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Muslim nations group to hold Gaza talks in Washington today

Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan will travel to Washington today along with counterparts in a so-called contact group of Muslim countries to discuss the situation in Gaza, Turkiye's Foreign Ministry said yesterday. The contact group was formed last month at a joint summit of the Arab League and Organisation of Islamic Co-operation (OIC) on the fighting in Gaza. It includes officials from Turkiye, Jordan, Qatar, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Nigeria, the Palestinian Authority and the OIC.

UN sees aid access via Israel crossing

UN humanitarian chief Martin Griffiths said he saw promising signs that the Kerem Shalom crossing from Israel into the Gaza Strip might be opened soon to allow aid in. The checkpoint was responsible for 60% of goods getting into the besieged Palestinian territory before October 7 and the start of the war between Israel and Hamas. Griffiths said that in recent days there had been signs that key countries – notably Gaza's neighbours Israel and Egypt – have become much more open to the idea of gradually reopening Kerem Shalom.

Putin, Raisi discuss Gaza developments

Russian President Vladimir Putin and Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi discussed in Moscow yesterday developments in the Middle East and Palestine, especially the Gaza Strip. The Russian President said that it was important for both sides to exchange views on developments in the region, particularly in Palestine. He also said that the two sides have been discussing a range of infrastructure projects for a while that moved into the implementation phase.

US fully supports Guyana's sovereignty

The White House yesterday reiterated the United States' "unwavering support" for Guyana's sovereignty amid growing border tensions between Guyana and Venezuela. The US said it would conduct flight operations within Guyana that build on its routine engagement as Britain and Brazil expressed concerns about the growing border tensions. The long-running spat over the oil-rich Esequibo region, which is being heard by the International Court of Justice (ICJ), escalated over the weekend when voters in Venezuela rejected the ICJ's jurisdiction and backed creation of a new Venezuelan state.

Meta encrypting Facebook chats

Tech giant Meta yesterday was rolling out long-promised end-to-end encryption of chats and calls at Messenger and Facebook. Ramped up defences against snooping that include disappearing messages come as the US company defends against lawsuits accusing it of being misleading about safety at its family of apps and of being a "breeding ground" for predators who target children. Meta worked closely with outside experts to ensure that privacy and safety go hand-in-hand," an official said.



PM attends Islamic committee meeting with US lawmakers

QNA
Washington

HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani participated yesterday in Washington in the meeting of members of the ministerial committee assigned by the extraordinary joint Arab-Islamic summit, with members of the United States House Committee on Foreign Affairs.

Also participating in the meeting were Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Prince Faisal bin Farhan bin Abdullah al-Saud, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriate Affairs of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan Dr Ayman al-Safadi, and ambassador of Turkiye to the United States Hasan Murat Mercan, representing the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs.

During the meeting, they discussed developments in the Gaza Strip and the military escalation, in addition to discussing efforts made to reach an immediate ceasefire, protecting defenceless civilians, and ensuring the application of the rules of international law and international humanitarian law.

Members of the Ministerial Committee called on the international community to take serious and urgent steps to ensure that relief corridors are secured to deliver urgent humanitarian, food and medical aid to the Gaza Strip.

The members of the committee stressed the importance of activating the role of parliaments and civil society institutions to urge governments to stop the violations committed by the Israeli occupation authorities against the brotherly Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip and the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

They pointed out the importance of returning to the path of just, lasting and comprehensive peace, after de-escalation and ceasefire, by implementing international resolutions related to the two-state solution, and enabling the Palestinian people to obtain their legitimate rights to establish an independent and sovereign Palestinian state on the borders of June 4, 1967 with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Hundreds more massacred as Israel bombs south Gaza

Reuters
Gaza/Jerusalem

Israel battled Palestinian Resistance Movement (Hamas) fighters in the Gaza Strip's biggest cities yesterday and said it had attacked dozens of targets, leaving 350 Palestinians dead and the rest struggling to survive in rapidly shrinking areas of refuge.

Gazans crammed into Rafah on the southern border with Egypt, heeding Israeli leaflets and messages saying that they would be safe in the city after successive warnings to head south.

But more than 20 people were killed in apartments there late on Wednesday sheltering displaced civilians from the north, said Eyad al-Hobi, a relative of some of those killed.

Israel said militants had fired at least one rocket from Rafah and 12 from the desolate area of Al Mawasi on Gaza's southern Mediterranean coast where it has also advised displaced people to gather.

In southern Gaza's largest city, Khan Younis, Israel said its forces killed a number of gunmen, including two militants who emerged firing from a tunnel. Residents reported several Israeli air strikes and non-stop tank fire in the city's east.

In Washington, a senior State Department official said US Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke with Israel's strategic affairs minister and told him Israel needs to do more to protect civilians.

Israeli troops reached the heart of Khan Younis on Wednesday in a new phase of the war, now entering its third month.

Gaza genocide toll mounts to 17,177

Israeli strikes have killed 17,177 Palestinians in Gaza since Oct. 7 and 350 people have died in the past 24 hours, Gaza's Health Ministry said yesterday, adding health services were barely functioning in the northern half of the besieged enclave. Ministry spokesman Ashraf al-Qidra said the ministry was urgently trying to reopen Al Shifa Hospital. Some 46,000 people in Gaza have been injured since October 7. (*Reuters*)

Qatar asks Israel to honour Islamic sites in Jerusalem

QNA
Doha

Qatar condemned in the strongest terms the Israeli occupation's permitting of a demonstration for extremists in occupied Jerusalem under the banner of controlling Jerusalem and Al Aqsa mosque, considering it a serious provocation and a flagrant violation against the rights of the Palestinian people, as well as the Hashemite historical custodianship over the holy sites in occupied Jerusalem.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs warned in a statement yesterday against Israeli efforts to change the historical and legal status quo in Jerusalem and its holy sites, stressing that these provocative steps will only serve to increase tensions and widen the circle of violence in the region.

In this context, the ministry stressed the need for the Israeli occupation authorities to respect the historical and legal status quo in the Islamic and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem, halt all steps aimed at changing this status quo, and acknowledge the importance of the Hashemite historical custodianship in protecting the holy sites.

The ministry called on the international community to take urgent action to compel Israel to comply with international law and to stop its violations of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people and Islamic and Christian holy sites.



A Qatari Armed Forces aircraft headed yesterday to the city of Arish in Egypt, carrying 24 tonnes of aid, including food and medical supplies and six ambulances, provided by Qatar Fund for Development, the Ministry of Public Health, and the Qatar Red Crescent Society, in preparation for transporting them to Gaza. **Page 2**

Qatar Hot Air Balloon Festival kicks off at Katara



The event showcased a Night Glow Show yesterday at Katara, a crowd-puller activity that will take place until December 18. **PICTURE:** Shaji Kayamkulam

By Joey Aguilar
Staff Reporter

The fourth edition of the Qatar Hot Air Balloon Festival kicked off yesterday (December 7) at Katara – Cultural Village (southern area), featuring an array of balloons that attracted a large number of spectators.

Marking the beginning of a 12-day extravaganza, organisers noted that the event promises to be bigger and better with 55 balloons this year, a significant increase from the 30 during its inception.

Speaking on the sidelines of the launch, flight director Lee Hooper shared insights into what makes this year's festival unique, saying that the choice of Katara as the venue adds a new dimension.

He said Katara offers a stunning backdrop for the 55 hot air balloons from around the world. "Katara is very famous in Doha, and having it here in the centre of the city with beautiful landscapes makes for an absolutely stunning balloon line."

Hooper acknowledged the logistical challenge of bringing balloons from different parts of the world to one central location but stressed the thrill that awaits visitors, with morning flights over various city landscapes and afternoon tethered shows at Katara.

According to the organisers, the event aims to position Qatar as a must-visit global destination for hot air balloon enthusiasts, attracting visitors with balloons of various sizes, designs and colours taking to the skies in breathtaking sunrise launches.

Spectators will have the opportunity to witness the colourful giant balloons floating above the city, providing a visual spectacle that adds to the vibrant atmosphere. **To Page 12**

QATAR

Chief of Staff meets US Air Force official



HE the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces Staff Lieutenant-General (Pilot) Salem bin Hamad al-Nabit met with US Secretary of the Air Force Frank Kendall. During the meeting, they discussed topics of shared interest and discussed co-operation between the two sides, in addition to ways of bolstering and developing them. The meeting was attended by a number of senior officers of the Qatari Armed Forces. **(QNA)**

Qatar's permanent representative partakes in media stand in UN for current situation in Gaza

HE the Permanent Representative of the State of Qatar to the United Nations (UN) Sheikha Alya Ahmed bin Saif al-Thani participated in a media stand in New York, organised by the Arab Group at the United Nations for the current situation in Gaza Strip. During the stand, HE Sheikha Alya affirmed that the State of Qatar will continue its mediation efforts and work with the international community in order to restore the pause, leading to a permanent ceasefire. **(QNA)**



Official

Amir sends cables of condolences to king of Bahrain

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 condolences to King Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifah of the Kingdom of Bahrain on the death of Sheikh Isa bin Mubarak bin Hamad al-Khalifah. (**QNA**)

Guatemala embassy in Doha Inaugurated



The Embassy of the Republic of Guatemala to the State of Qatar was inaugurated in Doha in the presence of Acting Director of the Department of American Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Al Muhannad bin Ali al-Hammadi and ambassador of the Republic of Guatemala to the State of Qatar Carlos Humberto Jimenez. In his speech marking the inauguration of the embassy, the Acting Director of the Department of American Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs extended his congratulations on the inauguration of the Embassy of the Republic of Guatemala in Doha, stressing the importance of strengthening the relations and co-operation between the two friendly countries. **(QNA)**

Qatari plane heads to Egypt's Al-Arish carrying aid for Palestinians in Gaza





A Qatari Armed Forces aircraft headed yesterday to the city of Arish in Egypt, carrying 24 tonnes of aid including food and medical supplies and 6 ambulances, provided by Qatar Fund for Development (QFFD), the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH), and the Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS), in preparation for transporting them to Gaza, bringing the total number of aircraft to 38, with a total of 1,243 tonnes. The aid comes within the framework of Qatar's full support to the Palestinian people during the current difficult humanitarian conditions they are living. **(QNA)**



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Shura Council attends parliamentary meeting on climate change at COP28

QNA
Dubai





The Shura Council, chaired by HE the Speaker Hassan bin Abdullah al-Ghanem, concluded its participation in the parliamentary meeting organised by the Federal National Council of the United Arab Emirates in partnership with the Inter-Parliamentary Union on the sidelines of the 28th Conference of the Parties (COP28) of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change being hosted by the UAE in Expo Dubai until Dec. 12.

The meeting, held over one day, was attended by presidents and representatives of over 140 national parliamentary associations along with several parliamentary organisations, unions, and regional UN bodies. Its various sessions provided a comprehensive overview of the global climate scene and evaluated efforts to combat the impacts of climate change, aiming to equip parliamentarians to oversee climate commitments.

Participants exchanged insights derived from the global assessment process during the meeting. Parliamentary representatives highlighted national efforts in their countries to enhance climate action and shared best practices in this field.

Within the meeting's agenda, a session on advancing climate action and adaptation for the benefit of local communities emphasised the urgent need to increase funding to enable communities to adapt to the global response to climate change.

Another session highlighted the International Parliamentary Union's climate campaign "Parliaments for the Planet," designed to rally national parliaments to take climate actions. The meeting also showcased the activities and initiatives led by female parliamentarians and young parliamentarians through the International Parliamentary Union.

Furthermore, the meeting addressed the crucial role of parliamentary oversight in driving effective implementation of the Paris Agreement and post-COP28 commitments. This involves strategies to enhance parliamentary participation, legislative frameworks, and emphasising the pivotal role of parliaments in ensuring all citizens' voices are heard in climate change discussions and international negotiations.

Through these discussions and dialogues among national parliamentary committees, the parliamentary meeting aimed to establish a comprehensive platform for parliamentary dialogue, support urgent climate efforts at both national and international levels, and translate COP commitments into actionable realities.

The conference concluded its proceedings with a final document emphasising the importance of parliamentary participation in addressing climate change and exploring innovative legislative and policy approaches for this purpose. The Shura Council's delegation participating in the conference included Council Speaker, and members of the council Mubarak bin Saif al-Mansoori, Mohamed bin Mansoor al-Shihwani, Youssef bin Ali al-Khater, Abdullah bin Nasser al-Subaie, and Umair bin Abdullah al-Nuaimi.



The Shura Council's delegation with other participants at COP28 in Expo Dubai.



HE the Minister of Transport Jassim bin Saif al-Sulaiti with QAA director general Sheikh Jabor bin Hamad al-Thani and UDST president Dr Salem Al-Naemi and other officials after the signing of the MoU.

QAA, UDST sign accord for joint efforts in academics, research

By Shafeeq Alingal
Staff Reproter

Qatar Aeronautical Academy (QAA) and the University of Doha for Science and Technology (UDST) yesterday signed a memorandum of understanding of co-operation in the education and higher education sectors.

QAA director-general Sheikh Jabor bin Hamad al-Thani and UDST president Dr Salem Al-Naemi signed the MoU in the presence of HE the Minister of Transport Jassim bin Saif al-Sulaiti.

The objective is to help develop the academic and research co-operation between the two sides based on mutual benefit. Areas of co-operation include redesigning the foundation programme, and jointly upgrading the diploma programmes, currently offered by the QAA, to a bachelor's degree and making them available for admission at both entities with a certificate to be issued by the UDST. Co-operation areas also cover scientific research, student affairs, marketing, and training.

HE the Transport Minister said the agreement will reflect positively on building up and improving students' knowledge in a way that supports human development and the goals of the Qatar National Vision 2030.

"The Ministry of Transport (MoT) supports all forms of co-operation with educational institutions to optimise the work of the QAA further thereby building promising generations capable of meeting the requirements of the civil aviation industry," HE al-Sulaiti said. He thanked the two parties for their efforts to sign the MoU noting that it would serve students' learning paths according to their aspirations and desires.

The QAA director-general lauded the signing of the MoU, which lays the foundation of a strategic partnership with UDST.

"The MoU will achieve the desired benefit for both parties, most importantly, enabling QAA students to enrol at UDST," he said, noting that the co-operation with UDST will open promising prospects for future co-operation, exchange of expertise and development of work between the two sides, thereby creating new opportunities to obtain higher degrees.

Al-Naemi emphasised the importance of the MoU in terms of empowering the QAA's students, sharpening their skills, and allowing them to complete their academic path at UDST. He praised the faith the academy has placed in UDST through the efforts of the MOT and the QAA administration.

