



Welcoming
Gynecology
Excellence

Dr. Nusrat Jabir
MBBS, DGO, DNB
8 Years of Proficiency



Book Your Appointments



C Ring

Naseem Medical Centre

4411 1133 naseem.qa




www.habartrealstate.com

Your Comfort, Our Commitment

Staff/labour Accommodation

HABARI REAL ESTATE
CR No: 174949

Call Now! +974 3030 0880
+974 3341 9475

Building No: 92, Zone 14, Street 983, Al Wihor, Qatar

January Daily Madness

Up to 50% off every... single... day!

Unlimited free delivery

3 JAN

Shop with Confidence 100%

A Four Star Hotel Offer For Rent Outlet

SPA, RESTAURANT, SHOP, LOUNGE, MASSAGE CENTRE, MEN'S SALON, LADIES SALON, CAFETERIA

Contact: 33598672, 66698828, 50556669

LOW SODIUM FOR BETTER HEALTH

Amwaj

بوتلات مياه الشرب المعبأة
BOTTLED DRINKING WATER
1500ml/650ml/350ml/200ml

QATARI WATER PURIFICATION

Doha Juice & Food Factory
Contact : 70960448 / 30454443

GULF TIMES



668039 136499

SATURDAY Vol. XXXXIII No. 12895

January 20, 2024
Rajab 8, 1445 AH

www.gulf-times.com 2 Riyals

Published in QATAR since 1978

www.gulf-times.com gulftimes GulfTimes_QATAR gulftimes GulftimesVideos



vodafone

Use your local plan abroad

To activate, download MyVodafone App or dial: *110*120#



Roam Like Home Pack
150 QR Per Week



Sheikh Joaan crowns winners of camel racing



HE the President of Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC) Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani crowned the winners in the final rounds of the annual festival for purebred Arabian camel racing on the Sword of His Highness the Father Amir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, held at Al Shahaniya racetrack yesterday, amid wide participation from GCC states. HE Sheikh Joaan crowned the winners of the six main final rounds of Al Hail and Al Zamoul competitions for tribesmen's camels with silver symbols. Ahmed Matar al-Khaili, owner of the Al Azoum camel, was awarded the silver sword after winning the title of the Al Hail (open) round. He also awarded two silver shelfa to Ahmed Rashid al-Mansouri, owner of the Amatar camel after winning the title of Al Hail (Omanis), and Salem Saeed al-Ketbi, owner of the Sultana camel, after winning the title of Al Hail (production). HE Sheikh Joaan also awarded three silver daggers to Hamad Rashid al-Ketbi, owner of the Muhannad camel after winning Al Zamoul (open) and Mohamed Sultan al-Ketbi owner of Nisnas and Kafu camels after winning the title of Al Zamoul (Omanis) and Al Zamoul (production) rounds, respectively. **(QNA)**

Iraq stun Japan to reach Asian Cup last 16, Iran join them

Iraq coach Jesus Casas said his team were “close to perfect” in stunning Asian Cup favourites Japan 2-1 yesterday to reach the knockout rounds, where they were joined by rivals Iran. Aymen Hussein scored two first-half headers in front of nearly 40,000 in Doha to consign four-time champions Japan to a first Asian Cup group-stage defeat in 26 matches. It also set Japan on a potential collision course with Son Heung-min's South Korea in the last 16, assuming they still progress. Casas said that the first big shock of the tournament was “only one win” but hailed it as “a great day for Iraqi people”. “I think the perfect match doesn't exist,” said the Spaniard. “It's impossible to have a perfect match, but we were close to perfect.” Indonesia defeated Vietnam 1-0 thanks to a 42nd-minute penalty by Asnawi Mangkualam. It means Indonesia and Japan will battle it out on Wednesday for the second qualification spot from Group D, although finishing third might also be enough.



Iraq's forward (No 18) Aymen Hussein celebrates with teammates after scoring his team's second goal during the Qatar 2023 AFC Asian Cup Group D match against Japan at the Education City Stadium in Doha yesterday. **(AFP)**

Iran joined Iraq, Australia and hosts and holders Qatar in the last 16 but they made hard work of beating Hong Kong 1-0. On paper the fixture was among the biggest mismatches at the tournament, with Iran ranked 21st in the world to Hong Kong's 150. **Sport Pages 1, 3, 4**

UN chief praises Qatar, France for aid deal

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has praised the efforts of Qatar and France in reaching an agreement between Israel and Hamas to bring medicines and aid into Gaza. Guterres stated that the entry of these vital supplies and humanitarian aid is encouraging, indicating that there is a need for more aid to enter the sector. He urged all relevant actors to ensure the arrival of adequate humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip, expressing his concern about the escalating tensions in the region, calling for an urgent halt to the escalation. **(QNA)**

Japan lunar landing: craft short on power

Japan has become the fifth country to put a spacecraft on the moon, but solar power issues threatened to cut short the nation's mission to prove a “precision” landing technology and revitalise a space programme that has suffered setbacks. **Page 8**

Today's schedule

AFC ASIAN CUP QATAR 2023

Group E:
Jordan vs South Korea, 2:30pm
at Al Thumama Stadium

Group E:
Bahrain-Malaysia, 5:30pm
at Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium

Internet services gradually returning to Gaza: telecom firm

Internet services are starting to return to the besieged Gaza Strip, telecom operator Paltel said yesterday, after the longest outage since the Israeli aggression on October 7. Gaza's Internet and telecommunication services have been constantly disrupted throughout the war, with Paltel blaming Israel's bombardment of the Palestinian territory for the outages. In the most recent interruption, Gaza residents have been largely without Internet and

telephone services for a full week, according to Internet monitor NetBlocks. “We announce the gradual return of communication services in various areas of the Gaza Strip,” Paltel said in a statement. The restarting of Internet services was later confirmed by the territory's telecommunications ministry. The UN has warned that the blackouts are worsening the Palestinian territory's already dire humanitarian situation. “The blackout of

telecommunications prevents people in Gaza from accessing lifesaving information or calling for first responders and impedes other forms of humanitarian response,” the UN humanitarian agency OCHA said on Thursday. Israeli onslaught has ravaged Gaza since Oct 7 attacks. At least 24,762 Palestinians, about 70% of them women and children, have been killed in Israeli bombardments and ground assaults, according to the Gaza health ministry's latest figures.



Displaced Palestinians using eSIM cards attempt to get a signal in order to contact their relatives yesterday on a hill facing their makeshift camp in Rafah.

Israeli drones attack hospital in south Gaza

THE Palestinian Red Crescent accused Israel of firing yesterday at a hospital in Khan Younis, as a major advance in the main city in the southern Gaza Strip threatened the few healthcare facilities still open.

The Red Crescent said displaced people were injured “due to intense gunfire from the Israeli drones targeting citizens at Al-Amal Hospital” as well as the rescue agency's base.

Nearby in the same city, Israeli tanks were also approaching Gaza's biggest remaining functioning hospital, Nasser, where people reported hearing shellfire from the west. Residents also reported fierce gun battles to the south.

Israel has launched a major new advance in Khan Younis this week to capture the city.

The Gaza health ministry said 142 Palestinians had been killed and 278 injured in Gaza the past 24 hours, taking the death toll from more than three months of war there to 24,762.

The World Health Organisation says most of the enclave's 36 hospitals have stopped working. Only 15 are partially functioning and those are operating at up to three times their capacity, without adequate fuel or medical supplies, it says.

More than 1.7mn people – around 75% of Gaza's population – are estimated to be displaced, many forced to move repeatedly, according to UN Palestinian refugee agency (UNRWA) figures. Many have sought refuge in tents that do little to protect them from the elements and disease.

Among them, Mohamed al-Ghandour wanted to give his bride a beautiful wedding but

Biden ‘still believes’ in Palestinian state

US President Joe Biden told Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in a call yesterday that he still backs future statehood for the Palestinians, the White House said, amid tensions between the two leaders over the issue.

“The president still believes in the promise and the possibility of a two-state solution. He recognises that it's going to take a lot of hard work,” National Security Council spokesman John Kirby told reporters.

they had to flee their homes in Gaza City and the couple finally got married this week in the tent city in Rafah, near the Egyptian border, where they now live.

“My happiness is maybe at 3% but will get myself ready for my wife. I want to make her happy,” Ghandour said.

In the north, where Israel says it has started pulling out troops and shifting to smaller scale operations, 12 people were killed in Israeli strikes on a residential building near the largely non-functioning Al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza City, Palestinian health officials said.

An Israeli strike on a house in Al-Nusseirat refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip killed five Palestinians, health officials said.

Washington has had scant success in persuading its ally to alleviate the plight of the civilian population, deprived since October of most of the regular aid on which they had depended, let alone of adequate medical care for the more than 62,000 people

who have been wounded.

Diplomats were dealing yesterday with the repercussions after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu appeared to rule out an independent Palestinian state, rejecting a long-standing pillar of US strategy in the Middle East.

“Israel must have security control over the entire territory west of the Jordan River,” Netanyahu told a briefing in Tel Aviv on Thursday. “It clashes with the principle of sovereignty, but what can you do?” US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller responded at a news briefing that the establishment of a Palestinian state was the only way to provide lasting security to Israel itself, along with reconstruction, governance and security for Gaza.

In one of countless protests in Israel since Oct 7 to push for action to secure the release of the hostages, some 200 women marched in Tel Aviv yesterday, including one pulled along in a cage. They chanted “Their time is running out, bring them back”.

The Russian foreign ministry said yesterday it had received a delegation from Hamas and had urged it to release the hostages, including three Russian nationals. Hamas said both sides emphasised the importance of reaching a ceasefire.

Apart from Gaza, Israel has also carried out raids in the occupied West Bank, which has seen the worst violence in many years.

A Palestinian-American teenager was killed by Israeli security forces there on Friday, Palestinian health officials said. The Israeli military did not immediately respond to a request for comment. **(Reuters) Page 3**

QF to host activities to mark International Day of Education



اليوم الدولي للتعليم
International Day of Education

Qatar Foundation (QF) will host a range of activities to commemorate the International Day of Education, celebrated each year on January 24 by the United Nations – creating the opportunity for schools and families to come together with the aim of improving the quality of education, and students' performance.

In partnership with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, QF's celebration of the day will take place under the theme ‘Education is Everyone's Responsibility’, which aims to inspire public and private entities, as well as individuals across society, to

actively champion and elevate the standard of education throughout Qatar.

Among the activities that will be hosted at QF's Education City from 9am to 6pm on January 24, will be an interactive exhibition featuring educational programmes, a thought-provoking session covering a spectrum of topics to enrich the dialogue on education from multiple perspectives, and visits for secondary school students to QF's partner universities, where they will get to learn about the wide range of programmes available at these institutions.

The day will begin with an Arabic session titled ‘Language and Identity - Strategies for Preservation’, followed by a session by Education Above All Foundation on the topic of ‘Building Resilient Futures: The Transformative Power of Education in Conflict Zones’.

A panel discussion later in the day by QF's Doha International Family Institute will highlight the importance of building a supportive environment that enhances trust and communication with children and youth, and the final discussion will be on the role of technology in the field of inclusive and specialised education.

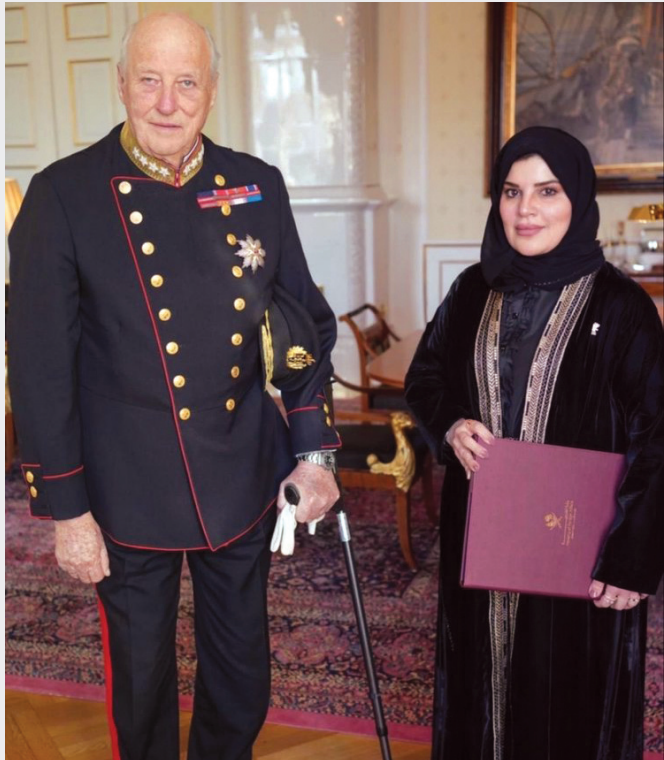
A student discussion will also be organised on the topic of whether education fulfils students' needs.

Meanwhile, 11 of QF's Pre-University Education schools, alongside 19 schools from throughout Qatar, will be participating in this celebration of education, and a further 22 entities will also be hosting activities.

QF is inviting parents to be part of this special occasion, through visiting their children's schools and taking part in activities like workshops and community events. The sessions are open to everyone, with registration for the event required.



Qatar's ambassador presents credentials



King Harald V of the Kingdom of Norway received the credentials of Nadia bint Ahmad al-Sheebi as ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary of Qatar (non-resident) to the Kingdom of Norway. The ambassador conveyed His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani's greetings and wishes of good health and happiness to the Norwegian king, and continued progress and prosperity to the government and people of Norway. The king of Norway entrusted the ambassador with his greetings to the Amir, wishing His Highness good health and happiness, and the State of Qatar continued progress and development. **(QNA)**

Somali president meets ambassador of Qatar



President of Somalia Hassan Sheikh Mohamud met with ambassador of Qatar to Somalia Dr Abdullah bin Salem al-Nuaimi. During the meeting, co-operation relations between the two countries were discussed. **(QNA)**

Graduation ceremony



Under the auspices of HE the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defence Affairs Dr Khalid bin Mohamed al-Attiyah and in the presence of HE the Chief of Staff of Qatar Armed Forces Staff Lieutenant-General (Pilot) Salem bin Hamad bin Aqeel al-Nabit, the Mohammed Bin Ghanem Al Ghanem Maritime Academy held a graduation ceremony for its 2nd batch of cadets. The 2nd batch comprised 63 cadets from Qatar as well as fraternal and friendly countries, who completed their four-year study in the academy, which covered various military and maritime sciences. At the end of the ceremony, HE the Chief of Staff of Qatar Armed Forces handed over the certificates to the candidates in the presence of a number of senior officers. **(QNA)**

Qatar backs Lebanon's unity and stability



HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Mohamed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh al-Khulaifi met yesterday with the visiting French president's envoy to Lebanon Jean-Yves Le Drian. The meeting discussed bilateral relations and the latest developments in Lebanon. HE Dr al-Khulaifi affirmed Qatar's stance supporting Lebanon and its fraternal people, as well as Qatar's support for international efforts aimed at Lebanon's unity and stability. **(QNA)**

President of Croatia receives credentials of Qatar's envoy

President of the Republic of Croatia Zoran Milanovic received the credentials of Asma bint Naji al-Amri as ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary of the State of Qatar to Croatia. The ambassador conveyed His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani's greetings and wishes of good health and happiness to the Croatian president, and continued progress and prosperity to the government and people of Croatia. The president entrusted the ambassador with his greetings to the Amir, wishing His Highness good health and happiness, and the State of Qatar continued progress and development. **(QNA)**



Al-Muraikhi meets ministers of Philippines, Belarus, Somalia

HE the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sultan bin Saad al-Muraikhi met separately yesterday with Philippine Secretary of Foreign Affairs Enrique Manalo, Belarus Foreign Minister Sergei Aleinik, and Somali State Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation Ali Mohamed Omar, on the sidelines of the 19th Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement held in the Ugandan capital, Kampala. During the meetings, they discussed the co-operation relations and several topics of mutual interest. **(QNA)**

Qatar attends meeting of Arab educational councils

QNA
Tunis

Qatar participated in the high-level meeting of the heads of the Arab educational councils, held at the headquarters of the Arab Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organisation (Alecso) in Tunisia on Jan 18 and 19.

