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**GULF****TIMES**



0 668039 136499

**FRIDAY** Vol. XXXXIII No. 12901

January 26, 2024  
Rajab 14, 1445 AH

[www.gulf-times.com](http://www.gulf-times.com) 2 Riyals

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# Qatar ‘appalled’ at alleged Israeli criticism of mediation

Qatar has rebuked Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu after he allegedly criticised the Gulf country's role as a mediator in the Gaza war as “problematic” in a leaked recording.

At a meeting this week with the families of captives being held in Gaza, Netanyahu blamed Qatar for ‘financing’ Hamas and said he was upset at a decision by the United States to extend the presence of a military base in the Gulf state, according to an Israeli news outlet.

“These remarks if validated, are irresponsible and destructive to the efforts to save innocent lives, but are not surprising,” Qatar’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson Dr Majed al-Ansari said in a post on X on Wednesday.

The MoFA spokesman said: “We are appalled by the alleged remarks attributed to the Israeli Prime Minister in various media reports about Qatar’s mediation role. These remarks if validated, are irresponsible and destructive to the efforts to save innocent lives, but are not surprising.

“For months, and following a successful mediation last year that led to the release of more than a hundred hostage, Qatar has been engaged in regular dialogue with the negotiating parties including Is-

**These remarks, if validated, are irresponsible and destructive to the efforts to save innocent lives: MoFA**



Dr Majed al-Ansari

raeli institutions, attempting to establish the framework for a new hostage agreement and the immediate entry of humanitarian aid into Gaza.

“If the reported remarks are found to be true, the Israeli PM would only be obstructing and undermining the mediation process, for reasons that appear to serve

his political career instead of prioritising saving innocent lives, including Israeli hostages.

“Instead of concerning himself with Qatar’s strategic relations with the United States, we hope Netanyahu decides to operate in good faith and concentrate on the release of the hostages.”

Qatar, along with Egypt, has repeatedly engaged in negotiations to broker a truce in Gaza and ensure the entry of humanitarian aid into the besieged enclave. In November, it helped secure a week-long pause in fighting in which more than 100 captives were released in exchange for Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails.

The Gulf state remains involved in talks aimed at securing a new deal for the release of more captives still being held by Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups.

Dr al-Ansari said Netanyahu’s leaked comments were detrimental to those efforts. **To Page 2**

## Amir, UK foreign secretary discuss ties, Gaza situation



QNA  
Doha

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani met at the Amiri Diwan yesterday with Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs of the United Kingdom David Cameron and his accompanying delegation, on the occasion of his visit to Qatar.

During the meeting, they discussed the two countries’ close bilateral relations, and prospects for promoting and developing them, in addition to the latest regional and international developments, primarily the

situation in the Gaza Strip and the Occupied Palestinian Territories and “means to reach a permanent and immediate ceasefire to spare the blood of our Palestinian brothers” and ensure the protection of civilians and the delivery of humanitarian aid to those in need in the Strip.

The British Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, voiced the United Kingdom’s thanks to His Highness the Amir for Qatar’s endeavours to reduce the escalation and end the war in Gaza.

HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani attended the meeting. **(QNA)**

## 20 Gazans killed in strike on food aid queue

Reuters  
Gaza/Doha

An Israeli strike on Gaza City killed 20 Palestinians and wounded 150 who were queuing for food aid yesterday, Gaza’s Hamas-run health ministry said, in what Palestinian groups called a “war crime.” The Israeli military said it was looking into the report. To the south of the enclave Israeli tanks battered areas around two hospitals in Gaza’s main southern city Khan Younis, forcing displaced people into a new desperate scramble for safety, residents said.

Meanwhile in the north a World Health Organisation official described the food situation as “absolutely horrific” and humanitarian workers said rare deliveries of aid were mobbed by desperate people who were visibly starving with sunken eyes. Most of the Gaza Strip’s 2.3mn population is now squeezed into Khan Younis and towns just north



Palestinians fleeing Khan Younis, move towards Rafah, in the southern Gaza Strip, yesterday.

and south of it, after being driven out of Gaza’s northern half earlier in Israel’s military campaign, now in its fourth month. Gaza health officials said at least 50 Palestinians had been killed in the past 24 hours in Khan Younis, where Israel has shifted full-blown military operations after starting to pull forces out of northern areas it says it now largely controls.

## First Qatar-UK joint humanitarian aid for Gaza arrives in Al Arish

QNA  
Doha

Qatar and the United Kingdom sent the first joint humanitarian aid shipment to the Gaza Strip within the framework of humanitarian and development co-operation between the two countries.

In the presence of HE the Minister of State for International Co-operation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Lolwah bint Rashid AlKhater and Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and



HE Lolwah bint Rashid AlKhater with David Cameron yesterday.

Development Affairs of the United Kingdom David Cameron, the first shipment of 29 tonnes of joint assistance was sent yesterday from Doha, which later arrived in the city of Al Arish in Egypt, on board an aircraft of the Qatari Armed Forces, and includes food supplies and shelter materials.

The joint humanitarian aid shipment to the Gaza Strip comes in light of the catastrophic humanitarian conditions that the Strip is going through, and a desire by the two countries to work to increase the pace of aid reaching the enclave. **To Page 2**

## US says warned Iran before IS bombings

The United States said yesterday it had specifically alerted Iran to the threat of an attack before bombings claimed by the Islamic State group killed around 90 people in southeastern Kerman. “Prior” to the Islamic State (IS) attack, the “US Government provided Iran with a private warning that there was a terrorist threat within Iranian borders,” a US official said on condition of anonymity.

## Former Trump adviser given 4 months in jail

Peter Navarro, a White House trade adviser to former president Donald Trump, was sentenced to four months in prison yesterday for refusing to testify before the congressional panel that investigated the January 6, 2021 attack on the US Capitol. Navarro, 74, a Harvard-educated economist, was found guilty of two counts of contempt of Congress. **Page 9**

**COMMUNITY**

See Pages 5 & 6

## 674 horses from 27 countries for Katara Arabian Horse Fest

As many as 674 horses from 27 countries are registered so far for the 4th edition of the Katara International Arabian Horse Festival, to be held under the patronage of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani from February 1 to 11. “The festival has become a prominent event in the equestrian world,” Katara – Cultural Village Foundation general manager and the festival organising committee chairman Prof Khalid bin Ibrahim al-Sulaiti told a press conference yesterday (Thursday).

He thanked the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy (platinum sponsor), Ooredoo (exclusive communications sponsor), Nasser Bin Khaled (NBK) Group, Ali Bin Ali Luxury Group (diamond sponsors), QNB (exclusive banking sponsor), Qatar Insurance Group (exclusive insurance sponsor), Al Kass TV (offi-



Prof Khalid bin Ibrahim al-Sulaiti (right) at the press conference yesterday along with representatives of sponsors.

cial channel), Socast, 2connect, White Event and Qommunication (social media sponsors).

Tournament director Badr al-Darwish said the festival will witness the Arabian Horses

Tour – Doha from February 1 to 5, with its second station being Abu Dhabi, followed by Muscat, France, the Netherlands, Rome, and Paris. The auction is on February 4.

## South Korea, Bahrain, Indonesia make AFC Asian Cup last 16

South Korea finished second in Asian Cup Qatar Group E after Malaysia held them to a 3-3 draw yesterday, as Bahrain topped the standings after a 1-0 win over Jordan. Bahrain ended with six points thanks to Abdulla Yusuf Helal’s winner and South Korea finished on five. Jordan, third with four points, also went through as one of the best third-placed teams.

Saudi Arabia, who had already guaranteed a last-16 spot, topped Group F after they were held to a goalless draw by Thailand while Oman failed to advance after a 1-1 draw with Kyrgyzstan. Oman finished with two points and Indonesia (three points in Group D) advanced for the first time with a better record as a third-placed team along with Syria, Palestine and Jordan.



Saudi supporters cheer during the Qatar 2023 AFC Asian Cup Group F football match between Saudi Arabia and Thailand at Education City Stadium yesterday.





## Qatar and The Netherlands hold political consultations



The third round of the political consultations between the foreign ministers of Qatar and The Netherlands were held on Thursday in the Hague. The Qatar's side was chaired by HE the Secretary-General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Ahmed bin Hassan al-Hammadi and the Netherlands' side was chaired by Secretary-General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Paul Huijts. During the consultations, they discussed bilateral co-operation and ways to strengthen and support them. The consultation round was attended by ambassador of Qatar to The Netherlands Dr Mutlaq bin Majed al-Qahtani, Director of the European Affairs Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Saoud bin Abdulla Zaid al-Mahmoud, and the accompanying delegation. **(QNA)**

### Official

#### Amir, Deputy Amir, PM condole with Chinese leadership

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani and His Highness the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani sent cables of condolences to Chinese President Xi Jinping on the victims of the landslide that hit Yunnan province, southwest of China, wishing the injured a speedy recovery. HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani also condoled with Chinese Premier Li Qiang on the victims of the landslide, wishing the injured a swift recovery. **(QNA)**

## PM meets British foreign secretary



HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani met in his office at the Amiri Diwan yesterday with Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs of the United Kingdom David Cameron who is visiting the country. The meeting discussed co-operation between the two countries, notably in the field of development aid, as well as discussing the region's developments, especially regarding the Gaza Strip and the occupied Palestinian territories. HE Sheikh Mohamed stressed, during the meeting, the need to strengthen regional and international efforts in order to reduce the escalation in the region, underlining that the current priority must be ending the war in Gaza and prevent its spread, which contributes to enhancing regional and international security and stability. **(QNA)**



## Qatar-UK joint humanitarian aid for Gaza arrives in Arish

From Page 1

The Qatar Fund for Development and the British Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office signed a memorandum of understanding for strategic co-operation in the field of international development and humanitarian aid between the two countries, on the sidelines of the 5th United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, which Doha hosted in March of last year.

HE the Minister of State for International Co-operation expressed Qatar's aspiration to enhance joint co-operation with the UK to deliver humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip, pointing to development and humanitarian co-operation with the British side in Somalia as well.

She stressed the keenness of Qatar to co-operate with all international partners in order to ensure the flow of humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip, underscoring in this re-

gard the need for aid to reach all areas of the Strip in a sustainable manner without obstacles, especially with the increasing suffering in light of the catastrophic situation resulting from the continuation of the war and the siege.

For his part, the UK Foreign Secretary expressed his country's appreciation for the humanitarian and development partnership with Qatar, expressing his gratitude to Qatar for its humanitarian efforts in the Gaza Strip.

## Greece president receives credentials of Qatar's envoy



President of Greece Katerina Sakellariopoulou received the credentials of Ali bin Khalfan al-Mansouri as ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary of Qatar to Greece. The ambassador conveyed His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani's greetings and wishes of good health and happiness to the president, and continued progress and prosperity to the government and people of Greece. The president of the Greek Republic entrusted the ambassador with her greetings to His Highness the Amir, wishing him good health and happiness, and Qatar continued progress and development. **(QNA)**



## Qatar 'appalled' at alleged Israeli criticism of mediation

From Page 1

"You don't hear me thanking Qatar ... who are essentially no different from the United Nations or Red Cross, and even more problematic. I have no illusions with regards to them," Netanyahu purportedly said in the recording obtained by Channel 12.

Al Jazeera's Stefanie Dekker, reporting from occupied East Jerusalem, said any leak from Netanyahu's office "isn't usually by chance" and "is usually done for a political reason - what that is you can only question".

Netanyahu is under a lot of pressure from "all sides", domestically and internationally, and "from people on the streets ... to do more to bring back the captives," Dekker said yesterday.

Hassan Barari, a professor at Qatar University, told Al Jazeera that the Israeli prime minister's alleged criticism of Qatar's mediation efforts reflects frustration over his failures in the war.

"Qatar has stepped in many times, and Qatar has succeeded in mediating between Israelis and Hamas," Barari said, calling the comments a sign of "des-

peration". Responding to Dr al-Ansari's comments, Israel's ultranationalist, far-right Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich accused Qatar of supporting "terrorism".

Members of Netanyahu's far-right ruling coalition have been pushing for an escalation of the war on Gaza, and the prime minister this week rejected a proposal by Hamas to end the conflict and release captives in exchange for withdrawing Israeli forces, releasing prisoners and accepting the armed group's governance of Gaza.

## Chief of Staff meets SHAPE's deputy chief of staff at partnerships directorate



HE the Chief of Staff of Qatar Armed Forces Staff Lieutenant-General (Pilot) Salem bin Hamad al-Nabit met with the visiting Deputy Chief of Staff at Partnerships Directorate at Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) of Nato, Rear Admiral Gunnstein Bruusdal, along with his accompanying delegation. They discussed topics of common interest and bilateral relations and ways to strengthen them. Senior Qatar Armed Forces officers attended the meeting. **(QNA)**

## Ambassadors of Kyrgyzstan, Norway, New Zealand, Cambodia present credentials



HE the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sultan bin Saad al-Muraikhi received copies of the credentials of ambassador of the Kyrgyz Republic Marat Nuraliev, ambassador of the Kingdom of Norway (non-resident) Olav Myklebust, ambassador of New Zealand (non-resident) Richard George Kay, and ambassador of the Kingdom of Cambodia (non-resident) Sman Manan to Qatar. HE the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs wished the ambassadors success in carrying out their duties, assuring them of providing all support to advance relations between Qatar and their countries to closer co-operation in various fields. **(QNA)**





# talabat honours delivery champions

**t**alabat, the leading platform for everyday deliveries in the region, celebrated its riders for their ‘strong commitment and hard work’ at a recent awards ceremony, a statement said yesterday.

The annual event by talabat recognised dozens of riders for their outstanding performance, and celebrated their success in the presence of vendors and third-party logistics providers.

Several incentives were given to riders for their achievements during day-to-day activities, including timely delivery of orders, following the safest road practices, and covering the longest distances throughout the year. The awards ceremony also provided a platform to express gratitude to vendor partners and third-party logistics companies for



their continuous operational support towards the brand.

Expressing his delight at the ceremony, Francisco Miguel De Sousa, managing director of talabat Qatar, stated: “We take immense pride in celebrating the diligent efforts and

hard work demonstrated by riders during 2023. This awards ceremony allows us to highlight the noteworthy performance of riders who consistently delivered exceptional services, and went above and beyond their scope of work to sup-

port our community.

“We also appreciate the collaborative efforts of the fleet of vendors and third-party logistics providers whom we have built a strong partnership with throughout the past few years. We truly honour the



collective contributions by all valued stakeholders that truly make our platform the region’s leading choice for everyday deliveries.”

The riders were also acknowledged for their thoughtful acts of kindness that have garnered im-

mense appreciation from the community in Qatar. Additionally, recognition was given to the riders for their engaging content on social media platforms, bringing life to their day-to-day routines through content creation, the statement added.