He also pointed out the potential good outcomes of this MoU such as the exchange of expertise and conducting joint research within the framework of the national strategic pillars, which help meet the needs of the country and national industries and contribute to developing the national economy within the framework of the QNV2030.

Al-Muraikhi meets Kenyan ambassador

HE the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sultan bin Saad al-Muraikhi met with ambassador of Kenya to Qatar Boniface Nduva Mwilu, on the occasion of the end of his tenure. HE the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs thanked the ambassador for his efforts in supporting and strengthening bilateral relations, wishing him success in his new duties. **(QNA)**



Uzbekistan's FM meets Qatari envoy

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan Bakhtiyar Saidov met with ambassador of the State of Qatar to Uzbekistan Hassan bin Hamza Hashim. During the meeting, relations between the two countries were discussed. **(QNA)**



Qatar flags on talabat

Ahead of the upcoming Qatar National Day, talabat, 'the region's leading platform for everyday deliveries', has announced its latest onboarding of The Look Company, a renowned manufacturer of flags and related accessories.

"This alliance is poised to inspire customers with a spirit of nationalism ahead of Qatar National Day, by offering them a one-stop shop to purchase high-quality flags, banners, and accessories through talabat," a statement said yesterday. "How to make a purchase: Just hop onto your talabat app, head to Groceries, find "National Day Flags – The Look Company", place your order." Francisco Miguel Condeco Caetano De Sousa, managing director in talabat, said: "We are privileged to serve the community in Qatar in this meaningful way, transcending beyond the provision of everyday essentials to instil a deep sense of national pride. This partnership empowers us to broaden our offerings by effortlessly providing Qatar's flags and associated accessories to our clientele, in the most convenient way ever."



Qatar participates in 47th Arab Police, Security Leaders Conference in Tangier



Qatar participated in the 47th Arab Police and Security Leaders Conference, held in Tangier, Kingdom of Morocco over two days, with the participation of various Arab countries security officials. Assistant Director of Public Security Major General Mohamed Jassim al-Sulaiti headed Qatar's delegation to the conference. The conference discussed various security topics, including the use of modern technologies in the fight against terrorism and organised crime. Recommendations from the conferences of security leaders and committee meetings held during 2023 were also discussed. (**QNA**)



The Algerian pavilion was inaugurated at the International Zone of Expo 2023 Doha by ambassador of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria to Qatar, Salah Attia, HE Expo 2023 Doha Commissioner General, Ambassador Bader bin Omar al-Dafa, and Expo 2023 Doha Secretary-General, Eng Mohamed Ali al-Khouri, in the presence of a number of heads of diplomatic missions accredited to the State, as well as members of the Algerian community in Qatar.

Algerian pavilion opens window to rich heritage, cultural history

Ambassador of Algeria to Qatar Salah Attia, HE Expo 2023 Doha Commissioner General Ambassador Bader bin Omar al-Dafa, and Expo 2023 Doha Secretary-General Eng Mohamed Ali al-Khouri inaugurated the Algerian pavilion in the International Zone of Expo 2023 Doha, in the presence of a number of heads of diplomatic missions accredited to the state, those interested in environmental affairs, as well as members of the Algerian community in Qatar.

The pavilion offers a glimpse into Algeria's rich heritage, cultural history, customs and traditions. It shows the promising sustainable future of Algeria and presents a complete picture of the heritage and history of Algerian agriculture, including its innovations and future plans. The Algerian ambassador said that Qatar succeeded in organising a global exhibition that includes diverse cultures from all over the world and displays the agricultural and environmental innovations of the various participating countries. He stressed the importance of addressing the issues related to agriculture, sustainability, horticulture, water and the environment which affects the whole world.

He added that in response to these issues, Qatar hosted the Expo 2023 Doha and welcomed countries of the world to display their best during this international exhibition. He also praised all involved in organising the event and facilitating the exhibitors' experiences.

Head of the Algerian Pavilion Mokhtar Attar explained that the pavilion tells the story of Algeria's challenge and success in combating desertification and highlights the best modern and advanced technologies that it has used in desert agriculture. He noted that Algeria first began combating desertification more than 50 years ago by cultivating many desert areas. The pavilion's visitors can also learn about the most prominent Algerian plants and dates that were brought to Expo 2023 Doha, he added.

This marks the first time Algeria has participated in the International Horticultural Expo. The country is keen to be present in this platform to strengthen its international partnerships and contribute to building a sustainable future.

The Algerian pavilion presents a full picture of the origins and development of agriculture, leading to the latest innovations that the country uses to combat desertification. It also showcases the national plan to combat desertification, confront climate change, and Algeria's efforts in this field, in addition to the country's shift towards renewable energy, the Head of the Algerian Pavilion explained. **(QNA)**

Qatar Airways resumes flights to Yanbu

Qatar Airways landed its first resumption flight at Yanbu yesterday, the airlines' eighth connection in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The non-stop service will operate two weekly flights on Wednesday and Sunday.

To mark the resumed operations, passengers onboard the aircraft received special menu cards with exclusive design that reflects the distinctiveness of the occasion. Upon touchdown at Prince Abdul Mohsin bin Abdulaziz International Airport, water cannons saluted Qatar Airways flight QR1216 with showers of affection, signifying the renewed connection between Yanbu and Doha.

Qatar Airways Group Chief Executive Badr Mohamed al-Meer, said, "We are pleased to welcome Yanbu back into our extensive network, comprised now of eight Saudi cities. This highlights our commitment to increasing travel options for passengers in the Saudi market, which remains one of the key global markets for Qatar Airways.

"We look forward to connecting travellers to and from Yanbu to over 170 destinations across the globe, while offering them an unrivalled travel experience onboard our state-of-the-art aircraft and through our multiple award-winning hub, Hamad International Airport."



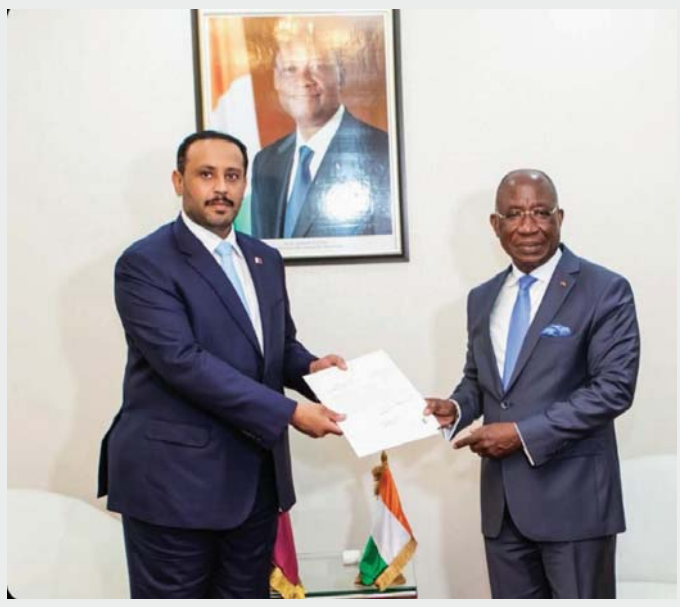


Offering two weekly flights to Yanbu, the new route aims to facilitate both business and leisure travel, further reinforcing Qatar Airways' dedication to connecting travellers from six continents to some of the most sought-after destinations across Saudi Arabia. The addition of Yanbu operations compliments the airlines' over 120 weekly flights to eight Saudi cities including Al Ula, Dammam, Gassim, Jeddah, Medina, Riyadh, and Taif, Yanbu.

QATAR

Cote d'Ivoire's FM receives copy of credentials of Qatari diplomat

Minister of Foreign Affairs, African Integration and Diaspora of the Republic of Cote d'Ivoire, Kacou Houadja Leon Adom has received a copy of the credentials of Mubarak bin Hussein al-Marri as ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary of the State of Qatar to Cote d'Ivoire. **(QNA)**



Zanzibar president meets Qatar's envoy



President of Zanzibar Dr Hussein Ali Mwinyi met with ambassador of the State of Qatar to the United Republic of Tanzania Fahad Rashid al-Muraikhi. During the meeting, they discussed bilateral relations. **(QNA)**

QRCS flags off Celebrities of Goodness initiative

QNA
Doha







The inauguration of the initiative came during a ceremony held by QRCS to honour the partners of the humanitarian mission, including officials and cadres of Qatari media, digital platforms, and social media influencers, in recognition of their role in spreading awareness of its activities and achievements in the humanitarian field, locally and internationally.

The Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS) inaugurated the 'Celebrities of Goodness' initiative, which aims to involve social media influencers as sponsors and contributors in mobilising support for its humanitarian and charitable projects intended to be implemented inside and outside Qatar in various areas affected by disasters and conflicts.

During the inauguration of the initiative, President of QRCS Yousef bin Ali al-Khater underscored the initiative's significant role in building trust and credibility among community members, the contribution of influencers as a link between the Qatar Red Crescent and their audience of followers, and helping to implement more humanitarian and charitable projects for the benefit of those in need inside and outside Qatar.

The inauguration of the initiative came during a ceremony held by QRCS to honour the partners of the humanitarian mission, including officials and cadres of Qatari media, digital platforms, and social media influencers, in recognition of their role in spreading awareness of its activities and achievements in the humanitarian field, locally and internationally. In this context, the President of QRCS honoured them and handed them the certificates.

In his speech at the honouring ceremony, al-Khater praised the efforts and role of the celebrated media institutions, digital platforms, and social media influencers in spreading awareness of the activities and achievements of QRCS, considering them partners in the humanitarian message, as they are the ones who convey its voice to all the parties concerned with its relief and development work and express the true image of the humanitarian work sector in the State of Qatar. They also urge members of society and its institutions to donate to projects and humanitarian aid that are in the interest of the beneficiaries, whether inside or outside Qatar.

In her speech on behalf of the celebrated media corporation in the country, media adviser at the Qatar Media Corporation Elham Badr highlighted the significance of synergy between humanitarian and media work in advocating victims of humanitarian crises, delivering the humanitarian message, as well as supporting those issues at the local and international levels. She pointed out to the efforts of the State of Qatar and its keenness on humanitarian work in various countries, latest of which is Qatar's efforts to support people of Gaza at various levels.

In turn, Director of Communication and Public Relations Department at QRCS Mohamed Rashid al-Marri praised the efforts of the celebrated persons in conveying, disseminating, and raising awareness of the QRCS's humanitarian message at all local and international levels. **(QNA)**



Qatar University observes International Volunteer Day

QNA
Doha



The QU event aims to enhance the public's understanding of the importance of volunteering and its vital role in the development of communities.

The Volunteering and Community Service Center at Qatar University (QU) organised an event entitled 'world of opportunities: be part of the experience,' in co-operation with Ezdehar (Initiatives and Volunteering Incubation) at Qatar Charity, to reinforce the importance of volunteering and encourage students to actively participate in building a sustainable and distinguished society.

The event aims to enhance the public's understanding of the importance of volunteering and its vital role in the development of communities, as well as enhancing the personal and professional skills of university student volunteers and enhancing the spirit of co-operation and teamwork among the participating work teams.

This step comes within the framework of the QU's efforts to motivate students to acquire new skills and develop their abilities to achieve excellence and success in various fields.

Regarding the event, Associate Vice-President for Student Life and Services at QU Dr Mohamed Diab said that these activities and events enhance students' understanding of the concept of volunteering and its importance and provide students with the opportunity to employ their skills and abilities by participating in volunteer activities.

He pointed out that the experience of volunteer work reflects greatly on the personality and performance of students, making them capable of being resilient and self-reliant individuals, supported by the necessary skills that enable them to achieve success.

For her part, Head of Volunteering and Community Service Center at QU Shaikha al-Kuwari praised the effective co-operation with Qatar Charity to enhance the role of volunteers in the activities of International Volunteer Day, adding that special focus was placed on celebrating volunteers who constitute the essential element for the success of any event.

For his part, Regional Director of Bevol Platform Mohamed al-Kubaisi considered participating in volunteer activities a serious and important step, as volunteering carries great importance at the individual level, as well as at the level of institutions and schools, including universities, stressing that volunteer activities in these universities is a wonderful opportunity to participate and interact.







Doha Institute celebrates graduation

The Language Center at the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies (DI) celebrated the graduation of the 10th cohort of graduates of the Doha Residence Program in Advanced Arabic and Social Studies (DRP) Fall semester of 2023. Over 14 weeks, students from diverse backgrounds, including Germany, China, India, Georgia and Turkiye.

Through the language partner initiative, students were allowed to interact with Arab peers from the Doha Institute who spoke different dialects. This not only provided a valuable linguistic exchange but also facilitated the establishment of long-term cultural ties.

Additionally, students had the opportunity to experience an authentic Arabic academic setting by auditing graduate seminars aligned with their areas of interest. The Doha Institute offers a wide range of courses in humanities and social studies, enabling students to actively participate in discussions with guest speakers and access intellectual events hosted by the DI and the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies.

Alongside their linguistic studies, they engaged in a variety of cultural activities, such as exploring the various Museums in Qatar, Aljazeera Media Network, the Qatar National Library (QNL), Al Zubarah heritage site, Expo 2023 Doha, as well as participating in calligraphy classes and other enriching experiences. Director of the Language Center Dr Alaa Elgibali explained that the Doha Institute shows special interest in the DRP and provides it with great support, as it represents an important part of the Institute's mission to establish, maintain, and nurture intellectual links and two-way dialogues between its students, faculty, and the international learning and research community.

The Residence Program is offered for one semester on-site in Doha. It meets the language, culture, and academic needs of advanced non-native and heritage graduate students who wish to strengthen their language and cultural skills. **(QNA)**

PSA hosts symposium on institutional performance

The Planning and Statistics Authority (PSA), in co-operation with the Community Service and Continuing Education Center at Qatar University, has organised a symposium for its employees on the institutional performance quality.

The symposium was presented by Dr Mamdouh Riad, consultant of career and institutional performance management and development, learning and training management and HR development.



The objective of the symposium was to give insights on quality management concepts and systems at the global level, the expected future developments with respect to quality and innovation, and the standards of quality and institutional performance management systems in Qatar, along with spreading awareness of the importance of quality at work.

This symposium comes within the framework of Planning and Statistics Authority's constant endeavour to spread and enhance the culture of quality among its employees in line with the best professional practices.

