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Scholz blasts Trump comments

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said yesterday that any relativisation of Nato's mutual defence clause was "dangerous" and only served Russia, following comments by former US President Donald Trump questioning the alliance's key provision. Trump suggested the United States might not protect Nato allies who are not spending enough on defence from a potential Russian invasion. "Any relativisation of Nato's guarantee of assistance is irresponsible and dangerous," Scholz told reporters.

Marathon star Kiptum killed in car crash

Tributes poured in yesterday for Kenyan running sensation Kelvin Kiptum after the marathon world record-holder was killed in a car crash at the age of 24. The death of Kiptum just months before the Paris Olympics has shocked Kenya and the world of athletics. Kiptum, a father of two, was driving from Kaptagat to Eldoret in the Rift Valley, when his car careered off the road and hit a tree. Police said Kiptum and his Rwandan coach Gervais Hakizimana were killed on the spot while a woman passenger was injured. **Sport Page 1**



Amir, Palestinian president discuss Gaza truce efforts

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani met with President of the sisterly State of Palestine Mahmoud Abbas, at the Sheikh Abdullah bin Jassim Majlis in the Amiri Diwan yesterday. During the meeting, they discussed bilateral relations and ways to support and enhance them, the latest developments in the Gaza Strip and the occupied Palestinian territories, and the expanded cycle of violence in the region, and its repercussions on regional and global security and stability. The meeting also discussed the ongoing efforts for an immediate ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, in a way that facilitates a just, comprehensive and sustainable solution to the Palestinian issue.

The Palestinian president briefed His Highness the Amir on the latest developments in the diplomatic and legal paths aimed at stopping the Israeli aggression against the besieged Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip, and reaching a final and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian issue. He expressed his thanks and appreciation to His Highness the Amir for Qatar's permanent support for the Palestinian people. His Highness the Amir affirmed Qatar's firm position on the Palestinian issue and its support for the brotherly Palestinian people to obtain their legitimate national rights, and the continuation of work on diplomatic mediation to bring the ongoing fighting in Gaza,

the West Bank and the occupied territories to an end. His Highness the Amir also welcomed efforts to resolve the Palestinian division, wishing them to be crowned with success, in a way that serves the Palestinian people and their national interests. The meeting was attended on the Qatar side by HE the Chief of the Amiri Diwan Sheikh Saoud bin Abdulrahman al-Thani, HE the Head of the State Security Abdullah bin Mohamed al-Khulaifi, HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Mohamed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh al-Khulaifi, along with several senior officials. On the Palestinian side, it was attended by Secretary-General of the Executive Committee of the



Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) Hussein al-Sheikh, Head of the General Intelligence Service, Maj Gen Majed Faraj, Presidential Adviser for Diplomatic Affairs Majdi al-Khalidi, and several senior officials and members of the official delegation. (QNA)

Dr Hanan al-Kuwari wins 'Best Minister Award'



Sheikh Maktoum bin Mohamed bin Rashid al-Maktoum honoured HE Dr Hanan Mohamed al-Kuwari with the award.

HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani witnessed the honouring of HE the Minister of Public Health Dr Hanan Mohamed al-Kuwari with the "Best Minister Award" at the World Governments Summit in Dubai. Sheikh Maktoum bin Mohamed bin Rashid al-Maktoum, deputy ruler of Dubai and deputy prime minister and minister of finance, honoured Dr al-Kuwari with the award at the event under the theme "Foreseeing Future Governments". Dr al-Kuwari, said: "Winning this award affirms the leadership of Qatar and government's out-

standing performance thanks to the support and directives of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani." She said that Qatar has made great breakthroughs in all fields, and has become a global beacon of comprehensive and sustainable development and building the ideal educated person who is committed to the values; capable of performing their responsibilities and duties towards their country, citizens and residents and leading the development process efficiently, responsibly and competently thanks to the support of the wise leadership and the inspiring vision of His Highness the Amir. **To Page 4**

All set to celebrate Qatar National Sport Day today

By Joey Aguilar
Staff Reporter

Qatar is all set to mark the National Sport Day (NSD) 2024 with an array of activities and events across the nation, aimed at promoting a healthy and active lifestyle among residents. Various public and private organisations and institutions have come together to host a diverse range of activities, from sports competitions to several recreational activities for different age groups to take part. One of the highlights includes the collaboration between Msheireb Downtown Doha and several prominent entities, including the Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC), PSG Academy Qatar, Cyqlone, and Zula Wellness Resort, curating a variety of engaging activations throughout the area and promising a day filled with sports and fun. The NSD activities, endorsed by the QOC, are set to commence at 8am and will continue until 6pm, inviting members of the public to participate freely. Notable figures from the QOC, including Sheikh



Various public and private organisations have come together to host a diverse range of activities, from sports competitions to several recreational activities for different age groups

Khalifa bin Khalid al-Thani, QOC's director of Sport Sector, stressed the significance of these events in fostering a sports culture within the community. Sheikh Khalifa highlighted the participation of Team Qatar stars, aiming to inspire individuals to incorporate sports into their daily lives. The NSD festivities coincide with the second edition of the Schools Olympic Programme Race, where thousands of students will compete in running races of varying distances at Lusail Boulevard. Dr Hafiz Ali Abdullah, senior director of Corporate Commu-

nications at Msheireb Properties, expressed pride in promoting a healthy lifestyle and encouraged everyone to join the celebrations at Msheireb Downtown Doha. Abdulhadi Deyab al-Sahli, head of media section at QOC, highlighted the organisation's continuous efforts to foster a sports culture among individuals across the country. The main aim is to encourage everyone to embrace physical activity as an integral aspect of their lives, he added. "The QOC is fully aware of the value of sport for everyone's physical and mental health, that's why the QOC will keep organising sustainable events like National Sport Day and Schools Olympic Programme," added al-Sahli. The activities at Barahat Msheireb will cater to diverse interests, offering interactive sports stations and thrilling tournaments open to the public. A special Human Football Arena promises to provide a unique experience for visitors. Meanwhile, Cyqlone will challenge participants with outdoor cycling classes and a 5-kilometre run, while Zula Wellness Resort will host on-stage classes including yoga, Tai Chi, and Pilates. **To Page 6**

74 Gazans killed in bid to free hostages

Massacre toll rises to 28,340 Prospect of an attack on Rafah terrifying: UN

Reuters
Doha/Jerusalem

Israel freed two Israeli-Argentine hostages held by Hamas in Rafah yesterday in a ferocious rescue operation which killed 74 Palestinians in the southern Gaza city where about one million civilians have sought refuge from months of bombardments. The mission by the Israeli military, the Shin Bet security service and a special police unit, freed Fernando Simon Marman, 60, and Louis Hare, 70, the military said. Much of the densely-populated strip of land on the Mediterranean is in ruins, with 28,340 Palestinians dead and 67,984 wounded, according to Gaza health officials, with many others believed to be buried under rubble. US President Joe Biden, who has become increasingly vocal that Israel should not carry out a ground offensive in Rafah without a plan to protect civilians, is scheduled to meet Jor-



Members of a Palestinian family ride in the back of a truck with belongings as they flee Rafah, taking the coastal road north towards the central Gaza Strip yesterday.

dan's King Abdullah, who has been on a diplomatic tour of western capitals to push for a ceasefire.

An Israeli military spokesman said the hostages were being held on the second floor of a building that was breached with explosives during the raid amid heavy exchanges of gunfire with surrounding buildings. Some Palestinians feared Israel had begun a long-expected ground offensive in the city, where people displaced by the war are sheltering with nowhere else to go. UN human rights chief Volker Turk called the prospect of an attack on Rafah "terrifying". "Those with influence must restrain, rather than enable," he said in a statement. Many Western leaders have expressed alarm at Israel's offensive while continuing to support the country. Britain urged Israel to agree to a truce to free its hostages rather than attack Rafah where people were trapped. An Israeli official has said people will be evacuated further north, but its forces are also active in central Gaza.

Canadian firms keen to tap Qatari AI market

By Peter Alagos
Business Reporter

As many as 25 Canadian firms are expected to participate in the upcoming Web Summit Qatar, which is seen as a platform to explore, exchange, and open opportunities for collaboration in different tech-related sectors. Yasser Dhoub, executive director of the Canadian-Qatari Business Forum (CQBF), told Gulf Times that the participating Canadian firms are specialising in the fields of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and high technology, among other industries. The summit will be held at the Doha Exhibition and Convention Center (DECC) from February 26 to 29.



Yasser Dhoub noted that the CQBF delegation is "a diverse mix of startups, visionary investors," and established businesses that are keen to explore "the untapped potential on both sides of the partnership." **To Page 4**



We extend our most sincere
congratulations to

Her Excellency

Dr. Hanan Mohamed Al Kuwari

Minister of Public Health

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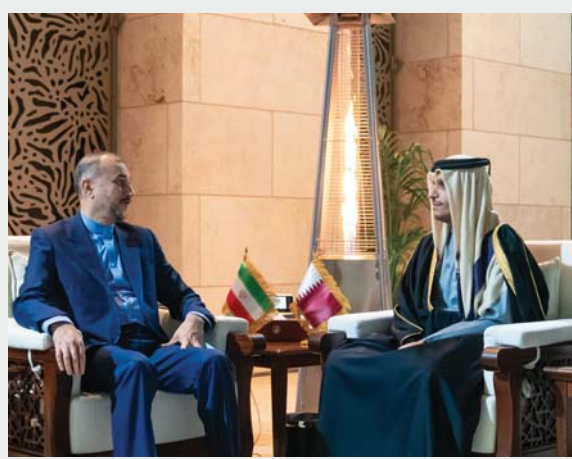


Wishing Her Excellency
continued progress and success



Weill Cornell
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PM, Iran FM discuss Gaza developments



HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani met in Doha yesterday with the visiting Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian. The meeting discussed bilateral relations and ways to enhance them, besides the latest developments in the Gaza Strip and the occupied Palestinian territories, as well as the expanding circle of violence in the region, and its repercussions on regional and global security and stability. HE Sheikh Mohamed reiterated Qatar's position calling for an immediate ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, the protection of civilians, and the continuous flow of humanitarian aid into the Strip without hindrance. **(QNA)**

Palestine president ends Doha visit

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas left Doha yesterday after a working visit to the country. He and the accompanying delegation were seen off at Hamad International Airport by HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Mohamed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh al-Khulaifi and Palestinian ambassador to Qatar Munir Abdullah Ghannam. **(QNA)**



PM partakes in World Governments Summit in Dubai

HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani participated yesterday in the World Governments Summit 2024, held in Dubai under the theme 'Shaping Future Governments'. HE Sheikh Mohamed pointed out that the wide participation of governments and organisations in the summit is an important indicator for the success of the summit which has become an important milestone in promoting the government work and discussing its developments, adding that the event is a testament to the success made by the sisterly United Arab Emirates in leading the dialogue between governments and professionals globally.

Labour minister participates in summit proceedings



HE the Minister of Labour Dr Ali bin Smaikh al-Marri participated in the proceedings of the World Governments Summit – 2024, held in Dubai. This edition discusses future opportunities and challenges, addressing pressing global issues and aiming to reach common visions to enhance governmental work, strengthen co-operation among world governments, and exchange experiences. The World Governments Summit's current edition includes six main topics and 15 global forums exploring major global trends and shifts in over 110 principal interactive dialogue sessions. These sessions feature 200 global figures, including over 25 presidents and prime ministers, more than 85 regional and global organisations, 120 government officials and a host of world experts and thinkers. **(QNA)**

Defence minister meets Chief of Staff of French Army, delegation



HE the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defence Affairs Dr Khalid bin Mohamed al-Attiyah has met with Chief of Staff of the French Army, General Thierry Burkhard, and his accompanying delegation. The meeting discussed topics of common interest between the two sides and ways to enhance and develop them. The meeting was attended by President of the International Military Co-operation Authority Brigadier-General Abdulaziz Saleh al-Sulaiti, Qatari military attaché in the French Republic Brigadier General (Engineer/Air) Mohamed Mubarak al-Shayeq al-Hajri, and a number of senior officials and officers from both sides. **(QNA)**

Shura lauds successful hosting of AFC Asian Cup

QNA
Doha

The Shura Council held yesterday its weekly meeting under the chairmanship of its Speaker HE Hassan bin Abdullah al-Ghanem. At the outset of the meeting, HE al-Ghanem hailed Qatar's successful AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023 hosting, expressing his pride in the success of the tournament.

The Council extended its congratulations and blessings to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani and the Qatari people on the national team's second successive Asian Cup title. The Council commended the organising committee of the tournament and expressed pride in the capacities of Qatari youth who have shown excellent performance, pride in their identity, and commitment to patriotism. It also affirmed that Qatar's successful hosting of the event demonstrated its world sports excellence capitalising on its integrated sports infrastructure.

Hailing the event as a milestone in the history of AFC Asian Cup, the Council highlighted the unprecedented record fan attend-

ance, media coverage and associated activities that received wide international acclaim. This success confirmed Doha's position as the capital of sports and culture, which created bridges of communication and became an important meeting place for people of different races and nationalities, the Council said.

