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TUESDAY Vol. XXXXIII No. 12898

January 23, 2024
Rajab 11, 1445 AH

www.gulf-times.com 2 Riyals

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Amir to patronise Air Academy graduation today

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani will patronise the graduation ceremony of the 11th batch of cadets of Al Zaeem Mohammed Bin Abdullah Al Attiyah Air Academy at Al Udeid Air Base today morning. (QNA)

Overwhelming fan response to AFC Cup, new-look Arab Cup tournament soon

HE the Minister of Sports and Youth and Chairman of the AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023 Organising Committee, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa bin Ahmed al-Thani said that the public turnout for the matches exceeded expectations, revealing that more than 1,200,000 tickets have been sold while the attendance so far reached 620,000. HE Sheikh Hamad said organising the Olympics is the biggest dream. He also said the FIFA Arab Cup will return in a new look in coordination with the International Federation of Football Associations (FIFA), the Arab Football Association, and other parties. "All details will be announced soon." To a question from Faisal al-Mudahka, Editor-in-Chief of the *Gulf Times*, HE the Minister said: "Sports is the most important reason why people or countries know Qatar." The minister said many misconceptions about Qatar and the region were corrected after the fans experienced the culture and hospitality of the country. He also said "the most important way to communicate with the peoples is football and sports in general". **Sport Page 1**

Canada to cap student permits

Canada yesterday announced an immediate, two-year cap on international student permits and said it would also stop giving work permits to some postgraduate students as it seeks to rein in record numbers of newcomers seen aggravating a housing crisis. The cap is expected to result in approximately 360,000 approved study permits in 2024, a decrease of 35% from 2023, according to a statement from the immigration ministry. Immigration Minister Marc Miller said the main reason for the cap is to protect students.

Today's
schedule



Group B:
India vs Syria, 2:30pm
at Al Bayt Stadium Stadium

Group B:
Australia vs Uzbekistan, 2:30pm
at Al Janoub Stadium

Group C:
Iran vs UAE, 6 pm
at Education City Stadium

Group C:
Hong Kong vs Palestine, 6 pm
at Khalifa International Stadium

Amir holds talks with Tajik president

- Discussions aimed at enhancing relations
- Amir, Tajik president witness signing of agreements, MoUs

QNA
Doha

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani held a session of official talks at Lusail Palace yesterday with President of the friendly Republic of Tajikistan Emomali Rahmon.

At the beginning of the session, His Highness the Amir welcomed the Tajik president and the delegation accompanying him, wishing them a good stay and the relations between the two countries further progress and development in different fields to meet the aspirations of the two friendly peoples. His Highness lauded the level of Qatari-Tajik co-operation, especially in investment sectors and trade exchange.

For his part, the Tajik president

thanked His Highness the Amir for the good reception and hospitality. He hoped that the talks with the Amir would contribute to reinforcing and upgrading the co-operation to broader horizons.

During the session, the two

sides discussed bilateral relations and the avenues for supporting and upgrading them in a variety of co-operation fields, especially in economy, energy, trade, investment, and agriculture, in addition to discussing the prominent

regional and global developments of common concern, particularly the developments in Gaza Strip and the occupied Palestinian territories.

The session was attended by HE the Minister of Interior and Commander of the Internal Security Force (Lekhwiya) Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, HE the Chief of the Amiri Diwan Sheikh Saoud bin Abdulrahman al-Thani, HE the Minister of Finance Ali bin Ahmed al-Kuwari, HE the Minister of State for Energy Affairs Saad bin Sherida al-Kaabi, HE the Minister of Commerce and Industry Sheikh Mohamed bin Hamad bin Qassim al-Thani, HE the Minister of Labour Dr Ali bin Smaikh al-Marri, HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Mohamed bin Abdulaziz al-Khulaifi, alongside a number of high-ranking officials. **To Page 2**

Israeli forces storm Khan Younis hospital

Reuters
Gaza

Israeli forces, advancing deep into western Khan Younis in Gaza's bloodiest fighting so far in January, stormed one hospital and put another under siege yesterday, cutting off the wounded from trauma care, Palestinian officials said.

Troops advanced for the first time into the Al-Mawasi district near the Mediterranean Coast, west of Khan Younis, the main city in southern Gaza. There, they stormed the Al-Khair hospital and were arresting medical staff, Gaza health ministry spokesman Ashraf al-Qidra said.

The Israeli military said three soldiers were killed in southern Gaza.

Al-Qidra said at least 50 people were killed overnight in Khan Younis, while the sieges of medical facilities meant dozens of dead and wounded were beyond the reach of rescuers.

The Palestinian Red Crescent said tanks had surrounded another Khan Younis hospital, Al-Amal, headquarters of the rescue agency, which had lost contact with staff there.

Elad Goren of COGAT, the Israeli defence ministry branch that

25,295 Gazans
massacred

The health ministry in Hamas-run Gaza said yesterday at least 25,295 people have been killed in the Palestinian territory. The toll includes 190 fatalities over the past 24 hours, a ministry statement said, while some 63,000 people in Gaza have been wounded in the conflict since October 7.

co-ordinates with the Palestinians, said: "A particular effort led by a dedicated team has been put on making sure civilians have access to medical care."

Residents said the bombardment from air, land and sea was the most intense in southern Gaza since the war began in October.

The newest phase of the war has brought fighting deep into the last corners of the enclave packed with those fleeing bombardment.

Most of Gaza's 2.3mn residents are now penned into Rafah just south of Khan Younis and Deir Al-Balah just north of it, crammed into public buildings and camps of tents made from plastic sheets lashed to wooden frames. **Page 8**

Palestinian families fleeing Khan Younis on the coastal road leading to Rafah, yesterday.

Amir patronises Maritime Academy graduation ceremony

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani patronised the graduation ceremony of the second batch of cadets of Mohammed Bin Ghanem Al Ghanem Maritime Academy, at the academy's headquarters in Al Shamal yesterday.

The ceremony was attended by a number of Sheikhs, ministers, heads of diplomatic missions and military attaches accredited to the state, and high-ranking security and military leaders in a number of brotherly

and friendly countries.

The ceremony was also attended by a number of senior officers of the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Interior, the Amiri Guard, the State Security, the Internal Security Force (Lekhwiya), guardians of graduates and guests.

The national anthem was played at the beginning of the ceremony. Then the commander of the graduates' queue came forward requesting His Highness the Amir to inspect the queue of the

63 graduates from Qatar. After reciting verses from the Holy Qur'an, and the march of the graduates' queue and the military parade, His Highness the Amir honoured the outstanding graduates. After that, the flag was handed over from the second batch to the third batch, and the appointment order was read out.

At the end of the ceremony, officers of the second batch took the oath and recited the college anthem. **Page 12**

Al-Haydos scores stunner as Qatar push China to brink of early exit

Captain Hassan al-Haydos' 66th-minute wonder goal gave Qatar victory against China at the AFC Asian Cup yesterday. The 1-0 win at the Khalifa International Stadium was hosts' third successive win, while China's campaign is hanging by a thread.

Qatar had already qualified for the last 16, while China finished third in Group A after failing to score in any of their three games and must wait to see if they squeeze into the knockouts as one of the four best third-placed sides.

Newcomers Tajikistan beat Lebanon 2-1 in Group A's other game to leapfrog China into second place and reach the next

Qatar's Hassan al-Haydos celebrates scoring their first goal.

round. China will need a mathematical miracle to join them.

China began the tournament with two dour 0-0 draws against Tajikistan and Lebanon. They again looked toothless in front of goal against holders Qatar.

At the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium, Debutants Tajikistan qualified for the last 16 in dramatic fashion when they came from behind to snatch a last-gasp 2-1 victory over 10-man Lebanon.

Tajikistan had two goals ruled out for offside by VAR but after Lebanon had Kassem El-Zein sent off in the second half, but late strikes from skipper Parvizdzhon Umarbayev and Nuriddin Khamrokulov gave Petar Segrt's side a memorable win. **Sport Pages 1, 3, 4**

AMIR HOLDS TALKS WITH TAJIK PRESIDENT



Tajik president's visit enhanced bilateral co-operation: Amir

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani confirmed that the visit of President of the Republic of Tajikistan Emomali Rahmon would enhance bilateral co-operation between the two countries in various fields. In a post on his official X account, His Highness expressed happiness over talks with the Tajik president and the close friendship between the two countries, adding that the mutual visits strengthen joint work and bilateral co-operation in various fields. His Highness said that they agreed on the main priorities of the two countries' partnerships in the next period and that they look forward to enhancing them with promising opportunities for more prosperity and development to both countries. **(QNA)**



From Page 1

From the Tajik side, the session was attended by Minister of Foreign Affairs Sirojiddin Muhriddin, Assistant to the President of the Republic on Foreign Relations Sharifi Azamsho Latifzod, Assistant to the President on Economic Affairs Nematullo Hikmatullozoda, Minister of Economic Development and Trade Zavqizoda Zavqi, Minister of Industry and New Technologies Sherali Kabir, Minister of Energy and Water Resources Daler Juma, Minister of Labour, Immigration and Population Employment Gulnara Hassanzadeh, Minister of Cul-

ture Dvlatzoda Zulfiya, Minister of Finance Fayziddin Qahhorda, Minister of Agriculture Qurbon Hakimzoda, alongside a number of members of the accompanying official delegation. His Highness the Amir and the Tajik president held a bilateral meeting during which they discussed several topics of common interest. His Highness the Amir held a luncheon banquet in honour of the president and his accompanying delegation. The president of Tajikistan was accorded an official reception upon his arrival at Lusail Palace.



Amir, Tajikistan president witness signing of agreements, MoUs

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani and President of the friendly Republic of Tajikistan Emomali Rahmon witnessed yesterday the signing of an agreement and several memoranda of understanding (MoUs) between the governments of the two countries. His Highness the Amir and the president of Tajikistan witnessed the signing of an MoU between the Permanent Committee for Emergency (PCE) of the Ministry of Interior of Qatar and the Committee of Emergency Situations and Civil Defence under the Government of Tajikistan; an executive programme between Qatar's Ministry of Education and Higher Education and the Republic of Tajikistan's Ministry of Education and Science on co-operation in education for the 2024-2029 period; a co-operation programme between Qatar's Ministry of Foreign

Affairs and the Republic of Tajikistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the 2024-2026 period, an MoU on museum development between the Qatar Museums and the Republic of Tajikistan's State Institution of the National Museum; and a joint declaration to enhance cultural co-operation between the Ministry of Culture of Qatar and the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Tajikistan. They also witnessed the signing of a bilateral co-operation MoU between the Qatar Financial Information Unit and the National Bank of Tajikistan's Financial Monitoring Department; an agreement to avoid double taxation and financial evasion with regard to income taxes and capital gains taxes between the governments of the two countries; an MoU on charitable and humanitarian co-operation between Qatar's Regulatory Authority for Charitable Activities and the Republic of

Tajikistan's Ministry of Economic Development and Trade; and an MoU between the Qatar Free Zones Authority and the Republic of Tajikistan's Ministry of Economic Development and Trade. The signing was attended by members of the official delegation accompanying the Tajik president. **President Rahmon ends Doha visit** Tajikistan President Emomali Rahmon left Doha yesterday, following a state visit to the country. He and the accompanying delegation were seen off at Hamad International Airport by HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dr Mohamed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh al-Khulaifi; Qatar's ambassador to Tajikistan Mubarak bin Abdulrahman al-Nasr and Tajikistan's ambassador to Qatar Khosro Sahibzadeh. **(QNA)**

