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Amir congratulates King Salman on Saudi National Day

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, His Highness the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani and HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani sent cables of congratulations to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz al-Saud of Saudi Arabia on his country's National Day. **(QNA)**

Karabakh rebels in talks to withdraw their forces

Nagorno-Karabakh separatists said yesterday they were negotiating the withdrawal of their troops from the disputed enclave after Azerbaijan reclaimed control in a lightning offensive. Azerbaijan on Thursday held a first round of "reintegration" talks with the ethnic-Armenian rebels after they agreed to lay down their weapons in the face of the day-long military assault. **Page 11**

Ukraine missile attack on Russian naval HQ

Ukraine claimed responsibility for a missile attack that struck the headquarters of Moscow's Black Sea fleet in annexed Crimea yesterday, sparking a huge fire and leaving at least one Russian serviceman missing. The strike on the symbolic heart of Russia's Black Sea fleet marks a major blow for Moscow, which has suffered a string of attacks on the strategically important port in recent months. **Page 11**

US auto workers expand strike at GM, Stellantis

The US auto workers union expanded a potentially damaging strike against two of Detroit's "Big Three" yesterday — and invited President Joe Biden to support workers on the picket line. United Auto Workers (UAW) President Shawn Fain announced strikes would begin at 38 US parts and distribution centres owned by General Motors and Stellantis, with whom negotiations have stalled. **Page 7**

Inaugural Jetski Jumping Competition thrills Doha

By **Joey Aguilar**
Staff Reporter

The shores of the Old Doha Port witnessed a spectacular display of aerial acrobatics on the water as the first-ever Jetski Jumping Competition in Qatar kicked off yesterday.

During the first of the two-day exhilarating event, the participants – aged between 18 and 25 – enthralled spectators with their stunning performance in gravity-defying stunts. The competition concludes today. The timing is from 3pm-6pm.

"It is very important for us to boost the water activities and encourage people to engage in these kinds of competitions since we do not have this kind of privilege everywhere," an organiser told *Gulf Times*.

She noted that the event was divided into two categories: RXP and Spark, each featuring 10 expert participants. A pair of specially designed jet boats generate the waves, propelling the jetski daredevils to new heights.

She added that the scoring for the competition is based on a number of key elements: style,

height of jumps, hand gestures (one or two-handed), mid-air spins (including 360-degree rotations), and precision criteria determined by a panel of expert judges.

"This event holds immense significance for Qatar, especially for our thriving tourism sector," she said. "Doha Port enjoys year-round access to the sea, a precious resource for us. This competition not only amplifies water activities but also indicates more competitions and visitors to our shores."

She said enthusiasm for water sports is gaining traction in Qatar, and the nation is gearing up for the upcoming aquathlon in three weeks, combining swimming and running events at the Old Doha Port.

Organisers have ambitious plans to elevate the Jetski Jumping Competition onto the international stage. "This year is a local affair, but if successful, we plan to make it a seasonal fixture. We want to throw open the registration to participants from across the Gulf and beyond, thus drawing in more visitors and propelling Qatar onto the global water sports map," she said. **To Page 12**



Action from the first-ever Jetski Jumping Competition in Qatar, which began yesterday at Old Doha Port. **PICTURE:** Shaji Kayamkulam

Prime Minister meets AUC chairperson



HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani met on Thursday with Chairperson of the African Union Commission Moussa Faki Mahamat, on the sidelines of the 78th UN General Assembly in New York. The meeting discussed co-operation between Qatar and the African Union. **(QNA)**

Qatar set to host Islamic world culture conference

Qatar, represented by the Ministry of Culture, will host the 12th Conference of Ministers of Culture in Islamic World under the theme 'Toward renewing cultural action in the Islamic world' on Monday.

The two-day conference, which the Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Iesco) is organising within the framework of its competencies, will discuss a number of topics, including issues of cultural development in the Islamic world, and mechanisms for developing the Iesco's Programme for Cultural Capitals in the Islamic World. It will also discuss some projects such as the programme to value living human treasures and traditional knowledge in the Islamic world, cultural policy guidelines and indicators for sustainable development in a transforming world, and strategy to combat illicit trafficking in cultural property.

The conference will be at-

tended by ministers of cultural affairs from a large number of Iesco member states, along with representatives of regional and international organisations working in the areas of culture and heritage, to discuss renewing collaborative cultural actions and ways to develop co-operation among Islamic countries in this sphere.

Qatar's hosting of this ministerial conference is the culmination of the efforts of the Ministry of Culture to support joint cultural action and consolidates the traditions of cultural and civilisational exchange among the peoples of the Islamic world. It also confirms the common civilisational and cultural values on which the state's vision for a diverse and rich Arab-Islamic cultural scene is based.

It is also the culmination of the success of Doha Capital of Culture in the Islamic World 2021 under the slogan "Our Culture is Enlightenment", that was held

within the Iesco's Programme for Cultural Capitals in the Islamic World.

In preparation for the conference, the 18th session of the Consultative Council for Cultural Development in the Islamic World, whose General Secretariat is held by Iesco, will be held today to discuss a number of draft decisions and documents related to the work of the Ministerial Conference, most notably the adoption of the draft agenda of the 12th Islamic Conference of Culture Ministers, and the formation of the office of the Consultative Council for Cultural Development in the Islamic World.

An intellectual symposium to discuss the influences on Islamic civilisation and its impact on humanity will be organised, while the Doha declaration on renewing cultural action in the Islamic world will be adopted in the closing session of the conference. **(QNA)**

QF-PUE launches initiatives for student well-being

By **Joseph Varghese**
Staff Reporter

The Pre-University Education (PUE) at Qatar Foundation (QF) has launched several initiatives which include school counsellors, psychologists and Darb Clinic to support the students for their mental well-being, especially in the post Covid-19 scenario.

According to QF website, there are 13 schools under the PUE network with over 7,000 students and over 1,300 staff and faculty. They represent 49 nationalities and there are more than 6,000 alumni.

"PUE has a team of counsellors in place at every school to ensure

ongoing responsive approaches to well-being and mental health needs. There is also a psychologist in most schools, and available as needed across our schools, for issues that require a more individualised and long-term intervention," said Edward Lawless - executive director, Academic Development, PUE.

"In addition to school-based staffing and interventions, the Darb clinic offers parents the opportunity to bring their children to a clinic outside the school day which adheres to the guidelines and quality associated with the professionals in our schools," explained the official.

Darb initiative - Assessment and Psycho-Educational Evaluations - offers educational evalu-

ations and therapy services for children and adolescents aged 3-18. The services are available in areas such as: Cognitive and psycho-educational evaluations; speech and language; occupational therapy; gifted and talented evaluations; psycho-education to parents and age-appropriate children/adolescents; counselling for social or emotional or behavioural concerns among others.

The official noted that PUE has started to collect comprehensive data on school climate, which includes many indicators relevant to student well-being.

"Each school receives training that invites a context-specific response to the needs indicated by the data. Responses are embracing intervention like increasing



Edward Lawless

their counsellor to student ratio, reactivating positive behavioural strategies, implementing social-emotional learning curriculum,

and actively engaging culturally responsive practices in their school. These efforts are supported by a new curriculum framework that promotes and holistic and student-centred approach to classroom instruction," continued Lawless.

Since the pandemic, PUE has seen an increase in safeguarding concerns, teacher burnout, teacher frustration in response to student behaviour, and behaviour from children that is not aligned with previous developmental norms.

The official pointed out that PUE teachers receive several training courses in mental health to help them identify and support students who may be facing mental health difficulties. In ad-

dition, there are on-going consultation and coaching available in PUE schools as specific needs arise.

He noted there are specific systems within PUE to assist students who are struggling with their mental health. "Our multi-tiered systems of support are specifically designed to differentiate between normal mental health challenges, needs requiring classroom-driven short-term solutions, and clinical needs. This system is driven by data, consistent collaboration, and highly trained staff who are ready to respond to clinically significant needs. In the rare case of a crisis that impacts the whole school, a crisis response team stands ready to intervene and support," he added.



Al-Muraikhi partakes in LDCs conference, security council meeting on Ukraine



HE the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sultan bin Saad al-Muraikhi participated yesterday in the annual ministerial meeting of the least developed countries (LDCs), which was held on the sidelines of the 78th session of the UN General Assembly in New York.



HE the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sultan bin Saad al-Muraikhi participated in the UN Security Council Meeting on Ukraine, on the sidelines of the 78th UN General Assembly (UNGA) in New York. **(QNA)**

Official

Amir congratulates Mali 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 Mali's Interim President Colonel Assimi Goita on the anniversary of his country's Independence Day. HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani also sent a similar cable of congratulations to Prime Minister Choguel Kokalla Maiga. **(QNA)**

Qatar attends UNGA meeting on universal health coverage

QNA
New York

Qatar participated in the high-level meeting on universal health coverage at the UN General Assembly.

Qatar was represented at the meeting by HE the Minister of Public Health and Chairman of the Executive Board of the World Health Organisation (WHO) Dr Hanan Mohamed al-Kuwari. The meeting endorsed a political declaration to accelerate progress towards universal health coverage by 2030.

Speaking at the meeting, HE Dr al-Kuwari said: "The Political Declaration on Achieving Universal Health Coverage by 2030 is a strong foundation for accelerating the fulfilment of our shared commitments in this regard."

She stressed the need to intensify collective efforts to strengthen commitment to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, focusing attention on achieving universal health coverage, a key pillar in providing quality health care for all.

She highlighted Qatar's firm commitment to taking decisive action at the national level to meet the requirements of the 2030 agenda, adding: "We have achieved important goals in our journey towards achieving our development goals, and the State of Qatar has presented, on three occasions, voluntary national assessments that provide transparent insights on the progress we have made and our leading efforts in strengthening development partnerships."

She added: "Recognising the



HE Dr Hanan Mohamed al-Kuwari speaking at the meeting.

importance of multilateral co-operation towards achieving universal health coverage, the State of Qatar has provided the necessary assistance to mitigate the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, especially for the population and groups most in need of care.

"Our humanitarian assistance and urgent medical support have extended to many countries, and the Qatar Fund for Development has allocated more than \$140mn to support healthcare institutions and programs of international organisations."

HE Dr al-Kuwari added: "Under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, the State of Qatar has succeeded in responding efficiently to the Covid-19 pandemic, and we have learned valuable lessons, which we are keen to share with the international community."

"The whole-of-government approach and robust healthcare system have enabled us to mitigate the impact of the pandemic and maintain one of the lowest mortal-

ity rates in the world. Our country has also contributed significantly to the global understanding of Covid-19 infections and vaccines through many high-level scientific studies published in leading medical journals.

"We have been successful in hosting world-class events, including the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, and through careful planning and dedicated effort from all stakeholders, we have been able to minimise any significant impact of the pandemic on the health of the population nationally and internationally."

She stressed Qatar's firm position in supporting co-operation with the international community to achieve the common goals. The High-Level Meeting on Universal Health Coverage aimed to provide an opportunity for countries and stakeholders to renew efforts to achieve health for all, and the adoption of the Political Declaration on Universal Health Coverage was a key support for the international community's efforts in this regard.

'UNRWA top priority for Qatar'

Qatar participated in the ministerial meeting of main partners to support the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). The meeting was held on the sidelines of the 78th session of the UN General Assembly in New York.

Qatar was represented at the meeting by HE the Minister of State for International Co-operation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Lolwah bint Rashid AlKhatir. During the meeting, HE AlKhatir expressed Qatar's appreciation for the continuous efforts made by Jordan and Sweden each year to highlight the financial situation of UNRWA.

She emphasised that UNRWA remains a top priority for Qatar and highly praised the critical importance of the basic services the agency provides to millions of vulnerable refugees in the occupied Palestinian territories and neighbouring countries.

She stressed that UNRWA's role is extremely important for regional stability as long as the refugee issue remains unresolved and the Palestinian cause awaits a just, permanent, and comprehensive solution.

She also underlined the need



HE Lolwah bint Rashid AlKhatir

to address the recurring liquidity crises faced by the agency and the chronic funding shortfall.

HE AlKhatir said that ensuring sufficient and predictable funding is essential, otherwise the quality and continuity of UNRWA's essential services could be compromised. She noted that Qatar remains committed to providing core funding to the agency as the first Arab country to sign a multi-year agreement with UNRWA in 2018. She also noted that, in this year's donation pledging conference, the State of Qatar pledged \$16mn for

the agency's core resources for the years 2023 and 2024. HE AlKhatir expressed her deep appreciation for the dedication and hard work of UNRWA staff, including Commissioner General of UNRWA Philippe Lazzarini. She commended their relentless efforts in challenging and difficult conditions, in addition to their professionalism in ensuring that UNRWA remains a trusted and capable agency despite limited resources. She affirmed that Qatar will continue to be a strong supporter of UNRWA in collaboration with other partners. **(QNA)**

QU enhances academic ties with University of Sarajevo

In a significant step towards enhancing international academic co-operation, Qatar University (QU) president Dr Omar al-Ansari, held a meeting with Ivana Pejovic, charge d'affaires at the embassy of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The meeting focused on enhancing academic relations through bilateral ties and student exchange programmes between QU and the University of Sarajevo (UNSA), a statement explained.

Various means of promoting academic co-operation between QU and UNSA were discussed. The highlights included the renewal of the memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the two institutions, fostering student exchanges, the possibility of offering scholarships for Bosnian students at QU, and the urgent need for an Arabic language lecturer at the UNSA as part of an effort to enhance faculty exchange programmes.

Though QU currently offers two scholarship positions to Bosnian students through the Academic National Network for Scholar-



A view of QU campus.

ships, the discussions revolved around the expansion of this programme, with the aim of accommodating more talented students from Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Pejovic invited Dr al-Ansari to visit UNSA and officially sign the renewed MoU. She expressed her intent to explore the possibility of Bosnian universities participating in QU's upcoming November conferences, which span a wide array of academic disciplines and serve as a platform for scholars, researchers, and students to exchange ideas and knowledge.

Dr al-Ansari said: "The meeting represents a significant milestone in our efforts to enhance academic ties with UNSA. We believe that education is a powerful tool for building bridges between nations, and we are committed to promoting mutual cooperation."

Pejovic said: "We look forward to future co-operation, especially concerning outstanding Bosnian students."

Additionally, the possibility of exchanging experts and Arabic language lecturers at our university is a great prospect."