After that, the Council discussed the findings of the Council's interim committee concerned with studying the problem of increasing divorce rates in society. The committee was formed by a Shura Council decision in its last session, to study a request by a number of Council members to address that issue.

Following extensive deliberations of the findings and submitting views for practical solutions to rein in increasing divorce rates, the Council decided to submit a proposition to the esteemed government that included several axes and visions that would contribute to addressing the increasing divorce issue.

These axes included forming a committee for co-ordination and co-operation among the concerned authorities to reduce divorce; holding mandatory training courses for those about to get



The Shura Council in session.

married; allowing sufficient time for spouse reconciliation before moving to the judiciary; returning the reconciliation jurisdiction to the Wafaq Centre; reducing working hours for married Qatari female employees according to regulations, in a way that supports the work-family balance; raising awareness of the importance of the family in educational curricula, the media, lectures, lessons and religious sermons, in addition to providing an accurate database showing divorce rates.

In this context, HE al-Ghanem

highlighted the negative social effects due to increasing divorce rates, warning that this issue goes beyond the family to affect the whole society.

The tolerant Islamic Shariah has dealt with and established appropriate solutions for all problems faced by Muslims, including divorce as the most hateful permissible solution; however, divorce has been increasing recently for reasons that can be avoided, and this is a challenge that creates a responsibility for maintaining the family cohesion, he said.

Given the importance the issue and the Council's commitment to society, he added, the Shura Council discussed it in the second session, formed an interim committee to study it, which made efforts to scrutinise its various aspects and dimensions. During his presentation of the report, Shura Council Member Khalid bin Abas Kamal al-Emadi, who chaired the Interim Committee, referred to the committee meetings with the concerned authorities to study the issue, and highlighted the reasons it found, and the recommendations

and insights it concluded.

In another context, the Shura Council discussed a government bill on exemptions and facilitations for the states hosting of sports tournaments, and decided to refer it to the Financial and Economic Affairs Committee to study and submit its report on it.

The Council also approved requests to extend the work of the Financial and Economic Affairs Committee to study a general debate request on developing tourism economy, and the work of the Information and Cultural Affairs Committee to study topics including 'disadvantages of using technology'; a 'draft law on higher education institutions' and the Cabinet's General Secretariat's response to a proposition on the Qatari teachers' reluctance to pursue the teaching profession.

At the conclusion of the session, HE al-Ghanem highlighted the completion of the Shura Council's preparations to participate in the National Sport Day 2024, due today, stressing the Council's keenness to participate in this important sporting event and urging all members of society to participate in the associated activities as a starting point towards a healthy, active life throughout the year.

Chief of Staff meets French counterpart



HE the Chief of Staff of Qatar Armed Forces, Staff Lieutenant-General (Pilot) Salem bin Hamad bin Aqeel al-Nabit, met with Chief of Staff of the French Army, General Thierry Burkhard, and his accompanying delegation. The meeting discussed topics of mutual interest and ways to enhance them, besides signing of the minutes of the 25th meeting of the Qatari-French joint higher committee held annually within the framework of the existing strategic partnership between the two nations. High-ranking officers from both sides attended the meeting. **(QNA)**

Amiri Guard chief meets general commander of Italian Carabinieri



HE the Commander of the Amiri Guard Lieutenant-General Hazza bin Khalil al-Shahwani met yesterday with the visiting General Commander of the Italian Carabinieri General Teo Luzi and his accompanying delegation at Barzan Camp. The meeting reviewed military co-operation relations between the two sides and ways to strengthen them. The meeting was attended by a number of senior officers in the Amiri Guard. **(QNA)**

Ooredoo celebrates network triumph during AFC Asian Cup

Ooredoo Qatar has announced its successful support during the AFC Asian Cup final match, marking a milestone in fan connectivity and a remarkable showcase of network capability.

The final game at the Lusail Stadium, which had as many as 86,492 fans witnessing Qatar win the tournament for the second time in a row, saw total data traffic soaring to 35TB, equating to the same digital engagement levels of the opening match of the 2022 FIFA World Cup. A significant portion of this success

A significant portion of this success was attributed to Ooredoo's advanced 5G network, which accounted for 53% of the connectivity, delivering an average downlink speed of 244Mbps and an uplink speed of 50Mbps

was attributed to Ooredoo's advanced 5G network, which accounted for 53% of the connectivity, delivering an average downlink speed of 244Mbps and an uplink speed of 50Mbps. The event also witnessed a new record in voice calls, with 726K calls made, of which a staggering 91% were high-quality VoLTE, achieving a Call Setup Success Rate (CSSR) of

99.97% and a drop rate as low as 0.01%. The success extended beyond the stadium, with various hotspots across Qatar, including Lusail Boulevard, Katara, The Pearl, Souq Waqif, Doha Port, and Al Bidda Park, experiencing record-breaking data traffic and voice calls, turning every corner of Qatar into a hub for sharing the nation's success with the world.

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- Katara
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- Souq Waqif
- Doha Port
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35TB

Total data traffic

726K

Calls made

ooredoo

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Al-Khulaifi meets French officials



HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Mohamed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh al-Khulaifi met yesterday with the visiting French president's adviser on the Middle East and North Africa, Anne-Claire Legendre, and Adviser to the French President Paul Soler. The meeting discussed bilateral relations and ways to reinforce them, besides the latest developments in the region, especially developments in the Gaza Strip, the occupied Palestinian territories, Lebanon, Libya and Iraq. HE Dr al-Khulaifi underscored the significance of getting the humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip and strengthening the regional and global efforts devoted to the immediate ceasefire. **(QNA)**

Ministry of Labour signs MoU with Meeza Company to foster IT skills

QNA
Doha

The Ministry of Labour entered into a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Meeza Company, aimed at fostering skill development, enhancing competencies, and strengthening the national workforce in the information technology (IT) sector.

The agreement was signed by the Assistant Undersecretary for National Manpower Affairs Office at the Ministry of Labour, Shaikha Abdulrahman al-Badi, and the acting Chief Executive Officer of Meeza Company, Mohsin Nasser al-Ghaithani.

This agreement entails that the Ministry of Labour and Meeza Company will conduct training sessions led by skilled professionals in IT sector. This initiative is designed to equip the national workforce with the skills necessary to adapt to the evolving dynamics of this crucial sector and the job market. Additionally, the practical training provided by Meeza Company offers the potential for job opportunities.

The signing of the memorandum of understanding comes within MoL's efforts to increase the effective participation rates of the national workforce in private sector facilities and to qualify and develop skills among job seekers to enable them to join jobs in large companies and various economic sectors.

The agreement aims to enable the skills of university graduates and students with practical knowledge and develop new student competencies in IT sector, and exchange information including newsletters, journals, studies, statistics, and data to enhance the presence of the national workforce in the information technology sector.

The Assistant Undersecretary for National Manpower Affairs Office at the Ministry of Labour emphasized the importance of the agreement in qualifying and developing the skills of the national workforce and enhancing its competitiveness in the job market, especially in IT sector. She pointed out that IT sector is witnessing tangible growth in Qatar, which necessitates the development of effective mechanisms to increase the participation rates of national workforce in this sector, which is one of the pillars of the national economy.



Al-Badi also explained that the agreement is part of the efforts of the national workforce affairs sector in the private sector to develop and qualify skills in partnership with companies, institutions, and entities in the private sector, noting that the private sector is an important partner for the Ministry of Labour in qualifying human resources, especially in the field of practical training which is an essential part of the qualification and skills development programs organized by the Ministry of Labour.

For his part, Acting CEO of Meeza Mohsin Nasser al-Ghaithani said: "Meeza understands the significance of developing local talent and supporting Qatar's extended economic objectives. Through our diverse programs, such as Meeza Academy, we demonstrate our dedication to cultivating future professionals and fostering innovation in the IT industry. This aligns with Qatar National Vision 2030's aim to establish a knowledge-driven economy." **(QNA)**

AlKhater meets Unesco, French officials



HE the Minister of State for International Co-operation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Lolwah bint Rashid AlKhater met yesterday with UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco) Representative for the Gulf States and Yemen and Director of the Unesco Regional Office in Doha Salah El Din Zaki Khaled. The meeting discussed the latest developments in the Gaza Strip and the occupied Palestinian territories, and the enhancement of co-operation between Qatar and the Unesco in Yemen and Afghanistan. HE AlKhater stressed Qatar's full rejection of targeting places of worship, educational institutions and other civilian objects.



HE the Minister of State for International Co-operation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Lolwah bint Rashid AlKhater met with Adviser to the French President on North Africa and the Middle East Anne-Claire Legendre. The two sides discussed bilateral relations and the latest developments in the Gaza Strip and the occupied Palestinian territories, in addition to aspects of co-operation in delivering humanitarian assistance to the Strip. During the meeting, HE AlKhater underlined the necessity of continuing the entry of humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip, and strengthening regional and international efforts aimed at reaching an immediate ceasefire. She touched on the close co-operation between Qatar and France, especially in the areas of relief and health in Gaza. She pointed, in this regard, to the joint initiative between the two friendly countries to deliver medicines to the Gaza Strip, in addition to evacuating a number of wounded Palestinians, who were receiving treatment on board the French ship Dixmude (anchored in the Egyptian port of Al Arish), to Qatar. French ambassador to Qatar Jean-Baptiste Faivre attended the meeting. **(QNA)**

Canada firms keen to tap Qatari AI market

From Page 1

He said the delegation is set to make a significant mark at Web Summit Qatar, which serves as "a pivotal moment" for CQBF, "marking the beginning of its journey to facilitate robust business connections between Canada and Qatar."

Dhouib said: "The forum's participation in Web Summit Qatar is certainly an important opportunity to in bring several Canadian companies to the country for a full-fledged outreach in the Qatari business market and beyond the region. It demonstrates how CQBF can catalyse growth. From technology to healthcare, energy to finance, the forum envisions a comprehensive collaboration that transcends industries."

He emphasised that Canadian companies are keen to open up to more promising markets in Asia and the Gulf region, "here many opportunities are awaiting the Canadian label and technology."

According to Dhouib, the global flavour of the Web Summit is seen as a channel for "promising prospects" between Canada and Qatar considering that the event is seen as "the world's largest gathering" for new technologies of the future, "which would certainly create an impact on how the business environment is going to change radically."

"The CQBF is ready to offer networking and expertise in the country to get both Canadian and Qatari entrepreneurs to meet and exchange what's best for their businesses."

"Of course, this entails challenges but also opportunities that should bind both countries, which are leaders in their respective regions and are interesting role models for many nations. AI and high technology will carry for the next years the interest of many business leaders and young entrepreneurs for the new shaping of an intelligent economy," he pointed out.

Dhouib stressed that CQBF "places a strong emphasis" on talent development by connecting aspiring individuals with seasoned Canadian entrepreneurs. He noted that this focus on mentorship and collaboration aims to propel innovation and create a sustainable business landscape.

He said, "Canada and Qatar share a longstanding relationship built on mutual respect and cooperation. Recognising the untapped potential for economic collaboration, CQBF emerges as a bridge between the two nations, poised to unlock a new era of bilateral trade and investment opportunities. The forum aims to foster a thriving ecosystem where Canadian and Qatari businesses can seamlessly connect, collaborate, and prosper."

"CQBF aims to provide a platform for Canadian businesses to secure contracts in Qatar and explore export opportunities. Simultaneously, it opens doors for Qatari enterprises to expand their footprint in the Canadian market."

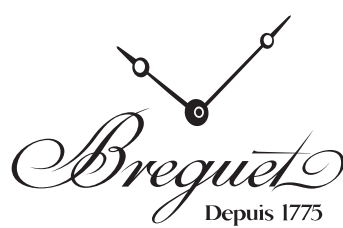
Dr Hanan al-Kuwari wins 'Best Minister Award'

From Page 1

The minister expressed her appreciation to all health workers and all state entities for joint work. "Thanks to their performance and outstanding efforts, the health sector has achieved excellence in providing efficient, sustainable and innovative services to population." The Best Minister Award commends the extraordinary work of government ministers at demonstrating excellence in the public sector and their design and implementation of successful, scalable and sustainable

initiatives for socio-economic advancement of their citizens. It also celebrates efforts to inspire and lead other government leaders and service providers towards promoting innovation and foresight in shaping public discourse on global issues of today and tomorrow.

The World Governments Summit is a global knowledge exchange platform between governments. It aims to move humanity towards a new era of responsibility and accountability, as governments take additional steps to better serve citizens.



Reine de Naples 8925 Valentine's Day Edition

Breguet pays tribute to Valentine's Day by adorning the iconic Reine de Naples with poetic references. A new timepiece issued in a limited edition of 28 pieces.



This new interpretation from the House of Breguet celebrates love with subtle red accents delicately scattered across its white mother-of-pearl dial. The flange is set with 66 hand-set rubies, complemented by a bezel featuring a myriad of diamonds and a crown adorned with a cabochon-cut ruby. Discreet red hearts mark the hours on an offset chapter ring. The hours and minutes hands follow their passionate path, perfectly complementing the alligator leather strap. Additionally, the lug and folding clasp are adorned with hand-set diamonds.



