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Amir to patronise Police College graduation today

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani will patronise today the graduation ceremony of the sixth batch of candidate students of the Ministry of Interior's Police College. (QNA)

Smart agriculture project launched

The Ministry of Municipality launched a project to develop protected farming and climate-smart agriculture, in co-operation with the Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency (KOTRA), the Hyundai Research Institute, and the Plant Farm company. The aim of the project is to better understand the situation of agriculture in Qatar, come up with realistic recommendations, and identify the most appropriate technologies for Qatar to develop and enhance its agricultural and food production capabilities. **Page 4**

Msheireb Downtown Doha wins award

Msheireb Downtown Doha, a pioneering development in the heart of Qatar's capital, has been honoured with the prestigious Global Economics Award in the Best Urban Regeneration Project category. Msheireb Downtown Doha, developed by Msheireb Properties, is an ambitious project that blends the rich Qatari heritage with modern sustainable living. **Page 7**

Two Qatari planes in Arish with aid for Gaza

Two aircraft of the Qatar Armed Forces carrying 61 tonnes of aid landed in Al Arish City, Egypt, yesterday. The assistance includes medicines provided by Qatar and the France, along with food items provided by Qatar Charity to be further transferred to Gaza. The aid will be sent to Gaza following the successful Qatari-led mediation. **Page 5**

Today's
Schedule



Group : B

India vs Uzbekistan, 5.30pm
at Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium

Australia vs Syria, 2.30pm
at Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium

Group : C

Palestine-UAE, 8.30pm
at Al Janoub Stadium

100 Gaza students to pursue education in Qatar

By Joseph Varghese
Staff Reporter

A total of 100 students from Palestine will reach Qatar within six months to continue and complete their higher education in various universities in the country, an official from Education Above All (EAA) Foundation told *Gulf Times* yesterday. "After the launch of the 'Re-building Hope for Gaza initiative', we started to bring students from Gaza to Qatar," explained Talal Alhathal, executive director, Al Fakhoora programme, EAA. He was speaking on the sidelines

EAA is helping Palestine students to continue their education in Qatar, said Talal Alhathal. **PICTURE:** Shaji Kayamkulam

of a welcome ceremony for the first batch of students from Palestine

who were admitted in the University of Science and Technology (UDST). These students had to leave Palestine due to the ongoing conflict in Gaza. "We are providing them hope to continue and complete their degrees from where they have stopped. We have already got eight students to UDST and are in the process of application review to bring the remaining students to study here in the universities in Qatar. Some of them will be admitted in UDST while others will be in other universities depending on the availability and the field of interest of the students," explained Alhathal. **To Page 3 Page 12**

Amir, Czech president hold official talks

QNA
Doha

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani held yesterday an official discussion session at the Amiri Diwan with President of the Czech Republic Petr Pavel. At the outset of the session, His Highness the Amir welcomed the Czech president and the accompanying delegation, wishing them a pleasant stay and bilateral relations further development and growth in various fields to meet the aspirations of the two friendly countries. For his part, the Czech president extended thanks to His Highness the Amir for the warm reception and generous hospitality. He voiced happiness at the inauguration of the Qatari embassy in the capital, Prague, looking forward to its contribution to enhancing relations between the two countries and pushing them towards broader horizons. During the session, they discussed areas of joint co-operation between the two countries, in addition to exchanging views on the most prominent regional

and international issues, most notably the developments in the Gaza Strip and the occupied Palestinian territories. The session was attended by HE Chief of the Amiri Diwan Sheikh Saoud bin Abdulrahman al-Thani, HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Mohamed bin Abdulaziz al-Khulaifi, and a number of senior officials. On the Czech side, it was attended by a number of mem-

bers of the accompanying official delegation. His Highness the Amir and the Czech president also held a bilateral meeting, during which they discussed a host of topics of mutual interest. His Highness the Amir hosted a luncheon banquet in honour of the Czech president and his accompanying delegation. Upon arrival at the Amiri Diwan, the Czech president was accorded an official reception. **Page 2**

Talks focused on economic co-operation: Amir

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani said that his discussions with President of the Czech Republic Petr Pavel dealt with ways to advance bilateral economic and trade co-operation to the advantage of both sides. In a post on his official X account, His Highness the Amir said that he discussed with President Pavel ways to develop bilateral

economic and trade co-operation to bring positive returns to the two friendly countries. His Highness the Amir expressed satisfaction at the special ties that bind Qatar and the Czech Republic and the evident development that these ties are undergoing, thanks to a bilateral keenness to expand and enrich co-operation in all directions. (QNA)

Holders Qatar first team to reach Asian Cup last 16

Akram Afif scores for Qatar.

Akram Afif struck again as holders and hosts Qatar became the first team to enter the Asian Cup last 16 with a 1-0 win over Tajikistan at the Al Bayt Stadium yesterday. China's 0-0 draw with Lebanon earlier in the day means Qatar are guaranteed to go through to the knockout round as Group A winners. Afif, who scored twice in Qatar's opening 3-0 victory over Lebanon, hit the winner midway through the first half in front of 55,000 fans. The forward raced

onto a through ball from Almoez Ali in the 17th minute before stabbing it deftly past goalkeeper Rustam Yatimov for another clinical finish. "We are happy to qualify for the round of 16, and I congratulate the players for their great effort and the fighting spirit they showed in the matches," said Qatar coach Marquez Lopez. Tajikistan drew 0-0 with China in their opening game for their first point ever at the Asian Cup and still have a chance to qualify for the knockout round. **Sport Pages 1, 3 & 4**

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Czech president accorded official reception



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PM meets Belgian premier and Dutch foreign minister



HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani met yesterday with Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo on the sidelines of the 54th World Economic Forum in Davos. The meeting discussed co-operation relations between the two countries and the latest developments in the Gaza Strip and the occupied Palestinian territories. (QNA)



HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani met yesterday with Foreign Minister of the Netherlands Hanke Bruins, on the sidelines of the 54th Annual Meeting of the World Economic Forum in Davos. The meeting discussed co-operation ties between the two nations and the latest developments in the region. (QNA)

Czech president meets with deputy PM



Visiting Czech President Petr Pavel met yesterday with HE the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defence Affairs Dr Khalid bin Mohamed al-Attiyah. During the meeting, the two sides discussed topics of common interest and bilateral relations and ways to strengthen them. They also took stock of the latest regional developments, primarily the Israeli war on Gaza, and Qatar's mediation efforts and its keenness to reach a ceasefire and stop the war. (QNA)

Czech president ends Doha visit

Czech President Petr Pavel left Doha yesterday evening after an official visit to the country. The Czech delegation was seen off at Hamad International Airport by HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Mohamed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh al-Khulaifi, Qatar's ambassador to the Czech Republic Nasser bin Ibrahim al-Lingawi and Czech ambassador to Qatar Petr Chalupecky. **(QNA)**

Al Mazayen Championship to be held on Jan 27

AI Mazayen Championship will be held as part of the Qatar International Falcons and Hunting Festival in its 15th edition (Marmi 2024) on January 27 at Katara. The festival is held under the patronage of HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani. Registration for the local and international dressage tournament, which specialises in falconry, will continue until January 24. Competitions of the 21st group participating in the Haddad Challenge Championship have been postponed due to weather conditions. Al bin Sultan al-Hamidi, chairman of the Hadad Challenge Committee, said the championship will resume today for the 22nd and 23rd groups.



100 Gaza students to pursue education in Qatar: EAA


From Page 1

The official noted that the first batch of students has started their academic journey with UDEST and others will follow soon. "We have processed (the papers) to bring 20 more in the coming days. The remaining will be processed once all the documentation and other formalities are completed. We are preparing the logistics for them to come here," he continued.

According to Althathal, currently EAA is focusing more on the national universities to admit the students from Gaza. He said: "We focus on UDSU and Qatar University to admit most of the students. Medical students will be admitted at Qatar University while engineering, IT and other technical programme students will be given admission in UDSU. We are also in discussion with Qatar Foundation universities (to know) if some of the students can be admitted."

The Al Fakhoora director highlighted that the programme aims to provide several support services also to the students.

"We are providing psycho-social support, trauma support, facilitate education at some of the undamaged facilities in Gaza besides the opportunity for the students to study in universities as well as in schools outside Palestine. We are focusing on well qualified students based on their academic strength, GPA and merit. We hope that with our support, these students will be able to complete their education and rebuild Gaza and Palestine for better."



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Admission process for various military services to open today

The Ministry of Defence, in co-ordination with all military authorities in Qatar, announced the start of the work of the Unified Permanent Committee for the Selection of Candidates for Military Officers, under the follow-up and supervision of the head of the committee, HE the Chief of Staff of Qatar Armed Forces Staff Lieutenant-General (Pilot) Salem bin Hamad bin Aqeel al-Nabit.

HE the Chief of Staff said that admission will be open for those wishing to join the various military authorities in the country starting from Jan 18, for high school graduates for the current year only (2023/2024).

Candidates must submit their applications on the committee's website in accordance with the terms and conditions in order to compete for a spot and be consid-

Candidates must submit their applications on the committee's website in accordance with the terms and conditions

ered to join one of the military authorities in Qatar, he noted.

He explained that unifying the process of registration is a step aimed at unifying efforts and reducing the burden on applicants under one umbrella that includes the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Interior, Qatar State Security, Internal Security Force (Lekhwiya), and the Amiri Guard.

The committee was formed of qualified and experienced representatives of these authorities to select the most suitable applicants according to the needs of each authority and to the conditions and standards that are published via the committee's website.

For his part, the head of the joint committee, Brigadier General Nasser al-Jaber said that the committee is keen to ensure equality and equal opportunities and choose the appropriate applicants who meet the conditions and standards of the military authorities.

He pointed out that the committee aims at fulfilling the Qatar National Vision 2030 and in accordance with the words of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani: "Qatar deserves the best from its children" (QNA)

Cabinet nod to draft law on real estate regulation

HE the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defence Affairs Dr Khalid bin Mohamed al-Attiyah chaired the Cabinet's regular meeting held at the Amiri Diwan yesterday.

After the meeting, HE the Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs issued the following statement:

The Cabinet then considered the topics on its agenda as follows:

First – The Cabinet was informed of the Shura Council's ap-

proval of a draft law on regulating real estate registration.

Second – Approval of a draft law amending some provisions of the Penal Code promulgated by Law No 11 of 2004, and referring it to the Shura Council.

Third – Approval of a draft law amending some provisions of the Qatar Financial Centre (QFC) Law promulgated by Law No 7 of 2005, and referring it to the Shura Council.

Fourth – the Cabinet took the

necessary measures to ratify the following: 1- Memorandum of understanding (MoU) regarding establishing a mechanism for bilateral consultations between the governments of Qatar and South Africa.

2- An MoU on mutual recognition of maritime qualification certificates for seafarers between the governments of Qatar and Georgia.

Fifth – Approval of a draft MoU between the interior ministries of Qatar and Egypt for co-operation in combating crime. (QNA)

AlKhater in Davos meetings



HE the Minister of State for International Co-operation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Lolwah bint Rashid AlKhater met with the head of the Peace and Human Rights Division at the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs Simon Geissbuhler, on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum in Davos. The meeting discussed the latest developments in the Gaza Strip and the occupied Palestinian territories and ways to co-operate in order to alleviate the catastrophic humanitarian situation caused by the war on Gaza, in addition to a number of regional issues of mutual concern, particularly Ukraine.



HE the Minister of State for International Co-operation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Lolwah bint Rashid AlKhater met yesterday with the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Mirjana Spoljaric, on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum in Davos. The meeting discussed ways to end the disastrous repercussions of the war on the Gaza Strip and providing humanitarian support, especially in the health field as well as arranging the entry of international aid into the Strip. They touched on several regional issues of mutual interest, notably the topic of Ukraine.



HE the Minister of State for International Co-operation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Lolwah bint Rashid AlKhater met yesterday with South African Minister of Trade, Industry and Competition Ebrahim Patel, on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum in Davos. The meeting discussed co-operation relations between the two countries, besides a number of topics of mutual interest. HE AlKhater praised South Africa's efforts towards the Palestinian issue, especially its pioneering international positions towards the war on the Gaza Strip. (QNA)

Ministry launches protected farming and climate-smart agri project

The Ministry of Municipality launched a project to develop protected farming and climate-smart agriculture, in co-operation with the Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency (KOTRA), the Hyundai Research Institute, and the Plant Farm company.

The project aims to better understand agriculture in Qatar, come up with realistic recommendations, and identify the most appropriate technologies to develop and enhance its agricultural and food production capabilities in a manner that is sustainable, natural

resource-efficient, adaptive to climate change, and limiting negative impacts on the environment.