QU launches first phase of 'Safety and Flow' campaign

QNA
Doha

Qatar University (QU) launched the first phase of the 'Safety and Flow: A Shared Responsibility' campaign aimed at ensuring the quality and flow of traffic on campus. The campaign includes a series of measures aimed at facilitating the flow of traffic on the university campus, while it includes aspects related to parking, opening new gates, and directing students to them, in addition to facilitating transportation services for students and university staff within the campus.

In a statement marking the occasion, Director of Facilities and General Services Department engineer Mai Fetais confirmed that the university had completed preparations for a new parking lot that aims to serve students from the College of Engineering and College of Busi-

ness and Economics, as one part of a comprehensive plan that began at the beginning of the current semester.

She pointed out that in accordance with the plan, short-term parking will be allocated for drivers of female students.

Mai Fetais added that the plan includes providing a golf cart service that will transport female students from the multi-storey parking to the colleges. She noted that the administration has provided everything that would provide comfort for the students, such as cafeterias in these parking lots.

The Director of Facilities and General Services Department noted the opening of three new gates, bringing the total of entry points to the QU campus to seven, which aims to reduce congestion at other gates. These new gates include Gate No 7, which leads directly to the College of Arts and Sciences (Female), Gate No 4, and Gate No 5,

which lead to the College of Education, College of Law and Student Affairs Building.

Mai Fetais encouraged the QU community to take advantage of these gates, to reduce pressure on the main gates and to avoid drop-off on the public streets, to ensure the safety of all and to prevent further traffic congestion.

The University has also worked on a comprehensive communication plan for this campaign to guide students to benefit from these new positions and the services it provide.

The operation of the multi-storey park is the first step in this thorough plan, which will be followed by successive steps, as part of a large project to regulate the flow of traffic within the QU campus in coordination and cooperation with concerned external authorities: The Ministry of Interior, Public Works Authority (Ashghal), specialised consulting offices, and others.

Ministers in New York meetings

HE the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sultan bin Saad al-Muraikhi and HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Mohamed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh al-Khulaifi held a number of meetings yesterday on the sidelines of the 78th session of the UN General Assembly in New York. HE al-Khulaifi met with Rwandan Minister of Foreign Affairs and

International Co-operation Dr Vincent Biruta. The meeting dealt with bilateral relations, and efforts to promote peace on the African continent. HE al-Muraikhi took part in the annual meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the Group of 77 (G77). He also took part in the meeting of the Peacebuilding Commission at the ministerial level

on the new Peacebuilding Agenda. HE al-Muraikhi met separately with Mauritanian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Co-operation, and Mauritians Abroad Mohamed Salem Ould Merzoug, and Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Ali Sabri. The two meetings dealt with bilateral relations besides discussing a number of topics of common interest. **(QNA)**

Myanmar deputy PM meets Qatari diplomat

Deputy Prime Minister and Union Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar Than Swe met with Acting Charge d'Affaires at the embassy of the State of Qatar to Myanmar Dr Rashid bin Abdullah al-Kuwari. The meeting discussed aspects of bilateral co-operation between the two countries. **(QNA)**



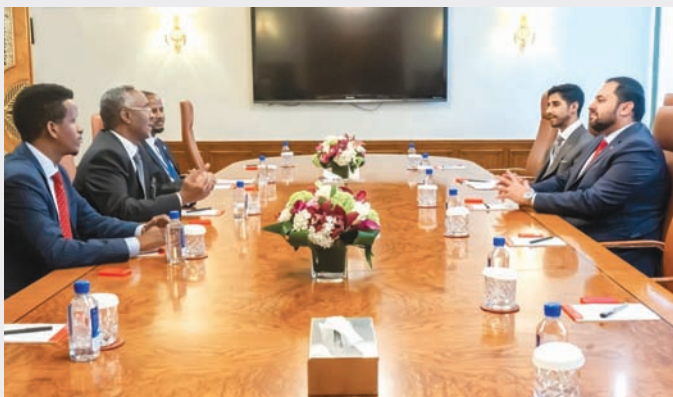
Al-Khulaifi in New York meetings



HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Mohamed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh al-Khulaifi met with Director-General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Rafael Grossi on the sidelines of the 78th session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York. The meeting dealt with discussing bilateral co-operation between Qatar and the agency. The two sides affirmed the agency's important and leading role, particularly in preventing nuclear proliferation. The director-general expressed during this meeting his appreciation of Qatar's efforts in supporting the region's pillars of security and stability.



HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Mohamed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh al-Khulaifi met with Minister of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants of the Lebanese Republic Dr Abdallah Bouhabib, on the sidelines of 78th session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York. The meeting dealt with discussing bilateral co-operation between the two countries, and the latest developments in Lebanon. HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stressed during the meeting that Qatar's position is to support Lebanon's unity and stability, and to support the Lebanese people.



HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Mohamed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh al-Khulaifi met with Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation of Somalia Abshir Omar Jama, on the sidelines of the 78th session of the UN General Assembly (UNGA 78) in New York. They discussed bilateral co-operation relations and developments in the situation in Somalia. **(QNA)**



Qatar fully backs comprehensive vision of UN's peace initiatives

QNA
New York

Qatar participated in the 13th ministerial meeting of the Group of Friends of Mediation, which was held on the sidelines of the 78th session of the UN General Assembly in New York. HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dr Mohamed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh al-Khulaifi represented Qatar at the meeting.

Addressing the meeting, HE al-Khulaifi hailed the Qatari mediation efforts that lead to many widely recognised achievements in promoting peace, security and stability, starting from Afghanistan and passing through Lebanon to the Horn of Africa and Chad.

He added that many parties in conflicts look forward to Qatar's good endeavours thanks to its honest and neutral approaches, which affirms that the concerned parties take the lead themselves.

Qatar's continued focus on comprehensive approaches to addressing conflicts and crises, and addressing their root causes, including by supporting human rights and justice, and inclusion of all components of society is another success factor, he added, highlighting Qatar's efforts to enhance participation of women and youth in peace processes.

Last year, Doha hosted the High-Level Global Conference on Youth-Inclusive Peace Processes, which aimed to promote the meaningful inclusion of youth in peace and security.

He added that Qatar sees the UN as an effective and important international body not only as a mediator, but also as a promoter of mediation, and fully supports the comprehensive vision of the UN Secretary-General for the sustainability of peace, which is reflected in his efforts to implement the recommendations related to international peace and security contained in the "Our Common Agenda" report.

Therefore, backing mediation, and innovation in mediation are among the priorities of the multi-year contribution agreement signed this year between the State of Qatar and the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, he added.

He pointed out that Qatar has long been calling for meaningful dialogue in the Gulf region on the basis of common interests, respect for sovereignty, and non-interference in the internal affairs of states, noting that Qatar has intensified its efforts, especially since last year, to facilitate indirect talks between the US and Iran, at the request of both parties, in order to build confidence and complete the Vienna talks. The results of this effort were demonstrated in the detainee exchange agreement on Monday, he noted.

He affirmed that Qatar would continue to work with its international partners to prevent and resolve conflicts and enhance the role of mediation.

Centara West Bay partners with QRCS

Centara West Bay Hotel & Residences Doha partnered with Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS) to extend vital assistance to the earthquake and flood-affected regions of Morocco and Libya. This charitable initiative aims to provide much-needed relief to the communities grappling with the aftermath of natural disasters, a statement said.

To facilitate this initiative and engage its community, Centara West Bay placed donation boxes

at the hotel. These boxes are accessible to both in-house guests and dedicated employees, encouraging them to contribute essential items such as clothing, footwear, bags, children's toys, and kitchen equipment.

The hotel has also donated towels, bathrobes, bedsheets, and pillowcases.

Centara West Bay general manager Sean Spinks expressed his pride in the hotel's ongoing collaboration with QRCS and other

organisations to support community and enhance corporate social responsibility.

"In a remarkable display of compassion and unity, Centara West Bay has taken steps to support Morocco and Libya during their time of need.

"We are committed to our brand's values and will continue to provide support as part of our ongoing commitment. Thank you to our guests and employees for their generous contributions."



ABET renews accreditation for QU engineering courses

Qatar University (QU)'s College of Engineering (CENG) has officially renewed academic accreditation for its previously accredited seven bachelor's degree programmes, a statement said yesterday.

Six undergraduate streams of engineering (Chemical, Civil, Electrical, Industrial and Systems, Mechanical, and Computer) were re-accredited by the Engineering Accreditation Commission of Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET) and the Computer Science programme by the Computing Accreditation Commission of ABET.

The QU statement explained



Dr Khaled Kamal Nagi

that ABET accreditation assures that programmes meet standards to produce graduates ready to enter critical technical fields that are leading the way in innovation and emerging technologies and anticipating the welfare and safety needs of the public. The renewal of accreditation for

bachelor's programmes is international recognition that the college maintains global standards.

Dr Khaled Kamal Nagi, dean of the College of Engineering, stated this renewal aligns with the plan to enhance academic excellence and the college continuously works to improve the global ranking of all its programmes. Achieving accreditation for the college's programmes will enhance the university's role and elevate its global ranking.

Dr Nagi thanked QU president Dr Omar al-Ansari, vice-presidents, industrial partners, alumni, students and his colleges at CENG for their support.



WCM-Q event discusses ways to tackling obesity.

WCM-Q symposium tackles obesity

Weill Cornell Medicine - Qatar (WCM-Q) recently hosted a one-day symposium titled 'Tackling Obesity: Multidisciplinary Approaches for Comprehensive Care,' which comprised a series of lectures and interactive sessions.

Co-ordinated by the Division of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) at WCM-Q and directed by Dr Tariq Chukir, assistant professor of medicine at WCM-Q and a WCM-Q alumnus, the symposium was designed to enable health professionals to recognise misconceptions about the management of obesity; describe up-to-date and evidence-based strategies to manage obesity,

from lifestyle interventions to advanced therapies; and formulate an individualised patient-centred plan to manage patients before, during, and after weight loss.

The symposium was aimed at physicians, nurses, pharmacists, allied health professionals, researchers, and students and was delivered in collaboration with experts from local, regional, and international institutions.

Dr Chukir said: "Obesity is a complex and serious medical problem that increases the risk of developing several other conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, liver disease, sleep apnea, and certain

cancers. By bringing together healthcare professionals from various fields and institutions to discuss the most up-to-date and scientific evidence-based strategies, we can help ensure they can effectively support patients in managing the condition over the long term."

Dr Thurayya Arayssi, vice dean for academic and curricular affairs at WCM-Q, said: "We offer health practitioners a series of workshops on diverse but relevant topics throughout the year. We also provide a comprehensive overview of each topic under discussion by inviting local, regional, and international experts to share their valuable insights."

QU Health faculty placed in esteemed list of ASCP

Qatar University (QU) Health announced that Dr Maha al-Asmakh, associate professor and head of Biomedical Sciences Department at the College of Health Sciences, has been selected as one of the 40 high-achieving esteemed honorees in the American Society of Clinical Pathology's (ASCP) 2023 Under Forty list.

This recognition highlights her exceptional contributions to the field of clinical laboratory sciences and underscores QU's commitment to fostering excellence in education and research, a statement said.

The ASCP president, Dr Marsha Kinney, said: "ASCP's 40 Under Forty programme is an opportunity to recognise the next generation of pathology and medical laboratory leaders from around the globe."

Dr Asma al-Thani, vice-president of Health and Medical Sciences, said: "Dr. Maha al-Asmakh's inclusion in the prestigious ASCP 2023 40 Under Forty list is a testament to her exceptional



Dr Maha al-Asmakh

dedication and contributions to the field. Her innovative work continues to inspire the next generation of healthcare professionals at QU and beyond."

Dr al-Asmakh said: "I am very proud to be the first Qatari to be selected for this prestigious ASCP 40 under forty programme. I am honoured to represent my country, showcase my achievements in the field of clinical labo-

ratory sciences, and highlight the contribution of QU and my department in educating the young generations of clinical laboratory scientists in Qatar."

Dr Hanan Abdul Rahim, dean of the College of Health Sciences, said, Dr al-Asmakh's significant achievement highlights her commitment to excellence in clinical laboratory sciences research and teaching.

"As the head of the Biomedical Sciences Department, Dr al-Asmakh oversees our NAACLS-accredited bachelor programme as well as the Master programme, working to provide the highest quality education for the future generations of laboratory scientists."

During the recent QU's Annual Convocation 2023, Dr al-Asmakh received a special honour dedicated to international achievement. Her remarkable contributions to academia highlight QU's commitment to fostering excellence in education and research on an international scale, the statement added.

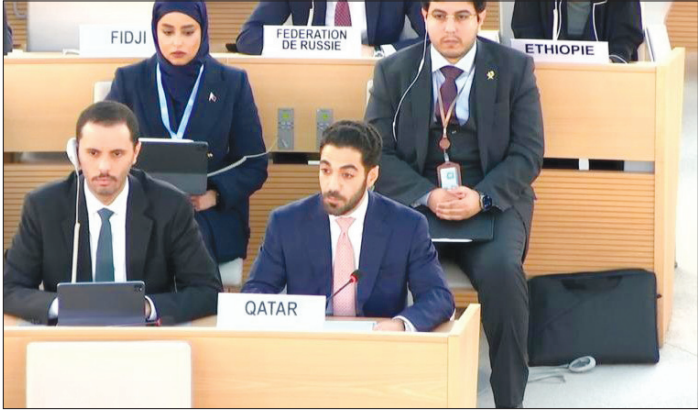


Qatar condemns Syrian escalation in northern cities

Qatar affirmed its strong condemnation of the escalation of military operations carried out by Syrian forces against the cities of northern Syria, which caused the death of civilians, the displacement of thousands of families, and the continuation of human rights violations.

This came yesterday during the statement of Qatar delivered by Abdullah Behzad, Third Secretary at the Permanent Delegation of Qatar to the UN Office in Geneva, during the interactive dialogue with the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria, before the 54th session of the Human Rights Council.

The peaceful protests that have recently taken place on the streets in a number of Syrian cities, especially Daraa and Suwayda, are evidence that the revolution is still going on, and that the Syrian people of all sects are still steadfast and determined to bring about a real change that guarantees justice, freedom and dignity, Behzad said calling on the international community to protect the Syrian people and ensure that all those responsible for the violations



committed against them are held accountable.