Shura hails Qatari mediation for Gaza aid

The Shura Council held yesterday its ordinary weekly session, under the chairmanship of Speaker HE Hassan bin Abdullah al-Ghanem. At the outset of the meeting, the Council welcomed the successful Qatari mediation efforts between Hamas and Israel to enter medicine and humanitarian aid shipment to the civilians into the Gaza Strip. In this regard, the Council commended the position of Qatar, led by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, towards the Palestinian issue and its efforts to support the brothers in Palestine, particularly in the Gaza Strip, and its diligent efforts in accordance with the directives of the wise leadership to promote interna-

tional peace and security. During the session, the Shura Council reviewed the response of the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers to the proposal submitted by the Council, related to the topic of inflation, high costs of living, and increasing financial burdens on citizens, and decided to refer it to the Financial and Economic Affairs Committee to study it and provide the Council with its conclusions. The Shura Council had discussed in previous sessions the aforementioned topic and concluded by submitting a proposal with the Council's views on the subject in question, at the request of the esteemed government. The proposal included a number of themes that would contribute to reducing the effects



The Shura Council in session.

of inflation, address the problem of high prices of consumer goods, and provide realistic scenarios for addressing the high opera-

tional cost of goods and services, including preventing monopoly, increasing the places allocated for commercial activities, sup-

porting basic goods and materials, and supporting the national product to increase production in the local market, review duties and tax policies, and raise awareness of the important role of the merchant and consumer in this aspect. The Council also reviewed a draft law to repeal Law No 2 of 1991 regarding imposing a fee for issuing certificates from the Ministry of Interior and its affiliated agencies, and Law No 7 of 1991 regarding imposing a fee for issuing certificates from the Ministry of Defence, which was assigned to it by the esteemed government, and decided referring it to the Internal and External Affairs Committee for study and submitting its report thereon to it. The Council approved

a request to extend the work of the Legal and Legislative Affairs Committee to study a draft law on public and private state property. The Shura Council also reviewed a report on its participation in the Science for Peace Parliamentary Meeting, which was held in Vietnam last September under the title 'Water Security and Insecurity: Rebuilding Peaceful Coexistence with Science'. At the conclusion of the session, Speaker of the Shura Council informed the members about his meeting with Tajikistan President Emomali Rahmon. The meeting discussed the existing bilateral relations between the two friendly countries, in particular those related to parliamentary co-operation and ways to enhance and develop it. **(QNA)**

Culture minister meets Turkmen counterpart



HE the Minister of Culture Sheikh Abdulrahman bin Hamad al-Thani met with Turkmenistan's Minister of Culture, Atageldi Ashirovich Shamuradov. The meeting discussed ways to bolster cultural co-operation. Meanwhile, the Days of Culture of Kyrgyzstan kicked off yesterday evening at Expo 2023 Doha in the presence of HE the Minister of Culture and Kyrgyz Minister of Culture, Information, Sports and Youth Policy Maksutov Altynbek Askeroovich. The opening of the Days of Culture came in conjunction with the AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023. Activities include cultural events, in addition to the participation of Kyrgyz folk music bands in several regions and tourist sites. **(QNA)**

Tajik president meets QFFD chief



Tajikistan President Emomali Rahmon met yesterday with HE the Director-General of Qatar Fund For Development (QFFD), Khalifa bin Jassim al-Kuwari. The meeting discussed topics of common interest. **(QNA)**

Qatar relief for Gaza reaches 2,063 tonnes



Two Qatar Armed Forces planes carrying 89 tonnes of aid arrived in the Egyptian city of Al Arish yesterday. The aid includes food items provided by Qatar Charity to be further transferred to Gaza. So far Qatar has sent 68 aircraft carrying 2,063 tonnes of aid. Qatar is supporting the brotherly Palestinian people during their difficult humanitarian conditions. **(QNA)**

Safari Hypermarket joins Samsung Galaxy S24 AI series soft launch



Safari Hypermarket Qatar has joined the soft launch ceremony of Samsung Galaxy S24 AI series and announced the commencement of pre-order until January 30. AI amplifies nearly every experience on Galaxy S24 series, from enabling barrier-free communication with intelligent text and call translations, to maximising creative freedom with Galaxy's ProVisual Engine, to setting a new standard for search that will change how Galaxy users discover the world around them. Customers can experience the various features of artificial intelligence (AI) and other benefits in the new Samsung Galaxy S24 AI Series through all Safari mobile outlets across Qatar and also through Safari's website. Tittu George, Haris Khader, Favas, Shibesh from Safari Group and Mohamed Fahad from Dohatna Retail were present at the event, a statement added.

QF academic stresses key role of tech in special education

By Joseph Varghese
Staff Reporter

An academic from Qatar Foundation has emphasised the significant role of technology for students' communication in special education while highlighting the involvement of parents within this learning process.

Matthew Campion, director of Renad Academy, QF noted the importance of technology in enhancing education, ahead of the International Day of Education observed tomorrow through a series of activities and sessions at Education City.

Campion explained: "Renad Academy, which supports students with autism and their families, is committed to integrating innovative technology within the classroom, while prioritising the involvement of parents within this learning process. The technology for special education is fundamental for children in terms of their communication and their access to learning."

Campion said that many of the children at Renad Academy are preverbal. "So they can use the technology to communicate, and this gives them the opportunity to have a voice, to be able to speak, and to share their needs and their feelings. The use of interactive applications or games to access the learning world and the wider world is vital for all our children," he said.

The academic noted that the institute is keen to integrate technology into the educational process in effective and innova-



Matthew Campion

tive ways, and use a variety of applications and programmes that give the students access to educational resources and enhance their academic experience using devices such as iPads and Chromebooks, as well as interactive boards, to facilitate the learning and communication process.

The director stressed the role of parents in this learning journey.

"A big part of the learning technology is that we train the parents to support their children. Our team, especially the speech and language therapists, work with children on a particular application, but they've also created training modules, like webinars or screencasts, to guide parents through a step-by-step journey," he said.

"We pay special attention to continuous communication with parents. We hold face-to-face meetings with them regularly to review their children's needs and consider the resources available to them. By cultivating these relationships with parents, we have been able to increase communi-

cation, which has facilitated ongoing conversations about what is appropriate for each case," he pointed out.

"Concerns were also raised about the excessive use of electronic devices at home, and their impact on children's behaviour. We provide support and guidance to parents through workshops and collaborations with different organisations. We work to develop positive strategies, allowing technology to be used more selectively and effectively in the educational process," he said and highlighted about the need for distinguishing between the use of technology for educational and entertainment purposes.

Campion stated that with collaboration between school and parents, and the technology used, students can express themselves more effectively which reflects the transformative power of technology in education and the importance of the role of the family and school in supporting student development.

"I call on all parents to focus on their children's abilities and uniqueness rather than on their disability. We know that not every child will be able to go to work, go to university, or live independently, but each of our children can achieve at different levels, and, therefore, technology will be very important because having this ability to communicate first and foremost is the primary need. Each child must communicate to advocate for his or her own needs," concluded Campion.

Over 2mn passengers 'used Doha Metro, Lusail Tram since start of Asian Cup'

By Joey Aguilar
Staff Reporter

The Doha Metro and Lusail Tram networks in Qatar carried a total of 2,164,211 passengers since the start of the AFC Asian Cup until the end of the second round, Qatar Railways company (Qatar Rail) has said.

A Qatar Rail post on X noted that 2,086,162 passengers used the Doha Metro while 78,049 passengers utilised the Lusail Tram.

During the first round of the tournament's group stage, Qatar Rail transported more than a million passengers, with a statement noting that from January 12 to January 16, the total number of passengers reached 1,079,340. Out of this, 1,040,973 passengers used the metro and 38,367, the tram.

According to Qatar Rail, the networks witnessed huge demand, particularly on the opening day of the tournament, which featured the Qatar versus Lebanon match at Lusail Stadium. On this day alone, the metro and tram combined transported 234,862 passengers.

Qatar Rail noted that the Doha Metro played a key role in providing connectivity to key event areas and attractions, including Souq Waqif, Lusail Boulevard, Katara and Al Bidda Park, where the Expo 2023 Doha is currently being held. The metro is directly connected to Al Bidda and Corniche stations on the Red Line.

The busiest stations on the



Doha Metro were Lusail QNB, DECC and Msheireb while Leg-taifiya emerged as the busiest stop along the Lusail Tram route.

For the AFC Asian Cup, Qatar Rail has deployed its fleet of 110 modern, comfortable and secure Doha Metro trains, including six-carriage trains on the Red Line. This doubled the capacity to 1,120 passengers per train.

To ensure the efficient move-

ment of passengers, Qatar Rail adopted advanced systems and closely monitored the Command Suite, providing real-time information about passenger flow before and after matches.

It also deployed additional staff at stations and introduced complimentary Day Passes for match-day ticket holders, improving the overall transportation experience for fans.



MoI unveils first prison reform research award

The Ministry of Interior (MoI) held a ceremony yesterday to announce the first research award dedicated to upgrading penal and correctional institutions.

The event was organised by the permanent committee for punitive and correctional institutions, in collaboration with endowment fund for scientific and cultural development of the General Department of Endowments under the patronage of HE the Minister of Interior and Commander of the Internal Security Force (Lekhwiya) Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani.

Held at the Officers Club of the General Directorate of Civil Defence, the ceremony was attended by Director-General of Civil Defence Maj Gen Hamad bin Othman al-Duhaimi, Director of Penal and Correctional Institutions Department and chairman of the permanent committee for punitive and correctional institutions Brig. Gen Nasser Mohamed al-Sayed, Director General of the General Directorate of Endowments, vice-chairman of the Committee Sheikh Dr Khalid bin Mohamed bin Ghanim al-Thani, alongside several directors at MoI, officers and specialists.

To mark this occasion, Brig. Gen al-Sayed said the aim of launching the award is to primarily promote research that target reforming inmates, rehabilitating them, returning them to community as good individuals, studying their humanitarian and social conditions, as well as the legislation that regulates penal and correctional institutions, and establishing the global principle which affirms that these institutions are solely for reform and rehabilitation.



The event was organised by the permanent committee for punitive and correctional institutions, in collaboration with endowment fund for scientific and cultural development of the General Department of Endowments

Sheikh Dr Khalid said the award promotes the vital role performed by the institution in protecting the community and offering a wholesome, conducive environment for individuals who contribute to developing the community, pointing out that the award will offer qualitative research that promote work, understand better practices and share experiences and expertise.

He hoped the research would be a scientific reference for those operating in punitive and correctional institutions globally.

The theme of the award primarily focuses on the programmes of successful care, reform and rehabilitation in prisons, as per experiences of several countries around the world, as researchers can change the title in a way that does not deviate from the content of the award topic. Special awards have been dedicated to subscribers.

First-place winner will receive QR150,000, while winner of the second place will receive QR100,000, with the winner of the third place receiving QR50,000.

They will also receive certificates of appreciation.

In addition, the MoI said the participation in the award is available for all researchers at home and abroad.

Those who desire to participate shall submit their research via the designated website on the specified dates, adding that participants are invited to register and submit their research during the period from Jan 29 to Feb 27, 2025, for the award results to be announced on July 17, 2025.

The information about the award, along with scientific and formal requirements for the research can be obtained via the link: [https://awqaf.gov.qa/eslah/\(QNA\)](https://awqaf.gov.qa/eslah/(QNA))

Kite Festival set to add colour to Qatar skies

By Joey Aguilar
Staff Reporter

The Qatar Kite Festival 2024 is set to adorn the skies of Old Doha Port from January 25 to February 3, featuring colourful kites, cultural celebrations and family-friendly activities.

Safe Flight Solutions, organiser of the Qatar Balloon Festival, noted that the latest edition of this picturesque event will showcase giant kites flown by 60 participants from various countries. The 10-day festival also provides an opportunity for both Qatar residents and visitors, especially families, to spend quality time together and delight in the mesmerising spectacle of the kites in the sky, organisers said.

The event, organised with the support of strategic partner, Qatar Tourism, and venue partner, Old Doha Port, will be held in front of the cruise terminal, adding an extra layer of excitement for international passengers during the bustling cruise season.

Visit Qatar noted that attendees can look forward to a variety of activities, including workshops, arts and crafts and thrilling kite-flying competitions. International kite experts



One of the highlights of the Qatar Kite Festival is the day-night kite flying, where kites will fill Qatar's sky both day and night, creating a breathtaking visual experience.

will also be on hand to showcase their vibrant creations.

