



QATAR



We extend our heartiest congratulations to

His Highness
Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani
Amir of the State of Qatar

His Highness
Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al Thani
Father Amir

His Highness
Sheikh Abdullah Bin Hamad Al Thani
Deputy Amir

and to all the honorable people of Qatar

**on Qatar National Football Team
winning the
AFC ASIAN CUP QATAR 2023**

We hope for more success in promoting the name of our beloved country Qatar
to the highest level under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir



Chairman, members of the Board of
Directors, executive management and
all employees in Qatar Media City



المدينة الإعلامية
Media City
قطر Qatar

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Government Excellence Awards presented

By Ayman Adly
Staff Reporter

Under the patronage and in the presence of HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani, the Civil Service and Government Development Bureau organised yesterday the first edition of the Qatar Government Excellence Award ceremony.

Launched on the basis of Amiri Decision No 63 of 2023, the award aims to improve the level of government performance quality and encourage government entities and employees to compete in implementing quality, development, and excellence in performance through honouring the achievements and efforts of all the categories contributing to achieving Qatar National Vision 2030.

The award consists of seven categories covering four main awards and three specialised subsidiary awards, where the participating ministries and government entities are divided into four main groups, each competing for the “Advancement” award and the “Excellence” award, for achieving the highest score in all criteria of the Qatar Government Excellence Model.

HE Sheikh Mohamed alongside HE Abdulaziz bin Nasser bin Mubarak al-Khalifa, president of the Civil Service and Government Development Bureau and chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Qatar Government Excellence Award, honoured the winners and handed them mementos.

The Ministry of Interior won the “Advancement” award for ministries, achieving the highest evaluation scores, and the award was received by HE the Minister of Interior Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani. The “Advancement” award for entities was won by the Public Works Authority (Ashghal) and received by HE the Minister of Municipal-



ity Abdullah bin Hamad bin Abdullah al-Attiyah.

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry won the “Excellence” award for ministries for achieving outstanding results within its competitive group, and the honour was received by HE the Minister of Commerce and Industry Sheikh Mohamed bin Hamad bin Qassim al-Thani. The “Excellence” award for entities went to Aspire Zone Foundation, and received by its CEO Mohamed Khalifa al-Suwaidi.

As for the subsidiary awards, the “Pioneering in Comprehensive Experience” award was won by the Ministry of Municipality for its innovative practices in service delivery and the adoption of effective work systems for managing complaints and suggestions on its services, as well as its efforts to develop an exceptional experience for stakeholders and employ modern technologies in service delivery. The award was received by HE the Minister of Environment and Climate Change Dr Abdullah bin Abdulaziz bin Turki al-Subaie (former Minister of Municipality), and HE the Minister of Municipality Abdullah bin Hamad bin Abdullah al-Attiyah.

The Ministry of Sports and Youth won the “Pioneering in Institutional Transformation” award for its encouragement of innovation and experimentation with emerging technologies, and



exceptional leadership qualities, and the ability to make effective decisions. The award was received by HE Salah bin Ghanem al-Ali, former Minister of Sports and Youth, and HE Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa bin Ahmed al-Thani, Minister of Sports and Youth.

The “Pioneering in Human Capital Development” award was won by the Primary Health Care Corporation (PHCC) for providing a distinguished and motivating work environment for employees, and its efforts to enhance trust and positive relationships among all stakeholders, and implement plans related to talent recruitment and development. The award was received by Dr Mariam Abdulmalik, CEO of the PHCC.

Addressing the ceremony, al-Khalifa stressed the milestone achieved in the journey of government excellence. He said

that this ceremony “is a tangible implementation of the Third National Development Strategy, whose seventh outcome focuses on creating distinguished government institutions.”

Al-Khalifa noted that one of the most important outputs of this award is the follow-up reports that will be provided to participating government entities, containing strengths and improvement opportunities. The award cycle will be every two years to provide sufficient opportunity and time for government entities to build improvement plans and implement them based on the follow-up report outputs for this cycle.

Qatar Government Excellence Model consists of four main factors: visionary direction, qualitative value, institutional resources, results, and impact. Evaluation is based on 10 main criteria and 38 sub-criteria.

Amir congratulates Iranian president

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, His Highness the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani and HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani have sent cables of congratulations to Iranian President Dr Ebrahim Raisi on his country's National Day. **(QNA)**

Health minister meets Chadian counterpart



HE the Minister of Public Health Dr Hanan Mohamed al-Kuwari met yesterday with the visiting Chadian Minister of Public Health and Prevention Dr Abdelmadjid Aberahim. The meeting discussed co-operation relations between Qatar and Chad in the health fields and ways to enhance them. **(QNA)**

Palestinian president arrives in Doha



Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas arrived in Doha yesterday evening for a working visit. He and the accompanying delegation were welcomed upon arrival at Hamad International Airport by HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Mohamed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh al-Khulaifi and Palestinian ambassador to Qatar Munir Abdullah Ghannam. **(QNA)**

Rwandan president ends Doha visit



Rwandan President Paul Kagame left Doha yesterday, following a working visit to the country. He and the accompanying delegation were seen off at Hamad International Airport by the Director of the Department of Protocol Ibrahim bin Yousif Fakhro and Rwandan ambassador to Qatar Igor Marara Kainamura. **(QNA)**

Egyptian minister visits injured Palestinians in Qatar hospitals



Egyptian Minister of Health and Population Dr Khaled Abdel Ghaffar yesterday visited a number of injured Palestinians evacuated from the Gaza Strip for receiving treatment in Qatar. He was accompanied by HE the Minister of State for International Co-operation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Lolwah bint Rashid AlKhatir.

The Egyptian minister visited a group of wounded adults at The View Hospital and another group of wounded children at Sidra Medicine.

During his tour of the two hospitals, Dr Abdel Ghaffar was briefed on the health condition of the wounded Palestinians and the nature of their injuries, and listened to an explanation from officials and doctors about their treatment plans, the condi-

tions of their stay and the facilities provided to them throughout the treatment period.

Dr Abdel Ghaffar appreciated the treatment provided by Qatar for the wounded Palestinians in the state-of-the-art hospitals with distinguished medical staff and the latest medical equipment which ensures the provision of high-quality healthcare.

On the co-ordination between Qatar and Egypt, he said it contributed to the success of the initiative to treat the wounded Palestinians in Doha.


For her part, HE AlKhatir expressed Qatar's appreciation for the close co-operation with Egypt, especially the Ministry of Health and the Egyptian Red Crescent, in treating the wounded Palestinians, noting in this regard that most of the wounded



received treatment first in Egypt before being transferred to Qatar for further treatment.

Qatar has so far received 15 batches of injured Palestinians for treatment, as part of the initiative of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani to provide treatment for 1,500 Palestinians from the Gaza Strip.

The initiative is a continuation of Qatar's steadfast support and its ongoing efforts to alleviate the suffering of the brotherly Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip, in co-operation with various regional and international partners, in the backdrop of the current difficult humanitarian conditions in the Strip. **(QNA)**



DOLPHIN ENERGY

دولفين للطاقة

Dolphin Energy Limited

Invitation to Tender

Tender Number	Description	Tender Bond	Deadline for Submission, 12 Noon (Qatar Time) on
ITT-QC-OPU-1752	Offshore Shutdown Works (2025-2027)	USD 60,000	26 th February 2024

Dolphin Energy Limited (Qatar) is inviting companies to participate in the above Invitation to Tender.

Only companies registered in the State of Qatar with proven experience, the required facilities and technical knowledge as well as a demonstrated track record in the supply of the services required should apply.

How to Tender

Expression of Interest (EOI) Form and Scope of Services/Works can be downloaded from the company's website www.dolphinenergy.com/procurement

Interested companies must complete the EOI Form and submit to company's email address within two (2) working days from the publication date of this advertisement.

Following receipt of completed EOI Form, interested companies will receive a Request for Proposal (RFP) through Dolphin Energy's SAP Ariba to tender.



Qatar Charity project enhances vital paediatric services in northern Syria

Qatar Charity (QC) has launched the “Enhancing Specialised Child Health Services” project in northern Syria, with the support of benefactors from Qatar.

This initiative involves supporting and operating Al-Ra’i Hospital’s Paediatric Department for 12 months, aiming to reduce the child mortality rate.

More than 24,556 children are expected to benefit from the services, which will positively impact at least 122,780 individuals in the region.

The project includes support for medications and covering the operational costs of healthcare facilities.

The project will offer diverse services to support Al-Rai Hospital’s various departments, such as the Outpatient Department, Hospitalisation Department, Neonatal and Intensive Care Unit (NICU), and Paediatric Intensive Care Unit (PICU), in addition to a dedicated medical team working around the clock as well as Newborn Hearing Screening Department.

Abdul Fattah al-Qadi from the Medical Office at the Local Council in northern Syria, said that more than 130 children are treated at Al-Rai Hospital’s Paediatric Department.

Al-Rai Hospital paediatric specialist Dr Alaa al-Aboud confirmed that, thanks to this support, the capacity of the Incubators Department has increased.

The hospital has also been able to receive paediatric intensive cases, instead of referring them to Türkiye, a statement added yesterday.

Traffic congestion increased by 23% in 2023: QMIC report

According to the 9th edition of the *Qatar Traffic Report (QTR)*, released by the Qatar Mobility innovations Centre (QMIC), traffic congestion during weekdays increased by 23% last year compared to 2022.

The report, released yesterday, analyses traffic data from 2023 and compares it against previously recorded data from past years.

The report indicates an increase in hours wasted in traffic from 30 hours/year in 2022 to 37 hours/year in 2023.

The report found a correlation between the congestion levels and population, suggesting that cars remain the primary mode of transport.

There was an increase in the correlation by 14% in 2023 vs 2022.

Conversely, the impact of visitors to Qatar on congestion decreased by around 40% in 2023 compared to 2022, making the overall impact moderate.

“With over 8bn data records collected by the QMIC’s multi-source data collection network in 2023, we are committed to continue expanding our traffic data bank,” QMIC director of technology and research Dr Fethi Filali, who



Dr Fethi Filali

led the *QTR* team, said. “This vast and diverse data bank serves as the foundation for generating the annual *QTR*.”

The report highlights several key findings, including:

○ The three major factors contributed to traffic trends in 2023 which are: Qatar hosting the World Cup; completion of many road projects; and hosting of the Expo 2023 in Doha.

○ Commuters, on average, spent around 37 hours in congestion during 2023.

○ November was the most congested month of 2023, with a congestion index of 14.4%, while April and July were the least congested, with a congestion index of 9.4%.

○ During weekdays, the evening peak (6pm-7pm) was the most



Omar Mohamed al-Jaber

congested time of the day, with a congestion index of 12.2%.

○ A different congestion trend is observed on Thursdays, where congestion is higher towards evening compared to the rest of the weekdays.

○ The cost of congestion in 2023 is estimated to be around 0.47% of GDP, which is below the global average of about 1%.

“As we introduce the 9th edition of the QMIC’s *QTR*, we’re proud to offer a comprehensive analysis of post-FIFA World Cup 2022 traffic dynamics, particularly influenced by the Expo 2023 mega event happening in Qatar,” said QMIC director of strategic partnerships and outreach Omar Mohamed al-Jaber. “This edition not only highlights the efforts made by Ashghal in ex-

panding the country’s road infrastructure, but also serves as a vital tool for decision-makers dealing with the complexities of such large-scale events.”

“Beyond its insights into traffic behaviours and patterns, the *QTR* provides key stakeholders with actionable intelligence to enhance daily transport operations, streamline costs, and elevate safety standards,” he said.

The QMIC’s annual *QTR* plays a vital role in the centre’s comprehensive and locally built mobility data platform, which provides a range of interconnected services including Intelligent Transport, Road Safety, and Smart Logistics/Telematics.

In addition to its analytics platform, advanced GIS (geographic information systems) layers, and proprietary technologies, the platform incorporates a sophisticated network for collecting data from multiple sources.

This network includes a vast array of fixed sensors utilising the QMIC’s WaveTraf road traffic sensors, telematics devices installed in fleet vehicles, and crowd-sourced data contributed by thousands of Wain mobile application users.



limousine services, with dedicated ranks at every stadium.