The Syrian regime failed to exhibit any interest in the initiatives and proposed solutions, and thus the international community must rethink new options to exert more pressure on the Syrian regime in order to engage in a real political process that guarantees reaching a comprehensive solution in accordance with the Geneva Declaration (1) and the full implementation of Resolution 2254. This should be done in a fashion that contributes to re-

solving the crises that the Syrian people are suffering, achieving their legitimate aspirations, and preserving Syria's unity, independence, and sovereignty, Abdullah Behzad said.

He voiced concern that the Security Council would not be able to extend the mechanism for delivering humanitarian aid through the Bab al-Hawa crossing, and stressed the importance of continuing its use and ensuring that assistance reaches, unhindered, to the deserving beneficiaries. (QNA)



Qatar guest of honour as Amman int'l book fair begins

The 22nd edition of the Amman International Book Fair kicked off on Thursday under the theme "Jerusalem is the Capital of Palestine."

Qatar is the fair's guest of honour this year, presenting a special pavilion featuring various cultural institutions and a unique cultural programme with participation from Qatari writers and researchers.

The opening ceremony of the fair was attended by Qatar's ambassador to Jordan Sheikh Saud bin Nasser bin Jassim al-Thani and Jordanian Minister of Culture Haifa al-Najjar along with Assistant Undersecretary for Cultural

Affairs at the Ministry of Culture Dr Ghanem Mubarak al-Ali, who also heads Qatar's delegation to the fair, as well as directors of Arab book exhibitions and guests of the fair.

In his speech, the ambassador highlighted the deep-rooted and growing relations between Qatar and Jordan, expressing pride in Qatar's role as the honorary guest of this cultural event. He noted that the Amman International Book Fair has been successful over the years, with 400 local, Arab, and international publishing houses from 22 countries participating this year.

He also emphasised the diverse

cultural programme offered by the fair, showcasing the pride of Qatar in being a guest of honour at this cultural occasion.

Jordanian minister al-Najjar described the Amman International Book Fair as a success story for the book and publishing industry in the country.

She highlighted the fair's role as a platform for dialogue and communication of ideas, encouraging Jordanian families, students, schools, universities, institutions, and cultural entities, as well as visitors to Jordan, to visit the fair and engage with the cultural programme, which includes a dedicated space for children. (QNA)

Kuwait PM supports Qatar's hosting of horticulture expo

Kuwait Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf al-Ahmad al-Jaber al-Sabah has welcomed Qatar hosting Expo 2023 Doha for Horticulture under the theme "Green Desert, Better Environment," with the aim of promoting innovative solutions for the sustainability of desert regions.

This came in his speech at the 78th session of the UN General Assembly in New York City, representing the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Nawaf al-Ahmad al-Jaber al-Sabah.

The Kuwaiti prime minister emphasised the importance of international co-operation based on partnership and responsibility in addressing the myriad risks and threats facing today's world, including conflicts between nations, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the rise

of terrorism, increasing poverty levels, as well as threats related to natural disasters, climate change, food security challenges, modern cyber threats and their impact on cybersecurity.

He renewed Kuwait's commitment to the multiparty international system, the principles and goals of the UN Charter, and the development and enhancement of international governance to ensure the fulfilment of its noble mission in preserving international peace and security and serving humanity.

He also expressed the Kuwaiti government's anticipation of the support of UN member states for Kuwait's candidacy for membership in the Human Rights Council for the term from 2024-26 in the upcoming elections scheduled for October. (QNA)

Saudi Arabia commemorates its 93rd National Day today

Under the slogan "We Dream and We Achieve," Saudi Arabia celebrates its 93rd National Day today to commemorate the unification of the kingdom and its founding at the hands of King Abdul Aziz bin Abdul Rahman al-Saud, may Allah have mercy on him.

On Jumada Al Awwal 17, 1351 AH, a royal decree was issued unifying all parts of the modern Saudi state under the name of Saudi Arabia, and King Abdulaziz chose Thursday, Jumada Al Awwal 21 of the same year, corresponding to Sept 23, 1932 CE, as the day to announce the establishment of Saudi Arabia, which is the Kingdom's National Day.

At that time, a young state was created applying Islamic Shariah law, spreading its tolerant teachings and human values in all parts of the world, spreading peace, goodness, and the blessed call, pursuing knowledge and development and moving steadily towards a better future for its people, the Islamic nation, and the entire world.

On this occasion, the people of the kingdom and those living in its blessed land remember this glorious day in which the Saudi citizens became proud of their religion and patriotism under the wise government, that set them as its first goal for development and empowerment to take them to advanced levels among the people of the world with all pride and dignity. They also remember this occasion as they live today in a new reality full of huge development projects and wise vision projects, that stand as a witness to the progress and advancement of the kingdom on par with developed countries and a witness to a great entity characterised by growth, security, ambition and

determination to transform the impossible into a tangible reality on their great homeland.

King Abdulaziz established his modern state on the basis of modernisation and contemporary development, established several ministries, and diplomatic relations in accordance with officially recognised international political representation. Ambassadors, consuls, commissioners and ministers were appointed for this purpose, and upon the establishment of the League of Arab States in Cairo in 1365 AH/1945 CE, Saudi Arabia was among the founding countries.

King Abdulaziz worked to improve the kingdom's social and economic situation, directing care and attention to education by opening schools and institutes, sending missions abroad, encouraging the printing of books – especially Arabic and Islamic books – ordering the focus on the Two Holy Mosques and expanding them and the provision of services for pilgrims.

In 1357 AH/1938 CE, oil was extracted in the Eastern Province, which helped to increase the monetary wealth that contributed to the development, progress and prosperity of the kingdom. The Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency was established after the Saudi currency began to take its natural place among the currencies of other countries.

The kingdom bought agricultural machinery and distributed it to farmers to promote agriculture, built and paved land roads, built a railway to connect Riyadh with Dammam, linked the kingdom with a network of wired and wireless communications, and laid the nucleus of civil aviation with the establishment of Saudi

Arabian Airlines in 1945 CE, and then extended an oil pipeline from the Gulf to the Mediterranean ports. The kingdom also opened the Saudi Radio in 1368 AH/1949 CE. King Abdulaziz was concerned with providing health services, establishing hospitals and health centres in various cities of the kingdom, and setting up a system for Saudi passports and other public facilities.

King Abdulaziz laid solid foundation on which the kingdom was built, and the kings of the kingdom for generations, focused their efforts on building, learning, progress and prosperity, in order for the kingdom of Saudi Arabia to become at the forefront of nations.

The process of giving and building in the kingdom has been continuing since its unification. All its kings continued on the right path and put the service of the kingdom and its people as a priority to build a strong, prosperous and advanced homeland until the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz al-Saud took over the reins of power, to complete what his predecessors had begun in creating a strong and modern homeland.

The kingdom's leadership and people are currently living in an atmosphere of celebration for the National Day, on the occasion of the 93rd anniversary of its founding, based on a sound approach, and continuing the process of construction and development under the leadership of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz al-Saud and Crown Prince Prince Mohamed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz al-Saud. (QNA)

Qatar attends GCC states security media meeting



Qatar participated in the sixth meeting of the technical team for awareness works in security media field in the GCC states, which was held on Thursday via video conferencing.

The delegation of Qatar was represented at the meeting by Assistant Director of Public Relations Department at the Ministry of Interior Colonel Dr Jabr Hammoud al-Nuaimi and Director of the Security Media Department Lieutenant Colonel Hadi Mohamed al-Hajri. The meeting discussed several topics on its agenda, the most important of which was ways to enhance co-operation between the ministries of interior in the GCC states on issues of security awareness and security media. (QNA)

Audio Education Complex marks International Day of Sign Languages



The Audio Education Complex of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education marked the International Day of Sign Languages, which is celebrated annually on September 23 each year.

On this occasion, the complex held a number of distinguished scientific, sports and entertainment activities, including an introductory workshop on sign languages, in which students, parents, the local community and some government schools partici-



pated, in addition to organising of an electronic cultural competition for students.

In a speech at the beginning of the celebration, Director of the Audio Education Complex Munira al-Jusaiman stressed the im-

portance of commemorating this international occasion, noting the keenness of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education to celebrate it, for the benefit of students and their community and to develop their knowledge of sign



languages and everything related to it.

Certificates and prizes were distributed to the winners and participants in the competitions that were organised on the occa-

sion of the celebration.

International Day of Sign Languages is an opportunity to support and protect the linguistic identity and cultural diversity of all deaf people and other sign

language users. According to statistics from the World Federation of the Deaf, there are 70mn deaf people around the world who use more than 300 sign languages. (QNA)



QU students learn about sports options, benefits



QU Sports Affairs dept hosts introductory meeting for teams

Over 200 Qatar University (QU) students, including male first-year students and female students from various majors, attended the annual introductory meeting for teams organised by the Sports Affairs

Department for the Fall 2023 semester.

The meeting was an opportunity for students to learn about the types of sport available at the university, the training plans and programmes, competitions, and the method of registration.

Students also learned about the goals of the Sports Teams

Department, the services it offers and the privileges they receive as distinguished sports team players.

Walid Desouqi, head of the Males' Sports Teams Department at the Department of Sports Affairs at QU, said: "This meeting is an opportunity for especially first-year stu-

dents, to exploit their talents, abilities, and sports hobbies and develop them by practising under the supervision of the Sports Teams Department and playing for university teams.

"Distinguished sports team players will have the Academic Support Department maintain their academic performance, in

addition to providing financial aid to cover the costs of study in accordance with the conditions and laws of the Financial Aid Department."

The Sports Teams Department at QU has had many achievements recently at various levels, including: First place in the 2023 Universities Football Champi-

onship, first place in the 2023 University Volleyball Championship, second place in the 2023 University Basketball Championship, third place in the 2023 Universities Handball Championship, first in paddle, silver in swimming, and third in water polo in the 2023 Gulf Championships.



Ritaaq hosts traditional Onam celebrations



Rajiv Gandhi Institute of Technology (Govt Engineering College, Kottayam) Alumni Association Qatar (Ritaaq) members and their families celebrated the Onam festival at an event titled 'Aarattu 2023: A Day of Unity and Tradition.'

The day began with members showcasing their artistic flair

in crafting intricate 'Pookalam' (floral carpet) designs. Chairman Sheffin Shahab welcomed the gathering followed by a brief introduction about the purpose and importance of the event by general secretary Mohamed Hashir and a vote of thanks by treasurer Rishad Payyapatha.

The cultural performances fea-

tured Kerala's traditional dances and a fashion show depicting the beauty of traditional attire. The highlight of the day was the sumptuous Onam Sadhya, a grand feast prepared and served by the members themselves.

A touch of nostalgia was added with the inclusion of the traditional game of Vadam Vali (tug of war).

Insurance campaign launched



Doha Immanuel Mar Thoma Yuvaiana Sakhyam joined the Indian Community Benevolent Forum (ICBF) and launched a two-month Suraksha 2023 Insurance Campaign. Rev M J Cheria, vicar of Immanuel Mar Thoma Church Doha, delivered the presidential address. Rev M J Cheria was the chief guest. The event was inaugurated by accepting the first application form from Dr Simon Thomas, the co-ordinator of IDCC. ICBF president Shanavas Bava and general secretary Varkey Boban also addressed the gathering. Deepak Shetty led the classes. Indian Cultural Centre (ICC) secretary Abraham K Joseph conveyed a felicitation message. Yuvaiana Sakhyam president Rev Ajay T Oommen, programme convener Rony Mathew Joseph, vice-president Liju Abraham, secretary Lijo Titus, joint secretary Sharon Saji, and trustee Kelvin were also present.

Indonesian embassy organises second edition of 'Civic Course'

To strengthen patriotism and nationalism among young Indonesians in Qatar, the Indonesian embassy conducted the second edition of the 'Civic Course' from September 10-15.

The event brought together over 40 Indonesian teenagers residing in Qatar. They actively participated in a series of discussions and intensive activities aimed at deepening their understanding of crucial topics, including State's ideology of Pancasila, Indonesia's natural landscapes, religiosity, role of young Indonesians on the global stage, among a host of other subjects.

The inaugural day of discussions kicked off with the theme, 'Nationalism and Indonesian Youth,' facilitated by Dr Anto Mohsin, a faculty member at Northwestern University in Qatar. He discussed the historical roles of youth and how young Indonesians can actively contribute to addressing future challenges.

Putri Handayani, an employee and an accomplished mountain



climber, facilitated a discussion on the extensive natural landscapes of Indonesia. In addition to addressing the challenges of environmental stewardship in Indonesia, participants also actively presented and exchanged their viewpoints.

The event concluded with a closing address by the Indonesian ambassador to Qatar, Ridwan Hassan. This was followed by a special guest lecture delivered online by Dr Darman-sjah Djumala, member of Expert Council of Indonesia's National Agency for Fostering Pancasila

Ideology and former ambassador to Austria.

Dr Djumala emphasised the pivotal role of Pancasila as the driving force as well as a bridge between nationalism and internationalism (humanity). He, among others stressed the importance of Indonesian young diaspora to have the spirit of nationalism. However, the Indonesian youth also should have capacity to respect the nationalism of other nations.

"Our nationalism is not built by underestimating other nations," said Dr Djumala added.

Tulukoota Qatar wins kabaddi trophy



Tulukoota Qatar, an associate organisation of Indian Cultural Centre, won the maiden MAT Kabaddi Trophy at a tournament it hosted recently at Aspire Dome's multipurpose hall. Indian ambassador Vipul was the chief guest and Indian Sports Centre president E P Abdul Rahman was the guest of honour. Tulukoota lifted the championship trophy and received a cash award of QR3,333. Qatar Indian Friends was the first runner-up winning a cash prize of QR2,222 and trophy, while SKMWA bagged the second runner-up trophy and cash prize of QR1,111. Adars of Qatar Indian Friends was adjudged the best all-rounder of the tournament, Vishwaraj (TKQ) won the best rider award and Ashiq (TKQ), the best defender award. The day-long tournament featuring eight teams had 12 league matches before the semifinal and final. The viewership both online and onsite exceeded 10,000. Earlier Tulukoota president Kiran Anand welcomed the gathering.



Qatar attends annual meeting of foreign ministers of Landlocked Developing Countries

Qatar participated on Thursday in the 22nd annual meeting of foreign ministers of Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) under the theme “From Vienna to Kigali: Building momentum towards a new decade of action for prosperity and transformation of LLDCs”.