One of the highlights of the festival is the day-night kite flying, where kites will fill Qatar's sky both day and night, creating a breathtaking visual experience. In addition, children can participate in free kite workshops, building and decorating their kites under the guidance of experts, and take home their creations as souvenirs.

The event is free and open to all, making it an ideal family outing. Visitors can join in public flying sessions, learn the art of kite handling, and enjoy the festivities with food carts and kiosks offering delicious treats and children's entertainment.

The previous edition of the festival saw a vibrant and scenic view of the Doha skyline and the skies surrounding the Museum of Islamic Art park.



Qatar participates in Real Estate Future Forum in Riyadh

Qatar is participating in the 3rd edition of the Real Estate Future Forum, held in Riyadh under the theme *The Power of Flexibility ... Building a Sustainable and Prosperous Real Estate Future*.

Qatar's delegation is headed by HE the Minister of Municipality Abdullah bin Hamad bin Abdullah al-Attiyah.

The forum held over three days in the Saudi Arabia city, which kicked off yesterday, discusses best international practices as well as the latest technologies in sustainable devel-



opment and ways to activate them.

Qatar's participation in the forum is aimed at showcasing its successful experience in real estate development, investment opportunities in developing cities, infrastructure, and the quality of life of residents, and introducing the services provided by the Ministry of Municipality in this field.

On the sidelines of his participation in the forum, HE al-Attiyah held a meeting with Saudi Minister of Municipal and Rural Affairs and Housing Majid bin Abdullah al-Hogail.

The meeting discussed co-operation between the two countries and ways to enhance them in the fields of common interest, especially municipal and real estate.

As part of Qatar's participation in the forum, the Chairman and Managing Director of Qetaifan Projects Sheikh Nasser bin Abdulrahman al-Thani reviewed a working paper on ways to tackle the challenges of the real estate development sector through flexibility and innovation, during which he presented the Qetaifan Projects model. - **QNA**



Qatari Public Prosecution, Uzbek General Prosecutor's Office sign agreement

Qatar's Public Prosecution and the General Prosecutors Office of Uzbekistan signed yesterday a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to identify bilateral areas of co-operation and to plan, prepare and implement activities and training programmes aimed at raising the efficiency of public prosecution staff in both countries, and exchanging experiences pertaining to their competencies.

HE the Attorney-General Dr Issa Saad al-Jafali al-Nuaimi and Uzbek Prosecutor-General Nigmatilla Yuldashev, who is visiting Doha, signed the MoU.

In a pre-signing meeting, the two sides discussed ways to strengthen legal and judicial co-operation and exchange experiences between the public prosecutions in the two countries.

Yuldashev and his delegation learned about Qatar's Public Prosecution's technological achievements, especially those related to applying digital transformation in the judicial field, and leveraging artificial intelligence (AI) to speed up judicial procedures and achieve criminal justice. - **QNA**



Barwa Real Estate unveils 'Barwa' app for smart devices

Barwa Real Estate Group has unveiled the "Barwa" application, designed for smart devices operating on both iOS and Android systems.

The new application, available on Apple and Google stores, provides details about completed and ongoing Barwa Real Estate projects.

These projects encompass a diverse and balanced mix of real estate developments covering all regions of the country.

Additionally, the app offers comprehensive details about available rental units with the group's subsidiary Waseef, including pricing, size, and location information within each project.

It includes information about all markets and supermarkets present in the group's developed projects.

Furthermore, the application allows users to share information about real estate projects, featuring a map showcasing project locations.

The application facilitates the reservation of parking spaces for guests at the main headquarters of the group in the Barwa Al-Saad project.

It also provides information and images related to the group's projects and events.

This application is another achievement in Barwa Real Estate Group's digital transformation journey.

It aims to harness the power of advanced technologies and innovation to improve its services, add the desired value to the real estate sector, and elevate customer experiences.

HBKU's CSE hosts healthcare, technology collider roundtable

Hamad Bin Khalifa University (HBKU)'s College of Science and Engineering (CSE) partnered with IE School of Science & Technology's Impact Xcelerator to host the Healthcare and Technology Collider roundtable, which produced a wealth of formidable starting points for research to improve healthcare with artificial intelligence (AI) and new technologies.

Top-tier participation from CSE founding dean Dr Mounir Hamdi and IE School of Science and Technology dean Dr Ikhlaz Sidhu, who is an HBKU board member, along with many high profile speakers and guests from the healthcare system in Qatar, enriched a forum that mixed experts from different intellectual and professional backgrounds to achieve ideas.

Dr Aiman Erbad, associate professor and head of Information and Computing Technology Division at the CSE, and Dr Sidhu welcomed attendees to the event, which was held both online and in-person.

They discussed how cutting-edge tech-

nologies, such as AI, sensors, telemedicine, behavioural analytics, metaverse/digital twins, and genomics could form the basis for technological solutions that benefit the global healthcare sector.

The panel featured leading experts from both the healthcare and biomedical technology sectors, including Sidra Medicine's Department of Surgery vice-chair Dr Mitchell Stotland, Real Madrid FC chief medical officer Dr Niko Mihic, Ramon y Cajal University Hospital's director of Cardiology Service Dr Jose Luis Zamorano, and Shaun Holt, chief executive and board chairman at Alveo Technologies.

Academic perspectives were provided by CSE professor and associate dean Dr Amine Bernak, CSE associate professor Dr Marwa K Qaraque, IE School of Science and Technology executive committee member and Entrepreneur in Residence Dr David Yeregui Marcos, and Dr Dae-jin Lee, professor at IE School of Science and Technology.

"The multidisciplinary nature of the healthcare sector holds incredible potential



Some of the panellists during a discussion.

for technological innovation, and events like the Healthcare and Technology Collider provide the ideal platform for world-

renowned experts and entrepreneurs to collaborate and devise such solutions together," said Dr Hamdi.

BMW model recalled

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI), in co-operation with Alfardan Automobiles, has announced the recall of BMW i7 xDrive 60 Saloon, 2023 model, as engine sound insulation may collect water, causing corrosion to the battery cable.

The recall campaign comes within the framework of the MoCI's efforts to protect consumers and ensure that dealers follow up on vehicle defects and repairs.

The MoCI said it will co-ordinate with the dealer to follow up on the maintenance and repair works and will communicate with customers to ensure that the necessary repairs are carried out.

The MoCI urged all customers to report any violation to its Consumer Protection and Anti-Commercial Fraud Department, which processes complaints, inquires and suggestions through the following channels: Call Centre: 16001, e-mail: info@moci.gov.qa, X (formerly Twitter) - @MOCIQATAR, Instagram MOCIQATAR. The MoCI mobile application available on iPhone and Android devices MOCI_QATAR

HEC Paris in Qatar hosts gala dinner for graduates



HEC Paris in Qatar celebrated the achievements of its SBUM (Specialised Master's Degree in Strategic Business Unit Management) and Executive MBA graduates from Doha and Riyadh at a gala dinner recently. The event brought together the HEC Paris community, including faculty, corporate partners, alumni, and graduates. HEC Paris in Qatar dean Dr Pablo Martin de Holan highlighted the transformative power of education and personal growth, applauding the graduates' dedication, resilience, and leadership as they continue their impactful journeys.

Qatar wins award for sustainable project management

The Ministry of Municipality, represented by Waste Recycling and Treatment Department, has won the Gulf Excellence Award for Sustainable Project Management in Kuwait.

Kuwait's Ministry of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy, Ministry of Defence, and Environment Public Authority organised the Second Gulf Forum for Development and Sustainable Project Management under the theme "recycling solutions, clean energy and water, green smart cities".

Marking the occasion, Assistant Director of Waste Recycling and Treatment Department Hassan Nasr al-Nasr said that the Ministry of Municipality's winning of this award comes as a culmination of the efforts made towards achieving sustainability and recycling solutions. (**QNA**)





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QATAR PETROCHEMICAL COMPANY

QAPCO invites qualified bidders to participate in the following tender:

SI No.	Tender Reference and Description	(i) Deadline for Submission of Information & Interest for Bidding	(ii) Tender Fee	(iii) Tender Publication on ARIBA	(iv) Tender Bond	Bid Closing Date
1	P03-07-150 Supply of LED Luminaires and Lighting accessories Tender Condition: Supplier shall replace the failed luminaires / spares under guarantee / warranty terms on free of cost at QAPCO Mesaied Plant.	25 th Jan 2024	QAR. 500. 00 Payment t by 25 th Jan 2024	28 th Jan 2024	QAR 35,000	08 Feb 2024 12:00 Noon Doha LT

i. Interested bidders to communicate their willingness to bid and contact details to QAPCO Procurement (procurement@qapco.com.qa) indicating company name, address, telephone, official e-mail...etc. latest by the deadline for Submission of Information & Interest for Bidding indicated above.
Reference Number and Description of the tender must be mentioned in the email.

ii. Non-refundable tender fee indicated above is payable to QAPCO through **QNB account # 0013-001688-060** only at any QNB branch latest by the deadline indicated above.

iii. Tender link will be sent via email notification from ARIBA system to the confirmed bidders. Tender Document will be accessible only after attaching the proof of tender fee payment in ARIBA by the bidder followed by Qapco approval.
QAPCO shall reply with the access to "ARIBA eSourcing RFP event" along with necessary instructions and guidelines for the bid submission.

iv. **Tender Bond (Bank Guarantee):** Original tender bond must be submitted by hand to the following address latest by the Tender closing date & time:

Qatar Petrochemical Company (QAPCO) Q.P.J.S.C.
P. O. BOX 756, QAPCO Doha Office, Building No. 135, Zone 42, Street 230, C Ring Road, Doha, Qatar
Tel.: +974 4033 8109/102
Attention: Procurement Group Manager
Bidder to attach copy of tender bond to the offer in ARIBA. Offer without Tender Bond will not be considered.

Clarifications: Communicate queries with tender reference and description to procurement@qapco.com.qa.

Notes:

1. ARIBA Registration: Bidders who are not registered in QAPCO are requested to complete the registration process during the tendering period (Details on ARIBA registration can be accessed via QAPCO website www.qapco.com)

2. ICV: Effective from 01st July 2023, Bids from Local Suppliers and Contractors (companies established under the Law of State of Qatar) who are not in possession of an ICV score in the ICV portal (<https://icv.qa/en-US>) by Tender closing date (or commercial bid submission date if separately mentioned / notified) will not be accepted. Local companies that have been established for less than 2 years are exempted from this requirement.

For more information about QAPCO please visit our website: www.qapco.com

DFI awards 44 projects in 2023 Fall Grants

The Doha Film Institute (DFI) has announced the recipients of its 2023 Fall Grants cycle, featuring more than 40 films from over 30 nations, which were selected from hundreds of entries submitted by first- and second-time filmmakers and acclaimed Mena (Middle East and North Africa) directors.

The programme has supported more than 800 diverse film projects from 74 countries to date, including feature and short narratives, documentaries, experimental essays, and serial content for broadcast and streaming platforms.

In addition to Qatar, the 2023 Fall Grantees include projects from Afghanistan, Algeria, Bahrain, Belgium, Bhutan, Croatia, Egypt, France, Georgia, Germany, Hong Kong, Iraq, Italy, Jordan, Lebanon, Madagascar, Morocco, Mauritius, Myanmar, Nepal, the Netherlands, Norway, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Spain, South Africa, Sudan, Sweden, Switzerland, Syria, Taiwan, Tunisia, the UAE, the US, and Zanzibar, among others.

The recipients include 20 women filmmakers, with 12 returning grantees and five projects from Qatar-based talent.

In a press statement, DFI chief executive Fatma Hassan Alremaihi said: "The volatility of today's economic, social, and political conditions adversely impacts the support for creative talent, especially for independent voices in cinema with limited access to film finance."