## Swedish speaker meets Qatar’s envoy



Speaker of the Parliament of the Kingdom of Sweden, Andreas Norlen met with ambassador of Qatar to Sweden Nadia bint Ahmad al-Sheebi. The two sides discussed relations between the two countries. (QNA)

## UNIDO director receives credentials of Qatar’s permanent representative



Director-General of the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO) Gerd Muller received the credentials of HE Jassim bin Yacoub al-Hammadi as Permanent Representative of Qatar to the UNIDO. On this occasion, the director-general of the UNIDO praised the existing co-operation between Qatar and the organisation, especially Qatar’s constant support for the organisation’s various programmes and projects to ensure the achievement of sustainable development goals at the global level. For his part, HE the Permanent Representative of Qatar stressed the significant role played by the UNIDO in achieving industrial development, especially in developing countries, affirming Qatar’s keenness to support the organisation’s efforts in facing global development challenges. (QNA)

## Dialogue session held on research, sustainable development

**T**he Ministry of Education and Higher Education organised dialogue sessions that focused on the role of scientific research and sustainable development in promoting an integrated research and scientific environment, in line with the vision of Qatar, and the importance of encouraging scientific competencies among faculty members in physical education, and concerted efforts to highlight creativity, scientific innovation and development in the field of scientific research.

The sessions touched on the procedural research competition for teachers organised by the ministry within the activities of the National Science Research and Innovation Week, the winners of first places at the secondary school level, the mechanisms and criteria for selecting researchers and research topics, and on the provision of guidance to researchers on the secrets of winning the scientific research competition.

The dialogued sessions also addressed the communica-



tion style of physical education teachers and its relationship to the psychology of the learner. In this regard, the importance of teachers’ awareness of their style in the classroom and their daily communication with students in an innovative, interactive and positive way to achieve the desired educational goals was emphasised.

In addition, the sessions discussed scientific research and sustainable development, their concepts and the ways they are achieved. The methods for directing research studies and sci-

entific dissertations and linking them to comprehensive development plans, the role of scientific research in the sports field, and the necessity of encouraging researchers to translate their innovations into successful products and projects, were also covered.

The topic of scientific research and physical education was also discussed, and the importance of the role of the physical education teacher in the context of developing scientific research skills among students in grades seven to eleven through scientific projects and research. (QNA)

# Saudi Arabia’s AlUla becomes Gulf Air’s newest destination

**B**ahrain’s national carrier Gulf Air is expanding connectivity to Saudi Arabia, a move that promises increased accessibility and convenience for travellers. With the addition of AlUla as its newest seasonal destination from February 3, Gulf Air offers travellers a captivating and diverse travel experience while maintaining exceptional service for its passengers.

This is in line with its vision to excel and enhance the travel experience, ensuring that the diverse needs of travellers are met.

The introduction of AlUla route is a prominent addition to Gulf Air’s seasonal destinations for 2024, with more “exciting” destinations to be added later this year. Gulf Air flights to AlUla will operate twice weekly starting from February 3 to March 6 and from April 10 to April 27 on A320-Neo aircraft with “a modern and comfortable cabin to



provide a pleasant travel experience” for passengers.

This offers an opportunity for travellers to explore this cultural destination with its distinctive history, scenery, and exciting activities. Gulf Air has been operating flights to and from Saudi Arabia since 1950. With the addition

of AlUla seasonal flights starting in February, the number of Gulf Air destinations in Saudi Arabia will become six.

This expansion will enable travellers to take advantage of Gulf Air’s growing connectivity to Saudi Arabia and its global network, reaching 54 destinations.

## Ikea charger recalled due to damaged cable

**T**he Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI), in co-operation with Hamad & Mohamed Al-Futtaim Co, Ikea WLL, has announced the recall of Ikea Askstorm 40W USB charger dark grey (article number 60461197), as the power cable may get damaged or broken, after being wrapped around a charger or bent back and forth after a longer period of use.

The damaged cable may lead to

thermal burns and electric shock. The MoCI said the recall campaign comes within the framework of its ongoing efforts to protect consumers and ensure that dealers follow up on defects and withdrawals.

The MoCI said that it will co-ordinate with the dealer to follow up on the recall campaign and will communicate with customers to ensure that the necessary actions are carried out.

The MoCI urged all customers to report any violations 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\_QATARS

# QU college sheds light on role of education in SDGs

**O**n International Day of Education, faculty from QU’s College of Education shed light on the role of education in achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In a statement on this occasion, Dr Mayamin Altae, Professor of Educational Sciences, said: “The development and expansion of society heavily relies on the vital role of education, facilitated by the university’s colleges. Qatar University plays a crucial role, serving as a central hub that links the requirements of diverse societal sectors with scientific research.”

Dr Monoem Haddad, Professor of Physical Education, said: “Quality Education is the fourth goal among the main goals for the SDGs and aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.”

Dr Intisar Ghazi, Professor of Islamic Studies Education, said: “Education expands the realm of



knowledge and critical thinking, playing a role in fostering positive transformations within societies. It fosters heightened comprehension and tolerance, fortifying social bonds and alleviating tension.”

Dr Abdellatif Sellami, director of the Educational Research Center at QU’s College of Education, said: “Education is a fundamental pillar in sustainable development, contributing to both economic and social progress through developing

capabilities, the encouragement of innovation and creativity, and the provision of essential knowledge and skills to individuals.”

Dr Ayat Ibrahim Mohammad Alshaer, Professor of Physical Education, emphasised the vital role that education plays in shaping peaceful, stable societies, by fostering communication, understanding, and instilling values of tolerance and mutual respect among individuals.

## Culture ministry takes part in Cairo book fair

The 55th edition of the Cairo International Book Fair kicked off earlier this week with the participation of 1,200 publishing houses from 70 nations, including Qatar. Held under the theme: ‘Creating Knowledge, Preserving the Word’, the event will run until Feb 6, with the Ministry of Culture participating in this edition to showcase the Qatari intellectual production through its diverse and new publications in a plethora of

sciences such as novels, law, social and human sciences, along with stellar releases of child books. The Ministry of Culture primarily aims to promote its digital library within the framework of promoting cultural and intellectual communication, as there are a host of Qatari publishing houses participating in this fair, namely Dar Al Watad for Publishing and Distribution, Hamad Bin Khalifa University Press, and Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies.

Norway is the guest of honour this year whose supreme committee selected the late Egyptologist Selim Hassan as the key figure of this edition, alongside the Egyptian children’s writer Yacoub El-Sharouni as the figure for the children’s pavilion. The fair features 550 events with the cultural programme comprising conferences and activities on a contingent of intellectuals and thinkers of Arabic culture.





# Qatar pledges to continue Gaza mediation efforts

Qatar has affirmed its firm commitment to continue its mediation efforts with its partners to assist parties in reaching a permanent and immediate ceasefire to halt the bloodshed in the Gaza Strip, ensure the protection of civilians, and deliver humanitarian aid to those in need in the Strip.

This came in a statement delivered by HE the Permanent Representative of Qatar to the UN Sheikhha Alya Ahmed bin Saif al-Thani before the Security Council session on building peace and sustaining peace through comprehensive approaches, under the title “Investing in Human Beings, Including Empowering Women,” at the UN headquarters in New York.

HE Sheikhha Alya emphasised the importance of not overlooking the volatile situation in the Middle East, particularly the ongoing war conducted by Israeli occupation forces against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. She reiterated Qatar’s call to the council to fulfil its responsibilities and implement resolutions 2712 and 2720, along with relevant General Assembly resolutions.

She emphasised the importance of adopting a comprehensive approach to prevent conflicts, achieve sustainable peace, and build resilient communities to achieve long-term peace and stability by addressing the root causes of conflicts.

HE Sheikhha Alya highlighted Qatar’s commitment to ensuring that its efforts in peace and security are comprehensive, noting that Qatar has consistently invested in preventive diplomacy and conflict prevention by addressing the root causes of conflicts.

In this context, she pointed out Qatar’s strategic partnerships with UN agencies, especially the UN Development Programme (UNDP). She ex-



HE the Permanent Representative of Qatar to the UN Sheikhha Alya Ahmed bin Saif al-Thani.

pressed pride in the efforts of the Education Above All Foundation, which has transformed the lives of over 16mn children and youth through 100 education projects across 59 countries, pointing to the strategic partnership between the Qatar Fund for Development and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation in 2022, which provides \$200mn to small productive farmers and their communities in African countries.

HE Sheikhha Alya renewed Qatar’s welcome and support for the Secretary-General’s “Our Common Agenda” report and the new peace plan, underscoring the importance of considering these initiatives in preparing for the Future Summit in 2024 and the 2025 review of the UN Peacebuilding Architecture.

She reiterated Qatar’s commitment to continuing peacebuilding efforts and investing in human capital, particularly empowering women, youth and other marginalised groups. **(QNA)**



## NHRC stresses co-operation with UN House in Doha

HE the Chairperson of the National Human Rights Committee (NHRC) Maryam bint Abdullah al-Attiah underscored the significance of co-operation with the UN House in Doha, pointing out that its presence in Doha is a great opportunity that must be invested.

This came when HE the Chairperson of NHRC inaugurated the painting of Litaarafu, which means ‘get to know each other,’ at the UN House in Doha, which is one of the Arabic calligraphy paintings on human rights in the Islamic culture. The event was held in the presence of Unesco Representative for the Gulf states and Yemen and Director of the Unesco Office in Doha Salah El Din Zaki Khaled.

Her Excellency welcomed the joint work and co-operation between the two parties. She urged further partnerships and emphasised the importance of the role performed by the UN House in Doha.

Following the inauguration of the painting, HE Maryam bint Abdullah al-Attiah said after maintaining the classification “A” three consecutive times, NHRC performs a global role in the region through urging states to establish national human rights committees, pointing out that the constant maintaining of classification “A” by the national human rights committees comes by virtue of adherence to Paris Principles, chiefly the financial and administrative independence of the national committees to document, monitor, raise awareness of human rights principles as part of their duties.

She asserted that the NHRC opens its doors to all inhabitants in Qatar whether they are citizens or residents to receive their complaints, follow up on them and to find solutions for them, stressing that NHRC considers all received complaints seriously and engages with the competent authorities to further solve these problems.

The most critical points the committees pursue to maintain their classification primarily entail the execution of legislations and laws issued by the state and to figure out the extent of their conformity with the international human rights law, review the laws that were previously issued, in addition to submitting their comments to the state for further amendments for alignment with the international human rights law.

Khaled said the UN has a long history in urging countries to establish the commissions concerned with promoting and protecting human rights, along with the keenness to compel the UN member states to keep mainstreaming human rights in their all territories and relevant scope of works.

Khaled emphasised that he looks forward to reinforcing co-operation with NHRC to support the universal principles of human rights, share ideas and visions, as well as explore new co-operation means, noting Qatar’s unwavering efforts and keenness to boost co-operation and partnership with all UN organisations, and thanked the NHRC for offering the valued art painting to the UN House in Doha.

He called for sharing the draft strategy of NHRC for 2028 to open the door to broader partnerships with the UN organisations in the future, pointing out that the meeting offered an opportunity to share a variety of projects and initiatives carried out by the UN organisations, as well as to review the NHRC strategy in Qatar and ways to reinforce co-operation between the UN organisations and NHRC.

It was agreed to hold roundtables to foster partnership in the future, along with a roadmap based on NHRC’s new general strategy in the future, Khaled added, underlining that Qatar is making utmost efforts to bolster the United Nations’ role in the region and provides full support to UN organisations, which he said are appreciated efforts.

The NHRC Secretary-General Sultan bin Hassan al-Jamali said the inauguration of one of the paintings of the Arabic calligraphy exhibition on human rights in the Islamic culture at the UN House in Doha comes in recognition of the UN as an incubator that includes all peoples cultures and traditions under its umbrella.

Al-Jamali revealed that NHRC strategic plan of 2028 will be inaugurated in the upcoming days, pointing out that NHRC has numerous professional techniques and mechanisms to achieve these strategic objectives.

Meanwhile, Director of the Unicef office in Doha, Anthony MacDonald lauded the role of Qatar in human rights, in addition to its excellence in childcare indicators. **(QNA)**

## Tourist, commercial spots in Qatar attract Asian Cup football fans

With the organising of the AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023, global attention has turned towards Qatar as a distinguished tourist and commercial destination, as this sport event is an opportunity to showcase the charm and diversity that Qatar offers to the world, allowing visitors to explore its magnificent tourist landmarks and unique commercial facilities.

In this context, a report by Iraqi Al Sharqiya TV channel highlighted the heritage Souq Waqif, located in the heart of the Qatari capital Doha, which has become the hotspot for fans to meet.

The report added that Souq Waqif has been one of the most attractive areas for the fans of teams participating in the continental tournament. The souq has transformed into a square where chants of various languages are heard, while fans wave different flags.

The report added that Souq Waqif, the popular market, is open round the clock and throughout the week to welcome the fans that visit this beautiful heritage landmark designed in the local traditional architectural style. It pointed out that in recent years, the Qatari government has been keen on renovating the market by restoring old buildings and constructing new ones, while preserving the identity of the old places and their authentic heritage.

The presenter of “Doha Asia” programme on Abu Dhabi Sports TV Mohamed al-Ahmed continued his field tours of Qatar’s prominent landmarks, coinciding with the ongoing events and activities of the Asian Cup. This time, the spotlight was on the Museum of Islamic Art (MIA) and its collections.

Al-Ahmed initiated a new episode by saying that every place in Qatar is distinctive and beautiful, deserving exploration.

He further noted that the museum building is inspired by the Ahmad Ibn Tulun Mosque in Cairo, designed by a Chinese-American architect I M Pei, who was nearly 90 years old when he began designing the museum, proving that creativity knows no bounds.” Al-Ahmed pointed out that the building was inspired by the Sabil, or ablution fountain in Ahmad Ibn Tulun Mosque, and serves as a model, blending traditional Islamic designs and patterns, such as domes and arches, with modern architecture, resulting in the museum’s splendid appearance. The programme also highlighted the contents of the museum, showcasing various collections.

In his article published in the *Al Roya* newspaper of Oman, Omani sports journalist Mohamed al-Alyan said that the tournament hosted by Qatar, the capital of Arab, Asian, and global sports, has succeeded even before it kicked off. This success was attributed to the fantastic atmosphere and more than wonderful organisation, creating a beautiful tournament that has brought together the entire continent with one heart and sportsmanship. He highlighted the vast global facilities, luxurious and legendary stadiums, diverse hotels, various transportation options, tourist sites, entertainment programmes, a winter football atmosphere, and a noticeable fan attendance from across

Asia and beyond. He emphasised that Qatar has become the heart of global sports and an exemplary model, particularly in sports, with the strong presence of professional players from their respective national teams and from Europe’s prestigious clubs. These players added a distinctive flavour to the tournament in terms of technical, popularity, marketing, and media aspects.

Al-Alyan further said that Qatar has now become a country that competes with global capitals and cities in hosting tournaments and other sport events, and is comparable to cities like London, Paris, Madrid, Berlin, Rome, Lisbon, Beijing, Tokyo, and others.

In another context, the Saudi website Alsharq with Bloomberg said in a report that the passion for football drives many fans to sacrifice time, effort, and money to enjoy the widely popular game and support their national teams, a sentiment clearly evident during the AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023.

The report titled “How Much Fans Pay to Attend AFC Asian Cup Qatar” quoted 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 as saying that ticket sales exceeded 1,200,000 while the attendance had reached 620,000.

According to a source from the Saudi Arabian Football Federation, fans were transported via flights from Riyadh, Jeddah, and Dammam, and he added that the federation has covered all expenses for the fans throughout their stay to support their national team, the report said.