The meeting took place on the sidelines of the 78th session of the UN General Assembly in New York.

HE the Minister of State for International Co-operation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Lolwah bint Rashid AlKhater represented Qatar at the meeting.

HE AlKhater expressed gratitude to Botswana for the invitation to participate in this important meeting, hailing its efforts in chairing the group of landlocked developing countries.

Her Excellency reiterated appreciation for the ongoing role of the UN Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLS) under chairmanship of Rabab Fatima.

Considering the unique developmental needs of landlocked developing countries, the upcoming UN Third Conference on Landlocked Developing Countries to be hosted by Rwanda next year, will serve as a pivotal milestone for enhancing momentum, co-operation, and partnerships to support these countries' efforts in achieving sustainable and comprehensive development and evaluate progress made in the Vienna Programme of Action for LLDCs.

Her Excellency expressed her satisfaction with Qatar's successful hosting of the Fifth UN Conference on Least Developed



HE the Minister of State for International Co-operation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Lolwah bint Rashid AlKhater represented Qatar at the meeting.

Countries (LDCs), which took place in Doha in March, 2023. This conference provided a historic opportunity to reaffirm commitment to working closely with LDCs and supporting their aspirations to build resilience in the face of future crises, she added. Her Excellency highlighted His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani's announcement that pledges a total financial contribution of US\$60mn to support the implementation of the Doha Programme of Action and the anticipated results, as well as to strengthen the capacity for resilience. This contribution reflects Qatar's steadfast commitment to supporting the development efforts of these countries, Her Excellency added.

She reiterated the importance of translating the ambitious measures and commitments outlined in the Doha Programme of Action for LLDCs for the decade 2022-31 into practical actions by all partners and relevant entities, underscoring its utmost significance in bringing about the desired transformation

in the lives of the people of LLDCs. Based on its policy of co-operation and partnership with the international community, Qatar continues to exert efforts as a true strategic partner in responding to the needs and challenges, Her Excellency noted, stressing that Qatar would remain dedicated to supporting the aspirations of LLDCs in their journey toward sustainable development and that Qatar Fund for Development would continue to provide developmental projects and humanitarian assistance benefiting millions of people around the world. Qatar aspires to continue strengthening the constructive and positive relationship with LLDCs, and to move forward with meaningful partnerships that stimulate comprehensive growth, Her Excellency added, stressing Doha's determination to continue effective and positive contributions.

She voiced hopes that the meeting would be a valuable contribution and a precursor to successful preparations for the UN Third Conference on LLDCs in 2024. (QNA)

Al-Muraikhi attends CICA foreign ministers' meeting



HE the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sultan bin Saad al-Muraikhi participated in the informal ministerial meeting of Foreign Ministers of Member States of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA), on the sidelines of the 78th session of the UN General Assembly in New York. (QNA)

Military strikes Gaza after new border protests

AFP
Gaza City

The Israeli military said it hit three Hamas targets in Gaza yesterday after new protests along the border sparked clashes in which health officials said 28 Palestinians were wounded.

There have been repeated clashes along the border fence since September 13, with Palestinians protesters throwing stones and petrol bombs at Israeli troops who have responded with tear gas and live bullets.

On September 15, Israel launched its first air strike on Gaza since early July, targeting the territory's rulers Hamas.

In Friday's strikes, an Israeli drone hit two Hamas positions, while a tank struck a third, the military said. It said shots had been fired at its troops from near one of the targets, without causing any casualties.

The latest casualties on the Palestinian side take the number



Palestinian demonstrators carry the national flag during clashes with Israeli soldiers near the Israel-Gaza border fence, yesterday.

wounded in the protests so far to 88, according to health ministry figures.

One protester has been killed by Israeli fire while five died in an explosion that witnesses said may have been the result of the premature explosion of a hand grenade.

The violence in Gaza follows an Israeli announcement late on Sunday that it would keep the

Erez border crossing closed.

Thousands of Palestinian workers from Gaza have been prevented from entering Israel by the closure, which an Israeli NGO, Gisha, condemned as “collective punishment”.

Israel has issued work permits to some 18,500 Gazans, COGAT, the Israeli defence ministry body responsible for Palestinian civil affairs, said on Tuesday.

South Africa chickens hit by 'worst' bird flu outbreak

South African poultry farmers have warned of possible chicken and egg shortages as they battle what the industry says is the worst bird flu outbreak ever to hit the country, AFP reported from Johannesburg. Producer Quantum Foods said yesterday that this year it had lost almost 2mn chickens – worth a total of more than 100mn rand (\$5.3mn) – because of the disease. “The bird flu outbreak is the worst that South Africa has witnessed,” fellow producer Astral said in a trading update on Thursday. “(It) has already caused short supplies of table eggs into the market, and it is expected that the supply of poultry meat into the value chain could be affected negatively in the coming months.” The outbreak has cost it 220mn rand so far, the company said. One of the continent's major poultry producers, South Africa reported the first bird flu cases in commercial farms in April, according to an industry group. Earlier this month, the South African Poultry Association (SAPA) said the country was contending with two different strains of the virus, H5N1 and a new strain H7N6.

Nigerian gunmen ‘broke doors, windows in university abduction’

Reuters
Maiduguri

Gunmen in Nigeria broke down doors, shattered windows and abducted 24 female students from hostels of a university in northwestern Zamfara state in the early hours of yesterday, witnesses said, in the latest kidnapping to hit the state.

As they marched their victims away, the armed men also took a security guard and 10 construction workers who were sleeping in a makeshift shelter on the premises of Federal University Gusau, local officials said.

“The armed bandits arrived on motorcycles and started shooting sporadically, that's when I woke up. They went to the girls' hostels near the campus, breaking windows and doors

and shouting for the students to come out,” said student Hus-saini Abubakar, who lives in a nearby hostel. The students were marched through bush country at the back of the university campus, which is not fenced, said Abubakar.

Armed gangs have plagued the northwest in recent years, kidnapping for ransom, looting and destroying communities and murdering civilians. Security forces' attempts to halt their rampage have met with little success. Zamfara is one of the hot spot states for kidnapping.

The state governor's spokesperson said 35 people from the university were taken in the first major abduction involving students this year.

Another student, who identified himself as Sodiq Moshood, said he was woken by the sound of gunfire.

Libya's flood-hit Derna to host reconstruction conference

AFP
Benghazi

Libya's eastern-based administration said yesterday that it would host an international conference next month in the flood-hit port city of Derna to aid reconstruction efforts.

A tsunami-sized flash flood broke through two ageing dams upstream from Derna after a hurricane-strength storm lashed the area on September 10, razing entire neighbourhoods and sweeping thousands of people into the sea.

“The government invites the international community to participate in the conference planned for October 10 in Derna to present modern, rapid projects for the reconstruction of the city,” the administration said in a statement.

It said the conference was being held in “response to the demands of residents of the stricken city of

Derna and other towns that suffered damage” during the flooding.

Wracked by division since a Nato-backed uprising toppled and killed veteran dictator Muammar Gaddafi in 2011, Libya has for years been ruled by two administrations vying for power.

A UN-backed, internationally recognised administration in Tripoli is run by Prime Minister Abdulhamid Dbeibah, while a rival administration in the east is backed by military strongman Khalifa Haftar.

Haftar's forces seized Derna in 2018, then a stronghold of radicals, and with the reputation as a protest stronghold since Gaddafi's days.

The latest official death toll released yesterday evening stood at 3,753 but the eventual count is expected to be far higher, with international aid groups giving estimates of up to 10,000 people missing.



Rescue teams search through the rubble in the eastern city of Soussa, following deadly flash floods.

Bodies are still being found in large numbers, under the debris or on beaches where they have washed up after being swept out to the sea by the flood.

Yesterday, dozens of bod-

ies were delivered in a lorry and two pick-ups to the village cemetery in Martouba, 27 kilometres southeast of Derna, for burial, footage posted on social media showed.

Libyan media said 200 people were buried in the cemetery in a single day.

The International Organisation for Migration said on Thursday that more than 43,000 people have been displaced from the disaster zone. It said a “lack of water supply is reportedly driving many displaced out of Derna”.

In Susa, about 60 kilometres to the west, residents complained that they too had no access to drinking water after the flood badly damaged a desalination plant.

Instead, volunteers have to “bring water from nearby cities in big trucks,” 34-year-old Ahmed Saleh said.

Mobile and Internet services were restored in Derna on Thursday following a two-day disruption that came after demonstrations by angry residents on Monday.

The protests saw hundreds of demonstrators gather outside the

city's grand mosque, chanting slogans against the eastern-based parliament and its leader and calling for accountability over the high death toll.

Amnesty International reported “arrests of critics and protesters” in Derna and criticised “efforts to choreograph and control media access”.

The dams that burst had developed cracks as far back as the 1990s, Libya's top prosecutor has said, as residents accused authorities of negligence.

Scientists from the World Weather Attribution group said in a report issued on Tuesday that a deluge of the magnitude seen in eastern Libya during Storm Daniel was an event that occurred once every 300-600 years.

They said such downpours were both more likely and heavier because of human-caused global warming, resulting in up to 50% more rain.

Alabama seeks to execute prisoner using nitrogen gas asphyxiation

By Jonathan Allen
Reuters

The Supreme Court of Alabama is weighing whether to allow the state to become the first to execute a prisoner with a novel method: asphyxiation using nitrogen gas. Last month, Alabama Attorney-General Steve Marshall asked the court to allow the state to proceed with gassing Kenneth Smith, who was convicted of murder in 1996, using a face mask connected to a cylinder of nitrogen intended to deprive him of oxygen.

Smith's lawyers have said the untested protocol may violate the US Constitution's ban on "cruel

and unusual punishments." They are due to file their opposition to the attorney general's death warrant application with the court on Friday.

Death penalty experts also say the state has not provided enough information about how it will mitigate the danger to execution officials and others of using an invisible, odourless gas inside the death chamber.

Smith, 58, is one of only two people alive in the US to have survived an execution attempt after Alabama botched his previously scheduled execution by lethal injection last November when multiple attempts to insert an intravenous line into a vein failed.

Most executions in the US use

lethal injections of a barbiturate, but the decades-old method has become more challenging in recent years. Some states have struggled to obtain the needed drugs as pharmaceutical companies refuse to sell them to prison systems. Autopsies have found the lungs of people executed by lethal injection filled with frothed bloody fluids, which opponents of the punishment say shows they suffered the sensation of drowning before they died.

In seeking the death warrant, the attorney general's office released a heavily redacted version of the Alabama Department of Corrections' new gassing protocol, which it refers to as "nitrogen hypoxia."

In the gas chambers used in earlier executions by US states and in

Nazi concentration camps, poisonous gases such as hydrogen cyanide were used to kill. Nitrogen, however, is not poisonous, making up about 78% of breathable air. In Alabama's proposed method, which lawmakers approved in 2018, it is intended to displace the oxygen being inhaled by the condemned person.

Oklahoma and Mississippi have also approved nitrogen asphyxiation executions, but are yet to try the method. The unredacted portions of Alabama's protocol indicate Smith would be placed on a gurney and a mask would be strapped on his face. Many details about the new apparatus remain unclear, but the mask has both an inflow tube attached to it and an

outflow mechanism for exhaled breaths.

Dr Joel Zivot, an anaesthesiologist at the Emory School of Medicine who has been an expert witness in challenges to execution protocols, said it is difficult enough for doctors to maintain an airtight seal when applying a mask to an unconscious patient, and it is unclear how Alabama is addressing this issue in using a mask on a conscious, possibly uncooperative prisoner. "It's clear to me that they don't know what they're doing," Zivot said. "If there's any air that gets in underneath mask then they're not going to die." Someone who is temporarily starved of oxygen but does not die risks severe injury to the brain and other organs. Officials at

the attorney general's office and the corrections department did not respond to queries.

The published protocol does not say how Alabama will prevent pressurized nitrogen gas, which will run through the mask for at least 15 minutes, from leaking into the execution chamber and surrounding rooms, endangering others present. The state has said it will have oxygen-level meters in the execution chamber that will sound an alarm if levels fall too low.

It will also require the condemned person's spiritual adviser to sign a form acknowledging the risk of "inert-gas asphyxiation" and agreeing to remain at least three feet (0.91m) away from the mask and the outflow.

US shutdown could slow Biden impeachment probe

Reuters
Washington

The looming US government shutdown that some hard-line Republicans, including Donald Trump, are cheering for could slow one of their other priorities: the recently launched impeachment inquiry of Democratic President Joe Biden.

Republican House of Representatives Speaker Kevin McCarthy launched the inquiry on Sept 12, an escalation after months of probes into Biden's son, Hunter Biden, with the first hearing set for Sept 28 - just two days before the shutdown deadline.

Most congressional staffers are expected to remain at work if the government partially shuts down after Sept 30, when funding runs out - that's in part because only Congress has the authority to pass legislation to fund and re-open the government. But the White House

plays by different rules and will likely send home as many employees as possible in a bid to heighten pressure on Congress to act - and that could include staff who would respond to requests for information, lawmakers said.

That's a possibility McCarthy had warned about in August, when he was still trying to persuade his caucus not to move ahead with an immediate impeachment inquiry. "If we shut down, all of government shuts it down, investigation and everything else," McCarthy said in an interview with Fox News. A spokesperson for the speaker did not respond to a request for comment. In a 2018-2019 shutdown, the White House furloughed 1,100 of 1,800 staff in the Executive Office of the President. The impeachment inquiry is focused on Biden's son Hunter Biden's foreign business dealings. House Republicans alleged that the elder Biden benefited from his son's work but have produced no evidence of that.



US President Joe Biden speaks during the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute 46th Annual Gala at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center in Washington, DC.

The White House says President Biden has done nothing wrong and that Republicans have no basis for the inquiry.

"They should answer for their

own backwards priorities that are hurting the American people so they can play politics," said Ian Sams, a White House spokesman. House Republicans say they plan to

seek personal and business records for Hunter Biden and James Biden, the president's brother, and to seek testimony from certain officials.

"Whether the government gets shut down or not, we're going to continue to do our work, whether it's individually or as a committee as a whole," said Troy Nehls, a Republican on the House Judiciary Committee, one of the three panels at the centre of the inquiry. Multiple Republican lawmakers said they thought a shutdown could slow the probe.