"We are on a mission to identify and support these voices because we believe that their stories mirror the harsh lived realities of many communities through creative visions that need to be realised," she said.



MDD organises open-air 'Baraha Orchestra' with QPO

As the AFC Asian Cup 2023 heads towards the knockout stage, Msheireb Downtown Doha (MDD) invites guests to enjoy an open-air "Baraha Orchestra" in collaboration with the Qatar Philharmonic Orchestra (QPO).

On the tournament's rest days, the MDD will host two concerts at Barahat Msheireb.

The first concert, titled "Football Classics", is scheduled for January 26-27.

The second is called "Golden Gulf Classics" and will take place on February 4-5.

Visitors will enjoy a 90-minute musical

journey blending football and Gulf traditions.

"The AFC Asian Cup 2023 brings people together through the universal language of football, and we are excited to layer in international sounds for an elevated cultural experience," QPO deputy executive director Nasser Sahim said. "We're thrilled to perform at Barahat Msheireb in Msheireb Downtown Doha to celebrate the diversity and unity of the games."

Visitors will have a chance to take in the beautifully sculpted setting of Barahat Msheireb during the concert intervals, with catering provided by the 5-star Alwadi Hotel

- M gallery serving dishes inspired by the orchestra themes.

"Msheireb Downtown Doha is a great place to be for visitors and residents enjoying the tournament, with a unique blend of traditional influences and modern conveniences," Msheireb Properties' corporate communications senior director Dr Hafiz Ali Abdullah said. "We're delighted to host the 'Baraha Orchestra' in collaboration with the Qatar Philharmonic Orchestra, providing an extraordinary encounter for the diverse audience present in Qatar for the AFC Asian Cup 2023."



'A Day in the Life of a Georgetown Student' is taking place tomorrow.

Doha Institute holds annual career fair

Career Advising Services of the Doha Institute (DI) for Graduate Studies's Student Affairs department organised the 7th career fair yesterday with the participation of 47 institutions from both the governmental and the private sectors in Qatar.

The annual event was opened by DI president Dr Abdelwahab ElAffedni and Eman AlSulaiti, executive director of the administrative and financial sector.

The DI Career Fair is a platform for DI students and graduates to learn about the most prominent opportunities available in the local labour market, providing them with direct contact with different organisations and institutions, and allowing them to seek clarification, if any, as well as identify vacancies and training opportunities that fit their future career orientations.

"The Career Fair connects DI students and graduates with the Qatari labour market, provides training opportunities for the existing students and serves as a platform to familiarise participants with DI specialisations and academic programmes," AlSulaiti explained.



DI student career advising and skills development specialist Aliaa Chebaro added that the function

of the career advising services is to provide the tools for students to explore the local labour market

and connect with it, to find the job that fits best each one's qualifications and capabilities.

GU-Q invites prospective students and families to experience campus life

Prospective undergraduate students can experience "A Day in the Life of a Georgetown Student" hosted by the Georgetown University in Qatar (GU-Q) tomorrow.

This annual tradition invites high school and transfer students, their families, and educational leaders to get to know the GU-Q's academic and student life opportunities.

With the February 1 admissions deadline approaching, participants can connect with GU-Q faculty, staff, and students for guidance and insight on preparing their applications.

The event, which runs from 4pm to 6.30pm, will also highlight college life and the vibrant, multicultural campus experience outside the classroom.

Emphasising the event as an opportunity to ask questions and hear directly from professors and students, assistant dean for admissions and strategic enrolment management Joseph Hernandez said: "For a day, participants can immerse themselves in the GU-Q experience, gaining a real feel for what our global campus here in Education City has to offer."

"It is a valuable opportunity to see how their personal and professional lives will be enriched by a Georgetown degree," he said.

The event will also highlight the GU-Q's four-year interdisciplinary Bachelor of Science in Foreign Service (BSFS), which follows the same curriculum as the Walsh School of Foreign Service on the Washington, DC campus.

Students unable to attend the event can meet a GU-Q counsellor at an online Admissions Workshop on January 29.

Additional information on the application requirements, frequently asked questions, and programme information, are available on the university's website.



Qatar Charity distributes winter kits to workers

Qatar Charity (QC) is continuing to distribute winter kits to the workers of municipalities and companies within Qatar, with the objective of reaching 1,000 beneficiaries.

The move comes as part of the QC's 2023-24 winter campaign "One Heart" and with the support of benevolent people in Qatar.

The kits include essential winter items such as jackets, shoes, socks and blankets.

The kits have so far been distributed to the workers of the municipalities of Al Sheehaniya, Al Jumailiya, and Al Shamal.

The winter kit distribution will also take place in other areas, such as Al Kharrara, Al Jeryan and Umm Qarn.

Abdulrahman al-Hajri, director of the QC's Local Programmes and Community department, said that the project is a form of social solidarity and compas-

sion and aims to promote values of generosity, benevolence, and charitable work.

Al-Jumailiya Municipality office director Rashid Za'al al-Naemi commended the QC's role in bringing happiness to those with limited income in the country through such projects.

Al Shamal Municipality's Dr Abdul Khaliq al-Khalidi thanked the QC for its continuous efforts in supporting municipal and other workers in Qatar.

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Qatar, Somalia: partnership for a prosperous future

The working visit of Somali president Hassan Sheikh Mohamud to Qatar is within the framework of their keenness to develop bilateral relations.

Qatar and Somalia have strong historical relations, based on mutual respect, common understanding and co-ordination in regional and international forums, and are based on a set of common ties, foundations, interests, aspirations, and goals, regulated by a set of agreements and memorandums of understanding.

Bilateral relations have witnessed milestones and have become stronger under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani.

Somali leaders and senior officials there are keen to visit Doha continuously, for further consultation and co-ordination between the leadership of the two countries on relations between Doha and Mogadishu and regional and international issues and topics of common interest.

In this regard, His Highness

the Amir and the Somali president held an official talks session in May last year. The two leaders had affirmed their keenness to enhance brotherly relations between the two countries. The president thanked the Amir for the development support provided by Qatar to the Somali people.

Qatar plays an important role in the implementation of many vital projects for development, reconstruction and rehabilitation in Somalia such as building roads that connect the capital, Mogadishu, to several cities like the Mogadishu-Jowhar and the Mogadishu-Afgooye roads, in addition to Qatar's contribution to the rehabilitation and construction of the headquarters of the Ministry of Planning and Investment, and the construction and rehabilitation of the Mogadishu Municipality building, as well as other vital infrastructure projects.

Qatar also supports security capabilities, economic empowerment programmes, and job creation for youth in Somalia.

Out of belief in humanitarian

and Islamic duty, and out of sincere brotherhood, Qatar provided humanitarian aid to Somalia through Qatari institutions such as the Qatar Fund for Development, the Qatar Red Crescent and Qatar Charity.

Qatar also implemented and is implementing many development and sustainable projects and contributed significantly to projects to eradicate illiteracy and educate about 300,000 students, and another project to empower Somali youth economically and provide job opportunities for them in the fishing sector, to enhance stability, security, and peace in the country. It also supported the Trust Fund for Peace and reconciliation.

Qatar is always keen, during all relevant occasions, to emphasise that it will remain a fundamental supporter of Somalia and its brotherly people, to achieve their hopes and aspirations for building their state and ensuring a prosperous future for its coming generations.

Qatar participated in the inauguration ceremony of the Somali

president with a high-level delegation, which reflects the strength of the relations between the two countries. Qatar is one of the largest supporters of Somalia in various fields, especially education and making Somali people capable of contributing to building and developing their country. Doha is considered one of the largest contributors to creating development projects in various Somali regions and governorates.

In addition to the above, Qatar is known for its long experience in mediation issues to resolve disputes. Qatari diplomacy has played a positive and effective role in mediation between the parties in Somalia, as well as efforts to restore diplomatic relations between Somalia and Kenya, which consolidates Qatar's position and its ability to resolve disputes through negotiation and dialogue and peaceful means.

Somalia views with great appreciation the support it receives from Qatar, and its standing with it over the past years until it reached the stage of recovery

Somali president arrives in Doha



Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud arrived in Doha yesterday, on a working visit to the country. He and the accompanying delegation were welcomed upon arrival at Hamad International Airport by the Director of the Department of Protocol, Ibrahim bin Yousif Fakhro, and Somali ambassador Mohamed Ahmed Sheikh Ali. (QNA)

from war and instability.

Last September, during his visit to Doha, Somali Prime Minister Hamza Abdi Barre praised Qatar's position towards his country in various circumstances.

During their visits to Doha, senior Somali officials are keen to discuss trade and economic relations between the two countries, and ways to enhance them, and to support trade exchange and stimulate investments.

Somalia seeks to attract Qatari investors to set up projects that can support development in the country and create job opportunities for its youth and children. There are many sectors that can be invested in, especially agricultural projects, livestock, and fisheries, since Somalia has coasts that extend for more than 3,700km. Somalia also has about 8.5mn hectares of fertile arable land, about 40mn head of camels, sheep, and cows, and other opportunities in the energy sectors and various industries. (QNA)

Westin Doha launches 'Move Well' initiative



The Westin Doha has unveiled its exclusive 'Move Well' campaign, featuring a series of wellness experiences throughout January and February, a statement said yesterday.

Central to the campaign is a Fitness Challenge taking place until February 13, with a curated selection of classes, including Bootcamp Zumba, Total Body Workout, Aqua Aerobics, STEP Class, and Yoga.

The Fitness Challenge will take place at WestinWorkout fitness studio, a state-of-the-art facility managed by expert trainers. The Westin Doha is also collaborating with Strava, a

leading fitness tracking app, to provide a complimentary platform to track fitness progress.

As part of the initiative, The Westin Doha has also introduced the brand's signature WestinWorkout Gear Lending Programme, in which guests can borrow high-tech recovery and total body strength training equipment from Bala and Hyperice.

The Westin Doha's 'Move Well' staycation blends premium accommodation with personalised wellness experiences, including one complimentary personal training

session at WestinWorkout fitness studio per night.

The Westin Doha also offers a nutritious breakfast from their 'Eat Well' Menu. Valid until February 29, 2024, this exclusive offer is bookable through their website via <https://www.marriott.com/offers/move-well-staycation-off-101454/dohwi-the-westin-doha-hotel-and-spa>

General manager Ilkin Imanov said: "The Westin Doha's exclusive 'Move Well' campaign, is a pledge to health, a celebration of well-being. I am proud to lead a team dedicated to providing transformative wellness experiences."

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Yemen's Houthis claim attack on US military cargo ship in Gulf of Aden

Reuters
Cairo

Yemen's Houthi movement said yesterday its forces had launched a missile attack on American military cargo ship

Ocean Jazz in the Gulf of Aden. It did not say when or precisely where the attack took place, or if any damage was caused, and there was no immediate comment or confirmation from the US military. "The Yemeni armed forces con-

tinue to retaliate to any American or British aggression against our country by targeting all sources of threat in the Red and Arab Sea," Houthi military spokesperson Yahya Sarea said in a statement. US and British forces have launched strikes across Yemen

against Houthi forces in recent weeks in response to months of Houthi attacks on Red Sea shipping that the fighters cast as a response to the war in Gaza. The Houthis, who initially said they were only targeting vessels linked to Israel, said they would

also attack US vessels after the strikes. British maritime security firm Ambrey said the vessel named by the Houthis yesterday had been contracted by the US military. Houthi attacks on ships in and around the Red Sea have slowed

trade between Asia and Europe and alarmed world powers in an escalation of the war in Gaza. The Houthis, who control most of Yemen, say their attacks are an expression of their solidarity with Palestinians under attack from Israel in Gaza.



Palestinians fleeing Khan Yunis, due to the Israeli ground operation, amid the ongoing conflict, arrive in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip, yesterday.

Displaced again, Gazans flee under fire

Reuters
Near Khan Yunis

Mariam Abu Haleeb and her family were on the move again yesterday, the seventh time they had been displaced in less than four months of war.