In this regard, Director of the Food Security Department Dr Masoud Jarallah al-Marri said that this project comes within the framework of co-operation and the memorandum of understanding on agriculture and food security signed by Qatar and South Korea end of last year, aiming to determine the expected climate change effects that could impact food production in Qatar, propose the necessary means and measures to mitigate their repercussions,

such as by increasing production efficiency and the use of modern technologies and practices, and to create varieties that are resistant to drought, high temperatures, and high humidity levels.

The project will benefit from South Korea's successes that are relevant and applicable in Qatar. Dr al-Marri expressed his hope that this project will meet its goals and strengthen Qatar-South Korea ties through knowledge and expertise exchange, praising Qatar-based research institutions and farms' contributions to implement this project.

The Director of the Food Security Department at the Ministry of Municipality said that KOTRA helps countries identify their agricultural challenges and offers Korean technologies and financial projects to deal with those challenges. Dr al-Marri said that discussions will be held in the context of this project with farmers, companies, and stakeholders in order to overcome agricultural challenges and advance food production to reach a self-sufficiency level, in light of state aspirations, in addition to enhancing the responsible use of water and energy resources

and to lengthen the farming season to as long as possible.


He said that the ministry's new food security strategy 2024-2030, to be finalised and approved soon, will work on converting open-air agricultural activities to enclosed ones in order to reduce evaporation rates and water wastage, as well as to avoid soil-related issues.

He added that this was proven to be Qatar's ideal solution given its environment and climate conditions, whereby it increases productivity, reduces water use, lengthens the farming season, reduces pests, provides ease of con-

trol, and uses fertilizers efficiently.

Dr al-Marri said that most types of modern international agricultural practices are employed in Qatar, praising the ministry's support for the private sector by providing it with information and counselling, seeds and fertiliser, with greenhouses at times, in addition to facilitating administrative and financial matters.

He also praised the private sector for adopting the latest technologies and best practices, advancing the agricultural sector and working towards the country's food security. (QNA)



قطر للطاقة QatarEnergy

The General, Limited Tenders Committees and Supply Chain Department announces the following Tenders:

Important Notice:
Suppliers and Contractors who are already registered with QatarEnergy via Mushtaryat Portal can "Buy Tender Online and download "Tender Document" from QatarEnergy website (Mushtaryat Portal).

Effective from 1st July 2023, Bids from Local Suppliers and Contractors (companies established under the Laws of State of Qatar) who are not in possession of an ICV score in the ICV portal (<https://icv.qa/en-US>) by Tender Closing Date (or commercial bid submission date if separately mentioned/notified) will not be accepted. Local Companies that have been established for less than 2 years are exempt from this requirement.

Sl. No	Tender Number	Tender Sale Period		Tender Closing Date	Tender Bond	Bond Curr.	Tender Fee	Fee Curr.
		Start Date	End Date					
1	GT24100500	18.01.2024	24.01.2024	18.02.2024	400,000.00	QAR	500.00	QAR
Title of Tender: MODIFICATION OF CRUDE OIL TANKS' DRAIN PIPING SYSTEM IN NGL TANK FARM, MESAIIEED OPERATIONS								
Mid-Tender Meeting Location : To be advised if required								
Mid-Tender Meeting Date & Time : To be advised if required								
2	GT24101100	16.01.2024	25.01.2024	11.02.2024	300,000.00	QAR	500.00	QAR
Title of Tender: EPIC FOR VVIP RECEPTION BUILDING AT RLIC MPAC								
Mid-Tender Meeting Location : To be advised if required								
Mid-Tender Meeting Date & Time : To be advised if required								
3	LT24MT0002	18.01.2024	25.01.2024	05.02.2024	30,000.00	QAR	N/A	
Title of Tender: SUPPLY OF LED STREETLIGHTS								
Mid-Tender Meeting Location : To be advised if required								
Mid-Tender Meeting Date & Time : To be advised if required								

* Tender documents can be purchased and downloaded from QatarEnergy Website-> Supply Management -> Tenders page during the Tender Sale Period mentioned above against each Tender. Request for issuance of Tender after the specified Tender Sale Period will not be entertained.

* Always refer to QatarEnergy Website (www.qatarenergy.qa) -> Supply Management -> Tenders page for up to date information on QatarEnergy Tenders. Subscribe to Tender Alert to receive notification in your email on new Tenders

* Changes to Tender Sale Period and Bid Closing Date will be updated in QatarEnergy website/Mushtaryat Portal only.

* Brief Scopes of Work for the above tenders are posted on the QatarEnergy website/Mushtaryat Portal.

* Suppliers and Contractors who are in possession of a valid SAP ID issued by QatarEnergy are instructed to maintain their Company Registration and Communication details upto date and valid via QatarEnergy Mushtaryat Portal on urgent basis.

* No queries will be entertained, or bids received, from entities who have not purchased tender documents in compliance with the above provisions.

* QatarEnergy invites all prospective Suppliers and Contractors interested to participate in QatarEnergy Tenders to register online and obtain a QatarEnergy SAP Vendor Code, a mandatory requirement for the issue of Tender Documents by QatarEnergy.

* Prospective Qatar based Suppliers and Contractors interested to participate in future QatarEnergy Tenders shall obtain an ICV score. Relevant information pertaining to ICV, ICV Scorecard, ICV Certification, and ICV Guidelines are available on the ICV Digital Portal - <https://icv.qa/en-US>

Zakat fund provided over QR16mn aid in Dec 2023

The Ministry of Endowments (Awqaf) and Islamic Affairs announced that the aid provided by the Department of Zakat Fund during December 2023 amounted to QR16,121,577 donated to 400 families eligible for assistance in Qatar. In this context, Assistant Director of the Department of Zakat Fund Ahmed Sultan al-Meseifri stated that the department is keen to provide assistance to families deserving of Zakat funds within Qatar. He clarified that the assistance provided by the Department is of two types. One that is provided to families monthly to help them with their needs for food, drink and housing, which amounted to QR10,437,209. The second is a lump sum aid, which is donated to families once according to need, amounted to QR5,684,368. All the money is disbursed by the Department of Zakat Fund to eligible registered families in accordance with the controls, Sharia banks, and approved mechanisms. (QNA)

Free Japanese film screening

The embassy of Japan, in co-operation with Katara - the Cultural Village, will screen on Saturday, a film titled *Ninja Warrior* at building 15, Katara, at 7pm. Entry is free. The screening is part of Katara's activities coinciding with the ongoing AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023, a statement from the embassy said.

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Qatar sends medicines and food to Gaza



Two Qatar Armed Forces aircraft carrying 61 tonnes of aid arrived in the Egyptian city of Al Arish. The aid includes medicines provided by Qatar and France, along with food items provided by Qatar Charity. It will be transferred to Gaza. So far Qatar has sent 63 aircraft with 1,958 tonnes of aid. The provision of this aid comes following the successful Qatari-led mediation in co-operation with France in reaching an agreement between Israel and Hamas to get medicines and humanitarian aid shipment to the Palestinian brothers in Gaza Strip, particularly in the most affected areas, in exchange for delivering medicines to those who are trapped in the Strip. It also comes within the framework of Qatar’s unwavering support for the brotherly Palestinian people, during the current difficult humanitarian conditions. **(QNA)**

Govt bureau creates roles in AI to boost modernisation

The Civil Services and Government Development Bureau has announced the creation of the two positions of artificial intelligence (AI) researcher and artificial intelligence system engineer, with their different job classifications, noting that the positions are available through the National Manpower Portal (Kawader).

The bureau clarified in a statement that the creation of these two positions was part of the government development strategy aimed at modernising government processes, supporting disciplines with a direct impact in achieving Qatar National Vision 2030 and contributing to the advancement of innovation and technological development in the government sector to achieve sustainable development.

It also emphasised that, through the creation of these positions, it sought to enhance the work of information systems departments in the government sector, contribute to the development of its administrative

The bureau pointed out that its Institute of Public Administration will work through its specialised programmes, to train national talents to fill the new jobs in co-ordination with leading international companies in the field of AI

organs and to its ability to keep pace with the latest developments, as well as providing career opportunities for national talents in the computing, information systems and artificial intelligence specialisations.

The bureau pointed out that its Institute of Public Administration will work through its specialised programmes, to train national talents to fill the new jobs in co-ordination with leading international companies in the field of AI.

This is to enable them to analyse and understand the current problems and needs of the required businesses and to equip them with the know-how to solve these problems. They will

identify opportunities available through AI, analysing its feasibility and impact, as well as design and develop AI models and algorithms suitable for analysing large-size data.

The bureau noted that the training programmes will improve the performance of current systems, by using new smart technologies to enhance the ability to learn and adapt to different environments, provide the necessary support to users of artificial intelligence systems, as well as to help them develop their technical skills, prepare reports and evaluation of the systems’ performance, and to identify problems and necessary modifications. **(QNA)**

Winners of Safari Shop & Shine fourth draw announced



The fourth draw for Safari Hypermarket’s ‘WIN 6kg Gold Promotion’, took place at their Barwa Village location through an e-affle coupon system on January 17, in the presence of officials from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry as well as representatives from the Safari management.

The winners: First prize of

250gm gold - MA Ann Margarette Zornosa (coupon number SSS401179755); second prize of 150gm gold each - Manoj B K (SSS401217286), Rajesh Kumar Radhakrishnan (SSS400131771), and Mohamed Zakariya (SSS401110950); third prize of 100gm gold each - Bilal Alikkal (SSS400807616), Mohamed Kunhi (SSS400445069), and Jabir

Meethal Jabir (SSS400223440). Every purchase of QR50 from any Safari outlet provides one coupon. The Shop and Shine Mega Promotion, under which this draw took place, continues until April 20. On offer is a total of 1kg gold to seven winners in each draw. The fifth draw on March 3, is at Safari Hypermarket in Industrial Area Street -16.

Monoprix Qatar launches its M’ Loyalty cashback programme

Monoprix Qatar, a subsidiary of Ali Bin Ali Holding, has launched its cashback reward programme – M’ Loyalty, a digital card accessible through a mobile app, a statement said yesterday.

M’ Loyalty was launched at the Monoprix Hypermarket in Doha Festival City in the presence of Sebastien Farat, COO, Ali Bin Ali Consumer Hi-Tech & Retail; and the entire Monoprix DFC team. Festive decorations covered the whole store.

M’ Loyalty is available to all Monoprix customers who are 18 years old or older and have a valid local mobile number.

Customers can earn cashback every time they spend at any Monoprix or Monop’ store in Qatar, redeemable after a 24-hour period.

M’Loyalty offers a tiered cash back reward system based on the amount spent, which is as follows: 1% cash back on purchases up to QR99, 3% cash back on purchases up to QR299, and 5%



cash back on purchases up to and above QR300.

Cashbacks can be redeemed on everything except the purchase of cigarettes and other tobacco products, gift cards, extended warranty, mobile prepaid cards, subscriptions, and future services.

In a press statement, Farat said: “The launch of M’Loyalty marks a significant milestone for Monoprix Qatar. Customer loyalty is not merely about accumulating points or re-

deeming rewards; it’s about fostering a sense of belonging, appreciation, and exclusivity. M’ Loyalty cultivates this connection by creating personalised experiences inside and outside of our stores and we are committed to continuously enhancing the Monoprix experience.”

Within the M’Loyalty app, customers can effortlessly access their loyalty information, browse promotional offers, explore store locations, discover M’ restaurants’ menus, and seamlessly track their cashback balance and redemption history. The app additionally provides a scan-and-pay option for a streamlined checkout experience at Monoprix Msh-reib.

To join the M’Loyalty programme, customers can download the free app from the App Store or Google Play Store, create their account, provide basic information, and start earning rewards immediately.

Qatar attends Arab meeting to support Somalia

Qatar participated in the meeting of the Arab League Council at the ministerial level in the extraordinary session held virtually yesterday to support Somalia in confronting the attack on its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Qatar was represented at the meeting by HE the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sultan bin Saad al-Muraikhi. In a speech to the meeting held via video conferencing technology, HE al-Muraikhi said Somalia faces threats to its unity, stability and territorial integrity, reiterating Qatar’s firm commitment to strengthening fraternal relations with the country and its opposition to any measures that would affect its

sovereignty. Qatar expressed its concern about the increasing actions, procedures and official statements issued by countries in the Horn of Africa region, which would undermine stability in the region and increase tensions between the countries, at a time when the African continent is witnessing an increase in conflicts and disputes, a matter which requires concerted efforts to contain, as well as to deal with its repercussions instead of fuelling tension in an unprecedented way, al-Muraikhi said. He added that Qatar has stressed the need for the countries of the region to use the voice of reason and wisdom. **(QNA)**

Doha Clinic Hospital Receives Canadian Diamond Accreditation Certificate

Doha Clinic Hospital has been successfully accredited with Diamond Accreditation Canada Version 4 for three years.