Undersecretary of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education Dr Ibrahim bin Saleh al-Nuaimi, head of Qatar's delegation, spoke during the meeting about the efforts exerted for the development of education in Qatar, presenting an executive summary of the Third National Strategy for the Education Sector.

He also touched on the country's educational policies and their main objectives, which included consolidating the values and principles of the Islamic religion, respecting other religions and cultures among young people, consolidating the values and traditions of Qatari society, preserving Qatari heritage to enhance

national identity, providing fair and just opportunities for all categories of learners to meet their needs and improving their performance according to their abilities and inclinations. He provided models of educational plans within the framework of developing the educational process, and promoting the use of modern technology.

It is worth noting that this meeting is the first for heads of Arab educational councils, organised by the Alecso with the aim of enhancing co-operation and exchanging the best experiences and expertise among member states, by diagnosing reality, discussing opportunities and challenges, anticipating the future of education in Arab countries, and urging Arab countries to work on adopting structures for educational councils.

The meeting also aimed to contribute to the formulation of educational policies and the development of educational strategies among Alecso member states. In this context, educational experts and researchers presented a number of scientific papers, in addition to the



speeches of the participating countries on presenting the best national experiences in developing education.

HEC Paris to host panel discussion on agritech, foodtech

HEC Paris in Qatar will host a panel discussion on 'Innovation, Investments and Entrepreneurship in the Agritech and Foodtech Sectors' on January 30 from noon to 2pm. A group of experts from the relevant sectors will take part in the event at the HEC Paris in Qatar campus in Msheireb Downtown.

The masterclass will include presentations followed by a panel discussion featuring various prominent figures from the industry as well as HEC Paris alumni. They will discuss opportunities, challenges and necessary enablers to unfold the full potential of the agri-food sector.

The presenters in the discussion are: Ghanim al-Sulaiti, founder, Enbat Holdings and HEC Paris alumnus; Sophie Benard, food strategist and HEC Paris alumni; and Hussein al-Hussein, regional manager for the Mena region at Farm to Plate Company. The session will be moderated by Dr Delphine Acloque, food security adviser to the Ministry of Municipality.

The panellists at the event are: Alwyn Severien, founder and CEO of Algama Foods, vice-president of the French Microalgae association and food-tech ambassador for the French government; Ramzi Schumann, director of commercialisation at Vital Foods Technologies

and HEC Paris alumnus; Firas Khalil, director of information technology at Baladna Food Industries and HEC Paris alumnus; Mohamed Batran, group general manager at Agrico Qatar and Mickaël Boccacino, president of DIFFERS Company and HEC alumnus.

The panellists will explore the latest innovations and investments in the agri-tech and food-tech sectors, as HEC Paris will bring together Qatari, GCC and French stakeholders to shed light on the current agri-food challenges and dive into some insightful entrepreneurial journeys. With technology transformation, climate change and global threats on food security



are shaping a new wave of concerns as well as major opportunities in the agri-food sector. Investments in agri-tech and food-tech businesses and pilot projects have increased worldwide and many GCC countries are at the forefront of this trend.

Qatar-based researcher highlights effective DKD treatment options

By Joseph Varghese
Staff Reporter

A Qatar-based researcher has highlighted two effective treatment options for diabetic kidney disease (DKD), noting that they are able to provide better long-term outcomes.

Mohamad M Alkadi at the Division of Nephrology, Department of Medicine, Hamad General Hospital, as well as Transplant Nephrology Fellow at Weill Cornell Medicine New York in an article in Qatar Medical Journal and featured on Qscience.com, describes sodium-glucose transport protein 2 inhibitors (SGLT2i) along with nonsteroidal

oidal MRA as effective treatment options for DKD patients.

Alkadi highlights that given the overwhelming evidence of their renal and cardiac efficacy and safety, both SGLT2i and nonsteroidal MRA are now part of the Kidney Disease Improving Global Outcomes and the American Diabetes Association guidelines.

"These guidelines recommend using SGLT2i as a first-line therapy in DKD patients with estimated glomerular filtration rate (eGFR) \geq 20 mL/min/1.73 m² with or without albuminuria.

They also recommend using nonsteroidal MRA called Finerenone in DKD patients with eGFR \geq 25 mL/min/1.73 m² and mod-

erately to severely increased albuminuria. Thus, in the current era physicians have more treatment options to manage DKD patients leading to better long-term renal and cardiac outcomes," he explains.

Pointing out that both these treatment options have emerged recently Dr Alkadi says "From 2016 onwards, numerous studies showed that a new class of antidiabetic medications, SGLT2i, exhibits a synergistic effect in terms of renal and cardiac outcomes in DKD patients. In late 2020, a new nonsteroidal, selective mineralocorticoid receptor antagonist MRA, Finerenone was shown to improve renal and cardiac outcomes in DKD

patients synergistically."

According to the researcher, since early 1990s, angiotensin-converting enzyme inhibitors and angiotensin II receptor blockers have been the mainstay of treatment for DKD patients, given their proven renoprotective, cardioprotective, and antiproteinuric effects.

However, physicians did not have much to offer patients once they maximised the doses of these medications other than controlling their blood pressure and blood sugar and applying lifestyle modifications.

"In 2019, Canagliflozin became the first SGLT2i to receive the US Food and Drug Administration ap-

proval for treating DKD patients. In 2020, a landmark study in managing CKD patients, was published. It was the first study to assess the efficacy and safety of the SGLT2i, Dapagliflozin, in adult CKD patients with eGFR as low as 25 mL/minute/1.73 m², with or without type 2 diabetes mellitus," he notes.

The use of Dapagliflozin resulted in a significant relative risk reduction (39%) of a composite primary outcome of decline in eGFR \geq 50%, end-stage kidney disease, and death from renal or cardiovascular causes in both diabetic and non-diabetic patients.

In late 2020, Finerenone was shown to improve renal and cardiac outcomes in DKD patients.

The FIDELIO-DKD study included adult DKD patients with an eGFR as low as 25 mL per minute per 1.73 m² and moderately to severely increased albuminuria.

According to him, the use of Finerenone in DKD patients resulted in a significant risk reduction rate (18%) of a primary composite outcome of kidney failure, a sustained decrease in eGFR of \approx 40% from baseline, or death from renal causes.

It also resulted in a significant risk reduction rate (14%) for a secondary composite outcome of death from cardiovascular causes, non-fatal myocardial infarction, non-fatal stroke, or hospitalisation for heart failure.

Switzerland says Israeli president subject of criminal complaints at Davos

Reuters
Geneva

Swiss prosecutors yesterday confirmed that Israeli President Isaac Herzog had been the subject of criminal complaints during his visit to the World Economic Forum in Davos,

as Israel finds itself accused of committing war crimes in Gaza.

“The criminal complaints will be examined according to the usual procedure,” the Office of the Swiss Attorney-General said, adding that it would contact the Swiss foreign ministry to examine the question of immunity of the individual concerned.

In theory, third countries do not hold criminal jurisdiction over current heads of states, heads of governments and foreign ministers of other countries.

The Office of the Swiss Attorney-General would not reveal details about the nature and number of the complaints, nor who had lodged them.

A spokesperson for Herzog’s office did not comment on the statement by Swiss prosecutors, saying only that Herzog had been to Davos to present Israel’s position on the situation in Gaza.

Herzog spoke at the World Economic Forum on Thursday, where he called on the international community to reject geno-

cide allegations against Israel.

Herzog said last week there was “nothing more atrocious” than the lawsuit filed by South Africa with the International Court of Justice (ICJ) accusing Israel of genocide against Palestinians in Gaza.

In making its case, South Africa named Herzog and other Israeli officials it says have ex-

pressed genocidal intent against Palestinians.

The Israeli offensive in the Gaza Strip launched in the wake of a storming by Hamas fighters into southern Israel in the first week of October has displaced most of the enclave’s 2.3mn people and caused a grave humanitarian crisis.

Gaza doctor amputates niece’s leg at home, without anaesthesia



Hani Bseiso, a Palestinian doctor who performed a leg amputation on his niece, A'hed Bseiso (right), at home without anaesthesia, speaks during an interview with Reuters nearly a month after the procedure, in Gaza City.



Reuters
Gaza

Palestinian doctor Hani Bseiso faced an agonising decision when his teenage niece was wounded by Israeli shelling of her Gaza City home: amputate her leg or risk her bleeding to death.

Unable to reach a nearby hospital, and using little more than a pair of scissors and some gauze he had in his medical bag, he removed the lower part of A'hed Bseiso's right leg in an operation carried out on the kitchen table without anaesthetic.

Grainy video footage that went viral on Instagram shows him wiping the bloody stump of her right leg as she lies on the table. One of her brothers holds her steady, another holds up two mobile phones to provide better lighting. The house is only 1.8km from Gaza's Al-Shifa hospital, usually a six-minute drive or a 25-minute walk away, but Bseiso said intense Israeli fire in the area made it too dangerous to try to get there.

“Unfortunately, I did not have any other choice. The choice was that I either let the girl die or I try to the best of my abilities,” Bseiso told Reuters this week in an interview in the room where he amputated her leg on Dec 19.

Reuters was unable to confirm independently what struck her home, why it came under fire and what events preceded the attack.

“Could I get her to the hospital? Of course not,” Bseiso said,

describing the area as “under siege”. “The tanks were at the entrance of the house.” Israeli authorities say they work to minimise harm to civilians.

Asked for comment about the events of Dec 19, the Israeli military did not specifically respond to questions about the incident at A'hed Bseiso's home, but said Hamas used hospital complexes as cover, an allegation the group denies.

“A central feature of Hamas' strategy is the exploitation of civilian structures for fighters' purposes,” the military told Reuters.

‘THANKS TO GOD’

A'hed Bseiso, 18, is part of a generation of young amputees emerging from the war being fought in Gaza since Hamas fighters stormed Israel in the first week of October.

Doctors say many of those killed in the Gaza Strip since then might have been saved if they had been able to reach hospital.

Lying in bed several weeks after the amputation, A'hed Bseiso told Reuters she found an Israeli tank near her house when she went outside at about 10:30am to get a signal to call her father, who lives abroad.

She and her sister went inside and closed the blinds of the house in case it was shelled. Shortly afterwards, the building came under fire and she was wounded, she said.

She realised she had no feeling in her leg when family members tried to help her

by pulling out shrapnel. “They placed me on the dining table. There was no medical equipment. My uncle saw the sponge that we clean the dishes with, a wire, washing-up liquid and chlorine (disinfectant),” she said.

“He took them and he started scrubbing my leg. He amputated my leg without anaesthetics and without anything at home.” Asked how she withstood the pain, she said: “I was just saying ‘Thanks to God’ and reading the Qur’an. Thanks to God, I did not feel much but of course there was pain, and the scene and the shock.”

She has since undergone further operations in hospital to treat the injuries she received.

More than 24,000 Palestinians have been killed since Israel began its military campaign in Gaza in response to the October first week storming, Palestinian officials say.

Many others, including children, have had limbs amputated because of the severity of their wounds during the Israeli offensive, which Israel's military says is intended to eliminate Hamas and secure the release of the remaining hostages.

More than 1,000 children in Gaza had undergone leg amputations by the end of November, according to the UN children's agency Unicef.

Poor hygiene and shortages of medicine further endanger lives, and doctors say supplies to hospitals are hindered by the lack of access to them.

Nearly 20,000 babies born into Gaza conflict: UN

AFP
Geneva

The United Nations said yesterday that thousands of babies had been born in conditions “beyond belief” in Gaza since the war there erupted more than three months ago.

Unicef spokeswoman Tess Ingram, back from a recent visit to the Gaza Strip, described mothers bleeding to death and one nurse who had performed emergency caesareans on six dead women.

Nearly 20,000 babies have been born into the war that began after Hamas stormed Israel in the first week of October, according to Unicef, the UN children's agency.

“That's a baby born into this horrendous war every 10 minutes,” Ingram told reporters in Geneva via videolink from Oman.

“Becoming a mother should be a time for celebration. In Gaza, it's another child delivered into hell,” she said, emphasising a need for urgent international action.

“Seeing newborn babies suffer, while some mothers bleed to death, should keep us all awake at night,” she said.

Israel has vowed to “annihilate” Hamas in response, and its air

and ground offensive has killed at least 24,762 Palestinians, around 70% of them women, children and adolescents, according to figures from the Hamas-run health ministry.

Ingram described “heartbreaking” meetings with women caught up in the chaos.

One woman, Mashael, was pregnant when her house was hit and her husband buried under the rubble for several days, and her baby stopped moving.

“She says she is sure now, about a month later, that the baby is dead,” Ingram said. But, she added: “She is still waiting for medical care.”

Mashael had told her it was best “a baby isn't born into this nightmare”, she said.

Ingram also told the story of a nurse named Webda, who said she had performed emergency caesareans on six dead women in the past eight weeks.

“Mothers face unimaginable challenges in accessing adequate medical care, nutrition and protection before, during and after giving birth,” Ingram said.

“The situation of pregnant women and newborns in the Gaza Strip is beyond belief, and it demands intensified and immedi-

US carries out fresh strikes against Houthis

AFP/Reuters
Washington

The US military carried out another round of strikes against Yemen's Houthi rebels yesterday, targeting missile launchers that were preparing for attacks on shipping in the Red Sea, the White House said.

“This morning, US forces conducted three successful self-defence strikes against Houthi targets in Yemen,” National Security Council spokesman John Kirby told reporters.

HOUTHIS NOT KEEN TO EXPAND ATTACKS

Earlier, Yemen's Houthis said they did not intend to expand their attacks on shipping in and around the Red Sea further, beyond their stated aims of blockading Israel and retaliating against the US and Britain for air strikes.

In an interview with Reuters, spokesman Mohamed Abdulsalam, who is also the chief Houthi negotiator in peace talks over the country's decade-old civil war, told Reuters the group had no plans to target longstanding foes. “We do not want the escalation to expand. This is not our demand. We imposed rules of engagement in which not a single drop of blood was

shed or major material losses,” said Abdulsalam. “It represented pressure on Israel only, it did not represent pressure on any country in the world.” The Houthis, who control most of Yemen's populated areas, have attacked ships at the mouth of the Red Sea since October, in what they say is a show of solidarity with Palestinians by targeting vessels linked to Israel.

