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Amir to meet Tajik president tomorrow

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani will meet Tajikistan President Emomali Rahmon and the accompanying delegation at Lusail Palace tomorrow. The Amir will hold discussions with President Rahmon on bilateral relations and ways to support and develop them. A number of agreements and memorandums of understanding will be signed as well. The president of Tajikistan will arrive in Doha today on a state visit to the country. (QNA)

First Qatari lady-led company lists on QSE

Al Faleh Educational Holding, under the leadership of its CEO, Sheikha Anwar bint Nawaf al-Thani (pictured), has announced its move to the main market of the Qatar Stock Exchange (QSE). Following the successful completion of procedures with the QSE, the Qatar Central Securities Depository, and relevant authorities, the holding is poised for a historic transition, with the first trading day on the main market scheduled on January 28, a company statement said. **Business Page 1**



Winners of Sheikh Joaan Bin Hamad Al Thani Trophy, Rifle crowned



President of Qatar Olympic Committee HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani crowned the winners of the last two races of the HE Sheikh Joaan Bin Hamad Al Thani Rifle Day at the Al Rayyan Racecourse yesterday. Wathnan Racing-owned Simca Mille won the prestigious HE Sheikh Joaan Bin Hamad Al Thani Rifle on an action-packed day.

S Korea salvage draw against Jordan

South Korea avoided a major AFC Asian Cup Qatar upset with a last-gasp 2-2 draw against an impressive Jordan side yesterday as Bahrain also left it late to blow open Group E. One day after Iraq beat tournament favourites Japan, the Koreans needed an injury-time own goal to salvage a point. Captain Heung-min Son fired them in front from the spot in the ninth minute. But a Park Yong-woo own goal and a Yazan al-Naimat strike put Jordan ahead at half-time. South Korea did not look like scoring for much of the second half but grabbed an equaliser when Yazan al-Arab deflected Hwang In-beom's shot into his own net in the first minute of injury time. South Korea need a draw in their last group game on Thursday against bottom side

Malaysia to guarantee they reach the last 16. Jordan, who beat Malaysia 4-0 and face Bahrain on Thursday, are still also in a strong position to reach the knockouts. In the later match, Bahrain scored in the 95th minute to beat Malaysia 1-0. Bahrain are third in the group after beating Malaysia for their first points of the tournament, Ali Madan thumping the winner deep in stoppage time to stay alive in the competition. Today at the Asian Cup, Saudi Arabia will start favourites against Kyrgyzstan. Saudi Arabia fought back to beat Oman 2-1 in stoppage time in their opening match and can seal their place in the knockout rounds. Also today, Oman face Thailand. **Sport Pages 1, 4**

Missile strikes across ME raise Gaza war escalation dangers

Reuters
Washington/Baghdad

Missile attacks in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Yemen yesterday threw into sharp focus the increasing risk of the war in Gaza triggering a wider regional conflict pitting Iran and its allies against Israel and the United States.

Iran said five of its Revolutionary Guards were killed in a missile strike on a house in Damascus for which it blamed Israel, and security sources in Lebanon said an Israeli strike there killed a member of Hezbollah.

Later yesterday an American official said a missile or rocket attack had injured US personnel at a base in Iraq.

The United States also said it had targeted a missile the Iran-backed Houthi group in Yemen was aiming into the Red Sea, which it called a threat to shipping.

Palestinian resistance movement Hamas is part of Iran's "Axis of Resistance", a regional alliance that also includes Lebanon's Hezbollah, the Syrian government of President Bashar al-Assad, militia groups in Iraq and the Houthis who control much of Yemen.

Over the past three months Israel has repeatedly struck at Iranian targets in Syria, while Iranian-backed groups in Syria and

24,927 Palestinians massacred in Gaza

A total of 24,927 Palestinians have been killed and 62,388 have been wounded in Israeli strikes on Gaza since Oct7, the Gaza health ministry said in a statement yesterday. Some 165 Palestinians were killed and 280 wounded in the past 24 hours, the ministry added. (Reuters)

Iraq have fired at US targets in those countries.

Aside from Gaza, the theatre of conflict with the widest international repercussions has been the Red Sea, where the Houthis have repeatedly targeted shipping.

Israel's intense bombardment of Gaza since Oct 7 has killed nearly 25,000 Palestinians.

Israel pounded targets across the Gaza Strip yesterday while its planes dropped leaflets on the southern area of Rafah urging Palestinians seeking refuge there to help locate hostages held by Hamas, residents said.

Palestinian fighters battled tanks trying to push back into the eastern suburbs of the Jabalia area in northern Gaza. **Pages 5, 6**

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Qatar takes part in Global Forum for Food and Agriculture in Berlin



Qatar took part in the Global Forum for Food and Agriculture; the Berlin Agriculture Ministers' Conference, which was held under the theme "Food Systems of the Future – Together for a World without Hunger"; and the International Green Week fair, which showcases a wide range of fresh products from all over the world. HE the Minister of Municipality Abdullah bin Hamad al-Attiyah headed Qatar's delegation to the events. The three-day Global Forum for Food and Agriculture, which concluded in Berlin yesterday with the participation of agricultural ministers from 70 countries, discussed the role of trade in securing sufficient food for the world's population, the importance of transparency in the food supply chain, and the impact of free trade on agriculture and rural development. The International Green Week is an international event that showcases a wide range of fresh products from all over the world. From luxury items to agricultural and horticultural machinery, visitors can find everything they need for their gardens and outdoor spaces.

Tatarstan president arrives in Doha



Tatarstan President Rustam Minnikhanov arrived in Doha yesterday to watch part of the AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023 matches. He and the accompanying delegation were welcomed upon arrival at Hamad International Airport by the Director of Department of Protocol Ibrahim bin Yousif Fakhro. **(QNA)**

HMC showcases efforts of Tobacco Control Centre at CMC session

The Central Municipal Council (CMC) hosted a team from Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC) to showcase the efforts of its Tobacco Control Centre and the initiative: "Together for a Smoke-Free Majlis" as a continuation of HMC's efforts to control smoking.

The team was led by Dr Ahmed Mohamed al-Mulla, director of Tobacco Control Centre at HMC, an accredited centre by the World Health Organisation. The accompanying team included Dr Maha al-Muhammadi, Dr Jamal Basehi, and Noor El Nakib.

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss ways of mutual co-operation with the municipal council to enhance the effectiveness of anti-smoking efforts and support

the "Together for a Smoke-Free Majlis" initiative. The meeting took place within the framework of the Central Municipal Council's discussion of strategies to address the issue of smoking within its jurisdiction. The meeting was attended by members of the Central Municipal Council and the General Secretariat.

At the beginning of the meeting, Dr al-Mulla reviewed Qatar's journey in smoking control, the vision of the Tobacco Control Centre, treatment methods, and the facilities provided by the centre as part of the anti-smoking efforts. Dr al-Mulla presented global statistics on the negative effects of smoking, the scale of the smoking problem, and the quantity of imported tobacco in Qatar, and discussed

smoking risks on the society and the health benefits of quitting.

"Smoking cessation services in Qatar are preventive and therapeutic services available free of charge to all residents. They are provided in government health institutions, including HMC, which has dedicated a centre for smoking cessation in Hamad Bin Khalifa Medical City and specialised clinics in HGH, Al Wakra Hospital, Hazm Mebareek Hospital, Al Khor Hospital, in addition to 16 health centres offering smoking cessation assistance," said Dr al-Mulla.

Dr al-Mulla pointed out that over 25.2% of adults aged 18 and above in Qatar are daily tobacco users, imposing additional responsibilities on the centre to launch more campaigns. He emphasised that tobacco control

services are joint community efforts involving all parties. He affirmed that Qatar was among the first countries in the region to introduce smoking cessation services in 1999, receiving WHO Tobacco Control Accreditation in 2017, making it the first in the region.

The president of the Central Municipal Council praised the efforts of HMC's Tobacco Control Centre to control smoking. The council members expressed their readiness to support the initiative "Together for a Smoke-Free Majlis".

The president honoured the team from HMC by presenting a commemorative plaque as a token of appreciation for the centre's efforts in smoking control.



HMC team gives a presentation at Central Municipal Council session.

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Qatar Tourism announces winners of third Shop Qatar '24 raffle draw



Qatar Tourism held the third raffle draw for Shop Qatar 2024 on Friday at Place Vendôme. Seven winners were awarded cash prizes starting from QR10,000, while one lucky winner received a LandRover Defender. Among the seven winners, Rania Ali won the LandRover Defender

while Afshad Riyadh won QR50,000. Hanan Jassimam (Coupon No 336616) and (Coupon No 114980) won QR20,000 each. Huda Salman Jabir, Menna Mohamed and Rim Monajed won QR10,000 each. The draw is the third of four draws taking place as part of Shop Qatar this year. For every QR200 spent, shoppers are eligible



to enter a draw, and have a chance to win a set of grand and valuable prizes. This year's festival also features redemption booths across the country's shopping districts, where visitors can redeem invoices, win vouchers, enjoy unique gaming experiences, and photo booth activations.

The Pearl Island unveils new EV chargers in sustainability drive

UDC hosts seven new EV chargers and Qatar's first electric patrolling vehicles at The Pearl Island

United Development Company (UDC), the master developer of The Pearl Island and Gewan Island, has announced the deployment of seven cutting-edge electric vehicle (EV) chargers at The Pearl Island, coupled with the introduction of the first-of-its-kind electric security patrolling vehicles in Qatar.

This marks a significant stride towards realising UDC's commitment to sustainability, particularly in the realm of eco-friendly transportation. A total of seven cutting-edge EV chargers have been strategically installed at The Pearl Island, enhancing the island's commitment to sustainable transportation.

Among them, six can efficiently charge EVs with a capacity of up to 60kWh and 120kwh, while one stands out as Qatar's fastest charger, capable of charging EVs up to 180kWh. This impressive addition is the result of a collaborative effort with Kahramaa's Tarsheed programme, a strategic support part-



UDC officials during the launching of the state-of-the-art EV charges at The Pearl Island.

ner, and AUDI (Q-Auto), the supplier of these advanced chargers.

Operational in record time, these chargers exemplify the swift evolution of EV technology, enabling vehicles to reach an 80% charge within a mere 10-15 minutes. This not only elevates the convenience for electric vehicle owners but also marks a significant leap towards sustainable and eco-friendly mo-

bility solutions. The inauguration was attended by UDC, Kahramaa, Tarsheed, Q-Auto, and Al Sraiya Security Services (SSS). This collaborative effort underscores the strategic planning that solidifies The Pearl Island and Gewan Island as leading sustainable destinations in Qatar and aligns with the goals of Qatar National Vision 2030.

The Pearl Island has joined

forces with SSS to unveil Qatar's inaugural electric security patrolling vehicles. This innovative collaboration signifies a breakthrough in sustainable security practices, aligning with The Pearl Island's commitment to environmental responsibility.

Beyond the immediate impact on public safety, this initiative is poised to contribute significantly



to the reduction of greenhouse gas (GHS) emissions across the island. By adopting eco-friendly security measures, The Pearl Island is creating a safer, healthier living environment for its community.

This strategic move is intricately woven into UDC's comprehensive Environmental and Sustainability Strategy for 2022-2026, aiming to curtail CO2 emissions by at least 12%. The electrification strategy, addressing the urgent challenges of climate change, is actively realised through initiatives like the introduction of electric security vehicles.

In quantifiable terms, the transition from conventional petrol fuel-burning vehicles to fully electric alternatives for the HSSE fleet

is projected to reduce CO2 emissions by almost 7% for the entire UDC operation. This remarkable achievement not only surpasses the annual target of a 2.4% reduction in CO2 emissions set in UDC's Environmental and Sustainability Strategy but also exemplifies UDC's steadfast commitment to a sustainable future.

Emphasising a holistic approach to sustainability, UDC is leading by example in transitioning 50% of its transportation fleet to electric alternatives. Earlier this year, UDC introduced a hybrid plug-in limousine service, boasting a 65% reduction in urban heat and greenhouse gas emissions, which exemplifies UDC's dedication to luxurious yet sustainable transportation.

US ambassador visits Qatar International Academy for Security Studies in Lusail

The United States ambassador, Timmy Davis, visited the Qatar International Academy for Security Studies (QIASS), the professional institute working to raise security standards, knowledge, and co-operation within the Gulf region and across the globe.

Ambassador Davis toured the facility and was briefed by staff on the cutting-edge programmes the academy delivers to Qataris and foreign partners from law enforcement and security services to build their capacity to address shared security challenges and combat transnational crime. During the tour, ambassador Davis visited the dedicated office for Doha's Global Security Forum, which QIASS organises in partnership with The Soufan Centre. The ambassador's visit builds on the success of a three-day event organised by QIASS which facilitated a Qatari and US training exercise in Doha for hostage rescue operations. The exercise saw participation from the Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the State Security Bureau, and the Internal Security Force (Lekhwiya). US representatives included officials from the US Departments of State and Defence, the FBI, and US Embassy Doha.



The US ambassador at QIASS.

QNCC lines up diverse events for first half of 2024

Qatar National Convention Centre (QNCC) has announced an array of events for the first half of 2024, offering a diverse range of entertainment, cultural experiences, conferences, exhibitions, and celebrations, a statement said.

In the line up is Russell Peters planned for a February show as he tours the GCC region. Along with this an array of Arabic cultural shows is expected at QNCC within the Al Mayassa Theatre seating 2,300 guests. The first in the series is live performances, including a Nassif Zeytoun concert.