She and other Gazans, their cars and donkey carts piled high with belongings, fled what they said was a terrifying night at the Al-Aqsa university in the west of Khan Yunis, where they had taken shelter after being told again it was risky to stay put.

They had no idea where to go next. "What hurts me most is that my old mother is under siege. My siblings and their children are besieged. Everyone, everyone. All of Khan Yunis needed help yesterday," she said. "This is the seventh time I've been displaced, or maybe even more. Torture, torture, torture," she said, weeping.

Mohamed Abu Haleeb said many people had pitched their tents at the university after the Israeli military warned them to move from other areas as they stormed through the southern Gaza city, where they now say Hamas leaders are hiding.

"In the evening, gunfire started - shelling and air strikes from every direction. I couldn't move with my nine children at



This photograph taken yesterday on the southern outskirts of Khan Yunis, in the southern Gaza Strip, shows Palestinian families fleeing the city on the coastal road leading to Rafah, amid ongoing battles.

all. There was a building inside that we all entered and we stayed there until the morning. No one was able to leave." "There were injured and martyred people that no one was able to reach," he said. Israel says it tries hard to protect civilians but that Hamas deliberately fights amongst them, an allegation the fighters deny.

In the end Abu Haleeb said he escaped through the university's back entrance and headed towards Rafah at the southern tip of the narrow coastal strip, where almost a million people have already taken shelter in a town of 300,000.

"I do not know where I should go, as you see," he said, standing by his car on the side of the road.

Ahmad Abu-Shaweeh, a young boy, was helping relatives

unload their belongings, placing them on the ground.

"We hardly made it out of the university under the shelling. We didn't expect the tanks at the university's gates. We hardly made it out," he said.

Manal Abu-Jamea said he had been sheltering at Nasser Hospital in Khan Yunis and was then told it wasn't safe any more, only to find that the university complex wasn't either.

"We left under air strikes and bullets flying in our direction. I took my children and ran away with them.

Nahed Abu-Jamea said he had been on the road for four hours and did not know what to do next.

"There isn't a safe place," he said. "Let us live safely"

EU presses Israel on eventual two-state solution after Gaza war

AFP
Brussels

EU foreign ministers yesterday pressed Israel on an eventual two-state solution with the Palestinians after the war in Gaza, at meetings with the top diplomats from the two sides and key Arab states in Brussels.

The surprise Hamas storming in the first week of October on Israel and the subsequent devastating military response from Israel has plunged the Middle East into fresh turmoil and sparked fears of a broader conflict.

But while the bloodshed appears to have driven a long-term solution further out of sight, EU officials insist now is the time to talk about finally resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The 27 EU ministers met first with Israel's foreign minister Israel Katz before sitting down separately with the Palestinian Authority's top diplomat, Riyad al-Maliki.

The foreign ministers of Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia also held talks with the European ministers.

Israel's assault on Gaza has left over 25,000 Palestinians dead, the vast majority women and children, according to the Hamas-run health ministry.

Netanyahu has vowed "complete victory" over Hamas after the storming by the movement's fighters.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has drawn condemnation from the UN and defied key backer the US by rejecting calls for a Palestinian state.

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell insisted the immediate "priority is to provide support to the people" facing a humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza.

"More death, more destruction, more hardship for the Gaza people, for the Palestinian people, will not help to defeat Hamas or the ideology," he said.

"It will not bring more security to Israel on the contrary." He in-



Palestinian Authority Foreign Minister Riyad al-Maliki (left) speaks with European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs Josep Borrell ahead of a meeting of EU Foreign Ministers at the European Council building in Brussels, yesterday.

sisted that the urgency of the situation on the ground "should not prevent work in the long-run and medium term" towards a conference to work towards an enduring peace.

'ONLY SOLUTION'

Borrell said the Israeli minister "could have made better use of his time" after he showed videos about a potential artificial port island off Gaza and a transport corridor to India to his European counterparts.

"This didn't have much to do with what we were discussing," he said.

Katz ignored questions from journalists over a future two-state solution and said Israel was focused on returning the hostages and ensuring its own security.

Al-Maliki demanded the EU call for a ceasefire immediately and urged the bloc to consider sanctions against Netanyahu for "destroying the chances for a two-state solution".

"Every day that... we show hesitancy, people are being killed," he said.

The EU has struggled for a united stance on the conflict in Gaza as staunch backers of Israel such as Germany have rejected demands for an immediate ceasefire made

by the likes of Spain and Ireland. But there is overall backing in the bloc for a two-state solution.

"The two-state solution is the only solution, and even those who don't want to know about it have not yet come up with any other alternative," said German foreign minister Annalena Baerbock.

Borrell circulated what he called a "comprehensive approach" towards finding peace, involving the international community holding a conference that would come up with a plan to be put to both the Israelis and the Palestinians.

The paper said the international community should then eventually "set out the consequences they envisage to attach to engagement or non-engagement with the peace plan" by either side.

Jordan's Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi said Israel's "continuation of measures to undermine the two-state solution is dooming the future of the region to more conflicts and more war".

"The whole world is saying the only way out of this misery is the two-state solution. So the party who's standing against the rights of all peoples of the region, including Israelis, to have peace cannot just be left unaccountable," he said.

Iran holds funerals for Guards killed in alleged Israeli strike

Hundreds of mourners gathered yesterday in Tehran for the funerals of Revolutionary Guards killed in Syria, in what Iran called an Israeli strike, AFP reported from Tehran. It was the latest incident adding to regional tensions and fears of wider conflagration during the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza. The strike in Damascus on Saturday killed five members of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), the military force said. Iranian media later reported the victims included the group's intelligence chief for Syria, and his deputy. Mourners carried aloft coffins bearing some of the victims, draped in colours of the Iranian flag, before a stage bearing pictures of IRGC General Qassem Soleimani who was killed three years ago by the United States. A funeral dirge sounded. State media reported that funeral processions were planned for three of the five IRGC members killed. Asked about the strike, Israel's military said it does not comment "on reports from the foreign media." The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights war monitor reported at the time that the strike hit the Damascus neighbourhood of Mazzeh where leaders from the IRGC and pro-Iranian Palestinian factions live. A total of 13 people were killed, added the British-based monitor which has a network of sources in Syria.

US 'committed' to deeper Africa ties, Blinken says opening coastal tour

AFP
Abidjan

Secretary of State Antony Blinken said yesterday the US was committed to deeper relations with Africa despite global crises as he opened a trip in the shadow of coups and the rising influence of Russia and China on the continent.

Blinken is touring four democracies on the Atlantic Coast - Cape Verde, Ivory Coast, Nigeria and Angola - as security deteriorates in the Sahel and doubts grow about a key US base in coup-hit Niger. President Joe Biden welcomed African leaders in 2022 in a show of newfound US attention to the continent. But Biden failed to live up to a promise to visit last year and Blinken's trip is his first to sub-Saharan Africa in 10 months as he has been consumed since October with the Israel-Hamas war. Blinken nonetheless quoted Biden as he vowed "We are all in when it comes to Africa." "Our futures are linked, our prosperity is linked, and African voices increasingly are shaping, animating and leading the global conversation," Blinken said on his first stop, Cape Verde. "The US is committed



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Prime Minister of Ivory Coast Robert Beugre Mambe and President of the Confederation of African Football (CAF) Patrice Motsepe watch the Africa Cup of Nations (CAN) 2024 football match at the Alassane Ouattara Stadium in Ebimpe, Abidjan, Ivory Coast, yesterday.

to deepening, strengthening and broadening partnerships across Africa," Blinken said.

He called Cape Verde, a Portuguese-speaking archipelago of some half million people that has co-operated with the US on law enforcement and naval stops, a "beacon of stability" and a "strong, principled voice".

Much of the continent has been uneasy about the billions of dollars in Western aid to Ukraine and Prime Minister Jose Ulisses Correia e Silva told Blinken that Cape Verde "strongly condemns" Russia's invasion.

Silva also criticised coups in Africa and said that Cape Verde was "guided by the values of liberal

democracy". Blinken toured the port in the capital Praia, expanded as part of nearly \$150mn given to Cape Verde through the Millennium Challenge Corp, which grants US aid to countries that meet democratic standards.

The US government body said last month it will work with Cape Verde on a third package, and Silva invited the Peace Corps to return after a decade-long absence. Blinken arrived later in Ivory Coast where he sought to show a softer side of the US, with the French-speaking, football-loving American to watch a knockout game at the African Cup of Nations between the Ivorian hosts and Equatorial Guinea.

CONFLICT

Israel firing in south Lebanon kills 200 since start of Gaza war

The number of people killed by Israeli fire into south Lebanon since the start of the war in Gaza rose to 200 yesterday, according to an AFP tally, AFP reported from Beirut.

Since the outbreak of war between Hamas and Israel in the first week of October, the Lebanese-Israeli border has witnessed a near-daily exchange of fire between Israel's army and Lebanon's movement Hezbollah, an ally of Gaza-based Hamas. Yesterday, Hezbollah announced that two of its fighters had been killed "on the road to Jerusalem" - the phrase the group has been using to refer to fighters killed by Israeli fire since hostilities began. That took the overall number of deaths in south Lebanon to 200, according to AFP's tally. The majority were fighters, with 146 of them belonging to Hezbollah, according to an AFP count of death notices issued by the group. AFP based its overall tally on death notices issued by groups involved in fighting, including Hezbollah and various Palestinian factions, as well as official sources. Israeli fire has also killed at least 25 civilians, including three journalists and two rescuers in addition to a Lebanese soldier. The Lebanese army has not exchanged fire with Israel since hostilities began.

HEALTH

Cameroon launches routine malaria shots

The global fight against malaria took a stride forward yesterday as Cameroon launched the world's first routine vaccine programme against the mosquito-borne disease that is projected to save tens of thousands of children's lives per year across Africa, Reuters reported from Geneva. Around 40 years in the making, the World Health Organisation (WHO)-approved RTS,S vaccine developed by British drugmaker GSK is meant to work alongside existing tools such as bed nets to combat malaria, which in Africa kills nearly half a million children under the age of five each year. After successful trials, including in Ghana and Kenya, Cameroon is the first country to administer doses through a routine programme that 19 other countries aim to roll out this year, according to global vaccine alliance Gavi. Around 6.6mn children in these countries are targeted for malaria vaccination through 2024-25. "For a long time, we have been waiting for a day like this," said Mohamed Abdulaziz of the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) at a joint online briefing with the WHO, Gavi and other organisations.

Straw deal: UK farmers stage scarecrow protest for survival

AFP
London

Dozens of scarecrows stood outside Britain's parliament yesterday as UK fruit and vegetable farmers protested against "unfair" treatment by the country's six largest supermarket chains. The demonstrators placed 49 scarecrows opposite the British legislature in London to represent the 49% of farmers who say they are on the brink of leaving the industry.

Supermarkets are "bringing British farming to its knees," Guy Singh-Watson, founder of fruit and veg box delivery firm Riverford Organic and one of the protest organisers, told AFP. Singh-Watson, whose company initiated a petition that has received 112,000 signatures, says government policies have failed to provide adequate support for farmers and were rarely enforced.

"It is really up to our politicians to accept responsibility and have some sort of policy rather than just abdicating policy to our big retail-

ers who are contractually bound to act in the interests of their shareholders," he added.

The farmers want the supermarkets to adhere to "fair" purchasing agreements, including buying agreed quantities and paying the agreed amount on time "without exception".

They say unfair purchasing agreements by the chains Tesco, Sainsbury's, Asda, Morrisons, Aldi and Lidl will drive many of them out of business in the next 12 months.

The protest was held as lawmakers

debated a petition by the farmers to overhaul the grocery supply chain code of practice. The petition asks the government to ensure that retailers "buy what they agreed", "pay what they agreed" and to pay on time.

"The continued pressure from retailers to produce food at cheaper prices...(is) just unsustainable for a lot of farmers," British farmer Ben Andrews told AFP.