The movement

At the heart of its 33mm egg-shaped case, 180 parts form the 586/1 self-winding movement with its 38-hour power reserve and 3 Hz frequency. This calibre is equipped with a balance spring made of silicon, a material endowed with



numerous properties. As well as being resistant to corrosion and wear, silicon is unaffected by magnetic field influences and improves the timepiece's precision. Whether visible or invisible, the components are all meticulously hand-finished in the Breguet tradition. The sapphire-crystal back of the white gold case reveals its platinum oscillating weight, showcasing the Côtes de Genève decoration and bevelling on the mechanism.

A Queen's watch

During her reign in Naples, Napoleon Bonaparte's younger sister, Caroline Murat was a passionate supporter of the arts, acquiring over 30 Breguet watches and clocks. In an era when women wore watches as necklaces, Caroline Murat placed a bold and avant-garde order with Abraham-Louis Breguet: she desired a timepiece that she could wear on her wrist. Thus, in 1810 Abraham-Louis Breguet began to work on this one-of-a-kind timepiece: the world's first wristwatch.

Conceived by a woman, created by a man this historic timepiece delivered in 1812, with undergoing repairs in 1849 and 1855, is documented in the Breguet archives, retracing the history and characteristics of this watch, which has since disappeared. This oblong creation with a silver guilloché dial was extremely dainty and included several complications including a minute repeater, a moon phase and a thermometer. Lastly a bracelet made of hair intertwined with gold threads allowed the timepiece to be worn on the wrist.



Expo 2023 Doha celebrates National Day of Netherlands

The Horticultural Expo 2023 Doha celebrated the National Day of the Netherlands in the presence of Minister for Nature and Nitrogen Policy of the Netherlands Christianne van der Wal-Zeggelink, Secretary-General of Expo 2023 Doha Mohamed Ali al-Khouri, Expo 2023 Doha Commissioner General, Ambassador Bader bin Omar al-Dafa, and members of the Dutch embassy and community in Qatar.

The ceremony began with opening remarks by representatives of the two countries, in which they praised Qatar's efforts in hosting the international horticultural expo and highlighted the well-established relationship between the countries. The ceremony was followed by a tour of the pavilions of Qatar and the Netherlands.

The Dutch pavilion has four sections that include a miniature world with a special climate system, so that a visitor can learn about the most prominent Dutch innovations and sustainability methods in the fields of water, energy and food, in addition to highlighting the latest technical innovations in the field of sus-



tainability. The pavilion, which resembles the Mondrian Garden, a garden inspired by the Dutch artist Piet Mondrian, features three main colours: blue, red and yellow.

It introduces visitors to an inspiring and miniature model of an integrated bio-environmental unit, through a different vision for a sustainable green future that addresses the challenges of population growth and the increasing need for the main resources of water, energy and food. The pavilion visitors can learn about the latest innovations used for water for agriculture in the Netherlands, which is

through generation of water by condensation from the air and relying on clean electricity from solar energy.

The pavilion also showcases a number of Dutch plants and flowers. An electronic presentation also introduces methods for growing various food plants, ways to support innovation in the Netherlands as well as to make sustainability a way of life for countries and individuals to follow.

The pavilion presents a palette of contrast between a desert garden with local plants and a Dutch garden with thriving green plants. (QNA)

DFI's 'Geekdom 3000' returns with biggest lineup

The Doha Film Institute (DFI) will be bringing back the largest pop culture event in Qatar, "Geekdom 3000", with the most extensive fun-filled lineup to date for gaming enthusiasts, geeks and superfans, a statement said yesterday.

Geekdom 3000 will bring together fans from comic crusaders to sci-fi enthusiasts to unite daily from 3pm-11pm, from February 15-24 at Geekdom Building in Lusail Boulevard.

Geekdom 3000 will feature tournaments, screenings, live concerts, escape rooms, talks, tabletop gaming adventures, karaoke, artist alley, lounges, cosplay competitions and more.

"This year, we've expanded Geekdom even further, showcasing an array of activities that resonate with our diverse and growing creative community," said DFI chief executive Fatma Hassan Alremaihi.

"Geekdom 3000 pushes boundaries with an eye to the future, and challenges participants to go beyond their limits to find new opportunities in our common love for fun and whimsy," said DFI chief administrative officer and Geekdom founder Abdullah al-Mosallam.

One of the most anticipated events of Geekdom 3000 is the Gaming Tournament, organised in partnership with Showdown.

Hosted at The Forgotten Planet - Gamers' Arena, this year's featured tournaments will include Rocket League, EA FC24, Valorant, Pokemon Scarlet and Violet, Tekken 8, Pokemon Go, and Super Smash Bros Ultimate, with a total of QR75,000 in cash prizes.

The annual cosplay competition Powered by TOD and organised in partnership with Nakama, will be held in three categories - performance and craftsmanship for those aged over 14, and a kids category for those aged 5-13.

Visitors can also explore "Error 404", a themed escape room where participants are tasked with solving a series of puzzles and riddles within a 60-minute timeframe in order to "escape" the



room. Rooms are designed with distinct storylines, such as escaping from inside of a computer.

The "Sixth Dimension" is an innovative and interactive environment featuring cutting-edge digital technologies that fosters imagination, creativity, and innovation through futuristic installations, educational games, apps, and new digital tools.

Along with this year's 53 participating artists and vendors, over the years Geekdom has given a space to over 500 independent small businesses from the local community to find their target audience, helping launch many careers and enrich Qatar's economy.

Additional activities include workshops on Pottery Wheel Basics, and the return of the Ajjal Tunes performances and Karaoke Nights.

For film fans, there will be screenings of movies such as *Sumikko Gurashi* and *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, and a short film programme featuring local genre films.

Qatar to observe World Radio Day

Qatar Radio will mark today (Tuesday) as the World Radio Day (WRD), an occasion that celebrates the 100-year milestone of the radio as an affordable platform, specifically designed for remote communities and vulnerable groups.

Themed 'Radio: A century informing, entertaining and educating', the 2024 observance highlights the rich history of radio and its powerful impact on news, drama, music, and sports as well as

its challenging present and future. First proclaimed by Spain in 2011, the WRD was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2012 to be celebrated annually on Feb 13 - the day when the UN Radio was created in 1946. Director of Qatar Radio Mohamed Nasser al-Mohannadi said Qatar Radio has served as a key media platform for covering local, Arab and international news and events since its inception in 1968. He added that it has experienced

tremendous technical developments, starting from analogue to digital broadcasting, and leveraged radio broadcasting technologies such as stereo (holographic sound) and FM broadcasting as well as a website, smartphone application to provide news, radio programmes online. Qatar Radio has expanded its content to include politics, economics, sports, and culture, and launched many diverse programmes, he added. (QNA)

Kuwaiti artist's exhibition opens at Al Markhiya Gallery



Kuwaiti artist Thuraya al-Baqsmi (Centre) with Kuwaiti ambassador Khalid Badr al-Mutairi (third right) and other guests at the opening of the exhibition. PICTURES: Thajudheen

By Ayman Adly
Staff Reporter

An exhibition titled, *Mazyouna*, by Kuwaiti artist, writer and printmaker Thuraya al-Baqsmi, featuring 86 paintings that reflect various stages of her career, opened yesterday at Al Markhiya Gallery's headquarters in the Artists' Headquarters at Fire Station in co-operation with Dar Hessa Arts.

Anas Kutit, managing director of Al Markhiya Gallery, expressed his happiness at hosting the exhibition which runs until early April. This is the first co-operation with al-Baqsmi since the Gallery's inception in 2008, as she is considered among the pioneer fine artists in the region.

Hanady al-Darwish, Qatari artist and founder of Dar Hessa Arts, described the exhibition as the fruit of successful co-operation with Al Markhiya Gallery, with preparations being held over two years. It is also part of the efforts of enriching the Qatari artistic scene and to encourage artists from various schools to interact with each other directly and to exchange experiences and views.

The Kuwaiti ambassador to Doha, Khalid Badr al-Mutairi, stressed at the opening of the exhibition that artist al-Baqsmi has a long career, distinctive creativity and approach. He expressed his happiness to see an exhibition of a Kuwaiti artist in Doha, which plays a very positive role in enhancing cultural relations among the people of the two friendly countries and to further deepen the bonds of mutual appreciation, love and understanding.

The envoy said he hopes that more Kuwaiti artists would come to display their works in Qatar and similarly added that Qatari artists should exhibit in Kuwait to enhance the artistic movement between the two coun-



tries and to further strengthen the deep friendship among the people. He also expressed his full support for such a co-operation. Artist al-Baqsmi pointed out that the Qatari audience are highly appreciative of culture and arts, as it is clear that the government of Qatar has invested heavily in sophisticated museums and art galleries over the past few years. She first displayed her works in Doha in the late 1980s and held an exhibition in Doha in 1995.

"What I have seen in Qatar recently is considered a modern miracle. There is such great advancement in everything across



the country, that has transformed into a surprisingly amazing modern country with all special focus on arts and culture," she stressed.



Kalyan Jewellers opens new showroom in Uttar Pradesh

Kalyan Jewellers, one of the largest jewellery brands, has announced the launch of its first showroom in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh, India, a statement issued in Doha yesterday said.

The new showroom, the company's 250th globally, was inaugurated by the company's brand ambassador and renowned actor Amitabh Bachchan. Kalyan Jewellers managing director T S Kalyanaraman and executive directors Rajesh Kalyanaraman and Ramesh Kalyanaraman were present.

The new showroom promises a luxurious shopping experience with an extensive array of exquisite jewellery designs in a world-class ambience, it was explained.

The city of Ayodhya came to a standstill as crowds jostled to

catch a glimpse of the iconic superstar. Addressing the crowd, Bachchan, said: "With a rich legacy spanning over three decades, Kalyan Jewellers has consistently redefined the jewellery industry through pioneering initiatives. It fills me with pride to be associated with this iconic brand for over a decade. The jewellery brand is firmly grounded on the pillars of trust, transparency and customer-centricity. I am confident that the patrons here will warmly embrace and wholeheartedly support this distinguished jewellery brand."

Ramesh Kalyanaraman, said: "As we inaugurate our 250th showroom, we extend gratitude to our customers, partners and employees, who have been an integral part of this three-decade long journey that has been marked with trust and

transparency. "At Kalyan Jewellers, we have made significant advancements in building a holistic ecosystem, ensuring a service-backed shopping experience for our patrons. As we move ahead, our customer-centric approach remains key to our continued growth, building upon the very essence that defines our brand."

The showroom will stock Kalyan's popular house brands, including Muhurat (Wedding Jewellery Line), Mudhra (Handcrafted Antique Jewellery), Nimah (Temple Jewellery), Glo (Dancing Diamonds), Ziah (Solitaire-like Diamond Jewellery), Anokhi (Uncut Diamonds), Hera (Daily Wear Diamonds), Rang (Precious Stones Jewellery), and the recently launched Lila (Coloured Stones and Diamond Jewellery).

QNSD - a pioneering initiative to highlight importance of sport in human-building



Qatar will today celebrate the 13th edition of the National Sport Day under the slogan 'The Choice Is Yours', which reaffirms the wise leadership's belief and insightful vision that sports are a key factor in building both Qatari citizens and residents alike.

The Sport Day aims to increase awareness of the importance of physical health, encourage community members to engage in physical activity, and promote the concept of sport for all. It also reflects the state's commitment to raising awareness about the importance of sports in achieving comprehensive balance between the body and mind. Qatar was a pioneer in the initiative to designate a national day for sports, in response to the Amiri Decision No 80 of 2011, stating that each Tuesday of the second week of February shall be Qatar National Sport Day (QNSD), and that it shall be an official holiday. Qatar's interest in sports stems from its complete awareness and realisation of its significant role in building individuals as one of the most important elements in the processes of development. Sport actively and effectively contributes to the nation-building journey, especially since sports is a key pillar in the Qatar National Vision 2030. The designation of a national sports day in the coun-

try aims to encourage the practice of sport, elevate the ethical and humanitarian values of sport, as well as its health benefits. It also seeks to raise awareness among all segments of society about the importance of sport in daily life and encourage them to engage in it throughout the year.

Citizens and residents in Qatar will gather today to celebrate the 13th edition of the National Sport Day, affirming the importance of dedicating a national sport day and reinforcing the importance of sport as a healthy lifestyle. The slogan 'The Choice Is Yours' was chosen for this day to emphasise the importance of making a thoughtful decision to engage in sports. It signifies the optimal choice to face contemporary challenges and combat chronic diseases resulting from a lack of physical movement. It also aims to promote awareness that the decision to practice sports should be based on understanding and awareness, where individuals themselves are responsible for making this decision and making sport an integral part of their lifestyle. The increase in awareness of sports in the Qatari society comes through the availability of all the necessary elements for practising it. This is evident from the large number of public parks, reaching up to 150. Additionally, there has been an increase in the number of licences for sport activities in the private sector, totalling 1,216. Last year alone saw the issuance of 125 new licences for sport activities.