Another edition of the Rouda Al Malki Exhibition is set for Feb-



ruary as it showcases a unique blend of fashion, accessories and more. Dimdex (Doha International Maritime Defence Exhibition) will happen in March over three days.

The Autonomous e-Mobility Forum, hosted by the Ministry of Transport, is scheduled in April

and the Build Your House Exhibition in May. QNCC will also host over 20 school and university graduations during the first half of the year. Many of the graduations are hosted within the Al Mayassa Theatre, Conference Hall and for the larger graduations in the Exhibition Space.

QNCC general manager Robert Tripoli said: "From world-class entertainment to industry-leading conferences and exhibitions, QNCC continues to be a hub for cultural enrichment, knowledge sharing, and celebration. We are also expecting a number of other exciting events to be announced in the coming months."

VCUarts Qatar students visit leading fashion brands in Italy

VCUarts Qatar students from the university's Fashion Design Department recently went on a learning trip to the headquarters of Fendi and Valentino in Rome. They had a chance to tour the brands' numerous workshops, or ateliers as they're called in the world of fashion.

They were able to interact with staff in various departments, giving them a ringside view of the creative and business processes that go into designing and marketing clothes and accessories created by two luxury brands.

"In class you learn about the myriad specialisations that make the fashion world what it is," says Anji Speldevinde, one of the senior students who participated in the experience. "But it's quite something else to see it in practice, complete with the stakes involved in maintaining the high standards these brands are renowned for."

"Fashion designers, textile experts, researchers, cultural advisers, architects, interior designers, graphic designers, accountants, business administrators, sales and marketing professionals - the list of professionals working with these brands was mind-boggling. It is incredible, especially if you think that styles keep changing across seasons, and all these experts are on their toes."

Alfutoon al-Said, another senior, added, "As undergraduate students, this truly was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. We're blessed to have faculty who have industry experience; they go all out to ensure classroom instruction is balanced with feet-on-the-ground reality."

The group of 11 students also visited the Gucci Museum in Florence, and to Armani/Silos, the museum in Milan dedicated to Armani style.

In addition to Fashion Design programme chair, Christopher Fink, they were accompanied by Fashion Design faculty members, Ali Khan and Esther Alice deVeve.



VCUarts Qatar students visited headquarters of Fendi and Valentino in Rome.

Shura takes part in AP Standing Committees’ meetings in Cairo

QNA
Cairo

The Shura Council participated in the meetings of the Arab Parliament (AP) Standing Committees, held in Cairo yesterday, in preparations for the 2nd meeting of the 4th session of the Arab Parliament third legislative term, slated for today.

The Shura Council’s delegation included members of Arab Parliament Standing Committees: the member of the Social, Educational, Cultural, Women and Youth Affairs Committee Shaikha bint Yousuf al-Jufairi, the member of the Economic and Financial Affairs Committee Essa bin Ahmad al-Nassr, the member of the Legislative, Legal, and Human Rights Affairs Committee Salem bin Rashid al-Meraikhi, and the member of the Foreign Affairs and Political and National Security Committee Hamad bin Abdulla al-Mulla.

The Social, Educational, Cultural, Women and Youth Affairs Committee approved the Arab women parliamentary document and the Arab world social status 2023 report, as well as discussed a parliamentary vision for a database of destroyed, looted, stolen, mutilated, or altered Arab artifacts.

During the meeting, al-Jufairi, committee member, presented several proposals centred around empowering women, reducing unemployment, and diversifying employment sectors, which were all well received by the attendees.

The Economic and Financial Affairs Committee reviewed a number of legislative initiatives and a draft law regulating food supply chain losses, in addition to following up on preparations for the 2nd edition of the Arab economic forum on Arab-interstate economic integration.

As for the Legislative, Legal, and Human Rights Affairs Committee, it discussed the Arab world human rights 2023 report and a guiding law draft on combating bullying in the Arab world, in addition to developing an Arab parliamentary vision to address the negative repercussions



of natural disasters on human rights in the Arab world.

In addition, the Foreign Affairs and Political and National Security Committee covered the latest political and security developments in the Arab world and worked on a comprehensive Arab vision to enhance security and stability in the Arab world. (QNA)

Qatar backs NAM’s position on just causes

Al-Muraikhi represents Qatar at 19th NAM Summit in Kampala

QNA
Kampala

Qatar participated in the meeting of the 19th Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) held in Kampala, Uganda on Jan 19-20.

HE the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sultan bin Saad al-Muraikhi represented Qatar at the meeting.

In his speech at the summit, HE al-Muraikhi extended the congratulations of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani to Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni for assuming the presidency of this vital international group, adding that he is confident the presidency will be successful in co-ordinating efforts towards achieving NAM’s objectives during the upcoming period, underscoring Qatar’s unwavering support in this respect.

HE al-Muraikhi praised the stellar efforts exerted by Azerbaijan to coordinate NAM’s action, particularly during a period that was fraught with unprecedented challenges, highlighting that this convention comes due to gross incidents, primarily the brutal Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip that has been continuing for months, as one of the latest issues that stirred the interest of NAM since its inception, which is the Palestinian cause.

He stressed that the strong and unwavering position of NAM towards the Palestinian cause stems from its rejection of the foreign occupation, the flagrant violations of the UN charter, the international law, the international humanitarian law, and double standards, emphasising that these principles are more crystal clear than any time before considering the current incidents in Gaza.

HE al-Muraikhi added that it is vitally important to reiterate NAM’s position that represents the international consensus on this just cause and to strongly push forward to stop these heinous massacres, protect the Palestinian people, secure the fundamental needs and prevent



the attempts of displacing them from their lands, as well as deprive them of their rights.

He added that it is important to push for a just, enduring, and comprehensive settlement based on the international law, international legitimacy, and the two-state solution, in addition to everything that necessitates the establishment of the viable Palestinian state on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital and for the Palestinian people to regain their full rights.

He emphasised that since the beginning of the crisis Qatar has been scrambling for achieving a humanitarian pause for hostilities resulting in durable ceasefire leading to enduring and comprehensive settlement stemming from its belief and achievements in mediation to resolve crises and disputes, as well as its humanitarian efforts.

HE al-Muraikhi outlined that those efforts achieved humanitarian pauses, strengthened the access of humanitarian assistance, in addition to releasing hundreds of civilian prisoners from the two sides, asserting that Qatar continues its relentless endeavour to achieve these humanitarian aims in coordination with parties and partners.

He reiterated that this is part of Qatar’s ironclad commitment to perform a

constructive role in achieving security, peace and stability at global, regional and local levels, including mediation and facilitating dialogue for the interest of stability in countries of this group, such as Afghanistan, Chad, Lebanon and others, as well as endeavours to address the humanitarian suffering such as the efforts that have recently led to the reunification of a number of Ukrainian children with their families.

HE the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs noted that Qatar is keen to be an effective and positive member in the international community as it maintains close bilateral relations, especially with the member states in the international groups it belongs to them, including NAM.

He added that stemming from Qatar’s keenness to bolster multilateralism, it continues engagement under the umbrella of NAM as an effective platform to enhance multilateralism and collective action to address common challenges and achieve joint interests.

He affirmed that NAM could perform a critical role in advancing an international system in which multilateralism has a larger role and reactivate the international organisations, especially the UN to make them more transparent, effective and democratic.

Al-Muraikhi meets Venezuela, Bangladesh FMs



HE the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sultan bin Saad al-Muraikhi held separate meetings with foreign ministers of Venezuela and Bangladesh Yvan Gil and Dr Mohamed Hasan Mahmud, respectively, on the sidelines of the 19th Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement in Kampala yesterday. The meetings focused on co-operation relations in addition to a host of topics of mutual interest. (QNA)

Nomas Wild Camp consolidates values, enhances national identity

The Nomas Centre, affiliated with the Ministry of Culture, has organised the Nomas Wild Camp in the Labsair – Al Shahaniya area, targeting youth aged 8-14. The camp aims to instil values and enhance national identity by utilising the leisure time of children in engaging in various activities related to Qatar’s authentic heritage, customs, and traditions.

The camp, held three days a week throughout the winter season, focuses on teaching participants Qatari traditional dance, council etiquette, falconry, archery, camel riding, cooking, preparation of Arabic coffee, building traditional tents, and more.

In remarks to the Qatar News Agency (QNA), Ghanem Abdulrahman al-Kuwari, the director of the Nomas Centre, said that the camp is being held for the first time in 2024 in line with the centre’s annual plan.

He explained that the camp programme includes a variety of activities allowing participants to familiarise themselves with the Qatari environment, traditional games, poetry and stories, hunting with traps, learning traditional knotting and lighting a fire, as well as archery.

Al-Kuwari added that the Nomas Centre is organising 12 similar camps in 2024, where a variety of theoretical and practical workshops will be offered. In addition to the practical application of the workshops, participants from the centre will benefit from the experiences gained in previous periods. (QNA)

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ANNOUNCEMENT FOR TENDER

No.	Document No.	Description	Tender Bond	Bid Closing Date
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Brief Scope: Contractor shall arrange required manpower, equipment, tools and consumable materials necessary to carry out metal roof repair works at Q-Chem, Q-Chem II and RLOC on call off basis for five years.				

Tender Documents for the above description can be obtained as follows:

A. Pay to Bank and send the original receipt with authorization letter via email

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B. Date and Time of Tender documents Issuance via email

Tender documents issuance from **21/01/2024 to 25/01/2024, 8am-12noon.**

C. Proposal details

Proposals should be valid for **240 days** from the tender closing date.

Tender must be accompanied by a Bank Guarantee (Tender Bond) issued by one of the Qatari Banks or by a Bank operating in Qatar and should be valid for **240 days** from the tender closing date.

D. Submission of Proposals

Guidelines for Electronic Bids Submission is attached in the Tender documents.



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4	D	Tinned Fish, Tinned Fruits & Tinned Vegetables	650
5	E	Frozen Vegetables & Fruits	500
6	F	Bakery Products- Items for Pastry	650
7	G	Olives & Oils	650
8	H	Rice	600
9	I	Tea and Coffee	350
10	J	Meat Items – Frozen, Chilled & Fresh	950
11	K	Poultry, Frozen	950
12	L	Milk products – Dairy items	650
13	M	Sauces & Seasoning	250
14	N	Eggs, Fresh & Frozen	300
15	O	Grocery Items- Cereals, Spices, Pasta & Vermicelli	350
16	P	Arabic Sweet	250
17	Q	Bread- Arabic Bread & Confectionery	250
18	R	Arabic Specialty	250
19	S	Nuts, Dates & Chocolates	250
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22	V	Cold Cuts	400

CONDITIONS:

- Tender Documents may be obtained from The Diplomatic Club Contract & Procurement Department upon presentation of **Authorization Letter to collect tender documents with valid Commercial Registration, Computer Card, Trade License Certificate, Tax Card, ICV Certificate and payment of the non-refundable tender fee. Payment by CASH, DEBIT, CREDIT CARD to the cashier at the Diplomatic Club.**
- Prices to be fixed for the period of 01/04/2024 to 31/03/2025
- Tenders should be accompanied by a Tender Bond equivalent to 5% of quoted value, issued by a bank operating in the state of Qatar as a temporary guarantee and valid for 120 days from the date of closing to be submitted in a separate envelope.
- Successful Tenderers shall submit Performance Bond issued by a bank operating in the state of Qatar equivalent to 10% of the Contract sum which shall be valid until 30/04/2025
- Offers should be valid for 90 days commencing from the closing date
- The Diplomatic Club’s shall have the right to increase or decrease the quantity by 20% of the contract quantity or value, as per its condition & price
- The Diplomatic Club’s is not be bound to accept the lowest or any other tender and is under no obligation to show reason thereof.
- Tenders should be submitted not later than **11:00 AM on Tuesday, 30 January 2024** (closing date) and must be deposited into the Tender Box provided in the Contract & Procurement Department, located at The Diplomatic Club, West Bay Dafna. Tenders should be submitted in sealed envelope addressed to the **Chairman, Tenders Committee**, quoting the Tender Number, Subject and Group/s.

CHAIRMAN - TENDERS COMMITTEE

Tel: 44847471 Fax: 44839001 Email: tendercommittee@dclub.com.qa

Web: www.thediplomaticclub.com

QatarDebate holds debate on global co-operation in Davos

The QatarDebate Centre held a debate on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos, Switzerland, in collaboration with *The New York Times* under the theme of global co-operation and whether it has become obsolete.

The session featured industry experts, businesspeople, thought leaders, decision-makers and high-ranking officials headed by HE the Minister of State for International Co-operation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Lolwah bint Rashid AlKhater, alongside representatives of the QatarDebate Centre, a statement said.

New York Times president and chief executive Meredith Kopit Levien and *New York Times* Company president (International) Stephen Dunbar-Johnson delivered inaugural remarks before the session.

QatarDebate Centre outreach programmes manager Abdulrahman al-Subaie also addressed the session.

He said that the QatarDebate Centre has proven to the world that it has succeeded in conveying its message after years of having witnessed milestones and expansion in building bridges of co-operation with global institutions of more than 80 states, in addition to engaging tens of thousands of young people in initiatives and programmes.

Organised by the QatarDebate Centre, the debate was squarely convened before a jury, as per the Oxford method, with the participation of international speakers in a variety of fields and moderated



by *New York Times* climate change and the environment correspondent David Gelles. The debate features open discussions between those who supported the laid-out issue and those

who rejected it that primarily revolved around ways to restore confidence in global organisations that started to crumble, as well as programming them to be more effective.