“What the Yemeni people did in the beginning was to target Israeli ships heading to Israel without causing any human or even significant material losses, just preventing ships from passing as a natural right,” said Abdulsalam. “Now, when America joined in and escalated the situation further, there is no doubt that Yemen will respond,” he said. The Houthi attacks have forced international shipping companies to route trade between Europe and Asia around Africa, adding time and costs. The US and Britain bombed Houthi targets last week in what they called an intervention to keep one of the world's busiest shipping routes open.

“We do not want the conflict to expand in the region and we do not prefer that, and we are still working on non-escalation, but the decision is up to the Americans, as long as they continue to attack,” said Abdulsalam. “Yemen is concerned with responding, and is interested in verifying or maintaining its position by preventing Israeli ships from heading to the occupied Palestinian territories.”

DEVASTATION

Three homes destroyed in Israeli strikes on south Lebanon

Israeli air strikes “completely destroyed” at least three houses in southern Lebanon yesterday, official news agency NNA and the mayor of the affected border community said, AFP reported from Beirut. The NNA reported four houses were targeted “since this morning by the Israeli air force in Kfar Kila”, a village near the Israel-Lebanon border, while three were “completely destroyed”. A fifth home was also targeted by artillery fire, the NNA said. Since the surprise October first week storming by Hamas on southern Israel, there have been near daily exchanges of fire across the border between the Israeli army and the Hezbollah group. Israel has repeatedly bombarded border villages, with the violence killing more than 195 people in Lebanon, including at least 142 Hezbollah fighters, according to an AFP tally. On the Israeli side, 15 people have been killed, of whom nine were soldiers and six civilians, according to the Israeli army. The army said yesterday it had “conducted air strikes and carried out artillery and tank fire against Hezbollah observation posts and infrastructure” in the Kfar Kila sector.

CORRUPTION

Iraq finds nearly \$800mn fraud in funds for IS victims

Iraq's National Security Service announced it had uncovered a corruption scheme involving fraud and embezzlement of payments intended for victims of Islamic State that saw more than 1tn Iraqi dinars (\$760mn) taken from state coffers, Reuters reported from Baghdad. Iraqi state media said a three-month investigation had led to the arrest of more than 30 suspects including senior employees at several state entities such as retirement funds and the country's Martyrs Foundation. The alleged corruption scheme based in Anbar province saw defendants falsify pension transactions with faked identities and false credit card information and sell confidential data. The wasted funds totalled more than 1tn 32bn Iraq dinars, state media said.

Gaza couple marry in tent city by barbed wire fence

Reuters
Rafah

Palestinian groom Mohamed al-Ghandour wanted to give his bride a beautiful wedding but after war began in Gaza they had to flee their homes and the couple finally got married this week in the tent city where they now live.

Ghandour led his wife Shahad by the hand towards the tent decorated with some coloured lights and a mirror with a gold-coloured frame as a few relatives escorted them, clapping in time.

Inside the tent Shahad, wearing a white dress and veil with traditional red embroidery, lifted her hand and Ghandour put a ring on it.

“I wanted a party. I wanted a celebration, a wedding. I wanted to invite my friends, my relatives and my cousins, like anyone would,” said Ghandour.

The couple are from Gaza City in the north of the tiny enclave where some of the worst of Israel's heavy bombardment and the fighting between it and Hamas



A Palestinian couple, Mohamed al-Ghandour and his bride Shahad, walks on their wedding day in the tent camp, amid the ongoing conflict between Israel and the Hamas group, in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip.

have taken place since the war began in the first week of October.

The homes of both Ghandour's family and Shahad's family were destroyed in Israeli airstrikes, they said, and they lost cousins and other family members in the bombardment.

“My happiness is maybe at 3% but will get myself ready for my wife. I want to make her happy,” said Ghandour.

The war began when Hamas fighters stormed into Israel.

Instead of the big party that Ghandour had wanted, he and Shahad had a small group of relatives who like them had managed to leave Gaza City and flee to Rafah, at the far southern end of the strip next to Egypt.

Shahad's mother led a small group of women ululating in celebration of the marriage and somebody had saved batteries for

a small portable music player.

For a wedding feast in an enclave that the UN warns is heading towards famine, the couple had only a few snacks in plastic package, laid out carefully for them in the tent.

Both families had already spent lots of money on the wedding before the war began. Shahad had spent more than \$2,000 on clothes, they said.

“My dream was to give Shahad the best wedding, the most beautiful in the world,” said her mother, Umm Yahia Khalifa.

“We prepared her wedding things and she was happy. But it is all gone in the shelling. Every time she remembers she starts to cry,” she said. As the small wedding party began to clap and dance, people around them went about their daily chores among the lines of tents stretched across the sand, seeking food or hanging laundry.

A small girl in a pink and white dress smiled broadly as the clapping began and joined a group of other children dancing as the sun set behind the high border fence topped with barbed wire.



HOPE Qatar students visit Bangladesh embassy



A group of 14 special needs children from HOPE Qatar Centre visited Bangladesh embassy and got a glimpse of the activities and the services. The children visited the consular and e-passport desks with guidance and briefing from the embassy officials. They attended screening of a video documentary on Bangladesh. The ambassador delivered a motivational speech to the children. At the end of the two-hour-long visit, the envoy entertained the children with their favourite food and handed over welcome gifts. The visit was a part of the effort of the HOPE Qatar Centre to acquaint the special children with the activities of various institutions and organisations.

Award-winning author to speak on resilience, identity at VCUarts Qatar

Award-winning Palestinian-American author Hala Alyan will give a public talk at Virginia Commonwealth University School of the Arts in Qatar (VCUarts Qatar) on January 22, at 5.30pm.

Titled 'Endurance and Solidarity Through Art', Alyan, a poet, clinical psychologist and novelist, will read selected poems and nonfiction pieces touching upon themes of resilience, identity and heritage during the talk at the Qatar Foundation partner university.

Delving into the pivotal role of art in fortifying both personal capacity and solidarity, she will also discuss strategies for building endurance during this time. The talk will be followed by a question-and-answer session.



Haya Alyan

Alyan is the author of the novel *Salt Houses*, winner of the Dayton Literary Peace Prize and the Arab American Book

Award and a finalist for the Chautauqua Prize.

Her latest novel, *The Arsonists City*, was a finalist for the Aspen Words Literary Prize. She is also the author of four award-winning poetry collections, most recently *The Twenty-Ninth Year*. Her work has been published by *The New Yorker*, *The Academy of American Poets*, *LitHub*, *The New York Times* and elsewhere. She lives in Brooklyn with her family, where she is a clinical psychologist and professor at New York University.

Her forthcoming poetry collection, *The Moon that Turns You Back*, will be published by Ecco, a New York-based publishing imprint of HarperCollins, next year.

ICC hosts Wednesday Fiesta



The latest ICC Wednesday Fiesta conducted by the Indian Cultural Centre featured a variety entertainment programme.



Expatriate forum marks 'Chaliyar Day'

Indian expatriate organisation Chaliyar Doha observed 'Chaliyar Day' on January 11, the death anniversary of K A Rahman, an environmentalist who campaigned for the protection of the Chaliyar River.

Media One reporter Mujeeb Rahman Vazhakkad inaugurated the event. Renowned writer M T Nilambur (Ibrahim), in his keynote address, spoke about the influence of 44 rivers of Kerala on Malayalam literature.

Jaisal Elamaram, in his K A Rahman memorial lecture, recalled that the health and happiness of human beings is being destroyed due to the pollution of nature and the river, against which K A Rahman fought.

Chaliyar Doha president Zameel Abdul Vahid Chaliyam presided.



General secretary C T Siddique Cheruvadi welcomed the gathering and Jabir Beypore proposed a vote of thanks.

Chaliyar Doha chief adviser V C Mashhood, founder member Siddique Vazhakkad, Kodyathoor Pain and Palliative Qatar chapter president Noufal Kattayat, general secretary Basheer Thuvvarikkal, Cultural Forum Malappuram district secretary Shameer Veet-

tilakath, Eppaq president Faisal Babu and leaders of different Panchayaths under Chaliyar Doha participated in the event.

Chaliyar Doha vice presidents Ratheesh Kakkov, Mohamed Layis Kuniyil, Dr Shafeeq Thappi, Raghunath Feroke, Abdul Azeez Cheruvannur, secretaries Sabiqussalam Edavanna, Abi Chungathara and Thouseef Kavanoor led the programme.

Chekyat panchayat triumphs in cricket tourney



Chekyat panchayat won a three-day cricket tournament organised by Qatar KMCC Nadapuram Mandalam Committee. In the final, the Chekyat team led by Irshad defeated Thuneri team led by Muneer Theyambadi. Chekyat's Mufid Mufi, who scored a century in the final, won the player of the match award. Chekyat's Sajeer Shahjahan was named the player of the tournament.

SA scholar to deliver lecture on Global South at NU-Q

Herman Wasserman, professor and chair of the Department of Journalism at Stellenbosch University, will examine disinformation and its drivers in the Global South at the inaugural Northwestern University in Qatar (NU-Q) Lecture on the Global South, on January 24.

The signature annual event addresses critical issues in the Global South. Joining NU-Q students, faculty and staff for the lecture, Wasserman will look into disinformation in the context of the North-South relationship and how disinformation studies replicate the asymmetrical knowledge production characterising the field as a whole.

He will also discuss the ways Global South brings to light the importance of

history, social dynamics and power relations in understanding the drivers of disinformation and the most appropriate responses to the problem.

"Disinformation is a key concern in empirical research, media practice and political discourse, and despite the strong growth in academic scholarship and professional fact-checking, this burgeoning subfield of communication studies remains dominated by perspectives and experiences from the Global North," said Marwan M Kraidy, dean and CEO of NU-Q.

"As a media school and a community of evidence-based storytellers, disinformation poses a threat to our core values. I'm delighted to have a scholar of Herman's global stature join us for this



Herman Wasserman

community event, which will help our students, faculty and staff engage critically with disinformation and examine

the importance of the Global South as a context for new understandings of disinformation."

A media studies scholar from South Africa, Wasserman's career began in the early 2000s after spending several years working as a newspaper journalist in Cape Town. His scholarly productions have focused on media in post-apartheid South Africa and include more than 80 articles in peer-reviewed journals, numerous book chapters and co-authored books and monographs, including *Media, Geopolitics, and Power: A View from the Global South* (University of Illinois Press, 2018); *Tabloid Journalism in South Africa: True Story!* (African Expressive Cultures); and *China's Media and Soft Power in Africa: Promotion and Perceptions*.

In addition to his scholarly work, Wasserman has served as a consultant for multiple media, NGOs and international organisations, including Unesco, Deutsche Welle Akademie, Digital Public Square, Africa Check and the Center for International Media Assistance.

He also serves on the scientific committee of Reporters without Borders, is a fellow of the International Communication Association, and is an elected member of the Academy of Science of South Africa.

The NU-Q Lecture on the Global South is part of a series of community programmes hosted by the Institute for Advanced Study in the Global South (#IAS_NUQ), designed to inform and engage the NU-Q community on pressing issues in the Global South.

MES retains overall championship at 'Kalanjali 2023'



MES Indian School has retained the overall championship for a second consecutive year at 'Kalanjali 2023', an inter-school youth festival for Indian schools in Qatar hosted by Media Pen at Ideal Indian School over three days. About 200 students took part in 69 events covering art, literary and cultural domains. Out of the 64 events contested, MES won in 44 events, securing 23 first prizes, 12 second prizes and nine third prizes. MES principal Dr Hameeda Kader and other officials received the trophy from the chief guest, Indian ambassador Vipul and special guest, renowned South Indian film artiste and National Award winner Aparana Balamurali. For MES, Anver, Sumitha Nassar and Harshan along with a team of teachers co-ordinated the Kalanjali competitions.

BPS tiny tot wins entry in India Book of Records

Slishta Prakash, a student at Birla Public School (BPS) kindergarten, has won an entry in the *India Book of Records* for being the youngest child to play and record the Indian National Anthem on an electric keyboard. She played with her right index finger in 1 minute and 34 seconds, at the age of three years and eight months.



QTS celebrates Pongal festival on a grand scale



Indian socio-cultural organisation Qatar Tamizhar Sangam (QTS), celebrated Pongal festival on a grand scale with the participation of more than 1,500 people, comprising members and their families at the Al Thakira Youth Centre, Al Khor. The day-long programme featured traditional games for all age groups and cultural shows in the evening. Pongal meals with variety of side dishes were served on a banana leaf to all participants. Indian embassy's deputy chief of mission Sandeep Kumar and leaders of various Indian forums attended. Those interested to join QTS can contact WhatsApp number 33521857 or visit www.qatartamizharsangam.org



Rajagiri school nurtures advocates for sustainability



GSP director Amanda Abrom is seen with some members of the Green Army and officials during her visit to RPS.

RPS embraces Global Schools Programme

Rajagiri Public School (RPS), Doha, has embraced the Global Schools Programme (GSP) to nurture young minds into ardent advocates for a sustainable future, a statement said. This is an initiative of the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network in support of Unesco's Global Action Programme on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). Rajagiri's commitment to ESD predates their formal affiliation with the GSP. The formation of the Ploggers' Club, which has embarked on microplastics cleanup missions, was an example. The campus pulsates with plastic-free vitality. Disposable plates have been replaced by reusable alternatives at school functions. During birthdays, wrapper-free sweets are encouraged. These seemingly small steps weave a tapestry of environmental consciousness, reminding students of their role in shaping a sustainable future. The school garden, tended by students across sections, embodies Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 15 (Life on Land), showcasing the power of collaborative stewardship. The school recently created a Miyawaki forest, complete with a bird feeder and birdbath. ESD at Rajagiri permeates the very fabric of learning. Instead of presenting sustainability as a standalone subject, teachers ingeniously weave its principles into various disciplines. Topics are thoughtfully linked with specific SDGs, organically cultivating awareness and a sense of global inter-connectedness. Dramatisation and gamification techniques further invigorate learning, transform-



The SDG snake and ladder game.

ing classrooms into vibrant laboratories of sustainable action. The selection process for the next cohort of GSP Advocates is poised to begin in April this year. Each year, 300 teachers worldwide are empowered to become vocal champions for the planet, wielding the torch of knowledge and responsibility. Amanda Abrom, director, GSP, recently visited RPS, and appreciated the efforts of the institution, the statement added.

BPS hosts CBSE development programme for teachers

India's Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) Professional Development Programme, organised by Qatar Sahodaya for the teachers of the CBSE schools in Qatar was held at Birla Public School (BPS). CBSE Delhi joint secretary Dharini Arun and Chandigarh St Joseph's Senior Secondary School principal Monica Chawla were welcomed by BPS vice chairperson Maria Pakalomattom, management representative Chindu Rappai and acting principal Radhika Rele along with the other members of the leadership team. Monica Chawla, the resource person, gave insight into the Na-



tional Education Policy (NEP) 2020. Dharini Arun urged the teacher fraternity to join hands to impart the best education to students of the Indian community, to help them reach great heights in life. The session, attended by teachers from

various CBSE schools in Qatar, focused on the pedagogical changes and innovations advocated by NEP 2020, the implementation strategies and challenges faced by schools in integrating it. The discussions and activities

facilitated a deeper understanding of the policy's implications and its potential impact on the learners and facilitators. The session served as a platform to explore the transformative potential of NEP 2020 and its relevance in the local educational

context. The event also provided insights regarding practical strategies to effectively implement the policy's recommendations to improve the quality of education among CBSE schools in Qatar. The six-hour training session

ended with chapter convener and Podar Pearl School principal Manjari Recriwal, Radhika Rele, DPS-Modern Indian School principal Asna Nafees and other principals presenting mementos to the guests.