“The AFC 2023 Asian Cup project has been a remarkable achievement for Mowasalat (Karwa),” said Karwa chief executive Fahad Saad al-Qahtani. “Since we organised the transport for the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 we have not rested on our laurels but have honed our service skills and operational streamlining.”

“Our detailed planning and the dedication of our diverse team have demonstrated our capacity to provide great transportation solutions,” he said. “We are honoured to have contributed significantly to the success of this global event, reinforcing Qatar’s position as a premier destination for major sports tournaments.”



Fahad Saad al-Qahtani



Karwa successfully wraps up Asian Cup transport services

Mowasalat (Karwa) has wrapped up the comprehensive AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023 transportation services.

“Demonstrating a commitment to excellence and efficiency, Mowasalat has once again proven itself as a leader in transportation, facilitating seamless travel for fans, teams, and officials throughout the tournament,” a statement said.

“During the event, Karwa’s Tournament and Public Bus Services Team managed the transportation of 3,389,040 passengers, with a record-breaking day on January 31 as the event’s busiest,” it said. “This achievement again highlights the company’s ability to deliver outstanding service on a massive scale.”

To meet the needs of the AFC Asian Cup 2023, Karwa operated a fleet of 900 buses, with 50% of them electric.

The operation was supported by a dedicated team of 1,000 drivers and 500 support and ground staff from over 54 nationalities.

Specialised transportation services catered to the Local Organising Committee (LOC) requirements, including tailored solutions for the 24 national teams, officials and referees, international VIPs, and media personnel.

Karwa operated metro shuttle services to major stadiums such as Al Bayt, Al Janoub, Al Thumama, and Abdullah Bin Khalifa, and park-and-ride options for Lusail Stadium.

Karwa also provided attendees with taxi and

Dukhan Bank announces Thara’a February winners

Dukhan Bank has announced the winners of the latest draw for Thara’a, its Shariah-compliant savings account, which was conducted at the bank’s headquarters under the supervision of a representative from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry’s Qualitative Licence and Market Control Department.



A cash prize worth QR5,000 each was awarded to Bibibakhiyar Mahoudinowdaz, Ibrahim al-Abdulla, Nabil Allahham, Sameer Khan, Najat al-Muslemami, Amroo Haikal, Shaikh Munawaruddin, Aldana al-Saad, Naseer Cheruvote, Salem al-Qitairi, Abdulla al-Marri, Latifeh Taha, Abdulla al-Khulaifi, Rabie Khaldi, Maryam Alkhayareen, Mohamed Allabban, Fildy Iswara, Khalid Alobaiddi, Adeeba al-Sulaiti, Ali Alkhulaifi, Maryam al-Hetmi, Abdulaziz Abdulmageed, Alina Nefedova, Hatem Hajri, Sanchita Talwar, Rashid al-Kuwari, Eleen Elbatneagy, Rene Pena, Sharifa al-Mulla, and Yousif al-Abdulla.

Departing from the previous annual grand prize structure of QR1mn for a solitary winner, the enhanced campaign now boasts a collective grand prize of QR3mn, distributed among three fortunate individuals.

Additionally, the initiative introduces 30 monthly winners, each contending for a QR5,000 prize, resulting in a noteworthy increase in the total prizes awarded to customers: a grand total of 273, with a cumulative value of QR4.35mn.

Coupled with cash prizes and a reward scheme, Thara’a is a product full of value-added benefits and services.

Thara’a offers account holders access to Dukhan Bank’s innovative banking channels.

Customers may learn about the many benefits of Thara’a savings account by visiting dukhanbank.com or by calling 800 8555 or ask “Rashid”, the bank’s virtual assistant, on the website, mobile app or via WhatsApp on 44100888.

Family ministry inaugurates Sokoon sign language app

The Ministry of Social Development and Family (MoSDF) has launched the Sokoon sign language app, funded by the Social & Sport Contribution Fund (DAAM), which is dedicated to digitising sign language in collaboration with the Qatar Assistive Technology Centre (Mada).

HE the Minister of Social Development and Family Maryam bint Ali bin Nasser al-Misnad said that work is underway to complete the second phase of the project that includes modernising the vocabulary to contain 15,000 Arabic words to ensure the utmost benefits and services for the community segments, in addition to providing an intelligible platform through which the certified sign language is taught in Qatar and disseminating it in the Arab region and countries of the world.

The assistant undersecretary for Family Affairs at the ministry, Sheikha Sheikha bint Jassim al-Thani thanked the DAAM for its role in supporting the sustainable development in alignment with the Qatar National Vision 2030.

The accessible Sokoon app helps individuals learn sign language in a more interactive and seamless way, forge a social network that connects people with deaf and mute individuals, and promotes the feasibility of interaction and communication with society.

The Sokoon app has been upgraded within the framework of the Qatar government’s initiative, represented by the MoSDF, to digitise the unified Arabic sign language vocabulary in collaboration with the Arab League.

The application currently includes 2,637 words, 485 sentences, along with 20 classifications in a variety of fields, and it can be surfed in the Arabic, English and French languages.

Qatar is taking effort to empower persons with disabilities at the local, regional and international levels; the country began unifying the Arabic sign language and issued the unified Arabic sign language vocabulary in 2007. – QNA

Lecture on historic shipwrecks at MIA

The Museum of Islamic Art (MIA), in partnership with Qatar Museums (QM)’s Department of Archaeology and the Years of Culture initiative, will host a public lecture on two ancient shipwrecks off the coast of Indonesia, shining the spotlight on the robust trading routes that encircled the world over a century ago.

Organised as part of Year of Culture legacy programming, the event will take place at the MIA Auditorium on February 19 at 6.30pm.

It is free and open to the public who pre-register through the MIA website.

Renowned scholar Stephen A Murphy will lead the discussion on *From Srivijaya to the Abbasid Caliphate: The Belitung and Cirebon shipwrecks and maritime connectivity in the 9th and 10th centuries CE*.

He holds the position of Prapatitya Pal senior lecturer in curating and Museology of Asian Art at the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London.

“The lecture by Dr Stephen Murphy promises to be a captivating exploration of the ancient maritime world, uncovering hidden stories of trade and cultural exchange,” said Years of Culture



The talk will delve into the heart of the 9th and 10th century Indian Ocean World to discover the untold tales of globalisation and cultural convergence that once connected the Gulf region with modern-day Indonesia.

Legacy co-ordinator and spokesperson Aljazi al-Khayareen.

The talk will delve into the heart of the 9th and 10th century Indian Ocean World to discover untold tales of globalisation and cultural convergence that once connected the Gulf region with modern day Indonesia.

The spotlight will be on two archaeological wonders – the Belitung and Cirebon shipwrecks – revealing the powerful connec-

tions that shaped the world over a millennium ago.

In the middle of the ninth century, a ship embarked from the Gulf on a monumental journey, connecting three major cultures – the Abbasid Caliphate, the maritime power of Srivijaya, and China’s Tang dynasty.

Laden with Chinese ceramics, the ship faced disaster near Palembang, a major port in southern Sumatra (modern day Indonesia).

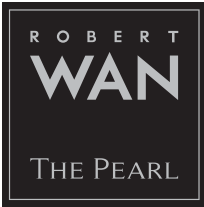
The Belitung wreck, discovered in 1998 by fishermen, stands as one of the few surviving Indian Ocean World shipwrecks from the ninth century.

Just over a century and a half later, another vessel set sail from southern China, stopping at a port in southern Sumatra before heading to Java.

Known as the Cirebon Wreck, this ship carried Chinese ceramics and Middle Eastern glassware, offering insight into interregional trade between Indonesia and China in the 10th century.

Discovered between 2004 and 2006, the Cirebon Wreck provides valuable information on trade and the exchange of ideas and social ties that shaped the world.

Artefacts from the Cirebon shipwreck are on permanent display at the MIA and the National Museum of Qatar.



The Links Of Love Collection

by Robert Wan



Demonstrate your love connection for Valentine’s day with Links Of Love Collection !

Tahitian pearl specialist Robert Wan is widely recognized as a pioneer in French Polynesia.

Becoming the No.1 Tahitian pearl producer worldwide, he is known as ‘The Pearl Emperor of Tahiti’.

Producing the highest quality black pearls for over 40 years, the label produces head turning decadent pieces.

The Links of Love collection attracts by its simplicity & elegance.

Modern, soft, the collection is gently balanced by an exceptional Tahitian Pearl in its muddle. Perfect for a gift or to wear everyday, the Links sits at cutting edge of international jewelry trends.

The inspiration is the verdant beauty of the islands of French Polynesia, most specially the legendary Island of Marutea, a personal favorite of Robert Wan.





Preparing workforce for future challenges is key focus of Qatar development strategy

HE the Minister of Labour Dr Ali bin Smaikh al-Marri has highlighted that preparing a workforce ready for future challenges is a key focus of Qatar's National Development Strategy.

This strategy aims for a transformative shift towards a more productive labour market that prioritises highly skilled jobs.

This came in a speech made by HE Dr al-Marri during the 7th Abu Dhabi Dialogue (ADD) Ministerial Consultation between Asian labour-sending and receiving countries, held on Feb 10-11, with the participation of a number of Gulf, Asian countries and international organisations.

HE Dr al-Marri explained that the Ministry of Labour is collaborating with both local and international partners to modernise the labour market's regulatory framework and to enhance information systems. This is being done by leveraging artificial intelligence (AI) to back policies grounded in solid evidence related to the labour market. The objective is to boost productivity and aid in the development of a competitive, diversified and sustainable economy.

The significant shifts the world is experiencing due to climate change

and technological advancements, is impacting the labour markets in both countries that send and receive workers. This will alter the demand for certain jobs, leading to the change and disappearance of some roles, he said.

HE the Minister of Labour and head of Qatar's delegation in the Ministerial Consultation meeting elaborated that the swift advancement in AI technology presents numerous challenges for the future work environment.

However, it also creates new prospects for both workers and organisations. This necessitates acquiring new skills, with an emphasis on apprenticeship and ongoing learning.

HE Dr al-Marri pointed out that the meeting is an opportunity to exchange new ideas, experiences and dialogue on best practices in order to face these challenges and to keep pace with recent developments and transformation towards a more environmentally friendly and knowledge-based economy by providing the workforce with the necessary skills and competencies for the future, providing social protection, providing social protection for workers and facilitating their transition to new jobs. He stressed

the need to support social dialogue and to enable employers to assess their needs for the required skills and competencies in line with the expected developments of the labour market.

Sixteen countries are participating in this year's ministerial consultative meeting, including labour-receiving countries: Qatar, the UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, and the Asian labour-sending countries: Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam.

The Abu Dhabi Dialogue is a voluntary consultative mechanism that aims to provide a general platform for dialogue between Asian labour-sending and receiving countries, on best practices that will support and enhance bilateral and regional co-operation efforts and partnerships aimed at developing and activating the management of the temporary contractual work cycle. It also aims to enhance the benefits and advantages that will accrue to contract workers, employers and economies of exporting and receiving countries of these temporary workers as a result of mobility for work. (QNA)

QM invites public to join National Sport Day activities

Qatar Museums (QM) has invited the public to join the activities planned for this year's National Sport Day (NSD) to be held tomorrow, from 8am-3pm at the National Museum of Qatar at the Al Baraha Area.

The national holiday serves as a chance for citizens and residents of Qatar to adopt healthy exercise habits and to maintain an active lifestyle. QM collaborated with 14 Qatari businesses to deliver a range of activities for people of all ages to participate.

The activities include workout challenges and bootcamps tailored for children, adults and ladies only groups; challenges and obstacle races for children; healthy tips and Q&A sessions delivered by experienced dietitians and nurses; live cooking stations and healthy restaurants; giveaways and prizes for all participants, including gift vouchers and 150 bags of meals and snacks.



QSSA's second School Olympic Programme to identify new talent

Qatar School Sports Association (QSSA) has announced the launch of the second edition of the School Olympic Programme marking the National Sport Day tomorrow at Lusail Boulevard, with the participation of over 3,000 students from both genders.