The report also quoted the Director of Communication in the Saudi Federation Faisal al-Tuwaiher as saying that Saudi fans are strongly present at the AFC Asian Cup, and added that Saudi fans are always widespread in tourist and commercial sites in Qatar.

Managing Director of the tournament’s Local Organising Committee (LOC) and Secretary-General of the Qatar Football Association (QFA) Mansour al-Ansari said Qatar is currently considering attracting more foreign professional players.

In an interview with Al-Sharq TV as part of the “Aswaq Al-Sharq” programme, he underlined that the AFC Asian Cup witnessed massive attendance from neighbouring and Arab countries, which is a success built on the legacy left by the success of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, and which has contributed significantly to the local economy.

Al-Ansari also pointed out that if Qatar does not win the bid to host the Olympics, there are phased plans, including hosting of the the AFC U23 Asian Cup qualifying for the Paris 2024 Olympics. In case of any opportunity to host an event, the possibility of accepting it will be studied to gain more experience, he added.

He noted the significantly positive impact of hosting major sporting events in Qatar, which succeeded in changing the general perception of the Middle East, particularly Arab countries, by hosting the World Cup, adding that the fan attendance in the AFC Asian Cup 2023 exceeded expectations, providing a positive promotion for Qatar through football. **(QNA)**

## Endowments ministry releases new book in research series

The Department of Islamic Research and Studies at the Ministry of Endowments (Awqaf) and Islamic Affairs has issued the tenth book in the series of research and scientific messages, under the theme of selections of Imam Ibn Farhoun authored by the Judge Dr Nasser bin Omran al-Kuwari.

Director of the Department of Research and Islamic Studies Sheikh Dr Ahmed Mohamed Ghanem al-Thani presented the aforementioned book, highlighting that it sheds the light on the judicial issues through the jurisprudential blog of one of the ancient Imams, along with the analysis and comparison of Ibn Farhoun’s selections with the selections of other jurists,



and weighing them. This develops jurisprudential talent among jurists and judges.

Serving the Holy Qur’an and Sunnah by spreading science and supporting scholars, students and researchers is one of the good deeds, and which is the primary role performed by the Ministry of Endowments (Awqaf) and Islamic Affairs through publishing of the Shariah research within its keenness

to encourage Qatari researchers, said Sheikh Dr Ahmed Mohamed Ghanem al-Thani.

The book earns a special significance as a controlled academic research submitted by the researcher to obtain the PhD degree.

The book is considered one of the most important books on judiciary in the Maliki school of thought that handles judiciary matters and Shariah policy. **(QNA)**

## QU joins WHO EMRO Youth Council

Qatar University (QU) yesterday announced that its application to serve on the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office (EMRO) Youth Council has been accepted.

This nomination underscores Qatar’s commitment to cultivating youth participation in public health policy, the University asserted.

Dean of the College of Health Sciences at QU Dr Hanan Abdul Rahim, expressed her enthusiasm, stating, “I am delighted that QU, which has been designated a Healthy University by WHO, will be represented on the Council.” Dr Abdul Rahim added: “We see the WHO EMRO Youth Council as a platform for empowering youth, the future of our region, to get actively involved in addressing the conditions that

shape their health and wellbeing. QU’s keenness to be a part of this initiative is a reflection of its commitment to preparing responsible citizens and future leaders who prioritise the health and wellbeing of their communities.”

The WHO EMRO Youth Council is a visionary initiative recognising young people not only as future leaders but also as current agents of change. With a mission to position young voices at the core of global health decision-making processes, the Council aims to form strategic alliances with youth organisations, amplifying the contributions of young individuals to public health. This strategy promotes comprehensive and inclusive youth engagement across the Eastern Mediterranean Region. **(QNA)**

## WHO chief breaks down describing ‘hellish’ Gaza conditions

The head of the World Health Organisation (WHO) called for a ceasefire and a “true solution” to the Israel-Palestinian conflict in an emotional plea to the global health body’s governing body yesterday where he described conditions in Gaza as “hellish”, Reuters reported from Geneva. WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, who lived through war as a child and

whose own children hid in a bunker during bombardments in Ethiopia’s 1998-2000 border war with Eritrea, became emotional describing conditions in the bombed-out Gaza enclave where more than 25,000 people have been killed. “I’m a true believer because of my own experience that war doesn’t bring solution, except more war, more hatred, more

agony, more destruction. So let’s choose peace and resolve this issue politically,” Tedros told the WHO Executive Board in Geneva during a discussion about the Gaza health emergency. “I think all of you have said the two-state solution and so on, and hope this war will end and move into a true solution,” he said, before breaking down, describing the current situation as “beyond words”.

### Al Noor Center holds workshops to mark Int’l Day of Education

Al Noor Center for the Blind, one of the centres of the Qatar Foundation for Social Work, affiliated with the Ministry of Social Development and Family, has organised a series of workshops on the occasion of International Day of Education with the aim of highlighting the importance of education and its necessity in building and advancing societies. The workshops included sessions on the basics of braille, assistive technology and a workshop on developing basic skills in teaching braille, in

addition to staging of an exhibition highlighting modern technologies and innovations in the field of education. Executive Director of Al Noor Center, Mishal Abdullah al-Nuaimi expressed the importance of International Day of Education in stimulating innovation and advanced technologies. Al-Nuaimi also affirmed the Center’s commitment to developing the best educational methods and techniques to enhance the learning experience of its students and to develop their skills. **(QNA)**





Cloud streaks resembling water waves shrouded the setting sun in Doha the other day. Winter sunsets often leave memorable sights. **PICTURE:** *Gulf Times* news editor Bonnie James (Instagram: the.explorer7).


### Over 1,200 students take part in Indian schools fest




More than 1,200 students from 18 Indian schools participated in a four-day 'Kalanjali' art festival recently in Doha under the auspices of Media Pen. While MES Indian School became the overall champion with 254 points, Birla Public School was the first runner-up with 164 points, Rajagiri Public School was the second runner-up with 111 points and Shantiniketan Indian School, the third runner-up with 75 points. The best female performer or Kalathilakam was Vaishnavi Suresh (Birla Public School) and the best male performer or Kalaprathibha was Freddy Joshua Victor (Olive International School). Indian ambassador Vipul was the chief guest at the closing ceremony. The Kalathilakam and Kalaprathibha trophies were presented by the National Award winning actor Aparna Balamurali.



### CWF organises blood donation



A number of Sri Lankan expatriates participated in the annual blood donation event organised by Community Welfare Federation (CWF), in collaboration with Hamad Medical Corporation, at the Sri Lankan School in Doha.



## Get to know the ancient village atop a 100m boulder

By Shafqat Nabi



on the planet. It is a 500-year-old mud-brick village on top of a massive boulder, rising 100 metres, overlooking the Wadi Dawan valley in Hadhramaut Governorate. It has a population of 17 according to the 2004 census. In which country is it?

**Answers**  
**N11.** Norway, a total of 405, eclipsing USA at 330 and Germany at 267.  
**N12.** Nihon or Nippon. Both Nippon and Nihon literally mean "the sun's origin", that is, where the sun originates, and are often translated as the Land of the Rising Sun. The official Japanese-language name is Nippon-koku or Nihon-koku, literally "State of Japan."  
**N13.** Tango and Foxtrot.  
**N14.** Orange.  
**N15.** Brown. The brown streaks darken to black with age.  
**N16.** It marks the anniversary of the 1788 arrival of the First Fleet of British ships at Port Jackson, New South Wales, and the raising of the Flag of Great Britain at Sydney Cove.  
**N17.** Kobe Bryant.  
**N18.** Yemen.



## Tribe Nl.yays

The word "nepotism" is derived from an Italian word that means what specific familial relationship?  
Nephew.

(Rama Yadav, Doha)

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



# QU Health student scripts inspiring journey into research, advocacy

Dr Shahd Elamin, from Qatar University (QU) completed her journey within the PharmD programme at the College of Pharmacy (CPH), part of QU Health.

She joined PharmD in 2021, after BSc in Pharmacy, aligned with her ambition to contribute to healthcare through patient care and advanced research, a QU statement said.

Unlike traditional graduate programmes, PharmD is a professional doctorate emphasising hands-on clinical work, during which pharmacists receive intensive training. PharmD candidates emerge as clinical pharmacists, providing evidence-based clinical care through clinical placements over the academic year.

Actively involved in wellness and wellbeing advocacy, Dr Shahd contributed greatly to mental health awareness and wellbeing educational events. This includes leading the self-care and compassion team in the wellbeing space, as part of the All Together Better Health (ATBH) conference, which took place in Doha for the first time in November 2023.

Her commitment extends to joining the CPH alumni chapter as an executive member, reflecting her belief in continual growth and making meaningful contributions to health promotion and education.

Dr Shahd noted that a pivotal decision to engage in a research project with her mentor and PharmD faculty adviser was very impactful for her career, as it expanded her research involvement and opened new prospects. Joining this community provided diverse platforms for her to make meaningful contributions to mental health research and advocacy events, her longstanding passions. As the current PharmD ambassador, Dr Shahd proudly recounts her journey of growth



Dr Shahd Elamin,

and positive contributions to healthcare and the community. Acknowledgements during her time as a PharmD student include receiving an oral presentation award at the 11th Annual CPH research forum and a writing award from the International Pharmaceutical Students' Federation Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office.

In addition, she is an active participant in conferences and symposiums such as QIPC-6, QMH RS, and ATBH through poster/oral presentations and wellbeing events. She significantly contributed to multiple research projects, including two recent publications, and advocates for stigma-free healthcare and the wellbeing of Qatari communities through various events and initiatives.



QPWA members pose for a group photo after the annual general meeting where they elected the expatriate forum's new office-bearers.

## QPWA elects new officials

Qatar Parakkadavu Welfare Association (QPWA) has elected its new office-bearers for 2024-2026 at the annual general meeting.

Mohamed Abdulla M P is the new president.

The other officials are: Working president - Abdul Raoof; vice-presidents - Ahmed K,

Shabeer M K, Latheef K K, Ashraf K, Nasar K; General secretary - Ismail V P; joint secretaries - Saleem Ali, Rasheed P K, Hashim Abdulla, Azhar K, Ismail K; treasurer - Abbas T P; joint treasurer Haris R.

The proceedings started with the Holy Qur'an recitation by Afas Mohamed. Patron K K Us-

man inaugurated. Outgoing president K P Mohamed presided.

Chief patron M P Abdulla Haji launched EduSpark, an education initiative for the members' children.

QPWA membership card was also launched. Majeed Hudawi spoke about EduSpark.

## CMU-Q professor serves as key organiser for global conference



Houda Bouamor

Carnegie Mellon University in Qatar (CMU-Q) faculty member Houda Bouamor served as a key organiser for the 2023 Conference on Empirical Methods in Natural Language Processing, an event that drew about 4,000 global experts in the area of Natural Language Processing (NLP), a subfield of artificial intelligence.

Bouamor is an associate teaching professor of information systems and an expert in NLP.

This year, the conference took place in Singapore. Bouamor was one of the programme chairs for the conference, and Kemal Oflaz-

er, a CMU-Q teaching professor of computer science and an expert in Turkish NLP, served as an ethics chair.

"There were so many interesting researchers and practitioners at the conference that provided valuable insight into the possibilities, and the challenges of processing human languages. This was particularly pertinent given the surge of Generative AI, a crucial task within our field," said Bouamor.

Michael Trick, dean of CMU-Q, said: "At Carnegie Mellon, we believe that teaching our students responsible AI is the key to positive, ethical progress. Of course, the theory and technical intricacies of artificial intelligence are important, but equally important is to think through the impact of innovation."

As a programme chair, Bouamor helped ensure the conference addressed the challenges in the field including the importance of large language models in building Generative AI tools.

## Dukhan residents bid farewell to prominent community leader



The residents of Dukhan bid farewell to Salim Rehman Baharde, a prominent personality, who has been an integral part of the community for decades.

He has been instrumental in organising various community events and been a mentor to many young people in the community.

Baharde thanked in particular the Dukhan Community and stated that witnessing his employer QatarEnergy, evolve into what it is today, has been an honour.

"It's where I formed lifelong friendships and rallied through challenges with their unwavering support. As I leave Dukhan, I carry

with me something that will remain in my heart forever. May the Almighty God bless everyone with abundant happiness, health, wealth and most importantly, peace," he said.

The occasion also saw one of his colleagues, Mukhtar Khan bidding goodbye to the community.

## Katara, ICC conduct 'Team India Fashion show'



Katara-Cultural Village, in association with the Indian Cultural Centre (ICC), conducted a 'Team India Fashion show', where models showcased outfits from across the nation. The event was co-ordinated by Sumaa Mahesh Gowda, head of Culture at ICC.



## Grand reception hosted for Indian football team



Indian embassy in Qatar, in co-ordination with the Indian Sports Centre (ISC) and Indian Cultural Centre (ICC) hosted a grand reception for the Indian national football team participating in the ongoing AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023.

Indian team head coach Igor Stimac and captain Sunil Chhetri spoke on their experience and gave

insights to what the future holds for the team and Indian football, also thanking the Indian community for showing their love on and off the field and how much it means to the team and their confidence.

They presented to Indian ambassador Vipul, the team jerseys signed by the players. The Indian team manager Velu Dhayalamani presented a token of appreciation

to ISC president E P Abdul Rahman. A number of children from all Indian schools in Qatar were invited to the event.

Biography on legendary midfielder of Indian football, Olympian M Kempaiah written by his daughter Sumaa Mahesh Gowda was earlier launched at the event by the coach and captain in the presence of other dignitaries.



# Families slam UK authorities as killer of three sent to secure hospital

AFP  
London

Families of the victims of a random stabbing in Nottingham, central England, slammed the police yesterday as a 32-year-old man was sentenced to indefinite detention at a psychiatric hospital over the killings. Valdo Calocane stabbed to death two 19-year-old students and a 65-year-old school caretaker during the attacks in June last year that resulted in police locking down the entire city. Prosecutors earlier this week accepted Calocane's plea of guilty to manslaughter on the grounds of diminished responsibility. Judge Mark Turner, handing down the sentence, said Calocane would "very probably" be detained in a high-security hospital for the rest of his life. "Your sickening crimes both shocked the nation and wrecked the lives of your surviving victims and the families of them all," he told the killer. Nottingham University students Barnaby Webber and Grace

O'Malley-Kumar were stabbed near the city centre just after 4am on June 13. Ian Coates, the caretaker, was found stabbed nearby shortly afterwards. After sentencing, Webber's mother Emma said that "true justice has not been served", and claimed that prosecutors had "railroaded" families over accepting the manslaughter plea, rather than murder. She also said Nottinghamshire Police had "blood on your hands". "If you had just done your jobs properly, there's a very good chance my beautiful boy would be alive today," she said. "There is so much more to say and clearly serious questions regarding this case and events leading up to this monster being out in society." Nottingham Police admitted this week that it "should have done more" to arrest Calocane before the attacks in the wake of an alleged assault on a police officer. Before the judge sat, Coates' son Lee stood up in the courtroom and addressed fellow families. "I am so sorry that we had to go through this and this is how we have met," he said. "If I don't manage to stay the

whole day because I can't keep my mouth shut, I apologise. But we are in the same boat," he added, to a round of applause. Calocane, who showed no emotion as he was sentenced, also ran over three other people, leaving one with critical injuries, after stealing a van belonging to Coates. The attacks shocked Britain, and thousands of people attended vigils and memorial services for the victims in Nottingham. Calocane, who has paranoid schizophrenia, had previously been detained in hospital four times under mental health laws. He was arrested in September 2021 for assaulting a police officer. The judge told the court that Calocane had been convinced he was being controlled by artificial intelligence and that flatmates and intelligence services were spying on him. He even turned up to the headquarters of British domestic intelligence agency MI5 and urged "please arrest me". The court heard that he had not been taking his prescribed medication for his mental illness during the time he committed his crimes.