Doha Clinic Hospital has been awarded the official Accreditation Canada Diamond Level, after being re-accredited from the Platinum level previously to the highest Level at Diamond until Dec 2027. Doha Clinic Hospital achieved a remarkable 99% overall on the applicable standards on the Version 4 of the Qmentum International™ Standards. As a result, The Accreditation Decision Committee (ADC) has awarded the hospital with the Diamond Level Status, the highest level of recognition. More than 40 countries and 12,500 healthcare sites use Accreditation Canada programs.

This accreditation provides reassurance to patients, staff, and the community that Doha Clinic Hospital is dedicated to providing exceptional healthcare services. It also demonstrates the hospital's ongoing commitment to continuous improvement and adherence to best practices in the healthcare industry.

His Excellency Sheikh Jassim bin Mohammed bin Hamad Al Thani, Vice Chairman of Mohammed bin Hamad Holding, the mother company of Doha Clinic Hospital, expressed after receiving the accreditation his pride to have the



Accreditation Canada Diamond Level Status. H.E said that “This important accreditation is aligned with the hospital’s mission to ensure the highest quality care for our patient. “

His Excellency stressed that “providing quality healthcare to the nation of Qatar is our priority, using our



Mission, Vision, and Values which guide us along the way as this is a testament to our dedication towards affirming that commitment.”

He added, “As we celebrate this achievement, we at Doha Clinic Hospital consider it a step on the path to excellence and an impetus for achieving more success, which demonstrates the

distinguished position that the hospital holds.”

His Excellency thanked all employees, partners, and customers for this success, stressing the need to redouble efforts to accomplish more achievements, and to establish a culture of healthy society, in a way that contributes to achieving the hospital’s goals and directions towards a

healthy city as part of the Qatar National Vision 2030.

It is worth mentioning that Doha Clinic Hospital is one of the subsidiaries of Mohammed bin Hamad Holding Group, established more than 22 years ago as the first integrated private hospital in Qatar.



QMC chairman meets Saudi minister

QNA
Riyadh

HE the Chairman of Qatar Media Corporation (QMC), Sheikh Hamad bin Thamer al-Thani, met yesterday in Riyadh with Saudi Minister of Media Salman bin Yousef al-Dossary.

The meeting discussed co-operation in various media fields and ways to enhance them, development opportunities and exchanging experiences between the two sides and co-ordinating efforts and joint work in a way that contributes to highlighting the achievements of Qatar and Saudi Arabia in various fields and the depth of historical relations between them.

They also touched on the activation of the proposed initiatives for co-operation within the framework of the strategic partnership between the QMC and the Saudi Ministry of Media that was announced at the conclusion of the



7th meeting of the Qatari-Saudi Coordination Council held in Doha on Dec 5, 2023, co-chaired by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani and Saudi Crown Prince and Prime Minister Mohamed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz al-Saud, with the participation of the members of the council, heads of subcommittees, and members of the Executive Committee on both sides.

HE Sheikh Hamad said that the meeting represents an opportunity for consultation, communication and the exchange of visions on the best ways to enhance media co-operation between Qatar and Saudi Arabia to establish a strategic media partnership between the two sides. He also praised the development movement witnessed by Saudi Arabia and Riyadh becoming a regional media centre.

HMC to host first Qatar Thoracic Conference

Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC), Qatar's premier healthcare provider, has announced that the Qatar Thoracic Conference 2024 will be held from February 15-17 at the Sheraton Grand Doha Resort & Convention Hotel.

The conference is designed to bring together distinguished experts, researchers, and healthcare professionals worldwide to exchange knowledge and explore the latest innovations in thoracic medicine.

The event offers an exclusive platform for multidisciplinary discussions encompassing various topics of thoracic medicine, spanning the diagnosis, treatment, and management of lung diseases, respiratory disorders, and thoracic surgery.

With a strong emphasis on innovation, research, and evidence-based practices, the conference will facilitate collaboration and networking opportunities among participants.

Dr Hisham Abdul Sattar, chair of Scientific Committee and Chief of Pulmonology, said: "This inaugural conference is crucial in advancing thoracic medicine in Qatar and the wider region. By bringing together leading experts, we aim to foster knowledge sharing and promote the adoption of cutting-edge techniques and technologies."

The Qatar Thoracic Conference 2024 boasts a diverse programme featuring panel discussions and interactive sessions. Experts will share their insights on lung cancer, interventional pulmonology, sleep medicine, and more.

They include Dr Ammar Sadoon (associate professor, Division of Pulmonology and Sleep Medicine,



Dr Hisham Abdul Sattar

University of Alabama at Birmingham); Prof Ahmed Bahammam (Pulmonary and Sleep Medicine Professor, King Saud University, Riyadh); Dr Amjad Tuffaha (clinician in paediatric pulmonary and allergy/immunology); Prof Ella A Kazerooni (radiology and internal medicine professor, University of Michigan); Dr Hanaa Banjar (professor of paediatrics, Alfaisal University, Riyadh); Prof Nick Maskell (professor of respiratory medicine, The University of Bristol); Prof Omar Usmani (professor, National Heart and Lung Institute, Imperial College London).

The Qatar-based expert speakers include Dr Abdullatif al-Khal (head, Infectious Diseases Division, HMC); Dr Adham Darweesh (senior consultant radiologist, HMC); Prof Ibrahim Janahi (chair, Medical Education and the Division Chief of Pulmonology, Sidra Medicine); Dr Ahmed al-Mohamed (deputy chief medical officer, Medical Services, HMC); Dr Hisham Abdul Aleem Abdul Sattar Ahmed (chief, Pulmonary Division, Hamad General Hospital and professor, Weill Cornell Medicine - Qatar).

Qatar Charity's Izdihar first phase launched

The first phase of the electronic platform for the initiative and volunteer incubator Izdihar at Qatar Charity (QC) was inaugurated by Fahd Mohamed al-Khayarin, Assistant Undersecretary for Social Development Affairs at the Ministry of Social Development and Family.

The launch took place during his opening of the annual exhibition for civil society organisations at Expo 2023 Doha, in partnership with Ministry of Endowments (Awqaf) and Islamic Affairs and QC.

Faisal bin Rashid al-Fahida, assistant CEO of the Programmes and Community Development Sector at QC, explained that the Izdihar incubator aims to develop



and support capacity building of volunteers and humanitarian initiatives in all fields and raise awareness of their importance in

advancing society and creating a better tomorrow.

QC's pavilion at the exhibition is dedicated to the Izdihar Vol-

unteer Initiative and Incubator, which was launched in 2022, to introduce its role, programmes, and goals.

Through the Izdihar platform (Ezdehar.qcharity.org), one can register and browse the incubator's programmes and activities to benefit from the available volunteer opportunities, whether in person or remotely.

More than 21,000 male and female volunteers have joined the Izdihar incubator since its launch, and the number of volunteer opportunities provided by the incubator has reached 220. During 2023 a total of 150 were trained and programmes implemented, and more than 17,000 participants benefited.



Traffic awareness seminar held for school bus drivers

The Traffic Awareness Department at the General Directorate of Traffic, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education and the Public Relations Department of the Ministry of Interior, held yesterday an awareness seminar titled 'Common Traffic Mistakes Among Drivers'.

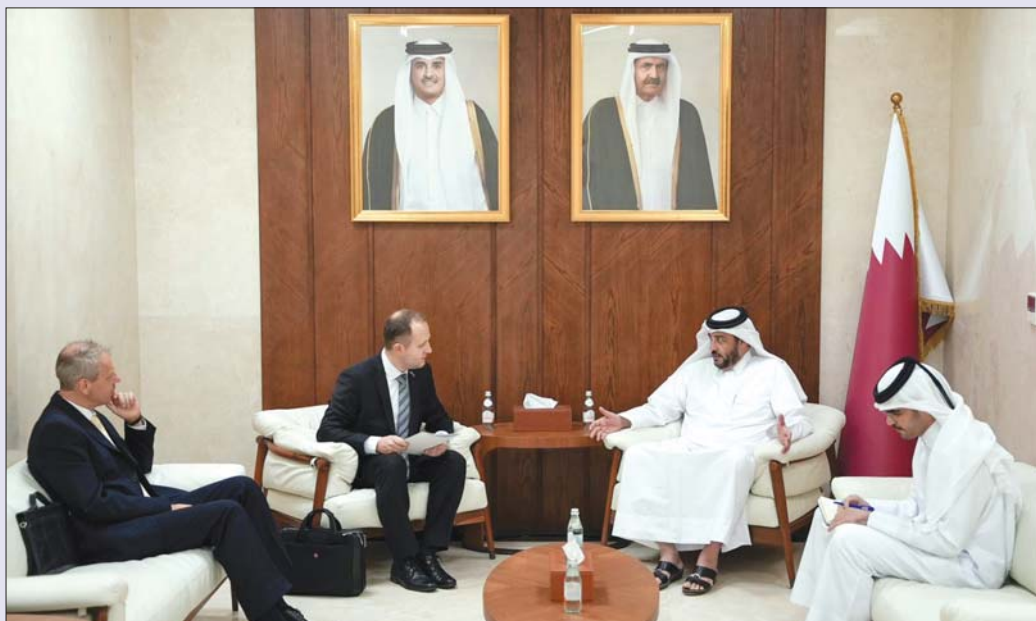
The initiative is part of the efforts to enhance traffic awareness among school bus drivers.

In a statement, the Ministry of Interior said that the seminar is part of the annual operational plan of the Traffic Awareness Department. It aims to target school bus drivers specifically, raising their level of traffic awareness to reduce traffic accidents and enhance security and safety for all road users around schools.

The statement added that the seminar included a simplified explanation of traffic laws, an overview of common mistakes and how to avoid them, and the mandatory traffic safety requirements. These include checking the safety of buses, reducing speed at signals, guidelines for getting on and off the bus, road safety, and other relevant topics. **(QNA)**



Qatar-Czech cybersecurity ties discussed



HE the President of National Cyber Security Agency Abdulrahman bin Ali al-Farahid al-Maliki met yesterday with the Director of the National Cyber and Information Security Agency in the Czech Republic Lukas Kintir, who was visiting Doha as part of the delegation accompanying the Czech president. The meeting discussed bilateral relations in cybersecurity and ways to develop and strengthen the partnership in this domain. **(QNA)**

ANNOUNCEMENT

I, SHELLA MARIE GRANDE BUTIONG
holder of
PHILIPPINES Passport No. P6501628B
QID No. 27960815351
hereby change my name
from
SHELLA MARIE GRANDE BUTIONG
to
SHELLA MARIE VILLANUEVA GRANDE
Any objection, please contact
THE PERMANENT COMMITTEE FOR
NATIONALITY AFFAIRS
within 15 days from the publication of this notice.

ANNOUNCEMENT

I, NOOR KHANAN ATLAS KHAN
holder of
PAKISTAN Passport No. EG4126833
QID No. 29358605047
hereby change my name
from
NOOR KHANAN ATLAS KHAN
to
NOOR KHANAN AKRAM KHAN
Any objection, please contact
THE PERMANENT COMMITTEE FOR
NATIONALITY AFFAIRS
within 15 days from the publication of this notice.

ANNOUNCEMENT

I, RAZZAK SALAM LOKAR
holder of
Bangladesh Passport No. EE0931385
QID No. 28605006518
hereby change my name
from
RAZZAK SALAM LOKAR
to
RAZZAK LOSKAR SALAM LOSKAR
Any objection, please contact
THE PERMANENT COMMITTEE FOR
NATIONALITY AFFAIRS
within 15 days from the publication of this notice.

Qatar to take part in Cairo book fair

The Ministry of Culture will participate in the 55th Cairo International Book Fair, set to start next Wednesday under the theme "Creating Knowledge...Preserving the Word." The fair will run until February 6. The ministry will showcase Qatari intellectual productions, promote its electronic library, and strengthen cultural and intellectual communication.

Several Qatari publishing houses are expected to participate in the exhibition, including Dar Al Watad, Hamad Bin Khalifa University Press, and the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies.

Director of the Libraries Department and Doha International Book Fair Jassim Ahmed al-Buainain stated that Qatar's participation in the fair aims to build new relationships with professionals in the fields of culture and publishing. It also involves showcasing Qatari intellectual productions from local publishing houses and promoting the Doha International Book Fair, he added. **(QNA)**

Culture minister opens Gulf Art Gallery 6x6 at Katara



HE the Minister of Culture Sheikh Abdulrahman bin Hamad al-Thani opened on Tuesday evening the first Gulf Art Gallery 6x6. The opening held at the headquarters of the Qatar Fine Arts Association in Building 13, Katara, the 21-day event brings together six Qatari and six other GCC artists, and displays 24 diverse works of art. HE the Minister of Culture honoured the participating artists. Honorary President of the Qatar Fine Arts Association Ali bin Ali opened the exhibition as an artistic space to display freedom of expression with an aesthetic sense, adding that the association seeks to embrace the artistic creativity and to preserve the continuous cultural development in Qatar. (QNA)

MDD wins Global Economics Award for urban regeneration

Msheireb Downtown Doha (MDD), a pioneering development in the heart of Qatar's capital, has been honoured with the prestigious Global Economics Award in the Best Urban Regeneration Project category.