In Davos, African nations want to tell a different story

By Yann Schreiber
AFP

From South Africa to Rwanda to Nigeria, African countries put on a show of force at the World Economic Forum (WEF) this week, seeking to transform their image by grabbing private investment rather than development aid.

This year in Davos there were no panels on development aid, and African policymakers at the Swiss Alpine resort instead discussed free trade, investment and the energy transition.

With the fastest growing population of young people in the world, African officials and business-people believe the continent provides an unparalleled opportunity for investors.

“There is the story of all of these challenges and risk but there is also a formidable

story of the amazing investment opportunities that the continent offers,” said Marie-Laure Akin-Olugbade, a senior executive at the African Development Bank.

“We think that we need to tell the story,” she said, speaking during an event at the summit that gathers business and political elites.

“Telling the story about what the continent offers is already a very good step in getting the private sector to crowd in,” Akin-Olugbade added.

Her enthusiasm was shared by others.

“We are in a position to really take advantage of the digital revolution in the world,” Kashim Shettima, Nigeria’s vice-president, said during a discussion about a project of the pan-African free trade area group.

The African Continental Free Trade Area is made up of 47 countries with 1.4bn people.

“People are beginning to understand the importance of Africa’s place in history going forward over the next 10, 20 years,” said World Bank President Ajay Banga.

Beninese singer Angelique Kidjo said: “Things are changing. Things have been changing for the last decade in music, in art in general. And why won’t the business change?”

The UN Development Programme (UNDP) presented a new initiative called “Timbuktoo” during the forum, a plan to invest \$1bn of public and private capital in innovative start-ups across the continent.

“Africa is increasingly going to emerge as an investment destination,” UNDP administrator Achim Steiner told AFP.

Today’s value of young companies in Africa represents only 0.2% of young companies worldwide.

Most of the capital injected into African start-ups comes from abroad, while 83%

goes to businesses in just four countries: Egypt, Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa, according to the UN.

“So many ideas die an early death, simply because there is not the will to take a bet,” Steiner said.

Rwandan President Paul Kagame said at the launch of the UNDP initiative that African “start-ups lack the funding to compete at a global level”.

Kagame announced Rwanda would provide \$3mn to the fund.

Under the project, the money will be used to establish eight innovation centres in eight African countries including Ghana, Morocco and Senegal.

“One of the fundamental challenges to achieving development goals in Africa remains the ability to mobilise significant resources to finance,” Ghana’s President Nana Akufo-Addo said.

Since most African economies had min-

imal room to spend more, he said “private sector investments will play a significant role”.

Norwegian International Development Minister Anne Beathe Tivnnerheim said that “humanitarian situations out there are increasing, in volume, in scale, the needs are increasing” but the financial space to address them were “shrinking”.

Tivnnerheim said there was a “perception” of risk, which could be absorbed by public money.

Norway and the United States recently launched a programme that will finance small and medium-sized businesses in Africa’s agricultural sector.

The money will not go directly to companies, but in funds that will include money from private investors.

“It can be done if we design the guarantee mechanism in the right way,” Tivnnerheim said.

African bank expats return to Ethiopia after PM apology

AFP
Abidjan

The African Development Bank (AfDB) said yesterday that its international staff had returned to Ethiopia, a month after their withdrawal following the assault of two staffers by security forces.

AfDB president Akinwumi Adesina met Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed in

Addis Ababa at the end of last month, the bank said in a statement.

It has “subsequently received formal apologies from the prime minister on behalf of the government of Ethiopia, with firm assurances of the security and safety of the bank and its personnel”, the Abidjan-based bank said.

On December 20, it said two of its Addis Ababa-based staff had been “unlawfully arrested, physically assaulted, and detained

for hours without charge or any official explanation” at the end of October.

The bank did not identify the two victims.

However, two diplomatic sources in Addis Ababa previously confirmed reports that the bank’s Ethiopia director Abdul Kamara was one of them and that he had since left the country.

The AfDB said yesterday that it was “de-lighted with and reassured by the strong

personal leadership and firm commitment shown by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, which have led to the resolution of the impasse following the incident”.

The bank was created in 1964 to finance development efforts in Africa.

Apart from countries of the African Union, its membership includes about 20 non-African nations.

Its investments in Ethiopia come to \$1.24bn, covering 22 projects.

Comoros opposition call for mass protest goes unheeded

AFP
Moroni

Call by the defeated opposition candidates in the Comoros for a mass protest against President Azali Assoumani’s re-election went unheeded yesterday, confronted by a heavy security presence.

The opposition challengers urged people across the Indian Ocean island chain to block roads after Friday prayers to denounce Assoumani’s “electoral masquerade”.

However, turnout was half the usual number at Friday prayers at the largest mosque in the capital Moroni, worshippers said, and there was no sign of political agitation afterwards.

Police and soldiers were deployed around the Medina market area on key junctions, some of them hooded or wearing surgical masks to hide their identities.

Bilali Soidiki, a supporter of opposition challenger Bourhane Hamidou, blamed the government’s clampdown on communications – Internet services have been disrupted since Wednesday.

“The government is preventing any communication,” he told AFP. “With the Internet shutdown it was difficult to mobilise, especially when the five candidates’ call to demonstrate was announced at night.”

Moroni had been paralysed by two days of running street-battles between stone-throwing youths and armed soldiers.

At least one person was fatally wounded, according to medics.

However, while tensions remain high, some in the city took advantage of the break in hostilities on the day of prayer to try to get their businesses up and running.

“Because of the riots I’ve had two days without work,” sighed stallholder Said, grilling chicken wings near the mosque and complaining about the quality of his charcoal.

While the opposition blamed the government crackdown for the lack of mobilisation, one of the youths whose protests have rocked the capital had a different explanation.

Kassim Omar Abdou, a student in his 20s, joined a protest group from a slum in the south of the city and has a bandage on his leg where he was hit by a tear gas grenade.

The slum was strangely calm yesterday.

“They received money this morning in exchange for a promise to stop everything,” Omar Abdou said of his comrades.

Other witnesses confirmed this turn of events to AFP.

Assoumani’s victory is expected to be confirmed by the Supreme Court at the weekend after the electoral commission declared he had won more than 60% in Sunday’s first-round vote.

However, the opposition says the unexpectedly low 16% turnout figure in the presidential vote falls far



A general view of a barricaded road in Moroni following the announcement of the presidential election results. The Comoros declared a curfew on Wednesday after security forces clashed with protesters angered by the re-election of President Azali Assoumani in a vote that opposition leaders denounced as fraudulent.

short of the figure for parallel governor polls.

According to the official tally, 189,497 Comorans voted to choose governors for each of the three islands in the archipelago, but only 55,258 cast a vote for president.

Yesterday the US embassy in Moroni expressed concern about the results and urged the electoral commission to “clarify” them before they are validated by the supreme court.

The embassy said the results announced by the National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI) raise “serious concerns that must be addressed to maintain the peace and the well-being of the nation”.

“We call on the CENI, and Comoran authorities, to ensure full transparency and clarify the results it announced,” the embassy said.

France, which was the islands’ colonial power until independence in 1975, also expressed concern, urging “all Comoran actors to favour restraint and dialogue”.

The UN and the EU have previously called for calm.

And on the higher turnout for gubernatorial elections than for the presidential vote, the US embassy said this “was not apparent to domestic and international elections observers”.

Assoumani, a 65-year-old former military ruler turned civilian president, has dismissed the concerns.

A nightly curfew was declared to curtail the unrest.

Some 45% of the Comoros’ population of 870,000 lives below the poverty line.

Namibia president medical check-up reveals ‘cancerous cells’

A routine medical check-up on President Hage Geingob has revealed “cancerous cells”, the Namibian presidency announced yesterday.

The president “was due for a colonoscopy and a gastroscopy on January 8, 2024, which were followed up with a biopsy”, his office said in a statement.

The 82-year-old statesman will undertake “appropriate” treatment to deal with the cancerous cells, it added.

Health scares have followed the southern Africa nation’s president even before he took up office.

In 2013, the year before his first term began, Geingob underwent brain surgery.

Last year, the tall, deep-voiced leader, underwent an aortic operation in neighbouring South Africa.

The desert nation of Namibia is to hold presidential and national assembly elections towards the end of the year.

In the meantime, the president’s office “wishes to inform the Namibian public that President Geingob will continue to carry out presidential duties, alongside the Cabinet”.

Geingob, who is serving his second term, was first elected as president in 2014 after spending 12 years as the country’s longest serving prime minister. – **AFP**

Extreme Congo floods leave 350,000 needing aid: UN

The worst floods in six decades have left more than 350,000 people in need of urgent aid in the Republic of Congo where many villages can be reached only by boat, the UN said yesterday.

Extreme rainfall since October has led the banks around the Ubangi River – a tributary to the Congo river – to burst, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said.

“The United Nations is responding to a flood

disaster, unprecedented in scale for six decades, and with hundreds of thousands of people in need of humanitarian assistance,” an OCHA spokesman said.

The republic, also known as Congo-Brazzaville, declared an emergency on December 29.

On the other side of the Congo river, the second largest in Africa after the Nile, the Democratic Republic of the Congo has also seen exceptional floods. – **AFP**

Somalia rules out mediation unless Ethiopia retracts Somaliland deal

Somalia has ruled out mediation with Ethiopia unless Addis Ababa cancels a controversial maritime deal with the breakaway region of Somaliland.

Tensions in the Horn of Africa have escalated since landlocked Ethiopia reached a memorandum of understanding with Somaliland on January 1 that gives it much sought-after access to the sea.

In return, Somaliland – which unilaterally declared independence in 1991 – has said that Ethiopia would give it formal recognition.

This has not been confirmed by Addis Ababa.

“There is no space for mediation unless Ethiopia retracts its illegal MoU (memorandum of understanding) and reaffirms the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Somalia,” the Somali foreign ministry said in a statement posted on social media.

The two countries have a history of stormy relations and territorial feuds, fighting two wars in the late 20th century.

Somaliland’s government on Thursday alleged that Somalia had “intentionally reneged on all agreements made with Somaliland”, including on security matters and air space access.

The statement came after the Somali Civil Aviation Authority said it denied entry on Wednesday to an Ethiopian Airlines overflight to the Somaliland capital Hargeisa.

On Thursday, the authority also refused entry into Somali airspace to a Thai-registered cargo plane flying from Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates to Hargeisa.

The African Union’s Peace and Reconciliation Council, a conflict resolution body, on Wednesday urged the two neighbours “to exercise restraint, de-escalate

and engage in meaningful dialogue towards finding a peaceful resolution of the matter”.

East Africa grouping IGAD also held an extraordinary summit in Uganda on Thursday to discuss the feud and the conflict in Sudan.

Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud is in Kampala for the meeting with other regional heads of state.

Ethiopia will not be attending because it was invited at “very short notice”, a foreign ministry spokesman said.

Mogadishu has branded the maritime pact an act of “aggression” by Ethiopia, which has in turn insisted no laws have been transgressed.

Under the wide-ranging agreement, Somaliland agreed to lease 20km (12 miles) of its coast for 50 years to Ethiopia, which wants to set up a naval base and a commer-

cial port on the coast.

The independence claim by the former British protectorate of 4.5mn people is not recognised by the international community.

Mogadishu vehemently opposes Somaliland’s quest for statehood but the fragile central government exercises little authority over the northern region, which has its own government, security forces and currency.

The United States, European Union, China and the Arab League, along with the AU and IGAD have all called for Somalia’s sovereignty to be respected.

Arab League chief Ahmed Aboul Gheit on Wednesday described the MoU as “a blatant attack against Arab, African and international principles, and a clear violation of international law”.

His statement was labelled “unaccept-

able” by the Ethiopian foreign ministry spokesman.

Ethiopia, the second most populous country in Africa and one of the biggest landlocked nations in the world, was cut off from the coast after Eritrea seceded and declared independence in 1993 following a three-decade war.

Addis Ababa had maintained access to a port in Eritrea until the two countries went to war in 1998-2000, and since then Ethiopia has sent most of its sea trade through Djibouti.

While Somaliland is largely stable, Somalia has witnessed decades of civil war and a bloody Islamist insurgency by the Al Qaeda-linked Al Shebaab militant group.

Mohamud has warned that the maritime deal could open the way to a “revival” of Al Shebaab, which has been the target of a major military offensive since 2022. – **AFP**

South Africa seeks to stop New York Mandela auction

A New York auction of Nelson Mandela's memorabilia planned for next month was thrown into doubt yesterday after South African authorities said they would attempt to block it.

Items including the late anti-apartheid leader's ID card and some of his iconic shirts have been listed for sale by a US auction house working with Mandela's daughter Makaziwe.

However, South Africa's ministry of culture now says that it has filed an appeal to halt "the unpermitted export" of the objects.

"Former president Nelson Mandela is integral to South Africa's heritage," Minister Zizi Kodwa said. "It is thus important that we ... ensure that his life's work and experiences remain in the country for generations to come."

Auction house Guernsey's had described the sale - expected to fetch several million dollars - as "remarkable" and "unprecedented".

"To imagine actually owning an artefact touched by this great leader is almost unthinkable," Guernsey's wrote on its website.

However, the house's president, Arlan Ettinger, told AFP that the government's move, which follows an earlier unsuccessful bid to halt the sale, put the firm "in the very, very difficult position of saying; 'Do we go forward with the auction?'"

The "nearly 100 treasured items" that played a role in the Nobel Peace prize winner's life and are slated for sale include clothing, writings and gifts Mandela received from US presidents including Barack Obama and Bill Clinton.

A black silk jacquard shirt Mandela wore when he met Britain's Queen Elizabeth II in 1996 is advertised with a starting price of \$34,000 while an ostrich leather briefcase is going for a minimum of \$24,000.

Offers for his 1993 personal identification booklet are to start at \$75,000.

Guernsey's said Mandela's eldest daughter, Makaziwe, authorised the event as a fund-raiser for a memorial garden to be built next to her father's resting place in the village of Qunu.

AFP was unable to reach Makaziwe Mandela for comment.

Initially advertised in 2021, the auction was first suspended a year later after the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) went to court arguing it included items of historical and cultural importance.

South African judges gave it the green light in December, but SAHRA and the culture ministry have since lodged an application for leave to appeal.

A decision is pending. SAHRA spokesman Ben Mwasinga told AFP that any item associated with a former statesman requires an export permit to be sold abroad, which has not been granted.

Objects of particular concern included Mandela's shirts and writings, he added.

Ettinger said the authority's position was "misguided".

"It would be hard for anyone to define these (items) as being culturally or historically significant," he said.

He described the artefacts as a "small collection of personal items" in some cases given by a father to his daughter that would have likely ended up "on shelves in a closet somewhere and be forgotten in time" rather than in a museum.