The debaters also touched on the significance of converging the perspectives of active parties and attendees through offering the state-of-the-art evolutions in science, industry, and society.

The jury committee was made up of former US vice-president Al Gore, Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) president Mirjana Spoljaric Egger, alongside former Dow Chemical Company of Midland chief executive and chairman Andrew N Liveris, the statement read.

Female speakers in the debate included the director of Programme Advocacy and Communications, Health at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation Alaa Murabit, GAYO Uganda country manager Betty Osei Bonsu, visiting Professor of Practice at the University of Oxford's Blavatnik School of Government Rachel Kyte, Professor in the Economics of Innovation and Public Value at University College London Prof Mariana Mazzucato, co-president of the Club of Rome Sandrine Dixon-Decleve, and alongside The B Team chief executive and chief change catalyst Halla Tomasdottir.

The debate wrapped up by unanimously voting for the conviction that global co-operation does still exist and has not become obsolete, but through enacting some laws on reforms. - **QNA**

Iran vows revenge over deadly missile strike in Damascus

Reuters/AFP
Damascus/Beirut

Tehran has vowed to carry out revenge attacks against Israel after a missile strike yesterday flattened a building used as a base of Iran's elite Revolutionary Guards in Damascus, killing five Guards and an unspecified number of Syrian troops.

Ambulances and fire trucks gathered around the site of the strike, which had been cordoned off, a Reuters journalist at the scene said.

Rescue operations for people stuck under the rubble continued through the day. A crane was in place to hoist concrete slabs off the wreckage.

An AFP journalist said the building had been reduced to debris.

"I heard the explosion clearly in the western Mazzeleh area, and I saw a large cloud of smoke," one resident told AFP, requesting anonymity over security concerns. "The sound was similar to a missile explosion, and minutes later I heard the sound of ambulances."

Asked about the strike, the Israeli military told AFP: "We do not comment on reports from the foreign media."

Israel has long pursued a bombing campaign against Iran's military and security presence in Syria but typically does not discuss such attacks publicly.

It has killed Iranian Guards in several such strikes in a stepped-up campaign in the wake of the events of October 7.

A security source in a network of groups close to Syria's government and its ally Iran told Reuters that the multi-storey building was used by Iranian advisers supporting President Bashar al-Assad's government.

It was completely flattened by "precision-targeted Israeli missiles", the source said.

The Guards said an unspecified number of members of the Syrian military were killed, along with the five Iranians, whom it identified without giving their ranks.

The security source said one of the slain Iranians ran the elite force's information unit.

The strike was a "desperate attempt to spread instability in region", said Iran's



People and security forces gather in front of a building destroyed in a strike in Damascus.

foreign ministry spokesperson Nasser Kanaani in remarks reported by state media. "Iran...reserves its right to respond to the organised terrorism of the fake Zionist regime at the appropriate time and place."

Syrian state media reported an Israeli "aerial attack" on a building in the Mazzeleh neighbourhood of Damascus and said Syrian air defences had shot down a number of missiles.

The neighbourhood also houses the United Nations headquarters, embassies and restaurants.

Essam al-Amin, head of the Al-Mowasad Hospital in Damascus, told Reuters that his hospital had received one dead body and three wounded people, including a woman, following yesterday's attack.

Palestinian Islamic Jihad, an Iranian-backed Palestinian faction present in Syria and Lebanon, condemned the air strike but told Reuters that none of its members were wounded, dismissing reports that some were at the bombed-out building.

Iran and its military allies in Syria have entrenched themselves in wide areas of

eastern, southern and northern Syria and in several suburbs around the capital.

In December, an Israeli air strike killed two Guards members, and another near Damascus on December 25 killed a senior adviser to the Guards overseeing military co-ordination between Syria and Iran.

Israel responded to the events of October 7 by unleashing a devastating air and ground war in Gaza with the aim of eradicating its ruling Islamist group Hamas.

The conflict has reverberated across the Middle East with violence surging in Syria, Lebanon, northern Iraq and in the Red Sea.

In Lebanon, the Iranian-backed Hezbollah as well as local wings of Palestinian militant groups have fired rockets across the border at Israel in solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza.

An Israeli strike in south Lebanon yesterday killed a member of Hezbollah and one other Lebanese national as they were travelling in their car, two security sources told Reuters, after earlier saying that two Hamas members were killed.

UK says two Royal Navy vessels involved in collision in Bahrain

Two British Royal Navy mine-hunter vessels were involved in a collision in a port in Bahrain, the Royal Navy said.

No one was injured in the accident which occurred in Bahrain Harbour on Friday, the Royal Navy added.

An investigation into the incident has been opened.

The Royal Navy is working with the US Navy in the Gulf region in an effort to protect Red Sea shipping from an upsurge in attacks by Houthi forces based in Yemen.

The Houthis say they acting in solidarity with the Palestinian group Hamas, which is locked in conflict with Israel in Gaza.

The attacks have disrupted world trade and raised fears of supply bottlenecks.

Video on social media showed one boat, the HMS Chiddingfold, reversing into another, HMS Bangor, which was moored, causing a loud crashing noise and the Bangor to rock.

Rear Admiral Edward Ahlgren, the Royal Navy's Commander Operations, said in a post on X that nobody was hurt but some damage was sustained.

"I assure you that a full and thorough investigation is already under way and any changes in procedure that could prevent further incidents will be rapidly implemented," Ahlgren said.

"In the meantime the UK will continue to play a key part in ensuring the safety of merchant shipping in the region," he added. - **Reuters**

WAREHOUSE FOR RENT

- ✔ Warehouse for rent in Industrial area
- ✔ Warehouse 600 Sqm/1200 Sqm
- ✔ Municipality Approved
- ✔ Civil Defence Approved
- ✔ Secure Boundary Wall
- ✔ 24/7 Security

 **6672 2989**



Sudan suspends membership in east Africa bloc

The government of war-torn Sudan has informed the IGAD (Intergovernmental Authority on Development) that it is suspending its membership in the east Africa bloc, the foreign ministry loyal to army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan said yesterday.

Khartoum had already announced on Tuesday that it was freezing relations with the IGAD for inviting paramilitary chief Mohamed Hamdan Daglo - at war with Burhan for nine months - to a summit in Uganda that discussed the Sudan conflict.

Sudan "is facing one of the fastest unfolding crises globally", the United Nations humanitarian agency, OCHA, says, with more than 7.4mn people displaced and more than half the population needing humanitarian assistance.

The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, an analyst group, puts the death toll at more than 13,000.

In a statement, Sudan's foreign ministry said Burhan sent a letter yesterday to President Ismail Omar Guelleho of Djibouti, current chair of the bloc, "to inform him of the Sudanese government decision suspending its membership in this organisation". - **AFP**

ARPM Tender Committee announces the following Tender

Tender No.	Subject	Fees QR.	Tender Bond QR.	Opening Date	Closing Date
ARPM/157/2024/TEN/DOH	Provision and Installation of CCTV Camera at AL Bidda Park	1,000	10,000	21 January 2024	12 February 2024
ARPM/158/2024/TEN/DOH	Provision and Installation of Tree Lights at AL Bidda Park	1,000	10,000	21 January 2024	12 February 2024
ARPM/159/2024/TEN/DOH	Provision of General Supplies to Banana Island Resort, Souq Waqif Boutique Hotels, Al Najada Hotel, Souq Al Wakra Hotel and ARPM Group for One Year.	GROUP	As Below	21 January 2024	18 February 2024
	Printing & Stationery Items	A	500		
	Cleaning Supplies & Tools	B	500		
	Operating & Disposable Items	C	500		
	Paper Products	D	300		
	Plastic Products	E	300		
	Charcoal, Chaffing Fuel & Candle	F	500		
	Laundry Supplies	G	300		
	Collaterals	H	500		

1. Interested parties can collect copies of the tender documents from ARPM Purchasing Department, via email to m.aseef@arpm.com.qa and L.cabral@arpm.com.qa during working hours 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. (Fri & Sat Closed)

2. A payment of a non-refundable document's fees should be deposited in cash to:

- Beneficiary Name: Al-Rayyan Projects Management (ARPM)
- Account No. 0013-022375-004 (Qatar National Bank)
- IBAN No. QA86QNBAA00000000013022375004

And the original deposit receipt should be submitted upon receiving of the terms and conditions.

3. A tender bond (as stated above), issued by a bank operating in the State of Qatar and valid for 120 days from the closing date should accompany tenders. **The executed tender bond should be included with the technical offer.**

4. All tenderers MUST collect their original bonds from ARPM - Purchasing department upon expiry of the Tender Bond, unless alternative instructions are issued by ARPM.

5. Proposal to be submitted in sealed envelopes as per the RFP requirements in both HARD COPY & SOFT COPY on CD or USB.

6. Copies of valid **Company Commercial Registration, Computer Card & Authorization Letter** must be submitted in order to collect the tender documents.

7. The successful tenderer is required to submit a performance bond issued by a bank operating in the State of Qatar equivalent to 10% of the total contract sum and shall be valid for a period expiring 30 days after contract expiry.

8. Offers should be valid for 90 days commencing from the closing date (as stated above).

9. ARPM has the right to increase or decrease the scope of services by 20% with the same terms and conditions.

10. ARPM is not bound to accept the lowest tender or any other tender and is under no obligation to show any reasons thereof.

11. Bids should be submitted not later than 12:00 noon on the closing date and must be deposited into the Box, provided in the ARPM Purchasing office, located at the 9th Floor, ARPM, Head office and should be in sealed envelopes addressed to the Chairman - Tenders Committee, quoting the Tender Number and Subject.

12. Offers arriving thereafter may not be considered.

CHAIRMAN – TENDER COMMITTEE
TEL: 40341804



Fighting rages across Gaza as Israel drops leaflets seeking its hostages

AFP/Reuters
Gaza Strip

Israel pounded targets across the Gaza Strip yesterday while its planes dropped leaflets on the southern area of Rafah urging Palestinians seeking refuge there to help locate hostages held by Hamas, residents said.

Meanwhile, health officials in the Hamas-run Gaza Strip have reported a surging death toll in fighting with Israel, whose leader Benjamin Netanyahu rejected calls for “Palestinian sovereignty” after the war.

As fighting raged across the besieged territory, a strike in Syria blamed on Israel (*see report on Page 5*) and missiles fired at US-led coalition forces in Iraq (*see report below*) raised further fears of a wider conflagration.

Gaza’s health ministry reported at least 165 people killed over the previous 24 hours – more than double Friday’s figure.

An AFP correspondent reported gunfire, air strikes and tank shelling, especially in southern Gaza’s Khan Younis city.

Israel is pressing its push southwards against Hamas, after the army in early January said Hamas’ command structure in northern Gaza had been dismantled, leaving only isolated fighters.

However, Hamas reported fierce combat in north Gaza as Israel’s military said troops backed by air and naval support

Denial of Palestinian statehood is ‘unacceptable’, says UN secretary-general at NAM summit

The right of the Palestinian people to build their own state “must be recognised by all”, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) summit in Uganda yesterday. “The refusal to accept a two-state solution for Israelis and Palestinians, and the denial of the right to statehood for the Palestinian people, are unacceptable,” the UN leader said in Kampala. Such a stance “would indefinitely prolong a conflict that has become

a major threat to global peace and security; exacerbate polarisation; and embolden extremists everywhere”, Guterres warned. “The right of the Palestinian people to build their own state must be recognised by all.” In its final summit communique yesterday, the NAM “strongly condemned the illegal Israeli military aggression against the Gaza Strip”, and called for “a lasting humanitarian ceasefire”. -AFP

were striking militant infrastructure throughout the Palestinian territory, including the north.

Israel has vowed to destroy Hamas in response to the Palestinian group’s unprecedented October attacks which resulted in the deaths of about 1,140 people, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally based on official Israeli figures.

Israel’s relentless bombardment and ground offensive have killed at least 24,927 people in Gaza, mostly women and children, according to the Hamas government’s health ministry.

The United States, which provides Israel with billions of dollars in military aid, has urged it to take more care to protect civilians, and the two sides have disagreed over Gaza’s future governance.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and US President Joe Biden discussed on Friday the post-war future of Gaza amid a dire humanitarian situation.

Biden said it was still possible Netanya-

hu could agree to some form of Palestinian state, after the two leaders spoke for the first time in nearly a month.

However, Netanyahu’s office said in a statement yesterday that he “reiterated his policy that after Hamas is destroyed Israel must retain security control over Gaza to ensure that Gaza will no longer pose a threat to Israel, a requirement that contradicts the demand for Palestinian sovereignty”.

The UN’s UNRWA agency for Palestinian refugees says about 1.7mn people have been displaced in Gaza by the war.

About 1mn are crowded into the Rafah area in the far south, near Egypt.

UN agencies have warned better aid access – including through Israel’s Ashdod port – is needed urgently as famine and disease loom.

After Friday’s Biden-Netanyahu call, the White House said Israel would allow flour shipments for Palestinians through Ashdod.

In Gaza, the UN humanitarian agency OCHA reported only 15 bakeries were operating across the narrow territory.

Water availability for drinking and domestic use “is shrinking every day”, the UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) added.

It also said that without immediate funding and an expanded response, 375,000 malnourished children and vulnerable mothers risk undernourishment.

Thousands of Gazan men may have been detained by Israeli forces, often facing conditions that could amount to torture, said the UN’s human rights representative in the Palestinian territories, Ajith Sung-hay.

Israel’s military said individuals suspected of involvement in “terrorist activities” were being treated in accordance with international law.