Developed by Msheireb Properties, MDD blends the rich Qatari heritage with modern sustainable living. It has set new standards for urban regeneration, creating a vibrant and dynamic city centre while preserving and showcasing Qatar's cultural heritage.

The Global Economics Awards, known for celebrating excellence and innovation in various economic sectors worldwide, has recognised MDD for its outstanding achievements in transforming urban spaces, nurturing community engagement and contributing to the economic growth of Qatar and the region.

In a press statement, Msheireb Properties CEO Eng Ali Mohamed al-Kuwari explained how a well-designed city centre can serve as a pivotal contributor to economic development, supporting a sustainable and prosperous urban landscape.

"An intelligently planned ur-



MDD has been a thriving proof of concept when it comes to the value of intentionally designed business hubs.

ban core serves as a magnet for commerce, attracting a diverse array of businesses, retailers and entrepreneurs. The strategic layout of public spaces, transportation infrastructure, and mixed-use developments in a city centre creates a dynamic ecosystem that encourages innovation, collaboration and investment. Moreover, a vibrant city centre enhances the quality of life for residents and visitors alike, making the area more appealing for both businesses and talent."

MDD, over the past year, has welcomed several bellwether organisations in the sectors of innovations and technology, including Google Cloud, Microsoft Qatar, Total Energies Qatar, Ernest & Young, American Express and Meeza. MDD demonstrates a commitment to sustainable living and business practices with one of the highest concentrations of gold or Platinum LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certified sustainable buildings globally.

Al-Khulaifi meets UK official



HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Mohamed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh al-Khulaifi met yesterday with the visiting UK Foreign Secretary's Representative for Humanitarian Affairs in the occupied Palestinian territories Mark Bryson-Richardson. The meeting reviewed bilateral relations and discussed Qatar's efforts to mediate the release of hostages in the Gaza Strip. The UK official expressed his country's thanks to Qatar for its efforts to deliver humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip. (QNA)

Indian envoy visits Qatar campus of MIE-SPPU Institute



Indian ambassador Vipul visited the Qatar campus of the MIE-SPPU Institute of Higher Education, affiliated with Savitribai Phule Pune University (SPPU).

The dignitary was welcomed by MIE-SPPU Institute of Higher Education chairman engineer Ali bin Abdullatif al-Misned, along with acting vice-president George Thomas, executive committee members Gopi Vardhan and Mo-hamad Elwan, institute director Prof Bimalendu B Nath, and head

of administration Dinesh Bakshi.

The ambassador, accompanied by Indian embassy first secretary Sachin Dinkar Shankpal, expressed his appreciation for the institute's commendable efforts in providing quality education to the Indian diaspora.

In a presentation, Prof Nath highlighted the various programmes offered and underscored the unique teaching pedagogy being implemented. He emphasised the diverse student population, repre-

sented different nationalities, and the strong industry ties being developed by the university.

Al-Misned extended his gratitude to the Indian embassy and the Indian government for providing the opportunity to establish a campus in Qatar, aligning with the Qatar National Vision 2030. He commended the university for gaining the confidence of the local population and contributing to world-class education in a short span of time.

3D printing in spotlight at international workshop



Dr Salem Al-Naemi addressing the gathering.

UDST hosts second international workshop

University of Doha for Science and Technology (UDST) hosted the opening of the second International Workshop on 3D Printing for Applied Technologies yesterday.

The two-day event, organised by the College of Engineering and Technology, is based on the resounding success of last year's inaugural workshop, where over 150 participants attended.

This year's event brings together local and international experts from a diverse range of technical backgrounds to present key advancements on the topic, helping solidify UDST's central role in Qatar's 3D printing landscape.

A number of distinguished guests and partners are attending. They include Dr Robert Kay, professor of advanced manufacturing at the University of Leeds;



Some of the experts taking part in the workshop yesterday with Dr Awmi al-Otoom.

Dr Derya Daran, associate professor in Material Science and Engineering from the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology in Saudi Arabia; Dr Jang-Ung Park, professor in the Department of Materials Science and Engineering from the Yonsei University, Korea; Riccardo Nicastro, group chief commercial officer, Caracol AM in Italy; Vesna Covic Palikuca, lecturer and mechanical instructor in the Mechanical Engineering Department at UDST; and Dr Ehab Saleh, assistant professor in Smart Manufacturing at UDST and technical chair of this year's workshop.

Dr Salem Al-Naemi, president of UDST said: "The 3D Printing technology is estimated to lead the 4th industrial revolution, it is utilised in the healthcare sector, the aeronautical and automotive industry, manufacturing, construction, education and much more."

UDST workshop will focus on the latest advancements in 3D printing and its application in metals, ceramics and poly-

mers, including the production of stretchable electronics and printed wearables. Last year, UDST introduced its Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Engineering, Smart Manufacturing Engineering as part of a continued commitment to lead the way in the realm of 3D Printing and industrial technology.

Dr Awmi al-Otoom, dean of UDST's College of Engineering and Technology, said: "3D printing is a transformative technology, and a key element of our Smart Manufacturing curriculum. Just as last year, we are once again extending a valuable opportunity for both students and faculty to engage with industry leaders and to gain a broad perspective on the latest applications of 3D printing."

Today at the workshop, attendees will be treated to a specialised training session on the fundamentals of 3D printing and reverse engineering. This hands-on session will allow participants to gain practical experience and a deeper understanding of the 3D printing operational cycle.

Ocean Basket Qatar's new menu launched



Ocean Basket Qatar, the renowned seafood restaurant chain from South Africa, has launched a new menu at its Mall of Qatar outlet, a statement said yesterday. "The star of the show is the Fiery Prawn Spear, showcasing Ocean Basket at its finest. In addition, the menu features a range of seafood burgers, including hake, prawn and salmon, paired with Ocean Basket's signature sauces. Guests can also look forward to colourful Poke Bowls, Saucy Prawns, Sundae and a selection of new signature Sushis. To make Ocean Basket the go-to destination for lunch, the restaurant is introducing the Lunch Box, starting at QR25, allowing guests to choose from an array of selections alongside rice," it was added.



UN agency chief expresses concern over Gaza residents' post-war future

AFP
Jerusalem

The head of the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, Philippe Lazzarini, warned yesterday of the bleak future facing Gazans after the war between Hamas and Israel ends.

Following his fourth visit to the Palestinian territory since the war erupted in the first week of October, the UNRWA chief said many residents are no longer able to see “the future in the Gaza Strip”.

“You have hundreds of thousands of people living now in the street, living in these plastic makeshift (tents), sleeping on the concrete,” Lazzarini told journalists in Jerusalem.

The majority of Gaza’s 2.4mn residents have been forced from their homes, while Lazzarini said more than 60% of buildings are estimated to be damaged. The most extensive Israeli bombardment has hit the north, where AFP journalists have witnessed scores of residential blocks reduced to rubble. “The north for us is a pocket of humanitarian catastrophe,” the UNRWA chief said.

“Would you even encourage anyone to go to the north when we know the north is infested by UXOs — unexploded ordnance — and rubble, and non-functioning services?” he asked.

‘GENERATION OF LOST KIDS’

Fighting has ravaged Gaza since Hamas’ unprecedented October first week storming of



Displaced Palestinians, who fled their houses due to Israeli strikes, shelter in a tent camp in Rafah, amid the ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas, in the southern Gaza Strip, yesterday.

Israel. At least 24,448 Palestinians, more than 70% of them women, young children and adolescents, have been killed in Israeli bombardments and ground assaults, according to the Gaza health ministry’s latest figures.

While Israel expects the war to rage on for months, half a million children aged six to 14 are estimated to have no access to education.

“My fear is that we have now a generation of lost kids,” said Lazzarini, describing children who are living in “brutal” conditions and are deeply traumatised.

“This should concern all of us if we are talking about future peace and security and cohabi-

tation. The more we wait...the more we take risks for the future,” he said. Despite months of shuttle diplomacy between the belligerents and their allies, there remains no public plan outlining post-war governance or reconstruction in Gaza.

“When we talk about rebuilding Gaza, it’s not anymore like before, where we had to rehabilitate some shelter and that was still doable,” the UNRWA chief said, referring to previous rounds of fighting which lasted days or weeks.

“I don’t see any country investing significantly in the absence of a solid, proper political project and roadmap,” he said.

“And for this, you need countries to trust in this roadmap.”

At least \$15bn needed for Gaza housing: Palestinian official

Reuters
Davos

At least \$15bn will be needed to rebuild houses in Gaza, the head of the Palestine Investment Fund said yesterday, underlining the scale of devastation caused by Israel’s offensive.

Chairman Mohamed Mustafa said international reports indicated 350,000 housing units had been completely or partially damaged in Gaza. Assuming 150,000 of these would need to be rebuilt at an average cost of \$100,000 per unit, “that’s \$15bn for housing units”, he said.

“We still didn’t talk about infrastructure, we didn’t talk about the hospitals that were damaged, the grids...,” he said at the World Economic Forum in Davos.

The figure points to reconstruction costs that will dwarf previous bills for rebuilding Gaza after earlier conflicts, with the war not yet over more than three months since it began.

Following a 2014 war between Hamas and Israel, which lasted seven weeks and killed 2,100 Palestin-

ians, Qatar spent over \$1bn on housing and relief projects in Gaza.

Israel has laid waste to much of the territory in a campaign which health authorities in Hamas-run Gaza say has killed 24,448 people since October first week, when the Palestinian group stormed Israel.

Figures released by the Hamas-run media office in Gaza show more than 360,000 housing units have sustained severe or partial damage, and more than 70,000 have been completely destroyed.

Mustafa said the Palestinian leadership would, in the short-term, continue to focus on humanitarian aid including food and water but eventually the focus would shift to reconstruction.

The war has driven most of Gaza’s 2.3mn people from their homes, some of them several times, and caused a humanitarian crisis, with food, fuel and medical supplies running low.

“If the war in Gaza continues, more people are likely to die of hunger or famine than war,” Mustafa said. The first steps should be to bring food, medicine, water and electricity back to the besieged enclave, he added.

Jordanian army accuses Israel of damaging hospital

The Jordanian army accused Israel yesterday of damaging a Jordanian field hospital in the Gaza Strip and wounding two people during bombardments of the territory, AFP reported from Amman.

The hospital in Khan Yunis, the biggest city in southern Gaza, was severely damaged due to nearby Israeli bombing overnight from Tuesday to yesterday, the military said in a statement.

It came amid Israel’s war against Hamas, which was sparked by the Palestinian group’s unprecedented storming of Israel in October.

The bombing wounded a hospital medic in the right thigh and hand, the army said, and the medic would be evacuated by air to Jordan for medical treatment.

A Gazan civilian receiving treatment in the intensive care unit “was also injured by shrapnel and a bullet during the aggression”, the statement said, citing a senior military source.

“The Jordanian armed forces hold Israel fully responsible for the safety of hospital staff,” it said, adding that the strikes were a “flagrant violation” of international humanitarian law and the Geneva Convention. It urged Israel, “the occupying power”, to not take “any measures that prevent or

hinder medical personnel from carrying out their duties”.

The statement said the hospital would “continue to perform its medical and humanitarian duty”.

Hospitals have been hit repeatedly during the conflict. In December, Gaza’s health ministry reported damage from a strike at the sprawling tent compound that makes up the Jordanian field hospital in Khan Yunis.

Another Jordanian field hospital in the north of Gaza was hit by an Israeli strike in mid-November, wounding seven staff. The Royal Jordanian Air Force conducted seven airdrops over Gaza since the beginning of the war. Six airdrops delivered medical supplies for the field hospital and one for Palestinians besieged in a church in the north of Gaza. Israel has said airdrops are carried out in “co-ordination” with its authorities.

The war in Gaza was sparked by Hamas’ October first week storming of southern Israel.

More than 24,400 Palestinians, around 70% of them women, young children and adolescents, have been killed in the Gaza Strip in relentless Israeli bombardments and a ground offensive, according to the Hamas government’s health ministry.

Patience and sunshine help to charge a phone in Gaza

Reuters
Rafah

Huddling around a bewildering tangle of cables and extension leads plugged into a hospital power outlet, displaced Gazan men are pursuing a critical but elusive goal: getting their phones charged.

In wartime Rafah, a charged phone is nothing less than a lifeline. It serves to check on loved ones after Israeli bombardments, helps find out where food and water might be available, and provides light in tents after darkness falls.