Nostalgic dhow fest



The 13th edition of the Katara Traditional Dhow Festival, which concluded recently, was akin to a journey back in time, to the early era of the Gulf region's maritime heritage. There were nearly 200 participants from Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, the UAE, Bahrain, Iraq, Palestine, Iran, Portugal, Tanzania, and India. About 20 traditional dhows docked at Katara Beach during the festival. PICTURE: *Gulf Times* news editor Bonnie James.



MES school celebrates Constitution Day of India

To reinforce the significance and importance of the constitution and as a mark of tribute to Dr Bhimji Rao Ambedkar, who played a pivotal role in drafting it, MES Indian School observed the Constitution Day of India with a morning assembly covering all sections.

The assembly started with an inspirational speech on the life and career of Dr Ambedkar. Students dressed up as Dr Ambedkar gave the Constitution Day message. Students held placards with pictures of the Constituent Assembly members and spoke about Sardar Vallabhai Patel, Jaipal Singh, Jawaharlal Nehru, Abul Kalam Azad, Sarojini Naidu, K M Munshi and H C Mukherjee.

The preamble of the constitution was read and the students and teachers took an oath to adhere to the principles of the Constitution of India.



Students spoke eloquently about the formation of the constitution and its significance. A special quiz was also conducted.

The assembly ended with the display of the fundamental rights and the key features of the Indian Constitution by the students of grade VIII.

Principal Hameeda Kadar congratulated winners and lauded the initiates of teachers in organising various activities and engaging the students.

PPS student shines in Saudi badminton tournament

Samiha Shetty, a grade IX student of Podar Pearl School, bagged multiple titles in a badminton tournament conducted by JBC Club in Jubail, Saudi Arabia. She won the U-17 girls singles, U-15 girls doubles, supreme senior mixed doubles, and was the runner-up in U-15 girls singles.



Whose brain is it?

NUTTY'S INFOTAINMENT yays!

By Shafqat Nabi

NI1. According to a popular belief, whose brain was stolen by Thomas Harvey from Princeton Hospital morgue on April 18, 1955?
NI2. What is the derogatory term commonly used to describe a politically unstable country that is economically dependent on a single export commodity?
NI3. Castel Gandolfo, a small town 25km southeast of Rome, is known for being the summer residence of who?
NI4. What politician was mocked mercilessly after incorrectly correcting a child's spelling of the word "potato" in 1992?
NI5. You can buy Frank for 40,000 coins, Tasha for 30,000 coins, but the costliest is Prince K for 980,000 coins. While Jake is free and Tricky can be bought with 3 tokens, Yutani is the hardest to get, costing nearly 500 tokens. What are we talking about?
NI6. The Mpemba Effect is named after Tanzanian scientist Erasto Bartholomeo Mpemba who described it in 1963 as a secondary school student. He noticed a certain phenomenon happening when he was making ice-cream and had to freeze the ice-cream mix, which led to the discovery of this often ill-defined effect. What is Mpemba Effect?
NI7. Born as Tanya Maraj-Petty in Trinidad and Tobago, name this rapper, singer, songwriter, actress, model and more importantly today's birthday girl. A Barbie doll, inspired by her, was released in 2011.
NI8. The Royal Enfield WD/RE known as the "Flying Flea" was a lightweight British motorcycle developed by Royal Enfield for the British War Office. The WD in the name stood for 'War Department'. Why was it specifically designed to be light weight, which is also connected to its nickname "Flying Flea"?
NI9. Identify the country from its national flag below. Its national cricket team, nicknamed Cricket Cranes, has recently qualified for the 2024 ICC Men's T20 World Cup, which will be the team's first appearance at the T20 World Cup.

Answers

NI1. Albert Einstein. As per some reports, he stole it with the intention of conducting research. Thomas Harvey conducted the autopsy on Albert Einstein. In August, 1978, New Jersey Monthly reporter Steven Levy published an article, "I Found Einstein's Brain", based on his interview with Harvey when Harvey was working in Wichita, Kansas.
NI2. Banana Republic.
NI3. The Pope, the leader of the Catholic Church.
NI4. Dan Quayle.
NI5. The Subway Surfer Kids.
NI6. It is a name given to the observation that a liquid (typically water) which is initially hot can freeze faster than the same liquid which begins cold, under otherwise similar conditions.
NI7. Nicky Minaj.
NI8. So that it could be dropped by parachute or carried in gliders, to quickly carry messages and signals between airborne and assault troops where radio communications were not in place. The line ended in 1953 with the introduction of the Royal Enfield Ensign.
NI9. Uganda.



Tribe NI.yays

What part of the eye is the only living tissue in the human body that does not contain blood vessels?
Cornea.

(Ritesh Pandey, Doha)

Do you have some interesting bytes to share? And, does your vibe attract you to the 'Tribe NI.yays!' Every week one question from readers will be featured here. Please do send it to us at infotainment.factree@gmail.com. And, please do mention the school/college/company (or just 'home-sweet-home').

COMMUNITY



BPS students make a mark in Qatar Scientific Research and Innovation Competition

In the National Scientific Research and Innovation Competition conducted by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE), in collaboration with the Qatar Research Development and Innovation Council, Jai Aadhithya Ramesh and Mahika Rao of class XII from Birla Public School won the second position in the engineering category for their project S.A.F.E.

Nearly 160 schools participated in the final stage of the competition which took place in nine categories. The closing of the competition was conducted by celebrating the National Scientific and Research Innovation Week from November 18 to 23.

The project S.A.F.E. (Shark Alert & Flagging Equipment) includes an image recognition domain of AI to detect the presence of sharks along the coasts, and an alert system to notify the authorities in case of emergency.

Deep Learning algorithms are used in combination with other equipment including camera and sensors to identify the presence of sharks and distinguish them from other marine creatures.

The students constructed the actual working prototype of the device, and the testing was done in various pools and beaches to make the results more accurate.

Jai Aadhithya Ramesh, and Mahika Rao along with their mentor Anu Antony were felicitated in the closing ceremony of the National Scientific and Research Innovation Week.

MoEHE undersecretary Dr Ibrahim bin Saleh al-Naimi and other dignitaries were present. BPS acting principal Radhika Rele congratulated the students for their innovative ideas.

Literary event held at IIS

The department of English of Ideal Indian School (IIS) hosted the Ideal Literati, an inter school extempore and literary quiz competition. Principal Shaik Shamim Saheb inaugurated the competition which brought together literary enthusiasts from various Indian schools in Qatar.

In the extempore competition, Aadharsha Ilan Chezhiyan (Doha Modern Indian School) was first, Thejus Aravind (DPS-Modern Indian School) second and Farha Naaz (IIS) third.

The judges were author and Toastmaster Sushma Harish and English teacher and Toastmaster Vijylata Valluri.

Mansoor Moideen, a well-known quiz master, led the quiz competition.

DPS-Modern Indian School team was first with Atmika Vishwanath and Rida Imtiyas Khan, Rajagiri Public School was second with Archana Soman and Shruti Rajeev, and IIS third with Sri Hari Anil and Amaan Hanees.

During the closing ceremony, IIS principal underscored the importance of literature in students' lives, portraying it as a lifelong companion. He expressed gratitude to the department of English head Anwar Sadath, event co-ordinator Bindu Babu and their team and section heads.

The gathering was welcomed by Ronnie Elizabeth and a vote of thanks proposed by Rehana Begum. Affan Azad and Mayesha Fathima were the comperes of the competition.



IIQS hosts CPD event



Indian Institute of Quantity Surveyors (IIQS) Qatar Chapter hosted a Continuing Professional Development (CPD) event recently. Guest speaker Gary Richard Crossman, a contracts and commercial director with a major contractor in Qatar, delivered a presentation on 'How to Deliver Project on Time and within Budget'. CPD committee president Kiran Kumar presented a memento to Crossman. Vice-president Saravanan V K welcomed the gathering. Chapter officials Manash Kaushik, Avinash R Gaikwad, Venkat, Ganesh, Aadith and Shameena Koya were among those present.

Over 500 Sri Lankans benefit from free medical camp



Over 500 Sri Lankans benefitted from a free medical camp organised by the Community Welfare Federation (CWF) at Yasmed Medical Center, Madinat Khalifa, a statement said. Akram, a representative of CWF, said: "The well-being of our community is of paramount importance, and such events will be conducted periodically to ensure that everyone, regardless of their insurance status, has access to essential medical care." Clean Nation Movement leader Isham Marikar, lauded the organisers.

Park clean-up



Doha Toastmasters Club, joined hands with various Toastmasters clubs under Division A, for a clean-up drive at Al Muntazah Park.

IIS excels in CBSE National Taekwondo championship



Ideal Indian School (IIS) was the overall runner-up in the CBSE National Taekwondo tournament held at Gagan Public School in Noida, Uttar Pradesh, India recently.

Securing two silver and five bronze medals, the team's outstanding performance led them to clinch the overall championship in the Boys' Category and secure the second runner-up position in the Girls' Category.

Silver medal winners are: Ahmed Mohamed (U-19), Minha Binth (U-19). Bronze medals: Ayaan (U-17), Daniel K Selish (U-14), Rayhan Siddiqui (U-14), Ridha Zainab (U-14), Saida Nada (U-19).

In the Foreign Zone, Ayan Mohamed Bhat was selected as the best Taekwondo player and Amazad Khan best coach.

The chairman, president, principal, staff, and students of IIS congratulated the team.

NIS celebrates 17th Annual Day

Noble International School celebrated its 17th Annual Day – Noble Vezeto 2023-24 on a grand scale at Al Wukair Campus (Al Mashaf). The event was titled 'Moonlit Marvels: A Stellar Showcase.'

Indian embassy deputy chief of mission Sandeep Kumar was the chief guest. Qatar Charity's former corporate manager Khalid Ahmmed Fakroo was the guest of honour.

NIS chief patron engineer Ali Jassim Khalifa Jassim al-Malki, chairman Hussain Mohamed U, general secretary Basheer K P, finance director Shoukath Ali Taj, other management committee members, principal Shibu Abdul Rasheed and other officials were present.

Vice-principal (CCA) Shihabudheen welcomed the gathering.

The chairman in his presidential address conveyed his profound appreciation for the students and teachers. The principal presented the annual report.

Grade XII and X CBSE high achievers were felicitated by the guests. Awards were presented to students for achievement in various inter-school and international competitions. Vice principal (administration) Robin K Jose proposed a vote of thanks.

Students presented a cultural fest on the occasion. The highlight was the launch of NIS Voyager to explore the diverse cultures and innovations across the globe in order to encourage the students to embrace the richness and diversity of the global community.





DECISION

UK to raise BBC licence fee after two-year freeze

The UK government yesterday announced that the BBC licence fee will rise after a two-year freeze, but the broadcaster indicated the increase would not be enough to ward off further cuts. The annual household payment, which provides most of the BBC's funding, will go up to £169.50 ($213) from £159 starting in April 2024, the department for culture, media and sport said. The government froze the fee for two years in January 2022 and had been expected to increase it by 9% next year. But Culture Secretary Lucy Frazer said the new rate would instead rise by September's inflation rate, which was 6.7%.

OBITUARY

British poet and actor Benjamin Zephaniah dies

British poet Benjamin Zephaniah, who famously rejected an honour from Queen Elizabeth II over Britain's empire and links to slavery, died yesterday at the age of 65. The Rastafarian poet and writer also turned his hand to acting when he appeared in series six of the hit show *Peaky Blinders*. His family said he had been diagnosed with a brain tumour eight weeks ago. In 2003 he snubbed an Order of the British Empire award for services to literature. He said the award's name reminded him of his ancestors' "brutal" suffering at the hands of their white masters.

APPEAL

India trade body seeks flexibility on Russia gems ban

A Indian trade body suggested the Group of Seven countries should offer greater flexibility in implementing a ban on indirect imports of Russian gems. The G7 has announced a direct ban on Russian diamonds starting January 1 followed by phased-in restrictions on indirect imports of Russian gems from March 1. The implementation will depend heavily on India, home to 90% of the world's cutting and polishing of rare gems. "We are not happy with the timeline for implementation of restrictions," Vipul Shah, chairman, Gem Jewellery Export Promotion Council said. "We believe there should be more flexibility in these timelines," he said.

BRIEF LABEL

Indonesia eyes visa waivers for 20 nations

Indonesia is considering granting visa-free entry to nationals of 20 countries, including the US, China, Australia, India, South Korea, Germany, Britain and France, to boost its tourism and economy, its tourism minister said yesterday. The government will finalise the list of countries included in the provision within one month. Minister Sandiaga Uno said the president had instructed the government to consider the visa waiver as a means of boosting the economy, tourism visits and investment. From January to October, Indonesia received 9.49mn foreign visitors. Thailand and recently Malaysia have also waived visas for visitors from China and India.

Sunak urges Tories to back Rwanda migrant plan

Reuters
London

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak appealed to his Conservative lawmakers yesterday to unite behind his plan to send asylum seekers to Rwanda after a revolt that once again exposed deep divisions in his party.

Sunak is facing the biggest challenge to his year-long tenure as he tries to stop lawmakers on the party's right-wing from rebelling over their demand that Britain should quit international treaties to set its own migration policy.

His immigration minister quit on Wednesday and he is facing questions as to whether he can get his key policy through a vote in parliament. Some Conservative lawmakers said yesterday that Sunak could face a leadership challenge with the party far behind in polls ahead of an election expected next year.

At a press conference in Downing Street, Sunak said the legislation satisfied almost all the criticisms from his colleagues, but if the government went any further in disregarding human rights law, Rwanda would abandon the deal.

"It is the only approach because going any further, that difference is an inch, but going any further means that Rwanda will collapse the scheme and then we will have nowhere to send anyone to," he said.

"What everyone should do is support this bill."

Though Sunak said the bill should end legal wrangling over the policy, experts have said it is likely to face further court challenges, casting doubt on his aim to get flights going by the spring, two years after the policy was first announced.

The draft legislation comes three weeks after Britain's Supreme Court ruled that Rwanda was not a safe place to send migrants arriving in small boats on England's south coast, and that the plan would breach British and international law.

The Rwanda scheme is at the centre of the government's strategy to deter illegal migration. The court's decision dealt a heavy setback for Sunak who is struggling to revive a weak economy and is heavily trailing the main opposition Labour party in opinion polls.

Sunak will now try to get the legislation through parliament, but said he would not make it a confidence vote in his government in an attempt to shore up party support. Losing a confidence vote can trigger a national election.

The bill was introduced to the House of Commons yesterday, with the first vote on the legislation due on December 12.

Some Conservative members of parliament said for the first time since Sunak entered office a year ago there was a possibility he could face a leadership challenge.