Addressing a press conference at the premises of the Qatar Olympic Committee, President of QSSA and Chairman of the Schools Olympic Programme (SOP) Organising Committee Sheikh Khalifa bin Khalid al-Thani stated that the number of participants in the second edition is different this time, noting the evident surge in the number of participants compared to the previous edition.

He revealed that the contests of the second edition have a variety of age groups, and highlighted that the competition will be stellar



for all contenders. He added that the 1km race will be the launching pad with the participation of primary school students, followed by a 2km race for middle school students, as well as a 3km race for secondary school students, and said that the programme can absorb the capabilities of all participating students.

In conclusion, Sheikh Khalifa bin Khalid al-Thani emphasised that the previous edition had

achieved good results and multiple gains throughout the stages of all contests with an effective student participation, and pointed out that the organising committee is committed to propagating the culture of sport in the community on Sport Day, through the engagement of schools in these activities to further explore sports talents and to hone them as one of the key pillars and objectives of the programme in the future. (QNA)

Aspetar activities aim to create a 'physically, mentally healthy society'

Aspetar Orthopaedic and Sports Medicine Hospital, a world leader in sports medicine, has announced a range of activities on the National Sport Day tomorrow.

Aspire Park will be transformed into a vibrant hub of activity. Aspetar experts at Pitch 10 will offer free health checks and personalised advice.

The Aspetar pavilion will feature interactive exhibits, blood sugar testing, and services of nutritionists and physical activity specialists.

Aspetar CEO, Dr Abdulaziz al-Kuwari, said: "We at Aspetar are committed to creating a healthy sports environment and encouraging community engagement. Aspetar strives to turn every goal into reality by dedicating its scientific and operational efforts to building a physically and mentally healthy society. Our National Sport Day events raise awareness about the benefits of sports for both physical and mental wellbeing, contributing to a healthier so-



ciety, aligned with Qatar National Vision 2030." Dr al-Kuwari pointed out that Aspetar's "Guide to the National Physical Activity Guidelines", has become a trusted scientific reference guide and a primary source of information based on the latest evidence and is tailored to the local context. This guide benefits practitioners, doctors, teachers, and anyone wishing to incorporate regular physical activity into their lives.



GU-Q students feel that campus sport helps for a holistic academic experience.

GU-Q students underline key role of sport in community

Students at Georgetown University in Qatar (GU-Q) have reflected on the importance of campus sports in creating community and helping them to achieve goals on and off the field as part of their holistic academic experience as Qatar marks National Sport Day (NSD) 2024 tomorrow.

For Shahd al-Qassabi, a Qatari student and women's basketball team captain, playing basketball offers a chance to develop camaraderie, teamwork, and mutual support for personal and academic endeavours.

Jemimah Golo, co-captain of the women's basketball team, played the sport competitively in high school and it also helped her find her place at GU-Q. Being part of a team motivates her to stay active and healthy helping her to deal with the pressures of academic life. As part of the Qatar Collegiate Sports Federation, the team actively competes in the university basketball league tournaments against in-

stitutions from across the country.

For Abdul Hamman, captain of the Track and Field Club, running adds a dynamic and fulfilling dimension to his academic life. "Our group runs are open to everyone, regardless of individual skill level, creating a sense of camaraderie among peers," he noted.

According to Hannan, the Track and Field Club welcomes members of the public to join their programme of activities, a unique opportunity to forge new relationships. It also enables GU-Q to spread awareness of the physical and social benefits of sport, within Education City and the wider community, and contribute to Qatar's national vision to promote participation in sport.

Encouraging participation in team sports is part of GU-Q's year-round commitment to educating the whole person. Active clubs include badminton, cricket and football, with plans to start a women's swimming club.

Al Shaqab's showjumping event to be held on NSD

Al Shaqab National League Showjumping Event will be held at the Longines arena tomorrow in connection with the National Sport Day, from 9am-8pm, a statement said yesterday.

With a particular emphasis on promoting opportunities for female and junior riders, the event aims to create an inclusive and empowering atmosphere within the equestrian community. Entry is open to all Riding Academy members and external athletes who meet the requirements. All classes will adhere to FEI rules and regulations, except for intro classes.

The main local categories are: Future Champions, Junior Champions, Youth Champions, Al Farissa, open class. Each round of the competition has been designed to encompass diverse categories, specifically tailored to meet the unique needs and skill levels of riders across various age groups. This point system aims to determine the top-performing riders, irrespective of gender, by the season's conclusion.



MDD lines up diverse National Sport Day events

Msheireb Properties is celebrating National Sport Day (NSD) this year by hosting numerous activations all around Msheireb Downtown Doha (MDD) in collaboration with Qatar Olympic Committee, PSG Academy Qatar, Cyclone, and Zulal Wellness Resort.

"We invite everyone to join us in Msheireb Downtown Doha on Tuesday," said Dr Hafiz Ali Abdullah, senior director of corporate communications at Msheireb Properties. Barahat Msheireb will be filled with interactive stations dedicated to different sports including weightlifting, high jump, taekwondo, judo, karate, handball, long jump, basketball, football, and volleyball.

Stations will feature a treadmill challenge, a target wall, soccer skeeball, giant dart tennis, foot golf, touch the spots, interactive sports screen, and padel. There will be public tournaments for volleyball, football, basketball, and para-sports.

A custom-built Human Foosball Arena in Sahat Wadi Msheireb will host friendly matches between visitors. Up to 16 players will step into the cage designed to create conditions similar to a typical foosball table with live DJs providing play-by-play commentary and music.

Cyclone will be challenging visitors in their outdoor cycling class hosted at Sahat Al Nakheel on Sikkat Al Wadi at 10am. A 3km walk and a 5km run will also encourage participants to reach the Green Gorilla where they will enjoy mini acai bowls and receive gift vouchers. Cyclone's Longest Ride will also take place from 4.30pm-6pm, featuring a guest appearance from a prominent local DJ.

Zulal Wellness Resort will engage visitors with one hour on-stage classes, including yoga at 9am, Tai Chi at 12.30pm, and Pilates at 2pm.

ANNOUNCEMENT

I, **AMEEN SADEEK MOHMMED**
holder of
INDIAN Passport No. U0915207
QID No. 28835652141

hereby change my name

from
AMEEN SADEEK MOHMMED

to
AMEEN KURESHI

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

ANNOUNCEMENT

I, **THAMI ALJ**
holder of
MOROCCO Passport No. SW3601074
QID No. 27350400371

hereby change my name

from
THAMI ALJ

to
THAMI ALJ MOUMNANI

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

ANNOUNCEMENT

I, **EMMA ROSE**
holder of
Indian Passport No. U6381532
QID No. 31935607148

hereby change my name

from
EMMA ROSE

to
EMMA ROSE JOSEMON

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

Home Centre curates new Ramadan-inspired collections

Home Centre, one of the largest retailers of furniture and home furnishings in the Middle East, North Africa and the Indian sub-continent, has curated five brand-new Ramadan-inspired collections giving homes across the region the opportunity to make room for new memories during the holy month. Each of the five edits - Desert Elegance, Faris, Sama, Noura and Kashida for Home Centre - celebrates unique textures, fabrics and patterns influenced by the region's colourful heritage, allowing customers to reflect their own unique style at home this Ramadan, a statement issued in Doha said yesterday. "The Desert Elegance collection captures the magical spirit of the desert and classic mid-century design, applying organic shapes, bold patterns, earthy tones and striking silhouettes to bring the natural beauty of the region indoors to create warm and cozy living and dining spaces to gather in. "In homage to an icon of the region, the luxurious Faris collection is inspired by Arabian horses, dramatically mixing indulgent marbles and shimmering metallics to create a striking yet elegant impact.



"With energy and creativity at its heart, the Sama collection uses fluid shapes and ripple effects to create sophisticated signature pieces to elevate any space. Flowing lines, gold accents, and sumptuous velvets offer a premium and organic feel. "Influenced by modern mashrabiya architecture and structured origami designs, the Noura collection applies soft and contemporary neutral colours and textures

evoking a sense of serenity and calm. "And finally, the fifth curation in Home Centre's Ramadan collection is an exclusive collaboration with Kashida Design aptly titled Kashida for Home Centre. This iconic partnership with the UAE-based design house sees artistic Kufic script and calligraphy lend a sense of cultural richness to wall art, furniture, dining sets and more."



Shumalan Naicker, territory head, Landmark Group Qatar, said, "As a homegrown brand from the region, the holy month of Ramadan is very special to us. "We understand the sentiment of the season and recognise the extraordinary pressures that fall upon homemakers as they prepare to welcome Ramadan into their homes. "As a brand that celebrates individual expression, our objective is to always offer true choice through our extensive range of styles and price points. With a profound understanding born from our own reverence for Ramadan, we meticulously curate our collections that strike the perfect balance between trendy and traditional, enabling our customers to in-



fuse their homes with their unique style and creativity, ensuring a truly memorable Ramadan experience."

Qatar takes part in 126th session of Permanent Council of Francophonie

Qatar participated in the 126th extraordinary session of the Permanent Council of the Francophonie, which was held virtually under the chairmanship of Secretary-General of the International Organisation of La Francophonie (OIF) Louise Mushikiwabo. Qatar's ambassador to France and its representative to OIF Sheikh Ali bin Jassim al-Thani represented the State at the meeting. The OIF Secretary-General opened the session and reviewed the political, diplomatic and economic scope of the organisation, in addition to the developments in



Gabon, Guinea and Haiti. The meeting followed up on the implementation of the decisions adopted during the organisation's 44th Ministerial Conference which was held in the Cameroonian capital, Yaounde on November 4-5, 2023. Representatives of the member states of the OIF approved the recommendations of the 24th session of the Steering Board of the International Committee of the Francophone Games, and approved Armenia's candidacy to host the 10th Francophone Games in 2027. (QNA)

Public urged to utilise urgent care centres across Qatar

As part of the ongoing public healthcare sector campaign 'Where For Your Care?' aimed at educating the public on emergency and urgent healthcare services in Qatar, the partners are highlighting the importance of urgent care centres to the community.

Awareness of these centres supports the public's ability to seek appropriate medical care and reduce the number of patients attending emergency departments for minor injuries and conditions, ensuring that hospitals can focus on the most critical and emergency cases.

The Ministry of Public Health (MoPH), Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC), Primary Health Care Corporation (PHCC), Sidra Medicine and Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS) are the partners in the initiative.

Urgent care centres provide 24/7 medical support for non-life-threatening conditions such as respiratory conditions, minor burns, sprains, severe headache or earache and high fever.

With 13 health centres across Qatar offering urgent care services delivered by the PHCC and QRCS, these facilities ensure that the public has access to the right level of care at the right time.

PHCC has 11 adult urgent care centres, with five of them also accommodating paediatrics. The utilisation of PHCC's urgent care services has shown a steady increase, reflecting the community's reliance on these essential services, allowing for timely, efficient and comprehensive medical



Dr Samya Ahmad al-Abdulla

care when needed. PHCC also offers an urgent consultation service via telephone, seven days a week from 7am to 1pm by dialling 16000, selecting PHCC, followed by option 2.

Dr Samya Ahmad al-Abdulla, senior consultant of Family Medicine and executive director of operations at PHCC said: "Our urgent care services, operated in 11 urgent care units within our health centres, allow individuals with urgent but non-life-threatening conditions to access the care they need quickly which contributes to reducing unnecessary pressure on emergency services."

In addition, QRCS runs two 24/7 urgent care centres dedicated to craft and manual workers. Dr Hasan Ali Kasem, chief medical officer - Medical Affairs Division, QRCS said, "In co-operation with the MoPH, QRCS operates four Workers' Health Centers, which provide primary healthcare services for single male workers. Urgent care can be received at two of our centres in Al-Hemallah and Mesaimeer and



Dr Hasan Ali Kasem

includes, but is not limited to, minor and mild bruises, superficial wounds, spasm/spasticity pain, fractures, dislocations and minor non-extensive burns."

HMC also provides support to the community of Qatar with an Urgent Care Consultation Service that enables anyone with a medical query to speak to a physician over the telephone about their condition. Calls are triaged by a doctor to determine which specialty the patient should be referred to. This is available Sunday to Thursday, 8am to 3pm by dialling 16000 and selecting option 3.