"There's no question at all that the administration will not answer any questions and use a shutdown as an excuse to say they sent home the people who would answer," said Darrell Issa, a member of the House Judiciary Committee and a former chairman of the Oversight panel.

"So can we ask the questions? Yes. Are they going to deliver witnesses that they have control over, or answers? Probably not."

Amazon says ads coming to Prime Video streaming in 2024

Amazon's Prime Video streaming service will include ads beginning in early 2024, the company announced yesterday, following competitors in seeking to squeeze new revenue out of the burgeoning industry.

"To continue investing in compelling content and keep increasing that investment over a long period of time, starting in early 2024, Prime Video shows and movies will include limited advertisements," Amazon said in a statement.

The ad-supported offer will kick off in the US, UK, Germany and Canada early next year, before France, Italy, Spain, Mexico and Australia during 2024, the company said. The price of the standard Prime subscription will remain unchanged, however like on competing platforms, subscribers will be able to opt for ad-free content with an additional fee.

In addition to the streaming service, Amazon Prime subscribers also gain access to a array of other perks, such as expedited shipping and discounts.

The supplemental ad-free fee will be \$2.99 per month in the United States, Amazon said, with the prices in other countries announced at a later date.

Last year, Disney+ launched an ad-supported subscription in the United States, which is cheaper than the ad-free subscription, and then extended it to Europe. One of its main rivals, Netflix, has also launched this type of offer worldwide. Amazon said it hopes to have "meaningfully fewer ads than linear TV and other streaming TV providers."

Streaming platforms are hoping to bring in new lines of revenue with less expensive ad-supported offers to supplement slowing subscriber growth, as well as by cracking down on password sharing between users.

Disney announced in August that it had lost subscribers for a third consecutive quarter, but promised to focus on tackling password sharing.

Rival Netflix reported that its subscriptions climbed by nearly 6mn to a record high in the wake of its own crackdown. (AFP)

Biden visit to UAW strike would be historic move by US president

Reuters
Washington

If Joe Biden accepts the United Auto Workers' invitation to visit their picket line, the US president would be showing support to union workers in a labour dispute in a way that has not happened in the United States in more than a century, a presidential historian said.

The UAW yesterday invited Biden to visit workers on its picket lines, and said that it would expand its Detroit strike to parts distribution centres across the United States at General Motors and Chrysler parent Stellantis.

The company said it has made real progress in talks with Ford Motor.

"It's very rare for a president to visit strikers," said Jeremi Suri, a historian and presidential scholar at the University of Texas at Austin. He added that even pro-labour Democratic President Jimmy Carter never visited a picket line. "This would be a major, major shift for Biden to identify the presidency with striking workers, rather than siding with industry or staying above the fray."

The White House has not yet commented on the invite. Numerous unions have already endorsed Biden's re-election, but the UAW has for now withheld its endorsement. Biden said the automakers

should "go further to ensure record corporate profits mean record contracts for the UAW," echoing sentiments by union leaders.

Former President Donald Trump, who will be Biden's likely opponent in the 2024 race, plans to travel to Detroit next week to speak at a rally advertised for auto workers as he tries to win back some blue-collar workers who defected to Biden in his victory over Trump in 2020. Trump has called for rank-and-file union workers to ignore their leaders.

Trump has not said if he will visit the picket lines. United Auto Workers President Shawn Fain blasted Trump earlier in the week, saying the union was "fighting the

billionaire class and an economy that enriches people like Donald Trump at the expense of workers."

The last US president to show such support for striking workers was probably Theodore Roosevelt, Suri said. In 1902, Roosevelt invited striking coal workers to the White House with government officials and management, concerned that the country faced a coal shortage. Ahead of the precedent-shattering meeting, Roosevelt, like Biden, found himself with little leverage to negotiate.

"There is literally nothing ... the national government has any power to do," he complained to US Senator Henry Cabot Lodge of Massachusetts, according to a recounting

of the strike on the Department of Labor website. "I am at wit's end how to proceed."

Workers on the picket lines had mixed feelings over whether Biden should visit. Some said politicians should stay out of the fray, while others said they would welcome the support if the strike continued.

"Me personally, I wouldn't mind if Biden stepped up and showed some support," said Laura Zielski, 55, of Toledo, Ohio, on Tuesday, noting Biden's visit to the Stellantis Toledo assembly plant in 2010 while he served as vice president.

"Support like that would put a spotlight on the talks - kind of give a nudge to the companies."

Five civilians injured in Colombia car bomb blast

A car bomb exploded yesterday outside a police station in southwest Colombia, injuring five civilians just days after two people died in a similar attack attributed to guerrilla fighters in talks with the government.

The blast happened in the Jamundi municipality in the Valle del Cauca department where rebels are fighting soldiers engaged in a clampdown on drug trafficking.

"Reprehensible attack in Jamundi," President Gustavo Petro wrote on X, formerly Twitter. "We continue to affect illegal economies and the reaction is acts of violence," he added, vowing that the state "will not yield."

A police statement said the five injured people were all civilians. One was in a serious condition.

The bomb damaged the facade of the police station and five homes in the vicinity. Defence Minister Ivan Velasquez pointed the finger at a group that calls itself the Central General Staff (EMC) - a dissident faction of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Farc) that disarmed in 2017.

"We have had to go meter by meter, we have taken trenches, in some places there was hand-to-hand combat" he said of the ongoing operation against drug trafficking in the area. "It is clear that the EMC

is trying to... distract, to generate pressure in other places so that we will stop this operation, which we are not going to stop," the minister told Caracol Radio.

Velasquez said about three-quarters of the EMC's funding comes from drug cultivation in southwestern Colombia, the world's largest cocaine producer. The EMC is made up of former Farc fighters - about 3,500 according to official data - who rejected the 2016 peace agreement between the government and the now-dissolved Marxist rebel group.

It has steadily increased its presence in territories formerly occupied by the Farc and largely abandoned by government forces. On Wednesday, another car bomb targeting a police station in the same region, killed two civilians. That attack, which was not claimed by any group but blamed by authorities on Farc dissidents, came just a day after Bogota and the EMC announced they would observe a ceasefire and hold peace talks next month.

Petro took office last August with a vow to bring "total peace" to a country battered by decades of civil conflict between the state and various left-wing guerrilla groups, right-wing paramilitaries and drug traffickers. It is in talks with the EMC and other armed groups.

Zelensky visits Canada after challenges on US trip

Reuters
Ottawa

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky yesterday started an official visit to close ally Canada, where he is guaranteed a warmer welcome than he received from some US politicians sceptical about providing more military aid. Canada is one of Kyiv's staunchest supporters in its war with Russia, and is set to announce during the visit that it is sending more weapons to Ukraine, according to a government official.

In public remarks ahead of a bilateral meeting in Trudeau's office, the prime minister told Zelensky the visit was "an opportunity for Canadians to express directly to Volodymyr and through him to the Ukrainian people how strongly and unequivocally we stand with Ukraine."

In return, Zelensky said he had "a lot of warm words and thanks" from Ukraine for the military and humanitarian aid Canada had supplied. Zelensky was due to address parliament in Ottawa and then hold a news conference with Trudeau before flying to Toronto to meet business leaders and then address a rally. The Ukrainian leader earlier said he would be talking to Trudeau about defence co-operation, and would sign treaties to strengthen economic ties.



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau shake hands with New Democratic Party leader Jagmeet Singh during a ceremony on Parliament Hill in Ottawa.

Dozens of extra police were on duty yesterday in central Ottawa, and roads leading to Parliament Hill were blocked off. The Communications Security Establishment, Canada's signals intelligence agency, warned the cybersecurity community against malicious threats.

There are 1.4mn people of Ukrainian descent in Canada, the third most after Ukraine and Russia. Thor Michalchyshyn, executive director of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress lobby group, said Canada was influential given its membership in both the Group of Seven leading industrial countries and

Nato and noted all Canadian political parties support Ukraine.

"So I think it's appropriate for the president to be expecting and asking more from his Canadian partners," Michalchyshyn said in an interview. "If friends of Ukraine want Ukraine to win the war, then the only way that happens is with renewed and more military support." In Washington, Zelensky appealed to US lawmakers on Thursday for continued support amid doubts by some Republicans over whether Congress should approve a new round of aid.

Although there are no such divi-

sions in Canada, it does not have the deep pockets or military reserves of the United States, Germany and other major backers. Since the beginning of 2022, Canada has committed over C\$8bn (\$5.9bn) in aid to Ukraine, including over C\$1.8bn in military assistance.

The Canadian government official said the arms deal Trudeau was likely to announce on Friday would be bigger than the C\$33mn Ottawa unveiled on Sunday to help Kyiv buy missile defences. The official requested anonymity because the final details had not yet been agreed.

COMMENT

China warns at UN of ‘strong will’ on Taiwan

China warned at the UN not to underestimate its “strong will” on Taiwan, while saying Beijing preferred peaceful means to take the self-governing democracy. Addressing the General Assembly, Vice-President Han Zheng repeated Beijing’s stance that Taiwan — around which the communist mainland has staged repeated military exercises — constitutes an “inalienable part” of China. “No one should ever underestimate the firm resolve, strong will and the power of the Chinese people to safeguard their sovereignty and territorial integrity,” he said. “Realising China’s complete reunification is a shared aspiration of the Chinese nation,” he said.

PLAN

Philippines hopes to boost US economic co-operation

The Philippines is eager to expand economic co-operation with the US, particularly in critical minerals and production of battery components, Philippines Foreign Minister Enrique Manalo said yesterday. Manalo, in New York for the UN General Assembly, told an event hosted by the Asia Society that economic co-operation with the US should keep pace with bilateral defence-related activities. “One area is critical minerals, where we also hope to increase our co-operation,” he said. Manolo said the Philippines wanted to increase the presence of mining companies in the Philippines, and encourage production of battery components.

DISASTER

Floods force evacuations from Queenstown

New Zealand emergency officials have ordered about 100 people to evacuate in Queenstown after heavy rain triggered floods across the South Island, officials said yesterday. A cloudburst overnight dumped a month’s worth of rain on Queenstown in its wettest 24-period for more than two decades, meteorologists said. Flooding and debris washed through parts of central Queenstown as some residents had to flee their homes, officials said. Several schools were closed. The wet weather led to the declaration of a seven-day state of emergency in Queenstown, as well as the Southland district covering the bottom tip of New Zealand’s South Island.

UNREST

Indonesia protesters set fire to mayor’s office

Protesters set fire to a mayor’s office on an Indonesian island to demand compensation over a mining company’s activity in their area. The growing presence of mining companies on Indonesia’s main islands has caused riots and clashes over poor working conditions and land encroachment. The unrest began on Thursday in Pohuwato regency on mineral-rich Sulawesi island when a march involving some 2,500 protesters approached the local mayor’s office but no official was willing to meet with them. Activists had organised a march to demand compensation over gold mining activity in their area by PT Puncak Emas Tani Sejahtera.

Manila weighs legal options against China over coral reef ‘destruction’

Reuters
Manila

The Philippines is exploring legal options against China accusing it of destruction of coral reefs within its exclusive economic zone (EEZ) in the South China Sea, an allegation rejected by Beijing as an attempt to “create political drama”. The Philippines foreign ministry said it was awaiting assessments from various agencies of the extent of environmental damage in Iroquois Reef in the Spratly islands and would be guided by solicitor general Menardo Guevarra. The Philippines is studying the possibility of filing a second legal case before the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) in the Hague, Guevarra said yesterday. It won its first case, filed in 2013, contesting China’s claims to the area. The study “was prompted not only by the alleged destruction of reefs but also by other incidents and the overall situation in the West Philippine Sea,” Guevarra told Reuters, adding that a report and recommendation would be sent to President Ferdinand Marcos Jr and the foreign ministry. Manila refers to the part of the South China Sea that it claims as the West Philippine Sea. “The DFA stands ready to contribute to this effort,” the department of foreign affairs said in a statement. “States entering the Philippines’ EEZ and maritime zones therefore are likewise obliged to protect and preserve our marine environment,” it said.

Any move to pursue arbitration would be highly controversial after the Philippines’ landmark 2016 victory in a case against China that concluded Beijing’s claim to sovereignty over most of the South China Sea had no basis under international law. Iroquois Reef is close to the Reed Bank, where the Philippines hopes to one day access gas reserves, a plan complicated by China’s claim to the area. China, which has refused to recognise the 2016 ruling and has chafed at repeated mention of the case by Western powers, denied the latest claims of destruction of coral reefs. “We urge the relevant party of the Philippines to stop creating a political drama from fiction,” its embassy in Manila said, quoting Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Mao Ning. The Philippines’ coast guard and armed forces earlier this week reported “severe damage inflicted upon the marine environment and coral” at the Iroquois Reef, where it said 33 Chinese vessels had been moored in August and September. They described the vessels, which are typically fishing trawlers, as “maritime militia” and said they were harvesting the coral. Coral in the South China Sea has been used for limestone and construction materials, traditional medicines and even souvenirs and jewellery. China has asserted its claims of sovereignty over the Spratly area with a series of man-made islands built upon submerged reefs, some equipped with runways, hangers, radar and missile systems.

Heavy rains lash Dhaka



Commuters ride a rickshaw through a flooded road after heavy rains in Dhaka, Bangladesh, yesterday.

US envoy slams China in speech, social media post

Reuters
Tokyo

Rahm Emanuel, the US ambassador to Japan, took fresh aim at China yesterday over coercing its neighbours, posted pictures of Chinese boats he said were fishing near Japan despite a seafood ban and noted China’s defence minister was still missing. “Economic coercion by China is their most persistent and per-

nicious tool in their toolbox,” he said during a speech in Tokyo. The latest manifestation of that, he added, was China’s decision to ban all seafood from Japan after it started releasing treated radioactive water from the wrecked Fukushima nuclear power plant into the Pacific Ocean last month. Before speaking he posted four pictures on social media platform X, formerly known as Twitter, that he said were Chinese vessels “fishing for the same fish em-

bargoed by China”. Responding to Emanuel’s remarks on Fukushima, China’s foreign ministry said the ambassador should stop favouring Japan’s “irresponsible” behaviour. Emanuel’s swipe at China comes after the former mayor of Chicago and one-time chief of staff to former president Barack Obama used the social media platform to question the whereabouts of China’s defence chief, Li Shangfu, after Li missed a meeting in Vietnam.