## Selfie time



Britain's Prime Minister Rishi Sunak poses for pictures with trainees during a visit to the Construction Skills Village, in Eastfield, Scarborough, Britain.

# Bog body from 2,500 years ago discovered in N Ireland

Reuters  
London

Archaeologists in Northern Ireland have uncovered well-preserved remains of a teenage boy dating back up to 2,500 years – including bones, skin and possibly a kidney – in a rare find that may shed new light on the region's ancient history. The body was found in a peat bog – a wetland environment which can aid preservation of organic matter – in the village of Bellaghy after police archaeologists were alerted in October to the presence of human bones on the surface. Detective Inspector Nikki Deehan said yesterday police were

initially unsure whether the remains were ancient or the result of a more recent death, but radiocarbon dating showed the time of death was between 2,000-2,500 years ago. Other so-called "bog bodies" – the naturally preserved remains of long-deceased humans found in peat bogs – have been recovered and studied over the years, most commonly from Northern Europe. "This is the first time radiocarbon dating has been used on a bog body in Northern Ireland, and the only one to still exist, making this a truly unique archaeological discovery for Northern Ireland," Deehan said. The excavations uncovered a tibia and fibula and a humerus, ulna and radius bone, be-

longing to the left leg and right arm possibly of a male aged between 13-17 at the time of death, police said, adding little is known so far about how the individual died. The skeleton also had the presence of partial skin, fingernails, toenails and possibly a kidney. John Joe O'Boyle, Chief Executive of Northern Ireland's Forest Service, called the discovery a "very exciting find" and said the body would be transferred to the museum service for further examination and preservation. "It certainly adds an important chapter to the historical and cultural significance of this hinterland and archaeological discoveries of bog bodies across Europe," O'Boyle said.

# South Korean MP injured in attack

AFP  
Seoul

A South Korean ruling party lawmaker was wounded after she was struck on the head by an unidentified assailant yesterday, the MP's office and her party said. Bae Hyun-jin, 40, was hospitalised at Soon Chun Hyang University Hospital in Seoul and her condition was not life-threatening, the medical institution said. The lawmaker was bleeding before being transferred to the hospital in the South Korean capital, Seoul's Yonhap news agency reported, adding she was struck on the back of her head with a rock. The attack comes just weeks after opposition party leader Lee Jae-myung was stabbed in the neck while talking to reporters in the port city of Busan. South Korea is gearing up for a crucial election on April 10, in which President Yoon Suk-yeol's conservative party aims to regain

a parliamentary majority for the first time since 2016. Local broadcaster SBS aired CCTV footage released by Bae's office, which showed the assailant following the lawmaker into a building and suddenly striking her head with an object, the nature of which was blurred. In the footage, he continues to attack her even after she falls to the ground. Park Seok-gyu, a doctor at the Seoul hospital where Bae was being treated, said medical staff used a stapler to perform two sutures to treat a one-centimetre scalp injury. "Currently, it's not a situation where there is a great deal of concern, but still, it is a situation that requires some monitoring," Park told reporters, adding the lawmaker was experiencing swelling of the head and anxiety. The male assailant, who allegedly asked Bae to confirm her identity as a lawmaker before assaulting her, was arrested by police at the scene of the attack in Seoul's upscale district of Gangnam, reported Yonhap. Po-

lice said the assailant was a minor, according to Yonhap. Local broadcaster YTN aired an image that showed what appeared to be blood stains on the ground at the scene of the attack. Bae, a former news anchor, was President Yoon's spokeswoman when he was the president-elect. The ruling People Power Party's interim chief Han Dong-hoon visited Bae at the hospital last night and told reporters that the incident should "never have happened". Bae Hyun-jin asked him to "tell the public not to worry too much" as she was "overcoming the situation well", Han said. Opposition leader Lee underwent surgery after he was stabbed on January 2 and returned to work around two weeks later. In a statement, ruling party spokesman Park Jung-ha expressed "serious concern about the renewed violence and political terrorism in this chaotic era filled with extreme politics and politics of hatred".

# Japanese business leaders return to China seeking to boost co-operation

Reuters  
Beijing

A delegation of about 200 Japanese business leaders and CEOs returned to China this week in their first visit since 2019 as they sought to bolster economic relations in the face of geopolitical headwinds that have strained bilateral ties. Japanese economic delegations had visited China every year since 1975, but those visits lapsed during the Covid-19 era when China largely shuttered its borders due to its stringent pandemic policies. Yesterday, delegates from the powerful Keidanren, as the Japan Business Federation is known, and Japan-China Economic Association met Chinese Premier Li Qiang at the Great Hall of the People. "Premier Li Qiang said China-

Japan relations are currently in a critical period of inheriting the past and ushering in the future," Wang Wenbin, a Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson, told a regular news conference. "It is hoped that the Japanese economic community will actively exert an influence on win-win co-operation between China and Japan." Beijing-based Toshihiro Ueda, vice-chairman of the Japanese Chamber of Commerce in China, told Reuters that the meeting with Li and other sessions "were quite significant in confirming both sides' desire for better business relations". "We discussed quite frankly broad topics and shared each other's views to tackle challenges," said Ueda, who was part of the talks. Ties between Japan and China have become strained after the

world's second- and third-largest economies clashed over issues from Japan's release of treated radioactive water into the ocean to detention of Japanese citizens on suspicion of espionage. Japan's curbs on exports of advanced chipmaking equipment to China have also fanned Chinese accusations that Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's government was following in the United States' footsteps in "containing" China's economic development. But during a rare meeting between Kishida and Chinese President Xi Jinping in November, both men agreed their countries ought to pursue mutually beneficial relations. Japan is heavily reliant on China, where Japanese companies have for years invested in building manufacturing supply chains and forged relationships with local partners.

# India rolls out red carpet for Macron as France eyes trade deals

AFP  
Jaipur

President Emmanuel Macron was given a red carpet reception in India yesterday with a welcome parade of elephants, as France eyes lucrative deals with the world's fifth-largest economy. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is to host Macron for a banquet in a 19th-century maharaja's palace yesterday evening, and today he will be the chief guest at a colourful military march-past with massed ranks of tanks, camel cavalry and a fighter jet fly-past. India's foreign ministry says New Delhi and Paris are "strategic partners", while the French presidency says the trip will "consolidate and deepen diplomatic and economic relations". Western democracies have concerns about human rights in India, their differences over the war in Ukraine and New Delhi's close ties with Moscow – its key military supplier. But the United States and its European allies are courting India as a military and economic counterweight to China. France hopes to build on its



India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi and France's President Emmanuel Macron visit at the Jantar Mantar observatory in Jaipur.

military contracts after the Indian defence ministry purchased French-made Rafale fighter jets and Scorpene-class submarines in multibillion-dollar deals. Macron – who, according to Indian media, is coming after US President Joe Biden was unable to take up an invite – is also hoping France can sell six EPR nuclear reactors. With a red flower garland around his neck, Macron shook hands with cheering schoolchildren waving flags of both nations after landing

in Jaipur, in Rajasthan state. "We want to have more Indian students in France," he said. Modi was guest of honour at France's annual Bastille Day celebrations last July, and Macron is to receive a similar welcome. Paris and New Delhi collaborate on space and satellite technology, and the French delegation includes astronaut Thomas Pesquet. The visit included a stop at Jaipur's 18th-century Jantar Mantar astronomical observation site.



An artist gives finishing touches to a painting of French President Emmanuel Macron outside an art school in Mumbai.

On Friday, Macron will watch a military parade in New Delhi for Republic Day, the 75th anniversary of India's constitution. Just as Indian soldiers marched down the streets of Paris in 2023, a French contingent will join the military spectacle, as French-built jets roar overhead. India is "a key partner in contributing to international peace and security", the French presidency said ahead of the visit. Last year, Macron visited neighbouring Bangladesh and Sri Lanka,

and also took a Pacific trip aimed at "recommitting" France to the wider Asia-Pacific region. The French president was last in India for the G20 summit in September. Rights issues will also be discussed. Journalists, activists and religious minorities have complained of harassment since Modi's Hindu nationalist government took power in 2014, with accusations of rising religious intolerance towards the country's Muslim minority. Modi's government has

been accused of stifling independent media, with India falling 21 places to 161 out of 180 countries in Reporters Without Borders' press freedom index since Modi took office a decade ago. French journalist Vanessa Doug-nac was told this month that she is facing expulsion after more than two decades in India for what authorities have termed "malicious and critical" reporting. The visit also comes days after Modi opened a Hindu temple, built on grounds where a mosque stood for centuries before it was torn down in 1992 by Hindu zealots incited by members of his party. Modi said the temple heralded a "new era" for India after a ceremony that embodied the triumph of his muscular Hindu nationalist politics, galvanising loyalists ahead of elections this year. Macron is slated to visit a Muslim Sufi shrine in New Delhi's Nizamuddin West neighbourhood during his visit. "There are no taboo subjects", a French presidential adviser said ahead of the trip. "But the goal is to discuss them with respect and with the aim of achieving concrete results".



Florida lawmakers vote to curb children’s access to social media

The Florida House of Representatives has approved a bill aimed at barring children aged 16 and younger from social media platforms, following similar action in several states to limit online risks to young teenagers.

Passed by a bipartisan vote of 106 to 13, the measure would require social media platforms to terminate the accounts of anyone under 17 years old and use a third-party verification system to screen out the under-aged.

“We must address the harmful effects social media platforms have on the development and well-being of our kids,” said Florida House Speaker Paul Renner. “Florida has a compelling state interest and duty to protect our children, their mental health, and their childhood.”

The bill would also require firms to permanently delete personal information collected from the terminated accounts and let parents bring civil suits against those failing to do so.

The legislation now goes to the Florida state Senate for consideration. Republicans control both chambers of the state legislature.

Sponsors said the measure was necessary to protect children from depression, anxiety and other mental health woes they say are linked to excessive use of social media, whose addictive aspects critics say make children especially vulnerable.

Opponents argued that the bill goes too far, with some urging less restrictive measures, such as letting parents opt in or out of allowing their children to use social media.

Meta, the parent company of Instagram and Facebook, opposed the legislation, usually referred to as HBI, saying that it would limit parental discretion and raise data privacy concerns.

The Florida measure does not identify any Internet companies by name.

Instead, it defines a social media platform as an online forum that tracks account holders’ activity by letting them create user profiles, then upload content or view the content or activities of other users and interact with, or track, them.

Among the defining social media functions highlighted by the bill are “addictive, harmful or deceptive design features” or those that induce “an excessive or compulsive need to use or engage with” the platform.

However, the measure exempts websites and applications whose predominant function is e-mail, messaging or texting, as well as streaming services, news, sports and entertainment sites, along with online shopping, gaming and academic sites.

Utah became the first US state to adopt laws regulating children’s access to social media in March 2023, followed by others, such as Arkansas, Louisiana, Ohio and Texas, according to a legislative analysis prepared for the Florida bill.

It said numerous other states were also contemplating similar regulations.

In 2015 the European Union in 2015 passed a law requiring parental consent for a child to access social media, the analysis added. – Reuters

Colombia seeks help with forest fires as smoke blankets capital

AFP/Reuters  
Bogota

Colombia has appealed for international help as it battled dozens of forest fires burning vast swathes of the country and covering the capital in a blanket of smoke.

As hundreds of firefighters and volunteers battled flames on the mountains around Bogota for a fourth consecutive day, schools and a university in the worst affected areas scrapped in-person classes and dozens of flights from the El Dorado international airport were delayed or cancelled due to poor visibility.

Hundreds of blazes have already been extinguished countrywide in recent weeks amid record temperatures and dry conditions linked to the El Nino weather phenomenon.

More than 6,600 hectares (16,300 acres) of vegetation have been destroyed so far, according to the National Disaster Risk Management Unit (UNGRD).

Thirty-one fires were still raging in five regions of Colombia yesterday – at least three of them around Bogota.

President Gustavo Petro said he had ordered the “activation of international aid protocols” and announced that offers of help have already come from the United States, Chile, Peru and Canada.

He has declared a natural disaster, allowing funds to be diverted from other budget items towards containing the blazes.

In the departments of Santander and Cundinamarca – of which Bogota is the capital – fires have consumed about 600 hectares of forest, officials said.

Authorities have warned of a “significant deterioration” in air quality in the city of some 8mn people, with Bogotans counselled against outdoor physical activity.

Many pedestrians wore facemasks.

“I am very worried ... My God! It’s terrible,” resident Andrea Gomez, 48, told AFP.

The city council advised citizens to close their windows and leave wet towels under their doors, and Mayor Carlos Fernando Galan said he was in touch with the Spanish ambassador regarding possible assistance as the situation “can become more critical”.

Hundreds of wild animals including raccoon-like animals called coatis, porcupines, birds and frogs have been fleeing the heat and flames in one of the world’s most biodiverse countries, and spotted in growing numbers in built-up areas.

Citizens have mobilised to bring snacks and drinks to firefighters, and sharing appeals on social media to leave out water for distressed animals.

Images shared by Colombia’s Civil Aviation Authority showed a dense white smoke cloud engulfing the control tower at El Dorado, where airport officials said 48 flights were cancelled yesterday, 16 deviated to other airports and many others delayed.

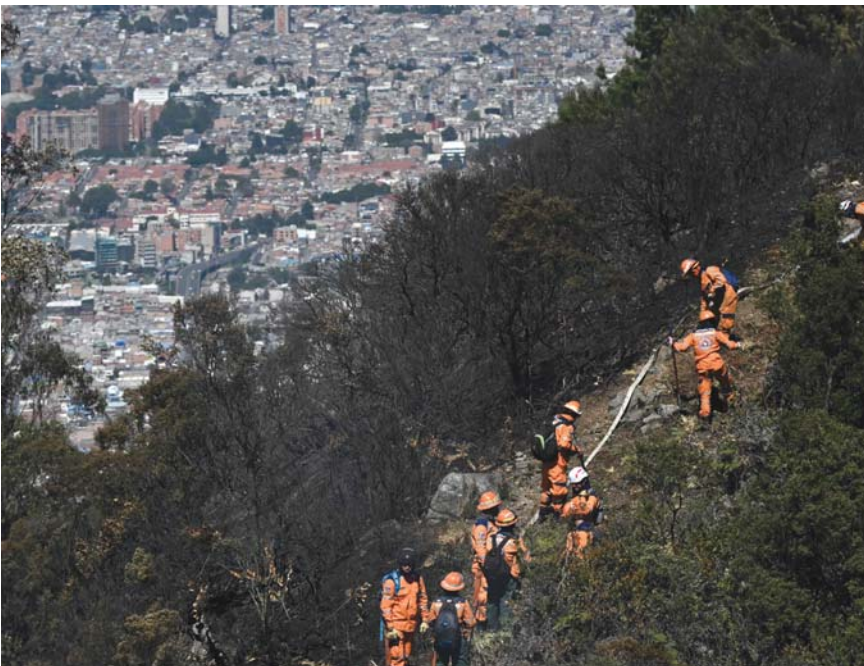
Petro said global warming was aggravating the effects of El Nino – a phenomenon typically associated with increased temperatures worldwide, drought in some parts of the world and heavy rains in others.

