent the night on beaches and streets during what Greece said was its biggest safe transport of residents and tourists in emergency conditions.

Some 19,000 people were moved from homes and hotels overnight as fires burning since last Wednesday gathered pace, tearing through forests until the flames reached coastal resorts on the island's south-eastern coast.

Some holidaymakers said they walked for miles in scorching heat to reach safety. The fires left trees black and skeletal. Dead animals lay in the road near burnt-out cars.

Tour operators Jet2, TUI and Correndon cancelled flights leaving for Rhodes, which lies southeast of mainland Greece and is famous for its beaches and historic sites. "The smoke was coming. So we all set off on foot. I walked 12 miles in this heat yesterday. It took me four hours," said British tourist Chris Freestone.

He spoke from a sports hall alongside evacuees lying on mattresses in the island's principal city, Rhodes Town, which was unaffected by the fires further south.

TUI said its teams were doing everything they could to support customers and had sent in additional staff in what it called "a difficult and evolving situation".

Another holidaymaker, Fay Mortimer from Cheshire in northern England, said the experience had been terrifying.

"I've never been so scared in my entire life," she said.

The Greek transport ministry said TUI and Jet2, which handle the bulk of tourism to Rhodes, planned 14 scheduled flights from Rhodes airport, transferring about 2,700 passengers until 3am local time.

All TUI and Jet2 flights would land empty to pick up tourists, the ministry said. Fires are common in Greece but climate change has led to more extreme heatwaves across southern Europe and many parts of the world.

Temperatures over the past week have exceeded 40 degrees Celsius in many parts of Greece. In addition to Rhodes, emergency services were dealing with fires on the island of Evia, east of Athens and Aigio, southwest of Athens, and on the island of Corfu where authorities ordered the precautionary evacuation of five small settlements.

A fire brigade official said the wildfires on Rhodes have affected 10% of hotels in the central and southeast parts of the island. The north and western parts were not affected.



Tourists wait for departing planes at the airport after their evacuation following a wildfire on Rhodes island yesterday. (**Reuters**)

Russia strikes Odesa cathedral, Putin: Counteroffensive failed





Left: A view shows the Transfiguration Cathedral damaged by Russian missile strike in Odesa yesterday. ***Above:*** Russian President Vladimir Putin (left) and Belarus' President Alexander Lukashenko visit Museum of Naval Glory during a visit to Kronstadt, on Kotlin Island, outside Saint Petersburg. (**Reuters**, **AFP**)

AFP
Kyiv

Russia's latest strike on Odesa yesterday killed two people and severely damaged a historic Orthodox cathedral, drawing a vow of retaliation from Ukraine's leader.

In Russian, Russian President Vladimir Putin claimed Kyiv's counteroffensive had "failed" as he met his closest ally, Belarus leader Alexander Lukashenko, in Saint Petersburg.

The 18th-century Transfiguration Cathedral, the biggest Orthodox church in Odesa, lies within the Unesco-protected historic city centre.

Unesco condemned the "brazen" attack on Odesa, which hit several sites in the port city's World Heritage centre. The attack marked "an escalation of violence against (the) cultural heritage of Ukraine", said Unesco chief Audrey Azoulay.

The strike on Odesa, which Russia has pounded since quitting the Black Sea grain deal last week, came just hours before Russian President Vladimir Putin met his Belarus counterpart for talks.

On the Black Sea in Odesa, locals looked in disbelief as the Transfiguration Cathedral — originally built in 1794 under imperial Russian rule — was hit.

Clergymen rescued icons from rubble inside the badly damaged shrine, which was demolished under Stalin in 1936 and rebuilt in the 1990s after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Ukraine said it had been "destroyed twice: by Stalin and Putin", denouncing the cathedral strike as a "war crime".

President Volodymyr Zelensky vowed retaliation: "They will definitely feel this," he said.

Images showed smashed mosaics on the cathedral floor as workers cleared the rubble. The outside of the building appeared intact.