“Every day we come here for three or four hours and waste time to charge our phones,” said Mohamed Abu Skheta, who fled with his family, including a baby boy, from Al-Shati refugee camp in northern Gaza to a tent in Rafah, southern Gaza.

“It’s a dream to fully charge it. It’s very difficult. You can charge it to 50 or 60%, 70% at most,” he said. The charging spot outside the Emirati Hospital in Rafah is popular because it is free. The hospital allows displaced people to plug cables into its power sockets, which are fed either by solar panels or by a generator, when there is fuel for that.

Elsewhere, some households or small businesses that have solar panels allow people to charge, but often for a fee, which not all can afford.

“My financial situation is difficult, so I have to look for an alternative, such as charging at a hospital or shop, without paying money,” said Abu Skheta.

Phones are not the only devices in need of regular charging. Mohamed Abu Taha, a barber in Rafah, said he was relying on a solar panel at the family home to recharge his electric razor in between jobs.

“For almost every haircut, I send my nephew to charge the razor. I have to inform the customer that if it’s sunny I can work, if not



Palestinians charge their devices outside the Emirati hospital, amid the ongoing conflict between Israel and the Hamas group, in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip.

then I cannot,” he said.

One tailor in Rafah has got around the lack of electricity by converting a dismantled child’s bicycle into a pedal dynamo to power his sewing machine.

NO PLACE TO CHARGE

The war in Gaza started when Hamas fighters stormed into southern Israel in the first week of October.

Vowing to destroy Hamas, Israel has responded with a siege, bombardment and ground invasion of Gaza which have killed more than 24,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza health officials.

Most of the population is displaced, and severe shortages of food, water, electricity and medicines have resulted in a humanitarian catastrophe, according to the UN. Charging a phone has become one of the challenges of daily life, as time-consuming and frustrating as the search for bread or water.

“We came here to charge, but there is no place,” said Mahmoud Marouf, who is displaced from Jabalia in northern Gaza, and had brought a battery similar to the ones in cars to the charging spot at the Emirati Hospital.

Alongside phones, people bring such batteries to charge so that they can then power devices they need in their tents.

Volunteers at the hospital organise a rota allowing people to charge for a certain period of time. The system helps avoid tensions by giving access to precious sockets to as many people as possible, but demand is too high to satisfy everyone.

Marouf said he needed to charge his battery to power medical devices for his children, who have respiratory conditions.

“We got them a large battery and came to charge it, because hospitals are full,” he said.

Despite the tedium, those lucky enough to have a spot waited patiently for their phones to charge as much as possible. “It lasts us for one day, or one day and a half at most, not more. We use it for lighting only,” said Mohamed al-Shamali, who is displaced from Gaza City.

“Calls and telecoms are down so we don’t have Internet. We try as much as we can to secure lighting, to see the roads we are walking on and inside the tent we are in, no more than that.”

Kuwait forms first govt under new Amir, PM

Kuwait yesterday formed a government headed by Prime Minister Sheikh Mohamed Sabah al-Salem al-Sabah, the state news agency said, the country’s first cabinet after the death of its previous ruler. Reuters reported from Dubai. Sheikh Mohamed appointed new ministers for oil, finance and foreign affairs in the first cabinet formed under Kuwait’s new Amir Sheikh Meshal al-Ahmad al-Sabah, which he said would carry out reforms to comply with the Amir’s guidance. “This is a heavy responsibility of a new phase of Kuwait’s history which includes challenges and aspirations, and requires further hard work and genuine accomplishment,” the prime minister said, quoted by KUNA. The prime minister appointed Emad Mohamed al-Atiqi as oil minister, Anwar Ali al-Mudhaf as finance minister and Abdullah Ali al-Yahya as foreign minister. Kuwait’s Amir Sheikh Meshal al-Ahmad al-Sabah came to power in December after his predecessor Sheikh Nawaf died, and is expected to preserve Kuwaiti foreign policies.

Nigeria blast kills two, dozens hurt as buildings collapse

Reuters
Ibadan, Nigeria

At least two people were killed and dozens injured when explosives stored at a private residence detonated in Nigeria’s Oyo state, its governor said yesterday.

A Reuters witness saw several collapsed houses and wrecked cars from the impact of Tuesday’s blast, which sent panicked residents into the streets.

Emergency services and security officials used bulldozers to clear debris during a search and rescue operation yesterday in a neighbourhood of Ibadan, the capital of Oyo state about 130km from Nigeria’s commercial capital of Lagos. Some houses had roofs blown off and windows shattered and their owners watched from a distance as officials searched for survivors. Police cordoned off the blast



A firefighter stands in front of a damaged building following a blast in Ibadan, Nigeria, yesterday.

site, where a huge crater could be seen from a distance.

“I was in the house with my kids and I just saw the ceiling and roof coming down on us. I have a lot of injuries, (including) my back,” said Olaitan Okanlawon, a mother of two. Okanlawon said she slept at a hotel with her children and came back to collect some of her belongings from her damaged house.

In a statement, the governor, Seyi Makinde, said there were two deaths while 77 people were treated for injuries, most of them being discharged. “Preliminary investigations by the security agencies revealed that illegal miners occupying one of the houses in Bodija had stored explosive devices there which caused the blast,” Makinde added.

Central Africa mine blast kills peacekeeper

AFP
Bangui

A Cameroonian member of the UN peacekeeping force in northwestern Central African Republic has been killed in a landmine blast and five others wounded, the UN said.

The region regularly sees clashes between rebel groups and the CAR army backed by mercenaries from Russia’s Wagner group. Soldiers from Cameroon’s contingent of the UN peacekeeping force were escorting a team from the International Organisation for Migration on Monday when the device exploded, the Minusca mission said in a statement seen by AFP yesterday.

It went off as the convoy passed by in the village of Mbindale, 450 kilometres north of the capital Bangui, it added.

Two of the wounded are “se-

riously” hurt and all were taken to hospital, Minusca said.

The explosion happened 20km from the site of a December 21 massacre of 23 civilians by armed elements of the 3R rebel group. UN peacekeepers were subsequently deployed to the village of Nzakoudou where the killings took place.

The 3R (Return, Reclamation and Rehabilitation) is one of the most powerful of the armed groups and criminal gangs produced by years of civil war that operate in the region.

Civilians are often victims of the conflict, with the UN accusing all sides of perpetrating war crimes and crimes against humanity. In July, a Rwandan member of the UN peacekeeping force was killed by an unidentified armed group in an attack on a UN patrol in eastern CAR.

Since 2022, five Minusca soldiers have been killed in the country, according to figures from the organisation.

Northern Ireland to miss deadline to break political impasse

AFP
London

Northern Ireland's devolved government will not be restored by Thursday's legal deadline after its assembly yesterday again failed to elect a Speaker amid an ongoing boycott by the Democratic Unionist Party.

The DUP withdrew from the Northern Ireland Assembly at

Stormont in February 2022, forcing its mothballing, because of post-Brexit trading rules it said undermined the region's place in the wider United Kingdom.

The assembly was yesterday recalled for a seventh time to elect a Speaker, but that bid failed as no candidate could command the required support, prolonging the stalemate. The UK government had set Thursday as the deadline for restoring the assembly, with

the law requiring fresh elections in the event of failure.

Northern Ireland minister Chris Heaton-Harris said it was "disappointing" that no speaker was elected. "The return of a locally elected, accountable and effective devolved government is the best way to govern Northern Ireland," he said. "However, in the absence of an executive, the government will proceed with a pragmatic and reasonable approach to support

Northern Ireland." Heaton-Harris has indicated he will pass legislation to extend Thursday's deadline rather than call elections. Frustration is mounting in the province over political dysfunction and crumbling public services, which have been hit by cuts in central funding from London.

Unionist hardliners, who support Northern Ireland's membership of the UK, insist problems with post-Brexit trading rules with

the European Union remain. They say changes negotiated with Brussels by Prime Minister Rishi Sunak under the so-called "Windsor Framework" adopted last March failed to remove a de facto border with mainland Britain in the Irish Sea.

The DUP's political foes, including the largest pro-Ireland nationalist party Sinn Fein, have heaped pressure on the party to return to Stormont. Sinn Fein vice-presi-

dent Michelle O'Neill warned yesterday that power-sharing institutions created as part of the peace process, which brought decades of sectarian violence to an end, were at risk. "If (DUP leader) Jeffrey Donaldson does not change his approach, then this sitting may well be the final one of this Assembly," she said.

"I fear that the democratic institutions of the Good Friday Agreement are in free fall."

Britain's Charles, Kate postpone appearances over health issues

AFP
London

British head of state King Charles III has been treated for an enlarged prostate and will undergo a procedure in hospital next week, Buckingham Palace said yesterday. The rare announcement about the monarch's health comes after Kensington Palace said his daughter-in-law Catherine, Princess of Wales, had undergone successful abdominal surgery.



Britain's King Charles III.



Catherine, Princess of Wales.



Police officers stand outside the London Clinic, where Britain's Catherine, Princess of Wales, is hospitalised for abdominal surgery, in London.

Catherine, often known as Kate, is facing up to two weeks in hospital and several months' recuperation after the operation, which palace officials said was non-cancerous, without specifying further. Charles, 75, became king on the death of his mother, Queen Elizabeth II, in September 2022 after spending most of his life as her heir.

He is head of state of 14 other countries outside the United Kingdom, including Australia, Canada and New Zealand, and is head of the 56-member Commonwealth, which comprises 2.4bn people.

He is also Supreme Governor of the Church of England, the mother church of the worldwide Anglican communion.

Charles has thrown himself into the role, despite reaching a phase of life when most men of his age have retired. His last public ap-

pearance was with other senior royals at a Christmas Day service at Sandringham. "In common with thousands of men each year, The King has sought treatment for an enlarged prostate," a palace statement read.

"His Majesty's condition is benign and he will attend hospital next week for a corrective procedure. The King's public engagements will be postponed for a short period of recuperation." Benign prostate enlargement is common in men aged over 50 and is not normally considered a serious threat to health or an increased risk of developing prostate cancer.

If the prostate gland is enlarged, it can put pressure on the bladder and urethra, affecting urination.

Causes of prostate enlargement are unknown but are thought to be linked to hormonal changes with age, according to the UK's state-

run National Health Service. The announcement came some 90 minutes after the health bulletin about Catherine, who is married to Charles's eldest son and heir, Prince William.

Her office at Kensington Palace said she was admitted to a private clinic in central London on Tuesday.

"The surgery was successful and it is expected that she will remain in hospital for 10 to 14 days, before returning home to continue her recovery," a statement read. "Based on the current medical advice, she is unlikely to return to public duties until after Easter (on March 31)."

The princess is one of the most popular - and photographed - members of the royal family.

In the latest polling she was third most-popular living royal with a 63% public approval rating,

behind William (68%) and King Charles III's sister Princess Anne (67%). Queen Elizabeth II, who died in September 2022 aged 96, remains the most popular, with 75%, according to YouGov.

The king's rating was 51%.

Catherine, 42, is frequently seen alongside William, 41, with whom she has three young children - Prince George, 10, Princess Charlotte, eight, and Prince Louis, aged five. But she is increasingly undertaking solo public engagements, particularly in her key areas of interest such as early years education.

At The London Clinic, one of the UK's largest private hospitals, two police officers stood guard at the main entrance as photogra-

phers and film crews gathered. Kensington Palace added: "The Princess of Wales appreciates the interest this statement will generate. She hopes that the public will understand her desire to maintain as much normality for her children as possible; and her wish that her personal medical information remains private."

"Kensington Palace will, therefore, only provide updates on Her Royal Highness' progress when there is significant new information to share. The Princess of Wales wishes to apologise to all those concerned for the fact that she has to postpone her upcoming engagements. She looks forward to reinstating as many as possible, as soon as possible."

India holding talks with Iran over Houthis' Red Sea attacks: source

Reuters
New Delhi

India is holding diplomatic talks with Iran and taking other measures to help shield its exporters from the impact of attacks on ships in the Red Sea by the Houthi group in Yemen, a government source said yesterday.

The attacks have slowed trade between Asia and Europe, disrupting supply chains. The Houthis say they are acting in solidarity with the Palestinians in Gaza and have threatened to expand the attacks to include US ships as the war between Israel and Hamas group rages for a fourth month.

Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanya Jaishankar held talks in Iran on Monday which he said had touched on the Red Sea situation.

"The defence ministry has improved surveillance (in the region) and the ministry of external affairs is diplomatically negotiating this very well," said the government source, who requested anonymity.

The finance ministry's banking division will also make it easier for exporters affected by the disruption to get credit, he added.

"The idea is to ensure credit flow to exporters is maintained as cargoes are getting delayed and transit is costing more," the source said. The foreign ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment from Reuters.