“This may be the hottest year in the history of mankind,” said the president, calling on “every mayor, every governor and the national government” to prioritise water supplies.

Sixty-two municipalities were facing water stress, he added.

Nine towns in the north, centre and east of Colombia posted record temperatures this week of up to 40.4° Celsius (105° Fahrenheit) in what is typically the coldest month in Colombia.

Some 300 firefighters, soldiers, police officers and volunteers with the backing of water-bearing helicopters and drones were fighting the fires around the capital yesterday, according to Galan.



Members of Colombian Civil Defence work to put out a forest fire near Bogota.

They were also using hoes, rakes and machetes to create firebreaks on the sloping hills bordering the sprawling capital.

Soldier Gustavo Andres Betancourt described challenging conditions.

“Some hotspots are still active. They are being contained, but at night, due to the high altitude and the winds, they start up again, creating new fires,” he said.

The Ideam meteorology institute said yesterday that more than 87% of the country was at “maximum risk” for fires.

Hot, dry conditions are expected to last through June, according to forecasters.

Colombia has put out some 204 fires this month – around eight per day – and 25 fires continued to burn, according to a report

from the environment ministry.

Almost half of the 2tn peso budget (\$508mn) for addressing issues caused by El Nino, like fighting fires, has already been spent, the report said.

Earlier this month, Colombia’s Environment Minister Susana Mohamed warned the country was at grave risk of forest fires that could worsen deforestation.

Climate change has been blamed for driving a record drought that has hit all nine countries in the Amazon basin – including Colombia – according to a study on Wednesday which found global warming made the drought 30 times more likely.

The drought is expected to worsen this year, scientists told Reuters in 2023.

South America dengue spike prompts vaccination drive

South America is seeing a surge in cases of the mosquito-borne disease dengue during the southern hemisphere summer, prompting Brazil to roll out a novel vaccine campaign, while in Argentina many stores have run out of bug spray.

With 2023 already having set a record for dengue cases in the region, Argentina has seen a sharp spike in the disease that’s endemic in much of Latin America. While often asymptomatic, dengue can be fatal.

Brazil this month has started spraying insecticide from trucks as the disease rips through previously unaffected regions, while hospitals in Paraguay have set up night clinics to attend to the sick due to elevated dengue activity.

Argentina has recorded over 12,500 cases of the disease in the last month, according to the latest official health bulletin, a big jump versus the same period a year ago, leading to health warnings and shortages of insect repellent.

“Repellent sold out everywhere, there were literal clouds of mosquitoes,” Buenos Aires resident Laura Ledesma told Reuters from Argentina’s capital, before adding that there were signs the situation had begun to improve. “Things seem to be more manageable than earlier in January.”

In Brazil, where dengue is often called breakbone fever for the severe joint pain it causes, cases have more than doubled in the first week of January compared to the same period last year.

Brazil will become the first country in the world to offer a dengue vaccine through the public health system, which officials said could begin within days.

South America and beyond is seeing the spread of dengue exacerbated as rising temperatures and the El Nino weather pattern in the Pacific contribute to prolonged dengue seasons and the geographical spread of infections, scientists say.



Health workers sprays insecticide to kill the Aedes aegypti mosquito to help mitigate a dengue outbreak in the Ceilandia neighbourhood of Brasilia.

“Climate change has expanded the range for mosquitoes to breed, both in the Americas and globally,” Thais dos Santos, who specialises in arboviral, or insect-borne, diseases at the Pan American Health Organisation (PAHO), told Reuters.

PAHO data shows that last year topped a previous 2019 record for dengue cases in the Americas, with some 4.2mn cases and 2,050 deaths.

Much of that was in the so-called “Southern Cone” of South America.

Spread by mosquitoes, dengue outbreaks typically occur three to five years after a previous epidemic.

The December-February southern summer months bring ideal hot and humid conditions for mosquitoes to breed, spreading the potentially deadly disease that can cause high fever, muscle pain and internal bleeding.

Paraguay and Uruguay issued epidemio-

logical alerts for the illness in December following intense rains, as standing water also provides ideal mosquito breeding conditions.

Residents in Brasilia were queuing this week outside temporary medical facilities set up to test for dengue as caseloads in the Brazilian capital have leapt by as much as 646% in the first 20 days of January versus last year.

Trucks spraying insecticide in the worst-hit areas have been deployed in so-called ‘fogging’ operations to slow transmission.

Nelson Diego, 37, who tested positive for dengue in the Brasilia neighbourhood of Recanto das Emas where fumigation is underway, said he was suffering muscle pain and fatigue from the disease, though some days were tougher than others.

“Today is one of the better days because I can still open my eyes,” he said. “I had a lot of pain in my joints and couldn’t walk before.”

– Reuters

Four officers killed in Mexico shooting

Four police officers were killed in shooting in the central Mexican state of Guanajuato, local authorities said yesterday, the latest casualties in one of the country’s most violent areas.

The attack took place on Wednesday evening, as the officers were driving through the town of Celaya.

According to local media, two people presumed to be civilians were also killed in the incident, but this toll was not confirmed by the authorities.

“On Wednesday evening, four members of the municipal police headquarters died after being attacked by armed men on the highway that runs from Celaya to Salvatierra,” the municipal security secretary said in a statement.

Following the shooting, the state police and National Guard launched an operation to find the suspects.

Guanajuato is one of the most violent states in Mexico, due in large part to the presence and activity of criminal gangs – including a pair of drug cartels feuding over trafficking routes.

More than 3,000 homicides were recorded there in 2023. – AFP

Top Venezuela, Guyana diplomats meet on border dispute

The foreign ministers of Guyana and Venezuela met yesterday in Brazil’s capital city to discuss the simmering crisis on their border over a disputed oil-rich region.

Guyanese Foreign Minister Hugh Hilton Todd and Venezuelan counterpart Yvan Gil met in Brasilia for the first high-level talks on the disputed Essequibo region since their respective presidents held a crisis summit in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines last month.

Neither diplomat made statements as they arrived at Brazil’s foreign ministry headquarters for the meeting, which was also attended by their Brazilian counterpart Mauro Vieira.

With both sides holding firm, observers do not expect a

major breakthrough on Venezuela’s claim to Essequibo, which makes up about two-thirds of Guyanese territory. The crisis has triggered international concern over a potential military conflict in relatively peaceful South America, though Presidents Irfaan Ali and Nicolas Maduro agreed at their meeting on December 14 not to resort to force.

Essequibo has been administered by Guyana for more than a century and is the subject of border litigation before the International Court of Justice in The Hague – whose jurisdiction in the matter Venezuela rejects.

The region is home to 125,000 of Guyana’s 800,000 citizens, but Caracas has long claimed the region should be under its control. – AFP

Pokemon Company looks to probe Palworld over copycat claims

AFP/Reuters

San Francisco/Tokyo

The Pokemon Company has warned that it plans to investigate reports that the new hit video game Palworld violates the intellectual copyright of its iconic franchise.

Widely described as “Pokemon with Guns” when it was released last week, the makers of Palworld said it sold more than 8mn copies in less than six days.

Released on the online Steam platform, Palworld blends weapon-wielding player avatars with monsters that look similar to those in the wildly popular Pokemon franchise, part-owned by Nintendo.

The title, which is also available on the Xbox, has received praise from reviewers for its gameplay while generating debate over perceived similarities with the family-friendly Pokemon series.

“We have received many inquiries regarding another company’s game released in January 2024,” the Pokemon Company said in a statement.

“We have not granted any permission for the use of Pokemon intellectual property or assets in that game,” it added, without referring to Palworld by name.

The company said it intends to “investigate and take appropriate measures to address any acts that infringe on intellectual property rights related to the Pokemon”.



This illustration photo shows the trailer for the game Palworld being played on a smartphone in front of a screen showing the PocketPair website.

As of now Palworld is in early-access mode and still being developed, with the help of feedback from players, its creators, Japan-based PocketPair, said in describing its new game.

The game is home to more than 100 different characters – called “Pals” – that players can capture and turn into allies for adventures in the game, according to its creators.

As the game went viral, some on social media accused PocketPair of copying from Pokemon, posting images of very similar-looking characters and features from the game and the franchise.



## Ukraine investigative reporters facing increasing ‘intimidation’: RSF

Ukrainian investigative journalists focused on exposing corruption in the country have in recent weeks been facing increasing acts of intimidation, Paris-based press freedom group Reporters Without Borders (Reporters Sans Frontières in French, RSF) warned yesterday.

“Several worrying cases of intimidation have emerged in recent weeks and we hope this is not a trend that will continue,” the

group’s Ukraine specialist Pauline Maufrais told AFP.

In a statement, RSF said it is “concerned about the increasing pressure on the media and calls for investigations to be conducted thoroughly, transparently and independently”.

It listed three cases that took place or were exposed within the space of a week including that of Yuriy Nikolov, an investigative reporter for the anti-corruption

media outlet Nashy Hroshy.

On January 14, masked individuals tried to force their way into his Kyiv apartment while at the same time threatening him with being forcibly enlisted to fight in the Ukrainian army against the Russian invasion.

Odesa-based journalist Iryna Hryb, who reported on cereal exports in the region, found a device in her car that could be used to listen to her phone calls or con-

versations with passengers and to track her movements.

The staff of Bihus.info, an outlet that publishes investigative reporting on corruption, discovered from a video exposing their personal lives that was posted on social media on January 16 that they had been subjected to surreptitious filming and eavesdropping for months, RSF added.

“The outlets concerned do not rule out that this is linked to the investigations they

have published in recent months on corruption,” Maufrais said.

Numerous investigative outlets operate in Ukraine, which for years has always enjoyed a far more vibrant media landscape than in Russia.

Even after the invasion by Russia in 2022, they have carried on exposing official corruption, including procurement scandals concerning the ministry of defence. – **AFP**

## Russia opens ‘terrorism’ probe into plane crash

AFP  
Moscow

Russia has opened a “terrorism” investigation over a military plane crash near the border with Ukraine after it accused Kyiv of downing the aircraft, which it said had more than 60 captured Ukrainian soldiers onboard.

The Russian defence and foreign ministries have blamed Ukrainian forces for downing the IL-76 transport plane over the southern Belgorod region on Wednesday.

“A criminal case under a terrorist act is being investigated in the Belgorod region on the IL-76 plane,” Russia’s Investigative Committee, which probes major crimes, said in a statement.

Moscow said there were no survivors among the 65 Ukrainian prisoners of war, three crew members and three military personnel onboard.

The Investigative Committee said “experienced detectives, criminalists and experts” were working at the scene, adding that “the plane was downed by a “missile from the territory of Ukraine”.

Yesterday Russia published for the first time what it said was footage of where the IL-76 military plane crashed.

The 39-second video of the scene was released by the Investigative Committee.

It mainly showed aerial shots of a large blackened stretch in a snow-covered field with some damaged trees.

The video also showed just one small destroyed airplane part of twisted metal and cables, and some human remains – a hand and an arm, though it is unclear if they were from one or two people.

While Kyiv has not denied the Russian allegations outright, they have questioned key aspects of its narrative, such as whether its servicemen were killed.

## Top French court scraps large parts of new immigration law

Reuters/AFP  
Paris

Large parts of a new French immigration law, including restrictions on access to welfare benefits for migrants and to citizenship for their children born in France, must be scrapped, the Constitutional Council said yesterday.

The court, which determines whether laws are constitutional, struck down 35 of the 80 measures contained in the bill.

Most of the scrapped clauses were introduced by opposition right-wing lawmakers during a turbulent parliamentary process.

Measures, including making it harder for migrants to bring in relatives to live with them in France, for birth in France to lead to citizenship and to get access to state welfare, were scrapped for procedural reasons.

The ruling offers some relief to President Emmanuel Macron, who had made the bill a key plank of his second term.

Macron, who lacks a working majority in parliament, was embarrassed by the support it drew from Marine Le Pen’s far-right National Rally party as conservative lawmakers hardened its content.

The toughened version of the text caused a revolt among lawmakers from the ruling party and led a minister to resign.

Along with three other groups, Macron had referred the legislation to the Council.

Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin welcomed the ruling.

“The Constitutional Council has approved all the government’s text,” he wrote on X, formally Twitter. “Never has a bill included more measures to expel delinquents or introduced stricter requirements for the integration of foreigners”.

Gathered some hundred metres away from the courthouse, a group of people opposed to the bill said they were still concerned, despite the changes.

“We are a bit relieved but we remained worried – in the initial text there was lots of

bad stuff,” said Virgile Vaugelade, a schoolteacher in a Paris suburb, adding that he expected the rejected measures would be added at another time.

Of the measures the court annulled, 32 were purely on procedural grounds.

The court did not say whether the content of those clauses breached the constitution, meaning that they could be introduced in a future bill.

Public law professor Serge Slama said that the ruling works in the government’s favour while changing very little for migrant rights since the articles proposed by the right-wing lawmakers were axed on procedural grounds, not on their content.

“They said as little as they could, while fulfilling their role to make sure procedure is respected,” said Slama, professor at University Grenoble-Alpes, adding that this is commonplace in Constitutional Council decisions.

Far-right opposition leader Jordan Bardella criticised the judges.

“With the support of the president of the Republic himself, the Constitutional Council has censured the tough measures most approved by the French people,” he said on X, describing it as a “coup by the judges, with the backing of the president”.

He called for a referendum on immigration as the “only solution”.

The decision comes as Macron seeks to curb the rapid rise of the far-right, expected to make considerable gains in European elections in June.

Also yesterday, the interior ministry released its immigration figures for last year, showing France deported 17,000 people from the country, a 10% hike compared to 2022.

More than 323,000 people were awarded first-time residency papers, a slightly higher figure than in 2022, the ministry said.

However, Darmanin said more had been handed out for “economic reasons” – students and workers – and less for families seeking reunification.



Hot air balloons take part in the 44th International Hot Air Balloon Festival in Chateau-d’Oex, Switzerland.

## ‘Earth moves away’ as hot air balloons fly high above Swiss Alps

Dozens of colourful hot air balloons dotted the near-cloudless sky above the Swiss Alpine town of Chateau-d’Oex yesterday during an annual festival that enthralls scores of balloon fliers and spectators from around the world.

US balloon pilot Eliav Cohen, who has recorded more than 1,000 flight hours around the globe, describes the chance to fly above the Swiss Alps as “the greatest blessing I could ever ask for in my ballooning career”.

“This is the most incredible place to fly in the world,” he said. “To be able to fly above the Alps at 8,000-9,000’ (2,438-2,743m) is absolutely mind-blowing”.

The International Balloon Festival Chateau-d’Oex closes on Sunday.

Located in an Alpine valley, the town is renowned for winds that make for particularly good flying.

“Flying in a balloon, there is no turbulence,” Cohen said “The Earth moves away from you, versus you moving away from it.”