Since the first edition of Qatar National Sport Day in 2012, public squares and parks in the State have witnessed a large influx of citizens and residents of various age groups practising sports and participating in diverse events across the country. These events turn the country into a large sports field on this day. Activities are being held every year in the State's sports facilities, in addition to the public parks, clubs, stadiums, schools, and universities, with both government institutions and private sector entities actively participating. Employees and their families are given the opportunity to participate in this special day. On the Sport Day, Qatar transforms into a vast playground that welcomes sports enthusiasts of all ages. Squares, fields, and sports facilities become small arenas where various sports, whether individual or team-based, are practised by all age groups. The Sports Day's events are scheduled to take place throughout the country today, contributing significantly to promoting the culture of physical and sports activity. This year, there are 250 activities organised by both governmental and non-governmental entities. The events this year will be evenly distributed across the country, providing everyone with the opportunity to participate and enjoy various sports activities. Qatar is a pioneer in organising Sports Day at the regional and global levels. Some countries have started organising a sport day similar to Qatar, given its importance to the individual and society. (QNA)

More than 250 activities to be held to celebrate National Sport Day

QNA
Doha

Adviser to the Minister of Sports and Youth and head of the National Sports Day committee Abdulrahman bin Musallam al-Dosari said this year's Sport Day activities are a materialisation of the principles and values embedded in the Amiri Decision No 80 of 2011 to hold the National Sport Day on the second Tuesday in February annually.

He added that there is a growing awareness of the value of practising physically activity and playing sports regularly to contribute to the Qatar National Vision 2030.

Held under the slogan 'The Choice Is Yours' today, the event will see ministries, institutions, authorities, and the private sector organise more than 250 activities across the country in celebration of the occasion.

In a press conference held today, al-Dosari said the ministry has chosen the Umm Al Seneem Park as the venue for this year's National Sport Day in order to draw at-

tention to the country's numerous parks and to attract people living in the vicinities to take advantage of parks and their facilities to exercise and play sports on a regular basis, all year long.

He explained that this year's slogan aims to encourage the practice of physical activity out of the understanding that doing so is the best way to fight chronic disease caused by a sedentary lifestyle.

Moreover, the Adviser to the Minister of Sports and Youth and head of the National Sports Day committee said that there is a rise in awareness of the importance of sports in Qatari society, thanks to the Qatar Sports for All Federation programmes, in addition to the country enjoying a robust sports infrastructure and industry, including 150 public parks and 1,216 sport activity licences granted in the private sector, with 125 new licences issued last year alone.

Al-Dosari said the activities organised by Qatar Sports for All Federation at Umm Al Seneem Park target all age groups of both genders, ensuring an enjoyable and active experience under the

supervision of physical trainers in order to promote proper and safe exercise and sports.

He elaborated that the activities will include badminton for children, tennis for adults, speedball, football, volleyball, dodgeball, tug-of-war and a running race, among others.

Al-Dosari said the Qatar Sports For All Federation in 2023 organised no less than 683 different sporting and community events, which saw a total of 191,215 participants.

The 365-Day Activity programme consisted of 1,515 sporting activities in which 25,578 people participated, 65% of whom were male and 35% female, supervised by 31 coaches.

In contrast, the total turnout figure for 2015 stood at 14,863 participants, indicating a significant rise in turnout last year, al-Dosari added.

The 2024 sport events calendar includes 720 different sport and community events, he said appealing to the general public to take part in the Qatar Sports for All Federation programmes.

Session on fitness awareness conducted

The Al Rayyan Security Department yesterday held an awareness lecture titled "Walking as a Lifestyle" in partnership with the Qatar Police Sports Federation. Lt Col Saeed Mohamed al-Kuwari, assistant director of the department, section heads and several officers were present. The session's objective, according to a post shared by the Ministry of Interior (MoI) on its X account, was to enlighten department personnel about the significance of integrating physical activity into their daily routines and its positive influence on their job performance.



MoI organises sports, fitness event



The Human Resources Department of the Ministry of Interior (MoI), through its Office for People with Disabilities, yesterday organised a sports and fitness event. The event, according to a statement shared by MoI on its X account, aimed to enhance the culture of sports and physical well-being. Nearly 50 female employees attended. Aligned with the National Sport Day celebration, the initiative emphasised the significance of incorporating sports into daily routines to foster both physical and mental health. The event featured sessions highlighting the benefits of regular physical activity, alongside engaging sports activities led by fitness trainers. Participants were introduced to various exercise equipment and received practical guidance on their usage.

QCS marks QNSD for children living with cancer



Qatar Cancer Society (QCS) celebrated Qatar National Sport Day (QNSD) by organising an awareness event featuring children living with cancer and their families. The aim was to emphasise the importance of sports and promote healthy lifestyles to prevent diseases, especially cancer that can be prevented by 30-40%, by following a healthy lifestyle. Mona Ashkanani, general manager of QCS, said: "The celebration of National Sport Day comes in light of the state's keenness to promote the concept of health and safety through its National Vision 2030 and the importance of investing in the human capital and a society whose members enjoy health and wellness." She highlighted QCS' keenness to spread awareness of the importance of sports and enhance its role in the lives of individuals and society in general based on its vision to be the community partnership platform for making Qatar a cancer prevention and burden control leader. She called on all members of society to make sports a way of life, as the sports sector represents one of the components of the pillar of health development. The event was in co-operation with Rexos Gulf Hotel, FMM company, and Ooredoo Qatar.

QU ECC joins QNSD celebrations



The Early Childhood Center (ECC) at Qatar University (QU), in collaboration with the Sports Activities Management and the Sports Department at the College of Education, celebrated Qatar National Sport Day (QNSD) with a number of activities. Competitions in jumping, running, climbing, ball transportation, javelin throw, tug-of-war, basketball, and football and balance beam walking were held. ECC director Prof Maryam al-Falasi, assistant director Amna al-Megheseeb, senior business support specialist Shaikha Shahbek and men's athletics section head Captain Walid Dessouki Khalil were present.

All set to celebrate Qatar National Sport Day today

From Page 1

Family-friendly activities are also scheduled at various locations across Qatar, including The Pearl Island and Education City, offering races, football tournaments, and engaging games for all age groups. The Expo 2023 Doha at Al Bidda Park will host a range of competitions and challenges, promoting sports and

fitness in line with Qatar Sports For All Federation's goals. The event will feature activities such as archery, Muay Thai, and fitness classes, ensuring a dynamic experience for attendees. In addition, Katara - the Cultural Village and Aspire Zone Foundation have curated activities dedicated to health, wellness, and sports, further enriching the NSD celebrations.

PHCC announces National Sport Day working hours

The Primary Health Care Corporation (PHCC) has announced the working hours of its 22 health centres today, on the occasion of the Qatar National Sport Day (QNSD) when nine centres will remain closed.

The Umm Ghuwailina, South Al Wakra, Al Daayen, Al Wajba, Al Waab, Abu Nakhla, Qatar University, Al Ghwayriyah, and Umm Al Seneem health centres will remain closed today.

In the 22 other health centres, family medicine services and allied services will operate continuously from 7am-11pm, while dental services will operate continuously from 7am-10pm.



Nine health centres to remain closed today.

Health centres at Al Wakra, Airport, Al Mashaf, Omar bin Al Khattab, West Bay, Al Sheehaniya, Abu Baker Al Siddiq, Muaither, Al Rayyan, Mesaimeer, Al Ruwais, Al Khor, Leabaib, Gharraraf Al Rayyan, Madinat Khalifa, Al Thumama, Rawdat Al Khail, Al Sadd, Al Kaaban, Umm Slal, and Al Karaana, while Al Jumailiya Health Centre will operate with a 24-hour call system. The specialised clinics will operate according to the appointments set for patients in advance. The ophthalmology, dermatology, and ENT clinics will operate in Leabaib and Rawdat Al Khail health centres in two shifts: morning shift from 7am until 2pm, and evening shift from 4pm until 10pm.

The premarital examination clinic will operate in Leabaib Health Centre, in the morning shift from 7am until 2pm, and in Al Mashaf Health Centre, in the evening shift from 4pm until 10pm.

Urgent care services will be operate 24 hours at: Al Ruwais, Umm Slal, Muaither, Al Mashaf, and Al Sadd health centres for both adults and children, while Gharraraf Al Rayyan, Al Sheehaniya, Abu Baker Al Siddiq, Rawdat Al Khail, Al Kaaban, and Al Karaana health centres are for adults only.

The Community Call Centre 16000 will operate round-the-clock. The Medication Home Delivery Service is suspended today.

Harris 'ready to serve' amid Biden age row

US Vice-President Kamala Harris said that she is ready to serve as leader, in a *Wall Street Journal* interview published yesterday, as voter concerns mount about President Joe Biden's age in an election year. Harris has faced scrutiny about her own abilities as the first in line to the presidency should Democrat Biden, 81, be incapacitated or stand down. "I am ready to serve. There's no question about that," Harris, 59, told the newspaper when asked whether voters' concerns about Biden's age meant she must convince them of her credentials. Everyone who sees her on the job "walks away fully aware of my capacity to lead", said Harris, the first black, South Asian and female vice-president in US history. The interview was carried out two days before a stinging special counsel report portrayed Biden as elderly and forgetful. Special counsel Robert Hur's probe into Biden's handling of classified documents said the president should not face charges and that he would come across to a jury as a "well-meaning, elderly man with a poor memory". The White House has hit back hard at the report, noting that Hur interviewed Biden when he was under intense pressure the day after the events of October 7 in Israel. -AFP

Biden joins TikTok ahead of 2024 election

Reuters/AFP
Washington

US President Joe Biden's re-election campaign joined TikTok on Sunday, using the NFL's Super Bowl to kick off its new account to reach young voters ahead of the presidential election in November. The campaign's launch on TikTok is notable given that the app, which is owned by Chinese tech giant ByteDance, is under review in the US for potential national security concerns. Some US lawmakers have long called for the app to be banned over concerns that the Chinese government could access user data or influence what people see on the app.

Last year, the Biden administration ordered government agencies to remove TikTok from federal government-owned phones and devices. TikTok has maintained that it would not share US user data with the Chinese government and has taken substantial measures to protect the privacy of its users. The company did not immediately respond to a request for comment on Sunday. Biden campaign advisers said in a statement it would "continue meeting voters where they are", including on other social media apps like Meta Platform's Instagram and Truth Social, which is owned by former US president Donald Trump. The campaign is taking "advanced safety

precautions" for its devices and its presence on TikTok was separate from the app's ongoing security review, a campaign official added. By Sunday night, the account had gained 10,900 followers. In Sunday's video posted on the @bidenhq campaign account, the 81-year-old Democratic president touches light-heartedly on topics ranging from politics to the NFL championship game. Trump, the Republican frontrunner in the presidential race, does not have an official account on TikTok. Sunday's video ends with the president being asked who he prefers: himself or Republican frontrunner Trump. "Are you kidding?" he laughs. "Biden."

US defence minister cancels travel after hospitalisation

Reuters/AFP
Washington

US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin (pictured) has cancelled a trip to Brussels where he was to take part in meetings with other Nato defence ministers, a US official said yesterday, after the Pentagon chief was admitted to a critical care unit and had to transfer his duties to his deputy. Austin, 70, was taken to Walter Reed Military Medical Centre on Sunday for "symptoms suggesting an emergent bladder issue", the Pentagon said.

known as the Ukraine contact group, would be held virtually. It was unclear how long Austin would remain in the hospital, but he has transferred his duties to Deputy Secretary of Defence Kathleen Hicks. Hicks "assumed the functions and duties" just before 5pm (2200 GMT), Pentagon spokesman Pat Ryder said in a statement, adding that the White House and Congress had been informed. Ryder noted initially that the defence chief brought along classified communications systems and would be retaining "the functions and duties of his office". However, the announcement that Hicks would instead be taking over came just a few hours later. Austin's secrecy during his hospitalisations in December and January raised a political uproar. Republicans accused him of dereliction of duty. President Joe Biden, a Democrat, has said he has confidence in Austin despite what the president agreed was a lapse in judgement. Earlier this month, Austin apologised for failing to tell Biden and senior staff about his cancer diagnosis ahead of time, adding



that the health scare was a "gut punch" that had shaken him. The most recent hospitalisation was publicly announced soon after he was taken there by his security detail. Austin is scheduled to testify before Congress on February 29 about the secrecy surrounding his initial hospitalisation. His trip would have come at a critical time in Europe. A narrowly divided US Senate moved closer to passing a \$95.34bn aid package for Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan on Sunday, but it would face an uncertain future in the House of Representatives.

The legislation includes \$61bn for Ukraine, which is viewed as crucial by Kyiv as it grinds toward the second anniversary of full-scale Russia's invasion, with front lines in the east and south largely static for many months. Former president Donald Trump, who is seeking a return to power in the November election, raised a storm of criticism from the White House and top Western officials over the weekend for suggesting that he would not defend Nato allies who failed to spend enough on defence and would even encourage Russia to attack them.