Indonesia ends search after volcano eruption kills 23



Members of an Indonesian search and rescue team gather for a roll call as they conclude the search operations on Mount Marapi after all survivors and victims have been found, in Batupalano, Agam, West Sumatra yesterday. Indonesian authorities said yesterday they had ended a search and rescue mission for hikers missing or killed after a volcano eruption over the weekend that left 23 people dead.

China's Xi warns top EU officials not to engage in 'confrontation'

Reuters
Beijing

Chinese President Xi Jinping yesterday warned top EU officials that China and Europe should not view each other as rivals or "engage in confrontation" due to their different political systems, in the first in-person China-EU summit for four years.

During a meeting to discuss issues ranging from trade imbalances to Ukraine, Xi also said China is willing to make the European Union a key economic and trade partner and to co-operate on science and technology, including artificial intelligence.

He urged the EU in the talks held at Beijing's Diaoyutai State Guesthouse to "eliminate all kinds of interference" in the bilateral relationship, according to state broadcaster CCTV.

Xi said both sides need to develop "a right perception" of each other, and encourage mutual understanding and trust.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, European Council President Charles Michel and EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell also met Chinese Premier Li Qiang during their one-day visit.

Li told the EU leaders that China opposes the "broad politicisation and securitisation" of economic and trade issues in violation of the basic norms of market economies, according to China's state television.

"We hope that the EU will be prudent when introducing restrictive economic and trade policies and when using trade remedy measures to keep its trade and investment markets open," he said.

Yesterday's meetings were the EU officials' last chance to get face time with top Chinese officials before the European Parliament election kicks off next year, which will bring changes in the 27-nation bloc's leadership.

A number of EU commissioners have visited Beijing since China lifted pandemic border restrictions this year, including the bloc's trade and climate chiefs. However, little progress has been made to resolve core irritants in the relationship. Most recently, Borrell's chief of staff and senior EU diplomat Enrique Mora visited in November.

FBI chief to visit India next week

FBI director Christopher Wray will visit India next week, officials said, days after Washington accused an Indian government official of directing an unsuccessful plot to assassinate a Sikh separatist on American soil.

India's government, which has denied any involvement in the plot, sought to distance the visit from the case, saying Wray's trip had been planned for some time.

The US ambassador to India, Eric Garcetti, did not go into any details as he announced the visit at a think tank event in New Delhi.

Federal prosecutors in Manhattan said last week an Indian national had worked with an unnamed Indian government employee on the plot to assassinate the New York City resident who advocated for a Sikh state in northern India.

The visit by the FBI Director had "been in the works for some time," India's foreign ministry spokesperson Arindam Bagchi said yesterday. "This is part of an ongoing security co-operation," he added.

Telangana chief minister sworn in



Telangana Chief Minister Anumula Revanth Reddy (right) along with state governor, Dr Tamilisai Soundararajan (left, front) greets people after his swearing in ceremony, in Hyderabad, India, yesterday.

Taiwan reports nighttime Chinese military activity

Reuters
Taipei

Taiwan reported rare nighttime Chinese military activity around the island yesterday, including aircraft crossing the sensitive median line of the Taiwan Strait, as Beijing continues such missions ahead of Taiwan's January election.

Taiwan, which China claims as its own territory, has complained for the past four years of regular Chinese military patrols and drills near the island.

Taiwan holds presidential and parliamentary polls on January 13 and campaigning has kicked into high gear.

Relations with China are a major point of contention.

Taiwan's defence ministry said that starting around 7.30pm (1130GMT) yesterday evening it had detected Su-30, J-10 and J-11 fighters as well as nuclear capable H-6 bombers and early warning aircraft operating off northern and central Taiwan and to the island's southwest.

Thirteen of those aircraft crossed the Taiwan Strait's median line, or areas close by, working with Chinese warships to carry out "joint combat readiness patrols", the ministry added.

The strait's median line once served as an unofficial barrier between the two sides, but Chinese planes now regularly fly over it.

Taiwan sent its own forces to monitor, the ministry said.

Over the past month, Taiwan has reported at least four other similar large-scale sorties by China's air force, which Beijing has not commented on, though those took place during the day.

Ex-PM Johnson defends decision to delay Covid lockdown

AFP
London

Former prime minister Boris Johnson yesterday defended his decision to delay a national lockdown during the UK's second wave of Covid, as he faced a second day of questioning at a public inquiry.

Johnson also defended his use of the phrase "let it rip" during meetings when referring to a potential strategy of allowing the virus spread naturally through the population.

The former UK leader has faced a barrage of criticism from ex-aides for alleged indecisiveness and lack of scientific understanding during the pandemic.

Under questioning by inquiry counsel Hugo Keith about why he favoured a regional system of restrictions rather than a nationwide "circuit-breaker" lockdown as infection levels rose in October 2020, Johnson said "there were question marks" about how effective it would be.

"The virus was not evenly distributed across the country and that's the key thing," he said.

"Circuit breakers is a glib phrase, it actually means an immensely difficult, costly exercise which falls hardest on the poorest and neediest in society," he added.

He claimed the regional approach had helped bring down infection rates, but that the arrival of the so-called Alpha variant shortly afterwards demanded further national lockdowns.

On his first day of evidence, Johnson apologised for "the pain and the loss and the suffering" caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Johnson – forced from office last year over Covid lockdown-breaching parties held in Downing Street – accepted "mistakes" had "unquestionably" been made but repeatedly insisted he and officials did their "level best".

Keith also quizzed the former leader about his use of the phrase "let it rip" in meetings, as documented by senior scientists present at the time.

Johnson claimed "plenty of people" were using the phrase to describe a potential strategy of shielding the vulnerable and allowing the rest of the population to acquire immunity.

He also disputed suggestions that his government's policy of offering financial inducements for people to eat out after the first lockdown was lifted had caused a rise in infections.

"I can't see anything that conclusively shows that it made a big difference," he told Keith.

"If it was safe to open hospitality, then it must be safe for people to go to hospitality," he added.

Four women were evicted from the inquiry room on Wednesday after holding up signs stating "the dead can't hear your apologies".

Later, a crowd that had gathered outside the venue heckled loudly as he left for the day.

Nearly 130,000 people died with Covid in the UK by mid-July 2021, one of the worst official per capita tolls among Western nations.

Johnson, who has prepared a lengthy written submission to the inquiry, insisted his government's "overwhelming priority" had been protecting the state-run National Health Service (NHS) and saving lives.

His grilling began with questions about failing to provide about 5,000 WhatsApp messages from late January 2020 to June 2020.

"I don't know the exact reason," he claimed, adding that the app had "somehow" automatically erased its chat history from that period.

Johnson's understanding of specialist advice was doubted last month by his former chief scientific officer, Patrick Vallance, who said he was frequently "bamboozled" by data.

His former top aide Dominic Cummings and communications chief Lee Cain both criticised their ex-boss when they gave evidence at the inquiry.

WORLD

Three killed in Las Vegas campus shooting

Reuters/AFP
Las Vegas

Three people were killed and another seriously injured by a gunman who was shot dead by police at a US university on Wednesday.

The incident at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, a short distance from the gambling hub's tourist-packed Strip, was the latest in the United States, where gun violence is a part of the fabric of daily life.

"Three of the victims are confirmed deceased," Las Vegas Sheriff Kevin McMahill told a press conference.

He said a fourth victim had been critically injured by the shooting but that condition later upgraded to stable.

The identity of the shooter was not immediately released, but CNN and the *Los Angeles Times*, quoting law enforcement sources, said he was a 67-year-old career college professor with links to schools in Georgia and North Carolina.

However, it was not clear what affiliation he had with the Nevada university where the shooting took place.

US President Joe Biden in a statement decried the latest "horrific act of gun violence" to terrorise a college campus.

Police responded within minutes to reports of an active shooter at 11.45am (1945 GMT), McMahill told a press conference.

Two officers "immediately engaged the suspect in a shootout" and the suspect "was struck and is deceased at this time", said university police chief Adam Garcia.

The incident began as an outdoor gathering of students was taking place.

"Students were playing games and eating food, there were tables set up for them to build Legos," said McMahill. "If it hadn't been for the heroic actions of one of those police officers who responded, there could have been countless additional lives taken."

Police did not provide any further information on the identities of the victims or gunman, and are in the process of notifying next-of-kin.

Officers were continuing to search the campus, but "there is no more ongoing threat to our community", the sheriff said.

The school, known by its initials UNLV, will remain closed today, according to police. The UNLV website said classes had been cancelled through December 10.

Las Vegas is an entertainment hub that attracts millions of visitors every year, many of whom come to see large, high-profile events.

Last month, the city played host to its inaugural Formula One Grand Prix.

It is currently hosting basketball's NBA Cup at the T-Mobile arena, just two miles (3km) away from the scene of the shooting.

Los Angeles Lakers star LeBron James sent condolences to affected families during a press conference on Wednesday, in which he also voiced anger about the grim regularity of mass shootings.

"It makes no sense that we continue to lose innocent lives, on campuses, schools, at shopping markets and movie theatres and all type of stuff. It's ridiculous," he said.

Mass shootings are common in the United States, a country where there are more guns than people, and where attempts to clamp down on their spread are always met with stiff resistance.

The country has recorded over 600 mass shootings this year, according to the Gun Violence Archive, a non-governmental organisation that defines a mass shooting as four or more people wounded or killed.

The *Washington Post*, which keeps its own tally of mass shootings, said that as of Monday, there had been 38 such incidents in which at least four people had been killed.

Las Vegas was the scene of one of America's deadliest-ever mass shootings, when a gunman opened fire on a crowded music festival in 2017, killing 60 people.

Efforts to tighten gun controls have for years run up against opposition from Republicans, staunch defenders of what they interpret as an unfettered constitutional right to weaponry.

The political paralysis endures despite widespread outrage over recurrent shootings.

"This is not normal, and we can never let it become normal," said Biden. "For all the action we have taken since I've been president, the epidemic of gun violence we face demands that we do even more. But we cannot do more without Congress."

Dozens injured in Seychelles blast at explosives depot

AFP
Mahe Island, Seychelles

A huge blast at an explosives depot in Seychelles yesterday injured 66 people and brought down buildings, prompting the country's "shocked" president to declare a state of emergency for much of the day.

The archipelago – famous for its idyllic white beaches and high-end tourism – is also grappling with flooding and landslides due to heavy rainfall which have claimed two lives, President Wavel Ramkalawan said.

The blast happened in the Providence industrial area in Mahe, the largest island in the Indian Ocean nation, causing huge damage at the site and to surrounding areas, the presidency said in a statement.

"Following an explosion at the CCCL explosives store that has caused massive damage ... and major destruction caused by flooding due to heavy rains, the president has declared a state of emergency for today the 7th December," the presidency said. "All schools will be closed. Only workers in the essential services and persons travelling will be allowed free movement. This is to allow the emergency services to carry out essential work."

Later in the day, Ramkalawan announced that the state of emergency had been lifted.

"As of now, the country is no longer in a state of emergency, which means that the shops can re-open and that normal movement of the public can resume, with the exception of the Providence industrial area," the president told reporters.

The explosion, which occurred before dawn, was heard several kilometres away, with the force of the blast smashing windows of nearby homes, banks and shops.

"I was shocked when I arrived early in the morning. The police and the army (have taken) control of the area," Ramkalawan told a press briefing. "Sixty-six people have been admitted to hospital."

Footage broadcast on television showed broken glass and sheet metal debris scattered on site.

"Many people are in a state of shock, and we strive to provide them with psychological support," Ramkalawan said, adding that the blast could have resulted in many more casualties had it occurred during the daytime.

"Seychelles learned a lesson today and we must do something to change the situation," he said, vowing to re-assess storage standards for explosives in the country.

Police have launched an investigation.

A former British colony, the Seychelles is made up of 115 islands and according to 2021 World Bank data is the richest African country as measured by per capita gross domestic product, with tourism and fishing the biggest contributors to the economy.

However, around 40% of the country's 98,000 inhabitants live in poverty.

Mahe, where the capital Victoria is located, is home to 87% of the country's population.

Heavier rains in East Africa due to human activity, says study

AFP
Nairobi

Climate change caused by human activity made torrential rains that have lashed East Africa since October and killed more than 300 people up to twice as intense, a scientific study said yesterday.

Somalia, Kenya and Ethiopia are grappling with heavy rainfall that has caused flooding in the latest devastating climate disaster to strike the region after a record drought.

Scientists from the World Weather Attribution (WWA) group said the current rainfall "was one of the most intense ever recorded in the region" between October and December.

"Climate change also contributed to the event, making the heavy rainfall up to two times more intense," they said, adding that the exact contribution of global warming was unknown.

The Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) – a climate system defined by the difference in sea surface temperature between western and eastern areas of the ocean – also added to "unusually extreme" rainfall, the WWA said.

"The scientists note that as long as the planet continues to warm, heavy rainfall events such as this one will be more frequent in East Africa," the report warned.

The Horn of Africa is one of the regions most vulnerable to climate change – even though the continent's contribution to global carbon emissions is a fraction of the total.

"The prolonged hardship caused by the drought meant many people struggled to cope with the devastating rainfall" in the region, the report said.

The scientists called for the urgent phasing out of fossil fuels and reduction of emissions as the extreme weather "has the potential to overwhelm the response of governments and humanitarian organisations" in East Africa.

Extreme weather events are occurring with increased frequency and intensity.

The rains have displaced more than 2mn people in East Africa, almost half of them in Somalia alone.

The disaster has killed more than 100 people in Somalia, at least 165 in Kenya and 57 in Ethiopia.

In one of the hardest hit areas, the Somali region in eastern Ethiopia, cholera has claimed the lives of at least 23 people, with more than 700 confirmed cases.

Republicans round on surging Haley in fiery US primary debate

AFP/Reuters
Tuscaloosa, Alabama

Republican presidential hopefuls sought to halt surging Nikki Haley's momentum in an acrimonious fourth primary debate on Wednesday, as they made their pitches to be considered the most viable alternative to runaway frontrunner Donald Trump.

The former president – who is seeking to retake the White House despite facing 91 felony charges – maintains a historically large lead and has seen his polling go from strength to strength with each new indictment.

However, he has skipped the debates, seeing no advantage in sharing the stage with distant rivals, and rendering them a sideshow to the battle pitting his presidential ambitions against the might of the US justice system.

In Trump's absence, former UN ambassador Haley touted her rising polling numbers to argue that she had supplanted Florida Governor Ron DeSantis as Trump's understudy, six weeks ahead of the first nomination vote.