Emily O'Brien, a Green Party spokesperson, warned that the disappearance of significant numbers of farmers could have serious

consequences for Britain's food supply.

"If our smaller farmers, our family farms, go under, we're going to see shortages on the shelves. We need that UK production, particularly of fruit and veg," she said.

A spokesperson for the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs said fruit and vegetable farmers are crucial to the resilience of the UK's food system to the wider economy.

"It is only right that British farmers and growers should be paid a fair price, and our review

into the fairness of the supply chain will help address these concerns," it said.

Farming and food leaders sent an open letter to the supermarkets last year, saying their buying practices were "all too often imbalanced, short term and wasteful".

Supermarkets sometimes reject whole crops "at the last minute", the letter said.

"Good food ends up rotting in the field. Farmers are left without payment for their crops. And without a stable, reliable income, they are struggling to survive."

Storm Isha batters Britain, cutting power and diverting some flights

AFP
London

Tens of thousands of people across Britain and Ireland were without power yesterday after Storm Isha lashed the countries with strong winds and heavy rain, leaving two people dead. Gusts of 99 miles per hour (159km per hour) were recorded in northeast England as the whole of Britain was subject to weather warnings for its ninth named storm since September.

The high winds felled three trees and damaged several others at a site in Northern Ireland made famous by the hit fantasy TV series *Game of Thrones*. "This is another blow to the Dark Hedges," said Mervyn Storey, chairman of the preservation trust at the County Antrim site, now a major tourist destination thanks to the HBO drama.

Isha follows Storm Henk, which crashed into Britain earlier this month, causing widespread flooding and disruption to train services and roads. More strong winds and heavy rain are forecast today and tomorrow as the next storm of the season, Jocelyn, barrels in.

Climatologists say climate change is causing winters in the region to be warmer and wetter, increasing the likelihood of extreme weather events. In Ireland, which was badly hit by Isha, at least 235,000 homes endured power cuts, according to energy provider ESB. Another 45,000 people were without electricity in Northern Ireland, where a motorist died on Sunday night.

Several thousand properties went dark in northwest England and Wales, and several people had to be rescued from their cars in northern England when a swollen river broke its banks. Felled trees in



A fallen tree sits during Storm Isha in Linlithgow, West Lothian, Britain.



A tree surgeon removes a fallen tree from cars during Storm Isha in Linlithgow.

Scotland closed major roads, while debris and floods forced the cancellation of all Monday morning rush-hour trains in the country.

Police said an 84-year-old man died on Sunday night when the car he was in hit a fallen tree near the Scottish capital Edinburgh. Dozens of flights were cancelled or delayed late on Sunday, with some planes diverted after they were unable to land due to high winds.

A Ryanair flight to Dublin from

Manchester landed in Paris while another heading to the Irish capital from the Canary Islands was re-routed to Bordeaux in southwestern France after unsuccessful attempts to touch down. Several dozen schools in the Scottish Highlands were closed yesterday as flood warnings remained in place.

Britain's weather agency, the Met Office, said the storm was expected to move away throughout the day.

A message for the king



Britain's Queen Camilla receives get well cards for King Charles III during a visit to Deacon & Son Jewellers in Swindon, western England as the company celebrates 175 years of trading.

Dozens buried, eight killed in southwest China landslide

AFP
Beijing

Dozens of people were buried and eight confirmed killed when a landslide struck a remote and mountainous part of southwestern China yesterday. The pre-dawn landslide buried 18 homes and sparked the evacuation of more than 200 people when it struck in Zhenxiang County, Yunnan province, state media said.

Eight people are confirmed dead and rescuers have extracted four, according to a report by state broadcaster CCTV at around 5:30pm (0930 GMT), though the condition of the four was not immediately clear. Two hundred rescue workers have been dispatched as well as dozens of fire engines and other equipment, CCTV said.

And as temperatures plunged last night, dozens were still trapped, state news agency Xinhua said. Rescuers are "using all kinds of tools to search for survivors", Xinhua said.

One local told the state-run Beijing News outlet that she was asleep when the disaster hit and that parts of her ceiling had fallen onto her head. "At the time I thought it was an earthquake, but later I knew it was the hillslope collapsing," another resident told the outlet. Both were quoted under pseudonyms.

Footage shared on social media by a local broadcaster showed emergency workers in orange jumpsuits and helmets forming ranks outside a fire station as snowflakes whirled through the air. Other images showed rescuers picking through towering piles of collapsed masonry in which a few personal belongings could be seen. Chinese President Xi Jinping ordered "all-out" rescue efforts, CCTV reported. Xi "demanded that rescue forces be organised quickly...and efforts made to reduce casualties as far as possible," the broadcaster reported him as saying.



Chinese military personnel search for missing victims following a landslide in Liangshui village at Zhaootong, in southwestern China's Yunnan province.



He added that it was "necessary to properly handle the work of comforting the families of the deceased and resettling affected people". CCTV broadcast an image it said showed a firefighter working to pull a trapped villager from inside a home affected by the disaster. The local village head declined to speak about the landslide when contacted by phone, telling AFP he was "too busy".

Landslides are common in Yunnan, a far-flung and largely impoverished region of China where steep mountain ranges butt against the Himalayan plateau. Monday's disaster occurred in a rural area surrounded by towering peaks dusted with snow, state media footage showed. There was

no immediate official explanation for what may have caused the landslide.

Efforts to establish what happened are underway, Xinhua reported. China has experienced a string of natural disasters in recent months, some following extreme weather events such as sudden, heavy downpours. In September, rainstorms in the southern region of Guangxi triggered a mountain landslide that killed at least seven people, according to media reports. Heavy rains sparked a similar disaster near the northern city of Xi'an in August, causing the deaths of more than 20 people. And in June, a landslide in southwestern Sichuan province — also remote and mountainous — killed 19 people.

Sony 'terminates' merger with Zee

AFP
Tokyo

Sony "terminated" yesterday the \$10bn merger of its Indian operations with local rival Zee Entertainment that would have created a new streaming giant in the world's most populous nation. The joint entity with mooted annual revenue of \$2bn would have helped both firms better compete with Disney, Amazon and Netflix in the entertainment market of 1.4bn people.

But with reports that Sony was unhappy with Zee's performance since the merger was agreed in late 2021, the Japanese giant said yesterday that conditions to close the deal "were not satisfied".

Another stumbling block was reportedly Zee's insistence that its chief executive Punit Goenka, son of founder Subhash Chandra, run the combined entity. Both men are being probed by India's financial markets regulator over alleged fraud. They deny any wrongdoing.

Zee said yesterday that Goenka "was agreeable to step down in the interest of the merger" and that it proposed an extension of up to six months to close the deal.

It added in a statement that Sony was also seeking a "termination fee" of \$90mn for alleged breaches by Zee, a claim that the Indian company said it "categorically refutes". Goenka said on X, formerly Twitter, that "the deal that I have spent two years envisioning and working towards had fallen through, despite my best and most honest efforts".

"I believe this to be a sign from the Lord," he added, posting a selfie from a ceremony opening a grand new Hindu temple in the Indian city of Ayodhya. Before the Sony deal was agreed, Goenka had also been under pressure to quit from Zee's largest shareholder Invesco. Sony was to have owned 50.86% of the new entity with Goenka's family controlling 3.99%.

India's entertainment market, worth tens of billions of dollars, is already one of the world's big-

gest, while smartphone adoption is forecast to expand further in the coming years. A collapsed deal will leave Sony and Zee more vulnerable at a time when Reliance (RIL) is negotiating a merger with Disney's India unit, Bloomberg News reported.

Reliance is owned by Mukesh Ambani, Asia's richest person.

Vivekanand Subbaraman, a media analyst at Ambit Capital, said Zee would now have to "go back to the drawing board" and would be short of capital. "Sony was going to infuse \$1.3bn into the merger... Also, from an opportunity standpoint, it wasn't just TV. It was also digital where Zee was struggling," Subbaraman told AFP before Monday's announcement.

He added that Sony LIV, the Japanese firm's streaming service, had been "more successful" and was a "bigger business" than Zee's Zee5. "With reports of the RIL-Disney merger, the competitive landscape and overall market condition looks very different now than before," Subbaraman added.

Sri Lanka party leader gunned down in drive-by shooting

A Sri Lankan political party leader was killed yesterday along with four others, authorities said, in a rare drive-by shooting. Police said the motive was unclear, but that Saman Perera, chairman of the Our Power of People Party, appeared to be the main target of the attack. Perera's party has a seat in Sri Lanka's 225-member legislature, although he was not an MP himself. He was gunned down in the southern town of Beliatta, nearly 200km south of the

capital Colombo. Police said his vehicle had stopped at a roadside restaurant when gunmen in a pickup truck opened fire and then sped off. They said they were aware of a feud between Perera and a local criminal boss, a connection that local media have also reported. The shooting came as police backed by soldiers carried out a nationwide anti-crime operation which has seen more than 44,000 people arrested in a mass crackdown.

Police said operation "Yuktiya," the Sinhala name for justice, had resulted in a sharp decline in crime. The UN's human rights chief, Volker Turk, has criticised the police operation, saying it was responsible for a series of abuses including arbitrary arrests, torture, strip searches and searches without warrants. Public Security Minister Tiran Alles told reporters in Colombo last week he was unconvinced by the allegations and said the crackdown was in the country's best interest. (AFP)

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GULF TIMES

Protecting Ukraine aid from western political dysfunction

With each passing day, it becomes increasingly evident that Western support for Ukraine has become ensnared in various domestic and geopolitical developments that have nothing to do with Ukraine's struggle to defend itself. As Russia's war of aggression approaches its second anniversary, it is crucial to establish a more resilient and stable funding mechanism.

Although economists rarely agree on anything, there is a broad consensus that the cost of failing to provide Ukraine with enough support to win the war would be far greater than the cost of assisting it. But the current funding model relies heavily on tense last-minute negotiations among lawmakers in the United States and the European Union, and the resulting uncertainty inflicts enormous costs on Ukraine's economy and undermines its political stability.

The problem is compounded by political divisions within and among Western countries. Regardless of Ukraine's actions, the war is often overshadowed by other domestic and international conflicts, impeding efforts to deliver military aid despite overwhelming public and political support. Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's attempt to block a €50bn (\$55bn) EU aid package for Ukraine and the US Republicans' use of Ukraine aid as a bargaining chip in addressing the migration crisis at the US-Mexico border are prime examples.

The vulnerability of Western support for Ukraine to domestic political infighting suggests that a centralised decision-making system would be more effective than the current funding process. The goal of such a system would be to protect Ukraine from the effects of its allies' internal challenges, distractions, and dramas.

Fortunately, we already have a tried-and-tested model to counter such short-termism. Over the past decade, many US states and several national governments have established rainy-day funds to ensure they have the resources and flexibility they need to respond to unexpected shocks such as recessions and pandemics. The Great Recession and subsequent fiscal crises have led national and subnational governments alike to maintain these funds as a critical component of their emergency-response strategies. US states now collectively hold \$136bn in such funds, which is more than three times the amount they held in 2007.

To be sure, it took a major economic catastrophe for this strategy to be taken seriously. California, having depleted its cash reserves during the Great Recession, reformed its rainy-day fund in 2014 to avoid future financial meltdowns. Although not perfect, such funds proved their usefulness during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Building on this experience, Western countries should establish a long-term fund to support Ukraine. By borrowing on international markets, they could raise \$100bn – roughly the amount needed to support the Ukrainian war effort for six months – without placing enormous strain on their national budgets. Moreover, this sum – a tiny fraction of the combined GDP of Ukraine's Western allies – would not result in a substantial increase in these countries' debt-to-GDP ratios.

Once established and financed, Ukraine would be able to draw from this fund in accordance with the conditions and needs outlined in its existing International Monetary Fund programme, as well as any other relevant timelines and criteria determined in co-ordination with its allies.