The auction house was to consult with its attorneys and the Mandela family to decide the next steps, he added.

Mandela died in 2013 aged 95. The auction is to take place at the Lincoln Centre in New York City and online on February 22. - **AFP**

Canada hands control of rich Arctic lands to Inuit territory

AFP
Ottawa

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has signed over control of resource-rich Arctic lands to the government of the predominantly Inuit territory of Nunavut, in what was billed as the largest land transfer in Canada's history.

Nunavut, at more than 2mn sq km (800,000sq miles), is almost three times the size of the US state of Texas and is believed to hold some of the richest resource deposits in the country including gold, diamonds and rare earth minerals, as well as oil and gas.

With global warming, the Arctic territory is becoming more accessible for mining and shipping.

In its capital Iqaluit, the prime minister signed a devolution agreement with Nunavut Premier PJ Akeagok.



Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau pilots a dog sled with his son Hadrien and officials including Nunavut Premier PJ Akeagok during a visit to Iqaluit, Nunavut, Canada.

vut Premier PJ Akeagok.

It effectively gives the territorial government of Nunavut responsibility over its lands and resources, and the right to collect royalties that would otherwise go to the federal government.

"Inuit have hunted and fished and lived on these lands for generations, some going back well before recorded history. Today begins a new chapter in the history of Nunavut, a transformative chapter," Trudeau

said at the signing ceremony.

"This is a place that is rich with culture, traditional knowledge, critical minerals and other resources that are needed as we build the economy of the future together," he said. "And with this increased control, (the government and people of Nunavut) will be able to have more say and more prosperity"

The agreement comes after decades of negotiations between Nunavut and the federal government. It is to be fully imple-

mented over the next three years.

"It's our land, our resources (now) in the hands of our people," cheered Akeagok.

Ottawa started in the 1960s gradually transferring responsibilities for health, education, social services and other areas to its Arctic territories.

Nunavut, which was created in 1999, is the last of Canada's three Arctic territories - after the Northwest Territories and the Yukon - to take over full control of its lands.

Bolsonaro's Covid-19 vaccination certificate 'false', probe finds

AFP/Reuters
Brasilia

Brazilian ex-president Jair Bolsonaro's coronavirus (Covid-19) vaccination certificate was forged, an investigation by the country's Comptroller General's office revealed on Thursday, but it recommended that the case be closed.

The finding comes after federal police said last year that they uncovered a scheme in which a top Bolsonaro aide allegedly tapped a

network of contacts in the health system and government to obtain fraudulent vaccination certificates for Bolsonaro and others.

Police have said there was evidence Bolsonaro was "fully aware" of the fraudulent entries in the health ministry's electronic vaccination records system, which they said aimed to enable his anti-vaccine inner circle to dodge international travel requirements and other pandemic restrictions.

In the investigation, Brazil's comptroller points to inconsis-

encies between documents from the Brazilian ministry of health and Bolsonaro's vaccination record, which indicates that he was administered a dose of Covid-19 vaccine in Sao Paulo in July 2022.

Thus, "regarding the vaccination that allegedly took place in Sao Paulo - the only record that still remains on (Bolsonaro's) vaccination card...the conclusion was that it was fraud in the state system for registering vaccinations against Covid-19", the regulatory body said in a statement.

The investigation concluded that the vaccination certificate issued to Bolsonaro is "false".

However, it recommended that the case be closed "for lack of sufficient evidence" to find those responsible, after noting that many civil servants were able to enter false data, having gained access to the vaccination computer system.

One of the aims of the investigation was to determine whether federal officials had falsified Bolsonaro's vaccination record.

During his 2019-2022 tenure, the far-right leader consistently

criticised Covid-19 vaccines, insisting that he had no intention of being immunised against the pandemic that has claimed more than 700,000 lives so far in Brazil.

He later admitted that he had not been vaccinated.

Last May, Bolsonaro's home in Brasilia was raided by the federal police under the vaccine probe.

Some of his aides were arrested and his cell phone was seized.

Bolsonaro was infected with Covid-19 in July 2020, nearly one year before the record of his first vaccine.

Boeing 747 cargo plane makes emergency landing in Miami

Reuters/AFP
Washington

An Atlas Air Boeing 747-8 cargo plane made an emergency landing in Miami late on Thursday shortly after departure after suffering an engine fire.

The plane with five crew members safely returned and no injuries were reported.

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) are investigating.

The FAA said a post-flight inspection showed a softball-size hole above the engine, while the NTSB said it "has opened an investigation and is collecting information to evaluate and determine scope of the investigation".

Unverified videos on social media platform X showed flames shooting out of the left wing of the aircraft while in flight.

The plane "landed safely after experiencing an engine malfunction soon after departure", an Atlas Air spokesperson told AFP in a statement.

"The crew followed all standard procedures and safely returned to MIA," the spokesperson said, adding that the airline would investigate the cause of the malfunction.

Boeing said it is supporting Atlas and "will support the NTSB investigation into this incident".

The Atlas Boeing 747-8 is eight years old, according to the FAA and is powered by four General Electric GEnx engines.

GE Aerospace said is providing technical assistance to the FAA and the NTSB.

The engine failure comes against the backdrop of two high-profile jetliner accidents this year.

An Airbus A350 passenger plane operated by Japan Airlines collided with a Coast Guard aircraft in Tokyo, killing five crew members on January 2.

A few days later, a Boeing 737 MAX 9 jet made an emergency landing following a cabin panel blowout, which prompted the FAA to temporarily ground 171 jets for safety checks.

The Atlas Air Flight was headed for San

Juan, Puerto Rico, from Miami International Airport late on Thursday.

The pilot made an emergency call to report an engine fire and requested to return to the airport, according to multi-channel recordings of conversations between air traffic control and the plane available on liveatc.net.

Atlas Air, whose customers include parcel delivery giants DHL and FedEx, went private last year when it was bought by a group led by private equity Apollo Global Management.

Lawmakers avert damaging US government shutdown

Reuters/AFP
Washington

US President Joe Biden has signed into law a stopgap bill that will fund the federal government through early March and avert a partial government shutdown, the White House said yesterday.

The US House of Representatives had earlier approved the measure 314-108, with 106 Republicans and two Democrats in opposition, after the Senate had easily passed the bill, with a 77-18 vote ahead of the weekend deadline.

The "continuing resolution" was pitched by leaders in the upper chamber as public workers were preparing to be sent home unpaid, upending government functions from military operations to food aid to federal policymaking.

"We have good news for America. There will not be a shutdown," Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, a Democrat, said on the Senate floor just before the vote in that chamber.

"Because both sides have worked together, the government will stay open. Services will not be disrupted. We will avoid a needless disaster."

That sentiment was not shared by some far-right House Republicans.

"It's a loss for the American people to join hands with Democrats, form a governing coalition to do what Schumer and the Senate want to do," House Freedom Caucus Chairman Bob Good told reporters after the vote.

Both chambers accelerated their votes because of a forecast for a snowstorm that could have snarled lawmakers' departure for the weekend.

The Democratic-majority Senate and Republican-controlled House are far behind in carrying out their basic duty of funding the government for the fiscal year that began on October 1, with lawmakers scrambling to keep the lights on to give them more time to pass a full-year bill.

Schumer and his House Republican counterpart, Mike Johnson, early this month agreed to a \$1.59tn discretionary spending level for the year that ends on September 30.

However, in a sign of how bitterly the Congress is divided, the two parties now disagree on that number, with Democrats saying the actual amount agreed to is \$1.66tn.

The intense jockeying between House Republicans seeking deep spending cuts and Democrats comes amid a \$34.4tn national debt that is rapidly escalating and has prompted worries in part because of the heavy interest payments

now being borne by the Treasury Department.

This third stopgap funding bill, known as a "continuing resolution" or "CR", would simply extend last fiscal year's spending levels until two deadlines of March 1 and March 8 for completing action of spending for various government agencies.

With the temporary funding bill now on its way to enactment, the focus shifts to the need to pass the 12 bills providing the full-year budget.

In the House, Johnson could face blowback from hardline members of his party who oppose such stopgap funding bills without deep spending cuts.

That displeasure led last fall to the toppling of Johnson's predecessor, Kevin McCarthy.

So far, some of those hardliners were expressing tolerance toward Johnson, despite the dismal support from House Republicans.

"He's just playing the cards he's dealt," said Representative Tim Burchett, referring to Johnson.

Burchett had voted to oust McCarthy from the speakership after a bipartisan stopgap vote in September.

"It doesn't really upset me anymore. It's just reality," he said. "Johnson didn't create this problem."

US government launches disaster relief reforms as climate-driven events increase

US President Joe Biden's administration said yesterday that it is launching the most major reforms to disaster management relief in two decades as climate change-driven extreme weather events, such as floods and fires, increase.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) reforms of its federal assistance policies and expanded benefits for disaster survivors aim to cut red tape that victims have said makes it difficult for them to access resources after a disaster.

"We are on the verge of making the most significant update to survivor assistance in the last 20 years to reach more survivors and deliver assistance faster," said FEMA Administrator Deanne Criswell in a statement.

The FEMA said the reforms follow feedback from disaster survivors.

They are designed to make the agency better able to respond to the threats caused by climate change, which last year caused more "billion-dollar" floods, fires and other disasters than ever before.

In 2023, the US experienced a wildfire on Maui, the nation's deadliest in more than a century, severe floods in California, two tornado outbreaks in central states, a winter storm in the northeast, and Hurricane Idalia.

Among the new measures that the FEMA announced are a change to its cash relief programme that will provide a payment of \$750 to households for all disasters for shelter and evacuation to supplement other disaster aid.

Previously, the payment was assessed on a disaster-to-disaster basis.

It also created a new "displacement assistance" benefit to give eligible survivors who cannot return to their homes up-front funds to help until they are able to secure housing.

The FEMA will also make changes to help survivors who are under-insured by removing a requirement that they apply for a US Small Business Administration (SBA) loan before being considered for certain types of financial assistance, and make it easier to access repair loans for homes that were previously ineligible due to pre-existing leaks and damage.

The FEMA said the changes will take effect for new disasters declared on, or after March 22, 2024. - **Reuters**



China, Philippines seek better ties, management of conflicts in South China Sea

Reuters
Beijing

China and the Philippines agreed to improve maritime communication and to properly manage conflicts and differences through friendly talks in regards to issues around the South China Sea, their foreign ministries said in a statement.

China Assistant Foreign Minister Nong Rong and Philippines Foreign Ministry undersecretary Theresa Lazaro held a frank and in-depth exchange of views on the situation while co-chairing the eighth meeting of the China-

Philippines Bilateral Consultation Mechanism on the South China Sea in Shanghai, according to statements released by the Chinese and Philippine foreign ministries. In the talks, the two sides reaffirmed that the South China Sea dispute is “not the whole story of bilateral relations,” the Chinese foreign ministry said in a statement released late on Wednesday.

The two countries have had numerous confrontations recently in certain disputed waters in the South China Sea, with both trading accusations of provoking conflict in the economically strategic waterway, including charg-

es that China rammed a ship last month carrying the Philippine armed forces chief of staff. China said its operation was “professional, reasonable and legal”. Beijing claims sovereignty over almost the entire South China Sea, including parts of the exclusive economic zones of Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Vietnam. Both officials believe “maintaining communication and dialogue is essential to maintaining maritime peace and stability”, the Chinese foreign ministry said.

In the Jan 17 statement released by the Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) on Thurs-

day, it said both sides “agreed to calmly deal with incidents, if any, through diplomacy”. The two sides agreed to properly manage maritime conflicts and differences through friendly consultations, as well as properly handle maritime emergencies, especially the situation around the Second Thomas Shoal, known as Renai Reef in China, and Ayungin in Manila.

“Both sides presented their respective positions on the Ayungin Shoal and assured each other of their mutual commitment to avoid escalation of tensions,” the DFA said. Chinese coast guard and maritime militia vessels have

had heated and dangerous run-ins in that area, as China becomes more assertive in pressing its maritime claims there. Relations have been strained for months, but both have reiterated a commitment to dialogue. Both said in the meeting they would advance practical maritime co-operation, “so as to create favourable conditions for the sound and stable development of China-Philippines relations,” according to the Chinese foreign ministry.

On Tuesday, China summoned the ambassador from the Philippines and warned the country “not to play with fire” after President Ferdinand Marcos Jr con-

gratulated Taiwan’s president-elect Lai Ching-te on his election victory last Saturday. The remarks made by Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Mao Ning did not sit well with the Philippines’ defence secretary who on Wednesday accused the official of insulting Marcos, stooping to what he called “low and gutter-level talk.”

China demanded that the Philippine side earnestly abide by the one-China principle. The Philippine side reiterated that it adheres to the one-China policy and will continue to implement it, according to the Chinese foreign ministry statement.

Japan ‘Moon Sniper’ lands but ‘not generating power’: space agency

AFP
Tokyo

Japan yesterday became only the fifth nation to achieve a “soft landing” on the Moon, but its space agency said that the craft’s solar cells were not generating power. With the Smart Lander for Investigating Moon (SLIM), Japan followed the United States, the Soviet Union, China and most recently India in achieving the feat.

JAXA confirmed that the SLIM “landed on the Moon at 00:20am on 20 January 2024 (Japan Time). Communication has been established since landing,” JAXA said. “However, the solar cells are not generating power and data acquisition from the lunar surface is given priority,” it added.

“The SLIM is operated with on-board batteries. The data acquired on landing is stored in the spacecraft, and we are currently working to maximise the scientific results by first transmitting this data back to Earth,” said JAXA official Hitoshi Kuninaka.

Japan’s mission is one of a string of new projects launched in recent years on the back of renewed interest in Earth’s natural satellite.

The Japanese craft - equipped with a shape-shifting mini-rover co-developed by the firm behind Transformer toys - has been designed to land with unprecedented precision. If all went to plan, it will have landed within a target area just 100m across, far tighter than the usual landing zone of several kilometres (miles).

Success would restore high-tech Japan’s reputation in space after two failed lunar missions and recent rocket failures, including explosions after take-off. It would also echo the tri-



People watch the Smart Lander for Investigating Moon (SLIM)’s landing on the moon in a public viewing event in Sagami-hara, south of Tokyo.

umph of India’s low-cost space programme in August, when it became the first to land an uncrewed craft near the Moon’s largely unexplored south pole.

Japan’s space agency JAXA has already made a pinpoint landing on an asteroid, but the challenge is greater on the Moon, where gravity is stronger. SLIM was meant to try to reach a crater where the Moon’s mantle - the usually deep inner layer beneath its crust - is believed to be accessible at the surface.

“The rocks exposed here are crucial in the search for the origins of the Moon and the Earth,” Tomokatsu Morota, associate professor at the University of Tokyo specialising in lunar and planetary exploration, told AFP. This includes shedding light on the mystery of the Moon’s possible water resources, which will also be key to building bases there one day as possible stopovers on the way to Mars.

“The possibility of lunar commercialisation depends on whether there is water at the

poles,” Morota said. More than 50 years after the first human Moon landing, many countries and private companies are attempting to make the trip anew.

But crash-landings, communication failures and other technical problems are rife. This month, US private firm Astrobotic’s Peregrine lunar lander began leaking fuel after takeoff, dooming its mission.