"There was a direct hit to the cathedral," said Father Myroslav, the assistant rector of the cathedral. "It completely damaged three altars.

Icons were pulled out from under the rubble and the shrine was "very badly damaged inside", with "only the bell tower intact", he added.

Clergymen said a security guard and a priest getting ready for a morning liturgy were inside during the attack but both survived.

Russia blamed the cathedral damage on Ukrainian air defence. It said it had hit all its intended targets in the Odesa strike, claiming the sites were being used to prepare "terrorist acts" against Russia.

But local people said Russia had hit ordinary residential areas.

"We have ordinary residential buildings here, where people live," a woman who owns a beauty salon nearby, Tetiana, told AFP.

"There are no military facilities here. Just simple beauty salons, a marine agency, a groomer. Nothing military here at all."

Anzhelika Domanska said she ran with her neighbours when she saw the cathedral burning.

The strike came a year after a missile had hit her house in nearby Mykolaiv.

"It is not a pleasant anniversary," she said.

Ukraine has vowed to find a way to continue exports from the ports and said yesterday repeated Russian strikes on Odesa this week were an attempt to "prevent and neutralise international efforts to restore the functioning of the "grain corridor."

As Odesa cleared rubble from the Russian strikes, Putin hosted his ally Lukashenko in his native city of Saint Petersburg — their first meeting since Minsk helped end a revolt by Russia's Wagner force.

Both leaders were dismissive of the Ukrainian counteroffensive to take back land captured by Russia.

"There is no counteroffensive," Lukashenko said at the meeting, before being interrupted by Putin: "There is one, but it has failed."

The Belarus strongman now hosts Wagner fighters on his territory, after brokering a deal that convinced its leader Yevgeny Prigozhin to end a march on Moscow and exile himself to Belarus.

"We are controlling what is happening (with Wagner)," he said, thanking Putin for vowing to defend Belarus should it be attacked.

Wagner's presence in Belarus has rattled EU and Nato member Poland, which has strengthened its border.

Yesterday, Polish Defence Minister Mariusz Blaszczak said a new battalion of sappers would be formed in the country's northeast.

Polish, US, British, Romanian and Croatian soldiers were training "shoulder to shoulder", he said, during a visit to the north-eastern city of Augustow.

The comments came two days after Putin said western Poland was a "gift" from Stalin at the end of World War II, when victorious allies decided on the contours of post-war Europe. Warsaw had summoned the Russian ambassador over the remarks.

Both Putin and Lukashenko also accused Warsaw of having territorial ambitions on Ukraine and Belarus.

Ukraine's Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba responded quickly on Twitter.

"Putin's attempts to drive a wedge between Kyiv and Warsaw are as futile as his failing invasion of Ukraine," he wrote.

"Unlike Russia, Poland and Ukraine have learned from history and will always stand united against Russian imperialism and disrespect for international law."

Fighting in Ukraine continued yesterday, with Russia launching 17 cruise missiles and two ballistic missiles, according to the Ukraine army.

QATAR


The launch of the campaign.

HMC-WWRC hosts person-centred care awareness campaign

As part of Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC)'s Person-Centred Care (PCC) journey, the Women's Wellness and Research Centre (WWRC) successfully hosted a PCC Awareness Campaign recently.

Members of the Patient and Family Advisory Council (PFAC) played an important role planning and organising the event in collaboration with hospital staff from various departments, including Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Women's Emergency, Intensive Care Unit (ICU), and the Neonatal ICU.

"At the WWRC, we strive to meet the healthcare needs of every woman in Qatar in a manner that respects their individual values and preferences," said WWRC chief executive and medical director Dr Hilal al-Rifai. "Through the awareness campaign, we were able to show to the community that we are dedicated in providing them with a person-centred quality of care."

The campaign has helped to spread knowledge of the people-centred care (PCC) principles and practices by offering general information and learning opportunities about the services provided by the WWRC.