– **Reuters**

## Trump opens up lead over Biden in a rematch many Americans don’t want

By Jason Lange  
Reuters

Donald Trump leads Democratic President Joe Biden by six percentage points in a Reuters/Ipsos poll that showed Americans are unhappy about an election rematch that came into sharper focus this week.

The nationwide poll of 1,250 US adults showed Trump leading Biden 40% to 34%, with the rest unsure or planning to vote for someone else or no one.

The poll had a margin of error of three percentage points.

That represented a gain for Trump after a Reuters/Ipsos poll conducted earlier this month showed him and Biden tied, though a nationwide survey does not capture the subtleties of the electoral college contest that will be decided this fall in just a handful of competitive states.

As Trump handily beat his sole remaining primary challenger, Nikki Haley in New Hampshire on Tuesday, some 67% of respondents polled on Monday through

Wednesday said they were “tired of seeing the same candidates in presidential elections and want someone new”.

Still, just 18% said they would not vote if Biden and Trump were their choice.

“I hate to think that we’re constantly navigating the lesser of two evils,” said Kimberly Sofge, a 56-year-old project manager in Washington, DC, this week. “I honestly feel that we can do better”.

The two candidates themselves seem ready for a rematch following Trump’s back-to-back wins in Iowa and New Hampshire, with the White House regarding Trump as a beatable challenger, and Trump fuming because Haley did not immediately drop out of the Republican race.

Trump’s six-point lead held even when respondents were given the option of voting for third-party candidates, including anti-vaccine activist Robert F Kennedy Jr, with Trump drawing 36% support, Biden 30% and Kennedy 8%.

Slightly more than half of respondents said they were dissatisfied with the US two-party system, with just one in four satisfied by it.

Whitney Tallarico, 33, a consultant interviewed in Washington, is among those considering an alternative.

“The independents don’t really have a voice. Polarising characters usually take the front seat, and it’s a little sad for our country,” Tallarico said this week.

Asked whether she would vote for Biden or Trump, she said: “I’ll probably go for a third party”.

Overall, the poll gave numerous signs that voters are not happy with their choices.

Seventy per cent of respondents – including about half of Democrats – agreed with a statement that Biden should not seek re-election.

Fifty-six per cent of people responding to the poll said Trump should not run, including about a third of Republicans.

Biden has been weighed down by the widespread view that at 81, already the oldest person ever to be US president, he is too old for the job.

Three-quarters of poll respondents agreed with a statement that Biden was too old to work in government, while half said

the same about Trump, who at 77 would also be among the oldest US leaders ever if returned to the White House.

Just over half of Democrats saw Biden as too old while a third of Republicans viewed Trump that way.

Haley, 52, is trying to marshal dissatisfaction to turn around her well-financed but flagging campaign.

“Most Americans do not want a rematch between Biden and Trump,” she said on Tuesday after her loss to Trump in New Hampshire.

“The first party to retire its 80-year-old candidate is going to be the party that wins this election,” she added.

The new poll showed Trump with a towering nationwide lead over Haley – 64% to 19% – as they prepare for the February 24 Republican nomination contest in South Carolina, which Haley led as governor 2011-2017.

Turnout could still be high in the November general election in part because voters from both parties are highly motivated to beat the other side.

Fifty-nine per cent of respondents who

said they planned to vote for Biden said they were motivated primarily by opposition to Trump, while Trump voters were more positive about their candidate and his policies, with just 39% describing their vote as one against Biden.

Anti-Trump sentiment helped Biden defeat Trump in the 2020 election, when a record-high share of eligible voters cast ballots.

Another factor that could weigh on Trump: 55% of Republicans in the poll said he should be convicted and sentenced to prison if he broke the law.

Trump, who is currently facing four criminal prosecutions, has argued in court that he should be immune to prosecution for actions taken while he was still president.

To be sure, most Republicans do not think he is guilty – only one in five Republican respondents said it was believable that Trump solicited election fraud, one of the key charges against him, and four out of five said his political opponents were abusing the legal system to derail his presidential bid.

## Two prominent Haley donors to stop funding

Two major donors stopped funding Republican presidential candidate Nikki Haley’s campaign, saying that the race for the party’s nomination was effectively over and that Donald Trump will be the party nominee.

Trump issued a threat to donors on Wednesday night to stop funding Haley as he seeks to knock her out of the race before the next major primary race, in South Carolina on February 24.

Metals magnate Andy Sabin said in an interview that the Republican race was over, given that Haley had not been able to pull off an upset in the New Hampshire primary on Tuesday.

“Haley needs to drop out,” Sabin said late on Wednesday. “Regardless of what anyone tells you, her money is going to dry up. Why would you fund someone who you know has no chance?”

Haley’s campaign did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Trump’s back-to-back victories in the Iowa and New Hampshire contests have made his

march to the Republican nomination almost certain as he looks ahead to a likely general election rematch with Democratic President Joe Biden in November.

Another major Haley donor, Reid Hoffman, the billionaire co-founder of online business and employment platform LinkedIn, also does not plan to keep funding her campaign.

Dmitri Mehlhorn, a Hoffman adviser, said in a statement to Reuters that Haley no longer had a path to the nomination.

“The only way I can see (a path) happening is if Trump has a ‘senior moment’, and she’s able to exploit it to persuade GOP voters that he’s lost it,” Mehlhorn said.

Haley, Trump’s last surviving Republican rival, has vowed to carry on, triggering a warning to her donors from Trump on his social media account on Wednesday night.

On the Truth Social app, Trump, who is furious at Haley for refusing to drop out, said anybody making a contribution to Haley would be “permanently barred” from his political orbit.

Haley responded on social media platform X with a link to donate to her campaign: “Well in that case ... donate here. Let’s Go,” she wrote.

A Haley campaign spokesperson said they had seen a “surge” as a result of her post.

Threatening Haley’s donors is just one tactic Trump and his campaign are using to pressure the former South Carolina governor to quit.

Trump’s team has also been courting donors, urging them to support him and in at least one case promising one-on-one meetings with Trump at his Mar-A-Lago Florida estate.

Haley donors brushed off Trump’s threat.

“Whatever,” said Eric Levine, a New York litigator.

“He sounds desperate,” said venture capitalist Tim Draper.

Retail businessman Art Pope said he was still backing Haley’s bid.

Sabin said Trump’s threat shows that he is a “nasty” person.

“It just does more harm,” he added. – **Reuters**

## Former Trump adviser Navarro jailed four months for contempt of Congress

Donald Trump’s trade adviser Peter Navarro was sentenced yesterday to four months in prison for contempt of Congress after refusing to co-operate with an investigation into the January 6, 2021, attack on the US Capitol.

Federal prosecutors in Washington had asked US District Judge Amit Mehta to give Navarro a six-month sentence, arguing that he chose allegiance to Trump over the rule of law.

“The defendant brazenly defied Congress,” prosecutor John Crabb said.

Navarro’s lawyers are asking for probation, arguing that the former White House adviser believed that he did not have to co-operate with Congress because he thought Trump had invoked the legal doctrine of executive privilege.

Navarro was found guilty in September of two counts of contempt of Congress for defying a subpoena to turn over documents and provide testimony to a Democratic-led House of Representatives panel.

“They led me to believe that privilege had been invoked and they accepted it,” Navarro said yesterday of the House committee.

The committee investigated the January 6 attack by Trump supporters and broader attempts by the former president to overturn his 2020 election loss to Democrat Joe Biden.

Navarro has asked that any sentence be put on hold while he pursues an appeal. – **Reuters**



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GULF TIMES

Should Germany's AfD be banned?

The recent revelation that politicians from Germany's far-right Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) met with right-wing activists last November to discuss an extremist "re-migration" plot has brought the debate over banning the party to a fever pitch. The clandestine meeting, held at a lakeside hotel near Potsdam, reportedly centred on the possibility of mass deportations of non-ethnic Germans if the far-right were to come to power. Alarmed by this horrifying vision, leaders from across the political spectrum, public intellectuals, and influential media commentators now argue that shutting down the AfD is necessary to safeguard German democracy.

The AfD's surging popular support has only heightened the sense of urgency, especially with regional elections scheduled in three of Germany's eastern states – the party's strongholds – later this year. More recently, the AfD has offered full-throated support for farmer protests against proposed subsidy cuts, raising concerns that the party could exploit the explosive situation for political gain.

Now, nearly half of the German public favours banning the AfD. And hundreds of thousands of Germans have participated in protests against the party in recent days. Moreover, an online petition calling for the government to strip Björn Höcke, the notorious AfD leader in the state of Thuringia, of his civil and political rights – a truly unprecedented proposal in Germany's post-war history – has collected more than one and a half million signatures.

But attempting to outlaw the country's second-most popular party would be democratically questionable and have unexpected – and potentially far-reaching – negative consequences.

Democratic values cannot be protected by curbing democratic freedoms

But the Court has set a high threshold for political exclusion, as demonstrated by earlier attempts to dissolve parties. In 2017, it rejected an application to outlaw the neo-Nazi National Democratic Party (NPD), despite the group's overtly racist and anti-democratic agenda. In fact, the Court last employed this mechanism in 1956, at the height of the Cold War, when it banned the Communist Party of Germany (KPD).

This precedent suggests that bringing a court case against the AfD would be anything but a formality and, more importantly, could easily turn into a political fiasco. Given the AfD's popularity, even asking the Court to ban the party would be widely perceived as a tactical ploy by established parties to eliminate an increasingly strong competitor, reinforcing the far-right's argument that the system is rigged. If this attempt ultimately failed, the AfD's cause would be strengthened, not weakened.

Moreover, Constitutional Court proceedings would inevitably be slow-moving – the case against the NPD took more than three years – and conclude long after the coming wave of elections has passed. But while any suggested benefits of an attempted AfD ban lie in the future, its negative repercussions would be felt immediately. In many ways, even debating legal action against the AfD only gives more ammunition to a party that thrives on a sense of victimhood.

Even in the unlikely event that the AfD is banned, only the party would disappear; its supporters – and their grievances – would not. Nothing would prevent AfD members from establishing a new right-wing party – an alternative to the Alternative.

It is high time to understand that fighting populism with legal activism will not work, and may even make the problem worse. The challenge from the far right must be confronted politically, with solutions that address the root causes of discontent: high energy prices, stagnant economic growth, persistently high levels of inward migration, and failed integration of the newcomers.

Certainly, liberal democracies must be vigilant – and they have both an obligation and a right to fight back, whether in the courts or on the floor of the Bundestag. But attempting to ban a political competitor is a short-cut around the unsettling fact that disgruntled voters have a legitimate right to express their grievances. Democratic values cannot be protected by curbing democratic freedoms.

The far-right challenge must be met in the voting booth, not at the judge's bench. A victory over the AfD by way of a legal ban would be a moral and political defeat. — Project Syndicate

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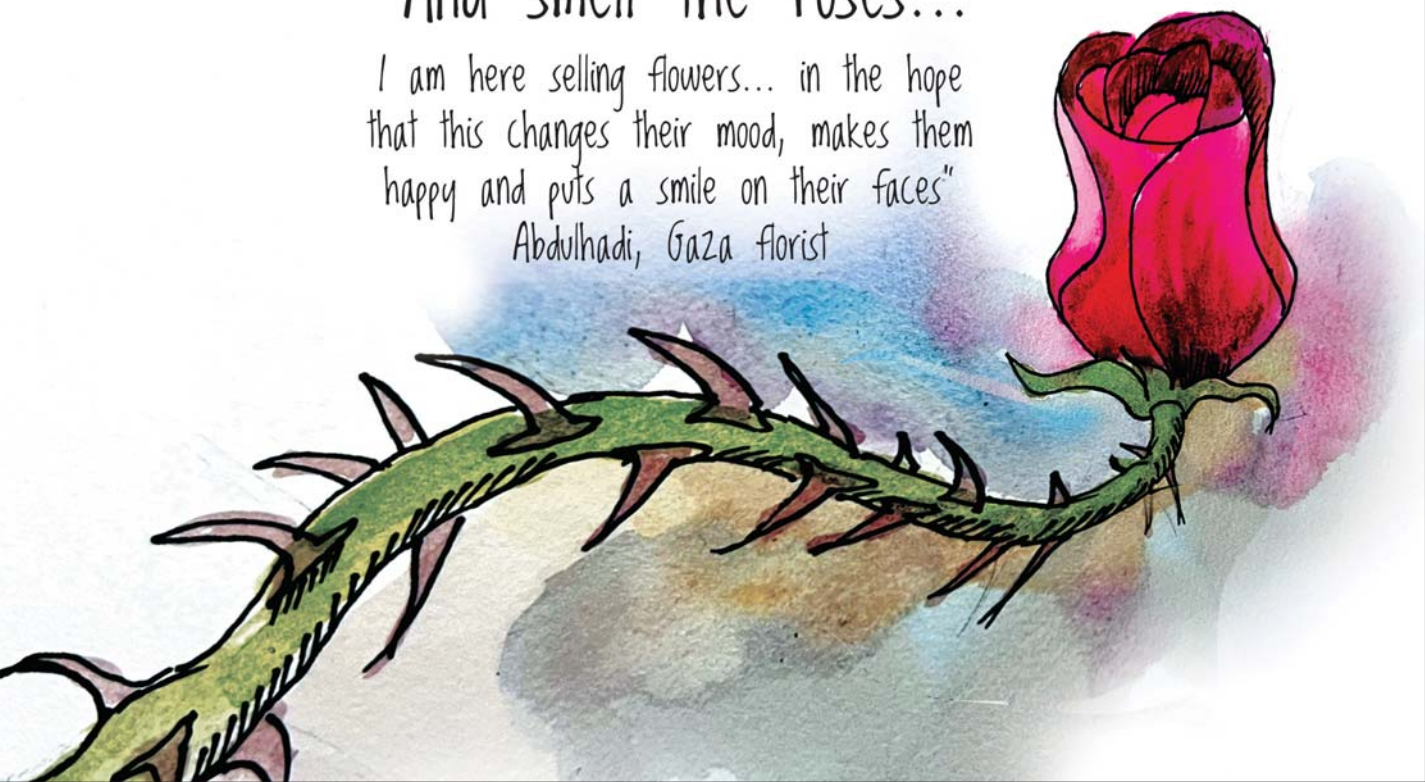
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KEYNOLD  
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Stop.  
And smell the roses...

I am here selling flowers... in the hope  
that this changes their mood, makes them  
happy and puts a smile on their faces"  
Abdulhadi, Gaza florist



Preparing Russia for permanent war

By Nina L Khrushcheva  
Moscow

In the late eighteenth century, Catherine the Great planned a tour of Crimea, which her court favourite, Count Grigory Potemkin, had conquered a few years earlier. But while Potemkin had managed to seize the agriculturally rich peninsula from the Ottoman Empire, he had failed to achieve the promised colonisation.

To save face, Potemkin ordered the construction of a row of painted pasteboard façades beside the river along which the empress would travel, and brought in cheerful villagers and herds of healthy livestock to complete the illusion. There was no prosperity, but it sure looked like there was.

Versions of "Potemkin villages" have been a staple of Russian history ever since. During Soviet times, the image that communism improved life for all obscured systemic violence and repression. And today, the Kremlin works tirelessly to create the impression that Russia is a beacon of stability and strength, and that a grateful people is fervently devoted to their leader, Vladimir Putin; but behind the façade, one finds disillusion, despair, fear, and rage.