Sidra Medicine delivers private urgent care services at its hospital for both women and children. The chargeable care is available via its Paediatric Urgent Care Clinic, open daily from 8am to 12am midnight. Its Women's Urgent Care services provide assessment and treatment for women who require emergency or urgent care related to early pregnancy, gynaecology and obstetric conditions. It is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

QIB announces new Misk Account draw millionaire

Qatar Islamic Bank (QIB) has announced the new millionaire of the seventh edition of the Misk Account Draw, which commenced in November, underscoring its commitment to encouraging saving habits and rewarding its customers. Shaikha Saad al-Kaabi is the first millionaire of this Misk edition. The draw took place in the presence of official representatives from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, along with QIB officials. The Misk Account Draw, known for its substantial prize pool and remarkable rewards, celebrates the financial success of its customers by awarding four individuals with QR1mn each year. Additionally, 15 customers are selected weekly, each receiving QR10,000, while four customers receive a monthly prize of QR50,000. With a total of 832 winners sharing a substantial prize pool of QR14.2bn, the Misk Account Draw remains the largest cash prize ever awarded in Qatar. QIB has awarded 188 of weekly and monthly winners since the start of the seventh edition in November 2023. Al-Kaabi said, "I am deeply



thankful to QIB for providing me with the chance to become a millionaire. As a long-standing QIB customer, I have found the Misk savings account to be exceptionally unique, offering great features and benefits. This account not only helps me in reaching my dreams and aspirations but also serves as an excellent means to save money." D Anand, QIB general manager - Personal Banking Group, said: "The Misk Account Draw has consistently awarded cash prizes, encouraging our customers to save responsibly with QIB. Last year, Misk witnessed impressive growth

and received positive feedback from our customers. We are committed to keep offering great rewards and opportunities to our valued customers." Existing and new QIB customers can open a Misk Account easily through the QIB mobile app. Customers will receive a free debit card, become eligible to request a free, for the first-year, credit card against their Misk Account balance, receive profits on their savings, and have the chance to frequently win cash prizes. For more information, visit www.qib.com.qa/en-miskaccount

QU Health takes part in QU Open Day 2024

QU Health has participated in Qatar University (QU)'s three-day Open House event. Invitations were extended to all secondary government schools across the country, as well as private international schools.

The students had the opportunity to learn more about healthcare professions, from Medicine and Dentistry to Pharmacy, Nursing, and Health Sciences including Speech and Language Therapy, Human Nutrition, Biomedical Science, and Public Health.

Prof Asma al-Thani, vice-president for Health and Medical Sciences Office at QU, commented, "Empowering our community through the advancement of health professions is a commitment and a vital step towards realising Qatar's Vision 2030."

Dr Alla el-Awaisi, director of Clinical Operations and En-



gagement at QU Health, stated, "Our participation serves as a testament to our commitment to nurturing tomorrow's health professionals. Through collabo-

orative engagement and cutting-edge education, we pave the way towards a healthier and brighter future for all as we shape the future of health together."

QRDI Council highlights progress with 46 Open Innovation Calls

The Qatar Research, Development, and Innovation (QRDI) Council's Qatar Open Innovation programme, launched in 2022, has achieved significant milestones, fostering collaboration between large local enterprises and the global innovation community.

With 46 Open Innovation Calls, launched in partnership with 19 local partners across key sectors, including AI and technology, agriculture, energy and environment, healthcare, and transportation, the programme has garnered participation from Qatar and countries worldwide.

The programme received 1,154 submissions from innovators worldwide. Qatar became the second-largest source of applications, with 129 applications submitted by Qatari companies, 11% of the total number of applications submitted.

Omar al-Ansari, secretary-general of QRDI Council, said: "Qatar Open Innovation Programme creates a vibrant marketplace for innovative technologies developed by the private sector, to be co-



developed in collaboration with Qatar's large local enterprises and government agencies. Qatar Open Innovation Programme is dedicated to developing technology development teams locally in Qatar, creating opportunities for local talent in the private sector, and attracting the best international talent to contribute to Qatar's innovation ecosystem. The programme also allows Qatar's most important enterprises across various economic sectors to access new-to-market technologies, empowering them to overcome business challenges and achieve global leadership."

To date, 20 innovation opportunities have been awarded to innovative private sector companies, turning into running technology co-development and piloting projects in various implementation stages.

A notable project that was recently completed is titled "Digital Port & Marine Services Platform supported by Blockchain Technology". This open innovation opportunity saw Milaha collaborating with US data management startup Vendia to optimise mari-

time functions. Proof-of-concept was successfully demonstrated in two cases, showing significant improvements in operational efficiency. This led Milaha to embark on the development of a larger scale digital maritime eco-system for Qatar port.

Another project nearing completion is titled the "Smart Tools for Audio Analytics in IoT networks," an open innovation opportunity where Ooredoo partnered with Groundup.ai, a startup company from Singapore specialising in IoT (Internet-of-Things) solutions. The project led to the development of a highly accurate predictive model for asset failure, which offers potential new business opportunities for Ooredoo to explore in the facility management, manufacturing and oil and gas industries.

These projects highlight the Qatar Open Innovation Programme's effectiveness in fostering collaborative innovation and demonstrate its role in driving technological advancements and environmental sustainability in key industries.



WAFF president Prince Ali calls on FIFA to ‘isolate’ Israel

Jordanian president of the West Asian Football Federation (WAFF), Prince Ali bin al-Hussein, in a powerful letter has written to FIFA and its federation members calling for united action to “isolate” Israel for its military action in Gaza.

“The situation in Palestine demands our immediate attention and concerted action as a football community. It is with

a sense of profound responsibility and commitment to the principles of human rights, justice and peace that we implore your engagement in this crucial matter,” said Prince Ali in his letter.

Jordan shares a border with the Palestinian West Bank and Israel, and even before the current crisis had provide a home for an estimated 3mn Palestinian

refugees, according to the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

Citing the United Nations’ stance on Gaza and the genocide investigations by the International Court of Justice Prince Ali called for an “unequivocal and resolute response from the global football community” citing the principles in article 3

of the statutes and the FIFA Human Rights Policy. The principles “echo our shared commitment to promoting and protecting these rights”, said Prince Ali.

“We, the West Asian Football Federations, encompassing all its members, call upon FIFA, the Football Confederations, and Member Associations to join us in taking a decisive stand against the atroci-

ties committed in Palestine and the war crimes in Gaza, by condemning the killing of innocent civilians including players, coaches, referees and officials, the destruction of the football infrastructure, and taking a united front in isolating the Israeli Football Association from all football-related activities until these acts of aggression cease,” added Prince Ali.

Desperate Palestinians in Gaza’s Rafah fear upcoming attack

Reuters
Rafah/Doha

The Abu Mustafa family’s tent is hard against the high concrete and metal fence separating Gaza from Egypt in Rafah, the last relatively safe place in an enclave devastated by Israel’s military offensive, but one that may now also come under attack.

The family is among more than a million Palestinians now crammed into the area around Rafah and fearing they have nowhere left to flee inside a tiny strip largely reduced to rubble and where fighting still rages.

“Every day, we’re on the run. Being displaced is tough because I have two daughters with disabilities. I can’t carry them around. I don’t have a car or a cart,” said Laila Abu Mustafa.

“If there will be more displacement, I’m not moving,” she said.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has ordered an evacuation plan for the civilians who crowd Rafah, camping in streets and empty lots, on the beach and like the Abu Mustafa family on the sandy strip along the Egyptian border.

Before previous assaults on Gaza cities, Israel’s military has ordered civilians to leave without preparing any specific evacuation plan. Aid agencies say an assault on Rafah would be catastrophic in a war that has already caused untold misery.

US President Joe Biden was due to speak with Netanyahu, White House officials said, the first conversation between them since Biden last week described Israel’s military response in Gaza as “over the top”.

The war began on October first week when the fighter group Hamas that controls Gaza stormed the border fence with Israel.



People walk through the rubble of a building heavily damaged by Israeli bombardment, in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip, yesterday.



Displaced members of Palestinian Abu Mustafa family, who fled their house due to Israeli strikes, prepare food as they shelter at the border with Egypt, in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip.

Four months later, Gaza is in ruins. Under a massive daily

bombardment, Israeli ground forces have overrun most of the

enclave, smashing houses, public buildings and infrastructure with air raids, artillery fire and controlled detonations.

Palestinian health authorities say more than 28,000 people have been killed in the war. More than 85% of Gazans are homeless. A UN survey found that nearly one in 10 children under five are acutely malnourished.

Talks for a deal on a ceasefire and the release of hostages have so far failed to bring an agreement. Last week Israel rejected a Hamas proposal, saying it would not stop fighting while the group retained brigades that Israel says are hiding in Rafah.

Egyptian security sources said more high-level talks were planned for tomorrow with senior officials from Qatar and the US to attend, as well as Israeli and Palestinian delegations.

Israeli air raids have started

targeting Rafah over recent days.

Yesterday, Hamas said Israeli air raids in the Gaza Strip over the previous four days had killed two hostages and injured eight others.

The group said any Israeli assault on Rafah would “blow up” the discussions for a deal to free the remaining hostages.

Speaking in an interview that aired on US network ABC yesterday, Netanyahu reiterated that Israeli forces would assault Rafah, but said they were preparing “a detailed plan” for where civilians there could go.

A spokesperson for France’s Foreign Ministry said “a large-scale Israeli offensive at Rafah would create a catastrophic humanitarian situation of a new and unjustifiable dimension”.

Palestinian health authorities say around 70% of people killed in Gaza are women or children under 18. The Israeli military said in a briefing in December that they thought roughly two civilians had been killed in Gaza for each dead Hamas combatant. The World Health Organisation has described the Palestinian Health Ministry system for reporting casualties as “very good” and UN agencies regularly cite its death toll figures.

Against the border fence, topped with barbed wire, the Abu Mustafa family hangs laundry between tents. They cook what little food they can gather in empty tin cans over a fire in the sand.

Fear of an assault on Rafah is the constant subject of every conversation in the cramped city, said Mariam, a woman who fled her home in Gaza City early in the war with her three children aged 5, 7 and 9.

“I can’t describe how we feel. There is turmoil in my head. My children keep asking me when Israel will invade Rafah and where we will go and if we will die. And I don’t have the answers,” she said.

Jordan’s King Abdullah takes part in Gaza aid airdrop

Reuters
Amman

Jordan’s King Abdullah participated in an air drop of humanitarian aid to Gaza, state-owned Al Mamlaka broadcaster said yesterday.

A video showed the monarch in military gear on board a plane in the latest mission by the Jordanian air force to drop urgent medical supplies to field hospitals it runs in the war-torn enclave. According to official media, the latest airdrop was on Feb 6.

The kingdom, which has been among Arab neighbours pushing Israel to allow more aid into Gaza, is the only country that airdrops aid to the enclave, channelling it through these two medical facilities.

It has conducted 11 air drops, with at least two conducted with the French and Dutch air forces, to deliver medical aid.

The king, who has been vocal in calling for an end to Israel’s campaign, left on Thursday on a tour of major Western capitals and is due to meet US President Joe Biden in Washington today, to lobby for an immediate ceasefire.

Jordan succeeded in getting Israel to allow the World Food Programme (WFP) to send deliveries to Gaza through another land route that begins from Jordan, helping ease pressure on the main Rafah border crossing which is limited in capacity.

Jordan, which shares a border with the West Bank, fears that the Gaza conflict could spread, with wider violence by armed settlers encouraged by the army triggering a large-scale Palestinian exodus to the other side of the Jordan River.

CASUALTY

Four Emirati soldiers, Bahraini officer killed in Somalia attack

Four Emirati soldiers and a Bahraini officer were killed following an attack in Somalia, where they were training the Somali national army, the United Arab Emirates announced, AFP reported from Dubai.