Brazil ups troop numbers in the Amazon

Border tensions over Guyana's Esequibo and the humanitarian crisis among the Yanomami Indigenous people have led Brazil's army to increase its forces in the Amazon by 10% ahead of plan, the military commander for the region told Reuters. The additional 2,000 troops will help the army patrol a 9,000km border with Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia in a jungle region used by drug traffickers and illegal miners, loggers and smugglers, General Ricardo Costa Neves said. The dispute arising from Venezuela's claim over Guyana's oil-rich Esequibo region has already led the Brazilian army to send more soldiers, armoured cars and artillery to the border state of Roraima with the creation of a new regiment there. The reinforcement will include the creation of two permanently deployed forward bases inside the Yanomami reservation on the Uraricoera and Mucajai rivers, major access routes for wildcat gold miners that have invaded the territory. The miners brought disease, destruction of the rainforest and armed violence to the isolated Yanomami lands bordering Venezuela, causing malnutrition and deaths. -Reuters

Five found dead in Canada, man arrested

A 29-year old male was arrested on Sunday in Canada after the bodies of three children and two women were found in Manitoba, police said. The events took place on Sunday morning in the vicinity of the small town of Carman, home to 2,800 people, in central Manitoba province. A woman's body was first found along a road on Sunday morning. Several hours later the burning vehicle with the three children, who died on the spot, was found. Investigators found the body of a second woman in a home shortly after, the statement said. -AFP

Two injured in shooting at Texas church

Two off-duty law enforcement officers in Houston took down a woman who opened fire on Sunday at Lakewood Church, one of the largest evangelical churches in the US led by televangelist Joel Osteen, police said. A woman in her early 30s entered the megachurch shortly before 2pm, armed with a long rifle and accompanied by a toddler, and began firing, Houston Police Chief Troy Finner told reporters on Sunday. Two off-duty officers killed the woman before she could kill anyone inside the church. Two people were injured, including the child who was with the shooter, Finner said. -AFP

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GLUCOSE - FASTING	SERUM ELECTROLYTES
LIPID PROFILE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li style="width: 50%;">• Cholesterol <li style="width: 50%;">• Triglyceride <li style="width: 50%;">• LDL Cholesterol <li style="width: 50%;">• VLDL <li style="width: 50%;">• HDL Cholesterol
LIVER FUNCTION TEST	IRON
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li style="width: 50%;">• Alkaline Phosphatase <li style="width: 50%;">• Albumin <li style="width: 50%;">• ALT(SGPT) <li style="width: 50%;">• Total Protein <li style="width: 50%;">• AST(SGOT) <li style="width: 50%;">• Total Bilirubin 	URINE ANALYSIS
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People inspect the damage in the rubble of a mosque following Israeli bombardment, in Rafah, on the southern Gaza Strip, yesterday.

Israeli assault on Rafah a 'terrifying' prospect: UN

AFP
Geneva

The UN said yesterday the prospect of a full Israeli incursion into the crammed Gaza town of Rafah was "terrifying" and risked an "extremely high" number of casualties.

UN human rights chief Volker Turk urged world powers to "restrain rather than enable" as fears of a looming ground incursion grew among more than 1mn Palestinians trapped in the territory's far south.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed to send ground troops into the crowded Rafah area as part of his goal of eliminating Hamas.

His declarations have sparked international alarm.

"A potential full-fledged military incursion into Rafah — where some 1.5mn Palestinians are packed against the Egyptian border with nowhere further to flee — is terrifying, given the prospect that an extremely high number of civilians, again mostly children and women, will likely be killed and injured," Turk said in a statement.

"Sadly, given the carnage wrought so far in Gaza it is wholly imaginable what would lie ahead in Rafah.

"Beyond the pain and suffering of the bombs and bullets, this incursion into Rafah may also mean the end of the meagre humanitarian aid that has been entering and distributed with huge implications for all of Gaza, including the hundreds of thousands at grave risk of starvation and famine in the north."

The Gaza war broke out after Hamas launched an unprecedented storming of Israel in the first week of October.

Israel has responded with a relentless offensive in Gaza that the Hamas-run health ministry says has killed at least 28,340 people,



Women mourn loved ones killed during Israeli bombardment at Al-Najar hospital in Rafah, on the southern Gaza Strip, yesterday.

mostly women and children.

"My office has repeatedly warned against actions that violate the laws of war. The prospect of such an operation into Rafah, as circumstances stand, risks further atrocity crimes," said Turk.

He said those who defy international law had been put on notice and accountability must follow.

"The world must not allow this to happen," Turk said.

"Those with influence must restrain rather than enable. There must be an immediate ceasefire. All remaining hostages must be released. And there must be renewed collective resolve to reach a political solution."

FAMINE-LIKE CONDITIONS
The population of the Gaza Strip is suffering "unprecedented" levels of "near famine-like conditions" as the Israel-Hamas war drags on, the UN's agriculture agency said yesterday, AFP reported from Rome.

Some 550,000 people are now likely facing catastrophic food insecurity levels, while the whole population is in crisis mode, the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) said.

"There are unprecedented levels of acute food insecurity, hunger, and near famine-like conditions in Gaza," FAO Deputy Director General Beth Bechdol said in an interview published by

the Rome-based agency. "We are seeing more and more people essentially on the brink of and moving into famine-like conditions every day," she said.

All 2.2mn people in Gaza are in the top three hunger categories, from level three, which is considered an emergency, to level five, or catastrophe, she said.

The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) rates hunger levels from one to five.

"At this stage, probably about 25% of that 2.2mn are in that top-level IPC five category," Bechdol said.

Rafah, on Gaza's southern border with Egypt, has become a last refuge for fleeing civilians.

Many are sleeping outside in tents and makeshift shelters amid mounting concern about lack of food, water and sanitation during an Israeli siege.

Before the conflict, the people of Gaza had "a self-sustaining fruit and vegetable production sector, populated with greenhouses, while there was also a robust backyard small-scale livestock production sector," Bechdol said.

"We've recognised from our damage assessments that most of these animal inventories, but also the infrastructure that is needed for that kind of speciality crop production, are virtually destroyed," she said.

Palestinian refugees in West Bank fear UNRWA closure

Reuters
Jerusalem

In refugee camps in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, Palestinians relying on the UN agency UNRWA for schooling and healthcare fear key services will stop as donors have paused funding over accusations staff members took part in Hamas' October first week storming.

Most of the focus on the fate of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian refugees has been on its emergency operations in war-devastated Gaza where it is critical to an aid effort for the enclave's 2.3mn inhabitants.

But the agency is also a lifeline for Palestinian refugees across the Middle East, including in the West Bank where it serves more than 870,000 people, running 96 schools and 43 primary healthcare facilities.

"If they cut off aid from UNRWA, there will be no help of any kind for residents, especially in refugee camps because they rely on UNRWA," said Mohamed al-Masri, a resident of Dheisheh refugee camp near Bethlehem.

UNRWA announced last month that it had dismissed staff after Israel presented it with allegations that 12 of its 13,000 employees in Gaza had taken part in the storming of the nation by Hamas fighters.

Israel's aerial and ground war in the Hamas-run enclave has killed more than 28,000 people there, health authorities there say.

Accusations against UNRWA have reignited longstanding Israeli demands to dismantle an agency which both sides see as closely linked to a refugee problem dating to Israel's creation in 1948 that lies at the heart of their decades-long conflict.

Some 700,000 Palestinians, half the Arab population of



Palestinian students leave school in the Dheisheh refugee camp in Bethlehem in the occupied West Bank.



A Palestinian gets medicine in a UNRWA health centre in the Aida refugee camp in Bethlehem in the occupied West Bank.

what 75 years ago was British-ruled Palestine, fled or were expelled, many spilling into neighbouring Arab countries where their descendants remain. The tent camps they lived in after 1948 evolved into built-up townships.

With no lasting settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the horizon, they retain the status of refugees, including in the West Bank and Gaza, and assert a right to return to their homes within Israel's borders.

Israel has always rejected that, saying they chose to leave and have no right to go back. Last month Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu renewed demands for UNRWA to be shut down, saying "it seeks to preserve the issue of Palestinian refugees".

Daoud Faraj was 10 years old when his family became refu-

gees. Now 85, he has lived most of his life in the West Bank's Aida refugee camp near Jerusalem.

"Cutting off aid will hurt many people. Not only me," he said, referring to the health services and schools that UNRWA manages in the camp.

The agency has said it hopes donors will review their funding decisions in a few weeks after a preliminary report into Israeli accusations and UNRWA's handling of them.

It has said that it may run out of funds to operate services by the end of February if funding is not restored.

"It is possible for UNRWA to be forced into the worst scenario, which is a nightmare for us, and it is to stop our operations. Not only in Gaza, (but) in other locations where we operate," said agency spokesperson Kazem Abu Khalaf.

Hezbollah official wounded in Israeli strike

AFP
Beirut

An Israeli air strike yesterday seriously wounded a local Hezbollah official in his car in Lebanon's south, a Lebanese security source said.

Israeli forces and the Lebanese movement Hezbollah, a Hamas ally, have traded near-daily fire since war broke out on the first week of October between Israel and the Palestinian group in the Gaza Strip.

In the past few days, a series of Israeli strikes has injured officials from Lebanese and Palestinian armed groups in southern Lebanon.

The source said an Israeli strike "targeted a local Hez-

bollah official in the town of Bint Jbeil" and the official was "seriously injured".

Lebanon's official National News Agency (NNA) said "an enemy drone targeted a car near the hospital" in Bint Jbeil, near the country's southern border with Israel.

An AFP journalist on the ground saw the targeted car, severely damaged with a hole punched through its roof.

The Israeli military said in a statement on X, formerly Twitter, that "an aircraft struck a vehicle in which Hezbollah fighters were identified in the area of Maroun El Ras," which is on the edge of Bint Jbeil.

This came during a series of Israeli strikes against Hezbollah targets, it said.

Yemen's Houthis target cargo ship bound for Iran

Yemen's Houthis have targeted a cargo ship in the Red Sea which shipping analysts said yesterday had been carrying corn to Iran, Reuters reported. It appeared to be the first time the Houthis have targeted an Iran-bound vessel since starting attacks on international shipping in solidarity with Palestinians over the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza. A US defence official said it was likely that the ship had been targeted but not hit, but provided no further comment. Earlier reports by maritime specialists suggested the vessel may have been damaged but that there were no casualties. The Houthi identified the vessel as the Star Iris. The group's military spokesman, Yahya Saree, said in a televised statement the ship was American but maritime-shipping trackers said the Marshall Islands-flagged ship was Greek-owned.

South Africa's opposition pursues graft charges against vice-president

AFP
Cape Town

South Africa's leading opposition party said yesterday it had asked authorities to charge the country's deputy president with corruption, upping pressure on the ruling party ahead of general elections.

Deputy President Paul Mashatile has for months been at the centre of media investigations alleging he benefitted from luxury properties made available to him by his son-in-law and others in return for help securing tenders and other favours.

"We have laid an affidavit and supplied a charge sheet," John Steenhuisen, head of the Democratic Alliance (DA), a liberal opposition party, told journalists, after handing a dossier detailing the alleged wrongdoing to the police in Cape Town.

"We hope to continue to use

whatever channels we have to make sure that justice is done, and the matter is properly investigated." A spokesman for Mashatile, who took up his current post in March 2023 after being appointed by President Cyril Ramaphosa, did not immediately reply to a request for comment.

He has previously denied the allegations, which pre-date his appointment as second in command and revolve around his time in provincial and national government.

Last month, the DA had called on Ramaphosa, who promised to stamp out corruption upon first coming to power in 2018, to fire him.

The president's spokesman, Vincent Magwenya, later responded on social media, inviting "any organisation or individual that has information on criminality or wrongdoing" to "submit that information to the police".

Bomb kills three at DR Congo displaced camp

AFP
Goma

At least three people died yesterday and a dozen were wounded when a bomb hit a camp for the displaced amidst heavy fighting in eastern DR Congo, local sources said.

Government forces and M23 rebels had been fighting during the day in the Sake region, 20 kilometres west of the provincial capital Goma, the sources said.

A civil society source accused the M23 group of hitting the Zaina camp. "There were five killed and 15 hurt," the source said.

A medical source reported that three of 18 casualties had died in the attack. "The fighting has continued this evening. The situation could lead to a new wave of displacement among the population," noted an administrative source.

Communications Minister and government spokesman Patrick Muyaya took to X, formerly Twitter to accuse the Rwandan army



A man argues with a police officer during a protest against Western partners near the United Nations' Monusco mission headquarters in downtown Kinshasa, DR Congo, yesterday.

of "firing the bomb in the early evening" and listed eight people seriously injured.

Clashes have intensified between the M23 — among the strongest of dozens of armed

groups roaming the troubled east — and the Congolese army.

The flare-up has pushed thousands of civilians to flee the town of Sake, a strategic location on the route towards Goma, capi-

tal of North Kivu. The M23 has seized vast swathes of the province since emerging from dormancy in late 2021, in an area wracked by decades of unrest and regional wars.