During the October attacks Hamas fighters seized about 250 hostages, around 132 of whom Israel says remain in Gaza. At

least 27 captives are believed to have been killed, according to an AFP tally based on Israeli figures.

Violence has also surged in the occupied West Bank, where Israeli troops and settlers have killed more than 360 people since October 7, according to the Ramallah-based Palestinian health ministry.

Deadly exchanges have occurred regularly between Israeli forces and Lebanon’s Iran-backed Hezbollah movement, whose deputy leader Naim Qassem has urged Israel not “to expand its aggression”.

In Rafah, Israel dropped leaflets showing photos of 33 hostages, their names written in Arabic, urging the displaced to make contact.

“Do you want to return home? Please make the call if you recognise one of them,” the leaflets read.

“They are asking people’s help because they are unable to get to their hostages because of the resistance,” said Abu Ali, one north Gaza resident.

More than 100 of the hostages seized by Hamas were freed during a short-lived November truce.

Israel says 132 remain in Gaza, 27 of whom have been killed in captivity.

In Israel, families of hostages camped outside Netanyahu’s residence in the coastal city Caesarea.

“He needs to choose one (deal) and end the hostage saga,” said Eli Stivi, whose son Idan is being held incommunicado in Gaza.

Comoros opposition candidates seek to annul vote

Three opposition candidates in Comoros’ presidential election filed a petition at the Supreme Court yesterday challenging the re-election of incumbent leader Azali Assoumani in a vote that has sparked deadly protests.

Abdallah Mohamad Daoudou, who was a flag-bearer for the opposition Orange party, told Reuters that the petition asks the Supreme Court to nullify the January 14 election result.

The opposition claims the poll was tainted by fraud, including alleged instances of ballot stuffing and of voting ending before the official closing time.

The government has denied those accusations.

“People have expressed their dissatisfaction with the results, which do not reflect reality,” Salim Issa, the runner-up and head of the opposition Juwa party, told Reuters. “We therefore went to court...we are waiting for a transparent judgment.”

Assoumani, who stood against five opponents, was declared the winner with 62.97% of the vote.

The opposition rejected the results and staged protests that have left at least one dead and 25 people injured.

The government has challenged the opposition to provide proof of the electoral fraud.

On Wednesday the army fired tear gas to disperse protesters in Moroni, capital of Comoros, an Indian Ocean archipelago of islands with a population of about 800,000.

The opposition had urged people across the island chain to block roads after Friday prayers to denounce Assoumani’s “electoral masquerade”, but the protest call went unheeded.

Assoumani first came to power through a coup in 1999. He stepped down in 2002 and then won elections 14 years later.

Constitutional reforms in 2018 removed a requirement that the presidency rotate among Comoros’ three main islands every five years, allowing Assoumani to seek re-election in 2019. - Reuters/AFP



First Lady Denise Nyakeru Tshisekedi arrives with her children at the swearing-in ceremony of her husband at Kinshasa’s Martyrs stadium.

DR Congo president is sworn in for new term

AFP/Reuters
Kinshasa

The president of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DR Congo), Felix Tshisekedi, was sworn in for a second five-year term yesterday after sweeping elections that the opposition branded a sham while calling for protests.

With tensions simmering in the vast nation’s volatile eastern provinces, the 60-year-old president known as “Fatshi” picked Kinshasa’s 80,000-capacity Martyrs sports stadium for the ceremony.

The stands were packed well before midday with singing and dancing in full flow, with some 20 invited heads of African states in attendance.

“I solemnly swear...to defend the constitution and the laws of the Republic...to maintain its independence and the integrity of its territory,” the re-elected president declared before the judges of the Constitutional Court.

Following that Tshisekedi received greetings from the traditional chiefs of the 26 provinces

of the immense Central African country.

In a speech, Tshisekedi acknowledged the nation’s hopes of better living conditions and economic opportunities.

Around 62% of DR Congo’s 100mn people live on less than a dollar a day.

“I am aware of your expectations,” he said. “A goal of this new five-year term is to create more jobs.”

He also promised “a profound restructuring of our security and defence apparatus” and further diplomatic efforts to address the DR Congo’s long-running security crisis in eastern provinces.

Tshisekedi’s first swearing-in, in January 2019 after controversially defeating Joseph Kabila, took place in the gardens of the Palace of Nations, a solemn venue that has traditionally staged important official events.

He is the son of the late historic opposition figure Etienne Tshisekedi.

He became president promising to improve living conditions in the DR Congo – which boasts mineral riches but has a largely impover-

ished population of 100mn – and put an end to 25 years of bloodshed in the east.

He has not kept those promises but this time around he campaigned strongly on his first-term achievements such as free primary medication, asking for another mandate to “consolidate” the progress.

More than 40mn people were registered to vote on December 20 for a president, as well as national and regional lawmakers and municipal councillors.

Polling was officially extended by a day to account for multiple logistical snarls and continued for days afterwards in remote areas.

In the end, Tshisekedi officially triumphed with 73.47% of the vote.

Moise Katumbi, a former governor of the central region of Katanga, came a distant second with 18.08%.

Martin Fayulu, who says he was also robbed at the last presidential vote, garnered 5%.

Denis Mukwege, who won the Nobel Peace Prize for his work with rape victims, scored just 0.22%.



Tshisekedi waves as he arrives to be sworn in for a second term as president during the inauguration ceremony at Kinshasa’s Martyrs stadium.

These candidates called for the election results to be cancelled.

A protest planned for December 27 was banned and snuffed out by the police.

The archbishop of Kinshasa denounced the elections as a “gigantic, organised mess”.

The authorities acknowledged there were issues but dismissed allegations the vote was stolen.

Accusations of fraud and an “electoral hold-up” have not abated and the fear of violence remains real in a country with a dark political past.

Katumbi and Fayulu have appealed to supporters to “show their discontent” this weekend.

They urged people “to stand up and say ‘no’”, from wherever they happen to be.

AFP reporters said that tyres were burnt yesterday morning on the streets of Goma, capital of the conflict-torn eastern province of North Kivu.

In the provincial town of Beni, also in the east, youths tried to set up barricades but police intervened.

The electoral commission CENI has recognised cases of fraud,

vandalism and intimidation, as well as the use of illegal voting machines.

In the general election, the vote has been annulled for 82 candidates – including three government ministers and four provincial governors.

The security challenge remains monumental for Tshisekedi.

There was a lull in fighting in the east during the elections but violence has since resumed between the army and M23 rebels, backed by neighbouring Rwanda.

Since mid-December, troops from the 10-nation Southern African Development Community (SADC) have been discreetly arriving in the DR Congo.

They are taking over from an East African peacekeeping force whose mandate was ended by the DR Congo government, which alleged that it colluded with the rebels instead of fighting them.

A senior army officer said on Tuesday that Kinshasa was counting on them to help recapture ground from the M23 militia, which has conquered swathes of territory in the east since taking up arms again in 2021.

ANNOUNCEMENT

I, ASHRAFF MOHAMMED

holder of

INDIAN Passport No. Z4761543
QID No. 27635627731

hereby change my name

from

ASHRAFF MOHAMMED

to

MOHAMMED ASHRAFF

Any objection, please contact
THE PERMANENT COMMITTEE FOR
NATIONALITY AFFAIRS
within 15 days from the publication of this notice.

US personnel suffer minor injuries in Iraq base attack

US personnel suffered minor injuries and a member of Iraq’s security forces was seriously wounded in an attack on Iraq’s Ain al-Asad air base yesterday, a US official said.

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said initial reports indicated that the base was hit by ballistic missiles but he left open the possibility it was struck by rockets.

Two security sources in Iraq and one government source said the base was hit by multiple rockets fired from inside Iraq.

A second US official said the attack was carried out by militants from inside Iraq.

Since the Israel-Hamas war began in October, the US military has come under attack at least 58 times in Iraq and another 83 times in Syria by Iran-backed militants, usually with a mix of rockets and one-way attack drones.

The militants are seeking to im-

pose a cost on the United States for its support of Israel against Iran-backed Palestinian militant group Hamas.

The US has 900 troops in Syria and 2,500 in Iraq on a mission to advise and assist local forces trying to prevent a resurgence of Islamic State, which in 2014 seized large parts of both countries.

Iraq is deeply concerned about becoming a battleground between the United States, Israel and Iran.

Iraq’s Prime Minister Mohamed Shia al-Sudani’s office announced moves to evict US forces following a US drone strike in Baghdad.

The Pentagon said the strike killed a militia leader responsible for recent attacks on US personnel.

The Pentagon said it has not been formally notified of any plans to end the US troop presence in the country, and says its troops are deployed to Iraq at the invitation of the government in Baghdad. - Reuters

US again targets Yemen’s Houthis

Reuters
Washington/Cairo

US Central Command forces struck yesterday a Houthi anti-ship missile that was aimed into the Gulf of Aden and prepared to launch, the US military said, with the latest round of strikes coming hours after the United States struck three other Houthi anti-ship missiles.

“US forces determined the missile presented a threat to merchant vessels and US Navy ships in the region, and subsequently struck and destroyed the missile in self-defence,” the US Central Command said in a statement on X.

The incident, the latest amid growing tensions in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden that have disrupted global trade and raised fears of supply bottlenecks, took place around 0400 Yemen time (0100 GMT), the US Central Command added.

Hours earlier late on Friday, US Central Command forces conducted strikes against three Houthi anti-ship missiles that they

said were aimed into the Southern Red Sea.

Attacks by Houthi militia on ships in and around the Red Sea for the past several weeks have slowed trade between Asia and Europe and alarmed major powers in an escalation of the war in Gaza.

The Houthis, who control most of Yemen, say their attacks are in solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza.

Since last week, the United States has been launching strikes on Houthi targets in Yemen, and this week returned the militia to a list of “terrorist” groups.

President Joe Biden said on Thursday that air strikes would continue even as he acknowledged they may not be halting the Houthi attacks.

Saturday’s strikes were the fifth in the past week by the US against Houthi missile launchers that were prepared to launch attacks.

The Houthis launched two anti-ship ballistic missiles at a US-owned tanker ship late on Thursday that hit the water near the vessel but caused no injuries or damage, according to the US military.

The Collective Season Two is now available exclusively in Printemps Doha

Printemps Doha and M7's The Collective program, now in its second season, concludes with shortlisted designers showcasing their capsule collection at the largest department store in the Middle East

Six Qatari and Qatar-based startup designer brands from The Collective retail incubation program have launched their exclusive capsule collection in a dedicated M7 space located on the 2nd floor of Printemps Doha.

The Collective is a pioneer project co-launched by M7, Qatar's epicentre for innovation and entrepreneurship in fashion and design, and Printemps Doha, the largest department store in the Middle East, to enable up and coming designers to develop a successful retail business. The Collective Season Two sees the launch of an exciting new line-up that includes ready-to-wear, eveningwear, abayas, kidswear and footwear.

The designers' line-up includes: TAGREED OMER, LIN, DRIZZLE, NINTH, MARYAM ALMALKI and F.J. DESIGN. Their collections are now available exclusively at Printemps Doha.

TAGREED OMER's namesake eveningwear brand started with a love for textile arts, hand painting fabrics and creating unique prints and patterns that caught the attention of many local designers and clients. Her unusual textile designs have become highly sought after by both local and international fashion brands. Tagreed Omer explained the concept of her brand, saying: "As a passionate advocate for sustainable fashion practices, I am firmly committed to combatting the harmful effects of fast fashion. My mission is simple: to make sustainability accessible and fashionable for all."

LIN uses fabric as a story telling tool and sophisticated medium to highlight individuality within the realm of fashion. The designer Introduces 'Falling Blossoms', a collection of ready-to-wear pieces and abayas, inspired by the enchanting autumn season. As a special addition to this collection, Lin reimagined her signature piece with a printemps color palette. The brand founder, Noof Almulla said: "This collection beautifully combines minimal colors with delicate flower touches, capturing the essence of nature's transformation during this magical time of year. Each flower-inspired detail represents our commitment to sustainability and our desire to preserve the beauty of our surroundings."

Thierry Prevost, General Manager of Printemps Doha, added: "The second edition of The Collective has highlighted a great maturity in the approach and work of how we equip young local designers with the necessary tools and knowledge to develop a successful retail business. Cultural diversity, traditional crafts and creativity define this selection. The finalists are fully involved in sustainability issues and their uniqueness and commitment to their brands have impressed us. We now look forward to seeing the reaction from our customers as we continue to support home growth designers."



Maha Al Sulaiti, Director of M7, said: "Now in its second season, The Collective was created to empower emerging designers by providing dedicated mentorship and coaching as they embark in their own journey. Together with Printemps Doha, we were able to tailor a program along with industry experts to pass down knowledge and share their personal journey to the talents of tomorrow. It's wonderful to witness the collective union and dedication to creating a landscape for homegrown designers to flourish in the industry. The result of this collaboration is a diverse line-up of talents to watch."



DRIZZLE is a Qatar-based womenswear brand established in 2018 by Alanoud Al-Hedfa, with a focus on timeless, elegant, and minimalist pieces, aimed to be worn by people of all ages and cultures. The designer showcases 'Serene Lines', a sophisticated and versatile collection, perfect for a variety of occasions. The owner Alanoud commented "From refined tailored trench coats to elegant abayas, our pieces effortlessly blend classic styles with contemporary flair. Featuring diverse range of fabrics from light, flowy satin, to structured and shaped taffeta, with a color palette of neutrals, offering the perfect wardrobe staples that women can wear with confidence for any occasion."