The soldiers were “exposed to a terrorist act” while “performing their work duties in training and qualifying the Somali Armed Forces”, the UAE’s defence ministry said in a statement on Saturday, adding that three Emirati soldiers and a Bahraini officer were killed. A fourth Emirati soldier, who was among two injured in the attack, “passed away upon arrival” in the UAE yesterday, the official WAM news agency said, raising the overall death toll. The corpses arrived in the UAE capital Abu Dhabi on board a military aircraft, according to WAM, which carried footage of three coffins draped in Emirati flags being carried on a red carpet across the tarmac during a military ceremony.

TRAGEDY

Nigeria bank boss dies in US copter crash

The co-founder of Nigeria’s biggest bank has died in a helicopter crash in the United States along with his wife and son, his company said yesterday, AFP reported from Abuja. Access Bank Group CEO Herbert Wigwe was killed when the aircraft crashed in California on Friday, Access Holdings said in a statement. “Dr Wigwe died alongside his wife and son on Friday, February 9, 2024 in a helicopter accident in the United States,” it said. “The entire Access family mourns the loss of Herbert, Doreen and Chizi.” US authorities said two crew members and four passengers were killed. Nigeria’s President Bola Ahmed Tinubu said former Nigeria Stock Exchange president Abimbola Ogunbanjo was among the dead, calling the crash “an overwhelming tragedy that is shocking beyond comprehension.” “The President condoles with the Wigwe and Ogunbanjo families, the business community, and all those impacted by this harrowing incident,” his spokesman said in a statement yesterday.

UNREST

Senegal protest death toll rises to three

A 16-year-old died following clashes in Senegal’s Ziguinchor, the third fatality in unrest after President Macky Sall postponed this month’s election, a hospital source and a local politician said yesterday, AFP reported from Dakar. Sall’s decision to push back the February 25 presidential vote has plunged Senegal into one of its worst crises since independence from France in 1960. Protests pitting youths against the security forces have turned increasingly violent in a country seen as a haven of stability and democracy in West Africa, a region roiled by coups and unrest. Landing Camara, who was known as Diedhiou, died Saturday evening in hospital after being wounded in Ziguinchor. His identity papers showed he was 16, after the hospital source said he was 19. The southern city is a stronghold of jailed opposition figurehead Ousmane Sonko, where youths and security forces clashed throughout the day.

Iran marks anniversary with demand to expel Israel from UN



A handout picture provided by the Iranian Presidency yesterday, shows Iran’s President Ebrahim Raisi addressing the crowd in Tehran’s Azadi (freedom) square, on the occasion of the 45th anniversary of the revolution. **Right:** Iranians attend the 45th anniversary of the revolution in Tehran, yesterday.

AFP
Tehran

Iran marked 45 years since its Islamic revolution with a ceremony yesterday in which President Ebrahim Raisi condemned Israel over the Gaza war and demanded it be expelled from the UN.

Tensions have spiralled since the bloodiest ever Gaza war erupted in the first week of October with the Palestinian group Hamas’s storming of Israel, in turn sparking violence between fighter groups and US forces.

Support for the Palestinian cause and harsh criticism of the US – often dubbed the “Great Satan” in Iran – and Israel dominated ceremonies marking the anniversary.

In Tehran, Raisi accused the “Zionist entity”, Iran’s term for

Israel, of committing “genocide” in Gaza with the support of the US and other Western countries.

Supporters chanted “Down with the United States”, “Down with Israel” and “Down with the United Kingdom” at the square, where Iranian-made missiles and other military hardware were on display.

Raisi demanded that the “bombing of Gaza should be stopped as soon as possible” and declared that “the death of the Zionist regime has come”, in his speech to thousands at Azadi Square in western Tehran.

He asked about Israel: “How can a regime that has violated 400 statements and resolutions of international organisations adhere to UN covenants? “We believe that one of the important steps that should be taken is the expulsion of the Zionist regime from the UN.”



Iran has presented itself as one of the main supporters of Hamas in the war triggered by its October first week storming of southern Israel. Israel has vowed to eradicate Hamas and launched a military offensive that has killed at least 28,176 people, mostly women and children, according to the health ministry in the Hamas-run Gaza Strip. Iran has hailed Hamas’s October first week storming as a “success” but denied any direct involvement.

Crowds in Azadi Square held up portraits of the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, as well as of the founder of the Islamic Republic, Ayatollah R Khomeini, and popular general Qasem Soleimani, who was killed in an US strike in January 2020.

Iran has been under crippling US sanctions since Washington’s 2018 withdrawal from a landmark deal which granted it sanctions

relief in return for curbs on its nuclear programme.

The US has accused Tehran of “actively facilitating” attacks on US forces in the Middle East and of backing attacks on Red Sea shipping by Yemen’s Houthi rebels, charges Iran has denied.

Around Azadi Square, Iranian-made Qiam ballistic missiles, Shahed 136 drones and Simorgh satellite launchers were on display.

Western countries have accused Iran of supplying drones to Russia during the Ukraine war, which Tehran denies, and missiles to armed groups in the Middle East.

The celebrations come ahead of March 1 legislative elections, the first national vote since a large-scale protest movement shook Iran after the death of Mahsa Amini on September 16, 2022. Amini, 22, died after being arrested for allegedly violating the country’s strict dress code for women.

King Charles thanks well-wishers after cancer diagnosis

AFP
London

Britain's King Charles III expressed his "heartfelt thanks" to well-wishers, in his first statement since his shock announcement that he has cancer. Buckingham Palace said on Mon-

day that Charles had begun treatment, but did not specify what type of cancer he has. "I would like to express my most heartfelt thanks for the many messages of support and good wishes I have received in recent days," the king wrote in a message to the public. "As all those who have been affected by cancer will know, such

kind thoughts are the greatest comfort and encouragement," he added. The note was published on the 75-year-old monarch's website and the royal family's official page on social media platform X. Charles added that it is "equally heartening to hear how sharing my own diagnosis has helped promote public understanding and shine a

light on the work of all those organisations which support cancer patients and their families across the UK and wider world." "My lifelong admiration for their tireless care and dedication is all the greater as a result of my own personal experience," he concluded, signing the letter "Charles R." Britain's National Health Service

reported last week that the king's diagnosis had sparked a surge in online searches for advice about the disease. Charles has taken an indefinite break from public duties while he receives treatment and is currently staying at the royal country residence of Sandringham, in the east of England. He is continuing some

administrative duties and held his weekly audience with the prime minister via phone this week. Charles is not thought to have prostate cancer, since after his recent hospital procedure for a benign prostate enlargement the palace said that "a separate issue of concern was noted", adding subsequent tests had identified "a form of cancer".

India scrutiny of Chinese firms unnerves suppliers: Xiaomi

Reuters
New Delhi

China's Xiaomi has told New Delhi that smartphone component suppliers are wary about setting up operations in India amid heavy scrutiny of Chinese companies by the government, according to a letter and a source with direct knowledge of the matter. Xiaomi which has the biggest share in India's smartphone market at 18%, also asks in the letter dated February 6 that India consider offering manufacturing incentives and lowering import tariffs for certain smartphone components. The Chinese company assembles smartphones in India with mostly local components and the rest imported from China and elsewhere. The letter is Xiaomi's response to a query from India's information technology ministry asking how New Delhi can further develop the country's component manufacturing sector. India ramped up scrutiny of Chinese businesses after a 2020 border clash between the two countries killed at least 20 Indian soldiers and four from China, disrupting investment plans of big Chinese companies and drawing repeated protests from Beijing. While Chinese companies operating in India are reticent to speak publicly about the scrutiny, Xiaomi's letter shows that they continue to struggle in India, especially in the smartphone space where many critical components come from Chinese suppliers.

In the letter, Xiaomi India president Muralikrishnan B said India needed to work on "confidence building" measures to encourage component suppliers to setup operations locally. "There are apprehensions among component suppliers regarding establishing operations in India, stemming from the challenges faced by companies in India, particularly from Chinese origin," Muralikrishnan said, without naming any companies. The letter said the concerns were related to compliance and visa issues that it didn't elaborate on, and other factors. It said "the government should address these concerns and work to instil confidence among foreign component suppliers, encouraging them to set up manufacturing facilities in India." Xiaomi and the IT ministry did not respond to queries for further information and comment. Indian authorities last year accused Chinese smartphone company Vivo Communication Technology of breaching some visa rules and alleged it siphoned \$13bn in funds from India. India has also frozen more than \$600mn in Xiaomi assets for alleged illegal remittances to foreign entities by passing them off as royalty payments. Both Chinese companies deny any wrongdoing. Other than regulatory scrutiny of the likes of Xiaomi and Vivo, India has since 2020 also banned more than 300 Chinese apps, including ByteDance's TikTok, and halted planned projects such as those planned by Chinese automakers BYD, and Great Wall Motor.



A China Coast Guard vessel manoeuvres near Philippine Coast Guard vessel BRP Teresa Magbanua near Scarborough Shoal in the South China Sea, Philippines.

Philippines accuses China vessels of 'dangerous' manoeuvres

AFP
Manila

The Philippine Coast Guard yesterday accused Chinese vessels of "dangerous" manoeuvres during a nine-day patrol near a reef off the coast of the Southeast Asian country. The Philippine vessel BRP Teresa Magbanua was sent in early February to patrol the waters around Scarborough Shoal, a rich fishing ground in the South China Sea, and deliver provisions to Filipino fishermen and ensure their safety. The reef has been a flashpoint between the countries since China seized it from the Philippines in 2012. Since then, Beijing has deployed patrol boats that Manila

says harass Philippine vessels and prevent Filipino fishermen from reaching the lagoon where fish are more plentiful. During the patrol, Chinese Coast Guard (CCG) vessels "performed dangerous and blocking manoeuvres at sea against BRP Teresa Magbanua four times, with the CCG vessels crossing the bow of the PCG vessel twice", the Philippine Coast Guard said in a statement. The Philippine Coast Guard said its ship was also "shadowed" by four Chinese Coast Guard vessels "on more than 40 occasions". The coast guard also observed what it described as "four Chinese Maritime Militia vessels". China Coast Guard spokesman Gan Yu hit back, saying the Philippine vessel had "illegally

intruded" into the waters several times. "The China Coast Guard, noting that the warnings it had issued had proved ineffective, took action in accordance with the law to control the progression of the Philippine vessel and force it to leave," Gan said. "The China Coast Guard dealt with the incident professionally and to standard," he added. Videos released by the Philippine Coast Guard show a Chinese Coast Guard vessel metres from the port beam of the BRP Teresa Magbanua, before it crosses the path of the Philippine boat. Scarborough Shoal is 240kms west of the Philippines' main island of Luzon and nearly 900kms from the nearest major Chinese land mass of Hainan.

The incidents came two months after tense standoffs between China and the Philippines around disputed reefs in the South China Sea that saw a collision between vessels from the two countries and Chinese ships blasting water cannon at Philippine boats. China claims almost the entire sea and has ignored an international tribunal ruling that its assertions have no legal basis. It deploys boats to patrol the busy waterway and has built artificial islands that it has militarised to reinforce its claims. Chinese and Philippine officials last month agreed on the need for closer dialogue to deal with "maritime emergencies" in the waterway as tensions escalated.

Philippine landslide death toll rises to 54

The number of people killed by a landslide in the southern Philippines has risen to 54, the provincial government said yesterday, as rescue workers dug more bodies from the mud. The landslide struck on Tuesday night near a gold mine in Maco town in the province of Davao de Oro, burying homes and vehicles ferrying employees to the site operated by Apex Mining. Davao de Oro's provincial government said in a Facebook post that 54 people had died in the landslide, raising its previous death toll of 37 earlier in the day as rescue workers found more bodies. The tally of missing people stood at 63 people, with the provincial government saying the number remains unverified. A total of 32 people were injured in the landslide. Edward Macapili, an official at Davao de Oro, said over 300 people were involved in the rescue, but operations were being hampered by heavy rain, thick mud and the threat of further landslides.

Unperturbed



An one-horned rhino grazes near a controlled burn of grasslands at Kaziranga national park in Assam yesterday.