The Red Sea, which lies on the key east-west trade route from Asia's manufacturing hubs to Europe and onto the east coast of the Americas.

About 12% of world's shipping traffic accesses the Suez Canal via its waters. India's defence ministry is providing protective escorts to Indian container ships in the region and the Indian Navy has responded to at least two attacks and hijacking attempts on merchant vessels in the Arabian Sea.

The government source said trade volumes from major ports had not been affected so far, but ships were having to take longer routes to avoid the attacks.

China's population drops for 2nd year, with record low birth rate

- China's population drops 0.15% y/y in 2023
- Birth rate at new low, death rate at highest since 1974
- Total new births drop 5.7% to 9.02mn
- Total deaths rise 6.6% to 11.1mn

Reuters
Hong Kong

China's population fell for a second consecutive year in 2023, as a record low birth rate and a wave of Covid-19 deaths when strict lockdowns ended accelerated a downturn that will have profound long-term effects on the economy's growth potential.

The National Bureau of Statistics said the total number of people in China dropped by 2.08mn, or 0.15%, to 1.409bn in 2023.

That was well above the population decline of 850,000 in 2022, which had been the first since 1961 during the Great Famine of the Mao Zedong era. China experienced a dramatic nationwide Covid surge early last year after three years of tight screening and quarantine measures kept the virus largely contained until authorities abruptly lifted curbs in December 2022. Total deaths last year rose 6.6% to 11.1mn, with the death rate reaching the highest level since 1974 during the Cultural Revolution. New births fell 5.7% to 9.02mn and the birth rate was a record low 6.39 births per 1,000 people, down from a rate of 6.77 births in 2022.

Births in the country have been plummeting for decades as a result of the one-child policy implemented from 1980-2015 and its rapid urbanisation during that period. As with earlier economic booms in Japan and South Korea, large populations moved from China's rural farms into cities, where having children is more expensive. Japan's birth rate was 6.3 per 1,000 people in 2022, while South Korea's rate was 4.9. "As we have observed again and again from

other low fertility countries, fertility decline is often very difficult to reverse," University of Michigan demographer Zhou Yun said. Further denting appetite for baby-making in China in 2023, youth unemployment hit record highs, wages for many white-collar workers fell, and a crisis in the property sector, where more than two-thirds of household wealth is stored, intensified.

The fresh data adds to concerns that the world's No 2 economy's growth prospects are diminishing due to fewer workers and consumers, while the rising costs of elderly care and retirement benefits put more strain on indebted local governments.

India surpassed China as the world's most populous nation last year, according to estimates by the United Nations, fuelling more debate over the merits of relocating some China-based supply chains to other markets, especially as geopolitical tensions rise between Beijing and Washington.

Long-term, UN experts see China's population shrinking by 109mn by 2050, more than triple the decline of their previous forecast in 2019.

China's population aged 60 and over reached 296.97mn in 2023, about 21.1% of its total population, up from 280.04 million in 2022.

China's 2023 rate of 7.87 deaths per 1,000 people was higher than a rate of 7.37 deaths in 2022.

The country's retirement-age population, aged 60 and over, is expected to increase to more than 400mn by 2035 - more than the entire population of the United States - from about 280mn people currently. The state-run Chinese Academy of Sciences sees the pension system running out of money by 2035. Zhu Guoping, a 57-year-old farmer in northwestern Gansu province, said his annual income of about 20,000 yuan (\$2,779.59) leaves his family with meagre savings. He will receive a 160 yuan monthly pension once he turns 60, the equivalent of \$22. "The money is definitely not enough," Zhu said. "Maybe our children can provide us with some support in the future."

High childcare and education costs put many Chinese couples off having children, while uncertainty in the job market discourages women from pausing their

careers. Gender discrimination and traditional expectations that women assume the caretaker role in the family exacerbate the issue, demographers say.

President Xi Jinping said last year that women should tell "good family tradition stories," adding it was necessary to "actively cultivate a new culture of marriage and childbearing," which he linked to national development.

Local governments have announced various measures to encourage childbirth including tax deductions, longer maternity leave and housing subsidies. But many of the policies have not been implemented due to insufficient funding and a lack of motivation by local governments, said a Beijing policy institute, urging a unified nationwide family subsidy scheme instead. Beijing resident Wang Weidong, 36, who works at an internet company, said he and his wife were reluctant to have a second child.

"People will not have a child because of these incentives. The incentives are auxiliary, not the root cause. So I think it is harder to reverse this trend," Wang said.



Smoke rising after an explosion at a fireworks factory near Sala Khao township in Thailand's Suphan Buri province.

23 dead in Thai fireworks factory explosion

AFP
Bangkok

Twenty-three people have died after an explosion at a fireworks factory in central Thailand yesterday, the provincial governor said. Images shared by the local rescue service showed metal debris littered on the ground, and a huge plume of black smoke.

The blast occurred at around 3pm near Sala Khao township, in central Suphan Buri province. "We received reports from EOD team that there were 23 confirmed dead," Nattapat Suwanprateep, Suphan Buri province governor, told AFP, referencing the Explosive Ordinance Disposal group.

The blast occurred at around 3pm near Sala Khao township, in central Suphan Buri province

There was no indication of what may have caused the explosion.

However, Nattapat said officials were investigating what may have triggered the incident. "The factory was operating legally with valid licences," he said. Police officers said the surrounding area had not been damaged. "Glass windows on one house have been affected by the explosion but no other reports," Nattapat said.

Police Lieutenant General Naiyawat Phademchid told AFP Prime Minister Srettha Thavasin - currently in Switzerland for

the World Economic Forum - had been informed of the incident. "Estimate of 20 deaths, however, we cannot confirm the official death toll," said the police officer, who is responsible for lower western Thailand.

He said that officials were sealing the surrounding area, and would begin to identify the bodies once the situation had stabilised, without going into further details.

"There were on average about 20-30 people working at this factory every day," he said.

In an official statement posted online, Prime Minister Srettha expressed his sorrow for the families of those killed. Srettha also ordered an investigation into whether the workshop was operating illegally, as well as the

cause of the incident.

Explosions at workshops producing firecrackers and other pyrotechnics are not uncommon in Thailand.

At least 10 people died after an explosion in a fireworks warehouse in Sungai Kolok town in southern Narathiwat province last year.

The blast was believed to have been caused by welding during construction work on the building, and police later sought the owners on charges of negligence.

Last year 11 people were also injured when a fireworks factory exploded in the northern city of Chiang Mai.

The Southeast Asian kingdom also has a poor safety record in the construction sector and deadly accidents are common.

CHAIRMAN

Abdullah bin Khalifa al-Attiyah

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Faisal Abdulhameed al-Mudahka

Deputy Managing Editor

K T Chacko

- 📍 P.O.Box 2888, Doha, Qatar
✉ editor@gulf-times.com
☎ 44350478 (News),
☎ 44466404 (Sport),
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GULF TIMES

Is Biden the new Jimmy Carter?

It has become fashionable of late to compare US President Joe Biden in 2023 to Jimmy Carter in 1979. Just as the events of 1979 doomed Carter's re-election hopes the following year, developments in 2023 are said to have effectively sunk Biden's bid for a second term in November.

Most obviously, both Carter and Biden confronted a demoralising inflation problem. But Carter-era inflation was far worse: in November 1979, a year prior to the election, consumer price inflation in the United States was running at 12.6%. In the 12 months ending in November 2023, in contrast, CPI inflation was a modest 3.1%. But inflation does remain a political liability for Biden, regardless of whether the phenomenon is now largely in the rearview mirror.

Second, Biden, like Carter before him, has given the Federal Reserve free rein to tackle the problem. Carter selected Paul Volcker to chair the US Federal Reserve Board largely for Volcker's inflation-fighting credentials, in full knowledge that the new chair would jack up interest rates. Despite warnings from his political adviser, Bert Lance, that Volcker's appointment would doom the president's re-election prospects, Carter then let Volcker go about his business. Carter's hands-off approach during the run-up to an election was quite different from that of some of his predecessors, in particular Richard Nixon before the 1972 election.

History suggests that American voters prefer optimism. But it also suggests that they are full of surprises

Biden has similarly allowed Jerome Powell's Fed to adjust interest rates as it chooses, ignoring howls of pain from homebuyers and others. And, again, Biden's unwillingness to criticise the Fed is diametrically opposed to the stance taken by his predecessor, Donald Trump.

Then there are the two presidents' problems on the foreign-policy front, in general and with respect to Iran in particular. In November 1979, student

demonstrators stormed the US embassy in Tehran, taking 66 Americans hostage. Soon thereafter, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini returned from exile in Paris.

The hostages were released minutes after Ronald Reagan's inauguration in January 1981. The failure of Carter's effort to rescue them the previous April had become an open political wound in the run-up to the election and a symbol of a failed foreign policy.

The Biden administration's inability to engineer an extended ceasefire or otherwise aid in freeing the captives in Gaza creates a similar sense of impotence.

Meanwhile, US-backed Ukrainian forces' failure to gain much ground against their Russian adversaries in their 2023 summer offensive, and the failure of US sanctions to deter aggression by Russian President Vladimir Putin, heighten the sense that American foreign policy is in disarray.

All this has translated into dismal approval ratings for Biden, worse even than Carter's in 1979. Thus, the comparison would be suggestive even if we hadn't just been reminded that none other than the young Biden, then a US senator, expressed doubts in the run-up to the 1980 election that it would serve the incumbent or the Democratic Party for Carter to seek a second term.

In addition to parallels, however, there is also an important difference between Biden and Carter, namely in their political positioning. Carter worried about Americans' anxious mental state and the outlook for the country. In July 1979, he delivered what came to be known as the "Malaise Speech." He decried Americans' crisis of confidence and lamented "growing doubt about the meaning of our own lives" and "loss of a unity of purpose for our nation." Americans, Carter went on, were losing faith "not only in government itself but in the ability as citizens to serve as the ultimate rulers and shapers of our democracy." Sound familiar?

In fact, the speech was not entirely negative. But it came to be portrayed that way, specifically by Reagan, who portrayed himself as a "happy warrior," famously asserting at the conclusion of his election eve address, "I find no national malaise." It was a winning bet on an optimistic message. In the dark days of 1979-80, American voters preferred Reagan's sunny confidence to Carter's dour rumination.

Now, of course, it is the incumbent, Biden, who is the optimist, insisting that America is on the right track, while the likely challenger, Trump, claims that America is suffering from a deep-seated malaise, rages about retribution, and sees threats at every turn. History suggests that American voters prefer optimism. But it also suggests that they are full of surprises. — Project Syndicate

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Pavel visit spurs ties with Qatar in multiple fields

QNA
Doha

The visit of the President of the Czech Republic, Petr Pavel, to Doha yesterday will contribute to enhancing co-operation in multiple fields, discovering more trade and investment opportunities between the two countries, supporting and further developing bilateral relations, and opening new areas in a way that serves the common interests and aspirations of the two countries and their friendly peoples.

Qatar and the Czech Republic share growing relations in various fields and are experiencing significant development, especially at the economic level, and in the fields of health, energy, and investment.

Relations between the two countries date back to 1990 when diplomatic relations were established at the level of ambassadors (non-resident representation), and Qatar's ambassador to the Czech Republic presented his credentials in 2007.

The visit of His Highness the Amir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, to the Czech Republic in 2022 contributed to consolidating relations between the two countries and increasing co-operation in many fields. His Highness the Amir and Milos Zeman, the president of the Czech Republic at the time, held an official discussion session in Prague, focusing on developing bilateral relations in various fields.

The Amir pointed to the strength of Qatari-Czech relations and their continuous

development, along with the co-operation that brings the two countries together in various sectors. The session discussed ways to enhance co-operation in trade, industry, energy, and investment, besides exchanging views on several regional and international issues of common interest.

The relations between Qatar and the Czech Republic are regulated by a set of agreements in many areas of trade, economy, and the air transport sector. The political views of the two countries on many regional and international issues are similar. To strengthen bilateral relations, the Qatar-Czech Parliamentary Friendship Committee was established in the Czech Parliament in April 2019.

Mutual visits and joint meetings between investors and businessmen in the two countries contributed to providing an important platform for discussing ways to establish alliances and joint projects, in addition to gaining a broader overview of viable investment opportunities in several promising sectors in the two countries. They also contributed to raising the rate of trade exchange between the two countries.

Trade and investment relations between Qatar and the Czech Republic are characterised by diversity. Many joint Qatari-Czech companies operate in the Qatari market in various sectors, especially in the fields of services, hospitality, sports consulting, and food trade.