On Thursday, contact with the spaceship was lost over a remote area of the South Pacific after it likely burned up in the Earth’s atmosphere on its return.

Nasa has also postponed plans for crewed lunar missions under its Artemis programme. Russia, China and other countries from South Korea to the United Arab Emirates are also trying their luck. Previous Japanese lunar missions have failed twice - one public and one private.

In 2022, the country unsuccessfully sent a lunar probe named Omotenashi as part of the United States’ Artemis 1 mission. In April, Japanese startup ispace



A H-IIA rocket carrying a small lunar surface probe and other objects lifting off from the Tanegashima Space Centre on Tanegashima island, Kagoshima prefecture.

tried in vain to become the first private company to land on the Moon, losing communication with its craft after what it described as a “hard landing”.

SLIM’s spherical metal probe, slightly bigger than a tennis ball and weighing the same as a large potato, is meant to pop open like a Transformer toy. Equipped with two cameras, the two halves of the SORA-Q sphere are designed to slot out and propel the gadget around either in “butterfly” or “crawl” mode, JAXA says. Back on Earth, a toy version costs 21,190 yen (\$140) and, according to its promotional video, can roll around a living room taking pictures - for example, of a buyer’s cat.



A Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) photo shows the “Smart Lander for Investigating Moon” (SLIM) at the satellite fairing assembly building at the Tanegashima Space Center, Kagoshima prefecture.

Is North Korea’s Kim preparing for war?

AFP
Seoul

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un has declared the South his country’s “principal enemy”, jettisoned agencies dedicated to reunification and outreach, and threatened war over “even 0.001 mm” of territorial infringement.

But is the fiery rhetoric a sign of a real shift? AFP takes a look at what we know:

What’s happened? After years of worsening ties, Pyongyang made it official this week: declaring Seoul its main enemy, abolishing agencies dedicated to reunification and threatening to occupy the South during war. It’s a big shift, as “in the past when there was risk of an armed conflict, there was a back channel to keep it in control, but now there is none of that,” said Hong Min, a senior analyst at the Korea Institute for National Unification in Seoul.

North Korea has gotten rid “of any inter-Korean mechanisms to prevent conflicts from spiralling out of control,” he added. “The North’s labelling of the South as its ‘principal enemy’ isn’t just rhetorical - the words could carry into action.”

Will he invade? Kim said he had no intention of starting a war - but also none of avoiding one.

He’s declared he will no longer recognise the de facto maritime border between the two Koreas, known as the Northern Limit Line, and his military recently staged days of live-fire artillery drills in



Kim Jong-un inspecting an important military vehicle production plant at an undisclosed location in North Korea.

the area. This has created “a growing possibility of the two sides getting into a military skirmish, which could lead to a wider conflict,” Hong said.

In addition, Pyongyang has been drawing closer to Moscow, including - Washington and Seoul claim - sending missiles for Russia’s war in Ukraine in exchange for help with their satellite program.

Seoul, for its part, has threatened a “multiple times stronger” response to any provocation, a hawkish approach that carries risks as an editorial in the Han-kyoreh newspaper pointed out this week.

“It is never wise for both South and North Korea to take a no-prisoners approach in inter-Korea dealings,” it said.

“As North Korea becomes more reckless, we hope that the government will focus its efforts...to manage the situation,” it added.

What’s next?The two Koreas

are now “at the highest probability of being dragged into armed conflict”, said Choi Gi-il, professor of military studies at Sangji University. “Let’s say civilian and military casualties incur from a future Northern provocation. We target the point of origin with shells. But will we also strike them with air power?” he said.

In 2010, when the North shelled the remote South Korean border island of Yeonpyeong, killing four, Seoul’s F-16 jets were “in the air ready to strike but then-president Lee Myung-bak called it off” to avoid escalating the situation.

“But if we have a similar incident, there’s no guarantee that air power will not be used given hawkish calls” from Seoul’s administration, Choi said.

And Pyongyang’s response could see the peninsula “reach a full-fledged war in the worst case scenario,” he said.

No chance of rapproche-

ment? The prospects for inter-Korean reconciliation have long been dim, but now Kim has told Seoul to its face that he views them as his number one enemy, Soo Kim, policy practice area lead at LMI Consulting and former CIA analyst, told AFP.

“He’s not only closed the door to rapprochement - he’s put a padlock on it to make it clear to the South Koreans where he stands on their relationship,” she added.

But the new rhetoric from Pyongyang doesn’t necessarily “change the calculus for North Korea,” she said. Pyongyang has long been developing nukes and missiles, and Kim has been waiting for an opportune moment to conduct his much-anticipated seventh nuclear test. “These weapons weren’t developed overnight, and the Kim regime’s plans to use them as tools of coercion, threats, and bargaining have been their modus operandi for decades,” she added.

Why is Kim doing this? Kim’s new messaging on South Korea “appears to be an ideological adjustment for regime survival, justifying Kim’s focus on nuclear missiles,” said Leif-Eric Easley, a professor at Ewha University in Seoul.

Despite years of Covid-linked border closures, and strict controls on the flow of information domestically, North Koreans “are increasingly aware of their country’s economic failings compared to South Korean successes,” he said. “So Kim is doubling down on military prowess against external threats for his domestic legitimacy,” he said.

Vinfast misses 2023 EVs sales target

Vietnamese automaker Vinfast said that it delivered nearly 35,000 electric vehicles last year, missing its target of selling up to 50,000 units. The communist state’s first homegrown car manufacturer is hoping to compete with EV giants such as Tesla, and is trying to crack international markets.

Vinfast said in a statement that it delivered a total of 34,855 EVs in 2023 against a target of between 40,000 and 50,000 cars. “Amid economic headwinds, slow EV adoption rate in certain regions has adversely affected deliveries plans,” Tran Mai Hoa, VinFast’s Deputy CEO of sales and marketing, said in a statement.

Earlier this month, Vinfast said it would build an electric vehicle factory in India’s southern state of Tamil Nadu, with an annual capacity of up to 150,000 units. The firm also plans to invest at least \$1.2bn in Indonesia. Vinfast listed on the Nasdaq in August, hitting headlines around the world as its valuation skyrocketed and then crashed.

Earlier this month, it announced a change in leadership which saw Vietnam’s richest man Pham Nhat Vuong named as the company’s new CEO. Vuong will directly oversee VinFast’s operations, including global production, sales and marketing. (AFP)

Nearly 300 Myanmar soldiers flee to India

Nearly 300 Myanmar soldiers crossed the border into India to flee an advance by armed insurgents fighting the country’s junta, an Indian paramilitary officer told AFP yesterday. Clashes have rocked parts of Myanmar near the Indian border since the Arakan Army (AA) attacked security forces in November, ending a ceasefire that had largely held since a 2021 military coup.

This week, the group said it had taken over the major town of Paletwa and six military bases along the border of India’s Mizoram state, where the soldiers had crossed on Wednesday. A total of 276 troops carrying their arms and ammunition arrived at Bondukbangsora village, an officer from the Assam Rifles paramilitary force, who declined to give a name, told AFP. “We have given them shelter at our camp,” he said, adding that the arriving soldiers were “given all the support they require”.

The officer said that his unit was collecting biometric data from the soldiers and had sought approval from the defence ministry in New Delhi to return them to Myanmar. Hundreds of other Myanmar troops have fled to India to escape fighting since the ceasefire ended in November, according to local media reports. Two Myanmar military aircraft arrived in Aizawl, the Mizoram state capital, to collect and repatriate soldiers who retreated from the conflict. In October, an alliance of the AA and two other ethnic minority armed groups launched a joint offensive across Myanmar’s northern Shan state, capturing towns and seizing vital trade hubs on the China border. Last week, the alliance announced a China-mediated ceasefire in Shan state after months of conflict that posed the biggest threat to the junta since it seized power. The agreement does not apply to areas near the Indian border where fighting between the military and insurgents has raged on.

Britain retail sales hit lowest since 2021 Covid lockdown

AFP
London

UK retail sales last month suffered the largest drop since January 2021 when Britain was in Covid lockdown, as Christmas shoppers tightened belts in a cost-of-living crisis, data showed Friday.

Sales by volume dived 3.2% in December, after gaining 1.4% in November on Black Friday dis-

counting, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said in a statement. That was far worse than expectations of a 0.5% decline for December, which is traditionally boosted by Christmas gift buying. The gloomy news weighed on the pound but boosted the London stock market owing to the large number of listed multinational companies that earn in dollars.

“Following a strong November, retail sales plummeted in December with all types of outlets being

hit,” said Heather Bovill, deputy director for surveys and economic indicators at the ONS. “This was the largest overall monthly fall since January 2021, when the re-introduction of pandemic restrictions knocked sales heavily.”

She added that food stores in December suffered their steepest fall since May 2021, with sales dented by early Christmas shopping in November. “UK retail sales fell sharply in December as consumers tightened their purse strings

during what is normally a hugely important time of year for retailers,” added Craig Erlam, analyst at trading platform OANDA. “Everyone from food retailers to department stores saw a sharp reduction in sales as consumers spent less on gifts and, as it turns out, food during the festive season.”

Friday’s data darkens the economic outlook following news of a surprise December acceleration in inflation, as drawnout strike action threatens to tip Britain into reces-

sion. “As things stand, the odds that the economy fell into a technical recession in late 2023 have increased,” remarked EY analyst Martin Beck following the retail figures.

The economy shrank 0.1% in the third quarter and a fourth-quarter contraction would place it in a technical recession ahead of a general election due this year. Separate data showed earlier this week that annual inflation unexpectedly picked up in December, dashing

hopes of an early cut to UK interest rates and prolonging a cost-of-living squeeze.

The Consumer Prices Index quickened to 4.0% from 3.9% in November, confounding expectations for a modest slowdown. In more upbeat news on Friday, international food delivery app Deliveroo revealed rising UK order growth in the fourth quarter from a year earlier and cited a “stabilisation in consumer behaviour” despite elevated inflation.

Prince Harry withdraws libel claim against British tabloid

Reuters
London

Britain’s Prince Harry yesterday withdrew his libel claim against the publisher of the *Mail on Sunday* newspaper over an article about his security arrangements, with his spokesperson saying he wanted to focus on his family’s safety.

Harry, King Charles’ younger son, had sued Associated Newspapers over a 2022 article which stated he only offered to pay for police protection after bringing a separate legal fight against the British government. The report also accused Harry, 39, of attempting to mislead the public about his willingness to pay for the policing, which was withdrawn after he stepped back from royal duties in 2020.

In December, he lost his attempt to have the paper’s defence to his libel lawsuit thrown out, meaning he would have likely had to give evidence at London’s High Court later this year. The *Daily Mail*, the *Mail on Sunday*’s sister title, reported that Harry, the Duke of Sussex, had abandoned his case hours before his lawyers were required to hand over relevant documents.

The paper said he would now be obliged to pay the paper’s costs of 250,000 pounds (\$316,900.00) along with his own fees which it put at 500,000 pounds. Both Harry’s lawyer and a spokesperson for Associated declined to comment.



Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex.

The prince’s spokesperson, who said the legal costs had not been determined, said he had withdrawn the claim because he wanted to focus on the safety of his family and his case against the British government over the decision to strip him of automatic police protection when he was in Britain.

Harry, his US wife Meghan and their two children now live in California after the couple stepped down from royal duties in 2020. His claim against the government was heard in December with a ruling expected in the next few months.

That case was Harry’s focus and not the libel action which would “give a continued platform to the Mail’s false claims all those

years ago”, the spokesperson said. London’s High Court had ruled last July that the Mail report was defamatory - paving the way for Harry to take the case forward against one of Britain’s biggest media publishers. But his bid to have the case decided in his favour without a trial then subsequently failed. The legal action was one of a number of cases the royal is taking against British tabloids at the High Court. He and six other high-profile figures including singer Elton John are also suing Associated alleging widespread unlawful behaviour including phone-hacking by its journalists.

A judge ruled in November that their case could go to trial after the publisher tried to have it thrown out.

Britain police issue appeal after newborn found on street

AFP
London

UK police appealed yesterday for the mother of a newborn baby abandoned in a shopping bag on a London street in freezing conditions to come forward, as the infant receives hospital care. A dog walker made the discovery on Thursday night in east London and alerted emergency services, who found the baby girl wrapped in a towel inside the bag, the Metropolitan Police said.

The newborn was not injured and is well in hospital, the force said, as officers try to trace the mother, who they say will be in need of urgent medical attention. Met Police Chief Superintendent Simon Crick praised passers-by for “thinking fast” and keeping the baby girl warm in sub-zero temperatures until paramedics arrived.

“I am delighted to report that she wasn’t injured in any way and is safe and well in the care of hospital staff,” Crick said in a statement. “I am grateful to the members of the public who stayed at the scene to speak with officers and medics - your actions contributed to saving the baby’s life.”

“Our thoughts now turn to the baby mother; we are extremely concerned for her welfare as she will have been through a traumatic ordeal and will be in need of immediate medical attention following the birth.”

Like much of northern Europe, London has experienced a cold snap this week, with temperatures plunging below 0C at the time of the baby’s discovery.

Selfie time



Britain’s Prime Minister Rishi Sunak poses for a selfie on his visit to Winchester in Southern England.

India’s Akasa Air orders 150 Boeing planes: CEO

AFP
New Delhi

India’s newest airline, Akasa Air, said it has ordered 150 Boeing 737 MAX planes as it looks to bolster its fleet and kick off international operations. The deal is a shot in the arm for US aviation giant Boeing, which is under intense global scrutiny over its 737 MAX 9 jet, after a scare on an Alaska Airlines jet in early January when a panel came off mid-flight and forced an emergency landing.

Akasa Air CEO Vinay Dube said the “historic” order for 737 MAX 10 and 737 MAX 8-200 jets would put the carrier on the path to “becoming one of the top 30 leading airlines in the world.” Akasa has been a strong Boeing backer, having ordered 72 aircraft in 2021, and another four in 2023, and Dube said Akasa’s growth illustrates the “promise that India holds as an aviation market”.

But the order does not include Boeing’s MAX 9 aircraft involved in the Alaska Airline scare. No Indian airline uses the Boeing MAX 9 plane. The country’s aviation regulator said two weeks ago that its check of the 737 8 MAX aircraft had been completed satisfactorily.

Civil Aviation Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia praised the order in a message on X, formerly Twitter.

“Congratulations to Akasa Air for the landmark order of 150 Boeing 737 MAX aircraft,” he wrote.

The carrier is “creating history by becoming the only Indian airline to reach a firm order book of 200+ aircraft within 17 months of operations,” Scindia added.

India is now the third biggest buyer of planes after China and the United States, Scindia said, speaking at the “Wings India” aviation conference on Thursday. “India’s Civil Aviation growth story is remarkable and poised for exponential growth,” Scindia added on X. “The sector has become a key driver of economic development and social progress, thus providing significant benefits in tourism, trade, and job creation”.

Last June, Scindia said that domestic carriers would order between 1,200 and 1,400 aircraft by 2028.

Sony set to decide on Indian merger

Sony was expected yesterday to make a final decision on a merger of its Indian unit with local rival Zee Entertainment, a source at the Japanese giant and press reports said. The tie-up is aimed at helping both firms compete with streaming rivals like Disney, Amazon and Netflix in the vast and booming entertainment market of 1.4bn people.