UK Rwanda plan 'incompatible with rights obligations'

AFP
London

The UK government's latest legislation to revive its controversial plan to send migrants to Rwanda is "not compatible" with the country's rights obligations, a watchdog panel of

British lawmakers warned yesterday.

The ruling Conservatives introduced the so-called Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Bill late last year, shortly after the Supreme Court ruled that deporting asylum seekers to Kigali is illegal under international law.

If passed after ongoing scrutiny

in both Houses of Parliament, the legislation would compel UK judges to treat Rwanda as a safe third country.

It would also give government ministers powers to disregard sections of international and British human rights legislation.

But after a detailed review, parliament's own Joint Committee on

Human Rights said in a new report that it had various concerns.

"By denying access to a court to challenge the safety of Rwanda the Bill is not compatible with the UK's international obligations," the committee concluded in its 52-page report. It noted the proposed law appeared incompatible with the European Convention on Human

Rights and the 1951 United Nations Refugee Convention, in particular, as well as domestic rights law.

The committee, which features five Conservative lawmakers among its 12 members, warned enacting it held many pitfalls, including "undermining the rights-compliant culture that should exist in all public bodies" in the UK.

Globally, the law also "risks damaging" Britain's hard-earned reputation for rights protections and "encouraging other states who are less respectful of the international legal order".

Meanwhile, the report criticised allowing ministers rather than judges to determine whether a country like Rwanda is safe or not.

Farmers ready for protests in Delhi

AFP/Reuters
New Delhi

Indian police erected barricades and banned public gatherings yesterday ahead of threatened protests by thousands of farmers demanding minimum crop prices in a bid to stop them from marching on parliament.

Long convoys of tractors gathered on borders between the capital New Delhi and neighbouring Haryana state, with police using a fearsome blockade of metal spikes, barriers and cement blocks to close key highways.

Farmers have called for a "Delhi Chalo", or "March to Delhi", echoing protests in January 2021 when farmers breached barricades and marched into the city on Republic Day. Farmers in India have political heft due to their sheer numbers, and the threat of renewed protests comes ahead of national elections likely to begin in April.

Two-thirds of India's 1.4bn population draw their livelihood from agriculture, accounting for nearly a fifth of the country's GDP, according to government figures.

"Farmers from across the country are prepared to march on Delhi starting today if the government doesn't meet our demands," Swaran

Singh Pandher, leader of a nationwide farmers' association said.

"We will move peacefully and our objective is that the government listen to our demands," Pandher, general secretary of Punjab Kisan Mazdoor Sangharsh Committee, added.

The government announces support prices for more than 20 crops each year to set a benchmark, but state agencies buy only rice and wheat at the support level, which benefits only about 6% of farmers who raise those two crops.

As well as a fixed minimum crop price, other demands include pensions and the writing off of loans.

Police in Delhi have banned public gatherings of more than five people.

Protests by farmers against agricultural reform bills in November 2020 lasted for more than a year, forming the biggest challenge to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government since it came to power in 2014.

Tens of thousands of farmers then set up makeshift camps, with at least 700 people killed during the protests.

In November 2021, a year after protests began, Modi pushed through parliament the repeal of three contentious laws that farmers claimed would let private companies control the country's agriculture sector.



Police officers block pro-government protesters as they approach anti-government protesters holding a rally demanding a fair election, outside the Indonesian parliament in Jakarta, Indonesia, yesterday.

Indonesia students protest alleged poll interference by Jokowi administration

Reuters
Jakarta

Hundreds of Indonesian students and activists staged protests yesterday over what they see as outgoing President Joko Widodo's abuse of power to sway voters in this week's election in favour of frontrunner, Prabowo Subianto, organisers said.

Jokowi, as the incumbent is known, has not explicitly endorsed any of the three candidates vying to replace him as leader of the world's third-largest democracy. But he has made highly publicised appearances with

Prabowo, and his eldest son is running on the same ticket for vice-president.

Two opinion surveys last week projected Prabowo could secure more than 50% of the votes tomorrow, allowing him to win in a single round. Rivals Anies Baswedan and Ganjar Pranowo were seen at least 27 and 31 points behind him respectively.

Some voters have taken issue with Jokowi's perceived lack of neutrality, saying it undermines Indonesia's democracy by giving one candidate an unfair advantage.

Students gathered in Yogyakarta on Java island, banging bamboo instruments and holding posters painted with "bring Jokowi and his cronies to justice".

"Jokowi was once called a new hope, we call him a new disaster," one demonstrator said.

The protest organiser, Aksi Gejayan Mambang, said on Instagram, "the ethical and moral breaches by Jokowi show that he is against a critical public voice."

Another protest was planned in the capital Jakarta by several rights groups.

The presidential office has denied political meddling by Jokowi.

The planned protests come after a documentary produced by an Indonesian investigative journalist, Dandhy Laksono, alleged that state officials including police and regional heads, and government welfare resources, have been used to favour Prabowo.

Bombing 'mastermind' dead: Philippines army

The alleged mastermind of a bombing at a Catholic service in the southern Philippines has died after a clash between members of a pro-Islamic State group and government troops, officials said yesterday. Four people were killed and dozens wounded in the December 3 attack inside a university gym in Marawi that was later claimed by the Islamic State group. Eight Dawlah Islamiyah militants were suspected of carrying out the attack on Mindanao island, army brigade commander Brigadier General Yegor Rey Barroquillo said. Five have been killed in manhunt operations, one has been detained and another two were still on the run, he said. Among the dead was Khadafi Mimbasa, who went by the alias of "Engineer". The Armed Forces of the Philippines said he was the "mastermind" behind the bombing. Mimbasa was wounded in a shootout between army soldiers and militants hiding out at a farm near Piagapo in January, Barroquillo said.

Britain's premier visits bus depot



Britain's Prime Minister Rishi Sunak (second right) reacts during a visit to a bus depot in Harrogate, northern England, yesterday.

Australia finds 'criminal' firms won public contracts

AFP
Sydney

Australia awarded public contracts to firms suspected of money laundering, bribery, arms running, drug smuggling and corruption, according to the findings of a probe into lax procurement practices published yesterday.

A damning investigation by Australia's former spy chief found that several companies and individuals who won contracts to manage Australia's controversial offshore migrant detention programmes were suspected of engaging in unethical or illegal activities.

"It's possible that hundreds of millions of dollars was funnelled from taxpayers into companies which were using that money in part to conduct criminal wrong-

doing," said Home Affairs Minister Clare O'Neil, who commissioned the report.

Under Australia's so-called "Pacific Solution", thousands of people who attempted to reach the country by boat were moved to offshore "processing" centres on the Pacific islands of Manus and Nauru from 2001.

Many languished in the camps for years, in conditions described by rights groups as "hellish".

Sparked by media reports that some companies contracted to implement the policy were suspect, Dennis Richardson - a former head of the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation and ambassador to Washington - was called in to investigate.

He found that "proper due diligence was lacking when it came to contracts with relatively small companies with limited or no public profile."

Young Chinese women turn to AI boyfriends

AFP
Beijing

Twenty-five-year-old Chinese office worker Tufei says her boyfriend has everything she could ask for in a romantic partner: he's kind, empathetic, and sometimes they talk for hours.

Except he isn't real.

Her "boyfriend" is a chatbot on an app called "Glow", an artificial intelligence platform created by Shanghai start-up MiniMax that is part of a blossoming industry in China offering friendly - even romantic - human-robot relations.

"He knows how to talk to women

better than a real man," said Tufei, from Xi'an in northern China, who preferred to use a pseudonym rather than her real name.

"He comforts me when I am in pain. I confide in him about my problems at work," she said. "I feel like I'm in a romantic relationship."

The app is free - the company has other paid content - and Chinese trade publications have reported daily downloads of Glow's app in the thousands in recent weeks.

Some Chinese tech companies have run into trouble in the past for the illegal use of users' data but, despite the risks, users say they are driven by a desire for companionship because China's fast pace of life

and urban isolation make loneliness an issue for many.

"It's difficult to meet the ideal boyfriend in real life," Wang Xiuting, a 22-year-old student in Beijing, said.

"People have different personalities, which often generates friction," she said. While humans may be set in their ways, artificial intelligence gradually adapts to the user's personality - remembering what they say and adjusting its speech accordingly. Wang said she has several "lovers" inspired by ancient China: long-haired immortals, princes and even wandering knights.

"I ask them questions," she said when she is faced with stress from

her classes or daily life, and "they will suggest ways to solve this problem".

"It's a lot of emotional support." Her boyfriends all appear on Wantalk, another app made by Chinese Internet giant Baidu.

There are hundreds of characters available - from pop stars to CEOs and knights - but users can also customise their perfect lover according to age, values, identity and hobbies.

"Everyone experiences complicated moments, loneliness, and is not necessarily lucky enough to have a friend or family nearby who can listen to them 24 hours a day," Lu Yu, Wantalk's head of product manage-

ment and operations, said.

"Artificial intelligence can meet this need."

At a cafe in the eastern city of Nantong, a girl chats with her virtual lover. "We can go on a picnic on the campus lawn," she suggests to Xiaojiang, her AI companion on another app by Tencent called Weiban.

"I'd like to meet your best friend and her boyfriend," he replies. "You are very cute."

Long work hours can make it hard to see friends regularly and there is a lot of uncertainty: high youth unemployment and a struggling economy mean that many young Chinese worry about the future.

That potentially makes an AI

partner the perfect virtual shoulder to cry on. "If I can create a virtual character that... meets my needs exactly, I'm not going to choose a real person," Wang said.

Some apps allow users to have live conversations with their virtual companions - reminiscent of the Oscar-winning 2013 US film Her, starring Joaquin Phoenix and Scarlett Johansson, about a heartbroken man who falls in love with an AI voice.

The technology still has some way to go. A two- to three-second gap between questions and answers makes you "clearly realise that it's just a robot", user Zeng Zhenzhen, a 22-year-old student, said.



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Strengthening Africa's community health programmes

In 2017, African Union heads of state pledged to deploy 2mn community health workers (CHWs), recognising their role in advancing health for all. Seven years on, as African leaders prepare to convene in Addis Ababa, we must reflect on our progress. By 2030, Africa will face a shortage of 6mn health workers, making CHWs a key component and a fast solution to bridging the continent's health needs. Developing resilient community health-worker programmes across Africa has never been more urgent.

We have witnessed how disease outbreaks can plunge a country into darkness – and how the power of CHWs can help pull it back into the light. As Liberia's experience shows, CHWs need adequate resources and financial support to be effective. In the early 2010s, Liberia's efforts to offer primary healthcare in remote areas faced significant challenges. There was a shortage of health workers, and where CHWs were deployed, they were under-compensated and did not have the necessary equipment or training to deliver the essential care that was so desperately needed. As a result, different community health initiatives run in parallel by the government and other stakeholders failed to have a significant impact on patients – a common problem in many African countries.

In 2016, the Liberian government launched the National Community Health Assistant Programme to address these issues and apply the lessons learned from the Ebola outbreak that began in 2014. With proper supervision, adequate salaries, and enough supplies to reach every household in their communities, CHWs were empowered to provide standardised, integrated primary healthcare services. The results speak for themselves. Liberia's 4,000 CHWs now deliver nearly 50% of all reported malaria treatments for children under five and consistently provide access to health services, even during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Community health is the key to a more prosperous, healthier Africa

Programmes that take a similar approach have yielded positive results in other African countries. Since Ethiopia implemented its community-based Health Extension Programme, which has deployed 40,000 community health workers, vaccination rates have tripled and child mortality has fallen dramatically. The experience of these and other countries shows that supporting CHWs and integrating them into national health systems can save lives and create livelihoods. It should serve as a guide for expanding community health services across the continent.

A resilient community health workforce is key to overcoming existing and future health challenges in Africa, which currently range from alarming maternal and infant mortality rates to a high burden of communicable diseases. Equally worrying is the escalating climate crisis, which has underscored the urgency of improving access to care and building health systems that can adapt to a changing environment. Increasing the number of CHWs, and ensuring that they have adequate resources, is one of the most cost-effective and sustainable ways to achieve these goals.

Unfortunately, a daunting \$4.4bn annual funding gap – compounded by fragmented financial flows – continues to slow our progress toward a healthier, safer, and more prosperous Africa. The solution is to adopt a "one plan, one budget, one report" framework, like that used by Liberia and Ethiopia. With this approach, governments outline their strategies for national community health programmes, and partners co-ordinate resources and technical expertise to reduce the bureaucratic burden.

To that end, the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and partners launched the first-ever continental coordination mechanism for community health in November 2023. Encouraging coordination among stakeholders will enable African countries to build effective and efficient CHW programmes to tackle the challenges of high-burden communicable diseases such as HIV, tuberculosis, malaria, and non-communicable diseases, as well as to respond better to emergencies, including epidemics and climate shocks.