You see this truth in contemporary Russian films and television, because popular

culture finds it hard to lie completely about the state of politics. In the Russian crime drama *The Boy's World: Blood on the Asphalt*, violent and chaotic politics translate into violent and chaotic streets. When leaders insist that enemies lurk everywhere and that the best defence is to strike first, paranoia, intolerance, and aggression grow.

It should be no surprise, then, that as Putin wages war on Ukraine, Russian children bully their classmates; teenagers film themselves attacking local residents; and adults get into public brawls.

Today's Russia is nothing like the citadel of stability and satisfaction nor the bastion of prosperity that the Kremlin claims it to be. Though Russian GDP grew by more than 3% in 2023, despite Western sanctions, this hardly reflects genuine, let alone sustainable, economic dynamism.

Instead, it reflects the fact that the state has poured massive resources into the military-industrial complex. But those resources had to be reallocated from somewhere, and a series of catastrophes – including infrastructure disasters, energy-supply breakdowns, and fires at factories and warehouses – offer clues about where.

Moreover, the Ukraine war triggered a mass exodus of

Russians, including many with valuable skills, such that 85% of businesses are now reporting a shortage of qualified manpower. Some estimate that, by 2030, Russia will be short up to four million capable workers, which would shave about two percentage points from GDP growth.

As in any dictatorship, the more problems Putin's regime has, the louder the propaganda. This explains why last November – on National Unity Day – a massive "forum and exhibition" simply called "Russia" opened in Moscow. The six-month event, timed to end after the presidential election in March, is intended to be a "large-scale projection of the country," with 131 expositions showcasing Russia's "main achievements," from "breakthrough discoveries" to Russian "victories" in "industry, culture, and sports."

The Russia that the exhibition presents might be as glorious as Putin claims, but like Potemkin's villages, it is a blatant attempt to obscure a dark truth with appealing lies. Moreover, it is being used to bolster Putin's cult of personality. In this sense, the choice of venue for the event could not be more appropriate: the Exhibition of Achievements of the National Economy (VDNKh) was built at the height of Stalin's purges.

Putin's image and avatar preside over the proceedings, talking to workers, meeting with doctors, and praying with clergy on giant screens positioned in the venue's pavilions. Meanwhile, the exhibition's gift shop sells merchandise plastered with quotes from the president. "The Russian flag can't bother anyone," declares a T-shirt. "It's equally honourable to be our friends and our enemies," adds a sweatshirt.

For Russians who can't make it to the VDNKh gift shop, similar quotes were featured on giant outdoor screens across the country during the first two weeks of this year. "The golden reserve of the nation is its people," Russians were reminded as they walked down the street. "We can do anything when our road is lit with love for the fatherland."

This is the language learned in Soviet Dictator 101. No-one can forget the posters of Stalin in a cream-coloured military-style jacket handing out ice cream to happy children, looming over tiled fields and crowds of peasants, or simply looking proudly into the distance. Images of him were ubiquitous during his rule, plastered onto the sides of buildings, carried as banners in parades, even woven into carpets. Others, from Lenin to Brezhnev, also produced posters touting their simultaneously grand and bland pronouncements.

The goal of current Kremlin propaganda is not to convince people that life in Russia is safe and prosperous. It might have started out that way, but as the Ukraine war drags on, Putin has had to adapt. Now, echoing Stalin's narrative that progress toward socialism brings more challenges, requiring intensification of the class struggle, Putin is using propaganda to prepare Russians for more war.

The effort is hardly covert. On January 14, a Ministry of Defence pavilion titled "Army for children. City of professions. Future of the country" was opened at the VDNKh exhibition. On the same day, another Moscow exhibition – "The Trial. Franz Kafka and 20th-Century Art," held at the Jewish Museum (also known as the Tolerance Center) – was closed.

What Russia needs today are precisely the messages the Kafka exhibition delivered: the Soviet system was absurd, but capable of ruthless efficiency in crushing innocent individuals. Instead, the messages Russians are now receiving are becoming more militarised and less tolerant by the day – a façade behind which lie sham elections, a weakening economy, and proliferating violence. Potemkin would be proud. — Project Syndicate

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MARATHON: Russian President Vladimir Putin is using propaganda to prepare Russians for more war, writes the author. (Reuters)



# Masjid: the fortress of Islamic faith

The masjid is the fortress of faith; the guardian of virtues; the home of the pious; the meeting place of Muslims; the centre of consultation and mutual advice, and the first school from which the Muslim graduates. The masjid provides relief and respite to the needy and the distressed. Muslim armies sprang from the masjid and spread the message of Islam to all parts of the world within a short time.

The masjid occupies a prominent place in Islam because prayer is the second most important pillar of Islam and the masjid is where it is performed. In fact, the word masjid is derived from the word for prostrate: *Sajada*. The masjid symbolises Islamic monotheism and the unity of the Muslim *Ummah*. When the call to prayer is made five times a day, the community comes together in the congregational prayer and all Muslims regardless of their race, colour, social, and economic status stand before their Lord in response to His call to prosperity. The masjid has certain functions and etiquette which must be taken into consideration when attending it:

**a) Congregational prayers:** Islam has made performing the prayer in congregation one of the most important duties of a Muslim. Abdullah Ibn Umar, *radhiallahu ‘anhu*, narrated that the Prophet, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, said: “Prayer in congregation is better than prayer performed individually by 27 degrees.” (Related by Al-Bukhari and Muslim). In addition, prayer performed in larger congregations and more distant masjids carries more reward.

Thus, the masjid serves as a meeting place for Muslims where they get to know news of each other and the community at large. Congregational prayer obviously has many spiritual and social benefits. It reinforces the unity and co-operation of Muslims as it strengthens the ties of brotherhood among them. After the prayer, Muslims exchange greetings and inquire about one another’s well being. Thus, it becomes easy to notice community members who may be sick, in difficulty, or in need.

**b) Entering and leaving the masjid:** When going to the masjid, one is encouraged to proceed with calmness and humility. He should make supplications on his way. One of the supplications the Prophet, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, used to make was: “In the name of Allah, I put my trust in Allah. There is no power or strength except with Allah.” (Related by Abu Dawud, Al-Tirmidhi and Al-Nasa’i). When

entering the masjid, one should begin with the right foot first and say: “Oh Allah, forgive me my sins and open for me the doors of Your mercy.” Similarly, when leaving the masjid, he should step out with the left foot first and say: “O Allah, forgive me my sins and open for me the doors of Your bounty.”

If a person enters the masjid when the prayer has already started, he should not rush to catch up as he might distract those in prayer. Once, the Prophet, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, noticed the sound of people rushing to join a prayer in progress and he said to them: “...When you come to the prayer, come with calmness and tranquillity. Perform whatever part of it you can (with the congregation) and complete what you have missed.” (Related by Al-Bukhari).

**c) Greeting others in the masjid:** The Prophet, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, stressed spreading the greeting of peace, “as-salamu alaykum,” at all times. He said: “You will not enter Paradise until you believe, and you will not believe until you love one another. Shall I direct you to something which if you do, you will love one another? Spread the greeting of peace among you.” (Related by Muslim). So, upon entering the masjid, it is appropriate to greet those who are already there.

**d) Performing two Rak’at as a greeting to the masjid:** When one enters the masjid, it is a *Sunnah* to perform two *rak’at* - which serve as a greeting to the masjid - before sitting down. The Prophet, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, said: “When one of you enters the masjid, he should perform two *rak’at* before sitting down.” (Related by Al-Bukhari). However, if one enters the masjid after the *iqamah* (call for commencement of prayer) is made, he should not initiate any other prayer. On the other hand, if he begins a *Sunnah* prayer and the *iqamah* is made before completing it, he may either proceed to finish it quickly, or discontinue and join the congregation. The Messenger of Allah, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, said: “If the *iqamah* is made, then no prayer other than the obligatory one should be performed.” (Related by Al-Bukhari and Muslim).

**e) Straightening the rows:** Before starting the prayer, the congregation should stand in straight rows without leaving any gaps in between. The Prophet used to make sure that all the lines were in order and he said: “Verily, making the rows straight is part of the proper performing



of prayer.” (Related by Al-Bukhari and Muslim). He also said: “Be close together and straighten your rows.” (Related by Al-Bukhari and Muslim). The rows symbolise the unity, equality and brotherhood of Muslims. There are no privileges or reserved places within the rows. Muslims of all races and nationalities - rich and poor, powerful and weak - stand next to each other in obedience to Allah. They stand shoulder to shoulder, face the same direction, and follow the same imam in unison.

**f) Distracting other people in the masjid:** The Muslim, while in prayer is in private conversation with his Lord. It is therefore not permissible to distract him in any way. Disturbing someone praying even with audible recitation of the Qur’an is discouraged. The Prophet, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, heard people reciting the Qur’an aloud while others were praying and he said: “Verily, each one of you is in private conversation with his Lord. So, you should not disturb each other. And you are not to raise your voices against each other in the recitation.” (Related by Abu Dawud, Al-Nasa’i, Al-Bayhaqi, and Al-Hakim).

On the other hand, Islam does not forbid engaging in lawful conversation in the masjid provided someone in prayer is not disturbed. Jabir Ibn Samurah, *radhiallahu ‘anhu*, narrated: “The Prophet would not rise from the place of the *Fajr* prayer until the sun had risen. And when it did, we would talk and laugh about the days of ignorance (pre-Islamic times) and he (the Prophet) would smile.” (Related by Muslim). Furthermore, it is permissible to lie

down, sleep, eat and drink in the masjid. Abdullah Ibn Al-Harith reported: “During the time of the Messenger of Allah, we would eat meat and bread in the masjid.” (Related by Ibn Majah). But the sacredness of the masjid should always be borne in mind and hence it must never be misused.

**g) Maintaining the cleanliness of masjids:** Many of the teachings and practices of Islam emphasise cleanliness and general hygiene. In the Qur’an, the believers are addressed to adorn themselves with their best clothes when going to the masjid. Allah says: “O children of Adam! Adorn yourselves fully with your best clothes to every place of worship.” (Al-A’raf, 7:31). masjids being houses of worship deserve the utmost attention of every Muslim to make sure that they are free of any filth or offensive smell. Jabir reported that the Prophet, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, said: “Whoever eats garlic, onion, or leek should not come close to our masjid for the angels are harmed by what harms the children of Adam.” (Related by Al-Bukhari and Muslim). Another *hadith* states: “...whoever eats upon (onion and garlic) should suppress their odour by cooking them.” (Related by Muslim, Ahmad, and Al-Nasi’i).

It must be noted that maintaining the masjid is the responsibility of every Muslim. Indeed, Muslims must safeguard the premises and property of the masjid better than even their personal belongings. There are several *Ahadiith* indicating the importance of caring for the masjids. A’isha, *radhiallahu ‘anha*, reported: “He (the Prophet), ordered us to build the masjids in

residential areas; to build them well and purify them.” (Related by Abu Dawud). In another *hadith*, Anas Ibn Malik, *radhiallahu ‘anhu*, reported: “The rewards of my ummah were placed before me, even for removing a speck of dust from the masjid.” (Related by Abu Dawud, Al-Tirmidhi, and Ibn Khuzaymah).

**Children in the masjid** Children are leaders of the future and the bearers of Islam to posterity, and they must not be denied the blessings of the masjid which nurtures the Muslim mind. Islam pays utmost attention to the proper bringing of children, such that the virtuous Islamic morals and character are instilled in them at tender age. Usually, the formative years of the child are the most vital in shaping his future personality. Parents should therefore allow their children (male and female) to accompany them to the masjid so that they get used to the Islamic acts of worship and grow up with obedience to Allah.

Children used to go to the masjid during the time of the Prophet, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, and he used to treat them kindly. Anas reported: “I have never seen anyone kinder to children than the Messenger of Allah.” (Related by Muslim). Also, the Prophet, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, used to take his grandsons to the masjid. Abu Hurairah reported: “The Prophet was delivering a sermon and Al-Hassan and Al-Hussayn (the Prophet’s grandsons) came wearing two red shirts and they were tripping while walking. The Prophet came down from the pulpit, picked them up and placed them in front of him. Then he said:

“Allah and His Messenger have told the truth. Verily, your wealth and children are a trial. I looked to these two children walking and tripping, and I could not be patient, so I cut off my sermon and went to pick them up.” (Related by Abu Dawud, Al-Tirmidhi).

To show his concern for children, he used to say: “Verily, I start the prayer intending to prolong it. But when I hear the crying of a child, I shorten it knowing how his crying disturbs his mother.” (Related by Al-Bukhari and Muslim).

Training our children to attend the masjids with us is more crucial. Parents and elders should bear the children’s distractions as this is the only way to prepare our future generations for their responsibilities towards this religion. On the other hand, children should be taught to respect the masjid and observe propriety to the test of their ability. Child should be taught to identify with the masjid and take proper care of its property.

## Women and the masjid

The Islamic *Shari’ah* permits women to attend the masjid to benefit from the lectures, sermons, and lessons offered there. However, it is preferable for them to pray in their houses. The Prophet, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, said: “Do not prevent your women from coming to the masjid, but their houses are better for them.” (Related by abu Dawud). In another *hadith*, he said: “If the wife of one of you asks permission to go to the masjid, he must not prevent her.” (Related by Al-Bukhari and Muslim).

However, women should dress modestly with *hijab* and should not use perfume when going out. The Prophet, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, said to the women: “When one of you (women) comes to the masjid, she must not use perfume.” (Related by Muslim). Women used to attend the masjid during the time of the Prophet to learn about religious matters. The Prophet set special lessons for them and also tailored part of his sermons to address women’s issues - especially on Eid days (festivities).

Today, Muslim women are in need of Islamic education more than ever before. Furthermore, the mother is regarded as the first and most fundamental school for her children and she should have the necessary access to learning so that she, in turn, transmits that knowledge to them. Also, Muslim women can teach young Muslims, new Muslims and organise women’s programmes in the Islamic centres and masjids.

## Istikharaah – The Guidance Prayer

We are humans, powerless in this sphere of life, knowledgeable only enough to survive. So why shouldn’t we turn to Allah and seek His perfect help whenever we require it? Allah responds to the call of His servant when he asks for guidance, and we are after all seeking to do something in order to please Him.

*Istikharaah* means to ask Allah to guide you to the path best for you concerning an affair with two halal options. In matters that are *waajib* (obligatory), *haram* (forbidden) or *makrooh* (disliked) there is no need to pray *Istikharaah*.

*Salaat-ul-Istikharaah* should only be used for matters that are *mubaah* (allowed) or in matters that are *mustahabb* (liked or encouraged), in which there is a decision to be made as to which one should be given priority.

Many wrong notions exist concerning *Istikharaah*. Many Muslims will pray, read the du’a, and run to bed expecting to see a dream showing them their future wife, what her favourite colour is, and some other weird fantasy. That is not the purpose of this salaah.

The results of an *Istikharaah* can take many forms. Basically, you go by your feelings, whether you now feel more favourable or not. Also, you may notice events have changed, either for or against you. Note that you must follow the results of an *Istikharaah*, because not doing so is tantamount to rejecting Allah’s guidance once you’ve asked for it. Also, you should first clear your mind, not have your mind already decided, and then afterwards follow the results willingly.