"All the PFAC members, patients and their families who were present at the event were encouraged to share their experiences to bring about the necessary improvement changes in the WWRC, which would simultaneously enhance the quality of care and patient experience at the HMC," said PCC specialist Dr Huda al-Saleh.

This year, the WWRC is one of the HMC hospitals undergoing Planetree Certification for Excellence in Person-Centred Care.

The Planetree Certification represents the highest level of achievement in PCC-based on evidence and standards.

"Person-centred care is about doing things for the patient, with the patient," said Nasser al-Naimi, deputy chief of Quality at the Centre for Patient Experience and Staff Engagement and director for Hamad Healthcare Quality Institute. "The role of the PFAC as advocates of PCC at the HMC has allowed us to improve our services in order to deliver excellent patient experience."

Store974 opens its largest gaming store at Place Vendôme



Khalifa al-Haroon led the opening of Store974 at Place Vendome recently.

Store974, the leading destination for PC gaming enthusiasts in Qatar, has announced the grand opening of its third and largest store in Qatar and the region, located on the 2nd level of Place Vendôme Qatar.

This launch marks a significant milestone for the gaming community in the country, offering an unparalleled gaming experience like never before.

"At Store974, we are thrilled to unveil our biggest and most ambitious store to date," said Khalifa al-Haroon, the chief executive of Store974 and ILoveQatar.net. "Our commitment to the gaming community in Qatar remains unwavering."

"The new store's unique features, such as Geek Street, Gamer's Cave, and Retro Gogo, are a testament to our passion for gaming culture and dedication to providing an extraordinary experience to our customers," he said. "We can't wait to work with more members of the community and give them all a space to grow."

"I wanted to show people how we do things in Qatar, and I'm so happy to hear all the amazing feedback from customers that visited from around the world. Our next steps will be to bring Qatar to the world," al-Haroon added.

With a strategic location and state-of-the-art facilities, customers can find many international brands at all price points.

Store974 leading the way

Store974 has been a leading name in the gaming community since its inception. As the go-to destination for PC gaming enthusiasts in Qatar, the store has continuously raised the bar by offering top-quality gaming components and unparalleled customer service. With its third and largest store, Store974 aims to elevate the gaming experience in the Middle East and provide gamers with an exceptional and immersive environment they deserve. The store operates out of Gate Mall, Mall of Qatar, and Place Vendome.



Covering 1,080sq m, the Place Vendome branch boasts an extensive array of products.

Covering an impressive 1,080sq m, the Place Vendome branch boasts an extensive array of products across various categories, catering to all gaming needs and preferences, such as the latest and best computer parts for the gamer's build, consoles, smart home products like lighting and pet feeders, toys, and more.

Store974 brings products from numerous leading companies in the industry to the local market, such as EKWB, Gigabyte, Ducky, Lian Li, MSI, NZXT, Zotac, Thermal Take, Epic Gamers, and UGreen.

For console gamers, Store974 offers games, consoles, and accessories across all leading platforms and brands, including PlayStation, Xbox and Nintendo.

The store is poised to redefine the gaming retail landscape, catering to gamers of all levels.

It showcases the latest cutting-edge gaming technology and top-of-the-line PC components, ensuring enthusiasts have access to the most advanced and high-quality products in the market, from powerful graphics cards to lightning-fast processors.

A unique feature of the retail store is that it includes dedicated areas such as the Build Bar, where tech enthusiasts can customise their dream gaming rigs under the guidance of experts.

A dedicated space named Geek Street promises to be a tech lover's haven, with an eclectic collection of gadgets, accessories, and limited-edition merchandise inspired by favourite pop culture icons.

Retro gamers can rediscover the joy of gaming's golden era, with classic video games from companies like Sega and Atari, vintage consoles, and rare collectables.



Store974 remains committed to providing exceptional customer service, with professional and well-trained staff to support customers.

One can also find local Qatari startups like Majlis Al Shabab and SectorX, who have set up their own pop-ups.