To minimise the impact on their national budgets, Ukraine's allies could offset the interest payments on long-term debt by seizing the returns on Russia's frozen assets. This would effectively eliminate the initial and ongoing operational costs of the rainy-day fund. Moreover, the issuance of long-term sovereign bonds would provide Western countries with the time they need to reach a consensus on the legal means to implement this strategy.

Financing a \$100bn rainy-day fund through long-term borrowing should be fiscally feasible, especially if the fund's size is tied to the value of Russia's frozen assets and the returns they generate. Suppose, for example, that Western countries hold \$300bn in Russian assets with a modest annual return of 3%, while their average borrowing cost is 4%. In such a scenario, the annual return from frozen Russian assets and the fund-related interest payments would each amount to \$9bn, enabling the fund to borrow up to \$225bn without additional interest costs.

Of course, given the devastation wrought by Russia's war of aggression, the Russia's frozen assets should be directly transferred to Ukraine. But this could be a slow and complicated process, and Ukraine desperately needs immediate funding. By contrast, setting up a rainy-day fund requires far less legal groundwork. Once financed and operational, the fund would ensure that support for Ukraine is not overshadowed by unrelated domestic issues. – Project Syndicate

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Deepfakes deceive voters from India to Indonesia before polls

 **AI technology makes it easy to create, spread deepfakes**

 **Social media platforms, govts not doing enough to curb them: experts**

 **Meta, Google claim policies in place to check deepfakes**

By Rina Chandran

Divyendra Singh Jadoun was busy making artificial intelligence-based visual effects and voice clones for film and television in India, when he began getting calls from politicians: could he create AI videos, or deepfakes, for their election campaign?

With a hotly-contested local election in his home state of Rajasthan last November, and a national election due by May this year, the opportunity for his company, The Indian Deepfaker, is tremendous. But Jadoun was reluctant.

“The technology to create deepfakes is so good now, it can be done almost instantaneously, with very little effort – and people cannot tell if it's real or fake,” said Jadoun, 30.

“There are no guidelines on deepfakes, and that's worrying, as it has the potential to influence how a person votes,” he told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

Instagram reels of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi singing in regional languages have gone viral recently, as have TikTok videos of Indonesian presidential candidates Prabowo Subianto and Anies Baswedan speaking in fluent Arabic.

But they were all created with AI, and posted with no label.

With elections due in India, Indonesia, Bangladesh and Pakistan in the coming weeks, misinformation is rife on social media platforms, with deepfakes – video or audio made using AI and broadcast as authentic –

being particularly concerning, say tech experts and authorities.

In India, where more than 900mn people are eligible to vote, Modi has said deepfake videos are a “big concern”, and authorities have warned social media platforms they could lose their safe-harbour status that protects them from liability for third-party content posted on their sites if they do not act.

In Indonesia – where more than 200 million voters will go to the polls on February 14 – deepfakes of all three presidential candidates and their running mates are circulating online, and have the potential to influence election outcomes, said Nuurianti Jalli, who studies misinformation on social media.

“From microtargeting of voters with disinformation to spreading false narratives at a scale and speed unachievable by human actors alone, these AI tools can significantly influence voter perceptions and behaviour,” she said.

“In environments where misinformation is already prevalent, AI-generated content can further skew public perception and influence voting behaviour,” added Jalli, an assistant professor at Oklahoma State University's media school.

Deepfake images and videos churned out by generative AI tools such as Midjourney, Stable Diffusion and OpenAI's Dall-E popped up ahead of elections from New Zealand to Turkiye and Argentina last year, with growing concerns about their impact on US presidential polls in November.

AI makes the creation and

spread of disinformation faster, cheaper and more effective, the US non-profit Freedom House said in a recent report.

In Bangladesh – where Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina won a fourth straight term after polls on January 7 – deepfake videos of female opposition politicians Rumin Farhana in a bikini and Nipun Roy in a swimming pool emerged.

While they were debunked quickly, they are still circulated, and even poor-quality deepfake content is misleading people, said Sayeed Al-Zaman, an assistant professor of journalism at Bangladesh's Jahangirnagar University, who studies social media.

“Given the low levels of information and digital literacy in Bangladesh, deepfakes can be potent carriers of political propaganda if crafted and deployed effectively,” he said.

“But the government does not appear concerned.”

The ministry of information did not respond to a request for comment.

In Pakistan, where an election is scheduled for February 8, Imran Khan, who is in prison on an official secrets acts case after being controversially ousted as prime minister last year, used a AI-generated image and voice clone to address an online election rally in December, which drew more than 1.4mn views on YouTube and was attended live by tens of thousands.

While Pakistan has drafted an AI law, digital rights activists have criticised the lack of guardrails against disinformation, and to protect

vulnerable communities including women.

“The threat that disinformation poses to elections and the overall democratic process in Pakistan cannot be stressed upon enough,” said Nightat Dad, co-founder of the non-profit Digital Rights Foundation.

“In the past, disinformation on online platforms has managed to sway voting behaviour, party support, and even influenced legislation change. Synthetic media will make this easier to do,” she added.

At least 500,000 video and voice deepfakes were shared on social media sites globally in 2023, estimated DeepMedia, a company developing tools to detect synthetic media.

Platforms have struggled to keep up.

Meta, which owns Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp, said it aims to remove synthetic media when the “manipulation is not apparent and could mislead, particularly in the case of video content.”

Google, which owns YouTube, said in November that the video sharing platform requires “creators to disclose altered or synthetic content that is realistic, including using AI tools, and we'll inform viewers about such content through labels”

But countries including India, Indonesia and Bangladesh have recently passed laws to more closely police online content and penalise social media sites for content deemed misinformation, so platforms are “holding their punches,” said Raman Jit Singh Chima, Asia policy director at advocacy group Access Now.

In these countries, “this election cycle is actually worse than the last cycle – platforms are not set up to handle problems, and they are not being responsive and proactive enough. And that's a very dangerous sign,” he said.

“There is a danger that the world's attention is only on the US election, but the standards being applied there, the effort being made there should be duplicated everywhere,” he added.

In India, where Modi is widely forecast to win a third term, Jadoun – who had declined to make deepfake campaign videos for the state elections – is gearing up to make them for the general election.

These will be personalised video messages from politicians for party workers, not voters, that can be sent on WhatsApp.

“They can really have an impact, because there are hundreds of thousands of party workers and they will, in turn, forward them to their friends and family,” he said.

“But we will add a watermark to show that it is made with AI, so there is no misunderstanding. That's important.” – Thomson Reuters Foundation



Missing Russian data causing Arctic climate blind spots

AFP
Paris

Loss of scientific data from Russia's Arctic monitoring stations following the invasion of Ukraine has worsened information gaps that could have serious implications for tracking and predicting climate change globally, researchers warned yesterday.

The Arctic is warming between two and four times faster than the rest of the planet and holds glaciers, forests and carbon-rich frozen soils at risk of irreversible change that could reverberate across the planet.

Monitoring relies heavily on data from stations spread across the vast and di-

verse region, but Moscow's assault on Ukraine in February 2022 triggered a freeze in scientific co-operation in the Arctic – and elsewhere.

Russia represents almost half the land-mass of the entire Arctic region, creating a massive information gap, said lead author Efrén Lopez-Blanco, of Aarhus University, who led the study published in *Nature Climate Change*.

Researchers sought to quantify just how much of an impact this has had on scientific understanding of the changes taking place in the Arctic.

“One of the immediate issues that arises if we neglect the Russian boreal forest is that we have an underestimation of biomass, soil organic carbon,” Lopez-Blanco told AFP.

“This has potentially global consequences for important processes such as permafrost thawing, shifts in biodiversity, or even greenhouse gas emissions.”

The researchers focused on around 60 research stations making up part of a large territorial network called INTERACT.

Using computer models, they looked at eight factors – including air temperature, rainfall, snow depth, vegetation biomass and soil carbon – and found that even before the conflict in Ukraine the network had gaps, with stations concentrated in warmer, wetter areas, leaving other areas under-represented.

Without Russia, which accounts for 17 of the 60 stations, this bias increased, with the loss of areas such as Siberia's huge taiga forest.

The research highlights the logistical challenges of monitoring such a vast and often inhospitable region, as well as inherent problems with voluntary data sharing.

As a result, projects have been delayed or cancelled, while the regional Arctic Council forum – long held up as a model of co-operation – is now divided between the West (Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and the United States) and Russia.

Dmitry Streletskiy, a researcher at George Washington University, who was not involved in the paper and whose work on permafrost uses another monitoring group, CALM, said of nearly 80 Russian sites registered in their network, around 55 normally share data every year.

But so far, only 37 have provided 2023 data, he said, although some may send information later.

One solution, he said, would be to treat key climate metrics the same way weather data is, and have a United Nations system to ensure continuous monitoring.

Streletskiy said data is being collected but not shared, potentially leading to gaps in global understanding.

“It's like these big communal apartments. You have a lot of rooms, and some neighbours are nice, some are not,” he said.

“But if you aren't aware that your neighbour has a room with a leaking roof, you will only find out when the entire house is flooded. That's pretty much what's happening.”

German train drivers set for longest-ever strike

AFP
Frankfurt

German train drivers will stage their longest-ever walkout with a six-day strike this week, their union said yesterday, escalating a dispute with rail operator Deutsche Bahn over pay and working hours.

The walkout called by the GDL union is to start at 2am tomorrow for passenger services and last until 1700 GMT on Monday. For cargo services, the stoppage will begin earlier, at 1700 GMT today.

State-owned Deutsche Bahn accused the union of “acting absolutely irresponsibly.”

It will be the fourth strike by GDL since November as the union pushes its demands for higher salaries to compensate for inflation, as well as a reduced working week from 38 to 35 hours with no loss in wages.

A three-day walkout earlier this month already caused travel chaos for thousands of passengers, with 80 percent of long-distance trains not running.

GDL said it had rejected Deutsche Bahn's “third and allegedly improved offer” and decided to call a fresh strike because bosses had shown “no sign of a willing-



Two Inter City Express trains of German national railway operator Deutsche Bahn stand at a platform at the main station of Frankfurt am Main, western Germany, in this file photo. (AFP)

ness to reach an agreement.”

Deutsche Bahn said the latest strike would be the longest in its history, breaking the record of a May 2015 walkout called by GDL that lasted around five days.

Deutsche Bahn criticised the renewed call to industrial action, saying it had offered pay rises of up to 13% percent and a one-off inflation bonus, as well as the chance to reduce the working week by one hour from 2026.

“The GDL is exacerbating the conflict,” a spokesman said.

“Anyone who doesn't even come to the negotiating table with a new offer of up to 13% and the possibility of a 37-hour week with the same salary is acting absolutely irresponsibly.”

The company said it expected this week's strike to “again have a massive impact” on German rail transport.

Passengers who had already booked to travel during the strike period would have the option to bring their trips forward or delay them, it said in a statement.

The disruptions to freight traffic meanwhile are likely to deal

another blow to Germany's struggling economy, which is already facing supply chain upheaval as a result of shipping delays due to tensions in the Red Sea.

Transport Minister Volker Wissing slammed the GDL's latest strike announcement.

He said he had “zero understanding for this type of collective bargaining” and denounced the “increasingly destructive” nature of the talks between GDL and Deutsche Bahn.

GDL chief Claus Weselsky was not “doing himself or his union any favours with this style”, Wissing told broadcaster ZDF.

Weselsky for his part said the union would return to the negotiating table only once Deutsche Bahn agreed to discuss “all the points we are demanding”, in particular a “mandatory reduction in weekly working hours”.

A 35-hour week along with higher pay was necessary to make the job of train driver “more attractive” to young people and address a persistent shortage in skilled workers, he told a press conference.

Friends again: Iran FM to visit Pakistan

Ambassadors to resume duties on January 26

Reuters/AFP
Islamabad

Pakistan said yesterday Iran's foreign minister will visit the country next week, signalling efforts to mend relations after the neighbours exchanged missile strikes last week at what they said were militant targets.