Emanuel also asked whether Li was under house arrest. Li, who has not been seen in public for more than three weeks, has been placed under investigation by Chinese authorities, Reuters reported last week, citing 10 sources. After his speech, Emanuel declined to say whether the White House had told him to halt his social media posts, instead pointing reporters to comments by White House Indo-Pacific co-ordinator Kurt Campbell yesterday.

Philippine smog prompts warnings, school closures

A small but restive volcano near the Philippine capital Manila spewed above average sulphur dioxide and volcanic smog yesterday, prompting authorities to close schools in dozens of cities and towns and to urge people to stay indoors. The state volcanology and seismology institute said it observed upwelling of hot volcanic fluids in the Taal volcano’s crater lake, resulting in the emission of volcanic gases. Heavy pollution also shrouded buildings in the capital region in haze. The alert remained at level 1 on a five-level scale, denoting a “slight increase in volcanic earthquake, and steam or gas activity”. Located in a scenic lake in Batangas province near Manila, the 1,020-foot Taal is among the most active of 24 volcanoes in the Philippines. Kennard Kaagbay, a tricycle driver in the province, has complained of throat irritation



Smog envelopes Tagaytay City, Cavite province, Philippines, yesterday.

from the volcanic smog. “It’s bad for me to inhale the air because I have asthma. Our passengers don’t go out as well because of the (smog), so we don’t get much passengers recently,” Kaagbay said.

In January 2020, Taal volcano spewed a column of ash and steam as high as 15kms, forcing more than 100,000 people to evacuate and dozens of flight cancellations as heavy ash fell as far away as Manila.

Randy Dela Paz, operations section chief of the civil defence’s southern Manila office, told DWPM radio they received reports of respiratory illnesses in the province due to intoxication from the volcanic smog.

Jailed Thaksin ‘could be adviser to new govt’

AFF
Bangkok

Thailand’s jailed former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra could act as adviser to the new government, the ruling party said yesterday, a move likely to raise hackles among the billionaire’s critics. The 74-year-old, ousted by a military coup in 2006, returned to the kingdom last month and was immediately jailed for historic convictions for graft and abuse of power. New Thai Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin, of Thaksin’s Pheu Thai party, said earlier this week that the two-time premier could still serve his country. Deputy Prime Minister Phumtham Wechayachai said yesterday he supported the idea of having Thaksin as a govern-

ment advisor. “It would be a good thing because he has six years of experience in the government. It would benefit the country,” he told reporters at the government house. Another party source confirmed that the new coalition government led by Pheu Thai plans to consult Thaksin, once he is freed from prison. Srettha said Thaksin - whose “Thaksinomics” policies in the early 2000s saw rapid growth - could help as the government seeks to boost the economy by 5% a year. “I believe he has value to add to the government and to the people of Thailand,” Srettha told Bloomberg TV in an interview on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York. “He was, and probably still is, the most popular prime minister in the history of Thai politics.”

Blockbuster movie scares Chinese tourists away from Thailand

AFF
Bangkok

For millions of Chinese tourists, Thailand used to be a happy land of water fights, lantern festivals and delicious food. But thanks to social media rumours and a blockbuster movie, the kingdom’s image among many Chinese people is now one of dangerous illegality and seedy scam border compounds - leaving visitor numbers plummeting. Thailand is hugely reliant on tourism, particularly from China. The country welcomed more than 10mn Chinese visitors each year

before the Covid-19 pandemic - numbers Bangkok is desperate to see return. But its struggling holiday industry has been hit by viral social media rumours claiming that tourists might be kidnapped and sent across the border to work in brutal scamming compounds in Myanmar or Cambodia. Chinese tourist Jia Xueqiong spent a week in Thailand with her husband and daughter, despite her parents’ disapproval. “They felt it was not safe here, and tried to persuade us not to come,” the 44-year-old nurse said outside Bangkok’s unusually quiet Grand Palace. “All my friends said ‘You go first to explore, if

it’s OK we will follow,” she said. Her family and friends’ concerns were stoked by *No More Bets*, a high-octane thriller claiming to be based on “real events” about a computer programmer who ends up in a violent scamming compound in southeast Asia after being trafficked through an unnamed country remarkably similar to Thailand. The movie has some basis in reality. The media has documented thousands of Chinese people lured to centres in southeast Asia, mainly in Myanmar and Cambodia, to operate online scams fleecing victims for large sums. But most of those involved are

tricked into it with fake offers of lucrative work - not dragged off the streets while on holiday - and so far, no such scam compounds have been found in Thailand. Despite only being released in August, *No More Bets* has become the third-most-popular film in China this year, raking in 3.8bn yuan (\$521mn) and super-charging online discussion about the dangers of visiting Thailand. Beijing student Leanna Qian, 22, said while she knew some of the stories were “exaggerated”, she was still concerned about travelling to the kingdom. “I’m worried that we’ll be taken to other places, such as Cambodia or Myanmar,” she said.

Thailand welcomed a record-breaking 11mn Chinese tourists in 2019 - a quarter of all visitors that year, according to official data. But since the start of 2023, only 2.3mn Chinese tourists have come, and last week the Thai government announced temporary visa-free travel for Chinese travellers in a bid to restart the flow. Sisdivachr Cheewarattanaporn, president of the Association of Thai Travel Agents, said that negative online chatter had played a role in the drop. “Things don’t happen in Thailand but Thailand is targeted,” he said. Rumours began in March on-

line and spread rapidly, with posts shared and viewed millions of times. Topics about whether travel in Southeast Asia was safe trended on Weibo. The rumours grew so persistent that earlier this year, the Thai embassy in Beijing released a statement reassuring visitors that officials would “take measures to secure tourists’ safety”. And across the border, the president of the Cambodia Association of Travel Agents, Chhay Sivlin, said the situation was worse. Chhay Sivlin said her company has received no Chinese tour groups so far this year, and feedback highlighted many tourists’ worries about safety.

INVESTIGATION

New images released in fresh appeal for clues to girl's death

British police yesterday released new pictures and renewed their appeal for information into the death of a 10-year-old girl, whose father will face trial for her murder. Sara Sharif's body was discovered at her family's home in southern England on August 10. A post-mortem examination revealed Sharif had sustained "multiple and extensive injuries" over a long period. Her father, stepmother and uncle have been charged with murder and causing or allowing the death of a child. Surrey Police said they were releasing the new images "as part of our ongoing appeal for information to help us build a picture of her life prior to the discovery of her body".

DECISION

Staff at dozens of UK universities call off strikes

Staff at dozens of universities in Britain have called off a planned strike next week after many employers agreed to end pay deductions, the University and College Union said. Strikes originally planned at 140 universities later this month will now only take place in 52, the UCU said. Staff at universities have taken part in a six-month long marking and assessment boycott in an ongoing dispute over pay and working conditions this year which saw classes, exams and graduations disrupted. While the boycott has now ended, the union had been in dispute with universities about pay deducted from its members who took part in that industrial action.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Britain's Superdrug to stop selling single-use vapes

British pharmacy chain Superdrug will stop selling single-use vapes, the company announced yesterday, citing the environmental impact caused by their disposal and the popularity of the products among young people. Nearly 5mn disposable vapes are thrown away every week in Britain according to research by non-governmental organisation Material Focus and YouGov. The vapes, many of which contain lithium-ion batteries, frequently end up in landfill. Superdrug said it has stopped all purchases of single-use vapes and aims to have its stock completely cleared by the end of 2023.

POLITICS

Labour pledges to submit budget plans to fiscal scrutiny

Britain's opposition Labour Party has promised to set in law a requirement that government tax-and-spending plans be reviewed by fiscal regulators, a year after former prime minister Liz Truss's uncoded "mini-budget" rocked financial markets. "We will guarantee in law that any government making significant, permanent tax and spending changes will be subject to an independent forecast of its impact from the OBR (Office for Budget Responsibility)," Labour's would-be finance minister Rachel Reeves said. Ahead of an election expected in 2024, Labour is seeking to make the case that it would be a better guardian of the economy than the Tories.

Biden 'raised issue of Sikh's murder with Modi at G20'

Reuters
Washington

US President Joe Biden and other leaders expressed concern to Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the G20 summit this month about Canadian claims that New Delhi was involved in the murder of a Sikh separatist leader in Canada, the *Financial Times* reported.

Several members of the Five Eyes - an intelligence-sharing network that includes the US, the UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand - raised the June killing in British Columbia of Hardeep Singh Nijjar, a Sikh separatist leader, with Modi, the newspaper said, citing three people familiar with the discussions at the summit.

The White House did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the *FT* report.

The summit was held in India days before Prime Minister Justin Trudeau made his allegations public in an address to the Canadian parliament earlier this week.

The leaders intervened at the G20 summit after Canada urged its allies to raise the case directly with Modi, the newspaper reported.

US national security adviser Jake Sullivan said earlier on Thursday that the US is in touch with Indians at high levels following Ottawa's claims about the murder of the Sikh separatist leader in Canada, and Washington is giving India no "special exemption" in the matter.

India has rejected Canada's allegations and called them "absurd." The crisis has put a further dent in Canada-India ties.

India on Thursday suspended new visas for Canadians and asked Ottawa to reduce its diplomatic presence in the country.

The situation has put some Western nations in a tough position as Canada has been a long-standing partner and ally while those countries are also seeking to build strong ties with New Delhi to counter the influence of China in the Asia Pacific region. Meanwhile, Indian Potash Ltd does not expect supplies of Canadian potash to be affected by the diplomatic row, its managing director said yesterday, and hopes to extend a contract with Canadian supplier Canpotex beyond the end of September.

India is a leading fertiliser importer to support its vast agriculture sector, which employs about half of its 1.4bn people and accounts for nearly 15% of its \$3tn economy.

Canada is one of the key suppliers of potash to India and Indian companies last year signed a memorandum of understanding with Canpotex to buy up to 1.5mn metric tonnes of potash a year for three years, starting from 2023.

Manipur protest



Women protest as they demand restoration of peace in India's northeastern state of Manipur after ethnic violence, in Imphal.

India cancels minister's trip to Asian Games in visa row

AFP
New Delhi

New Delhi yesterday cancelled a trip by its sports minister to the Asian Games in Hangzhou, saying that Chinese authorities had denied accreditation and entry to Indian athletes from a region claimed by Beijing.

According to Indian media reports, three women martial arts fighters from the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh were approved to take part in the sports extravaganza by the Hangzhou Asian Games Organising Committee.

But the wushu fighters were unable to download their accreditation cards, which act as visas to enter China, the *Hindustan Times* reported.

The northeastern state of Arunachal Pradesh is claimed almost in full by Beijing, which calls it "South Tibet".

China had discriminated against some of the Indian athletes "in a targeted and pre-meditated manner", India's foreign ministry spokesman Arindam Bagchi said in a statement.

"China's action violates both the spirit of the Asian Games and the rules governing their conduct, which explicitly prohibits discrimination against com-

petitors from member states," he added. A "strong protest" had been lodged in both New Delhi and Beijing against "China's deliberate and selective obstruction of some of our sportspersons", he said, and a trip by the sports minister to the event had been cancelled.

Wushu, or kung fu, is a multi-disciplinary martial art originating in China.

The rest of the 10-member Indian squad along with the coaching staff left for the Games in Hangzhou on Wednesday, according to reports.

Before the Indian foreign ministry statement, senior Olympic Council of Asia official Wei

Jizhong had insisted that the trio had been issued visas and were not barred. "I make it very clear: the Chinese government gave them a visa, they can enter China," he told reporters. "But unfortunately these athletes didn't accept the visa."

Asked about the trio at a regular foreign ministry briefing in Beijing, spokeswoman Mao Ning said that China welcomed "athletes from all countries with legal documents" to take part in the Asian Games.

"The Chinese government does not recognise the so-called Arunachal region that you mentioned," she added. "South Tibet is part of China."

MotoGP apologises for deleting Kashmir from India map

MotoGP yesterday apologised to Indian fans for displaying a map of the country without Kashmir on its live stream of a practice session. India's territorial integrity is a touchstone issue to the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party and its supporters. The premier global motorbike competition is holding its first-ever race in India to tap into a growing two-wheeler market in the world's most populous nation and fifth-biggest economy. Angry fans took to social media and demanded redress when MotoGP showed a map of India without any part of the Jammu and Kashmir region on their live feed. MotoGP soon posted an apology on social media. "We'd like to apologise to our fans in India for the map shown earlier as part of the MotoGP broadcast," the statement read. "It is never our intent to make any statement other than that of support and appreciation for our host country," it added.



Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, chairman of the moderate faction of Kashmir's main separatist political alliance, All Parties Hurriyat (Freedom) Conference (APHC), is surrounded by his supporters as he leaves Jamia Masjid after attending Friday prayers in Srinagar, yesterday.

Kashmir separatist leader freed after four-year arrest

AFP
Srinagar

The Indian government yesterday freed Kashmir's chief Muslim cleric and influential separatist leader Mirwaiz Umar Farooq after more than four years of house arrest.

The 50-year-old was detained along with other political leaders and thousands of residents when the government cancelled the region's constitutional semi-autonomy and imposed federal rule in 2019.

A months-long internet shutdown followed as India bolstered its armed forces in the region to contain protests.

Most detainees were subsequently released, but the Mirwaiz remained unable to leave his residence, down the street from his Jamia Masjid mosque in Srinagar.

Thousands of worshippers gathered to see him lead Friday prayers for the first time in 218 weeks, with women showering him with sweets and religious slogans resounding around the 14th-century building.

Last week, a court asked authorities to explain his continued detention and he told the crowd that police informed him Thursday that officials had decided to release him.

"This period of my house arrest and separation from my people has been the most painful for me since my father's death," he said, breaking down.

Mirwaiz called the constitutional changes by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist government "unacceptable".

Modi "said about Ukraine that this is not the time for war. He is right," he added. "Disputes and disagreements should be resolved by talks rather than using power or unilateralism."

Charles visits Bordeaux on last day of France trip

AFP
Bordeaux

King Charles III yesterday arrived in France's southwestern city of Bordeaux on the final day of his state visit, putting the environment at centre stage in a region famed for its vineyards but also hit by climate-induced wildfires.