The merger was first agreed in 2021, with Zee chief executive Punit Goenka saying that the new outfit would be worth close to \$10bn with annual revenues approaching \$2bn. But closing the deal has been beset by problems, most recently because Sony reportedly does not want Goenka to run the combined entity.

Goenka has offered to step down after the merger takes place, the Economic Times daily reported, but is in favour of an “independent search process” to find a new CEO. Sony, however, wants NP Singh, the CEO of its India unit, to replace him. In addition, Sony has become concerned about slumping profits at Zee since 2021, a source at the Japanese firm who declined to be named told AFP. The Economic Times reported earlier last week that Sony was also upset over not being kept in the loop over a \$1.5-bn cricket licensing agreement between Zee and Disney. Sony’s board on Friday could also decide on extending a January 20 deadline to close the deal in order to allow for more negotiations. A decision could be announced to the Tokyo stock exchange next week. India’s entertainment market, worth tens of billions of dollars, is already one of the world’s biggest, while smartphone adoption is forecast to expand further in the coming years. — AFP

Indian tycoon Adani bets big on vast solar and wind plant

AFP
Khavda, India

Deep in the desert along the border with Pakistan, India’s most controversial billionaire is building the world’s largest renewable energy park as he races to future-proof his coal-linked fortune. Gautam Adani’s ports-to-airports, media and energy empire - which critics say has benefited from his links with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi - made him for a brief time in 2022 the world’s second-richest man, with a \$154bn fortune.

A year ago his firms were hit by accusations of a “brazen stock manipulation and accounting fraud scheme” by US short-seller Hindenburg Research and their market value slumped by more than \$150bn.

But they have since recovered much of their losses and the publicity-shy 61-year-old high school dropout is betting hefty sums on making billions more from the energy transition. India is the world’s third-biggest carbon emitter and Modi’s government has been at the forefront of attempts to push back against the “phase out” of coal at global summits.

But the world’s most populous country and fastest-growing major economy needs ever more power, and Adani is building what he calls a “monumental” solar and wind project he boasts will be “visible even from space”. As the wind whips up sand in the baking heat of the Rann of Kutch desert, thousands of labourers erect vast rows of solar panels,



The installation of a wind turbine at the Adani Group owned Khavda Renewable Energy Park.

dig foundations for wind turbines and lay seemingly endless rolls of wires.

Sagar Adani, Gautam’s nephew and executive director of Adani Green Energy, told AFP that the project’s teams are working “at an accelerated pace”. When complete in 2027, the \$2.3bn Khavda Renewable Energy Park will cover 726sq km - nearly the size of New York City. The park is aimed to have the capacity to generate 30 gigawatts of solar and wind energy - enough to power the homes of 18mn people, more than the combined populations of London and New York.

Adani will produce 17GW, with the rest generated by other com-

panies. The project is slated to produce a third more power than China’s Three Gorges Dam, currently the world’s biggest power-generating facility. The scheme is the showpiece of Adani Green Energy - in which France’s TotalEnergies bought a 19.7% stake for \$2.5bn three years ago.

In Mundra, site of India’s largest commercial port - run by another arm of the Adani empire - it is manufacturing key components for its aggressive solar and wind energy foray, including colossal wind turbine blades nearly 80 metres long. Solar panels are churned out on high-tech production lines nearby. “We are creating one of the globe’s most ex-

tensive and integrated renewable energy manufacturing ecosystems for solar and wind,” Adani wrote last month on X, formerly Twitter, where he describes himself as a “Proud Indian. Excited to be part of the India growth story!”

New Delhi has called for ambitious clean energy projects to create 500 gigawatts of renewable capacity to meet half its energy needs by 2030. Adani - who rejected Hindenburg’s charges as “maliciously mischievous” - has said he will invest an estimated \$100bn into that energy transition.

When fully operational, Adani’s renewable energy park will make up the equivalent of a quarter

of India’s current capacity from wind and solar.

But India also plans to sharply increase its coal-based power capacity and vows to become carbon neutral only by 2070, two decades later than many countries. Political opponents have often accused Modi of abetting Adani’s rapid rise, allowing the billionaire to unfairly win contracts and avoid proper regulatory oversight.

Both men come from the western state of Gujarat, and Adani has often praised the premier’s policies.

Ashok Malik, from the Asia Group consultancy, said the Adani Group is “sitting on very solid assets” and “mirrors India’s ambitions and hopes and strategy”. Malik said Adani, like all of India’s conglomerates and major multinationals in the country, were “broadly aligning” themselves with the government’s economic strategy.

“It makes perfect sense for a company which is solely invested in India’s energy sector to start looking at clean and renewable energy to shift from coal - though coal will not entirely go away,” Malik told AFP.

At the energy park, workers in hard hats and neon jackets wrap their faces in cloth for protection from the biting sand and blazing sun.

One manager, who was not authorised to speak to the media, said the conditions were “challenging” but the scale of the construction was “awe-inspiring”. The site is around 75km from the nearest village, and about 6km from the heavily militarised border with Pakistan.

CHAIRMAN

Abdullah bin Khalifa al-Attiyah

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Faisal Abdulhameed al-Mudahka

Deputy Managing Editor

K T Chacko

Production Editor

Amjad Khan

✉ P.O.Box 2888, Doha, Qatar
✉ editor@gulf-times.com
☎ 44350478 (News),
☎ 44466404 (Sport),
☎ 44466636 (Home delivery)
☎ 44350474
📘 facebook.com/gulftimes
🐦 twitter.com/gulftimes_Qatar
📷 instagram.com/gulftimes
📺 youtube.com/GulftimesVideos

GULF TIMES

ECB faces bumpy road to low inflation as wages rise

Workers in Europe are hoping this year's pay round will help restore incomes eroded by higher prices, but the expected boost to their purchasing power could hamper the European Central Bank (ECB)'s efforts to bring inflation back to target.

The ECB has singled out wages as the single biggest risk to its 1-1/2 year fight against inflation. It expects salary growth across the euro zone of 4.6% this year, far more than the 3% pace it considers consistent with inflation at its 2% target.

Higher wage settlements would be a risk to interest-rate cuts that financial markets are betting will start in April.

"We see a path to 3% (wage growth) but it will be a bumpy road," Reamonn Lydon, an economist at the Central Bank of Ireland and one of the minds behind the popular Indeed Wage Tracker, said in an interview.

Pay hikes increase costs for firms and boost household income, both factors that might push up prices and require the ECB to keep rates high.

Unions see a combination of gradually cooling inflation, low unemployment and fat corporate profit margins as their best and possibly last shot this economic cycle at restoring workers' living standards.

And after seeing their real wages drop by roughly 5% in 2022-23 — and decades in which labour has lost its leverage — wage-earners are ready to fight. US giants Tesla and Amazon are among companies already grappling with strikes in Europe.

Unlike in the US, there is no real-time wage data for the 20-country eurozone

from 3.7% — although that was well below a peak of 5.2% recorded in October 2022, when inflation was at its peak.

Lydon and Indeed's Pawel Adrjan said December's increase was probably driven by new wage deals, an effect they saw continuing in early 2024 as more agreements are struck and minimum wage increases kick in.

Among recent settlements, wages rose by 4.5% for employees at Spanish stores of and IKEA, 5.0% at French energy major TotalEnergies and 6.6% for Dutch rail workers. French Uber drivers' minimum hourly rate rose 17.6%.

Minimum wages were meanwhile lifted by 3.4% in Germany, 3.8% in the Netherlands and 5.0% in Spain.

"Everything points to a return to real wage growth," said Martin Hoepner, a professor at the Max-Planck-Institut for the study of society in Cologne, Germany.

Emboldened by worker shortages that have only started easing, labour unions hope to reverse a trend of falling membership that accelerated with globalisation in the 1990s.

Employees at French state-owned power group EDF are demanding a 6% wage increase or they will go on strike while some German rail workers turned down an 11% rise, spread over time, because they wanted a shorter working week.

Some Amazon workers in Spain staged walkouts during the crucial holiday season and Tesla has faced blockades in Nordic countries aimed at making it sign a collective bargaining agreement in Sweden.

"At the moment the economic conditions are obviously conducive to strengthening the unions' bargaining position," Torsten Mueller, a researcher at the trade union institute, said.

But Lucio Baccaro, also a professor at the Max Planck Institute, said such "wage militancy" could backfire if it caused the ECB to keep interest rates higher to curb demand.

"If a wage-price spiral is triggered, or if the central bank fears that it is, it will intervene to cool off the economy," he said. — Reuters

Unlike in the US, there is no real-time wage data for the 20-country eurozone. But the Indeed Wage Tracker, which measures salaries advertised on that website, is closely watched by the ECB as an indicator of future trends. It ticked higher in December — to 3.8%

To Advertise
✉ gtadv@gulf-times.com

Display
☎ 44466621 ☎ 44466609 📠 44418811
📠 44418811 ✉ gtcad@gulf-times.com

Subscription
✉ circulation@gulf-times.com

© 2024 Gulf Times. All rights reserved

The global consequences of the war in Ukraine



FILE PHOTO: Ukrainian service members of the 55th Separate Artillery Brigade fire a Caesar self-propelled howitzer towards Russian troops, amid Russia's attack on Ukraine, near the town of Avdiivka in Donetsk region, Ukraine on May 31, 2023.

By Joschka Fischer
Berlin

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, changed everything for Ukraine, for Europe, and for global politics. The world entered a new era of great-power rivalry in which war could no longer be excluded. Apart from the immediate victims, Russia's aggression most concerned Europe. A great power seeking to extinguish an independent smaller country by force challenges the core principles upon which the European order of states has organised itself for decades.

Russian President Vladimir Putin's war stands in stark contrast to the self-dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union, which occurred in a largely non-violent manner. Since the "Gorbachev miracle" — when the Soviet Union started pursuing liberalising reforms in the 1980s — Europeans had begun to imagine that Immanuel Kant's vision of perpetual peace on the continent might be possible. It was not.

The problem was that many Russian elites' interpretation of the globally significant events of the late 1980s could not be more opposed to Kant's idea. They saw the demise of the great Russian empire (which the Soviets had recreated) as a devastating defeat. Though they had no choice but to accept the humiliation, they told themselves they would do so only temporarily until the balance of

power had changed. Then the great historical revision could begin.

Thus, the 2022 attack on Ukraine should be viewed as merely the most ambitious of the revisionist wars Russia has waged since Putin came to power. We can expect many more, especially if Donald Trump returns to the White House and effectively withdraws the US from Nato.

But Putin's latest war not only changed the rules of co-existence on the European continent; it also changed the global order. By triggering a sweeping re-militarisation of foreign policy, the war has seemingly returned us to a time, deep in the 20th century, when wars of conquest were a staple of the great-power toolkit. Now, like then, might makes right.

Even during the decades-long Cold War, there was no risk of a "new Sarajevo" — the political fuse that detonated the first World War — because the standoff between two nuclear superpowers subordinated all other interests, ideologies, and political conflicts. What mattered were the superpowers' own claims to power and stability within the territories they controlled. The risk of another world war had been replaced by the risk of mutual assured destruction, which functioned as an automatic stabiliser within the bipolar system of the Cold War.

Behind Putin's war on Ukraine is the neo-imperial goal that many Russian elites share: to make Russia great again by reversing the results of the collapse of the Soviet Union. On December 8, 1991,

the presidents of Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine met in Bialowieza National Park and agreed to dissolve the Soviet Union, reducing a "superpower" to a regional (albeit still nuclear-armed) power in the form of the Russian Federation.

No, Putin does not want to revive the communist Soviet Union. Today's Russian elite knows that the Soviet system could not be sustained. Putin has embraced autocracy, oligarchy, and empire to restore Russia's status as a global power, but he also knows that Russia lacks the economic and technological prerequisites to achieve this on its own.

For its part, Ukraine wants to join the West — meaning the European Union and the transatlantic security community of Nato. Should it succeed, it would probably be lost to Russia for good, and its own embrace of Western values would pose a grave danger to Putin's regime. Ukraine's modernisation would lead Russians to ask why their political system has consistently failed to achieve similar results. From a "Great Russia" perspective, it would compound the disaster of 1991. That is why the stakes in Ukraine are so high, and why it is so hard to imagine the conflict ending through compromise.

Even in the case of an armistice along the frozen front line, neither Russia nor Ukraine will distance themselves politically from their true war aims. The Kremlin will not give up on the complete conquest and subjugation (if not annexation) of Ukraine, and

Ukraine will not abandon its goal of liberating all its territory (including Crimea) and joining the EU and Nato. An armistice thus would be a volatile interim solution involving the defence of a highly dangerous "line of control" on which Ukraine's freedom and Europe's security depend.

Since Russia no longer has the economic, military, and technological capabilities to compete for the top spot on the world stage, its only option is to become a permanent junior partner to China, implying quasi-voluntary submission under a kind of second Mongol vassalage. Let us not forget: Russia survived two attacks from the West in the 19th and 20th centuries — by Napoleon and Hitler, respectively. The only invaders who have conquered it were the Mongols in the winter of 1237-38. Throughout Russia's history, its vulnerability in the east has had far-reaching consequences.

The main geopolitical divide of the 21st century will centre on the Sino-American rivalry. Though Russia will hold a junior position, it nonetheless will play an important role as a supplier of raw materials and — owing to its dreams of empire — as a permanent security risk. Whether this will be enough to satisfy Russian elites' self-image is an open question. — Project Syndicate

● Joschka Fischer, Germany's foreign minister and vice-chancellor from 1998-2005, was a leader of the German Green Party for almost 20 years.

Football unites nations in Asian Cup Qatar 2023

By Jose Benzaquen Perea
Ambassador of Peru

Once again, this great nation, Qatar, offers us unforgettable moments of passion and enjoyment with the most popular sport on the planet: football.

This time, it's the AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023, inaugurated by the Amir of Qatar, His Highness Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, on January 12, at the imposing Lusail Stadium in Doha. Twenty-four national teams are participating, featuring the best players in Asia, all chasing the same dream: reaching the winners' podium.

Just a year ago, we were participants as fans of this sport of multitudes, in the stunning FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, considered one of the best in history. We witnessed an electrifying and competitive final match where Argentina emerged as World Champions, led by the current best player in the world: Lionel Messi.

In the opening match of the Asian Cup 2023, the Qatar national team secured a well-deserved victory against Lebanon.

Football is joy and connection, present everywhere: in our everyday conversations, gatherings with family and friends who share



AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023 opening ceremony at Lusail Stadium.

this passion, in our homes, and even in the grandeur of modern sports stadiums.

The games are more than just the players on the field. The tireless support and unwavering passion of the fans for their teams are integral to this grand sporting event.

This sport has been with us since childhood, leaving an indelible mark on our lives. We forge friendships and reconnect with loved ones over the shared love of the game, witnessing

magical athleticism unfold on the emerald green pitch.

Football evokes a range of emotions — the exhilaration of victory, the dignified acceptance of defeat, and the camaraderie with fellow fans.