Presidential frontrunner skips press freedom event

Reuters
Jakarta

Two of Indonesia's three presidential contenders pledged to protect press freedom in the world's third-largest democracy at a weekend event that frontrunner Prabowo Subianto didn't attend. The event came just days ahead of the February 14 poll, and as some Indonesians raise concerns over an erosion of the country's hard-won democratic freedoms. Criticism over political interference has been levelled especially at outgoing President Joko Widodo, who has given tacit support to Prabowo. In the past, incumbents wrapping up their second term as president have remained neutral. On the last day of campaign-

ing, ex-Jakarta governor Anies Baswedan and ex-Central Java governor Ganjar Pranowo signed the National Press Council's written declarations to uphold democracy and press freedom. It was unclear if Prabowo, represented at the event by the head of his campaign team, signed the declaration. His campaign did not respond to queries on the matter. Prabowo is projected by some opinion surveys to pip the 50% threshold needed to win the election in a single round. The former special forces commander, who is making his third run at the presidency, has long faced allegations of rights abuses during his time in the military. He denies the accusations, but critics have questioned Prabowo's commitment to protecting human rights.

India's 'lake man' cleans up critical water supplies

AFP
Bengaluru, India

Ancient lake systems once provided Bengaluru with critical water supplies, but the Indian tech hub's breakneck expansion left many waterways covered over or used as dumps. In the rush to modernise, the city once known for its abundance of water largely forgot the centuries-old reservoirs it depended upon to survive, with the number of lakes shrinking by more than three-quarters. But after experts warned the city of nearly 12mn - today dubbed "In-

dia's Silicon Valley" - would not be able to meet its water needs with existing resources, mechanical engineer Anand Malligavad decided to take action. "Lakes are lungs of the earth," said the 43-year-old, known to some as the "lake man" for his campaign to bring scores of them back to life. "I tell people if you have money, better to spend it on lakes. Decades later, it will serve you." Water shortages are a chronic problem in India, which has nearly a fifth of the world's population but only four percent of its water resources, according to government think tank NITI Aayog. Malligavad's first target was a

trash-filled and dried-out site he passed on his way to work at an automotive components maker. "I thought instead of inspiring people... let me start doing it," Malligavad said. "Let it start with me." He began by studying the skills used during the centuries-long rule of the medieval Chola dynasty, who turned low-lying areas into shallow reservoirs that provided water for drinking and irrigation. The lakes stored the heavy monsoon rains and helped to replenish groundwater. But of the 1,850 that once dotted the city, fewer than 450 remain today. Many were destroyed to make room for high-rise towers, while

canals were filled in with concrete - meaning heavy rainfall now sparks flooding and is not stored for the future. Nearly half of Bengaluru depends on water sucked from intensive groundwater boreholes that often run dry in the summer heat, according to the city's Water, Environment, Land and Livelihoods (WELL) Labs research centre. Many residents already rely on expensive water trucked in from afar, and the problem is likely to get worse as climate change pushes global temperatures higher and alters weather patterns. "We're dependent on a precarious groundwater table, and that is going

to get even more precarious as you have a more unreliable rainfall," said WELL Labs chief Veena Srinivasan. "We already don't have enough water to drink," she added, noting that "the water sources that we do have, we are polluting". Fixing lakes can ease the problem, though the city still needs a large-scale urban water management plan, she said. Malligavad, trekking out to visit more than 180 ancient lakes, said he saw the "simple cost" they had taken to construct. They did not use expensive materials but only "soil, water, botanicals (plants) and canals", he said. He persuaded his company to

stump up around \$120,000 to fund his first project, the restoration of the 36-acre Kyalasanahalli lake. Using excavators, Malligavad and his workers took around 45 days to clear the site back in 2017. When the monsoon rains came months later, he went boating in the cool and clean waters. The restoration process is simple, Malligavad said. He first drains the remaining lake water and removes the silt and weeds. Then he strengthens the dams, restores the surrounding canals and creates lagoons, before replanting the site with native trees and aquatic plants.

CHAIRMAN

Abdullah bin Khalifa al-Attiyah

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Faisal Abdulhameed al-Mudahka

Deputy Managing Editor

K T Chacko

- P.O.Box 2888, Doha, Qatar
editor@gulf-times.com
44350478 (News),
44466404 (Sport),
44466636 (Home delivery)
44350474
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GULF TIMES

PACE satellite
spurs climate,
ocean research

The successful launch of a Nasa satellite last Thursday is a fillip in the quest to study ocean health, air quality, and the effects of a changing climate for the benefit of humanity. Known as PACE, the Plankton, Aerosol, Climate, ocean Ecosystem satellite has made contact with ground stations back on Earth providing teams with early readings of its overall status, health, operation, and capabilities postlaunch. A full postlaunch assessment review to determine PACE's readiness to move into the operational phase of its mission will be conducted in the coming weeks.

Information collected throughout PACE's mission will benefit society in the areas of ocean health, harmful algal bloom monitoring, ecological forecasting, and air quality. PACE also will contribute new global measurements of ocean colour, cloud properties, and aerosols, which will be essential to understanding the global carbon cycle and ocean ecosystem responses to a changing climate. The PACE's mission is designed to last at least three years, though the spacecraft is loaded with enough propellant to expand that timeline more than three times as long.

From hundreds of kilometres above Earth, the PACE mission will study the impact of tiny, often invisible things: microscopic life in water and microscopic particles in the air. "With this new addition to Nasa's fleet of Earth-observing satellites, PACE will help us learn, like never before, how particles in our atmosphere and our oceans can identify key factors impacting global warming," said Nasa administrator Bill Nelson. "The satellite's hyperspectral ocean colour instrument will allow researchers to measure oceans and other waterbodies across a spectrum

'PACE will accelerate our understanding of the Earth system and help Nasa deliver actionable science, data, and practical applications'

track harmful algal blooms, and identify changes in the marine environment.

The spacecraft also carries two polarimeter instruments, Hyper-Angular Rainbow Polarimeter #2 and Spectro-polarimeter for Planetary Exploration. These will detect how sunlight interacts with particles in the atmosphere, giving researchers new information on atmospheric aerosols and cloud properties, as well as air quality at local, regional, and global scales. With the combination of the instrument and the polarimeters, PACE will provide insights into the interactions of the ocean and atmosphere, and how a changing climate affects these interactions.

"Observations and scientific research from PACE will profoundly advance our knowledge of the ocean's role in the climate cycle," said Karen St. Germain, director, Earth Science Division, Science Mission Directorate, at Nasa Headquarters in Washington. "The value of PACE data skyrockets when we combine it with data and science from our Surface Water and Ocean Topography mission – ushering in a new era of ocean science. As an open-source science mission with early adopters ready to use its research and data, PACE will accelerate our understanding of the Earth system and help Nasa deliver actionable science, data, and practical applications to help our coastal communities and industries address rapidly evolving challenges."

Earth's oceans are responding in many ways to climate change – from sea level rise to marine heat waves to a loss of biodiversity. With PACE, researchers will be able to study climate change's effects on phytoplankton, which play a key role in the global carbon cycle by absorbing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and converting it into their cellular material. These tiny organisms drive larger aquatic and global ecosystems that provide critical resources for food security, recreation, and the economy.

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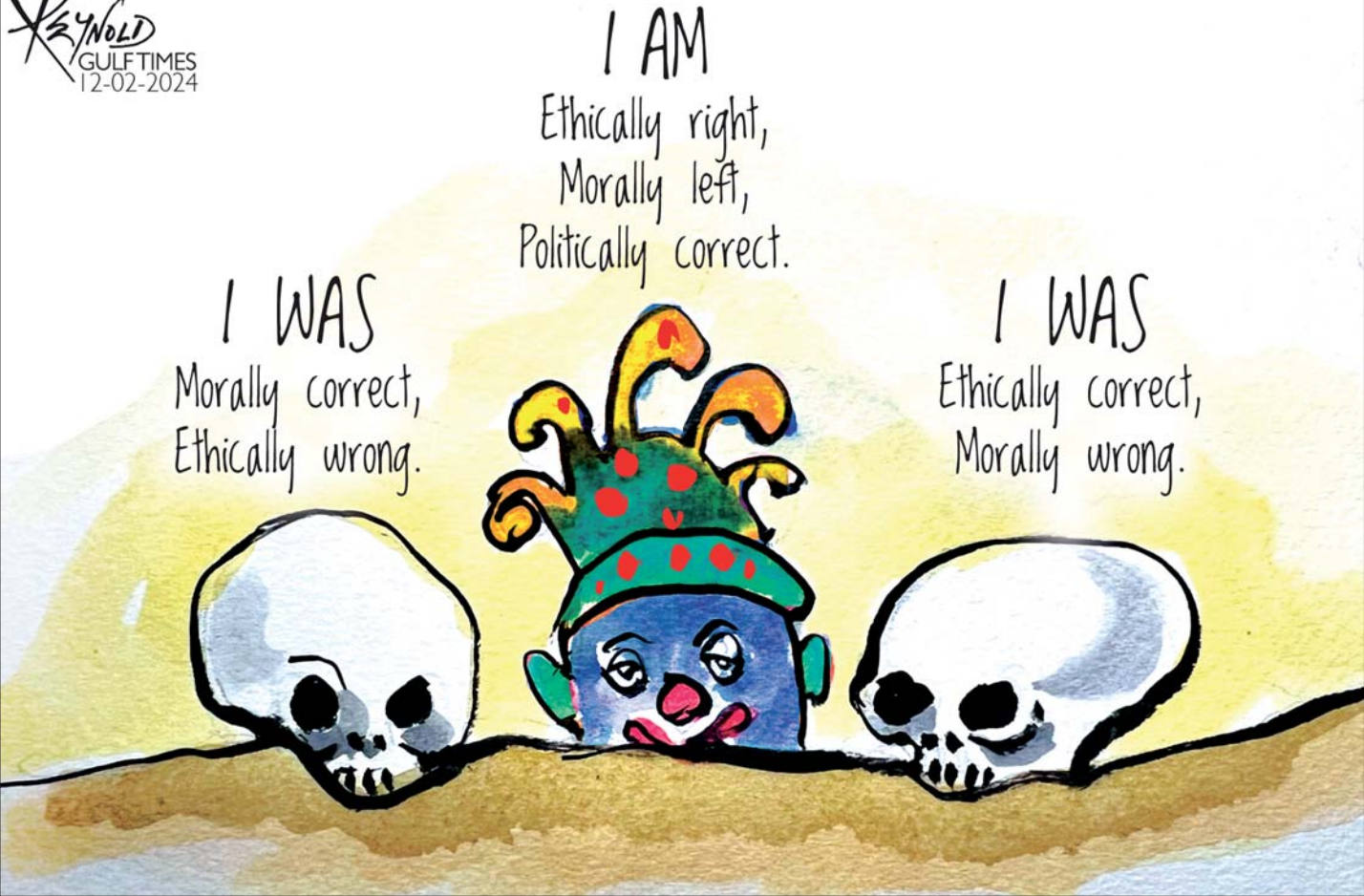
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How to democratise AI

By Bertrand Badré and Charles Gorintin
Paris

The rapid advance of artificial intelligence evokes both wonder and dread. Many regard AI as an object of marvel and awe (a Stupor Mundi, to borrow a Latin phrase), while others believe it can be a benevolent saviour (a Salvator Mundi). Regardless of whether AI is seen as miraculous or merely helpful, the question remains: How can we ensure that its benefits are available to everyone?

To answer this question, we need a nuanced understanding of AI. That means rejecting several simplistic narratives: functionalism, which says humans should adapt and augment themselves to keep up with technological progress; sensationalism, which depicts AI as an existential threat; cynicism, which seeks to exploit AI for profit; and fatalism, which implies a resigned acceptance of AI's inevitable rise.

What these scenarios overlook is that the future is still ours to shape. Adopting the verum-factum principle – knowing through making – is crucial to developing a more profound understanding of AI's capabilities and implications.

To prevent a minority from co-opting AI's transformative potential, it must be democratised. Equitable access is the key to ensuring that the benefits of technological progress are broadly shared, and that AI serves as a unifying force, rather than exacerbating the divisions within our fragile societies.