The 74-year-old British head of state wrapped up three days of diplomacy aimed at forging closer cross-Channel links after Brexit but also closer co-operation on environmental issues, his lifelong passion that are now top of the global

political agenda. Crowds of Union Jack-waving well-wishers gathered outside Bordeaux city hall to welcome Charles and Queen Camilla as they arrived after landing at the city's airport.

Bordeaux is well-placed to illustrate the point hammered home throughout the visit about Britain and France's shared personal, political and cultural history.

It became a British possession in 1152, when the future English king Henry II married Eleanor of Aquitaine, effectively beginning three decades of English dominance in the region, until the end of the Hundred Years' War in 1453.

The British influence remains:

some 39,000 British expats live in Bordeaux - the highest number in France.

Charles, accompanied by his wife Queen Camilla, 76, had been due to visit France in March but civil unrest over unpopular pension reforms forced the trip to be postponed at the last minute.

His rescheduled tour, including a ceremonial welcome at the Arc de Triomphe, a glittering state dinner at the Palace of Versailles and a landmark address at the Senate, has been largely well-received.

The warmth of Charles's relationship with President Emmanuel Macron was clear, with the king set a slightly more informal atmos-

phere than would have been the case under his late mother Queen Elizabeth II.

On Thursday, Charles called for a new Franco-British partnership for the environment - an alliance for sustainability - as part of a wider effort to repair frayed political ties caused by Brexit.

Speaking to lawmakers in the upper chamber of parliament - a first for a British monarch - he notably called climate change "our most existential challenge of all".

Some commentators in the UK interpreted that as coded criticism of Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, who this week rowed back on the government's net zero commitments.

But Charles has for a long time warned about the need to protect the environment for future generations, and he praised efforts by governments in both London and Paris for making moves to address the issue.

Before it was fashionable, he created an organic garden at his Highgrove estate in western England and has long published his household's carbon footprint.

The Aston Martin DB6 he has owned since 1970 has been converted to run on bioethanol from surplus English white wine and whey from cheese-making.

On his visit, Charles celebrated defence ties between the two Nato

allies on the British frigate HMS Iron Duke, ironically named after the Duke of Wellington, the British commander who defeated Napoleon at the battle of Waterloo in 1815.

In a key engagement of the day, Charles then visited a research centre looking at how forests are adapting to climate change.

Huge fires, fuelled by drought and high temperatures, ripped through the Gironde region near Bordeaux last year.

His last stop before heading home was a visit to Chateau Smith Haut Lafitte vineyard, which has become a model of sustainable practice.



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GULF TIMES

Indonesia's rainforest seen at risk from 2024 election handouts

Indonesia's elections next year are likely to spur deforestation as politicians seek campaign funds from businesses in return for easier access to rich natural resources, environmentalists say.

The southeast Asian nation, the world's third-largest democracy, will hold a general election on Feb 14, with regional polls planned for later in 2024.

"Next year's election is pivotal for Indonesia to determine the fate of the richest and most biodiverse forests in the world," said Annisa Rahmawati, a board member at Indonesian conservation group Satya Bumi.

She and other experts fear the soaring costs of campaigns — and little oversight of spending — will undercut rainforest protection.

Ward Berenschot, a professor in comparative political anthropology at the University of Amsterdam, said election campaigns in Indonesia are so expensive that politicians from local to national levels have developed "very close ties" with natural resource companies to help finance their ambitions.

"Measures to protect forests have been under pressure because helping campaign donors, or sometimes even family companies, to sidestep or circumvent (them) has been a way to fund campaigns," said Berenschot, who has researched the issue.

Nature-rich Indonesia has a third of the world's rainforests but large areas have been cleared in recent decades due to the expansion of crops like palm oil, as well as mining, pulp and paper expansion, and urbanisation.

Trees suck up planet-warming carbon dioxide to grow, but release it when they rot or are burned. Land use change, mainly deforestation, accounts for about 10-20% of global greenhouse gas emissions.

Indonesia's deforestation rates have slowed in recent years — helped by stricter policies and forest fire controls — but the Southeast Asian nation was still ranked fourth globally for primary tropical forest loss in 2022 by the nonprofit World Resources Institute.

Vote-buying has become common in Indonesia's national elections over the last 25 years

the result, with his party citing fraud that included vote-buying. The Constitutional Court dismissed his objections.

With current President Joko Widodo's second and final term due to end, candidates for next year's presidential elections include Prabowo, Central Java governor Ganjar Pranowo and former Jakarta governor Anies Baswedan.

Key voter issues include jobs, the economy, healthcare access, the cost of living, corruption, pollution and climate change.

Conservationists will be hopeful that Widodo's successor will build on the results his government has achieved in tackling deforestation and restoring mangroves, including making permanent a moratorium on primary forest clearing.

With a growing population of 270mn, Indonesia's elections are becoming increasingly expensive — leading to forests being used as an "ATM" cash dispenser by many parties seeking campaign finance, said Rahmawati of Satya Bumi.

This practice should stop "because it humiliates and ruins our progress in democracy... destroying our environment and our economy", she said, adding that electoral candidates should be forced to publish the source of all their campaign funds.

Marcus Colchester, a senior policy advisor at the UK-based Forest Peoples Programme, said Indonesian politicians are often unwilling to regulate corporations because they depend on them for funds.

Those links often harm local and Indigenous peoples, whose land is sometimes granted to companies without their consent, he added.

"(The) double whammy — impunity and graft — becomes the main obstacle to social justice and environmental prudence," Colchester said. "Accountability and democracy are undermined, and natural resource governance made impossible." — Thomson Reuters Foundation

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Digital tools crucial to creating robust supply chain networks



By **Hicham Nehme**
Doha

Over the recent years, global enterprises have come to realise the critical importance of building stronger, more resilient supply chain networks to ensure business continuity.

Businesses are urged to identify strategies and adopt innovative solutions to overcome future supply chain risks quickly, efficiently, and conveniently.

The pivotal value of supply chains in driving business operations and meeting customer expectations is now seen as a key indicator to business success. It has demonstrated that businesses must invest in developing their supply chains to become more agile and therefore more capable to weather unprecedented circumstances in the event of a crisis. Within that, the utilisation of digital tools and transformations has emerged as a necessity that can increasingly empower businesses to deal with emergent issues and achieve long-term success.

Embracing key digital solutions can crucially help reduce supply chain risks and strengthen the overall supply chain management. Supply chain visibility platforms are easily at the top of these solutions that enable companies to monitor inventory, shipments and demand patterns in real-time,



providing end-to-end visibility across the supply chain.

Arguably, one of the most transformational technologies of today, artificial intelligence (AI) also offers a number of benefits in this area. Leveraging predictive analytics and AI can help companies forecast demand fluctuations, detect possible supply chain disruptions, and optimise inventory levels. These tools enable companies to analyse vast amounts of data, detect patterns, and provide insights to make informed decisions during a crisis.

Other digital solutions such as digital twin and block chain can also greatly contribute to making supply chains more resilient. Essentially, digital twin technology offers a virtual replica of the physical supply chain, giving enterprises a tool to simulate various scenarios and assess the impact of possible interruptions. By experimenting with different strategies in a risk-free environment, they can develop robust contingency plans and improve their responsiveness to emergencies.

Conversely, companies can make use of blockchain technology to add greater transparency and traceability within their supply chains. Secure and immutable record-keeping, risk reduction of fraud, counterfeiting, and unauthorised changes, are among some of its immediate benefits. By implementing blockchain, companies can gain greater visibility into the movement of goods, ensuring product authenticity and offsetting possible risks.

Additionally, cloud-based collaboration platforms can help businesses maintain seamless communication and collaboration with supply chain partners. These platforms facilitate quick decision-making and effective coordination during a crisis, giving access to teams within supply chains to share real-time data, forecasts, and inventory information.

Furthermore, integrating robotic process automation (RPA) or supplier relationship management (SRM) can unlock positive gains for companies in the area of supply chain management. RPA automates repetitive and manual tasks in supply

chain operations, reducing errors and improving efficiency. By deploying robots to handle routine tasks,

companies can free up resources to focus on critical risk management activities during a crisis. On the other hand, SRM systems provide insights into supplier capabilities, financial health, and risk exposure, assisting companies to maintain supplier relationships. SRM lets companies evaluate risks, diversify their supplier base and move past obstacles.

Conclusively, organisations that take advantage of these tools as well as up-and-coming technologies will be better-prepared to thrive in any future crisis. By enhancing visibility, leveraging advanced analytics, and fostering collaboration, they can build resilient and agile supply chains capable of withstanding any disturbances and allowing operations to run smoothly even in challenging times.

● *The writer is Head of Supply Chain Management at Vodafone Qatar*

Whither the G20?

By **Takatoshi Ito**
Tokyo

Following the latest G20 summit, held in New Delhi earlier this month, there is no longer any doubt about India's central position in global power politics. But questions about the G20 itself are gaining traction.

India's achievement with this G20 is indisputable. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the summit's host, managed to secure agreement on a joint communiqué not at the eleventh hour, as is so often the case for multilateral summits, but on day one. This is particularly notable given the deep divisions among G20 members over the war in Ukraine. Many wondered whether there would be any final communiqué at all.

The fault line is clear to see. The West wants to take a hard line on Russia's invasion of Ukraine, whereas China and other Russia-friendly countries want to avoid any direct condemnations of the Kremlin's actions. At last year's G20 summit, the West's perspective won out: the final declaration deplored "in the strongest terms the aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine," and demanded Russia's "complete and unconditional withdrawal" from Ukrainian territory.

But this year — despite the absence of Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping — the final declaration was much vaguer. "In line with the [United Nations] Charter," it reads, "all states must refrain from the threat or use of force to seek territorial acquisition against the territorial integrity and sovereignty or political independence of any state. The use or threat of use of nuclear weapons is inadmissible." Russia is not mentioned explicitly.

The G7, the European Union, and their allies claim that they accepted this softer wording — which some have labelled a "climbdown" — in the name of reaching a global consensus and getting Russia to respect international law. But their real motivation was probably to hand Modi a win, so that he could shore up domestic support, just as Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida did after this year's G7 summit in Hiroshima. Western leaders are doubtless hoping that Modi will use his strengthened position to help tilt the global balance of power in their favour.

As matters stand, India has obvious — and, in some ways, deepening — ties to Western rivals. For starters, it is a member of the Brics (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) — which recently decided to admit six new countries (Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates) — and of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, which was established by China and Russia in 2001.

Moreover, India participated in the Vostok military drills in Russia's Far East last year. And it has abstained from the UN General Assembly resolutions condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine, perhaps owing to its past commitment to Soviet-style socialism and its current



(File photo) US President Joe Biden (left), Prime Minister Narendra Modi (centre) and Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva during the launch of the Global Biofuels Alliance at the G20 summit in New Delhi, India, recently. (AFP)

reliance on Russian military equipment.

But India also espouses Western democratic values. It is a member of the Quad strategic security dialogue — alongside Australia, Japan, and the US — and it has been gradually increasing its purchases of US-made weapons. When Modi visited the US earlier this year, he was welcomed warmly by US President Joe Biden.

For now, India is well served by sitting on the fence between the Western-led democratic alliance and the authoritarian camp led by Russia and China. But sooner or later, it will probably have to choose a side. Already, some are calling for India to drop out of the expanded Brics, since that grouping will be increasingly dominated by China and hostile toward the West.

In any case, India's successful G20 presidency does not mean that the G20 itself is still effective. On the contrary, the group appears to have lost its way.

The G20 emerged as a crisis-management mechanism. From the start, it stood out for an important feature: members' influence is far more aligned with their economic weight than is the case at other bodies, such as the International Monetary Fund. While IMF quotas are closely tied to voting shares and based mainly on a member's GDP, revisions to the weighting always lag behind reality. As a result, high-growth countries, like those in Asia, tend to be under-represented.

This was a source of considerable frustration after the Asian financial crisis in 1997-98, when the G20 finance ministers and central-bank governors meeting was created, and it was one reason why the G20 leaders' meeting — whose participants were selected based on GDP, with small adjustments to improve geographical representation — became the forum to lead the response to the 2008 global financial crisis.

In those early meetings, G20 leaders were united by a shared goal. They quickly agreed

to strengthen financial co-operation, reject protectionism (for the sake of global growth), and increase the IMF's financial resources. In 2010, G20 finance ministers and central-bank governors agreed to double IMF quotas, distributing more to emerging-market economies. With that, the G20 became the global economy's "steering committee."

The sheer size of the G20 — which represents 85% of global GDP — means that, when a consensus can be reached, it is well-equipped to drive change. But since widespread agreement is hard to come by, the meetings can easily become mere photo-ops, with most of the action happening through bilateral meetings on the sidelines.

Today, the G20 not only lacks a common vision; it is being undermined by deep divisions, even hostilities, between member states. For example, China has been attempting, unsuccessfully, to challenge the planned US presidency of the G20 in 2026. Add to that the decision by Xi and Putin not to attend this year's summit, and it seems clear that the G20 is no longer a priority for some key members. Its tenure as the world's premier crisis-response organisation may well be coming to an end.

Following the latest G20 summit, the G7 should be thinking seriously about deepening its own ties with more non-aligned countries. If the Ukraine war drags on, and if China continues to threaten to take Taiwan by force, the G20 will be split between friends of the Brics and friends of the G7. Where will India land when it is finally forced to get off the fence? — Project Syndicate

● *Takatoshi Ito, a former Japanese deputy vice-minister of finance, is a professor at the School of International and Public Affairs at Columbia University and a senior professor at the National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies in Tokyo.*

OPINION

Poland calls visa scandal an exaggerated 'media fact'

Poland's government has written to the European Union's security commissioner alleging that a cash-for-visas scandal is an exaggerated "media fact" timed to discredit the ruling nationalists in a tough battle for re-election next month. The letter from Poland's deputy foreign minister to EU home affairs commissioner Ylva Johansson emerged after she called on Poland to address allegations that up to 350,000 migrants purchased EU Schengen visas at Polish consulates through intermediaries. She said this raised concerns that Poland might have violated EU law, in particular the EU Visa Code.

COMMENT

Le Pen 'should face trial for EU funds' misuse claim'

The Paris prosecutor's office said far-right leader Marine Le Pen and 23 members of her party should stand trial over alleged misuse of EU funds. The prosecutor's office opened the investigation in 2016, saying it aimed to ascertain whether the then National Front used money destined for EU parliamentary assistants to pay staff who were working for the party. EU lawmakers are allocated funds to cover expenses, including their assistants, but are not meant to use them for party expenses. The prosecutor's office said some 49 assistants' situation had been examined over a period of time spanning three EU parliament terms of office, from 2004-2016.