During a visit to Doha in October 2019, meeting with Qatari businessmen, former Czech foreign minister Tomas Petricek confirmed that his country was seriously

seeking to strengthen trade and economic relations with Qatar as part of its efforts to attract foreign investments in various sectors. He reviewed the investment climate in his country, emphasising its strategic location in the European continent as a large market linking the countries of the European Union. He pointed out that the Czech Republic, characterised by the quality of products with global advantages, seeks to present innovative projects in many fields.

In June 2022, the Qatari-Czech business meeting, held at the Qatar Chamber, discussed ways to enhance commercial and industrial co-operation relations, investment opportunities available in the two countries, co-operation between business owners in the two countries, and the possibility of establishing alliances that enhance trade and investment exchange.

This resulted from the success achieved by Qatar in providing an attractive investment environment through facilities and incentives that allow a foreign investor to invest up to 100% in various sectors and economic activities, as well as the advanced infrastructure, laws, and economic legislation that have contributed to Qatar reaching a world-renowned position as a leading destination for investment and business.

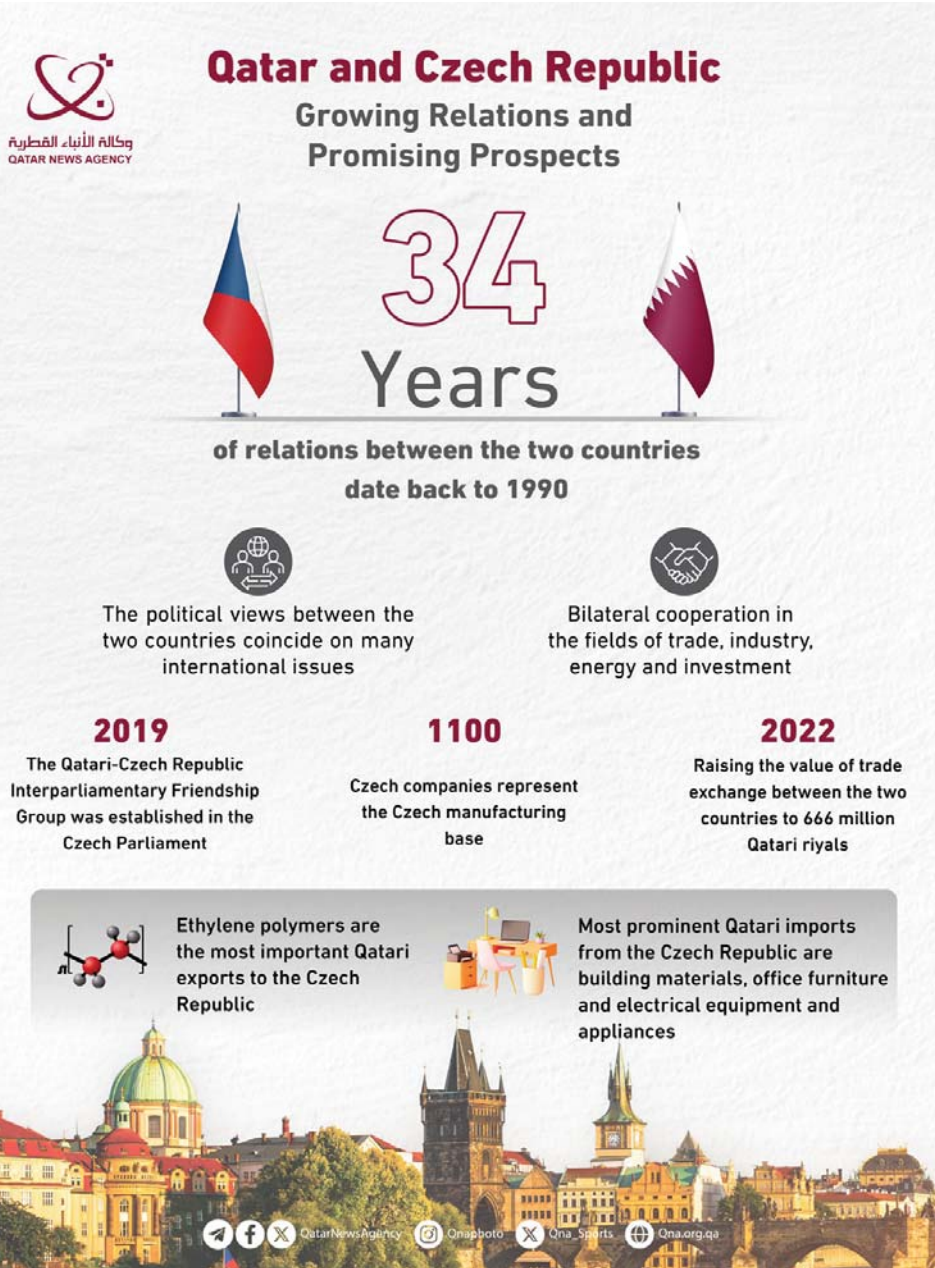
Building materials, office furniture, equipment, and electrical appliances are at the forefront of Qatar's imports from the Czech Republic, while ethylene polymers represent the most important Qatari exports to the Czech Republic. There are also many areas that contribute to deepening bilateral cooperation between the two countries, especially in the health, real estate, tourism, and agricultural sectors. The Czech Republic has a long history in these fields, and its economy is one of the most promising in Europe, bringing with it great future potential for investment.

The Czech Republic is one of the fastest-growing countries in Europe in recent years in the fields of infrastructure and medical tourism. It is a landlocked country located in central Europe with an estimated area of 78,867sq km and a population of 10.7mn people. Thanks to its special strategic geographical location and reasonable costs, with advanced infrastructure and a skilled workforce, the Czech Republic has become an ideal and attractive base for business and investment projects.

The Czech Republic is characterized by a broadly open economy, where three-quarters of its products are exported, and foreign investments are attracted. Czech companies are known for being reliable partners and suppliers of high-quality products, technologies, and services. The Czech export sectors comprise a wide range of products in various branches and fields of industry, including automotive.

The Czech Republic embraces major global brands in the automotive sector, and there is an aircraft industry, which includes the production of components for large transport aircraft, military aircraft, helicopters, small-sized aircraft for domestic and regional transport, training aircraft, light sport, agricultural, and sailplanes. It is estimated that a quarter of the world's lightweight aircraft sold are produced in the Czech Republic.

Engineering forms the backbone of the Czech economy, with its industrial base consisting of more than 1,100 companies, particularly involved in the field of energy engineering, transportation, machinery production, tool shaping, metallurgy, production of metal structures and components, air conditioners, construction machinery, agriculture, food processing, green technologies, in addition to medical equipment, chemical and pharmaceutical industries, electronics, and generators.





Pakistan recalls ambassador, bars Iran envoy from returning to Islamabad

AFP

Islamabad

Pakistan recalled its ambassador from Iran yesterday and blocked Tehran's envoy from returning to Islamabad after an Iranian air strike killed two children in the west of the country a day earlier.

Iranian news agency Mehrnews said the "missile and drone" attack targeted the Jaish al-Adl group's headquarters in Pakistan, calling it "another decisive step taken by Iran in response to the aggression against the security of our country".

The raid came late on Tuesday after Tehran also launched attacks in Iraq and Syria against what it called "anti-Iranian terrorist groups".

Pakistan denounced the strike, near the nations' shared border.

Pakistan Foreign Minister Jalil Abbas Jilani yesterday warned his Iranian counterpart Hossein Amir-Abdollahian that Pakistan reserved the right to respond to Iran's "provocative act" of attacking inside its territory.

Jilani, who is currently leading the Pakistan delegation to the ministerial meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement in Kampala, Uganda, made these remarks as he received a telephone call from the Iranian foreign minister, according to a statement issued by the Foreign Office.

The foreign minister firmly underscored that the attack conducted by Iran inside Pakistani

- **FM warns Iranian counterpart of 'right to respond' in phone call**
- **No nationals of 'brotherly' Pakistan targeted in attack: Tehran**

territory, on January 16, 2024, was not only a serious breach of Pakistan's sovereignty but was also an egregious violation of international law and the spirit of bilateral relations between Pakistan and Iran.

Expressing Pakistan's unreserved condemnation of the attack, the foreign minister said that the incident has caused serious damage to bilateral ties between Pakistan and Iran.

"Pakistan reserved the right to respond to this provocative act," the statement quoted Jilani as saying.

"Last night's unprovoked and blatant breach of Pakistan's sovereignty by Iran is a violation of international law and the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations," Pakistan Foreign Office spokeswoman Mumtaz Zahra Baloch said in a statement yesterday.

The foreign ministry recalled its ambassador from Tehran and said Iran's envoy — currently on a visit home — would not be allowed to return to Islamabad.

Tehran's top diplomat insisted his country's armed forces had targeted "Iranian terrorist group" Jaish al-Adl in Pakistan.

"None of the nationals of the friendly and brotherly country of Pakistan were targeted by Iranian missiles and drones," Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian said on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.



Pakistan Foreign Minister Jalil Abbas Jilani (left) and his Iranian counterpart Hossein Amir-Abdollahian.

hian said on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.

Formed in 2012, Jaish al-Adl is blacklisted by Iran as a terrorist group and has carried out several attacks on Iranian soil in recent years.

The Iranian foreign ministry said Amir-Abdollahian spoke with his Pakistani counterpart Jalil Abbas Jilani yesterday, stressing that "Pakistan's sovereignty and territorial integrity are of great concern".

Amir-Abdollahian said "Jaish al-Adl is a terrorist group that

acts against the common security of the two countries", according to a summary of the conversation released by Tehran.

Iran had earlier launched missile attacks on "spy headquarters" and "terrorist" targets in Syria, and Iraq's autonomous Kurdistan region.

The Iranian strikes add to multiple crises across the Middle East, with Israel waging a war against Hamas in Gaza and pro-Palestinian Houthis rebels in Yemen attacking commercial vessels in the Red Sea.

Yesterday, Iran's Defence min-

ister Mohamed Reza Ashtiani said Tehran would set "no limits" to its security.

China, close partners of Iran and Pakistan, urged restraint, with foreign ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning saying both should "avoid actions that would lead to an escalation of tension".

Pakistan's official statement did not specify where the strike took place, but Pakistani media said it was near Panjgur in southwest Balochistan province, where the countries share a sparsely populated border of nearly 1,000km.

Hours before the strike, Pakistan's caretaker Prime Minister Anwar-ul-Haq Kakar had met the Iranian foreign minister on the sidelines of the WEF.

"This violation of Pakistan's sovereignty is completely unacceptable and can have serious consequences," Pakistan's foreign ministry statement said.

It said the strike caused the "death of two innocent children while injuring three girls".

Jaish al-Adl claimed responsibility for an attack in December on a police station in Rask that killed at least 11 Iranian police officers.

The United States has also labelled Jaish al-Adl a terrorist organisation, saying the group "primarily targets Iranian security personnel" but also government officials and civilians with assassinations, kidnappings, and

suicide bombings.

Tehran and Islamabad frequently accuse each other of allowing militants to operate from the other's territory to launch attacks, but it is rare that official forces on either side engage.

"It is even more concerning that this illegal act has taken place despite the existence of several channels of communication between Pakistan and Iran," Pakistan's foreign ministry said.

"Pakistan has always said terrorism is a common threat to all countries in the region that requires coordinated action."

Michael Kugelman, director of the South Asia Institute at the Washington-based Wilson Center, warned of the seriousness of the strike.

"Iran has staged cross-border operations against Pakistan-based militants in the past, but I don't recall anything on this scale," he said on X, formerly Twitter.

"This plunges Pakistan-Iran ties — a delicate relationship even in the best of times — into serious crisis."

Meanwhile, the United States yesterday condemned recent Iranian strikes in Pakistan, Iraq and Syria, which Tehran has claimed were carried out against "anti-Iranian terrorist groups."

"So we do condemn those strikes. We've seen Iran violate the sovereign borders of three of its neighbours in just the past couple of days," State Department spokesman Matthew Miller told reporters.

Spain probes drowning of two soldiers during training

A Spanish military court is investigating the drowning of two soldiers who were made to cross a lake while bearing a heavy load, a lawyer for one of the victim's family said yesterday.

The Spanish army had on December 21 that two soldiers had died "during manoeuvres" at the Cerro Muriano base near the southern city of Cordoba, without giving details of the circumstances.

But Spanish media reports said the men, aged 24 and 34, had drowned after dozens of soldiers were made to cross a lake in frigid temperatures while carrying their material.

One of the soldiers who drowned, Carlos Leon Rico, had been made to carry an extra 3.5 kilos by his superiors as a punishment, for a total of 12 kilos, his family's lawyer Luis Romero told AFP.

It was not immediately clear if the second soldier who died was also carrying extra weight.

There were no rescue rafts or lifeline at the site of the exercise as should have been the case, Romero said, just a loose rope to guide the soldier.

The "tragedy could have been even worse" since around 60 soldiers were waiting on the bank of the lake to cross, he added.