"We have to stop the chaos but you can't defeat Democrat chaos with Republican chaos. And that's what Donald Trump gives us," she said as she pitched a more professional administration than the Trump presidency. "My approach is different: No drama, no vendettas, no whining."

"She caves anytime the left comes after her, anytime the media comes after her," DeSantis said of Haley during the first answer of the evening, as he sought to explain why voters should back him despite Trump's dominant position.

DeSantis boasted about legislation he passed in Florida banning gender-affirming medical care for transgender youth and accused Haley of opposing the law, an assertion Haley denied.

"He continues to lie about my record," she said.

Only two other candidates qualified for the showdown – tech entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy and former New Jersey governor Chris Christie – and a less cluttered stage gave the rivals time to drill into their opponents' policies and records.

Haley's rise has been attributed to strong performances in the previous three debates, and she is riding high on a key endorsement from the powerful Koch family and $250,000 from billionaire Democratic donor Reid Hoffman.

However, she went into the debate with a target on her back, as DeSantis and Ramaswamy characterised her as being in the pocket of corporate interests and weak on China, with Ramaswamy repeatedly calling her "corrupt".

"I love all the attention, fellas," she said, before suggesting that her rivals were jealous she had the backing of major donors.

Trump, 77, is way out front in polling at around 60%, but faces prosecution in four jurisdictions, and will be forced to divide his attention between the election and a series of trials if he wins the nomination.

He is accused of leading a criminal conspiracy to steal the 2020 election, mishandling classified documents, obstructing justice and lying in business records to cover up hush money payments to an adult entertainment actress.

In the battle to usurp Trump should voters get cold feet, DeSantis is averaging 13 percentage points to Haley's 10 in the two major polling averages collated by RealClearPolitics and FiveThirtyEight.

However, Haley has gained the upper hand on DeSantis in some of the early states that matter for building momentum.

Christie has been Trump's loudest critic by far – but is languishing around 2.5% in polling averages.

The ex-governor used his opening remarks to attack his opponents for giving Trump a pass, referring to the former president as Voldemort, the antagonist in the *Harry Potter* books who "shall not be named".

"This is an angry, bitter man who now wants to be back as president because he wants to exact retribution on anyone who has disagreed with him, anyone who has tried to hold him to account for his own conduct," Christie said.

None of the other candidates appeared willing to go after the front-runner directly, a reflection of Trump's continued popularity among the Republican base.

Ramaswamy enjoyed a surge in donations and headlines thanks to a rambunctious showing in the first debate that ingratiated him to the party's Trumpist base, but is down from a September polling peak.

He was heckled by the audience at the University of Alabama as he echoed Trump's false claims of widespread fraud in the 2020 election and was booed as he attacked Haley on supporting Ukraine against the Russian invasion.

"This is a woman who will send your kids to die so she can buy a bigger house," Ramaswamy said, to even louder boos.

In a rare show of unity, Christie defended Haley and called Ramaswamy "the most obnoxious blowhard in America" as the pair got into a shouting match.

Discussion of foreign policy was dominated by speeches of support for Israel in its response to the events of October 7 – and tough talk on China.

"Deterring China's ambitions is the number one national security task that I will do as president, and we will succeed," DeSantis said. "The 21st century needs to be an American century. We cannot let it be a Chinese century."

The debate was aired on the young cable news network NewsNation and the CW network.



Journalists in the press room watch as Haley speaks during the fourth Republican candidates' debate of the 2024 US presidential campaign, hosted by NewsNation at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa, Alabama.

Trump fake electors buckle in Wisconsin, charged in Nevada

Nevada charged six Republican fake electors in connection with a scheme to overturn Donald Trump's 2020 election loss to President Joe Biden, while 10 false electors reached a legal settlement in Wisconsin that affirmed the Democrat's victory.

Wednesday's actions marked the latest legal developments in a 2020 plan to persuade Republican-controlled legislatures in election battleground states to name their own Trump-friendly electors.

The indictments made Nevada the third state, behind Michigan and Georgia, to bring charges against Republicans who served as fake electors in 2020.

In Wisconsin's civil lawsuit, the Republican electors admitted the effort to overturn election results and acknowledged Biden's victory as legitimate.

In US presidential elections, voters do not directly pick who goes to the White House.

Instead, their ballots determine each state's slate of electors, who select the president in a process mandated by the Constitution.

Trump, 77, the frontrunner in the race for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination, pushed the false claims of a stolen election that led to the January 6, 2021, storming of the US Capitol by his supporters.

Special Counsel Jack Smith's federal indictment accusing Trump of efforts to overturn the 2020 election included a charge that the then-president and his allies sought slates of phony electors to support his false claims that he beat Biden.

"Fake electors schemes in Nevada, Wisconsin, and Michigan may not involve household names, but they could produce important witnesses and documents for Jack Smith, and bring accountability for abuse of power in their states," University of Michigan law professor Barbara McQuade said on social media platform X yesterday.

"We cannot allow attacks on democracy to go unchallenged," Nevada Attorney-General Aaron Ford said in a statement.

Trump and some supporters continue to embrace false claims of widespread election fraud that were rejected by multiple courts, state reviews and members of Trump's own administration.

The legal proceedings involving electors could buoy prosecutors in some of the four criminal cases Trump faces as he seeks to challenge Biden in November. – ***Reuters***

US grounds fleet of Ospreys after crash

The US military said on Wednesday that it was grounding its fleet of V-22 Osprey aircraft after a crash last week off the coast of Japan that killed eight people onboard.
Tokyo grounded its small fleet of the tilt-rotor aircraft the day after the fatal incident, which reignited controversy over its deployment.
Critics in Japan have said the Boeing and Bell Helicopter-developed Osprey is prone to accidents, although US and Japan reject that claim.
The latest crash happened during a training mission on November 29 off Yakushima Island, about 1,040km southwest of Tokyo. – ***Reuters***

'We don't want war in South America', says Brazil president

AP/Reuters
Rio de Janeiro/Bogota

Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva voiced "growing concern" yesterday over a deepening border dispute between neighbouring Guyana and Venezuela, warning against a war in South America.

"If there's one thing we don't want here in South America, it's war," the veteran leader told a summit of the Mercosur regional bloc in Rio de Janeiro as tensions surge over Essequibo, an oil-rich region that is under Guyanese administration but claimed by Venezuela.

"We have been following the development of the Essequibo issue with growing concern," Lula said, calling on the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States to approach both sides about holding negotiations and saying Brazil stood ready to help.

"We don't need conflict. We need to build peace," he said.

South American giant Brazil, which borders both Guyana and Venezuela, has been monitoring the dispute.

Brazil's army intelligence has detected a build-up of Venezuelan armed forces near the Guyana border, according to a senior military source.

The Brazilian army said on Wednesday that it was reinforcing its presence in its northern border region.

Tension over Essequibo has soared since President Nicolas Maduro's government held a controversial referendum Sunday in which 95% of voters supported declaring Venezuela the region's rightful owner, according to official results.

On Tuesday, Caracas proposed a bill to establish a Venezuelan province in Essequibo, and ordered the state oil company to issue licences for extracting crude in the region.

Guyana has administered Essequibo, which makes up more than two-thirds of its territory, for more than a century. But Venezuela has claimed it for decades.

The row intensified after ExxonMobil discovered oil in Essequibo in 2015, helping give Guyana – population 800,000 – the world's biggest crude reserves per capita.

The United States meanwhile said that it would conduct flight operations within Guyana that build on its routine engagement as Britain and Brazil expressed concerns about growing border tensions between Guyana and Venezuela.

The US Southern Command, which provides security co-operation in Latin America, will conduct flight operations with the Guyanese military within Guyana, the US embassy in Guyana capital Georgetown said in a statement.

"This exercise builds upon routine engagement and operations to enhance (the) security partnership between the United States and Guyana, and to strengthen regional co-operation," it said.

Two dead, five injured in Russian school shooting near Ukraine border

AFP/Reuters
Moscow

A 14-year-old girl shot a classmate dead and injured five people before killing herself at a secondary school in the Russian city of Bryansk near the Ukraine border yesterday.

Fatal attacks at educational facilities – previously a rarity – have become more common in Russia in recent years.

Moscow has taken steps to tighten already strict gun laws after a series of school attacks.

After the Bryansk attack, the Kremlin said it would look into "why the measures did not work".

Moscow has voiced concern after previous attacks, with President Vladimir Putin calling the incidents a US import.

"A 14-year-old girl brought a pump-action shotgun to school, which she used to shoot her classmates," Russia's Investigative Committee said in a statement. "As a result, two people died – one of them the shooter – and there are five wounded."

The victim was another girl in the shooter's class. Authorities did not identify the attacker and Russian media named her only as "Alina".

Footage filmed by pupils and shared by Russian state TV showed children screaming and the sounds of a loud explosion.

Another showed students barricading themselves inside a classroom.

The state-run Tass news agency reported that law enforcement believed there was an conflict between the shooter and the victim. It also reported that the girl had used a hunting rifle owned by her father.

The shooting took place in Bryansk's Gymnasium Number Five, a secondary school in the city's suburbs.

News agencies reported that the girl's father had been taken in for questioning and that the family's apartment was searched.

State media also reported that the girl's twin sister was also in the class, reporting that she was in shock.

Local news outlets meanwhile reported that the girl had come to school with a gun and a knife.

The Investigative Committee published a video of detectives assessing the classroom, which still had open textbooks and blood on the floor, confiscating phones and looking at laptops.

The governor of the Bryansk region, Alexander Bogomaz, called the shooting a "terrible tragedy".

"My sincere condolences to the parents of the girl who died at the hands of the girl shooter. This is an irreparable loss," he said.

Bogomaz said five minors were wounded with light and medium-severe injuries and taken to a local children's hospital.

Media later reported that one of the wounded teens, a boy, was in serious condition and had been taken to Moscow for treatment.

Bryansk is a city of around 370,000 people in southwest Russia.

Guns are normally tightly controlled in Russia, but Bryansk is one of several southern regions that have seen cross-border attacks in the course of the war with Ukraine, and where Moscow has encouraged the formation of self-defence units.

The border region – including Bryansk – has recently been targeted by Ukrainian drone attacks and occasional shelling.

Russia tightened its already strict gun ownership laws following a series of school shootings between 2019 and 2021.

In the western Russian city of Izhevsk in September last year, a gunman killed 18 people at a school.

In 2021, a 19-year-old shooter killed nine people in a school in Kazan, and the same year a teenager killed six people at a university in the Urals city of Perm.

In 2018, an 18-year-old student killed 20 people, mostly fellow pupils, in a mass shooting at a college in Russian-occupied Crimea, which Moscow seized from Ukraine in 2014.

Denmark passes law to ban Qur'an burnings

Reuters/AFP
Copenhagen

Denmark's parliament has adopted a law criminalising the "inappropriate treatment" of religious texts, effectively banning Qur'an burnings after a series of desecrations of Islam's holy book sparked anger in Muslim countries over the summer.

The bill, which prohibits "inappropriate treatment of writings with significant religious importance for a recognised religious community", was passed with 94 votes in favour and 77 opposed in the 179-seat Folketing.

"We must protect the security of Denmark and the Danes. Therefore, it is important that we now have better protection against the systematic insults we have seen for a long time," Justice Minister Peter Hummelgaard said in a statement.

In practical terms, it will be forbidden to burn, tear or otherwise defile holy texts publicly or in videos intended to be disseminated widely.

Those who break the law, which will be evaluated after three years, risk a fine or up to two years in prison.

Denmark and Sweden experienced a series of public protests this year where anti-Islam activists burned or otherwise damaged copies of the Qur'an, triggering demands that the Nordic governments ban the practice.

According to Hummelgaard, more than 500 demonstrations that included burnings of the Qur'an or flags were registered since July.

"Such demonstrations can hurt Denmark's relations to other nations, our interests and ultimately our safety," Hummelgaard said.

Denmark has sought to strike a balance between constitutionally protected freedom of speech, including the right to criticise religion, and national security amid fears that Qur'an burnings would trigger attacks by extremists.

Domestic critics in Sweden and Denmark have argued that any form of limitation on criticising religion undermine hard-fought liberal freedoms in the region.

"History will judge us harshly for this, and with good reason," said Inger Stojberg, leader of the anti-immigration Denmark Democrats party. "What it all comes down to is whether a restriction on freedom of speech is determined by us, or whether it is dictated from the outside."

Denmark's centrist coalition government has argued that the new rules will have only a marginal impact on free speech and that criticising religion in other ways remains legal.

Denmark is not the only European country to have banned burnings of the Qur'an.

According to Denmark's justice ministry, eight European countries – Austria, Belgium, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Italy, Poland and Romania – do so to varying degrees.

In Greece, for example, the burning of a sacred text can be banned if the act takes place in or near a religious site.

Greece, Turkiye vow to work on improving ties

Reuters
Athens

Greece and Turkiye have agreed to reboot their relations, establishing a roadmap designed to usher in a new era of closer ties between the two North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato) allies but historical foes.

In a landmark visit of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to Greece, the longtime sparring partners agreed to focus on pursuing good neighbourly relations, keep open channels of communication, seek military confidence-building measures to eliminate sources of tension, boost trade volumes and work on issues which have kept them apart, notably in the Aegean Sea.

"There is no issue between us that is unsolvable. So long as we focus on the big picture and don't end up being like those who cross the sea and drown in the river," Erdogan said after a meeting with Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis in Athens.

"We want to turn the Aegean into a sea of peace. Through the joint steps we will take as Turkiye and Greece, we want to be an example to the world," he added.

After customary verbal jousting over recent years, chilly relations between the two neighbours thawed markedly after Greece swiftly dispatched aid in the wake of a devastating earthquake in Turkiye in February.


Mitsotakis with Erdogan during the Turkish president's official visit to Greece.

By Greco-Turkish standards, yesterday's summit was a remarkable event without precedence, and a far cry from Erdogan's last visit in 2017 where both sides reeled off a litany of historical grievances stretching back to the crumbling days of the Ottoman Empire over a century ago.

The meeting of Mitsotakis and Erdogan went on longer than anticipated, and Mitsotakis addressed Erdogan as "Dear Tayyip".

Erdogan said he expected to receive Mitsotakis in Ankara.

The Nato allies want to raise bilateral trade volume to $10bn from $5bn, while Erdogan said both countries could benefit from high-level meetings held annually.

"Geography and history has dictated that we live in the same neighbourhood ... but I feel a historical responsibility to utilise this opportunity to bring the two states side-by-side, just as our borders are," Mitsotakis said.