POLICY

Asylum seekers in Italy told to pay to avoid detention

Asylum seekers in Italy will have to pay \$5,259 to avoid detention while their request for protection is being processed, the government said yesterday, in a measure apparently aimed at deterring migrants. Facing a surge in new arrivals, Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's coalition announced this week that it would increase the number of detention centres around the country to hold migrants ahead of their possible repatriation. It also said that it would increase the amount of time people could be detained to 18 months from three months. At present migrants to Italy who apply for asylum are free to move within the country while their application is reviewed

CRIME

Spain farmers jailed for illegal water tapping

Five siblings have been jailed for more than three years for illegally extracting water from an aqueduct feeding a Unesco-listed Spanish nature reserve that is threatened by desertification, a court ruling showed. The five farmers - four men and a woman - were found guilty of crimes against the environment and causing damage for "putting the ecosystem at serious risk" through the "systematic and extensive extraction" of water supplying Donana National Park, said the ruling dated September 18. If confirmed by a higher court, it would be the first ruling to involve a jail sentence for illegally tapping water from Donana.

No deal yet with Azerbaijan on security guarantees: Karabakh Armenians

Reuters
Near Kornidzor, Armenia

The ethnic Armenian leadership of breakaway Nagorno-Karabakh said yesterday that there was no agreement yet with Azerbaijan on security guarantees or an amnesty after a lightning Azeri offensive forced them into a humiliating ceasefire deal.

The future of Karabakh and its 120,000 ethnic Armenians hangs in the balance: Azerbaijan wants to integrate the long-contested region, but ethnic Armenians say they fear they will be persecuted and have accused the world of abandoning them.

Baku envisages an amnesty for Karabakh Armenian fighters who give up their arms although some have vowed to continue their resistance, Hikmet Hajiyev, foreign policy adviser to Azerbaijan's president, said. "Even with regard to former... combatants... we are envisaging an amnesty or alluding to an amnesty," he said.

But Karabakh Armenians, who call their territory the Republic of Artsakh, said agreement had not yet been reached.

"These questions must still be resolved," David Babayan, an adviser to Samvel Shahramanyan, the president of the self-styled republic, said. "There are no concrete results yet." However, Babayan said agreement had been reached for a humanitarian convoy to travel from Armenia to Karabakh via the Lachin corridor, a road crossing Azerbaijani territory. "The situation is very difficult: the people are hungry, there is no

electricity, no fuel - we have many refugees," he said.

Seven Russian peacekeeping vehicles, including large trucks, passed an Armenian checkpoint heading towards Nagorno-Karabakh yesterday, a Reuters reporter at the scene said.

After this week's swift military operation, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev vowed to guarantee the rights of ethnic Armenians but said his "iron fist" had consigned their idea of an independent Armenian Karabakh to history.

Armenia and Azerbaijan, which were both part of the Soviet Union, have fought two wars over Karabakh since its 1991 collapse. The region is internationally recognised as part of Azerbaijan but, backed by Armenia, has enjoyed de facto independence for the past three decades.

Given the bloody history between the two countries, many Armenians are fearful about what will happen next.

"Our one and only hope is help from the Russian peacekeepers. The world turned a blind eye, it doesn't want to hear anything. We think if there are no peacekeepers even for one hour, we will have genocide," said Grigor Zakharyan, an Armenian living near the border with Azerbaijan. Azerbaijani presidential foreign policy adviser Hajiyev said Karabakh Armenian rights would be respected as part of their integration into Azerbaijan.

Hajiyev said some Karabakh army groups and officers had pledged to continue resistance. "Of course this will cause certain challenges and difficulties but not on a such a big scale," he said.

Apple workers in France stage strike



Apple France workers wearing CFDT labour union vests gather in front of the Apple Store near Place de l'Opera. The workers staged a protest to demand higher pay and better benefits as Apple launched its iPhone 15, in Paris, France, yesterday.

Ukraine hits Russian naval HQ in Crimea

AFP
Kyiv, Ukraine

Ukraine claimed responsibility for a missile attack that struck the headquarters of Moscow's Black Sea fleet in annexed Crimea yesterday, leaving one missing and sparking a fire.

Ukraine has targeted Crimea throughout Russia's offensive but attacks on military installations there have recently intensified.

"Around 0900GMT, Ukraine's Defence Forces launched a successful attack on the headquarters of the command of the Black Sea Fleet of Russia in the temporarily occupied Sevastopol," the Ukrainian army's communication department said on Telegram.

Sevastopol, home to Russia's Black Sea Fleet, has been increasingly targeted as Kyiv has vowed to take back the peninsula, which Russia annexed in 2014.

"I would like to thank the air

force pilots once again," Ukrainian air force commander Mykola Oleshchuk said after the strike.

The Russian defence ministry said one serviceman was missing, after initially reporting one dead in the attack.

"The historic headquarters building of the Black Sea Fleet was damaged," it said, adding air defence had shot down five missiles.

"The headquarters of the fleet have been hit in an enemy missile attack," Mikhail Razvozhayev, the

governor of Crimea's largest city Sevastopol, had said on social media.

Razvozhayev said that missile fragments had fallen near a theatre and urged residents to stay clear of the site.

Ten residential buildings were lightly damaged, he said, but "no one was wounded."

He had warned that another aerial attack could be imminent, urging residents of the city, which is home to more than 500,000 people, to remain indoors.

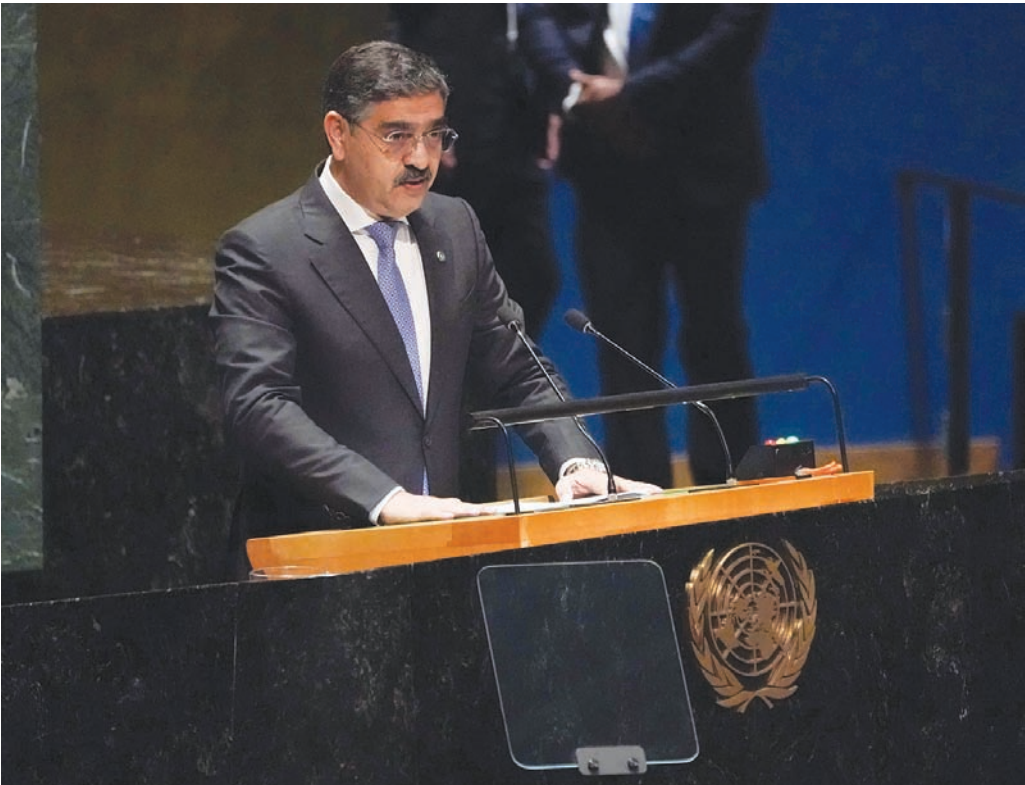
Gang-related shooting kills two in Sweden

Two people were killed and two injured when a lone gunman opened fire at a restaurant in a small town in eastern Sweden, in what police said appeared to be part of an escalating spiral of violence among criminal gangs. Sweden has been rocked by a wave of shootings and bombings in recent years that has intensified over the past few months to become an almost daily occurrence.

Police said one of the dead men, a man in his 70s, and the two injured people were probably bystanders at the restaurant in the small town of Sandviken, 190km north of Stockholm.

"We believe that one of the deceased, a man in his 20s, was the intended target. We think the three others just happened to be there," a police spokesperson said yesterday. The spokesperson said they were searching for a lone gunman but that no arrests had yet been made in connection with the shooting. "It most likely has links to the criminal gang environment, but I can't say much more at this point," he said.

Pakistan pushing for disbursement of flood-relief funds



Pakistani caretaker Prime Minister Anwaarul Haq Kakar addresses the 78th United Nations General Assembly at UN headquarters in New York City yesterday.

Reuters
Karachi, Pakistan

Pakistan is striving to get donors to release \$10bn in pledges to help it recover from devastating floods by launching rebuilding projects that hinge on the funding, caretaker Prime Minister Anwaarul Haq Kakar said yesterday.

Donors from around the world stepped up after Pakistan was hammered by floods last year and the \$10bn amounts to more than half of what Islamabad estimated it needed to rebound from the disaster.

"In all our interactions, one point has been that the projects are designed in accordance with the pledges, and that we ensure that they convert to tangible financial assistance," Kakar told the national broadcaster.

"We're trying to ensure that the amounts promised and pledged to us are dispersed to Pakistan and are spent on those affected by the floods," he said.

Addressing the United Nations General Assembly later yesterday, Kakar said the total cost of Paki-

stan's resiliency and recovery plan had been put at \$13bn and specific projects were being submitted to donors.

"I hope our development partners will accord priority to the allocation of funds," he said, adding that Pakistan also wanted developed nations to stick to commitments to provide \$100bn annually in climate financing to less-developed nations.

The funding is crucial for cash-strapped Pakistan but the government says it has not arrived, amid growing concerns about its future debt obligations. An IMF bailout was delayed until July this year over concerns about a lack of fiscal reform.

Among the donors were the Islamic Development Bank with \$4.2bn, the World Bank with \$2bn, Saudi Arabia with \$1bn, as well as the European Union and China. France and the US also made contributions.

The floods, which scientists said were aggravated by global warming, affected at least 33mn people and killed more than 1,700 from the beginning of the monsoon season in mid-June 2022 until mid-November that year.

Unusually deep methane leak in Baltic Sea: researchers

AFP
Stockholm

Researchers in Sweden have discovered large amounts of methane gas, a powerful planet-warming gas, leaking from unusual depths on the Baltic Sea seabed, they said yesterday.

A recent expedition found methane gas bubbling up from a depth of 1,312 feet at Landsortdjupet, off of Nynashamn on Swe-

den's southeastern coast, in a 20sq km area.

Methane gas is formed by micro-organisms that live in the seabed's deep sediment layers, and is emitted into the atmosphere by leaks in fossil fuel installations as well as from other human-caused sources like livestock farming and landfills.

While it remains present in the atmosphere for a shorter period, methane is 80 times more powerful than carbon dioxide when it comes to warming, and is respon-

sible for roughly 30% of the global rise in temperatures to date, even though it is far less abundant in the atmosphere than CO2.

"We know that methane gas can bubble up from shallow seabeds near the Baltic Sea coast, but I've never seen such intense bubbles before and definitely not from such a deep area," researcher Christian Stranne said in a statement from Stockholm University.

He was part of the research project conducted by Stockholm

University and Linne University.

Normally, researchers would expect to see methane bubbles rising up at a height of 150-200 metres from the seabed, but in this case they were surprised to observe them at a height of 370 metres from the seabed - unusually close to the surface.

"The methane in the bubbles dissolves in the sea and therefore they usually gradually decrease in size as they rise toward the surface," Stranne explained.

"I am not aware of any study

where such resilient bubbles have been observed at these depths."

"It could be a new world record, and it could force us to reevaluate the role of deep areas in terms of their contribution to methane in the surface water," Stranne said.

He said the phenomenon may be linked to the oxygen-free conditions in the Baltic Sea's deep waters.

The bubbles remain more intact in this environment, making the methane transport to the surface more efficient, Stranne explained.

He said there may also be other similar methane leaks in other parts of the Baltic Sea.

Researchers now hope to do further analyses to determine why so much methane gas is being released in this particular area.

"Knowledge about the factors that govern how much methane is produced in these deeper areas and where the methane goes is lacking," said project leader Marcelo Ketzer, professor of environmental science at Linne University.

Inaugural Jetski Jumping Competition thrills Doha



From Page 1

“We have six, seven months cruise season so it’s a plus also for us because lots of tourists are also coming and they start here at the terminal and then they explore the Mina District before going around Doha,” she said. The competition’s limited capacity, due to the hot weather and time constraints, saw only 20 participants selected for the inaugural event. However, organisers expressed optimism that during the cold season, larger-scale competitions with greater participation can be held, further

driving Qatar’s prominence in the water sports arena. As the event season kicks into high gear, she said Qatar is poised to welcome crowds to the fully operational venue, offering an array of dining options and water-based activities, complementing the thriving cruise season that covers nearly half the year. The Old Doha Port is poised to become a hub for maritime enthusiasts and tourists, ensuring that Qatar’s waterfronts remain vibrant and dynamic, she added.

PICTURES: Shaji Kayamkulam



Hayaakum Festival begins at Al Shaqab



The two-day Equine Education edition of the Hayaakum Festival began yesterday at Al Shaqab Longines Arena, featuring an array of activities that cater to horse enthusiasts of all ages and backgrounds. Attendees can look forward to a thrilling lineup of events, including gymkhana, pony rides, lead rein riding sessions, bouncy castles, archery, arts and crafts, play station, vaulting and many more, a statement said. Today’s itinerary will begin with a training show from 3pm, featuring talented riders and their equine partners. More information is available at <https://alshaqab.com/en/hayaakum-al-shaqab-1>

PICTURES: Shaji Kayamkulam