NINTH is a sustainable kidswear brand launched by designer Fatma Al Mohammadi dedicated to providing high-quality, eco-friendly clothing that is both stylish and comfortable. Believing that it is possible to create beautiful clothing that is also good for the planet, the brand is committed to reducing the impact of the fashion on the environment.

MARYAM ALMALKI was born out of the unwavering quest for beauty and timeless elegance in 2022. The brand's pieces are designed in Qatar by Maryam Al-Malki and brought to life through skilled artisans in Italy, this footwear brand is a testament to the rich heritage of artisanal expertise and craftsmanship, with a focus on embodying an effortless sense of contemporary chic - favored by the cool girls of today.

Her exclusive capsule collection for Printemps Doha include 5 shoe styles: the CAROLYN - a classic '90s-inspired slingback pump pays homage to Carolyn Bessette's legacy of



style, the VIVIENNE - a scene-stealing red suede t-strap heel with tan lining that commands attention with every stride, the CASSIDY - a playfully feminine slingback pump with a suede-burnished leather mix, the GRACE - a suede mule adorned with a burnished leather Western design motif that's versatile for any season, the JANE - an ode to the ultimate it-Girl, Jane Birkin, the LOLA - a burnished leather and shearling mule that personifies grace with an edge and the JEAN - a suede mule with an extra- soft fur lining.

Founded in 2015 by the dynamic mother-daughter duo, Fatima and Juwaher, FJ DESIGN was born from a deep love for self-expression and a passionate drive to empower women. The brand displays their Autumn/ Winter 2023 collection, a line carefully curated to always look impeccably good and timeless. The co-founder Juwaher said "We pay a lot of attention to how the fabric is cut and the materials used, because these contribute to the longevity of the pieces. Our customers can wear the pieces for a long time, while feeling confident and stylish no matter what."





Haley says no to Trump vice-presidency

Reuters
Manchester

Nikki Haley made it clear to New Hampshire voters on Friday: She won't serve as former President Donald Trump's vice-president if he wins the Republican nomination.

Haley, who's challenging Trump for the Republican presidential nod, has long said she won't "play for second." But in touring the independent-leaning state this week, she explicitly ruled out being a running mate in November, media reports said.

"I don't want to be anybody's vice-president. That is off the table," Haley told voters at a diner stop in Amherst, New Hampshire on Friday, *Politico* and the *Washington Post* reported.

"I have always said that. That is a game they play that I'm not going to play. I don't want to be vice-president," Haley added, according to the *Post*. Haley, who served as Trump's ambassador to the United Nations, is barnstorming New Hampshire ahead of its Tuesday contest and further distancing herself from Trump in a state known for a more moderate brand of Republicanism. Its semi-open primary can also draw more centrist voters, who may be turned off by Trump's criminal charges, increasingly authoritarian language and efforts to overturn his 2020 re-election loss. She must



Republican presidential candidate, ex-UN ambassador Nikki Haley, ties a man's shoe after he arrives to greet her with an untied shoe during a campaign event held at Keene Country Club in Keene, New Hampshire. (AFP)

close the gap in Republicans' second primary contest to have any chance at thwarting Trump's momentum after his decisive win in Iowa's caucus on Monday.

Only Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, who has largely written off New Hampshire to challenge Haley in her home state of South Carolina, remains in the three-

way contest for the nomination to challenge Democrat Joe Biden in November. Earlier this month, Trump said he knows who his running mate will be if he wins the nomination but declined to name anyone.

Here is other news from the campaign trail: Haley faced a blow from her

home state on Friday, with fellow South Carolinian Tim Scott, a US senator first nominated by Haley, poised to back Trump.

"Oh man. I'm so excited for the announcement tonight," Scott said in a video taken in front of a Trump-marked plane and posted on X. "Let's talk about four more years."

"New Hampshire here we come!" he wrote.

Scott, who had also challenged Trump for the Republican Party's nomination but ended his campaign last year, will endorse his former rival at a rally Friday night in Concord, a source told Reuters.

As South Carolina governor, Haley tapped then US Representative Scott to fill a Senate vacancy in 2012.

"Tim Scott wouldn't have a job without Nikki Haley," New Hampshire Governor Chris Sununu, a Republican backing Haley, said in a Fox News interview on Friday, according to the *Washington Post*.

"Nobody cares," Sununu said of the endorsement as he chatted with restaurant patrons in Milford, the *New York Times* reported.

DeSantis would like the people of New Hampshire to know something: He's still here.

The Florida governor called a press conference on Friday at St. Anselm College in Manchester, New Hampshire, amid reports that he was abandoning the state.

Polls show DeSantis lagging way behind Trump and Haley ahead of Tuesday's primary. He had events scheduled yesterday in South Carolina, which holds a primary next month, and his campaign hasn't said if he'll return to New Hampshire.

He chose St. Anselm because it was supposed to host a debate this week, but both Trump and Haley declined to participate, further

cutting off DeSantis' political oxygen.

DeSantis was asked if thought he could still win the nomination.

"As long as I'm in the hunt, that tells me that I'm seeing a pathway," he said. "The minute I don't, I'm not going to do this just for my health."

If Friday was DeSantis' farewell to the New Hampshire media, he left an impression. The press conference was scheduled for 3:30pm — outside in the winter cold. Reporters, along with a few die-hard supporters, stood and waited, shivering, for DeSantis to arrive.

The windchill was 12 degrees Fahrenheit (minus 11 Celsius). Some supporters gave up and trickled off, followed by a few members of the media.

"It's not that cold. It's not too too bad," said Katherine Prudhomme O'Brien, 53, of Derry, holding a DeSantis sign. She was jumping up and down to keep herself warm.

"He's lost my vote!" one attendee shouted, and the crowd laughed.

Finally, after nearly an hour, DeSantis' car rolled up and he bounded out without a winter coat, looking like he had just flown in from Tallahassee.

He took a handful of questions and then abruptly cut off the session after about 10 minutes. The crowd groaned.

A minute later, he was gone — off to a town hall in Nashua. Presumably indoors.

Over 100,000 in German protests against far-right AfD

AFP
Frankfurt

More than 100,000 people turned out across Germany yesterday in protests against the far-right AfD, which sparked an outcry after it emerged that the party's members discussed mass deportation plans at a meeting of extremists.

Around 35,000 people joined a call under the banner "Defend democracy — Frankfurt against the AfD", marching in the financial heart of Germany.

A similar number, some carrying posters like "Nazis out", turned up in the northern city Hanover.

Protests were also held in cities including Braunschweig, Erfurt and Kassel and many smaller towns, mirroring mobilisation every day over the past week.

In all, demonstrations have been called in about 100 locations across Germany from Friday through the weekend, including in Berlin today.

Not only politicians but also churches and Bundesliga coaches have urged people to stand up against the AfD.

The wave of mobilisation against the far-right party was sparked by a January 10 report by investigative outlet Correctiv, which revealed that AfD members had discussed the expulsion of immigrants and "non-assimilated citizens" at a meeting with extremists. Among

the participants at the talks was Martin Sellner, a leader of Austria's Identitarian Movement, which subscribes to the "great replacement" conspiracy theory that claims there is a plot by non-white migrants to replace Europe's "native" white population.

News of the gathering sent shockwaves across Germany at a time when the AfD is soaring in opinion polls, just months ahead of three major regional elections in eastern Germany where their support is strongest.

The anti-immigration party confirmed the presence of its members at the meeting, but has denied taking on the "remigration" project championed by Sellner.

But leading politicians including Chancellor Olaf Scholz, who joined a demonstration last weekend, said any plan to expel immigrants or citizens alike amounted to "an attack against our democracy, and in turn, on all of us".

He urged "all to take a stand — for cohesion, for tolerance, for our democratic Germany".

Friedrich Merz, the leader of the opposition conservatives CDU party, also wrote on X that it was "very encouraging that thousands of people are demonstrating peacefully against right-wing extremism".

But besides members of the AfD, two members of the hard-right faction Wertunion of the CDU were also at the meeting near Potsdam cited by Correctiv.

AFP
Washington

An all-European crew including Türkiye's first astronaut arrived at the International Space Station yesterday on a voyage chartered by Axiom Space.

Dubbed Axiom Mission 3 (Ax-3), it is the company's third launch to the space laboratory and the first where all three of the paid seats were bought by national agencies, rather than wealthy individuals.

The spacecraft docked at the ISS at 1043 GMT and boarded within about two hours, according to Nasa's livestream of the event.

The SpaceX Crew Dragon fixed to the top of a Falcon 9 rocket blasted off from Nasa's Kennedy Space Center in the US state of Florida on Thursday.

It arrived at the ISS, which flies around 260 miles above the Earth, after a journey of about 36 hours, according to Axiom Space's website.

Turkish pilot and air force colonel Alper Gezeravci is joined by Walter Villadei, an Italian air force colonel who has previously flown to the edge of space on a Virgin Galactic space plane, and by Marcus Wandt from Sweden, who is representing the European Space Agency.

They are led by Axiom's Chief Astronaut Michael Lopez-Alegria, a Spanish and US citizen and former Nasa astronaut.

The Axiom-3 team were welcomed with hugs by the seven crew members already aboard the ISS — from Japan, Denmark, the United States and Russia.

"We have doubled the number of nationalities on board the space station, going from four to eight, which I think is a great

testament to the international collaboration which underpins this marvellous space station," said ISS commander Andreas Mogensen in a livestream, welcoming the four-member Axiom crew.

"The ride uphill was pretty exciting. It never gets old," added Axiom commander Lopez-Alegria.

"I think we probably spent a few more hours in Dragon than we felt like we needed to," he said, smiling. "But it was all good."

The new arrivals will spend about two weeks carrying out 30 experiments, learning more about the impact of microgravity on the human body, advancing industrial processes and more.

Axiom Space was founded in 2016 by Michael Suffredini, a former ISS programme manager for Nasa, and entrepreneur Kam Ghaffarian.

In addition to organising pri-

vate missions to the orbital outpost, the company is developing spacesuits for future Nasa missions to the Moon.

It is also building a commercial space station that it intends to initially attach to the ISS, then separate and orbit independently sometime before the ISS is retired.

The exact costs of the Ax-3 have not been disclosed, but in 2018 when the company first announced the programme, which involves chartering SpaceX hardware and paying Nasa for services, it set a price tag of \$55mn per seat. More recently, Hungary was reported by spacenews.com to be planning a \$100mn deal with Axiom for a future mission involving one astronaut.

Britain, which is striving to build a post-Brexit space strategy, has also signed an agreement for a future mission carrying UK astronauts.



In this framegrab taken from a Nasa TV broadcast, the Axiom Mission 3 (Ax-3) members (L-R, front) Commander Michael Lopez-Alegria of Spain, Pilot Walter Villadei of Italy, Mission Specialist Alper Gezeravci of Türkiye and Mission Specialist Marcus Wandt of Sweden are joined by the Expedition 70 crew inside the International Space Station's (ISS) Harmony module on arrival yesterday. (AFP)

Fierce winter weather slams US, dozens dead

Unrelenting storms have pummeled the United States over the past week, leading to at least 50 weather-related deaths, officials and US media reported, as large swathes of the country brace for new winter wallops. Frigid temperatures, snow gales and thick ice have caused fatal accidents on treacherous roadways, snarled air travel, closed schools and cut power to thousands, with millions of Americans under fresh weather warnings. In Tennessee, 14 weather-related fatalities were confirmed by the southeastern state's health department, while five women who were returning home after making a pilgrimage to Makkah died on a Pennsylvania highway.

Antarctica mission analyses climate change footprints

AFP
Aboard The Arc Simon Bolivar, Antarctica

Colombia's 10th Antarctic Expedition is making its way to the far reaches of the continent, exploring remote and almost untouched places inhabited by penguins, whales and the occasional seal.

The Colombian Navy's ARC Simon Bolivar is taking aquatic samples in Antarctica and advancing scientific research on climate change amid huge blocks of ice and frost.

"Antarctica is the world's refrigerator," Pablo Araujo, a researcher at the Central University of Ecuador, told AFP on board the ship, which is home to 39 researchers, 11 Colombian projects and nine international co-operation projects with four countries.

"What we want to see is how climate change is affecting the

world's refrigerator and how that affects the whole quantity of nutrients (in the sea)," says the white-coated scientist.

On board the ship, the Ecuadorian researcher is carrying out a project to model Antarctic ecosystems using machine learning techniques, a branch of artificial intelligence focused on the study of statistical algorithms.

With the application of these models and the use of satellite images, researchers are studying the dynamics of greenhouse gas fluxes in Antarctic ecosystems.

One Colombian team is launching a battery of Niskin bottles, used to take water samples, into the ocean.

"Once (they) come to the surface, we proceed to take these samples for later analysis," said Alexis Grattz, a researcher from the Directorate General of Maritime Affairs, wearing a thick red mackintosh, gloves and a hat.

At the Ecuadorian scientific sta-

tion, located at Punta Fort Williams on Greenwich Island, the maritime authority installed a portable weather station to record atmospheric pressure oscillations in the area. These measurements are taken to "determine and help us understand more about these variations in sea level, understanding it as... an important indicator in the evolution of climate change," said Maritza Moreno, another researcher at the Directorate General of Maritime Affairs.

A Turkish mission, meanwhile, is studying the levels of polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) — which result from burning fossil fuels, wood, trash and tobacco — in Antarctic soil.

Burak Karacik, a professor at Istanbul Technical University, said he is collecting sediment samples.