Greece and Turkiye have long been at odds over issues including where their continental shelves start and end, energy resources, flights over the Aegean Sea, and the ethnically partitioned island of Cyprus

However, both countries want to demonstrate that they are willing to repair their relations.

Turkiye has been seeking EU membership for more than two decades.

Since being re-elected in May in a tight vote amid an economic crisis, Erdogan has said Turkiye remains committed to improving relations with its Western partners and allies.

Ankara has been working to draw foreign investors back, while mending fences with regional and Western actors, an issue that has long impacted the Turkish economy.

Following a debt crisis that rocked the euro currency zone, Greece aims to regain its footing and appear as a pillar of eastern Mediterranean stability in a geopolitical environment changing due to the war in Ukraine and the Gaza conflict.

Yesterday Greece re-established an automatic visa system for Turkish nationals to visit 10 of its islands.

Mitsotakis said meetings would continue and a further step in the relaunched bilateral dialogue could be coming closer to a deal to demarcate continental shelves and related economic exploitation zones – when conditions allow.

Striking an upbeat tone, Erdogan said Turkiye and Greece should focus on the positives, and less on the negatives.

"It will be much more beneficial for the future if we look at things from a glass half-full perspective," Erdogan told Greek President Katerina Sakellaropoulou.

Soaring pollution in Lahore fills paediatric wards

By Charlotte Greenfield & Mubasher Bukhari
Reuters

In the packed paediatric emergency room of a Lahore public hospital, parents holding sick children lined up for treatment this week, part of a surge of young patients caused by the air pollution crisis in Pakistan's second most populous city.

"We are disturbed and tense," said Mohamad Qadeer, holding a nebulising device to his three-year-old daughter Rameen's nose, engulfing her face in a billow of steam delivering medication to ease her congested airways.

She and her one-year-old sister Inaaya are among thousands of children suffering from pollution-related health problems.

Health officials estimated there has been at least a 50% rise in paediatric patients due to respiratory issues exacerbated by poor air quality in the last month.

Lahore, known historically as a city of gardens, is now choking with toxic smog that placed it as the world's worst for air quality last year.

As cooler temperatures took hold in November, air quality levels spiralled.

Twenty-four of the last 30 days had "hazardous" or "very unhealthy" air quality, according to Swiss group IQAir.

"It has gotten a lot worse than the previous years and it is affecting the health of the children," said Dr Maria Iftikhar, senior registrar at Sir Ganga Ram hospital's paediatric department.

The city of 11mn, considered the cultural capital of Pakistan, has been blanketed in thick haze that partially blocks the sun and shrouds streets with fog at night.

The problem becomes more severe in cooler months, as temperature inversion prevents a layer of warm air from rising and traps pollutants closer to the ground.

Mohamed and his wife, Shazma, had tried to keep Rameen and Inaaya safe with masks and limiting time outdoors but after days of coughing and fever the children stopped eating.

"We have been sleepless for three nights," said Shazma, bouncing Inaaya on her knee as she held up the nebulizer to her face.

More mothers and children waited nearby for their turn and a doctor rushed through the crowds with an infant in her arms, trailing a porter wheeling an oxygen canister pumping air to the baby.



A woman with a child enters the mother and child unit of a teaching hospital in Lahore, which is experiencing an influx of patients suffering from respiratory illness due to rising air pollution in the city.

"Inshallah (God willing), they will be better soon," Shazma said.

The UN children's agency says globally outdoor air pollution contributed to 154,000 deaths of children aged below five in 2019.

In Pakistan it is one of the top five causes of death among the entire population and young children are the most severely affected along with the elderly.

"Children are physiologically more vulnerable to air pollution than adults because their brains, lungs and other organs are still developing," said Unicef, adding that children breathe twice as fast as adults, increasing exposure.

"The government should take strong measures because small kids are suffering," said Shazia, cradling her nine-month-old son Mohamed who spent four days admitted to Sir Ganga Ram's packed wards for a chest infection.

The bed was shared by one-month-old baby Noor, suffering from pneumonia, who cried through her oxygen tubes as her grandmother tried to sooth her.

Provincial Health Minister Dr Javed Akram said hospitals are on high alert with beds and ventilators set aside for extra emergency cases.

Four partial lock downs have taken place since the start of November as well campaigns to promote masks.

Crop burning, carried out by farmers to remove remnants of rice crops to make way for wheat, is a major contributor to the problem, he said, as well as poor quality fuel in vehicles and construction and industrial activity.

Without prohibitively costly investments in specialised equipment for farmers, burning could not be fully curbed without risking food security.

The provincial government is researching cloud-seeding to make artificially induced rain to clear the skies.

It has also reached out to authorities in nearby India via diplomatic channels on how to improve the quality of air blowing across the border and consulted with experts in China.

"We are always trying to look at more evidence-based approaches," Akram said. "Our paediatric hospitals are overwhelmed with the burden from the respiratory issues ... the most vulnerable are small children."

Activists urge French resort to drop 'racist' district name

Activists have petitioned a French court to change the name of a neighbourhood and street in the seaside resort town of Biarritz over its racist connotations.

One of the southwestern town's districts has been officially called "The Negress" since 1861, while a road has been called "Negress Street" since 1986.

Anti-racism association Memoires et Partages (Memory and Sharing) says that Napoleonic soldiers gave the district the nickname after a former enslaved woman who worked in an inn there.

The group says the words "negro" and "negress" were used "to designate a black person deprived of their humanity, the only way for European societies to render their enslavement morally acceptable".

"The terms thus carry the mark of a crime against humanity that saw millions of Africans deported so they could work as slaves in colonial plantations," it said.

Instead, the association called for the neighbourhood to retake its old name of Harausta, which means "dusty quarter" in the regional Basque language.

Memoires et Partages asked the mayor's office to change the names in 2020, but that request was rejected.

It filed a case with the administrative court in the nearby city of Pau yesterday, and is expecting a ruling within a fortnight.

A magistrate who examined the claim yesterday gave a non-binding opinion that the word had indeed become "derogatory" but that the mayor's office was within its rights to reject the request.

William Bourdon, the lawyer for the association, deplored what he called the "normalisation of a racist stereotype".

Pierre Cambot, a lawyer for the mayor's office, said it was more of a "semantic slip".

"It was never the intention to humiliate anyone, but rather to pay tribute to this woman," he said.

If the court rules against the association, it has said it will take its complaint to France's top administrative court. – ***AFP***

More contaminated syrups found: WHO

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has said that several contaminated syrups and suspension medicines had been identified in countries in the WHO regions of the Americas, the Eastern Mediterranean, Southeast Asia and the Western Pacific.

The affected products were manufactured by Pharmix Laboratories in Pakistan, the WHO said, and were first identified in the Maldives and Pakistan.

Some of the tainted products have also been found in Belize, Fiji and Laos.

Pharmix was not immediately available for comment.

The medicines, liquids containing active ingredients to treat various conditions, contained unacceptable levels of the contaminant ethylene glycol, the WHO said.

The alert is the latest in a line of warnings from WHO about similarly contaminated medicines made in India and Indonesia, which were linked to the deaths of around 300 children worldwide last year.

No adverse events have been reported to the WHO regarding the Pakistan-made syrups, the agency's statement said, but it urged countries to step up vigilance and test products made by the company between December 2021 and December 2022. – ***Reuters***

COMMENT

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GULF TIMES

Planet tipping points pose 'unprecedented' threat to humanity

Humanity faces an "unprecedented" risk from tipping points that could unleash a domino effect of irreversible catastrophes across the planet, researchers warned Wednesday.

The most comprehensive assessment ever conducted of Earth's invisible tripwires was released as leaders meet for UN climate talks in Dubai with 2023 set to smash all heat records.

While many of the 26 tipping points laid out in the report — such as melting ice sheets — are linked to global warming, other human activities like razing swathes of the Amazon rainforest could also push Earth's ecosystems to the brink.

Five of these are showing signs of tipping — from melting ice sheets threatening catastrophic sea level rise, to mass die-off of tropical coral reefs — the report warned.

Some may have already begun to irrecoverably transform.

Once the world crosses the threshold for just one tipping point, dealing with the immediate humanitarian disaster could distract attention away from stopping the others, creating a "vicious cycle" of mass hunger, displacement and conflict, the report warned.

Tim Lenton, an Earth system scientist at the University of Exeter and lead author of the report, told AFP that these tipping points pose a "threat of a magnitude that is unprecedented for humanity".

But it was not all bad news.

The report also highlighted a range of positive tipping points — such as electric vehicles, renewable energy and changing to plant-based diets — that have the potential to swiftly build momentum and tip things back the other way.

"Imagine leaning back on a chair to that balance point where a small nudge can make a big difference," Lenton said.

"You could end up sprawled on your back on the floor — or if you're lucky, back upright."

The new report said it was plausible — though unlikely — that the AMOC would collapse this century

A key concern is if the melting West Antarctic and Greenland ice sheets collapse.

That could raise sea levels two metres by 2100, exposing nearly half a billion people to frequent coastal flooding, the report said.

The Greenland ice sheet has been shrinking at such a rate that it might already be too late.

"Is it past the tipping point or could it stop shrinking? No one's quite sure," Lenton said.

The other three tipping points most at risk are dying tropical coral reefs, melting permafrost and an ocean current called the North Atlantic subpolar gyre circulation.

Another ocean tipping point is the Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation (AMOC), a vast system that regulates the global transfer of heat from the tropics into the northern hemisphere.

The new report said it was plausible — though unlikely — that the AMOC would collapse this century.

This destabilising change could lead to vast regions getting far less rain, potentially halving the area worldwide where wheat and corn can be grown, it said.

"If that goes, suddenly there will be a global food security crisis and comparable water crisis as major monsoon systems in the tropics basically fail in India and West Africa. That will be a humanitarian catastrophe," Lenton said.

Recent massive fires in the Amazon rainforest and Canada's boreal forests suggest they are also more immediately at risk of tipping than previously thought, he added.

Lenton compared the job of the more than 200 researchers who created the over-400 page Global Tipping Points Report to risk assessors analysing a new aeroplane.

AMOC collapsing was like spotting something that could cause that plane to "fall out of the sky", he said.

But there's no way to redesign the Earth to make it safer.

Co-author Manjana Milkoreit from the University of Oslo said that "our global governance system is inadequate to deal with the coming threats and implement the solutions urgently required."

The authors called for tipping points to be included in the global stocktake being debated at the COP28 talks, as well as in national targets to combat climate change.

They also urged more effort to push tipping points in the right direction, such as changing policies on energy, transport, food and green ammonia used for fertiliser.

Sarah Das, a scientist at the US Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, who was not involved in the report, said the science was now "crystal clear".

"The risks for humanity in crossing tipping points into these unexplored states is dire, and the impact to human lives potentially horrific," she said. — AFP

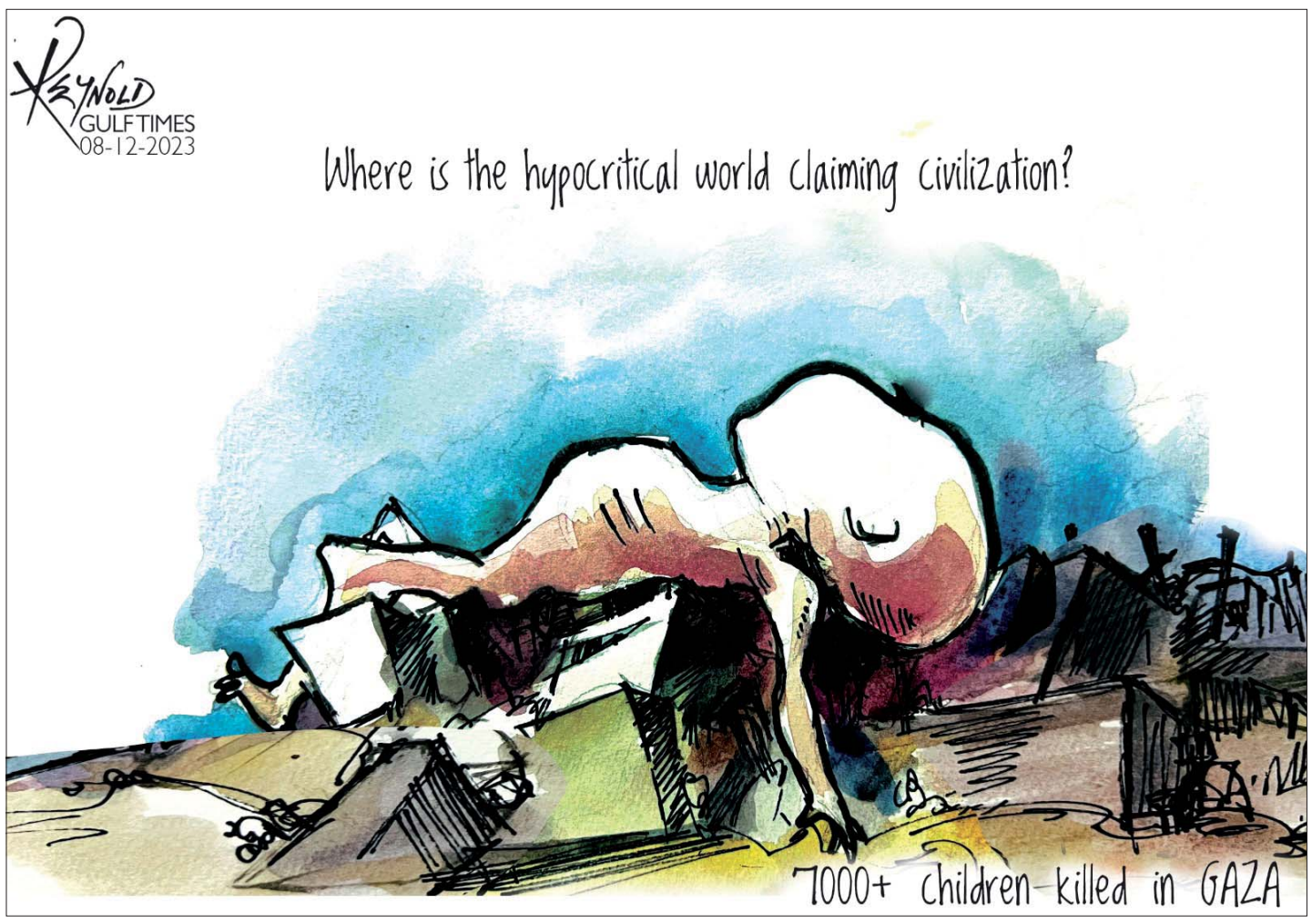
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What anti-Trumpism is missing

By Daron Acemoglu
Boston

These are unique and troubling times for the United States. A twice-impeached former president who now faces four separate indictments for serious crimes is the de facto leader of one of the two main political parties. Having remade the Republican Party in his image, Donald Trump will almost certainly be its nominee in the 2024 presidential election, despite mounting evidence of his financial misdeeds and role in an attempted coup. While Democrats fared well in various elections this month, polls show Trump leading US President Joe Biden in key battleground states. Clearly, something is rotten in the American Republic.