The Africa CDC remains firmly committed to strengthening the community health workforce, which dovetails with the New Public Health Order – the organisation's health-security agenda – and the AU's initiative to deploy two million additional CHWs on the continent. As part of this effort, the Africa CDC has collaborated with Africa Frontline First to mobilise the financing needed to professionalise CHWs. Last year's Reaching the Last Mile Forum in Dubai was a success on that front: 12 partners committed to accelerating support for professional CHWs. This announcement also included \$900mn from the Global Fund over the next three years, 74% of which is earmarked for Africa.

The private and public actors in Africa must take coordinated action. As heads of state convene for the AU Summit, we urge them to make the development of an integrated professional community health workforce a top priority. – Project Syndicate

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Ooredoo and Save the Dream hold forum highlighting the power and role of sport

Ooredoo and Save the Dream convened at Expo 2023 Doha the forum "The GameChangers: developing skills and promoting positive change through sport and its values".

More than 200 youth leaders, many of them mobilised by the Qatar Youth Power association, had the opportunity to meet and learn from high-level representatives from leading organisations based in Doha such as Generation Amazing, Aspire Academy, Hamad Bin Khalifa University, Josoor Institute, Qatar Foundation, the Unesco Office for the Gulf States and Yemen in Doha, and the EU Delegation to Qatar, and be inspired by the stories and experiences of successful athletes like Nada Mohamed Wafa, Dual Olympian, London 2012 and Rio 2016; Ali Alobaidli, Qatar's first World snooker champion; Mariam Farid, Runner, Member of Qatar's National Team of Athletics; and Wejdan Majed al-Malki, Athlete, CDI5* Grand Prix Dressage.

The forum also featured Save the Dream ambassadors Honey Thalji, Public Relations Manager at FIFA, and President of the Qatar Boxing and Wrestling Federation (QBWF) Sheikh Fahad al-Thani.

Held on the eve of the Qatar National Sport Day, the event provided a unique opportunity for young people to understand the role of sport with regard to the development of transversal skills, promotion of societal values and its contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Participants learnt about both volunteering and working opportunities in the sport industry and were engaged in a vibrant conversation on how to use the educational values of sport to build bridges and promote positive change.

The dialogue was structured around best practices, storytelling, and research findings related to youth empowerment through sports. Athletes shared their own experiences, reflecting on their journey of growth and success that defined their career and personal life.

Director of Public Relations at Ooredoo Qatar, Sabah Rabiah al-Kuwari, commented: "This event has highlighted the role of sport as a universal language of empowerment and positive change. Through our collaboration with Save the Dream and the involvement of Qatar's vibrant youth and sporting community, we have helped to spotlight the invaluable lessons sport teaches us resilience, teamwork, and the pursuit of excellence. As Ooredoo continues to champion these values, we remain committed to leveraging our platform to nurture young leaders and advocate for sport's educational and societal benefits."

CEO at Save the Dream Massimiliano Montanari said: "It was a very good day. First of all, we spent quality time with most of



our key partners in Qatar. And it was great to make new friends, meeting amazing athletes and so many youth leaders. I hope we were able to give them some useful information, tips, and a bit of inspiration."

Director of the Unesco Office for the Gulf States and Yemen, Salah Khaleel, recalled that "every human being has a fundamental right of access to physical education and sport, which are essential for the full development of his personality" as stated in the International Charter of Physical Education and Sport (1978). Through its Fit for Life Flagship project, Unesco is advancing the sports agenda globally. Fit for Life is a framework for public and private smart investments in the transformative power of sport, to promote its tenfold human, social inclusion, educational, health and equity benefits.

Deputy Head of Mission at the Delegation of the European Union to Qatar Dr Angelos Lenos said: "We were extremely glad to be part of this inspiring event, which afforded us the opportunity to engage again with some of our local partners in sports diplomacy, and to reaffirm our strong commitment to collaborating with the local community in advancing the values championed by our sports diplomacy activities."

Founder of Qatar Youth Power Natalie Magness said: "This event was testament to the power sport holds in bringing people together, transcending age, national, cultural, language, political and religious borders to unite and empower. The insights shared by the incredible speakers and the thought-provoking conversations were truly inspiring and a reminder that our world leaders must place a stronger emphasis on sport in

alleviating conflict and peace-building as well as including youth in the processes and decision-making in these efforts. I am certain that the youth of Qatar have been empowered and inspired to get more involved in sport, from active participation to championing the values sport espouses such as compassion, team work, and equality."

Executive Director of Generation Amazing Foundation Nasser Alkhori stated: "At the 'The GameChangers' forum, alongside Ooredoo and Save the Dream, we delved into the transformative power of sport, a cornerstone of Generation Amazing's mission for youth empowerment. The forum was a vibrant showcase of how sport influences societal values and contributes to the Sustainable Development Goals. Witnessing the passion of over 200 youth leaders and absorbing the powerful narratives of accomplished athletes only deepened our resolve. It's clear: sport is more than just a game; it's a dynamic force for fostering positive change, unity, and social development. Our collaboration at this event has further solidified our dedication to harnessing sport as a catalyst for empowering the next generation and driving meaningful societal progress."

Director of Football Performance & Science, Aspire Academy, Valter Di Salvo said: "The forum showcased the pivotal role of sport. It can help young people grow in many ways. We talked about how sports teach important skills, build strong characters, and promote good values. It wasn't just about celebrating sports skills; it was about showing how our youth are growing into people who can make a positive difference in the world championing societal values." (QNA)



Uncertainty after inconclusive Pak election

AFP, Reuters
Islamabad

■ PML-N, PPP talks for coalition deadlocked over choice of PM

Pakistan has weeks of political uncertainty ahead following its indecisive election, analysts said yesterday, with dozens of constituency results facing challenges in court and rival parties negotiating possible coalitions.

Independent candidates loyal to jailed former prime minister Imran Khan took most of the seats in Thursday's polls, scuppering the chances of the army-backed Pakistan Muslim League - Nawaz (PML-N) party from securing a ruling majority.

Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) defied a months-long brutal crackdown that crippled campaigning and forced candidates to run as independents to emerge as the winners of the vote.

There were widespread allegations of vote-rigging and result manipulation after authorities switched off the nation's mobile phone network on Election Day, ostensibly on security grounds, and the count took more than 24 hours.

"Three potential challenges are linked to the legitimacy of the elections through prolonged legal proceedings, protests and potential for violence," said Pakistan-based political analyst Amber Rahim Shamsi.

Despite independents winning 101 National Assembly seats, a government can only be formed by a recognised party, or coalition of parties, so they would have to join another group to become an effective bloc.

"In the short term, any coalition birthed through a highly controversial election in a highly charged political environment will find it challenging to enact unpopular reforms that Pakistan desperately

needs," Shamsi told AFP.

At least six minor parties won just one or two seats in the election, and would welcome independents to their ranks.

That would give them access to an additional 70 seats reserved for women and religious minorities and allocated according to election results — although it has never been done on this scale before and faces legal challenges.

"The courts have a very delicate role at this moment," said legal expert Osama Malik, adding: "They will (also) need to decide whether to order recounts in various constituencies."

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 said, before urging party supporters to picket election offices where he said rigging took place.

The United Nations weighed in yesterday, calling for resolution of disputes through "established legal frameworks."

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres "urges the authorities, political leaders, to maintain a calm atmosphere and to reject and refrain from all forms of violence," his spokesman Stephane Dujarric told reporters.

Hundreds of party leaders and supporters were picked up last year when Khan was hit with more than 200 criminal cases he says were trumped up by the military-led establishment to stop him from contesting the election.

Earlier this month he was sentenced to lengthy jail terms after being found guilty of "treason," "graft" and having an "un-Islamic marriage" — all three sentences handed in five days flat without



Supporters of Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party block Peshawar to Islamabad Highway as they protest yesterday against the alleged skewing in Pakistan's national election results. (AFP)

hearing the defence council's final argument or affording it the chance to examine witnesses.

Dozens of constituencies will have to have by-elections even without the results being challenged.

Several candidates won in multiple constituencies — a quirk allowed under Pakistan law — so they will have to choose one, with fresh elections held in the others.

Party defections are also common, with at least two winning independents who pledged pre-election loyalty to Khan already announcing they were joining the PML-N. More could follow.

"No government will have the luxury of time and political security after these elections," said Shamsi. "There are also fears that

this political insecurity will continue until the next elections."

Meanwhile, the two largest political parties were yesterday wrangling over who will be prime minister and try to form a coalition in a parliament dominated by independents.

The squabbling is likely to deepen concerns about the stability of the nation which is mired in an economic crisis and battling a surge in militant violence.

Pakistan's benchmark share index fell 3.4% yesterday, its first day of trading after the results of the February 8 vote.

Former prime ministers Imran Khan and Nawaz Sharif both declared victory on Friday, with independent candidates backed by the jailed Khan forming the largest

group of 93 members of a total of 264 seats for which results were declared.

However, Khan cannot become PM from jail and his grouping cannot form a government as they nominally ran as independents as his party was barred from standing.

Sharif's PML-N was the largest recognised party with 75 seats and the PPP of Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, the son of assassinated former premier Benazir Bhutto, was second with 54.

The two parties opened formal talks late on Sunday to form a coalition government, with a statement from PML-N saying the meeting was "constructive" and "both expressed commitment to putting nation's interest and well-

being above everything". PML-N and PPP officials, however, said their talks were snagged over which leader would take the top job.

"Both sides are interested to form a coalition, but there is no breakthrough so far. Both parties want the office of prime minister," a senior PML-N figure close to the Sharif family told Reuters, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The PML-N has not named its prime ministerial candidate.

However, the PML-N source said it was "most likely" that Shehbaz Sharif, 72, who held the post for 16 months until August, will be chosen. He is the younger brother of party founder Nawaz Sharif, 74, who has been prime minister three times.

Nawaz Sharif would have been the candidate only if the party had got a clear majority, the senior figure added. Ata Tarar, another senior PML-N figure, however, said that the party had not made a decision on its candidate.

To become prime minister, a candidate has to show they have a simple majority of 169 seats out of the 336-member National Assembly when it is called into session in the next few weeks.

The PPP has always maintained Bilawal as its political scion, and if successful, the 35-year-old former foreign minister will become Pakistan's youngest premier since his mother Benazir.

"Our party wants Bilawal as prime minister," PPP leader Faisal Karim Kundi told Geo TV, adding that independents were joining his party. "No one can form a government without us."

Some independent lawmakers, formerly of Khan's PTI, could join either party, or form a coalition with a smaller party to try block the two larger parties, analysts say.

The PTI declined to comment about the lawmakers' plans.

Biscuits and hugs: Milei mends fences with Pope

President Javier Milei brought Argentine biscuits with him yesterday to an audience with Pope Francis, as he sought to build bridges with a compatriot he has severely criticised in the past.

The two men held talks for more than an hour at the Vatican before Milei met with the pope's top aides, with discussions including the economic crisis in Argentina, the Holy See said.

While campaigning for election last year, Milei had sharply criticised the pontiff, accusing him of political interference and calling him an "imbecile" who "promotes communism". But in an interview this weekend he described Francis, a former archbishop of Buenos Aires, as "the most important Argentine in history".

A video of yesterday's meeting released by the Vatican showed the two men smiling and joking, and the president gave Francis gifts including Argentine biscuits that he is said to enjoy, officials said.

Milei also gave the pope a big hug when they met briefly at St Peter's Basilica on Sunday, on the occasion of a papal mass for Argentina's first female saint.

Francis had brushed off Milei's earlier criticism as rhetoric in the heat of a campaign, and called the newly elected president in November to congratulate him on his win. The president asked Francis to visit Argentina, a trip the 87-year-old pope has said he would like to make. But no date has yet been set



Pope Francis during a private audience with Argentinian President Javier Milei in The Vatican yesterday. (AFP)

for the visit, which would be his first since becoming head of the Catholic Church in 2013.

Milei also met yesterday with Italy's President Sergio Mattarella and with Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni. Milei and Pope Francis were both born in Buenos Aires but have different views of the world. One is a liberal economist and climate change sceptic on a drive to deregulate Argentina's economy, the other a champion of the poor who regularly attacks the power of financial markets and blames humankind for global warming. After their talks, Milei met with Vatican Secretary of State Pietro Parolin and de facto foreign minister Paul Richard Gallagher.

Among the topics of discussion, Milei and Francis "addressed the new government's programme to counter the

economic crisis," the Vatican said in a statement.

Some 40% of Argentines are living in poverty, while crippling inflation tops 200%.

Elected on a wave of anger over decades of economic crisis, Milei has embarked on massive economic deregulation by presidential decree. He has devalued the peso, cut state subsidies and scrapped hundreds of rules.

His reform package hit a roadblock last week, however, when parliament sent it back to committee for a rewrite, prompting Milei to lash out at his opponents, calling them "criminals" and "traitors". In January, Milei sent the pope a letter, saying a visit would "result in peacemaking and brotherhood for all Argentines, eager to overcome divisions and confrontations".