"I will analyse these sediment samples for persistent organic pollutants, and we will look at the effects of humans, here, in this environment," he added. Page 11



Crew members of the Colombian research vessel "ARC Simon Bolivar" ride a boat at the Gerlache Strait, which separates the Palmer Archipelago from the Antarctic Peninsula, in Antarctica. (AFP)

‘Moon Sniper’ lands but power running low

AFP
Tokyo

Japan on Saturday became the fifth nation to achieve a soft lunar landing, but said its “Moon Sniper” spacecraft was running out of power due to a solar battery problem. After a nail-biting 20-minute descent, space agency JAXA said its Smart Lander for Investigating Moon (SLIM) had touched down and communication had been established.

But without the solar cells functioning, JAXA official Hitoshi Kuninaka said the craft - dubbed the “Moon Sniper” for its precision technology - would only have power for “several hours”. SLIM is one of several new lunar missions launched by governments and private firms, 50 years after the first human Moon landing.

Crash landings and communication failures are rife, and only four other countries have made it to the Moon: the United States, the Soviet Union, China and most recently India. As mission control prioritised gathering data while they could, Kuninaka suggested that the batteries might work again once the angle of the sun changed. “It’s possible that it is not facing in the originally planned direction,” he told an early-hours news conference.

“If the descent was not successful, it

would have crashed at a very high speed. If that were the case, all functionality of the probe would be lost,” he said. “But data is being sent to Earth.”

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida called the landing “very welcome news” but said he was aware that more “detailed analysis” on the solar cells was needed. Nasa chief Bill Nelson tweeted his “congratulations (to Japan) on being the historic fifth country to land successfully on the Moon”.

“We value our partnership in the cosmos and continued collaboration,” he added. JAXA hopes to analyse data acquired during the landing, which will help determine whether the craft achieved the aim of landing within 100 metres (yards) of its intended landing spot.

SLIM was aiming for a crater where the Moon’s mantle, the usually deep inner layer beneath its crust, is believed to be exposed on the surface. Two probes detached successfully, JAXA said - one with a transmitter and another designed to trundle around the lunar surface beaming images to Earth.

This shape-shifting mini-rover, slightly bigger than a tennis ball, was co-developed by the firm behind the Trans-former toys.

While the accuracy of the touchdown needs to be verified, Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics astronomer Jonathan McDowell said: “I think

the mission is a big success.”

Several things could have caused the solar panel problem, he told AFP.

“A wire came loose, a wire was connected the wrong way, or the lander is upside down and can’t see the sun for some reason,” McDowell speculated. The scientist added that “hopefully” JAXA had been able to download images from the landing, but said an experiment to study the composition of Moon rocks may be a lost cause.

Russia, China and other countries from South Korea to the United Arab Emirates are also trying their luck to reach the Moon. US firm Astrobotics’ Peregrine lunar lander began leaking fuel after takeoff this month, dooming its mission. Then contact with the spaceship was lost over a remote area of the South Pacific on Thursday 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. Two previous Japanese lunar missions - one public and one private - have failed. 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 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”.

London on wheels



Two cyclists pedal past The London Eye in London, Britain.

UK parcel firm disables AI after poetic bot goes rogue

Reuters
London

A parcel delivery firm in Britain has disabled the artificial intelligence (AI) function in its online chat systems after a frustrated user coaxed the system into composing a poem about how bad the company’s customer service was.

“There was once a chatbot named DPD, Who was useless at providing help,” the bot wrote after Ashley Beauchamp gave up trying to get it to share a phone number for customer services and asked it to write a poem about bad chatbot service instead.

“DPD was a waste of time, And a customer’s worst nightmare,” the bot continued before concluding: “One day, DPD was finally shut down and everyone rejoiced. Finally they could get the help they needed, From a real person who knew what they were do-

ing.” Beauchamp, a pianist and conductor, posted his exchange with the bot on social media platform X on Thursday, since when it has been viewed 1.1mn times. He said he initially asked the bot to tell him a joke after failing to get information about the status of a parcel and when it did he asked it to write the poem about automated customer service failings. He also encouraged the bot to swear.

Beauchamp told ITV television he had still not received the parcel. “I think they might hold it hostage now. I wouldn’t blame them,” he said. “That’s totally on me.”

DPD UK said it had used an AI element within its chat system successfully for a number of years alongside its human customer service but an error had occurred after a system update. “The AI element was immediately disabled and is currently being updated,” the company said in a statement reported by ITV.

13 students dead in China school blaze

AFP
Yanshanpu

Thirteen schoolchildren died in a dormitory fire in central China’s Henan province, the official Xinhua news agency reported Saturday. The blaze at the Yingcai School in Henan’s Yanshanpu village was reported to the local fire department at 11pm Friday night, Xinhua said. Thirteen students were confirmed dead and one injured.

A teacher at the school told state-run Hebei Daily that all the victims were from the same third-grade class of nine and 10-year-olds. On Saturday evening AFP journalists saw the area around the school cordoned off, with more than a dozen police officers patrolling the scene. The owner of a supermarket told AFP she was asleep when the blaze took hold, but had heard about the tragedy. “The kids at the school are definitely mostly living around this area,” she said of the nearby boarding school. “Our kids don’t go there so we’re not sure about the details,” she added. Other shopkeepers in the area said they too had gone to bed by the time the deadly fire hit the dormitory.

AFP reporters were blocked from the immediate scene of the inferno, but China National Radio said that some windows of the dormitory building had been smashed. Yanshanpu village was quiet and foggy on Saturday night, AFP journalists saw, with just a handful of shops, some unlit buildings and hardly anybody walking on the streets.

There was a heavy security presence, with police cars lining a long stretch of the main street and a handful of onlookers standing behind the cordon tape. One woman told AFP that some of the pupils’ parents had left their children in the boarding



Police stand guard after a school was engulfed by fire in Yanshanpu in China’s Henan province yesterday.

school while they worked outside the area. Xinhua reported the flames had been extinguished by 11:40pm on Friday night. The injured survivor “is currently receiving treatment at the hospital and is in stable condition”, according to the country’s official news agency. Local authorities are investigating the fire’s cause, and at least one person linked to the school has been detained, Xinhua said.

Yanshanpu village lies on the outskirts of Nanyang, a city of nearly 10mn. Little information about the boarding school is publicly available, though social media videos published earlier showed young children including kindergarteners wearing smocks with the school’s logo as well as older children learning calligraphy. Chinese social media users on Saturday expressed outrage about the fire and called for any safety lapses to be punished.

“It’s too scary, 13 children from 13 families, all gone in an instant...if there is no severe punishment their souls will not rest in peace,” one

commenter on the Weibo social media site wrote. Fires and other deadly accidents are common in China due to lax safety standards and poor enforcement.

In November, 26 people died and dozens were sent to hospital after a fire at a coal company office in northern China’s Shanxi province. In July, 11 people died after the roof of a school gym collapsed in the country’s northeast. The month before, an explosion at a barbecue restaurant in northwestern China left 31 dead and prompted official pledges of a nationwide campaign to promote workplace safety.

In April, a hospital fire in Beijing killed 29 people and forced desperate survivors to jump out of windows to escape. After the coal company fire in November, Chinese President Xi Jinping called for the country to “conduct in-depth investigations of hidden risks in key industries, improve emergency plans and prevention measures”.

Vietnam jails 100 over police station attacks

Vietnam has jailed nearly 100 people on terrorism charges over shooting attacks last year on police headquarters in the country’s Central Highlands that left nine people dead, state media said Saturday. Attackers on motorbikes stormed police and political offices in Dak Lak province in June last year in a rare incident of violent unrest in communist-ruled Vietnam.

At the end of a five-day trial at a prison where the accused have been held, 10 defendants were sentenced to life in prison while 90 others were given sentences ranging from nine months to 20 years, VNExpress reported. Of the accused, 98 were charged with terrorism, one with hiding criminals and one with facilitating illegal immigration.

All are from ethnic minority groups indigenous to the Central Highlands, and the court accused them of seeking to “overthrow the state”. Their ages range from 18-56. Six defendants are on the run and were tried in absentia. International arrest warrants have been issued for them. — AFP

Harvest season



Farmers work during the harvest season at paddy fields in Lhoknga, Indonesia’s Aceh province, yesterday.



CONDOLENCES

The Editor-in-Chief,
Management and Staff of
GULF TIMES
extend their heartfelt condolences to
Yash Mudgal
(Sports Editor)

on the sad demise of his beloved mother



Pushpa Mudgal (92)
on 20th January 2024, in Indore, India

May God rest the departed soul in peace and give fortitude to the bereaved family to bear this great loss.

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GULF TIMES

AI era is upon us, but world needs to ensure it brings prosperity for all

Global economy is facing numerous challenges due to seemingly endless geopolitical and economic uncertainties. But global policy and opinion makers and business leaders among others have left the World Economic Forum (WEF) at Davos in Switzerland last week with cautious optimism about 2024.

While challenges and surprises remain inevitable, opportunities abound. This was a common theme at Davos, where delegates from around the world convened to focus on the fundamental principles driving trust.

For instance, while artificial intelligence (AI) will transform global economy, experts say it will affect almost 40% of jobs around the world, replacing some and complementing others.

“We need a careful balance of policies to tap its potential,” points out the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Undoubtedly, the world is on the brink of a technological revolution that could jumpstart productivity, boost global growth and raise incomes around the world. Yet, it could also replace jobs and deepen inequality.

Obviously, the rapid advance of artificial intelligence has captivated the world, causing both excitement and alarm, and raising important questions about its potential impact on the global economy.

It could unlock trillions of dollars in value across sectors from banking to life sciences

“The net effect is difficult to foresee, as AI will ripple through economies in complex ways. What we can say with some confidence is that we will need to come up with a set of policies to safely leverage the vast potential of AI for the benefit of humanity,” IMF says.

An IMF analysis found that almost 40% of global employment is exposed to AI. Historically, automation and information technology have tended to affect routine tasks, but one of the things that sets AI apart is its ability to impact high-skilled jobs.

As a result, advanced economies face greater risks from AI – but also more opportunities to leverage its benefits – compared with emerging market and developing economies.

In advanced economies, about 60% of jobs may be impacted by AI. Roughly half the exposed jobs may benefit from AI integration, enhancing productivity.

For the other half, AI applications may execute key tasks currently performed by humans, which could lower labour demand, leading to lower wages and reduced hiring. In the most extreme cases, some of these jobs may disappear.

In emerging markets and low-income countries, by contrast, AI exposure is expected to be 40% and 26% respectively. These findings suggest emerging market and developing economies face fewer immediate disruptions from AI.

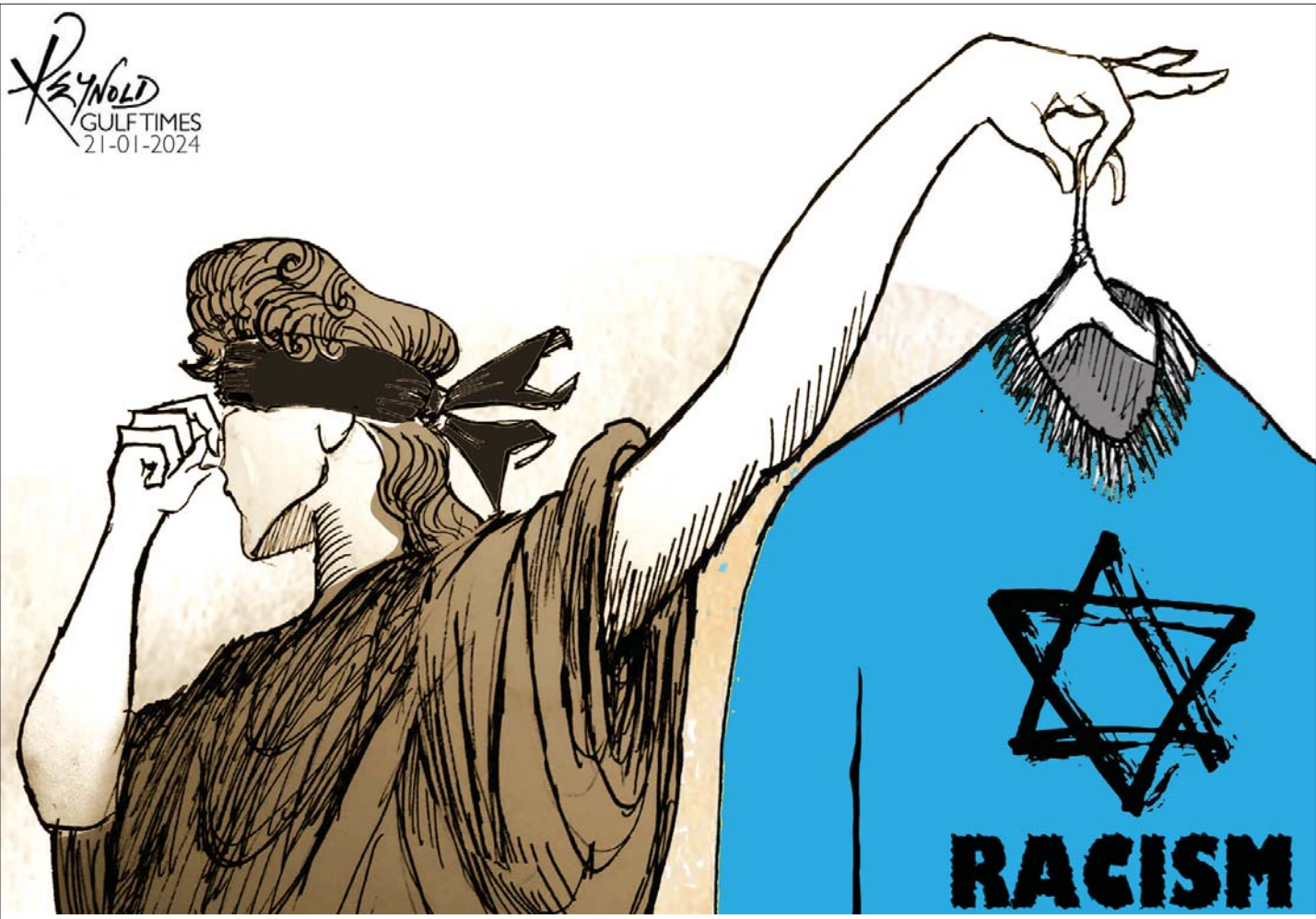
At the same time, many of these countries don’t have the infrastructure or skilled workforce to harness the benefits of AI, raising the risk that over time the technology could worsen inequality among nations.