A second Trump presidency would be a much greater threat to democracy than the first. Trump's own outlook and rhetoric suggest that he has been radicalised further, and his supporters have now learned from their failed attempt to overturn the 2020 election. Friendly think tanks are drawing up plans to dismantle the US government's checks and balances, allowing Trump to usher in a police state targeting his political opponents. The Heritage Foundation's Project 2025 aims to "create a playbook of actions to be taken in the first 180 days of the new administration to bring quick relief to Americans suffering from the left's devastating policies." Central to that effort will be to staff key positions with Trumpian cadres.

While Trump and his enablers in the political establishment obviously bear the blame for this dire state of affairs, so do the American left and the fact-based media, which have failed to develop a well-calibrated response. Reactions vary from implicit normalisation (who can deny a major party's choice of nominee?) to showing zero tolerance toward Trump's supporters. But a practical blueprint for addressing the situation is missing, even though the future of American democracy is at stake.

The most promising response would feature two seemingly contradictory stances. First, the centre and the left must unite in declaring Trump and his inner circle a mortal threat to the American Republic. His top lieutenants should be treated as such, rather than as ratings-boosting talking heads. Trump's clearly stated plans for destroying American democracy must be highlighted constantly.

But the centre and the left also must recognise that most Trump supporters have legitimate grievances. This is the part of a successful response that has been lacking. While there are undoubtedly strong white-nationalist and racist elements in the MAGA movement, they are far from representing most people who will be voting for Republicans in the next election.

A significant share of the US population has suffered economically over the last four decades. Real (inflation-adjusted) earnings among men with only a high-school degree or less have declined since 1980, and median wages had all but stagnated until the late 2010s. Meanwhile, incomes for Americans with college degrees and specialised skills (such as programming) have risen rapidly.

There are many reasons for this labour-market transformation, and several of them are rooted in economic trends that establishment politicians and the media long sold as benefits to workers. The wave of globalisation that was supposed to lift all boats has stranded many. The automation that was supposed to make US manufacturing more competitive and help workers is the biggest factor in declining earnings among workers without a college degree. Meanwhile, labour unions, minimum-wage laws, and norms protecting low-pay workers have weakened.

Many workers who have suffered from these trends also sense that they have lost ground socially. Legal, political, and cultural changes that have helped previously disadvantaged groups have flustered others. In the process, many Americans have grown resentful as they feel their viewpoints and grievances are being ignored by the mainstream media and the educated, technocratic elite.

In a recent paper, the economists Ilyana Kuziemko, Nicolas Longuet-Marx, and Suresh Naidu document a divide between the economic preferences of less-educated workers, on one hand, and the well-educated and the Democratic Party, on the other. Whereas ordinary workers have a strong preference for minimum wages, job guarantees, protections against trade, and stronger unions, elites oppose such programs as unwarranted interference with the market. The Democratic Party's preferred method for helping the less advantaged has been to push for redistribution via the tax and transfer system.

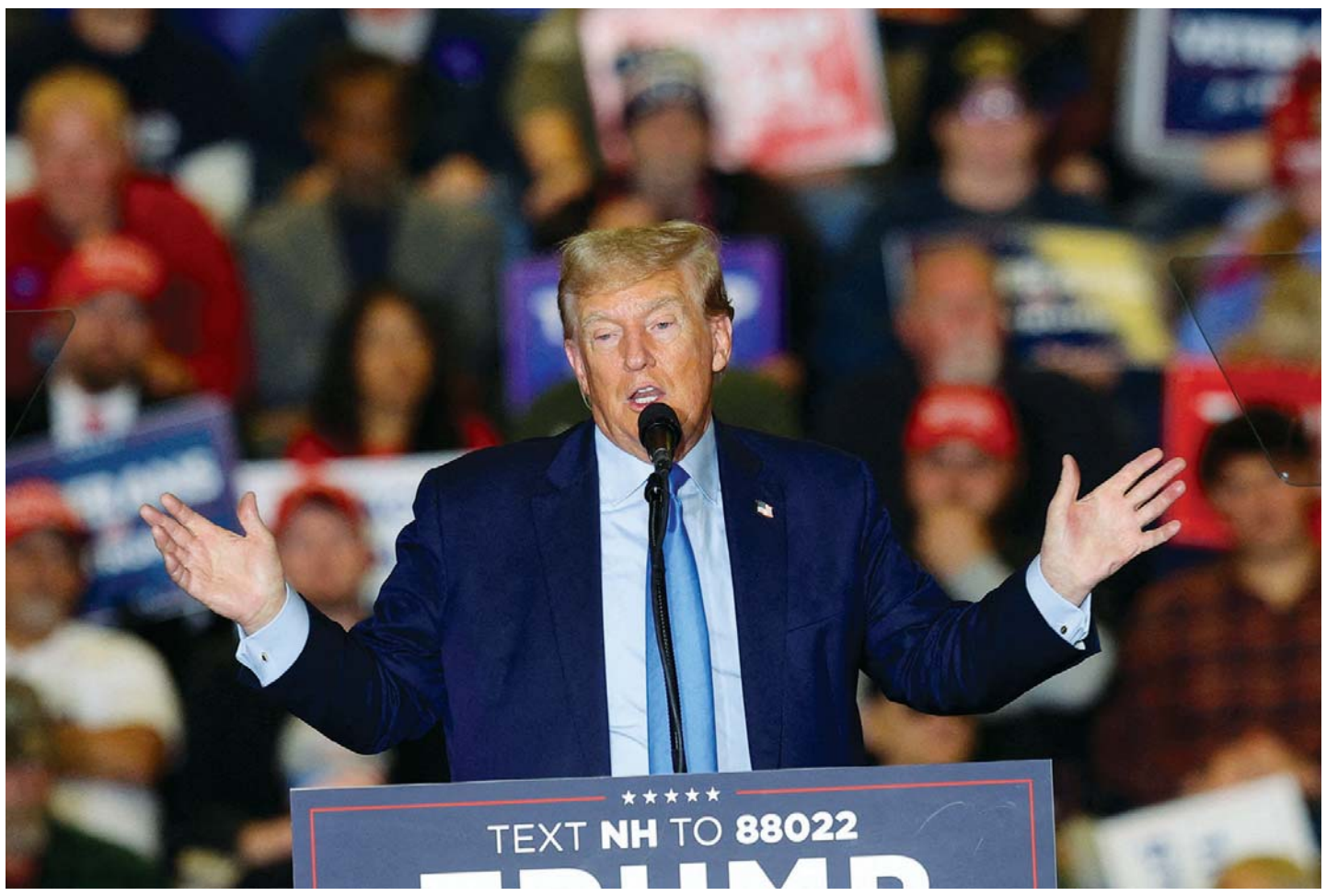
This disconnect between workers and centre-left policymakers is not confined to the US. As the economists Amory Gethin, Clara Martínez-Toledano, and Thomas Piketty show, a similar political realignment has occurred across 21 Western democracies. In the 1950s and 1960s, the working class reliably voted for centre-left and socialist parties, while wealthier and more highly educated citizens voted for the right. But by 2010, the more educated were voting overwhelmingly for centre-left parties, and workers had shifted to the right, partly because centre-left parties had moved away from policy positions aligned with workers' material interests and other priorities.

Reversing this trend requires changes not just to the specific policies that centre-left parties endorse, but also to the language they use. It also may require proactive efforts to promote workers to leadership positions within parties, rather than letting highly educated elites capture most top positions.

In the US, bringing workers back to the Democrats is not just an imperative for defeating Trump and the acolytes who will do his dirty work. It is also essential for America's economy. Regulating the tech industry and supporting workers will be key issues in the coming decade and beyond. A centre left that is devoid of workers' voices cannot hope to rise to the occasion.

Americans who still support democracy must expose Trump for what he is and work hard to prevent him from returning to power. But to do that, they also must be more accommodating and responsive to workers – including those who have not benefited as much from globalisation and technological changes and may not share all their positions on social and cultural issues. — Project Syndicate

● *Daron Acemoglu, Institute Professor of Economics at MIT, is a co-author (with Simon Johnson) of* Power and Progress: Our Thousand-Year Struggle Over Technology and Prosperity.



Republican presidential candidate and former US president Donald Trump speaks during a campaign rally in Claremont, New Hampshire, last month. **(Reuters)**

Acting upon the Qur'an

It was narrated on the authority of Abu Hurairah, may Allah be pleased with him, that the Messenger of Allah, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam* (may Allah exalt his mention), said:

He who recites the Qur'an and acts upon what it contains, on the Day of Judgment his parents will be crowned with the crown (of dignity), whose light is brighter than the light of the sun in the world when it is bright among you: what do you then think of the one who acts upon it? [Abu Dawood]

This *Hadith* clarifies the position and reward of him who recites the Qur'an and acts upon its laws and principles: his reward, indeed, transcends him to his parents (if they are believers; and if they are not believers, nothing will avail them even in the least).

Why would his parents be crowned with the crown (of dignity) on the Day of Judgment although they neither recited the Qur'an nor did what their child did? For the reason that they were the cause of the rectitude of their child, by either teaching him the Qur'an or arranging for him to learn it or by supplicating for him; or by bringing him up on righteousness and feeding him lawfully.

The Messenger of Allah, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, said: "If somebody dies, his deed will cease except from three: recurrent charity, advantageous knowledge by which the people benefit after him, and a good righteous child to supplicate (Allah for a good effect) to him." [Al-Bukhari in *Al-Adab*, Muslim, At-Tirmithi, Abu Dawood and An-Nasa'i] The one who died then caused those three things whose reward joins him not only during his life but also after his death.

The crown, then, is the reward of the parents of the righteous child who recites the Qur'an and acts upon its principles and laws. It is they who guided him to good, and the guide to the good is like its doer (in reward). But Allah multiplies the reward for whomever He pleases. Of course, Allah's multiplication of the reward to the doer of good is not like His multiplication to the one who guides to it. He may multiply the reward for the doer of good, if he is sincere in his intention to Allah, many times more than He does for the one who guides to it.

It is narrated on the authority of An-Nawwas ibn Sam'an, may Allah be pleased with him, that he said: I heard the Messenger of Allah, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, say: "On the Day of Judgment, the Qur'an, along with those who used to act upon it in the world, will be brought together, headed by both *Surahs of Al-Baqarah and Al 'Imran*, defending their reciter." [Muslim]

This *Hadith* explains the two previous ones. The people of the Qur'an are the party and selected people of Allah; and the Qur'an will come as an intercessor for its reciter who used to act upon it in the world, headed by the first two *Surahs* of the Qur'an, *Al-Baqarah* and *Al 'Imran*, to intercede and defend the one who used to recite and act upon them. To be sure, whoever acts upon the rulings of *Al-Baqarah* and *Al 'Imran* will have almost acted upon what is in the entire Qur'an in view of the great deal of rulings they contain.



Abu Sa'eed al-Kharraz, may Allah have mercy upon him, said:

The first part of understanding the Book of Allah is to act upon it, because doing so includes knowing, understanding and extracting its meanings; and the first thing to do towards understanding is to listen while being present in mind because Allah Almighty says (what means):

- {Indeed in that is a reminder for whoever has a heart or who listens while he is present [in mind].} [Qur'an 50:37]
- {Who listen to speech and follow the best of it. Those are the ones Allah has guided, and those are people of understanding.} [Qur'an 39:18]

The whole of the Qur'an is good and to follow the best refers to the wonders which are disclosed to the hearts when listening with attentiveness to it; and this leads to understanding and extracting its meanings. The first thing to do towards listening with attentiveness to the Qur'an is to listen to it as if the Messenger of Allah, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, is reciting to you; and then you transcend that to imagine that you are listening to it from Jibreel (Gabriel), may Allah exalt his mention, while reciting it to the Prophet, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, because Allah Almighty says (what means): {And indeed, the Qur'an is the revelation of the Lord of the Worlds. The Trustworthy Spirit has brought it down upon your heart, [O Muhammad] – that you may be of the warners.} [Qur'an 26:192-194] Then you may transcend further to imagine that you are hearing it from Allah Almighty.

It is narrated on the authority of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, may Allah be pleased with him, that he said:

O holders of knowledge! Act upon your knowledge because a true scholar is he who acts upon what he knows while his knowledge agrees with his deeds. There will appear a people who will carry knowledge but it will not go beyond their collar-bones: their deeds will contradict their knowledge, and what is in their hearts opposes what they show. They will sit with the people and vie in glory with each other, so much so, that a man will grow angry with his companion because he sits with someone other than him. As for those, the deeds they do in their gatherings will not rise to Allah Almighty. [Ad-Darimi]

It was narrated on the authority of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, may Allah be pleased with him, that the Messenger of Allah, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, said: "He who recites and memorises the Qur'an, making lawful what is lawful in it and making unlawful what is unlawful in it, Allah will admit him to Paradise and accept his intercession for ten of his household, to all of whom the Fire has been affirmed." [At-Tirmithi]

The Messenger of Allah, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, said:

"The lawful is evident, and the unlawful is evident, and in between them there are suspicious matters unknown to a lot of people. So, whoever forsakes those suspicious matters (lest he may commit a sin) definitely keeps his religion and honour blameless; and whoever bravely indulges in these suspicious things is about to fall into the unlawful, like a shepherd who grazes (his animals) around the protected zone, and he is about to pasture them in it. Verily, every king has a protected zone, and the protected zone of Allah is His taboos." [Al-Bukhari, Muslim, At-Tirmithi, Abu Dawood and An-Nasa'i]

Both the lawful and the unlawful are evidently clear in the Qur'an. Suspicious matters should be avoided according to the command of the *Hadith*, for fear of falling into the unlawful. Whoever does so, Allah will admit him to Paradise and accept his intercession for his family.

Intercession is proven in the Qur'an and *Sunnah*; and whoever recites the Qur'an and acts upon what it contains will be made to intercede for others because of his high position and superiority in the sight of Allah Almighty. The first for whom he will be made to intercede are his parents, and their worthiness of intercession goes back to their being the direct cause of this act, even though they themselves are not among the people of the Qur'an. The intercession takes place only by the permission of Allah by whomever He pleases for whomever He likes. There will be no intercession for him who does not believe in Allah and His Messenger, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*.