The Cordoba court that was investigating the deaths handed over the case Tuesday to a military court in Seville at the request of military officials.

Police in Russia break up rare protest over jailing of activist

Riot police fired tear gas and struck protesters with batons in the Russian republic of Bashkortostan yesterday after a leading local rights activist was sentenced to four years in a penal colony.

Large protests in Russia are extremely rare because of the risk of arrest — especially since the start of the war with Ukraine — at any gatherings the authorities deem unauthorised.

Clashes broke out between the police and a crowd of up to several thousand people who had gathered in support of the activist, Fail Alsynov. At a trial that was closed to the media, a court found him guilty of inciting ethnic hatred, a charge he denied.

Videos published on social media showed people fleeing from tear gas and a line of police lashing out with batons at the crowd. In one clip, a woman remonstrated with police to stop beating a person lying on the ground.

State investigators signalled they would mete out harsh punishment against those involved in the protest, saying they had launched criminal investigations into "mass disturbances" and use of violence against the authorities.

The timing is sensitive for the authorities, at the start of an election campaign in

which President Vladimir Putin is seeking a new six-year term. While Putin's victory is not in doubt, analysts said there would be pressure on Bashkortostan's regional head, Radiy Khabirov, to keep the situation in hand in order to avoid embarrassment for the Kremlin.

Alsynov, 37, was accused of insulting migrant workers in a speech he made in April 2023 at a protest over plans to mine for gold in Bashkortostan, which is located in Russia's southern Ural mountains near the border between Europe and Asia.

His name has also been added to a list of "extremists and terrorists" by Rosfinmonitoring, an agency that is empowered to freeze people's bank accounts if they are suspected of money-laundering or financing terrorism.

Alsynov's supporters said the case against him was delayed revenge for his role in protests several years earlier in which activists successfully blocked plans to mine for soda on a hill that local people consider a sacred place.

"Huge thanks to everyone who came to support me. I will never forget this. I don't admit my guilt. I always fought for justice, for my people, for my republic," he told online media outlet RusNews after the verdict.

Russia 'targeted French mercenaries in Ukraine hit'

AFP

Moscow

Russia said yesterday it had targeted a group of French fighters in a long-range strike on the eastern Ukrainian city of Kharkiv, an attack authorities said injured more than a dozen civilians.

The Kremlin's claim came hours after Ukraine's foreign minister vowed to gain full control over its skies in 2024, as Russia's full-scale assault enters its third year.

Kharkiv, Ukraine's second largest city lying close to the Russian border, has been under persistent shelling since Russia launched large-scale hostilities in Ukraine in February 2022.

"On the evening of 16 January, the armed forces of the Russian Federation carried out a precision strike on a temporary deployment point of foreign militants in the city of Kharkiv, the core of which were French mercenaries," the defence ministry said in a statement.

The ministry claimed to have killed dozens of foreign militants in the attack and injured many more but did not provide evidence.

The strikes tore into a multi-storey building in central Kharkiv, gutting the structure and leaving debris strewn around the street below.

Kharkiv region governor Oleg

Synegubov said that there were no military targets in the area.

Officials in Kyiv have seen a steep rise in civilian casualties since December, as Moscow intensifies air attacks, reversing a downward trend seen earlier in 2023, the United Nations has warned.

Ukraine's Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba yesterday said his country's priority for 2024 was to gain control over its skies, where Russian forces have had the upper hand.

"In 2024, of course the priority is to throw Russia from the skies," Kuleba said in an address to the World Economic Forum in Davos.

Kyiv has long pressured the West to deliver advanced fighter jets to support its troops entrenched in the south and east of the country.

Responding to those calls, French President Emmanuel Macron announced this week that France would deliver a new batch of around 40 SCALP long-range cruise missiles as well as hundreds of bombs as Kyiv fights the Russian assault.

But even that pledge is limited compared to the range of munitions that Russian forces have recently been raining down across Ukraine.

"We are fighting a powerful enemy, a very big enemy that doesn't sleep," Kuleba said.

"We defeated them on the land in 2022. We defeated them in the

sea in 2023 and we are completely focused on defeating them in the air in 2024," he told a discussion panel at the forum in Switzerland.

Kuleba's comments at the World Economic Forum in Davos came hours after Russian drone and missile attacks — including in Kharkiv — wounded at least 20 people across Ukraine and shelling killed two civilians.

The barrage left massive craters in the southern city of Odesa where AFP journalists saw residential buildings charred in the wake of the assault.

Rescue workers hauled out vulnerable residents on stretchers from housing blocks that had had their windows blown out in the Black Sea city, footage from emergency services showed.

Yesterday, officials in the southern region of Kherson said one person had been killed and another injured by Russian shelling.

In the northeastern Kharkiv region, Governor Oleg Synegubov said a woman was killed in Russian shelling on a village near the border.

A boy, aged 10, had to have a limb amputated and a 14-year-old girl received shrapnel wounds in the attack, he added.

Russia has also been weathering increased numbers of Ukrainian strikes, particularly in border regions where officials and residents are bolstering defences.

European crew poised for private mission to International Space Station

An all-European crew including Türkiye's first astronaut are poised to blast off to the International Space Station in a mission with Axiom Space, as countries hungry for a taste of space turn increasingly to the private sector.

The launch, Axiom's third, is scheduled to see the four-member crew lift off in a SpaceX Crew Dragon capsule fixed to the top of a Falcon 9 rocket at 4:49pm local time today from the Kennedy Space Center in Florida. "It marks a new era of opportunity for countries to join the international space community" and "shifts the paradigm of how space agencies access LEO (low Earth orbit), for exploration and research in microgravity," Axiom Space's chief of mission integration and operations Derek Hassmann said of Axiom Mission 3 (Ax-3). It is the first ISS mission for Axiom where all three of the paid seats have been bought by national agencies, rather than by wealthy individuals. Turkish pilot and air force colonel Alper Gezeravci is joined by Marcus

Wandt from Sweden, who will be the second Swede in space, and Walter Villadei, an Italian air force colonel who has previously flown to the edge of space on a Virgin Galactic spaceplane. The crew are led by Axiom's Chief Astronaut Michael Lopez-Alegria, a Spanish and US citizen and former Nasa astronaut. The exact costs haven't been disclosed, but in 2018 when the company first announced the program, which involves chartering SpaceX hardware and paying Nasa for services, it set a price tag of \$55mn per seat. More recently, Hungary was reported by spacenews.com to be planning a \$100mn deal with Axiom for a future mission involving one astronaut.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has displayed a keen interest in the mission, presenting Gezeravci to the Turkish public in the run-up to his re-election last year, and calling the 21-year air force veteran a "heroic Turkish pilot". "We see it as a new symbol of the growing, stronger and assertive Türkiye," Erdogan

said about the space mission on Tuesday. Sweden's Marcus Wandt, meanwhile, applied for the European Space Agency (ESA) astronaut class of 2022 but was made a reserve. Axiom-3 therefore allows Sweden to put its second national in space. The Axiom-3 team will join seven crew currently aboard the ISS — from Japan, Denmark, the United States and Russia — and carry out 30 experiments, learning more about the impact of microgravity on the human body, advancing industrial processes and more. Axiom-3 was previously scheduled to launch yesterday, but SpaceX posted on X it was holding another day to "complete pre-launch checkouts and data analysis on the vehicle." On Tuesday Benji Reed, the senior director of human spaceflight at SpaceX, said engineering teams had discovered certain technical issues in the way the Dragon capsule's landing parachutes deployed, and how it was attached to the Falcon 9 rocket, but said both problems had been resolved.



Photographers set up remote cameras as a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket is readied for launch of the Axiom Mission 3 to the International Space Station at Cape Canaveral, Florida yesterday. (Reuters)

UDST welcomes first group of Gaza students

By Joseph Varghese
Staff Reporter

A group of eight students from Palestine, whose education got disrupted due to the ongoing crisis in Gaza, were welcomed at the University of Doha for Science and Technology (UDST) yesterday at a ceremony.

They were received by UDST president Dr Salem Al-Naemi, Education Above All (EAA) Foundation CEO Fahad al-Sulaiti and the Ministry of Endowments (Awqaf) and Islamic Affairs' General Directorate of Endowments director general Sheikh Dr Khaled al-Thani.

In collaboration with EAA through its Al Fakhora Programme, and with the support from the General Directorate of Endowments, UDST is providing these students

with an opportunity to continue their education in Qatar's leading applied university.

"We have already enrolled them in different programmes and as a university we extend our support to them and welcome them to our programmes," Dr Al-Naemi told *Gulf Times*.

"We want to make sure that they get the education that they have missed. We hope that they will graduate from here in flying colours and go back to Palestine to rebuild their country," he said.

Dr Al-Naemi explained: "We are open to accepting more students from Palestine as some of the universities in Gaza have been destroyed totally. If the students from Palestine are coming, we will be able to admit them in more numbers in the Fall semester. We are working with EAA and those students



The newly admitted Palestinian students with dignitaries at UDST yesterday. **PICTURE:** Shaji Kayamkulam

interested in following a technical programme that we offer, we will be glad to admit them. We are providing them all the support such as academic support, cognitive support as well as academic support while EAA takes care of the financial sup-

port for the students to complete their studies."

Talal Alhathal, executive director of Al Fakhora programme noted: "It is our honour to partner with the University of Doha for Science and Technology in providing edu-

cational opportunities for Palestinian students affected by the crisis in Gaza. We firmly believe in the power of education to transform lives, and through this collaboration, we are committed to enabling these young men and women to continue their

academic journeys, equipping them with the tools and knowledge necessary to build a better future for themselves and their communities."

Sheikh Dr Khalid, affirmed that the scholarship programme is in collaboration and partnership with EAA and partner universities. "The initiative aims to support students who have discontinued their studies and to overcome obstacles for them to complete their educational journey in Qatar through the partner universities. This will significantly impact their future lives when they return to their countries and contribute to building their community through their academic achievements," he added.

The newly admitted students will have the opportunity to join UDST's wide range of programmes, spanning engineering, IT, business, and health sciences.

Haiti's pavilion opens at Expo 2023



Haiti's ambassador to Qatar Jean-Marie Francois Junior Guillaume inaugurated his country's pavilion at the Expo 2023 Doha Horticultural Exhibition, held under the slogan 'Green Desert, Better Environment'. HE the Expo 2023 Doha Commissioner General, ambassador Bader bin Omar al-Dafa, and Secretary-General of the Expo 2023 Doha engineer Mohamed Ali al-Khoury, participated in the inauguration, in the presence of a number of ambassadors, representatives of diplomatic missions accredited to the country, and commissioners of the pavilions of participating countries.

The pavilion provides glimpses into the reality, geography, heritage, culture, history

and wealth of this country located on the Latin American continent, and shows its strong commitment to efforts of preserving the environment and its friendly practices, as well as introducing visitors to the most important national plants and crops, such as mango, cocoa, coffee, papaya, and others. It features samples of Haitian products and industries, some of which are related to heritage and daily life, such as textiles and clothing, shoes, wood and leather goods, furniture, jewellery, accessories, food, and chemical products. Posters in the pavilion also promote tourism in Haiti, a country of white sand beaches, mountainous views, and a warm climate throughout the year. **(QNA)**

Al Meera pavilion at Expo 2023 Doha highlights eco-friendly practices

The pavilion of Al Meera Consumer Goods Company at Expo 2023 Doha is attracting visitors from around the world highlighting its sustainable initiatives as part of the participation as a platinum sponsor.

The expo, which will run until March 28 at Al Bidda Park under the theme 'Green Desert, Better Environment', is the first international horticultural exhibition in Qatar and the Middle East and North Africa.



Al Meera pavilion is located in the Family Zone of Expo 2023 Doha.

Al Meera's pavilion focuses on the company's ongoing efforts in the field of sustainability and under its social responsibility programme to reduce carbon footprint and protect natural resources.

The pavilion in the Family Zone is divided into three sections. The first revolves around some of Al Meera's sustainability initiatives and includes the plastic bottle and aluminium can reverse vending machine, battery bins for visitors to dispose of their used batteries, reusable shopping bags, online sustainability games, and more.

The second area is dedicated to children where they can actively participate in many fun activities to

guide them towards a more sustainable lifestyle. The third section is the only mini grocery at the expo to serve visitors with a range of snacks, sandwiches, and essential needs.

In the sustainability field, Al Meera has launched several initiatives, including deploying recycling facilities for plastic bottles, cans, and used batteries; offering reusable shopping bags and organising beach

clean-ups, among others.

In addition, it launched the 'Truth Bottle' campaign to emphasise the importance of rationalising water consumption. Al Meera is also in partnership with local recycling organisations that collect all types of paper, cardboard, and plastic crates used across all the branches to minimise waste. Most recently, Al Meera unveiled its first electronic waste recycling station.

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