That said, generative AI is poised to transform roles and boost performance across functions – and could add the equivalent of \$2.6tn to \$4.4tn of economic value annually.

Gen AI is poised to transform roles and boost performance across functions such as sales and marketing, customer operations, and software development. In the process, it could unlock trillions of dollars in value across sectors from banking to life sciences.

Certainly, the AI era is upon us, and it is still within our power to ensure it brings prosperity for all.

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Bangladesh solar power surge to unlock thousands of green jobs

By Md Tahmid Zami
Dhaka

Farzana Akter Isha, 24, works as a production supervisor at SOLshare, a renewable energy technology company that provides home-based solar power solutions to poor, rural families.

When she started her career in 2014 straight after leaving school, Bangladesh’s solar sector was facing hiccups with sluggish demand – and Isha saw many of her colleagues switch to other jobs.

But following years of slack progress, renewable energy in Bangladesh has recently seen a strong turnaround on the back of more affordable solar power. That momentum is expected to create 3,000 to 4,000 new green jobs in the next few years.

From rooftop solar projects alone, including industrial and commercial installations, a record 42 megawatts (MW) of new capacity were added in 2023.

In addition, about 10 large-scale grid-connected solar projects mounted on the ground are now operating, with more than 3,000MW of capacity from both types of project approved or in the final stages of approval.

Experts are predicting a surge in the renewable energy sector in Bangladesh as solar power becomes increasingly cost-effective compared to fossil fuels.

The country has been struggling to pay for its oil and gas imports with shrinking dollar reserves – and rising fuel prices have created pressure on the economy.

In 2023, the government resorted to tripling coal-based generation to tackle the energy crisis, but experts say renewables are a better long-term solution.

Shahriar Ahmed Chowdhury, director of the Centre for Energy Research at United International

University (UIU), told the Thomson Reuters Foundation that the upsurge in solar installations is being driven by new investors, both local and foreign, entering the market, while the average project size is increasing.

Ground-mounted projects have higher capacity and will give a larger boost to the share of solar in the electricity mix, he added, while rooftop projects – which are cheaper to install – are set for rapid growth on new factories in the 100 economic zones being built around the country.

According to a 2023 report published by BloombergNEF, the cost of solar power generation from utility-scale projects in Bangladesh now stands at \$97-135 per megawatt hour (MWh), making it a credible competitor to coal or gas-based power that cost \$110-150/MWh and \$88-116/MWh respectively.

By 2025, solar power will become the cheapest energy source for the country, the report said.

Chowdhury said recently approved independent solar photovoltaic (PV) projects have a tariff of less than 10 US cents per unit of power, while one unit of liquid fuel-based electricity in Bangladesh costs more than 16 US cents.

The economic advantage of transitioning to solar power is becoming increasingly evident to businesses and the government.

Last month, a report from the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis (IEEFA) showed that the Bangladesh government could save between 52.3bn taka (\$477mn) and 110.32bn taka (\$1bn) a year if industries, commercial buildings and other establishments installed 2,000MW of rooftop solar, beyond the 161MW so far installed.

The savings would come from not having to import expensive

fuels like furnace oil and diesel to generate power.

Shafiqul Alam, lead energy analyst for the IEEFA, said that by installing a rooftop solar system, an industrial business could save around Tk5 per kilowatt hour of electricity during the day, and the rate of savings would be even more for commercial buildings that pay higher tariffs for grid power.

One key problem is a lack of reliable and rigorous estimates for how much solar power can be generated in Bangladesh.

“A true assessment of the country’s rooftop solar potential is essential to understand the investment needed in the sector,” said Alam.

That would send the right signals to financial institutions, while the government and solar developers would be able to plan for the transition with more certainty, he added.

A significant expansion of solar power could mean thousands of new green jobs for engineers, technicians, project managers and manual workers.

A 1 MW solar project can produce 26.6 jobs in the residential sector, 10.1 jobs for commercial projects, and 2.1 jobs for utility-scale solar power, said Chowdhury from UIU.

A study by the Dhaka-based Centre for Policy Dialogue last year estimated that renewable energy could add about 13,800 jobs by 2030 – and if Bangladesh pursued a highly aggressive energy transition, more than 37,000 new jobs could be created.

Skilled people – like engineers and technicians with a few years of experience – are now in high demand as large companies move to invest in green energy.

“Earlier we would have to look for job opportunities, and now companies and headhunting firms reach out to us,” said SM Imran Hasan, an experienced engineer

working as a solar project manager at the Al-Mostafa Group.

There has also been a shift in the type of jobs, with rising demand for higher technical skills to match evolving technology.

A decade ago, the main pivot of solar power growth in Bangladesh was small-scale solar home systems that could be installed and repaired by low-skilled workers. But most of these are being phased out as larger solar projects are added to the expanding national grid.

Experts said many low-skilled jobs in solar home systems had been shed, but new higher-quality jobs will surpass the losses.

Solar project manager Abdul Arif said Grameen Shakti, the clean energy social enterprise where he works, employed as many as 15,000 people in solar home systems just a decade ago.

But many are now working as entrepreneurs or service providers as the rural economy enjoys better electricity supplies thanks to rooftop solar panels, mini-grids and electric mobility, he added.

Chowdhury from UIU said the installation of large-scale solar PV projects requires workers with more advanced engineering and technical skills, while low-skilled workers can be recruited for maintenance and security of the solar plants.

“Ultimately, the total employment in this industry will increase and can exceed the previous levels as (it) grows,” he said.

The skills shift calls for better training of workers and technicians, industry experts said.

Nuher L Khan, managing director of Joules Power Limited, a leading solar energy company in Bangladesh, said recruiters are aiming to support young workers to acquire the right skills and orientation.

“We try to recruit fresh graduates so that engineering and business students look at the renewables sector as a prospective sector where they can build their career,” he said.

The growing demand for skilled labour may also open a door for young women like Isha with relevant technical qualifications in a sector that has so far offered them fewer opportunities.

Isha said her workplace SOLshare – which has an all-female production team – is setting an example by showing that women with the right skills can shine in the solar sector.

She mentors her female co-workers to take on more technical challenges, which is slowly bearing good results.

“These days women are also showing interest in tech-based work, including the heavy work of developing technology,” she said. – Thomson Reuters Foundation



A study by the Dhaka-based Centre for Policy Dialogue last year estimated that renewable energy could add about 13,800 jobs by 2030 – and if Bangladesh pursued a highly aggressive energy transition, more than 37,000 new jobs could be created.



Pakistan's Prime Minister Anwar-ul-Haq Kakar chairs a National Security Committee meeting along with armed forces chiefs and other government officials in Islamabad. Pakistan and Iran "agreed to de-escalate" tensions yesterday, Islamabad said, after trading deadly airstrikes on militant targets in each other's territory this week. (AFP)

Internet disrupted again to thwart Khan's PTI

AFP
Islamabad

Pakistan's social media and Internet services were again severely throttled last night, as the party of jailed ex-prime minister Imran Khan held a "virtual rally" ahead of elections in under three weeks.

The outage of Facebook, X, Instagram and YouTube is the second in two weeks coinciding with online campaign events organised by Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party.

Elections scheduled for February 8 have been marred by allegations of pre-poll rigging, with analysts saying the military establishment — Pakistan's political kingmakers — are squeezing Khan and PTI out of the race.

The event was due to broadcast PTI speeches by livestream but Internet disruptions began in the early evening, before it began.

"We can confirm the nationwide restriction of social media platforms across Pakistan," said Alp Tokar, Director of the Net-blocks watchdog organisation monitoring cybersecurity and Internet governance.

He told AFP the outage was "remarkably systematic" and "consistent with previous re-

Google data shows PTI vastly outstripping competitors in online searches for political parties in Pakistan, with 80% of the traffic. A Gallup Pakistan survey confirmed Khan is the nation's most popular politician

strictions imposed during PTI events".

Khan and many prominent PTI candidates have been barred from standing for election, and in-person campaigning has been thwarted by a crackdown forcing party leaders to defect or go underground.

Nonetheless, a Gallup Pakistan survey taken in December confirmed Khan is the nation's most popular politician.

Google data shows PTI vastly outstripping competitors in online searches for political parties in Pakistan, with 80% of the traffic. Earlier this month, similar Internet disruption marred PTT's online campaign launch event.

Khan, 71, was controversially ousted in 2022 after falling out with Pakistan's powerful military leaders.

In opposition, he waged an unprecedented campaign of defiance against the military establishment which has directly ruled the nation for much of its history. Khan accused them of engineering his removal from of-

fice in a no-confidence vote via a US-backed conspiracy, and of plotting an assassination attempt that saw him take three bullets.

The crackdown against PTI began after Khan's brief arrest last May sparked riots, with Islamabad saying it had been targeted by "anti-state" violence.

Khan is currently languishing in jail after a second arrest in August, and has been barred from standing for office over a disputed conviction.

He says the avalanche of legal cases burying him have been triggered by the military establishment to prevent him from leading PTI back to power.

PTI — credited with running a tech-savvy campaign in 2018 — has attempted to mobilise on social media to circumvent the restrictions.

As Khan grapples with the courts, three-time prime minister Nawaz Sharif has returned from self-imposed exile and seen his corruption cases dissolve — a sign analysts say he is the army's favoured candidate.

Army called to rescue 600 Spanish motorists stuck in snow

Army units were mobilised to help about 600 drivers who were stuck on a motorway in heavy snow as Storm Juan blanketed many parts of Spain, authorities said on Friday.

Snowfalls left motorists stranded for hours on the N-122 road between Soria and Agreda in northern Spain so authorities said they had dispatched troops from a base in Zaragoza to help move the drivers.

Miguel Ángel Clavero, of the civil protection force, said on Friday that in Aragon in eastern Spain

a number of roads were left unpassable by the snowfall and Zaragoza airport was closed.

Temperatures plunged to minus 13 Celsius (8.6 Fahrenheit) in Soria, AEMET, the state weather forecaster, said on Friday.

Heavy rains fell in the western region of Extremadura and in Catalonia in northeastern Spain, Aemet added.

The storm was expected to pass by yesterday, forecasters said.

EU assessing situation after Poland claims fund conditions met

Reuters
Warsaw

Poland has met the final conditions needed to gain access to €76bn (\$83bn) in funds from the European Union's 2021-2027 budget, a minister said on Friday, but Brussels said it was still assessing the situation.

The European Union has held back billions in funds earmarked for Poland due to concerns over judicial reforms implemented by the previous nationalist Law and Justice (PiS) government which critics say undermined the independence of the courts.

New pro-EU Prime Minister Donald Tusk has vowed to restore the rule of law and get the EU funds released. But he faces resistance from supporters and allies of the former ruling party, who include President Andrzej Duda and some high-profile judges.

"We have confirmation from the European Commission — Poland meets the last three conditions necessary for the full mobilisation of structural funds — €76bn for the implementation of programmes until 2027," Funds and Regional Policy Minister Katarzyna Pelczynska-Nalecz posted on social media platform X.

The cohesion funds in question are meant to raise the standard of living in the EU's poorer regions.

The European Commission said Poland had officially informed it that it believed it had fulfilled the rule-of-law conditions necessary

to get the money, but that this was still being assessed.

"We are analysing the letter submitted by the Polish authorities to assess whether Poland fulfils the enabling condition in the area of judicial independence," the Commission said in an e-mail. "The Commission has three months to make this assessment."

Tusk met the EU's chief executive in December and announced that the bloc would transfer a first €5bn of aid.

This money comes free of the EU's usual rule-of-law conditions and is part of Poland's 60bn share of the bloc's Covid recovery stimulus.

EU Justice Commissioner Didier Reynders had said in December that Poland needed "some time" to improve the independence of the judiciary so the EU could disburse more funds.

HOPE

During a visit to Warsaw on Friday, Reynders said during a joint press conference with Polish Justice Minister Adam Bodnar that he hoped the European Commission would soon be able to approve the first application for EU funds from Poland.

A senior official in the new Polish government told Reuters before the briefing that the cabinet hoped some of the issues could be addressed without passing new laws which could be vetoed by Duda.

"We are completely relaxed that it is all going in the right direction," the official said. "Politically,

we have it agreed with the Commission that some things will be addressed without new laws."

Asked about this possibility, Reynders said that in the case of Duda vetoing new laws, Brussels and Warsaw would have to see what they could do about EU funds.

"We remain in dialogue with the European Commission, we are taking further steps to achieve milestones ... We are primarily interested in restoring the rule of law for citizens," Bodnar said.

He added that one of the changes planned in the process was separating the functions of the justice minister and the prosecutor general.

The prosecutor general will be appointed by the lower house of parliament with the consent of the upper house for a six-year term without the possibility of renewal, according to the draft bill published by the ministry.