The potential benefits are enormous. In the 1990s, Joseph

Stiglitz observed that "a child anywhere in the world who has access to the Internet has access to more knowledge than a child in the best schools of the industrial countries did a quarter-century ago." By democratising access to AI, we can empower today's children to engage with humanity's brightest minds in a way that caters to their individual needs.

But achieving this depends on how we shape the narrative surrounding AI's adoption and future impact. Instead of making lofty promises like "AI will solve world hunger," we should focus on its ability to bring about incremental yet meaningful improvements in people's daily lives.

In this regard, the technology's rapidly expanding capabilities and declining costs create new opportunities for smaller-scale models and enable individual users to personalise AI solutions, mirroring the Internet's freewheeling, creative early days. Just two years ago, for example, the leading open-source AI model was Meta's OPT-175B. Today, a leading open-source model, Mistral 7B, is 40 times smaller, at least 40 times cheaper to operate, and outperforms its predecessor. Remarkably, it was developed by a company of just 18 people.

And this is just the beginning. AI is currently experiencing its own version of Moore's law, setting the stage for rapid uptake, akin to the diffusion of telephones and televisions. This accelerated process calls for a shift in focus toward developing practical applications and mitigating risks, rather than fixating on reducing costs.

The rise of AI is a double-edged

sword. The technology could be a powerful equaliser or a source of division, depending on how it is deployed and who controls it. Like previous technological revolutions, it promises to create new employment opportunities while simultaneously threatening to displace existing jobs. A recent report by the International Monetary Fund underscores this point, warning that AI could lead to a growing divide between tech-savvy individuals, well-positioned to reap the economic benefits of innovation, and those who risk falling behind.

But our understanding of these technologies must reflect their complexities and the power of human ingenuity. By developing and promoting AI systems that significantly improve essential services, especially in underserved regions, we could ensure that their benefits are broadly shared. To achieve this, AI technologies must be deployed with the explicit objective of reducing existing inequalities.

At the same time, it is worth noting that AI will most likely increase the overall consumer surplus by lowering the costs associated with certain services. To ensure that these benefits reach the majority of people, a two-fold strategy is necessary: enabling individuals to harness this value locally while redistributing the overall gains to those unable to access them.

Hence, enhancing the accessibility of AI is both feasible and critical. To leverage these technologies to tackle pressing social problems, it is crucial to identify specific areas where AI can make a substantial difference, such as healthcare, education, environmental sustainability, and governance. But setting the

right priorities and implementing technological solutions requires a concerted effort. The concept of AI for good should be integrated into the strategies of development institutions and multilateral organisations.

But first, the global conversation about AI must shift from "wow" to "what" and "how." It is time to move away from mere fascination with the emerging technology to identifying the challenges it can address and devising strategies for its integration into the educational and social systems of developed and developing countries alike. Preparing society for an AI-augmented future requires more than just technological innovation; it calls for establishing ethical frameworks, updating policymaking, and promoting AI literacy across communities.

As we navigate the Stupor Mundi phase of AI, captivated by its seemingly magical capabilities, we must never lose sight of the fact that the impact of technology depends on how we use it. The choices we make today will determine whether AI benefits and enriches a select few or evolves into a powerful force for positive social change. To realise the promise of Salvator Mundi, we must harness these emerging technologies to forge a better, more inclusive future for all.

– Project Syndicate

● Bertrand Badré, a former managing director of the World Bank, is CEO and Founder of Blue Like an Orange Sustainable Capital and the author of Can finance save the world?

● Charles Gorintin, Co-Founder and Chief Technology Officer of Alan, is a non-executive co-founder of Mistral AI.



Equitable access is the key to ensuring that the benefits of technological progress are broadly shared, and that AI serves as a unifying force, rather than exacerbating the divisions within our fragile societies.

PTI-backed independents lead in final tally

Reuters, AFP
Islamabad

The final results of Pakistan's national election put independents, backed by jailed former prime minister Imran Khan, in the lead with 93 of 264 seats.

The party of another former prime minister, Nawaz Sharif, was second with 75 seats after Thursday's vote, lacking a clear majority but it was the largest single party in parliament as Khan's independents ran as individuals.

As coalition talks were held and protesters blocked roads in the north of the country, it was not clear who would form a government. The final tally of votes was published by the Election Commission more than 60 hours after voting ended, raising questions over the delay.

The former prime ministers and bitter rivals have both declared victory, adding to the uncertainty as the country faces numerous urgent challenges, including negotiating a new International Monetary Fund programme to keep a struggling economy afloat.

A prime ministerial candidate has to show a simple majority of 169 seats in the National Assembly when the house is called in the coming days. This will be determined by coalition talks and whether Khan-backed candidates are able to join a smaller party in parliament to form a single bloc to gain reserve seats.

Khan's PTI party had threatened to hold nationwide peaceful demonstrations yesterday if the vote tally was not released overnight.

Pakistan's interim government said the voting count delay was caused by communications issues due to a mobile Internet outage on Election Day. The outage, which authorities said was for security reasons, drew concern from human rights groups and foreign governments, including the United States.

Around 93 of the independent candidates who won seats were associated with Khan's PTI party.

Khan's supporters ran as independents because they were barred by the Election Commission on technical grounds from contesting the polls under his party's electoral symbol.

Despite the ban and Khan's imprisonment for disputed convictions on charges ranging from leaking state secrets to corruption, millions of the former cricket superstar's supporters came out to vote for him, even though he cannot be part of any government

■ The PTI is however, disadvantaged after the Election Commission denied it an election symbol, rendering it ineffective as a party



Supporters of Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party protest against the alleged skewing in Pakistan's national election results, in Karachi yesterday. (AFP)

Scenarios: What's next in deadlock

Pakistan's national election ended with no party winning a majority in parliament, in polls marred by militant violence, political turmoil and questions of transparency. Former prime ministers and bitter rivals Nawaz Sharif and Imran Khan both declared victory, adding to the uncertainty as the country faces numerous challenges that need to be addressed quickly, including negotiating a new International Monetary Fund programme to keep a struggling \$350bn economy afloat. Next, a prime ministerial candidate has to show a simple majority of 169 seats in the National Assembly when the house is called in coming days. The Assembly consists of 336 seats of which 266 are decided through direct voting on polling day. There are also 70 reserved seats — 60 for women and 10 for non-Muslims — allotted according to the strength of each party in the house to determine the final position of parties in the Assembly. Here are four scenarios on what could happen next:

Sharif strikes deal to head a coalition
Sharif's party, which won 75

seats, strikes a deal with the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) of Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari, the son of assassinated former premier Benazir Bhutto, which won 54 seats, to pull together a majority in parliament. The two, along with other smaller parties, form a coalition government in which Sharif or his brother is prime minister and important positions are given to other parties. The two parties were in government together for 16 months till August, with Bhutto Zardari as foreign minister and Sharif's brother Shehbaz as prime minister.

Khan's independents sweep to power
Khan's independent candidates, who won 93 seats, join a smaller party in parliament in order to form a single bloc to fulfil a requirement for them to be allocated reserved seats. That would push them closer to a majority and allow them to put up a candidate for prime minister. They can also strike a deal with other parties to support a consensus candidate, which also means Khan's supporters are in power, and can push to have their jailed leader released

under an agreement. Khan himself is not eligible to become prime minister. The party will have to push hard for allies to align with Khan's politics.

Bilawal pushes to head coalition
While Sharif and Khan's candidates won the most seats, no party can form government without the PPP. With both looking to keep the other out of power, the PPP strikes a deal to make the young Bilawal prime minister. He pushed the idea before the polls, saying he would bring a fresh approach to pull Pakistan out of multiple crises which other aged leaders have been unable to do.

No deal, army steps in
Uncertainty drags on with no-one able to form government. Pakistan's army, the most powerful and organised force in the country, steps in to restore order and takes power as it has done thrice before in the country's 76-year history — the last time in 1999 to overthrow Sharif's government. The army has already called on political parties to show "maturity and unity".

while he remains in prison.

One disadvantage the independents face in trying to form a government is that they, having not run as a party, are not eligible to be allocated any of parliament's 70 reserved seats, which are distributed according to party strength in the final tally. Sharif's party could get up to 20 of these seats.

A spokeswoman for Sharif's party said that he had met with representatives of the minority regional Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) party and they had agreed to "in principle work jointly in the larger interest of the country".

An MQM leader confirmed the meeting but said no formal coalition agreement had been made.

The Election Commission previously flagged that results for two seats could not yet be included, one in which a candidate was killed, requiring the postponement of polling, and another in which polling would be completed later this month.

"The results have clearly indicated that no single party possesses a simple majority to establish a government," said Zahid Hussain, a political analyst and author.

"The political future of the country from this point onward is highly uncertain."

Still, PTI leaders insist they have been given a "people's mandate" to form the next government.

"The people have decided in favour of Imran Khan," party chairman Gohar Ali Khan told *Arab News* in an interview.

A coalition between the PML-N and the PPP — who formed the last government after ousting Imran Khan with a no-confidence vote in April 2022 — still seems the most likely outcome.

The military looms large over Pakistan's political landscape, with generals having run the country for nearly half its history since partition from India in 1947.

The military-backed PML-N, founded by three-time prime minister Sharif, declared victory as the party with the largest number of seats, but to form a government he will be forced to cut deals with rivals and independents.

Meanwhile, police fired tear gas to disperse supporters of Imran Khan yesterday after his party urged protests outside election offices where they said rigging had taken place in

last week's national vote.

Clashes were reported in Rawalpindi city, south of the capital, and Lahore, in the east, while dozens of other protests were held across the country without incident.

Police warned earlier they would come down hard on "illegal" gatherings. There were no immediate reports of injuries from the protests.

"Throughout Pakistan, elections were manipulated in a subtle way," PTI chairman Gohar Ali Khan told a news conference Saturday, calling on supporters to "protest peacefully" yesterday.

Authorities warned they would take strict action, saying so-called Section 144 orders were in place — a colonial-era law banning public gatherings.

"Some individuals are inciting illegal gatherings around the Election Commission and other government offices," a statement from Islamabad's police force said yesterday.

"Legal action will be taken against unlawful assemblies. It should be noted that soliciting for gatherings is also a crime," it said.

A similar warning was also issued in Rawalpindi, while dozens of police equipped with riot gear assembled near Liberty Market in Lahore.

In Rawalpindi, AFP staff saw police fire tear gas at a crowd of dozens of PTI supporters after they refused orders to stop picketing an office used to collect constituency election results.

Another gathering of around 200 PTI supporters in Lahore dispersed quickly when police moved in with riot shields and batons.

Local media said several people were detained in Karachi, in the south, when they refused orders to clear the area.

Khan's candidate deserts party

As the race to secure support from independent candidates, Waseem Qadir, who was backed by the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), deserted the party last night to join the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N). His decision followed a triumphant victory over PML-N's Sheikh Rohail Asghar in the NA-121 constituency of Lahore, where he secured a commanding lead of over 8,000 votes in the polls held on February 8. This development unfolds against the backdrop of negotiations between the PML-N and the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) regarding the potential formation of a coalition.

Milei, Pope meet face to face in Rome



Argentine President Javier Milei with Pope Francis at the Vatican yesterday. (Reuters)

Argentina's top political and religious leaders — President Javier Milei and Pope Francis — met for the first time yesterday in Rome, amid the explosive economic situation in their native country. The two men with sharply diverging views on how to eradicate the poverty gripping Argentina met briefly before and after a papal mass, during the 53-year-old economist's first official visit to Rome as president. Milei, a libertarian and free-market champion who once called the 87-year-old pope from Buenos Aires an "imbecile" who "promotes communism", attended the ceremony at St Peter's Basilica to canonise Argentina's first female saint. Following the mass, Francis, in a wheelchair, stopped briefly to shake hands and share a few words with Milei amid the

congregation, who gave the pontiff a hug. The Vatican said they also met briefly beforehand. An official audience comes today, when Milei also plans to meet with Italian President Sergio Mattarella and Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni. The meeting between the two men comes amid major political uncertainty in Argentina, where newcomer Milei is engaged in a controversial, massive deregulation of Argentina's economy by presidential decree. Milei and Francis radically disagree over how to tackle poverty, which affects 40% of the population of Argentina, where inflation soars over 200%. Francis has railed throughout his papacy against the inequalities generated by the free markets, calling for protection of the most vulnerable in society.