It is a *Sunnah* that, if one must choose between permissible alternatives, one may pray two non-obligatory *rak’at*, even if they are of the *Sunnah* prayers or a prayer for entering the mosque, and so on, during any time of the day or night, and to recite therein whatever one wishes of the Qur’an after reciting *Al-Fatihah*. Then one praises Allah and sends salutations to the Prophet and recites the supplication in the *hadith* below.

The description of *Salaat-ul-Istikharaah* was narrated by Jaabir ibn ‘Abd-Alah al-Salami (may Allah be pleased with him) who said:

“The Messenger of Allah used to teach his companions to make *Istikharaah* in all things, just as he used to teach them *Surahs* from the Qur’an. He said: ‘If any one of you is concerned about a decision he has to make, then let him pray two *rak’ahs* of non-obligatory prayer, then say in Arabic:

*Allaahumma inni astakheeruka bi ‘ilmika wa astaqdiruka bi qudratika wa as’aluka min fadlika, fa imaka taqdiru wa laa aqdir, wa ta’lamu wa laa a’lam, wa anta ‘allaam al-ghuyoob. Allaahumma fa in kunta*

*ta’lamu haadha’l-amra* (then the matter should be mentioned by name) *khayran li fi ‘aqil amri wa aajilihi (or: fi deeni wa ma’aashi wa ‘aaqibati amri) faqdurhu li wa yassirhu li thumma baarik li fih.* *Allaahumma wa in kunta ta’lamu annahu sharrun li fi deeni wa ma’aashi wa ‘aaqibati amri (or: fi ‘aqili amri wa aajilihi) fasrifni ‘anhu [wasrafhu ‘amni] waqdur li al-khayr haythu kaana thumma radini bihi.*

“O Allah, I seek Your guidance [in making a choice] by virtue of Your knowledge, and I seek ability by virtue of Your power, and I ask You of Your great bounty. You have power, I have none. And You know, I know not. You are the Knower of hidden things. O Allah, if in Your knowledge, this matter (then it should be mentioned by name) is good for me both in this world and in the Hereafter (or: in my religion, my livelihood and my affairs), then ordain it for me, make it easy for me, and bless it for me. And if in Your knowledge it is bad for me and for my religion, my livelihood and my affairs (or: for me both in this world and the next), then turn me away from it, [and turn it away from me], and ordain for me the good wherever it may be and make me pleased with it.”

The Prophet, added that “then the person should mention his need.” [Sahih Bukhari]

*Salaat-ul-Istikharaah* is just two *rak’ats* of a non-obligatory prayer, prayed at anytime during the day, with a specific *du’a* at the end. While reciting the *du’a*, you should be thinking about the situation you want to be advised about with pure intentions and from the bottom of your heart. And Allah says that whenever he guides a heart aright it can never be misguided. Afterwards, you should “have a good feeling” about one of your options. Whatever option you feel is best right after you say the dua should be your decision. If you’re still in doubt, you can repeat.

Some people mistakenly wait for a dream to give a clear sign as to what decision to make, but this is not true, and often times it never really happens. In fact, dreams may lead you away from what Allah wants you to do, as Shaytaan might try to deceive you in your dreams.

*Salat-ul-Istikharaah* is for everybody. It’s a way for all of us to implore Allah for divine guidance and mercy. It is yet another invaluable resource from Allah to keep us on the straight and narrow *Siraat al-Mustaqeem*. The Prophet told all Muslims about *Istikharaah*, not just the scholars. Despite this gift, too many of us take the advice of our friends and parents, or accept the norms of our society and act without ever wondering what Allah wants us to do. We must stop looking to the *dunya* for guidance. We must begin to consult Allah.

## Countering evil with a better deed

Interacting with others in life is necessary, as a person is surrounded by neighbours, relatives and colleagues in institutions of study and workplaces. Due to this dealing with different types of people, it is natural to be made susceptible to harm from some of them. Suppose that every such act one is subjected to, is met by an evil one in its like, in return - regardless of whether this harm is slight or great, or intentional or not - the communities would turn into a jungle. People will abandon good traits and live without regulations or rules.

To prevent the Muslim community from this detestable scenario, Allah The Almighty commanded His believing slaves to resist evil with something good, when He Says (what means): {And not equal are the good deed and the bad. Repel [evil] by that [deed] which is better; and thereupon the one whom between you and him is enmity [will become] as though he was a devoted friend.} [Qur’an 41:34]

Undoubtedly, the ultimate act that is superior to countering evil with its like, is to pardon and be compassionate, or at the least, to turn away and avoid further embroiling oneself. Dear brother and sister! By adopting this noble moral, you are safeguarding your own self-respect and rationality. Therefore, you have to keep yourself away from the provocation of foul people in order to be one of the true servants of Allah The Almighty. He describes them Saying (what means):

{And they who turn away from *laghw* (anything from falsehood, and that includes association, other minor sins and all useless speech, actions and concerns; furthermore, busying oneself with that which does not concern him is included).} [Qur’an 23:3]

{And when they hear ill speech, they turn away from it and say: “For us are our deeds, and for you are your deeds. Peace will be upon you; we seek not the ignorant.”} [Qur’an 28:55]

{And when the ignorant address them [harshly], they say [words of] peace.} [Qur’an 25:63]

When one treats an abuser in a wholesome manner, he or she would suppress his or her anger, thereby becoming one of those whom the Prophet, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, referred to when he said: “He who stifles his rage while he is able to give vent to it, Allah will summon him in front of all people on the Day of Resurrection and let him choose from the *Hoor* (maidens of Paradise) as he pleases.”

Furthermore, one of the greatest benefits of repelling evil with a better deed is that the enemy who wants to inflict harm and evil, often converts into a defending supporter and a devoted friend. There is a wondrous magic in good manners that it can be more influential than physical force and vengeful will. Thus, antagonism changes into a different sentiment, as Allah The Almighty Says

(what means): {Repel [evil] by that [deed] which is better; and thereupon the one whom between you and him is enmity [will become] as though he was a devoted friend.} [Qur’an 41:34] That is why Ibn ‘Abbaas, may Allah be pleased with him, advised: “Use your forbearance to ward off the ignorance of those who harm you with [that trait of theirs].”

We have observed the best of all creatures, Muhammad, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, not only tolerating the maltreatment of the violent, but also overlooking that and pardoning them. ‘Aa’ishah, may Allah be pleased with her, described him, saying: “He does not counter evil with evil, rather he absolves and forgives.” This was also the example of the righteous people, may Allah be pleased with them, who followed the methodology of the Prophet, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*. One of them was insulted by someone once, so he said to him: “If you are mistaken, I ask Allah to pardon you; and if you are correct, I ask Him to forgive me.”

Although we are all required to adopt this trait, a person in a position of power is worthier of doing so more than others. That is why among the final instructions of the Prophet, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, before his death, was: “Whoever is given authority over something in the Ummah of Muhammad and has the power to harm or bring benefit to anyone, then he should reward those who do good and pardon those who commit evil.” A man once came to the Prophet complaining about his servant, saying: “I have a servant who is a wrongdoer and an oppressor. Should I beat him?” The Prophet, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, said: “Forgive him as much as seventy times per day.”

Also, a person whose relatives treat him unjustly is particularly in need of this quality. He or she should not meet their ill behaviour with evil in return; rather, he or she has to pardon, forgive and increase in compassion. It was narrated that a man came to the Prophet, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, and said: “O Messenger of Allah, I have some relatives with whom I maintain ties of kinship and they sever them; I pardon them and they oppress me; I treat them kindly and they harm me. Should I then treat them in the same way?” The Messenger of Allah, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, replied: “No, then you would all be sinners; rather, you should be better and maintain the ties of kinship and as long as you are in that state, you will have a protector and supporter appointed from Allah with you!”

Article source: <http://www.islamweb.net/mainpage/>





### Sheikh Joaan honours Marmi 2024 winners

The festival, now in its 15th edition, saw record participation and professionalism of the competing falconers, the official said, which gives reassurance that the goals of the Qatari Al Gannas Association have been achieved in preserving this Qatari and Gulf heritage as a global heritage. Al-Qahtani invited member of the public to attend the conclusion of the festival with the Al Mazayen Championship in Katara tomorrow evening, adding that the falcons competing in this tournament are rare falcons.

Marmi 2024 deputy chairman Abdul Wahab bin Omair al-Nuaimi told the Qatar News Agency (QNA) that the festival has become a landmark event for falconers, whether from Qatar or abroad. He expressed his thanks to HE Sheikh Joaan for sponsoring the festival annually, as well as the sponsorship and support of Katara - the Cultural Village Foundation and all supporting bodies contributing to preserving this heritage. Al-Nuaimi congratulated everyone on the success of this edition and the winners of the various festival tournaments, and wished everyone success in the coming seasons. - QNA

# Qatar targets 6mn visitors annually by 2030

By Joey Aguilar  
Staff Reporter

Qatar is gearing up for a robust tourism strategy outlined in the newly launched Third National Development Strategy (NDS3) 2024-2030 in a bid to solidify its position as a premier tourist destination, receiving 6mn visitors by 2030, said Qatar Tourism (QT) chairman Saad bin Ali al-Kharji.

The strategy aims to capitalise on the nation's tourism advantages and elevate its status as the preferred destination for families and business events, he stressed at a recent press conference announcing the return of the Doha Jewellery and Watches Exhibition

## Qatar Tourism gearing up for robust tourism strategy

(DJWE) this year.

"The third NDS has identified the tourism sector as a major player in the diversification cluster, contributing significantly to sustainable economic growth," he said. "Our focus is on enhancing the attractiveness and competitiveness of the tourism sector while leveraging the advanced infrastructure and connectivity network provided by Qatar Airways."

The QT chairman noted that NDS3 places strong emphasis on special initiatives to support the tourism sector, including the activation of tourism policies and maximising the benefits derived from Qatar Airways' expansive connectivity.



Saad bin Ali al-Kharji

Al-Kharji underlined the importance of designing tourism assets that meet the evolving needs of visitors, ensuring excellence in services, introducing new offerings, and crafting unique experiences.

Highlighting the commitment



Abdulaziz Ali al-Mawlawi

to overcoming challenges and fostering partnerships, he said: "We have a great work ahead of us during the coming years to achieve our strategic goals of receiving six million visitors (annually) by 2030."

"With the success of welcoming more than 4mn visitors in 2023, we

are optimistic about reaching this ambitious target with God's help," al-Kharji added.

He said that visitors enjoyed a distinguished tourism experience from the moment they arrived at Hamad International Airport, Doha Port, or Abu Samra border.

QT chief marketing and promotion officer Abdulaziz Ali al-Mawlawi echoed this optimism, saying: "Our vision is to grow the sector's contribution to GDP to 12% by 2030 and double employment in this sector in the country. Throughout the year, we curate world-class events to attract visitors from the region."

Citing the success of recent events in Qatar, the official under-

scored the importance of organising prestigious exhibitions such as the DJWE, which he described as "an incredible and remarkable milestone".

The QT recently unveiled an exclusive edition of the Qatar Calendar, dedicated to commemorating the football fervour enveloping the nation during the AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023.

Throughout January and February, an array of more than 25 events, ranging from sports championships to festivals and exhibitions, will be held in the country.

According to the QT, this robust line-up underscores Qatar's ability in hosting top-notch events, reaffirming its commitment to excellence with a meticulously crafted infrastructure.

## Qatar University president meets delegation of Chinese health and education experts

Qatar University (QU) president Dr Omar al-Ansari received yesterday a Chinese delegation led by Prof Jie Qiao, executive vice-president of Peking University and president of Peking University Health Science Centre.

The meeting was attended by several senior officials from QU Health and Hamad Medical Corporation, including vice-presidents Dr Ibrahim al-Kaabi (Academic Affairs), and Prof Asma al-Thani (Health and Medical Sciences).

The meeting was aimed at discussing further collaboration opportunities as well as the potential for student, faculty and knowledge exchange, a statement explained.



Following the meeting, guests commenced a tour of the QU campus, including QU's health services and facilities.

While welcoming the delegation, Dr al-Ansari stressed the importance of collaboration in higher education and health.

He noted that students would greatly benefit from opportunities, such as student exchanges, which open the door for diversification, and allowing students to interact with different cultures.

The Chinese delegation included many

esteemed professionals in health and other fields from China, such as Peking University Health Science Centre's director of the Office of International Co-operation Prof Qidan Sun, Peking University Dental Hospital vice-president Prof Yong

Jiang, Peking University's deputy dean of the School of Foreign Languages Prof Zhiming Fu, Peking University Health Science Centre's associate director of the Office of International Co-operation Xiaojia Li, Peking University Third Hospital's deputy director of the President's Office Jian Wang, physiotherapist Xin Miao of Peking University Third Hospital's Department of Rehabilitation Medicine, deputy chief of the Division of Exchange at Peking University Health Science Centre's Office of International Co-operation Division Yuan Liu, and Guotao Li, the director of Peking University Dental Hospital's International Communication Office.

## Embassy organises two events at Katara to promote Japanese culture



The embassy of Japan in Qatar organised two cultural events at Katara - the Cultural Village as part of the Katara's activities coinciding with the ongoing AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023. On January 20, the Japanese comedy *Neko Ninja* was screened in co-operation with Japan Foundation.

The film had a large turnout and was favourably received by the audience.

On January 23, the embassy co-organised a Kimono Show at Al-Hikma Courtyard, in co-operation with members from the Japanese community in Qatar.

The two events were designed to highlight and promote Japanese culture among the people of Qatar while celebrating the Japanese team's participation in the Asian Cup.

Japanese ambassador Satoshi Maeda said: "The goal of these events is to forge new bonds and discover the threads that bind us together in keeping with the spirit of the AFC Asian Cup."

"The AFC Asian Cup is a wonderful opportunity to celebrate the unifying power of sport by bringing together nations, cultures and individuals in a spirit of friendly competition and mutual respect," he said.



## QM unveils full line-up of designers and exhibitions for inaugural Design Doha



Qatar Museums (QM) has announced plans for six exhibitions that will open during the first week of Design Doha, the biennial showcase for excellence and innovation in the design community in Qatar and the Mena (Middle East and North Africa) region.

The opening week of the biennial will run from February 24-28, with programming continuing through August 5.

In addition to Arab Design Now, five additional exhibitions will open as part of the inaugural edition of Design Doha.

They are "Colours of the City: A Century of Architecture in Doha", "Weaving Poems", "100/100 HUNDRED BEST ARABIC POSTERS Round 04", and "Cultural Kinship".

Design Doha artistic director Glenn Adamson said: "The inaugural edition of our biennial spans the full breadth of design in the Arab world, showing the vitality of the region's creatives."

"Featuring conversations with global industry leaders as well as commissions from international designers, a juried prize, and more, Design Doha is an important new platform for regional designers," he said. "We are thrilled to have this opportunity to advance their artistic and commercial practices, and welcome the international design community to Doha."

The exhibition programme will be anchored by Arab Design Now, a regional survey of more than 70 Arab designers featuring 38 commissioned works, which will be on view at M7, Doha's centre for innovation, entrepreneurship, fashion, and design.

Encompassing themes that respond to the unique geographies and cultural values of the region, the exhibition highlights the design sentiments, aesthetics, and preoccupations of the Levant, the Gulf, and North Africa. - QNA