After a meeting with Reynders, Michal Kobosko, a lawmaker from the coalition government, told state-run news agency PAP he thought the European Commission may unblock funds even if Duda were to veto legislation aimed at restoring the rule of law.

"I have the impression that the European Commission may be open to unblocking funds for Poland, also in a situation where the laws are vetoed by the president," he said.

On Friday, PiS lawmakers said they had asked for a vote of no-confidence in Bodnar.

Right-wing faction of Germany's conservatives forms splinter party

The right-wing faction of Germany's opposition conservatives said yesterday it was breaking off and forming its own party, with an aim of contesting regional elections in September.

The Werteunion (Values Union) group said after a general assembly that it would leave former chancellor Angela Merkel's centre-right CDU and Bavarian sister party CSU.

"With a big majority, the members of the Werteunion voted for the founding of an eponymous party," said its leader Hans-Georg Maassen. "The party could already run in the state elections in eastern Germany and would work with all parties ... that are ready for a political change in Germany," said Maassen, who notably did not rule out co-operation with the far-right AfD party.

The anti-immigration AfD party leads opinion polls in Brandenburg, Thuringia and Saxony, which are due to hold state elections in September.

However, mainstream political parties like the CDU or Chancellor Olaf Scholz's Social Democrats have all ruled out governing in any coalition with the AfD. Maassen's Werteunion was founded in 2017

as a faction of CDU-CSU members who opposed Merkel's policies, including her decision to let in hundreds of thousands of refugees.

Maassen was Germany's former domestic intelligence chief but was forced to take early retirement in 2018 over controversial comments over immigration.

The new splinter party said it has about 4,000 members, most of them formerly from the CDU or CSU.

The founding of the party came at a time when the AfD was under intense scrutiny following revelations that some of its members had discussed mass deportation plans of immigrants and "non-assimilated citizens" with other extremists.

Two of the Werteunion's members were also present at the controversial meeting last November.

The AfD confirmed the presence of its members at the meeting, but has denied taking on the "remigration" project championed by Austria's Martin Sellner.

World's biggest iceberg 'battered' by waves

AFP
Paris

It was impossible to see through the snow and fog on the Antarctic seas but expedition leader Ian Strachan knew his ship was approaching a true behemoth: the world's biggest iceberg lay somewhere ahead.

"Then the clouds lifted and we could see this expansive — almost abstract — white line that extended each way across the horizon," he told AFP.

As the ship got closer during its visit on Sunday, huge gaping crevasses and beautiful blue arches sculpted into the edge of the iceberg came into focus.

Waves up to 4m (13 feet) high "smashed" and "battered" its wall, breaking off small chunks and collapsing some arches, Strachan said.

He compared sailing along the endless jagged edge to looking at sheet music. "All the cracks and arches were different notes as the song played."

The tooth-shaped iceberg named A23a is nearly 4,000 square km (1,550 square miles) across, making it more than twice the size of Greater London.

After three decades stuck to the Antarctic ocean floor, the iceberg is now heading north on what could be its final journey.

It contains an estimated one trillion tonnes of fresh water that is likely to melt off into the ocean along the way.

The iceberg, which is up to 400m thick in places, is currently drifting between Elephant Island and the South Orkney islands.

Strachan was speaking to AFP as his ship, run by the expeditions firm EYOS, was wrapping up a private tour of the Antarctic Peninsula.



View of an iceberg at the Gerlache Strait, which separates the Palmer Archipelago from the Antarctic Peninsula, in Antarctica yesterday. (AFP)

It had been planning to go to South Georgia island but due to a bird flu outbreak there, it visited A23a instead.

It was not the first ship to witness the majesty of the iceberg.

The UK's RRS Sir David Attenborough was travelling to Antarctica on a scientific mission last month, when it found the A23a blocking its path.

Andrew Meijers, the chief scientist on board, said that when they approached the iceberg, the mist parted, the sun came

out and a pod of orcas even swam past.

"It was really magical," Meijers told AFP.

"It took us six hours to steam past it," he added.

A23a first broke off the Antarctic coast back in 1986, making it the world's oldest iceberg, as well as its largest.

But it quickly became stuck to the ocean floor, where it languished for decades. Andrew Fleming of the British Antarctic Survey told AFP that in 2020 he saw

satellite images suggesting it was "wobbling".

Then late last year, A23a broke free from its icy shackles and started venturing north.

Whether or not this was caused by climate change — winter Antarctic sea ice reached its lowest level on record last year — remains an open question.

Fleming emphasised that these icebergs are a natural process, adding that one or two big ones break off every year.

"It's more likely that it's time had just come," he added. But he emphasised that such icebergs are "part of a huge system that is changing dramatically".

This "lumbering beast" moves slower than walking pace, Fleming said.

"The Titanic would've spotted this one coming."

Since breaking free, A23a has followed roughly the same path as previous massive icebergs A68 and A76, moving past the east side of the Antarctica Peninsula through the Weddell Sea along a route called "iceberg alley".

As the iceberg is "ejected out into the Southern Ocean", warmer waters and bigger waves will start to break it up, Fleming said.

If it follows the path of the two comparably huge previous icebergs, it will travel northeast towards the island of South Georgia, a haven for wildlife including penguins and seals.

There is a slight fear that if the iceberg parks itself near the island, it could block these animals from getting to where they normally forage, threatening their ability to feed themselves.

But this is not expected to happen.

A68 instead broke up into smaller chunks, causing a problem not for animals but humans, making it difficult for fishing ships to navigate the area, Meijers said.

A more likely path would be for A23a to move around the island and continue meandering northwards.

A rare few icebergs have made it so far that they have been spotted from the Brazilian coast.

But eventually A23a will meet the fate of all icebergs that journey north — melting away in warmer waters.

"Ultimately, they're doomed," Fleming said.



(From left) Tarek Biour, Jason Holland, Saad al-Kuwari, Dr Eddy Borges-Rey, Dr Abdulaziz al-Khanji, Nino Rahal, and Hicham el-Rawass during the special gathering hosted recently by Alfardan Jewellery inside The Pearl Island. **PICTURES:** Shaji Kayamkulam

Alfardan Jewellery hosts intimate gathering for Doha Watch Club

By Peter Alagos
Business Reporter

Alfardan Jewellery recently hosted an intimate gathering for the Doha Watch Club, providing an opportunity for its members to engage, as well as share stories and experiences about their favourite timepieces.

The event held at Alfardan Jewellery inside The Pearl Island was highlighted by a surprise unveiling of the latest Ulysse Nardin collection, said director of retail operations Tarek Biour.

“Alfardan Jewellery hosted the event to engage with members of the Doha Watch Club, allowing them to discuss their passion for watches and share their favourite watch stories,” he said. “We aim to educate people and explore the idea that watches are more than just tools for telling time.”

“A watch is a statement: It’s a legacy, a memory, and it carries emotional attachment to the wearer,” Biour told *Gulf Times* on the sidelines of the event.

“We appreciated the diversity of the club; anyone with a love for watches could join,” he added. “The club is open to growth and potential collaborations, aiming to bring all watch lovers together in one group.”

Gulf Times also sat down with the majority of the club’s founding members – Dr Abdulaziz al-Khanji, Nino Rahal, Dr Eddy Borges-Rey, and Jason Holland – who shared their passion for horology and a brief history of the club, as well as its aspirations.

Borges-Rey noted that another founding member, Ahmed Kobeissi, was instrumental in bringing together the core members of the club.

According to Dr al-Khanji, what makes the Doha Watch Club unique in the country is the international nature of the club,



which allows for a rich exchange of cultures.

He emphasised that the diverse perspectives presented in the club come from its multinational membership, thus bringing diverse points of view to every discussion or engagement.

Holland said that the club offers a unique opportunity for expats in Qatar to find a community and share common interests beyond horology and the love for different types of timepieces.

“The club provides an outlet away from work, offering a space to interact with people outside of the professional sphere,” he said. “Members can have a meal, a coffee, and engage in discussions about watches, sports, or any topic with people who share similar interests.”

Rahal pointed out that while members of the Doha Watch Club have different preferences, it accommodates collectors and enthusiasts with diverse tastes in watches.

Daily active discussions take place, primarily via a messaging platform, which is the main communication channel for the club, he added.

“The club is open to all kinds of watch brands and types. Members are always eager to learn about different watch movements, types, and brands,” Rahal said. “There are active discussions about microbrands, including their new releases and the value for money of their watches.”

“The Doha Watch Club fosters a non-judgmental environment where members are free to like any kind of watch,” he added. “Members occasionally share pictures of their watches, not to show off, but to share their passion. And this shared passion for watches is humble and varies in intensity and expense among members.”

“The club is inclusive and not limited to any specific type of watch or price range,” Rahal stated.

Dr Borges-Rey said that the club has experienced exponential growth since its establishment two years ago, with the number of members reaching almost 60, surpassing the regular numbers in other clubs in Qatar.

“The club envisions itself as part of a collaborative landscape with other clubs, open to being part of the broader envi-



Biour unveiling the latest Ulysse Nardin collection.



The latest Ulysse Nardin collection.

ronment of watches and horology in the country, and welcoming initiatives and collaborations,” he added.

Dr al-Khanji said that the Doha Watch Club is anticipating a better presence during the Doha Jewellery and Watches Exhibition (DJWE), which will be held from February 5-11 at the Doha Exhibition and Convention Centre (DECC).

“This is the first time that the club is going to the Doha Jewellery and Watches Exhibition as the Doha Watch Club,” Dr Borges-Rey said, adding: “The club has now built a good relationship with various watch brands.”

Rahal said one of the advantages of attending the DJWE is that the event provides easy access to various watch brands and showcases new novelties and models that might not be easily found in boutiques.

The event offers a hands-on experience where attendees can feel and see the watches, he said, emphasising that “buying a watch should be an experience”.

Aside from Ahmed Kobeissi, another Qatari, Saad al-Kuwari, is also considered

a key figure who helped propel the Doha Watch Club to its current status, according to Dr Borges-Rey.

Al-Kuwari lauded the club’s diverse membership, saying: “The group is not limited to locals but is a mix of expatriates and locals, reflecting the large percentage of expatriates in Qatar.”

“Qatar has a significant number of serious watch collectors, whom the group aims to bring together...establishing the club is greatly aided by recognition from watch brands,” al-Kuwari said. “It’s crucial for the brands to acknowledge the club as a collective entity.”

“The Doha Watch Club is going through an exciting chapter, aiming to represent Qatar in the vast watch industry,” he added. “In recent years, the watch industry has grown significantly, with a 300% to 400% increase in people developing a love for watches.”

“This growth extends to watchmakers and manufacturers, and the market in Qatar has also seen a surge in interest, particularly during and after the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic,” al-Kuwari said.



Three falconers qualify for Marmi 2024’s Haddad Challenge

The activities of the Qatar International Falcons and Hunting Festival continued yesterday in its 15th edition (Marmi 2024), which is held under the patronage of HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani and continues until January 27. The competitions resulted in three falconers qualifying for the Haddad Challenge Championship.



Marmi Festival director Miteb Mubarak al-Qahtani and deputy director Abdul Wahab al-Nuaimi honoured the finalists and winners. The qualifier receives QR100,000, the qualification shield, and entry to compete for one of the Lexus cars in the final. Al-Nuaimi said that there are four group qualifiers remaining in the Haddad Challenge, which ends next Tuesday (January 23).



Qatar Charity becomes charity partner for Expo 2023 Doha

Qatar Charity (QC) has signed a co-operation and partnership agreement with Expo 2023 Doha, becoming a charity partner.

The signing of the agreement took place within the framework of the co-operation between the Ministry of Municipality and Qatar Charity.

Under the agreement, the QC provides donation methods at the expo for funding humanitarian projects in environment.

The agreement was signed by Ahmad Yousef Fakhroo, the QC chief executive’s assistant (Resources Development and Media Sector), and Expo 2023 Doha secretary-general Mohamed Ali al-Khouri.

Fakhroo highlighted that the agreement strengthens the role of humanitarian work within Qatar and beyond.

He stated that, under the agreement, Qatar Charity has been given the opportunity to promote an



Officials at the signing ceremony.

environmental project in line with the Expo’s theme, *Green Desert, Better Environment*.

He indicated that the selected project, “Seawater Desalination in Somalia”, will offer solutions for producing fresh, clean, and potable water, provide a safe and sustainable water source, and contribute to alleviating the suffering of children and women and reducing diseases resulting from the use of contaminated water.

He noted that the QC has provided means of donations throughout the expo, as the fixed collection boxes are available in different locations, in addition to payment machines.

He added that a QR code is displayed on screens in the expo to promote the project.

Al-Khouri noted that the partnership would be fruitful and contribute to the valuable work carried out by Qatar Charity.



Expo 2023 Doha hosts winter running races

The International Horticultural Expo 2023 Doha is hosting winter running races in collaboration with Qatar Sports For All Federation.

Organised every Friday of the week, the event will run until February 9 and is held on a large swath of green spaces at Al Bidda Park.

The races are conducted through a four-level contest: 1km race, 3km race, 5km race, and 800m race for children.

The event offers joggers the participation to com-



pete and enjoy the magnificent winter atmospheres preceded by light warm-up exercises, along with a number of sporting games overseen by professional trainers.

The races represent an opportunity to pay tribute to sports and embody the pillars of Expo 2023 Doha based on strengthening bonds, going beyond borders, converging diverse cultures, sharing ideas, pursuing best future, and building a healthier and more interconnected world. – **QNA**