Ambassadors of both countries have also been asked to return to their posts by January 26, the Pakistani foreign ministry said in a statement.

“It has been mutually agreed that the ambassadors of both countries may return to their respective posts by January 26,” said a joint statement by the foreign ministries in Tehran and Islamabad.

Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian is also due to visit Pakistan on January 29 following an invitation from his Pakistani counterpart Jalil Abbas Jilani, the statement said.

The decisions were announced following a phone call between Jilani and Amir-Abdollahian.

Iran's foreign ministry confirmed that Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian would visit on Monday, and said its am-



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

bassador would resume duties in Islamabad on Friday.

Pakistan had recalled its ambassador to Tehran and had not allowed his counterpart to return to Islamabad, as well as cancelling all high-level diplomatic and trade engagements.

“At the invitation of Foreign Minister Jalil Abbas Jilani, Foreign Minister of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Hossein Amir Abdollahian, will undertake a visit to Pakistan on 29 January 2024,” a Pakistani foreign office statement said.

The tit-for-tat strikes by the two countries were the highest-profile cross-border intrusions in recent years and have raised alarm about wider instability in the region after Israeli assault on Gaza.

The two Muslim nations have

had a history of rocky relations, but the intrusions amounted to the highest level of attacks in decades.

Islamabad said it hit bases of the separatist Baloch Liberation Front and Baloch Liberation Army, while Tehran said its missiles struck militants from the Jaish Al Adl (JAA) group.

The militant groups operate in an area that includes Pakistan's southwestern province of Balochistan and Iran's southeastern Sistan-Baluchestan province. Both regions are restive, mineral-rich and largely underdeveloped.

Iran said the strikes in a border village on its territory killed nine people, including four children. Pakistan said the Iranian attack had killed two children.

Navalny ‘forced to listen to pro-Putin singer every morn’

Jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny (**pictured**) has complained of being poisoned, assaulted and deprived of proper medical care, but yesterday he disclosed he faced a new challenge: being forced to listen to a pro-Putin pop singer at 0500 every morning.

Navalny, 47, a former lawyer who rose to prominence more than a decade ago by lampooning President Vladimir Putin's elite and voicing allegations of vast corruption, is currently in a jail about 60km north of the Arctic Circle.

Sentenced to stay in prison until he is 74 on charges he says were trumped up to keep him out of politics, Navalny said his morning regime now consisted of listening to the Russian national anthem before being played “I am Russian,” a patriotic song performed by a pro-Putin singer called “Shaman”. Shaman, whose real name is Yaroslav Dronov, has ridden a



wave of war-fuelled patriotism to become a staple on state TV and is one of the celebrities officially putting Putin forward to run again for the presidency in March.

His signature song, which he sometimes performs dressed in a black leather outfit with an arm band in the colours of the Russian flag – *I am Russian* – talks of how Russians cannot “be broken” and “go to the end” and carry the blood of their fathers.

The 32-year-old singer courted

controversy in November when he simulated setting off a nuclear bomb at a concert broadcast on state TV pushing a red button in a mock nuclear suitcase before fireworks erupted around him.

In a message on X facilitated by his allies, Navalny described a surreal morning routine. “The singer Shaman came to prominence when I was already in prison so I could neither see him nor listen to his music. But I knew he had become Putin's main singer. And that his main song was *I am Russian*, wrote Navalny. “Of course I was curious to hear it, but where could I listen to it in prison. And then they brought me to Yamal (the location of his Arctic prison). And here, every day at 5 o'clock in the morning, we hear the command: ‘Get up!’ followed by the Russian national anthem and then immediately afterwards, the country's second most important song is played – *I am Russian* by Shaman.”

Apple pays \$13.6mn fine to Russia

Apple paid a \$13.6mn fine to the Russian government over Moscow's claims it abused its dominant position in the mobile app market, the country's competition watchdog said yesterday.

The US iPhone-maker halted sales and limited services in Russia shortly after Moscow launched its full-scale military offensive in Ukraine in February 2022.

Russia's federal anti-monopoly service (FAS) fined Apple 1.2bn roubles (\$13.6mn) in July 2022, saying the company had banned apps from informing customers about the option to make purchases outside its official App Store.

Following a years-long legal battle in the United States, Apple said last week it will begin allowing iPhone app developers to use alternative payment systems, and EU legislation due to come in force will also require Apple to allow payments outside of its ecosystem.

A Russian court last year rejected an appeal by Apple over the fine. “On 19 January 2024, Apple paid the fine. The funds were transferred to the Russian Federation's budget,” Russia's FAS said in a statement yesterday.

Turkish parliament to vote on Sweden's Nato membership

AFP
Ankara

Turkiye's parliament is expected to end more than a year of delays that severely strained its ties with Western allies and approve Sweden's membership of Nato this week.

CNN Turk said a vote could be held as early as today while a source told AFP that it might be held on Thursday.

Turkiye's ratification would leave Hungary as the last hold-out in an accession process that Sweden and its neighbour Finland began in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine nearly two years ago.

Finland became the 31st member of the US-led defence alliance last April.

Its membership roughly doubled the length of Nato's border with Russia and substantially strengthened the defences of three tiny Baltic nations that joined the bloc following the Soviet Union's collapse.

Sweden and Finland pursued a policy of military non-alignment

during the Cold War era confrontation between Moscow and Washington.

But Russia's invasion of its western neighbour set off Europe's biggest and most brutal land battle since World War II, upturning geopolitical calculations.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's resistance to Sweden's Nato accession reflected his more nuanced stance toward Moscow.

Turkiye has profited from maintaining – and even expanding – trade with Russia, while at the same time supplying Ukraine with drones and other essential arms.

Erdogan has also been one of the few Western leaders to hold regular meetings and phone conversations with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Turkish media reported that Putin could make his first wartime visit to Turkiye next month.

Erdogan's objections to Sweden's bid initially focused on Stockholm's perceived acceptance of Kurdish groups that Ankara views as “terrorist”.

Spanish police make arrest in ‘love scam’ triple murder

AFP
Madrid

Spanish police yesterday said they had arrested a Pakistani man in connection with the killing of three siblings in their 70s, over debts reportedly linked to an online romance scam.

The suspect turned himself in on Sunday, “admitting his involvement in incidents related to the triple murder in a house in Morata de Tajuna”, a police statement said.

Judicial sources said the suspect had previously been convicted for attacking one of the sisters with a hammer a year

ago. Police had on Thursday found the three bodies, which were partially burnt inside their home in the village some 35km southeast of Madrid.

Neighbours raised the alarm after not seeing the two sisters and their disabled brother for some time, with police saying their deaths were being treated as murder over a suspected debt.

Police yesterday said the man, referred to only as D.H.F.C., was the “main suspect” in the case as he had “previously injured one of the female victims last year”, with the courts confirming his arrest and conviction.

Quoting local residents, Spanish media said the tragedy was likely linked to a fake

online love affair, with the two sisters embarking on what they thought was a long-distance relationship with two apparent US servicemen.

They were led to believe one had died and that the other needed money so that he could send them a multi-million-euro inheritance, causing the sisters to rack up huge debts.

Initially they began borrowing money from neighbours. During that time, the suspect had reportedly lent the sisters at least €50,000 (\$55,000), which they had never repaid, prompting his violent attack on one of the sisters.

According to a statement from the Madrid region's top court, the suspect was

arrested in February 2023 at their house, where he was living as a tenant.

According to the sentence, he hit the victim “on the head, at least three times, with a hammer” then when she fell to the floor, he kicked her.

He was held in pre-trial detention until his case came to court in September when he was handed two years behind bars, slapped with a €2,900 (\$3,150) fine and banned from being within 500m of the victim for two years and six months.

But under Spanish law, anyone receiving a jail term of up to two years on a first offence automatically has their sentence suspended, so he was released after agreeing to pay the compensation, the state-

ment said. Police initially said the suspect was 43, but court records showed that he was 42.

When they called the police last week, neighbours said they hadn't seen the siblings since before Christmas.

Speaking to Spanish media, they said the sister had repeatedly asked to borrow large sums of money, refusing to believe it was a scam and saying they would pay it back when they got the €7mn (\$7.6mn) inheritance payout.

“They weren't asking for €100 or 20, they were asking you for €5,000 or 6,000,” one neighbour had told state-owned broadcaster TVE on Friday. Police did not comment on those reports.



Amir patronises Maritime Academy graduation ceremony

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani patronised the graduation ceremony of the second batch of cadets of Mohammed Bin Ghanem Al Ghanem Maritime Academy, at the academy's headquarters in Al Shamal yesterday.



Snapshots from the event.



Expo 2023 Doha marks Tajikistan Day

The International Horticultural Exhibition Expo 2023 Doha has celebrated the Tajikistan Day, which featured cultural activities and live artistic shows that vividly reflect Tajik patrimony.

The celebration was held in the presence of HE the Minister of Environment and Climate Change Dr Abdullah bin Abdulaziz bin Turki al-Subaie and Tajik Agriculture Minister Qurbon Hakimzoda, alongside a host of ministers, officials and heads of the diplomatic missions accredited to Qatar.

The Tajik minister commended Qatar for hosting a premium edition of the international exhibition.

He underscored his country's interest the issue of water use to achieve the sustainable development, along with its efforts in the UN to back global initiatives that aim to constitute a better understanding of water issues at the global level and achieve social and economic development, as well as environmental sustainability, peace and stability in general.

Following the celebration, the officials attending the event visited the Tajik pavilion that showcases the Tajik resources, culture,



landmarks, arts, history, and heritage, in addition to displaying its most prominent agricultural products.

Handmade carpets and prayer accessories are highlighted, giving insight to the place Islam has in the country's Islamic history.

The pavilion showcases handmade rosaries

as well as a collection of the finest rosaries made of alabaster and precious stones.

Leather and textile products are on display as well, distinguished drawings inspired by the flora and fauna of Tajikistan.

The pavilion also exhibits women's products, with shawls and scarves made of wool embroidered in bright colours.

In addition, the pavilion showcases samples of raw cotton and its products, as it is one of the most important agricultural crops in Tajikistan.

There are mountain white honey products, known to be one of the finest, in addition to a mini market offering dried fruits such as figs, peaches, sunshine, nuts, and sweets.

Also available are handmade heritage products that depict the Islamic identity and culture of the Tajik people.

The pavilion primarily promotes the tourist attractions of Tajikistan, with its walls adorned with the pictures of these landmarks. - QNA



Souq Waqif Arts Centre hosts exhibition on the theme of 'Out of the Box'

The "Out of the Box" exhibition opened on Sunday at the Souq Waqif Arts Centre in co-operation with the Atiq Art Forum.

The exhibition comes as the culmination of a workshop held last Friday and Saturday under the organisation of the Atiq Art Forum with the participation of 21 artists.

In their work, artists embodied Qatar's heritage as well as Souq Waqif in the past, in various artistic forms that are out of the norm.

In a statement to the Qatar News Agency (QNA), artist Mohamed al-Atiq explained that the theme of the forum was to think outside the box, yet not far from heritage, by recording it in a new contemporary way that has more thought than just drawing skills.

The first forum was in Al Shamal area while the second was done in collaboration with Souq Waqif Arts Centre, which provided the artists with opportunities for creativity since the centre is a place enriched with art as well as art lovers, al-Atiq said.

He said that the two-day workshop included a seminar on conceptual thinking and thinking outside the box.

Al-Atiq's participation in the exhibition includes a unique artwork.

While preparing his idea, he found his painting broken and decided to work on the back of it.

The damaged part was retouched with a colourful traditional dress of a Qatari woman that he purchased from Souq Waqif.

Artist Abdullah al-Mutawa told the QNA that this marks his second participation and that he wanted to present work different from what his fellow participants presented.

He found his inspiration in the sea and chose a fishing trap for his work.

Al-Mutawa placed two traps on top of each other, giving an hourglass shape that reflects the importance of time for divers and fishermen, as they used to spend a large part of the year in the sea fishing and diving for pearls. - QNA