In my country, Peru, everyone plays football. It's worth mentioning that the highest-altitude football stadium in the world, Daniel Alcides Carreon stadium, sits at a staggering 4,378m above sea level, nestled in the Peruvian Andes, in the mining

city of Cerro de Pasco, recognised by FIFA, boasts a capacity of 8,000 spectators and offers a truly unique experience for players and fans alike.

National teams bring out the best in football. We come together, united by our colours and anthems, celebrating not just the sport, but our shared humanity.

Football fosters healthy competition and relentless pursuit of excellence. In 90 minutes, players tirelessly strive to score, their efforts met by the brilliance of goalkeepers and the dedication of their teammates.

Over time, football has become a true sport of the masses, accessible due to its simple requirements: a ball and a patch of land.

We are confident that this gathering of nations will be another historic event, further solidifying Qatar's reputation as a world-class host for major sporting events. These events enrich our lives, offering a welcome escape from challenges and reaffirming our values of solidarity, unity, and the universal desire for peace.

Wishing success to all the participants and we express our heartfelt appreciation for the organisers who made this Asian Cup a resounding success sporting event that we experienced pleasantly in Qatar.

Baltic states to build new defences on borders

The three Baltic states have agreed to build new defences on their borders with Belarus and Russia, given security concerns in the region over Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Russia's aggression in the region has sparked concern in the Baltic states that they could be next on Moscow's agenda were it to win in Ukraine.

"The ministers signed an agreement in Riga, according to which Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania will construct anti-mobility defensive installations in the coming years to deter and, if necessary, defend against military threats," the Estonian defence ministry said in a statement.

It added that the installations would be on the borders with Russia and Belarus.

Latvia and Lithuania border both countries while Estonia only borders Russia.

The Baltic states – all former Soviet republics and now members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato) and the European Union – have been staunch supporters of Ukraine from day one of the invasion in 2022.

"Russia's war in Ukraine has shown that, in addition to equipment, ammunition, and manpower, physical defensive installations on the border are also needed," Estonian Defence Minister Hanno Pevkur said, quoted in the statement.

His Latvian counterpart Andris Spruds also announced the project.

"We will establish the Baltic Defence Line to defend Nato's Eastern flank and deny freedom of movement for our adversaries," he said on X, formerly Twitter. – **AFP**

Germany eases citizenship path despite migration rows

Reuters
Berlin

Germany shortened foreigners' paths to citizenship and ended a ban on dual nationality yesterday by passing a naturalisation law designed to reflect the reality of a society that has long been ethnically diverse and to attract more migrant workers.

The new law, a signature policy of Chancellor Olaf Scholz's coalition of centrist and left-leaning parties, was adopted after a stormy debate in parliament, during which opposition legislators accused the government of devaluing citizenship and adding to the burden migration is placing on public services.

"Two passports is the most normal thing in the world in 2024 and has long been reality in most countries," said Social Democrat legislator Reem Alabali-Radovan, born in Moscow to Iraqi Assyrian parents who won

asylum in Germany in 1996.

"We, the 20mn people of migrant background, we are staying here. This country belongs to us all, and we won't let it be taken away," she said, proposing the law, which must be signed by President Frank-Walter Steinmeier.

Citizenship will be available after five years' residence, reduced from eight, in line with neighbouring countries such as France.

Three years will be enough for the "exceptionally well integrated".

Dual nationality, now normally allowed only for citizens of other EU countries, will be permitted, letting tens of thousands of German-born Turks become voting members of society after their parents and grandparents contributed to the country's post-war reconstruction.

Until the start of this century, Germany had one of the world's most restrictive naturalisation laws, with citizenship available only to people who could show even very

distant German ancestors.

Progressives have long demanded a citizenship law that acknowledges the reality that Germany has been an ethnically diverse multicultural society since guest workers from Italy and Türkiye first arrived to ease labour shortages in the 1960s.

Earlier, Interior Minister Nancy Faeser said the new law was needed to compete in the global competition for skilled labour with countries like Canada and the United States.

However, parties are also competing to sound tougher on immigration, promising to speed deportations of illegal immigrants, in a bid to contain the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), which has been surging in the polls amid a weak economy and frustrations over public services.

The AfD, the target of angry street protests and calls for its banning after senior members were caught discussing plans to deport "unassimilated" German citizens of foreign background, opposes the law, as do

the opposition conservatives, who warned against "devaluing" the German passport and importing division.

"You want to create new voters for yourselves with this law," conservative legislator Alexander Throm told coalition politicians. "But careful: Most (Turks) who live here vote for AKP and (Turkish President Recep Tayyip) Erdogan...you're bringing the conflict to us."

Surveys show German Turks, many of whom are of ethnic Kurdish or Arab background, vote for the full range of Turkish parties, none of which run in German elections.

In a video message welcoming the new citizenship law, Scholz called planned nationwide protests against right-wing extremists this weekend "good and right".

"With the new citizenship law, we are saying to all those who have often lived and worked in Germany for decades, who abide by our laws, who are at home here: You belong to Germany," Scholz said.

Croatia arrests van driver transporting migrants

Croatian police arrested a Moldovan man in the capital Zagreb yesterday following a high-speed chase of a vehicle carrying nearly three dozen migrants.

The pursuit began after police tried to pull over a van suspected of trafficking migrants on a highway linking Zagreb with the coastal city of Split.

The driver refused to pull over and sped off along the highway, according to a police statement.

"After seriously violating traffic regulations he continued driving through Zagreb," the police said.

The driver, a 31-year-old Moldovan national, was arrested after hitting a police vehicle blocking a road, which allowed authorities to arrest him.

Police found 32 migrants in the van, with at least two sustaining minor injuries.

Croatia, an EU member since 2013, lies along the so-called Balkans route used by migrants trying to reach Western Europe.

During the first 10 months of last year, nearly 63,000 migrants – mostly Afghans, Turks, Moroccans and Pakistanis – crossed illegally into Croatia, according to official figures. – **AFP**

Arnie's 'customs adventure' watch sells for \$290,000

The Swiss watch that got Hollywood star Arnold Schwarzenegger in trouble with German custom officials has been sold for €270,000 (\$290,000), the actor's charity said yesterday.

The action hero-turned-environmental campaigner was held at Munich airport on Wednesday for failing to declare the bespoke Audemars Piguet timepiece that was being auctioned for his climate charity.

Schwarzenegger called his brush with the law a "wild experience" at the charity dinner on Thursday where the watch was auctioned, cracking raunchy jokes about a female official who he said "was going to put me in handcuffs", according to a video posted on entertainment website TMZ.

Schwarzenegger was held for three hours, according to the German media, before being allowed to take the watch to the dinner. The fundraiser for his Schwarzenegger Climate Initiative was held across the border in his native Austria in the Alpine resort of Kitzbuehel, with US climate envoy John Kerry said to be among the guests.

Duty should have been paid on the watch because Schwarzenegger was intending to sell it in the European Union, German customs spokesman Thomas Meister said. – **AFP**

Volcanic eruption in Iceland 'over'

Iceland officials said yesterday that the volcanic eruption that began last weekend near a fishing village was over, but warned that the area was still dangerous.

The Icelandic Meteorological Office (IMO) said "seismic activity continues to decrease in the area of the magma dyke", with observations showing that ground movement and deformation had slowed significantly.

"This information suggest that magma is no longer flowing into the dyke and the eruption has ended," the IMO said.

However, while hazard levels had decreased in the zones near the eruption, the agency said the area near the fishing town of Grindavik remains treacherous. – **AFP**

Pakistan, Iran agree to 'de-escalate' after trading deadly air strikes

AFP/Reuters
Islamabad

Pakistan and Iran have "agreed to de-escalate" tensions, Islamabad said, after trading deadly airstrikes on targets in each other's territory this week.

The rare military actions in the porous border region of Baluchistan – split between the two nations – had stoked regional tensions already enflamed by the Israel-Hamas war.

Iran carried out a missile and drone attack on what it called "terrorist" targets in Pakistan on Tuesday night, with Pakistan in turn striking militant targets inside Iran on Thursday.

Pakistan recalled its ambassador from Tehran and said Iran's envoy – on a visit home – was blocked from returning to Islamabad.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres urged the two nations to exercise maximum restraint. The US also urged restraint although President Joe Biden said the clashes showed that Iran is not well liked in the region.

China has offered to mediate.

However, after speaking by phone, Pakistan's Foreign Minister Jilil Abbas Jilani and his Iranian counterpart Hossein Amir-Abdollahian agreed "close co-ordination on counter terrorism and other aspects of mutual concern should be strengthened".

"They also agreed to de-escalate the situation," according to a summary of the conversation released by Islamabad's foreign ministry.

After the call, Amir-Abdollahian said in a statement that "the co-operation of the two countries to neutralise and destroy terrorist camps in Pakistan is essential".

The muted rhetoric matched analysts' predictions that both sides would seek to defuse the confrontation.

Tehran and Islamabad have both insisted they hit their own domestic militants sheltering on foreign territory.

"The upshot of the new situation is that the two countries are seemingly and symbolically even," said Antoine Levesques, of the International Institute for Strategic Studies.

Meanwhile, Pakistan Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar held yesterday an emergency security meeting with military and intelligence chiefs.



A woman sits near her hut at the Koh-e-Sabz area of Pakistan's southwest Balochistan province where Iran launched an air strike on Tuesday.

"The forum reiterated the unflinching resolve that sovereignty and territorial integrity of Pakistan are absolutely inviolable," said a summary released by Kakar's office. "Any attempt by anyone to breach it on any pretext will be responded with [the] full might of the state."

The summit also said Pakistan and Iran should "address each other's security concerns in the larger interest of regional peace and stability".

Pakistani broadcaster Geo TV, citing sources, reported that the cabinet had also decided to end a standoff and also endorsed a move to re-establish full diplomatic relations with Iran.

Caretaker leader Kakar cut short his visit to the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland following the strikes, which came with national elections due in three weeks.

A collective death toll of 11 – mostly women and children – was reported from both sides of the border that bisects an arid region where militant movements have simmered for decades.

In the remote villages near the strike site in Panjgur district, where mobile signal is rarely available, farmers pieced together the

events from reports passed on from visiting security officials who set up checkpoints in the area.

"Helicopters were flying overhead and going in the direction of where the Iranian strike hit, but we didn't know what had happened," Maulana Mohamed Sadiq, 42, the prayer leader of a small seminary around 5km (three miles) from where a missile hit, told AFP on Thursday.

Villagers feared that deteriorating relations between the two sides could lead to border closures and cut off residents from Iranian trade, which the area relies on for employment and food imports.

"If Iranians close the border, the people will starve and it will cause more militancy because youth will join the separatist organisations," said 55-year-old Haji Mohamed Islam.

Baluch separatists have been waging a low-level insurgency against Pakistani authorities from the largely ungoverned, impoverished region fighting for a better share of mineral resources.

Human rights groups say that the military's crackdown on the insurgency has included widespread enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings.

Anti-polio worker shot dead in northwest Pakistan

An anti-polio worker was shot dead in northwestern Pakistan yesterday, police said, accusing religious militants who frequently target vaccination teams of being behind the attack.

Pakistan and Afghanistan are the only countries where polio, a debilitating virus which can cause lifelong disability, remains endemic.

Pockets of Pakistan's mountainous border regions remain resistant to inoculation, with some firebrand clerics declaring it un-Islamic and militants such as the Pakistani Taliban staging attacks on vaccine teams.

Police said an anti-polio worker on routine duty in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province's Bajaur district – abutting the

Afghan border – was shot in the head by "unidentified persons".

"The attackers successfully fled on a motorcycle," senior police officer Kashif Zulfiqar told AFP, adding the co-ordinator was evacuated by helicopter to the provincial capital Peshawar but died in hospital.

He called the attack "an act of militancy" and said police are "conducting further investigations".

Another man was also shot in the leg and shoulder, and was being treated in a local hospital.

Last week a roadside bomb in Bajaur killed seven officers deployed to protect polio vaccination workers, police said. Opposition to inoculation grew after the US Central In-

telligence Agency organised a fake vaccination drive to help track down Al Qaeda's Osama bin Laden in Pakistan.

Clerics have also spread misinformation that the oral vaccine contains traces of consumables forbidden by Islam.

Pakistan is grappling with deteriorating security as it prepares to go to the polls in three weeks' time.

Last year saw casualties hit a six-year high, with more than 1,500 civilians, security forces and militants killed, according to the Islamabad-based Centre for Research and Security Studies.

Pakistan has accused Afghanistan's Taliban government of sheltering anti-Islamabad militants, a charge Kabul has always denied. – **AFP**



Katara's Asian Cup festivities continue

The festivities at Katara - the Cultural Village, related to the ongoing AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023, continue, with significant public turnout to enjoy events that blend entertainment, art, culture, and heritage from the nations participating in the tournament. The Katara Publishing House library received a large audience at its headquarters in Building 39 as it has been since the start of the festivities. The showcase includes 15 other Qatari publishing houses, and the best-sellers during the first week of events are heritage books and Arabic novels.



MDD a vibrant hub for Asian Cup activities

By Joey Aguilar
Staff Reporter

As the AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023 moves into high gear, Msheireb Downtown Doha (MDD) has emerged as a lively and engaging hub for football enthusiasts, offering an array of activities to celebrate the spirit of Asian football.

Visitors can revel in the excitement of the tournament with live screenings of matches at Barahat Msheireb, taking place daily from 4pm-11pm until February 10. The evening games are projected onto M7.

According to the organisers, the live screening at MDD is a celebration of Asian football, creating a fitting and enjoyable atmosphere for spectators in the heart of Barahat Msheireb.

The venue has become a favourite location for many visitors, especially families, due to its football-themed activities designed for children's enjoyment.

Hosting booths for the 24 participating countries in the tournament, Sikkat Wadi Msheireb has transformed into a vibrant celebration of customs and cultures as it features food, cultural exhibits, and craft experiences.

Such offerings provide an im-

mersive opportunity for visitors to learn about the diverse cultures participating in the sports event. The various authentic Asian cuisines at food and beverage outlets also continue to entice foodies.

Sahat Wadi Msheireb, meanwhile, allows football fans to engage in friendly matches with its custom-built Human Foosball Arena. Up to 16 players can enter the cage at once, mimicking a regular foosball table, with live entertainment providing commentary and music. The registration fee for this unique experience is QR20.

MDD also offers a cultural feast for visitors as the tournament progresses as it is set to host live

performances by the Qatar Philharmonic Orchestra on January 26 and 27, featuring World Football and Movie Classics. In addition, on February 4 and 5, visitors can enjoy Golden Classics from the Gulf Region. These ticketed performances start at 7:30pm.

For cinema enthusiasts, MDD provides a journey into the world of Arab cinema through a unique exhibition at Sikkat Wadi Msheireb, available until today (January 20). The exhibition presents a comprehensive view of the history and development of Arab cinema, with artistic works vividly reflecting the Palestinian reality. (source: Msheireb Properties website)



Sikkat Wadi Msheireb transformed into a vibrant celebration of customs and cultures as it features food, cultural exhibits, and craft experiences. **PICTURE:** Joey Aguilar



Msheireb Downtown Doha has become a melting pot of cultures, welcoming visitors from various countries since the start of the football tournament. **PICTURE:** Joey Aguilar



Sikkat Wadi Msheireb features booths for the 24 participating countries in the tournament. **PICTURES:** Thajudheen