Just as one's intercession for his parents is a fact, the parent's intercession for his child is also proven in the Book of Allah. Allah mentioned one's supplication for his parents (what means): {"Our Lord, forgive me and my parents and the believers the Day the account is established."} [Qur'an 14:41] Similarly, He mentioned the parent's supplication for his offspring (what means): {"My Lord, make me an establisher of prayer, and [many] from my descendants. Our Lord, and accept my supplication."} [Qur'an 14:40] A mention may also be made of the supplication of Ibrahim (Abraham), may Allah exalt his mention, for his descendants (what means): {"Our Lord, and send among them a messenger from themselves who will recite to them Your verses and teach them the Book and wisdom and purify them. Indeed, You are The Exalted in Might, The Wise."} [Qur'an 2:129]

For this supplication in this world and the intercession in the Hereafter, they are in dire need. Intercession is assured for the Prophets and Messengers as well as for the Qur'an, fasting, righteous deeds, and Allah's righteous servants and pious allies.

According to this *Hadith*, one will intercede, not only for his parents, but also for his family members to whom the fire has been affirmed. That is the bounty of Allah which He gives to whomever He pleases and the reward of reciting and memorising the Qur'an and acting upon its principles and laws in this world, and with Allah is the best reward.

Just as the righteous will intercede for their parents and relatives, they will also intercede, by the leave of Allah, for their teachers and disciples, those who have a good favor on them, those whom they like and those who like them in (the religion of) Allah Almighty.

It was narrated on the authority of Abu Shurayh Al-Khuza'I, may Allah be pleased with him, that he said: "The Messenger of Allah, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, said: 'No doubt, this Qur'an is a rope, one of whose ends is in the Hand of Allah and the other in your hands: hold fast by it so that you would never go astray nor be ruined after it.'" [Ibn Abi Shaybah]

Allah Almighty says (what means): {And thus We have sent it down as an Arabic Qur'an and have diversified therein the warnings, that perhaps they will avoid [sin] or it would cause them remembrance.} [Qur'an 20:113]

Allah only revealed this Qur'an to guide the people; and it is Allah's uncreated, revealed speech which He says and continues to say; and that is why one of its ends is in His Hand and the other end is the mus-haf, which is in our hands. We have to adhere to it: it is the strong rope between us and our Lord which no falsehood could approach, neither from before it, nor from behind. Allah kept it from any kind of distortion or alteration. In confirmation, He, the Almighty, says (what means): {Indeed, it is We Who sent down the Qur'an and indeed, We will be its guardian.} [Qur'an 15:9]

If things become difficult and the people fall into dispute and the ways are confused so much that no one will know what to do, the saved sect will be that which adheres to the Book of Allah (the Qur'an) and, after it, the *Sunnah* of the Messenger of Allah, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, as stated in a *Hadith*.

Article source: http://www.islamweb.net/emainpage/

islamweb.net English

Dominance of the Qur'an over previous Scriptures

Allah, The Almighty, revealed the Qur'an to be His last, all-embracing Scripture containing the final manifestation of the Divine Law. This necessitates that it has to be safeguarded from the mischievous hands of men and from all corruption. This protection has been a reality from the time the Qur'an was revealed until today and will remain so forever. It contains no additions or deletions. It has reached us by so many chains of transmission that it is impossible for them to have conspired on a lie. It has been recorded and memorised innumerable times.

There has been no change in its text over time, not even in a single letter. Some of those who have committed it to memory cannot speak Arabic; nevertheless, they recite it exactly as it was revealed.

Allah has guaranteed the preservation of the Qur'anic text, as He, the Most Exalted, Says (what means): "Indeed, it is We who sent down the Qur'an and indeed, We will be its guardian." [Qur'an 15:9]

Allah also Says (what means): "And the word of your Lord has been fulfilled in truth and in justice. None can alter His words, and He is the All-Hearing, the All-Knowing." [Qur'an 6: 115]

As for the previous Scriptures, they were for a limited duration of time. Allah gave human beings the responsibility of preserving them, and they lost them through corruption, alteration, and concealment. Allah Says (what means):

"Indeed, We sent down the Torah, in which was guidance and light. The prophets who submitted [to Allah] judged by it for the Jews, as did the rabbis and scholars by that with which they were entrusted of the Scripture of Allah, and they were witnesses thereto." [Qur'an 5:44]

In the Qur'an, Allah Almighty informs us that the Torah was changed; He Says (what means):

"So woe to those who write the "scripture" with their own hands, then say, "This is from Allah," in order to exchange it for a small price. Woe to them for what their hands have written and woe to them for what they earn." [Qur'an 2:79]

Being the final, all-encompassing and preserved against any change, the Islamic Law abrogated all the previous Scriptures which sustained human interpolations. Abrogation generally takes place with regards to secondary matters of law. As for fundamental principles, like the Oneness of Allah, The Most Exalted, the prohibition of idolatry, and the fundamentals of worship – matters that form the basic call of all the Messengers, may Allah exalt their mention, they are not subject to abrogation.

The Law that came with Prophet 'Eesa (Jesus), may Allah exalt his mention, abrogated part of the Law that came with Moosa (Moses), may Allah exalt his mention. Relating the words of Prophet 'Eesa to the Children of Israel, Almighty Allah Says (what means): "And I have come confirming that which was before me of the Torah and to make lawful to you part of what was forbidden to you…" [Qur'an 3:50]

The Islamic Law is lasting, remaining suitable for every place and time, and embracing the goodness of the previous manifestations of the Law. Allah Says (what means): "And We have revealed to you, [O Muhammad], the Book in truth, confirming that which preceded it of the Scripture and as a criterion over it." [Qur'an 5:48]

The Qur'an is different from the previous Scriptures in the following respects:

(1) The Qur'an is miraculous and inimitable. Nothing similar to it can be produced by human beings. Allah challenged both humans and jinn to produce the like of the Qur'an, as in the verse (which means): "Say, "If mankind and the jinn gathered in order to produce the like of this Qur'an, they could not produce the like of it, even if they were to each other assistants." [Qur'an 17:88]

He, The Almighty, further challenged the disbelievers among the Arabs to produce even one chapter similar to the Qur'anic chapters, Saying (what means): "And if you are in doubt about what We have sent down upon Our Servant [Muhammad], then produce a chapter the like thereof and call upon your witnesses other than Allah, if you should be truthful." [Qur'an 2:23]

(2) After the Qur'an, no more Scriptures will be revealed by Allah. Just as the Prophet Muhammad, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam* (may Allah exalt his mention), is the last Prophet, the Qur'an is the last Scripture.

(3) Allah has taken it upon Himself to protect the Qur'an from alteration, to safeguard it from corruption, and to preserve it from distortion (as stated in the meaning of [Qur'an 15:9] previously quoted. On the other hand, the previous Scriptures suffered alteration and distortion and did not remain in their originally revealed form (as mentioned above in [Qur'an 4:46]).

(4) The Qur'an, for one, confirms early Scriptures and, for another, is a trustworthy witness over them [Qur'an 5:48].

(5) The Qur'an abrogates them, meaning it cancels the rulings of the previous Scriptures and renders them inapplicable. The Law of the old Scriptures is no longer applicable; the previous rulings have been abrogated with the new Law of Islam.

Accordingly, Allah does not accept any religion except Islam as a way to His Pleasure, as He Says (what means):

"And whoever desires other than Islam as religion never will it be accepted from him, and he, in the Hereafter, will be among the losers." [Qur'an 3:85]

Article source: http://www.islamweb.net/emainpage/

Remedies for the heart in the Qur'an

Allah Almighty Says in the Qur'an (what means): "We send down of the Qur'an that which is healing and mercy for the believers." [Qur'an 17:82] And also (what means): "O mankind! There has come to you instruction from your Lord and healing for what is in the breasts and guidance and mercy for the believers." [Qur'an 10:57]

It is narrated on the authority of An-Nu'maan Ibn Basheer, may Allah be pleased with him, who said : "I heard the Messenger of Allah, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, say: "That which is lawful is plain and that which is unlawful is plain and between the two of them are doubtful matters about which not many people know. Thus, he who avoids doubtful matters clears himself in regard to his religion and his honor, but he who falls into doubtful matters falls into that which is unlawful, like the shepherd who pastures around a sanctuary, all but grazing therein. Truly, every king has a sanctuary, and truly Allah's sanctuary is His prohibitions. Truly in the body there is a morsel of flesh which, if it be whole, all the body is whole and which, if it be diseased, all of it is diseased. Truly it is the heart." [Al-Bukhari and Muslim]

Diseases of the heart are a mixture of suspicions and lusts which can lead our souls into turmoil and despair. However, Allah Almighty has provided us with a special prescription that will cleanse and heal our diseased hearts: The Qur'an.

The Qur'an provides the healing for many types of ailments:

1. It contains proofs and clear evidences which separate right from wrong.
2. It adequately and clearly negates our doubts.

No book on this earth other than the Qur'an provides such comprehensive proofs and testimonies in relation to exalted matters of monotheism, confirmation of Allah's attributes, the Day of Judgment, Prophethood and refutation of incongruous doctrines and degenerate opinions.

Although the Qur'an offers a genuine cure for the evils of suspicions and doubts, its benefit depends to a large extent on comprehending its essence and purpose. Those who are blessed with such faculties would have the ability to distinguish between right and wrong, as clearly and easily as they can distinguish between day and night.

They would know for certain that all other knowledge and concepts prevailing among people are either traditions or false presumptions; however fanciful and appealing they may appear, these would be unable to offer a substitute for the Truth or genuine matters as encapsulated in the Qur'an and would provide no benefit.

The *Hadith* (narration) of Prophet Muhammad, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, compares the futility of such efforts to: "Inferior camel's meat on top of a rough mountain, neither the hill is easy to climb nor the camel is healthy enough to get down the hill." [Al-Bukhari]

In fact, the knowledge obtained by theologians could be found in the Qur'an with a much better elaboration and explanation, for the theologians are inclined to affectation, wordiness and perpetuating perplexity. They assume that their attitudes help in refuting suspicions and doubts, but contrary to their presumption, these suspicions and doubts are better served by their efforts. If healing and guidance, knowledge and certainty could not be obtained from the Qur'an and the teachings of Prophet Muhammad, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, it would be impossible to obtain them from the utterances of those perplexed sceptics.

The Qur'an draws its ability of healing the diseases of lusts by its wisdom and fair exhortation, through the renouncement of earthly pursuits and the pursuance of the Hereafter. It draws upon parables and narrations containing lessons to be pondered. If the heart assimilated these qualities, it would certainly be inclined towards good deeds and renounce the evil ones.

Article source: http://www.islamweb.net/emainpage/

QATAR

Research vessel to monitor Qatar's marine environment



Members of the team with the research vessel.

Research vessel Janan has embarked on a mission to monitor Qatar's marine environment, it was announced yesterday.

Supervised by the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change (MoECC) in co-operation with the Environmental Sciences Centre at Qatar University (QU), the vessel will check the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) in its three-day journey.

The monitoring and research process, according to a statement from the MoECC, is carried out by a team of specialists and researchers from the ministry and the QU.

Dr Mai Mohamed al-Ghanem, head of the Aquatic Environment Quality Section at the Environmental Monitoring and Inspection Department, said the journey is aimed at collecting sediment and marine water samples from the specified sites to measure the most prominent physical and chemical environmental variables such as water temperature, salinity, saturated dissolved oxygen and turbidity.

The research team will classify various organisms and identify their types.

Abdullah al-Khulaifi, assistant director of the Environmental Monitoring and Inspection Department, said the mission is important and reflects the significance of research activities by the government.

"This trip will produce accurate results on the state of the marine environment of Qatar in addition to studying the environmental elements of soil and shallow or deep regional coastal waters," he said.

The research vessel, manned by expert technicians, has the latest equipment, tools and specialised laboratories to monitor environmental variables on the spot.


Hot air balloons being inflated yesterday at the Katara parking area.
PICTURES: Shaji Kayamkulam


Giant kites will fly from 2.30pm to 4pm daily at Katara.



Qatar Hot Air Balloon Festival aloft at Katara

From Page 1

The festival also offers a diverse range of entertainment for visitors of all ages.

There are activities ranging from a gaming zone for children, evening shows of illuminated balloons set to music and a lineup of mascots, jugglers and performers.

There is a specially designated arena with games, including carnival games, team activities, human football, VR (virtual reality) games, and more.

Food enthusiasts will also be delighted with a wide array of culinary options available at kiosks and food trucks spread across the venue.

Organisers noted that daily dawn flights are scheduled from today, depending on weather conditions, with balloons taking off from Katara and various locations.

Giant kites will fly from 2.30pm to 4pm daily, while tethered flights and the Night Glow Show will illuminate the evenings from 4pm-7pm.




Stilt walkers and dancers roaming around the venue to entertain visitors.

Right: Hot air balloons ready for take-off from the Katara parking area yesterday to mark the start of the 4th edition of the Qatar Hot Air Balloon Festival.




A group of students during a Qatar Charity Week 2023 activity.

Qatar University Charity Week 2023 a success

Qatar University (QU) has announced the success of Charity Week 2023, an event that captured the essence of unity and philanthropy.

The event, organised by the QU in co-operation with the Education Above All Foundation along with various student clubs such as Wmnahyaha, Meshkat, Chess, Astronomy, and the South Korean Club, aimed to raise funds and awareness for charitable causes.

The collective efforts of QU students and clubs led to QR44,900 raised this year, marking it as one of the highest among participating institutes.

The Charity Week 2023 Qatar total reached QR388,992, contributing significantly to the international QR12.4mn and fulfilling the QR4.4mn pledge to Gaza.

The activities hosted under the leadership of the QU included booths, painting sessions, sports tournaments, and partnerships with businesses committed to contributing a portion of their sales to charity.

"The event demonstrated the students' capabilities and abilities in spreading awareness and educating the student community about charitable work in a distinctive and diverse manner," said student organisation adviser Omar al-Emadi.

"The Sanabel Club board worked together to bring our vision to life with support from adviser al-Emadi, as well as our dedicated volunteers," said Charity Week events officer Areeba Faisal. "The success of Charity Week was not just measured in the funds raised but also in the profound impact we had from uniting the students and a sense of fulfilment derived from making a difference."

The football tournament saw Ali Sherif Tawfik emerge as the top goal scorer.

The university's booth at the inter-university event won the Buzz Worthy Booth Award, recognising innovation and engagement, the statement added.