Ukraine allies France, Poland, Germany to tighten ties

Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk yesterday discussed ramping up security co-operation in Europe with the leaders of Germany and France, as fears grow that Donald Trump's possible return to the White House might threaten Western solidarity against Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Former EU chief Tusk referenced Alexandre Dumas's classic book, "The Three Musketeers, as he said Poland was ready to stand shoulder to shoulder with France and stressed that the philosophy at the heart of relations between the European Union and Nato was based on the principle of "one for all, all for one".

"Together with France we are ready to fight for this security" of "all of Europe," he said, flanked by French President Emmanuel Macron.

Later in Berlin, Tusk hailed a "clear declaration that we are ready to cooperate" on Europe's defence. His comments were a thinly-veiled jab at US presidential hopeful Trump, who sent a chill through the United States' European allies at the weekend when he said he would "encourage" Russia to attack any Nato country that does not meet financial obligations.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz condemned Trump's remarks as "irresponsible and dangerous", at a joint news conference with Tusk, who compared the comments to a "cold shower" for Europe. Tusk also said that he was keen to revive the so-called "Weimar Triangle" format of French, German and Polish cooperation that was initially created in 1991 to enable concerted European action.

Blow for Wilders as majority coalition deemed unworkable

AFP
The Hague

Dutch far-right leader Geert Wilders' (pictured) bid to form a government suffered a setback yesterday as the official overseeing fractious coalition talks said there was currently no path to a deal and threw in the towel.

Since Wilders' seismic election win in November that sent shockwaves across Europe, he has been trying to win over other parties deeply sceptical of his anti-Islam, anti-European manifesto.

His preferred option is a four-way coalition with the centre-right liberal VVD, the farmers protest party BBB, and the New Social Contract (NSC), a new party created by anti-corruption whistleblower Pieter Omtzigt.

Talks have been tricky from the start, not helped by sniping on social media — mostly from Wilders' prolific account on X — but also marked by fundamental differences over policies considered anti-constitutional.

And in a long-awaited report, the "informant" overseeing the talks, Ronald Plasterk, said the differences between Omtzigt's NSC party and Wilders were too big to bridge.

"It should be noted that there are certainly significant differences between the four parties on various topics," said Plasterk.

His report suggested the parties had made little headway in their coalition discussions.

"It is also not possible to compromise on one topic, as the



willingness of parties to make concessions depends on others making concessions themselves," he wrote.

Things came to a head last Tuesday when the NSC abruptly pulled out of talks, seemingly without telling anyone, ostensibly because the fiscally conservative Omtzigt was "shocked" by the parlous state of Dutch public finances.

Omtzigt's withdrawal did not go down well with Plasterk, who told reporters he had found out via WhatsApp and later fumed about a lack of respect.

The NSC said it would be prepared to lend support to a minority cabinet on a case-by-case basis but not provide ministers.

The gap between the party and the PVV of Wilders on the rule of law was "too big", the NSC said, according to Plasterk's report.

Plasterk said a deal was eventually possible but not under his leadership.

"I recommend appointing a new informer with extensive administrative and political experience," said Plasterk.

Academics hold 'Swiftposium' at University of Australia

Whether it is her relatable pop songs, connection with millions of fans worldwide or role as a feminist icon, the power of Taylor Swift (pictured) is now too large for academics to ignore. So much so that the University of Melbourne held a "Swiftposium" yesterday to discuss the Grammy-winning artist's influence across a range of disciplines before The Eras Tour arrives on Friday.

"It's just so incredible to see how many different ways you can unpack Taylor Alison Swift," explains Jennifer Beckett, University of Melbourne senior lecturer in media and communications. The billionaire American is only 34 but can boost the economy of a city just by turning up. "She's amassed such an enormous

and, I think, unprecedented amount of power and influence in the industry, economically, her business models are intense," Beckett said.

"There's a lot that we can learn from her, but we also need to think critically. "Do we need to be worried about some aspects of it? Should she be more vocal in her support for certain groups of people or issues? Is that something we should be expecting now that she has this level of power?" she said.

Swift's role as poet, feminist icon and canny businesswoman will also be discussed. The Melbourne symposium echoes a course at Belgium's Ghent University last year that examined whether Swift is "a literary genius". One of the quirkier elements to emerge from the Melbourne conference is that



academics believe the beats of her songs could also help in the resuscitation of hearts.

The Bee Gees song *Stayin' Alive* has been taught for years as a rhythm to follow in cardio-pulmonary resuscitation, and academics have now identified Swift's songs that hit the right beats per minute and may better engage younger generations.

"You used to be taught CPR to *Stayin' Alive* but that's just not vibing with Gen Z and millennials," Beckett said. "Swiftonomics", examining the economic effect of Swift's tour on cities, urban planning, public transport, restaurants and hotels is also being discussed. Sociologist Georgia Carroll, a keynote speaker, has studied how Swift encourages fans to splurge on her merchandise. "She rewards fans that spend money

with attention...It's very trained and controlled," she said. Fans that critically examine Swift are also shunned of attention, Carroll said, yet they remain steadfastly loyal.

"Fans view her a lot more as the friend next door than they do as a billionaire superpower, which is the reality of what she is," Carroll said.

Brittany Spanos, another "Swiftposium" speaker and a writer at *Rolling Stone*, says Swift has excelled at engaging with fans on social media to "make them feel very seen and connected with her".

"She's been one of the smartest artists in terms of using that as a marketing tool," Spanos said. "It's been a huge part of her identity and how she connects with people."

QU Library opens photo exhibition

The Qatar University (QU) Library has opened a photo exhibition showcasing the institutions legacy in a ceremony attended by Board of Trustees vice-chairman Sheikh Dr Abdulla bin Ali al-Thani and QU vice-president for academic affairs Prof Dr Ibrahim al-Kaabi.

The exhibition at the QU Library provides a historical glimpse into the university's buildings, sports events, and memorable moments of its early graduates.

It features photographs, memorabilia from the first graduating batches, and ancient seals, offering a comprehensive view of the QU's illustrious journey.

The opening ceremony, also attended by a large number of university staff and guests, included the screening of a documentary featuring rare recordings of the late His Highness Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad al-Thani, the former Amir of Qatar.

During his reign, the foundation of the university was laid, and his words and directives played a crucial role in its establishment, a statement said.

Following the documentary, Sheikh Dr Abdulla, accompanied by university officials, went on a tour of the exhibition.

The tour provided a closer look at the historical narrative about the university's buildings, sports events, early graduate memorabilia, and ancient seals.

In a statement during the exhibition's inauguration, Sheikh Dr Abdulla emphasised the significance of the event in preserving the university's memory.



Sheikh Dr Abdulla al-Thani and other dignitaries during their tour of the photo exhibition.

He commended the efforts of those involved in reminding the public of a pivotal era in the establishment of the nation's foremost educational institution.

Sheikh Dr Abdulla urged individuals possessing photographs from that period to contribute them to the library, ensuring their preservation and display in this crucial exhibition.

Asma al-Buainain, head of Acquisition and Collection Development at the QU Library, expressed her gratitude to the attendees, organisers, and contributors for their efforts in making the exhibition a success.

"Many faculty members today yearn to revisit and witness these images that remind them of an essential period in their academic and professional lives," she said. "The exhibition serves as a vital means to revive the collective memory of an entire generation."



Local schoolgirls who took part in the event.

QU celebrates International Day of Women and Girls in Science 2024

Qatar University (QU) organised the International Day of Women and Girls in Science 2024 under the theme *Transition towards Innovation Economy: The Role of Women Entrepreneurs in STEM*, in partnership with the Unesco Office for the Gulf States and Yemen, the Qatar National Commission for Education, Culture and Science, and Sasol.

The event included a panel discussion led by women scientists and researchers as well as other stakeholders who discussed the breaking barriers in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) entrepreneurship, navigating the innovation landscape from global to national and regional trends, and building an enabling ecosystem.

"This celebration is an opportunity to showcase the inspiring achievements of women and girls and to enhance their participation in national and regional development, keeping pace with the rapid global transformation towards a knowledge-based economy focused on research and innovation," QU vice-president for research and graduate studies Prof Mariam al-Maadeed said in her opening speech.

"The hopes and future of this



Officials at the event.

country rests upon the students," said Sheikhha Aisha bint Mubarak al-Thani, head of the Unesco Department at the Qatar National Commission for Education, Culture and Science. "They must exert effort and utilise the resources provided by the state, including universities and colleges with scientific capabilities, to develop their capacities and skills to join fields that qualify them to lead in the development of this country and elevate it."

Unesco director of the Doha Office for Gulf States Region and Yemen, Salah Khaled, said: "On February 9, 2024, Unesco launched the Call for Action 'Closing the Gender Gap in Science?'"

"This call includes recom-

mendations towards an inclusive society in which women are not deterred from entering science or held back in their progress," he said. "Even minor changes at the societal level, such as increasing the visibility of female role models, can yield substantial differences."

"Initiatives led by industry, such as the Sasol STEM focused initiatives, can play an important role in our ability to encourage more women and girls to take on science, technology and engineering roles," said Sasol Middle East and India country manager Dr Pat Skhonde. "However, industry alone will not address the gender gap; this can only be achieved through collaboration and co-ordination between all stakeholders."



QIFF is proving to be hugely popular

By Joey Aguilar
Staff Reporter

The 13th Qatar International Food Festival (QIFF) continues to attract a large number of visitors with its culinary offerings and experiences – complemented by a diverse lineup of live entertainment shows and activities.

With over 100 food stalls and kiosks representing more than 15 international brands, the Qatar Tourism (QT)-organised event offers a diverse range of gastronomic experiences at a 61,600sq m area at Expo 2023 Doha's Family Zone at Al Bidda Park.

It features more than 120 entertainment shows, nine zones, and daily fireworks displays.

From vegan and gluten-free specialties to delicacies from the menus of Michelin-starred restaurants, the 10-day festival caters to all.

Renowned chefs from around the world are showcasing their culinary prowess through live cooking shows.

Among the culinary celebrities participating in the festival are:

- Noor al-Mazroei from Qatar, renowned for her expertise in vegan, veg-



- etarian, and gluten-free cuisine
- Najat Kaanache (Morocco), celebrated as the foremost female chef in the Middle East and North Africa
- Faycal Bettioui, a Moroccan culinary maestro boasting a Michelin star and mastery across all culinary genres
- Eric Lanlard (UK), acclaimed as one of the world's premier patisseries
- Thomas Graham (France), specialising in warm cuisine, sauces, and fermented delicacies
- Abir al-Saghir (Lebanon), recognised as the sole Arab personality featured on the TikTok discovery list for 2022, delighting audiences with culturally infused recipes

- Pankaj Bhadouria, winner of *MasterChef India's* inaugural season in 2010 and a globally recognised figure for her expertise in Indian cuisine
- Aruna Vijay, a finalist from *MasterChef India 2013*, renowned for her mastery of Tamil Nadu cuisine
- Jamila al-Lingawi from Kuwait, a certified expert in restaurant and kitchen management renowned for crafting bespoke menus tailored to Kuwaiti palates.

This year, the QIFF is spotlighting a special Qatar-Morocco theme to mark the Year of Culture 2024.

In a press statement, QT chairman Saad bin Ali al-Kharji expressed enthusiasm for the cultural exchange, aiming

to strengthen ties and showcase the rich heritage of both nations.

The festival, he noted, has become a highly anticipated event in Qatar's winter calendar, reinforcing the country's position as a global destination for culture and legacy.

The QT noted that the festival unveils a new theme daily, ranging from seafood gastronomy to desserts, vegetarian specialties, and spices, among others.

Visitors also have the opportunity to take part in masterclasses and workshops to deepen their understanding of gastronomy and culinary arts.

The Torba Market, the QIFF's Official Market Partner, celebrates local artisan

foods, promoting a community-centric atmosphere with fresh, organic produce and handcrafted goods, the organisers stated.

Beyond culinary delights, the QIFF offers entertainment for all ages: from film screenings that provide a relaxing evening activity to fireworks displays in the evening.

According to the QT, the festival presents nine distinct zones, each tailored to satisfy diverse palates and offer an immersive culinary journey.

They are The Lounge, Dinner in the Sky, Cafes, Main Street, Garden, The Stage, Heenat Salma Bazaar, Torba Market, and Cooking Studio.



The QIFF proved to be a crowd-puller event with its array of culinary offerings and shows that cater to different age groups. PICTURES: Shaji Kayamkulam



Ministry launches 'My Sustainable School' initiative



In co-operation with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, the Ministry of Municipality launched the "My Sustainable School" initiative.

Started by Al Rayyan Municipality, a Unesco Global Network of Learning cities member, the initiative targets 200 male and female students from 15 primary schools, to engage them in the recycling process, in an effort to meet the goal of the Zero Waste Campaign to permanently prevent waste accumulation.

This in turn would serve the Ministry of Municipality's sustainable development strategy to spread a culture of recycling by instilling in young school students the efficient use of resources for their benefit and that of future generations, in achieving the Qatar National Vision 2030.

The first phase of the initiative deals with recycling plastic caps, containers, and discarded paper, transforming them into art work and using them to grow seedlings. - QNA