Visitors can also explore the Gamer's Cave, where they can immerse themselves in the ultimate gaming experience, design and build the gaming room of their dreams, complete with high-performance PCs and top-notch accessories.

There's even a dedicated architect to help create renders for gamers and enthusiasts.

Another dedicated section is the Energy Bar, which offers hot and cold drinks and free Karak for customers.

While the new store's offerings are undoubtedly remarkable, Store974's commitment to an exceptional customer experience remains at the forefront: the highly knowledgeable and passionate staff are always on hand to assist customers, providing expert advice on PC builds, having an in-house build bar, and ensuring that every customer finds the perfect gaming solution tailored to their needs.

Store974 has a great customer loyalty programme, known as LevelUP rewards, which allows customers to gain points with their purchases.

Users can use these points to receive discounts, rewards, and get upgrades.

People can find the newest store in Place Vendome, with other megastores within Mall of Qatar, The Gate Mall, and a shop-in-shop within Virgin Megastores in Villaggio mall.

Katara summer camp activities get underway

The summer camp activities and events of Katara Camp got underway yesterday and will continue until August 15.

The camp takes place on Sundays, Mondays and Tuesdays in the southern area of Katara – the Cultural Village from 10am-7pm, with the participation of 40 children aged 10-15.

The camp is organised in collaboration of several entities, including the Ministry of Interior (MoI), the Ministry of Endowments (Awqaf) and Islamic Affairs, the Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS), Al Jazeera Media Institute, Nomas Centre, and the Qatar Shooting For Bow and Arrow Federation.

Monday's programme includes activities and lectures presented by the Civil Defence, the Poetry Council, and the Ministry of Awqaf, along with a workshop on *The Importance of Volunteering in Events*, in addition to training for the Qatari Arda dance.

In addition, there will be visits to the Pearl Museum, and beach volleyball and badminton games.

On the first day of the camp, the participants attended some lectures, including one from the Civil Defence about protection and safety measures.

Other participating entities also delivered lectures on topics such as self-confidence, and religious issues.

The children took part in a number of sports activities such as football, shooting, beach volleyball, and badminton, which were all supervised by specialised sports staff.

QRCS communications and public relations director Mohamed al-Marri stressed the organisation's commitment to the Katara Summer Camp, with four workshops planned throughout the month to familiarise 120 students aged 10-13 with basic first aid skills and proper health guidelines.

This partnership reflects the shared vision between the QRCS and Katara in promoting social, educational, and voluntary activities to build the capacities of young leaders.

Dr Abdulsalam Saleh, lecturer and researcher at the MoI's Department of Studies and International Affairs, said that the purpose of his lecture was to raise awareness among children about the importance of family bonds, religious piety, and enhancing authentic values and personal strength, which would positively influence behaviour.

Ahmed al-Kuwari from the Qatar Shooting for Bow and Arrow Federation said that this is not the federation's first participation in Katara events, as they have been involved in various festivals and activities before.

Its activities are aimed at teaching children air rifle shooting skills, and they provide mobile caravans with trainers from 5pm-7pm to train children and members of the public interested in trying the sport.

The federation also aims to attract children to join the national team.

Al Jazeera Media Institute offers a series of workshops as part of the "Al Jazeera Ambassadors" initiative.

The initiative's vision is to convey the message and values of Al Jazeera and share the experiences and skills of their employees through free training courses to empower young talents within the Arab world and beyond.

The main goal of the Katara Summer Camp is to link educational practices with the promotion of Qatari identity, local customs, and traditions, contributing to the development of social, religious, and national values.

Accordingly, the Maritime Museum and Beaches Department will present activities related to pearl diving, and the participants will receive valuable information during their museum visits, introducing them to maritime heritage and reviving ancestral traditions.

Further, the camp includes workshops on traditional practices such as starting a fire to make traditional coffee, coffee-making methods, and the way of serving coffee to the guests and receiving them at the Qatari Majlis, besides other authentic Qatari customs and traditions such as Ardah dance.


Snapshots from the summer camp activities.





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