Mayotte birthright citizenship revoked

French authorities yesterday announced a controversial plan to amend the Constitution to revoke birthright citizenship on the French Indian Ocean island of Mayotte, which has been struggling with social unrest and a crippling migration crisis. The proposal risks to further ramp up tensions in France following the adoption of a tough new law on immigration. The left denounced the fresh plan as another attack on France's centuries-old values, while the right suggested it be enforced across the entire country.

Centre-right Stubb leads Finland presidential vote

Reuters
Helsinki

Alexander Stubb of the centre-right National Coalition Party led in the run-off vote for Finland's next president yesterday, with 52.7% support in early results, justice ministry data showed.

The liberal Green Party member Pekka Haavisto was behind him at 47.3% support, with 63.2% of the votes counted, the data showed.

Finland is electing a new head of state who will also be responsible for its security and foreign policy.

Stubb, a former prime minister, won the first round on January 28 with 27.2% of the vote ahead of Haavisto on 25.8%. He has also led Haavisto in surveys, most recently by 6-8 percentage points.

"A very good start to this evening. That feels good at the moment but there are still plenty of votes to be counted," Stubb said after seeing the early results.

Haavisto remained hopeful.

"We are starting from a bit behind but it's still possible to catch up in the Election Day votes," he said.

The vote marks a new era in Finland, which for decades has elected presidents to foster diplomacy, in particular with neighbouring Russia, and opted not to join military alliances so it could soothe the tensions between Moscow and Nato.

But Finns changed their minds about playing that role after Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, in a rapid U-turn that led to the country joining Nato in April last year.

Now under the Western alliance's security umbrella, the new president will replace Sauli Niinisto, who is retiring after two six-year terms in which he earned the nickname "the Putin Whisperer" for his previous close ties with the Russian leader.

Niinisto's successor will have a central role in defining Finland's Nato policies, while taking the lead on overall foreign and security policy in close co-operation with the government and acting



Alexander Stubb reacts at his election reception in Helsinki yesterday. (AFP)

as commander-in-chief of the armed forces.

Both candidates are pro-European and strong supporters of Ukraine who have taken a tough stance towards Russia in their campaigns.

Lauri, a 36-year-old IT worker who voted in Helsinki, named Russia as the main task the new president will face.

"Obviously we all know that we

are in a difficult position nowadays looking at Russia, the entire turbulence in the world today. So I think that's the biggest threat and biggest issue that we have," he told Reuters on Saturday, without naming his preferred candidate.

In an interview with Reuters last month, Stubb said there would be no Russian pillar in Finland's foreign policy for now:

"Politically, there will be no relations with the president of Russia or with the Russian political leadership until they stop the war in Ukraine."

Stubb is in favour of deep Nato co-operation, such as allowing the transport of nuclear weapons through Finnish soil and placing some Nato troops permanently in Finland. He does not support storing nuclear weapons in Finland, however.

"At times, a nuclear weapon is a guarantee of peace," Stubb said in a debate on Tuesday.

Russia has threatened Finland with retaliation in response to its Nato membership and a defence co-operation agreement signed with the US in December.

Nolan wins top directors award for Oppenheimer

Oppenheimer was named the best film of the year by Hollywood's directors on Saturday, boosting expectations that Christopher Nolan's long wait for success at the Oscars could soon be over. The British director — who is renowned for making commercially successful, complex blockbusters, but has not always received love from awards voters — won the top prize at the Directors Guild of America (DGA) Awards in Los Angeles. "The idea that my peers would think I deserve this means everything to me," said Nolan, of his film about the invention of the atomic bomb. Nolan had been nominated four times previously



Outstanding Directorial Achievement in Theatrical Feature Film winner for *Oppenheimer* Nolan poses in the press room. (AFP)

for the top accolade from the DGA, but had failed to win for *Memento*, *The Dark Knight*, *Inception* or *Dunkirk*. He will now be hoping he can break a similar losing streak next month at the Oscars, where he has lost all five of his previous nods. Nolan lavished praise on his filmmaking team for bringing his hugely ambitious visions — including a jaw-dropping replica of the first atomic bomb test — to life over the course of his career. "People say 'Christopher Nolan destroyed a real plane' and 'Christopher Nolan blew up a building,' or whatever," he said. "Sorry, chaps! It's all down to you and your teams. And you were never more on your game than

making *Oppenheimer*." Eighteen of the past 20 DGA winners have gone on to also win the Oscar for best director that same year. This year's Academy Awards take place on March 10. The other directors nominated by the DGA for its top prize this year were Martin Scorsese (*Killers of the Flower Moon*), Greta Gerwig (*Barbie*), Yorgos Lanthimos (*Poor Things*) and Alexander Payne (*The Holdovers*). Nolan will go head-to-head with Scorsese and Lanthimos again at the Oscars, but notably not Gerwig, whose apparent snubbing by the Academy as director of blockbuster feminist satire *Barbie* caused outrage.

Qatar Tourism participates in OTM Mumbai

Qatar Tourism (QT) led a delegation of 13 partners from the hospitality sector at OTM Mumbai 2024, one of Asia's leading Travel Trade Shows. The event, which ran from February 8-10 at Mumbai's Jio World Convention Centre, provided the QT with a platform to present its latest offerings to the Indian market and engage with more than 35,000 industry professionals.

For the third consecutive year in a row, the QT won the "Best Design and Decoration" award for its booth.

This year, the double-decker pavilion was its largest edition yet, covering an expansive area of

200sq m and featuring unique activations.

An immersive augmented reality (AR) experience allowed visitors to closely view and interact with Qatar's iconic animals on an LED display, providing an opportunity to capture the moment.

The travel and trade show provided the QT with the opportunity to engage with core markets identified in the 2030 strategy.

In 2023, Qatar welcomed approximately 420,000 visitors from India, comprising 10% of the total international arrivals for that year, making it the second highest source market after Saudi Arabia.

This year's booth featured in-



Representatives of Qatar Tourism and its partners in front of the QT pavilion at the OTM Mumbai 2024.

dustry partners that included Qatar Airways, Discover Qatar, Qatar Calendar, Hilton Salwa Beach Resort, Rixos Qetaifan Island North Doha, The Chedi Katara Hotel & Resort, Marsa Malaz Kempinski, Rixos Gulf Hotel Doha, Sheraton Grand Doha Resort & Convention Hotel, Q Moments as the Destination Management Company, Tawfeeq Holidays, Regency Travel & Tours, and Ali Bin Ali Travel.



Ghanim al-Sulaiti

Vegan garden at QIFF is the largest in Qatar's history



By Joey Aguilar
Staff Reporter

The 13th Qatar International Food Festival (QIFF) is breaking new ground by showcasing its largest 100% vegan garden to date, offering visitors a wide selection of healthier food options and a diverse range of culinary experiences.

"Eight years ago, we launched Evergreen Organics at the food festival with the idea to test the market," Qatari entrepreneur Ghanim al-Sulaiti told *Gulf Times* on the sidelines of the festival, which runs until February 17 at Expo 2023 Doha, at Al Bidda Park. "Now, we have 14 (local and international) vegan concepts in one place."

Citing the growing demand for healthy and vegan options, he said that they were delighted to see the enthusiastic response from people eager to indulge in healthy and vegan cuisine.

Among the favourites, al-Sulaiti said, were vegan hot dogs and machboos, both of which have

garnered significant attention since the festival's opening.

"In the festival, we're very happy to see that vegan hot dogs being a staple, a lot of people want to try them," he said, noting that partnerships with renowned chefs and brands like Beyond Meat have helped elevate these dishes, challenging traditional perceptions of vegan cuisine.

"The vegan machboos is also very interesting ... we collaborated with Chef Noor AlMazroei, a local Qatari traditional chef, who created a vegan alternative to the machboos," he said. "The goal of this is to change the norms and change what people perceive when it comes to vegan."

Underlining the importance of catering to diverse dietary needs, al-Sulaiti suggested that food festivals in various parts of the globe should always have vegan or gluten-free options that cater to different people.

He also underscored the community's support, with numerous Qatari entrepreneurs joining the movement towards healthier dining options.

"It's nice to see as well the community coming together. I mean, we have many local entrepreneurs joining us and being part of this, and that just changes the way we see restaurants nowadays," said al-Sulaiti, who is the founder and chief executive of Evergreen Organics and Botany Lab.

He shone a spotlight on the authenticity of the vegan concept, aimed at providing a safe and inclusive space for both vegans and non-vegans.

"(Most people) think vegan is just salads and greens," al-Sulaiti said. "Actually, vegan can be burgers, hot dogs, donuts and even sushi. So that's the idea: more options and more flavours."

Queried about expansion plans, he said they expanded extensively in the last seven years, bringing together several brands and concepts, and looking forward to fostering more.

"We're trying to grow within our community, trying to bring more people and create a little bit of this kind of consciousness that veganism is not just a trend, not just a thing and a faith," he stated. "It's something that's here to stay, and it's a lifestyle."

Doha Metro, Lusail Tram carried over 6.4mn Asian Cup fans

Qatar Railways Company (Qatar Rail) announced that more than 6.46mn passengers used the Doha Metro and Lusail Tram during the AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023 from January 12 to February 10.

In a statement, Qatar Rail noted that 6.22mn passengers used the metro and 236,000 passengers used the tram. The metro and tram played an instrumental role in facilitating the movement of fans and visitors to and from stadiums and other event activations.

In terms of operational performance, 83,358 train-trips were completed on the metro and tram network during the tournament, of which 72,010 were by metro and 11,348 by tram. Throughout the tournament, 29% of spectators travelled to stadiums using the metro, whilst metro usage increased to 36% for stadiums within walking distance to metro stations.

The day of the Asian Cup Final recorded the highest daily network ridership of 303,500 with 295,900 travelling by metro and 7,600 on tram. Furthermore, Lusail QNB Metro Station recorded a footfall more than 115,000, with approximately 53% of the overall stadium trips using metro on the day. The overall footfall across all stations and associated facilities of the metro exceeded 734,000 across the day.

Engineer Abdulla Saif al-Sulaiti, chief of Service Delivery at Qatar Rail, stated: "We are proud of the reliable operational performance recorded during the Qatar 2023 Asian Cup and our contribution to its success while serving Qatar's visitors throughout the tournament via the Doha Metro and Lusail Tram networks."

He added: "This success is attributed to the pre-planning and readiness for the tournament, taking in consideration the lessons learned from the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 and previous major events into account in terms of operations, crowd management, customer service, and more."

"A comprehensive operation plan was developed and executed to meet the tournament's requirements, including increasing the metro's capacity by operating the full fleet of 110 trains, running the 6-car trains on the Red Line, and the train



Ajan al-Enazi



Abdulla Saif al-Sulaiti

headway was set to be 3 minutes before and after match times on all lines to."

"Additionally, we cannot overlook the role of coordinated efforts at various levels among all relevant entities, especially the Ministry of Transport and the Local Organising Committee, to provide a smooth and safe travel experience," al-Sulaiti said.

Both the Doha Metro and Lusail Tram played an exceptional role in providing a safe and reliable travel experience, allowing the fans the opportunity to attend four matches in a single day during the group stage.

Ajan Eid al-Enazi, chief of Strategy and Business Development at Qatar Rail, stated: "The Asian Cup tournament represented another key experience and added another milestone in network track record during major events. The metro achieved a new success as it became one of the key players of the tournament's transportation system, given its role in complementing the experience of both local fans and visitors throughout the Asian Cup."



The largest vegan garden at the QIFF, offering 100% vegan cuisines. PICTURES: Shaji Kayamkulam



More rain expected today

The Met office has forecast thundery rain today, associated with strong wind, both inshore and offshore, in continuation of yesterday's weather conditions. Scattered showers and strong winds were recorded across Qatar yesterday, accompanied by thunder and lightning at times. Today's minimum and maximum temperatures are expected in the ranges of 13°-17° Celsius and 20-22C, respectively. Yesterday's minimum and maximum temperatures were 16-18C and 20-22C, respectively.

PICTURES: Shaji Kayamkulam

