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Amir hosts Iftar banquet for ambassadors

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani held an Iftar banquet yesterday at Lusail Palace in honour of heads of the diplomatic missions accredited to Qatar, along with ambassadors of Qatar abroad and high-ranking officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, on the occasion of the holy month of Ramadan. His Highness the Personal Representative of the Amir Sheikh Jassim bin Hamad al-Thani, HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani, alongside a host of Their Excellencies Sheikhs, Ministers and high-ranking officials attended the banquet. (QNA) **Page 2**

QCB maintains interest rates

Qatar Central Bank (QCB) has decided to "maintain" the current interest rates for the QCB Deposit Rate, QCB Lending Rate and QCB Repo Rate. This follows QCB's "assessment of the current monetary requirements of the State of Qatar", it was announced yesterday (Wednesday). As a result, the QCB interest rates will continue as follows: QCB Deposit Rate (QCBDR) - 5.75%, QCB Lending Rate (QCBLR) - 6.25% and QCB Repo Rate (QCBRR) - 6%. QCB said it will "continue to assess the appropriate monetary policy taking into account all the factors that may impact financial stability and will periodically review its monetary policy as needed to address changes in economic requirements."

Irish PM quits unexpectedly

Leo Varadkar yesterday announced that he was stepping down as Ireland's prime minister and leader of the Fine Gael party in the governing coalition, citing "personal and political" reasons. Pundits called the surprise move, just 10 weeks before Ireland holds European Parliament and local elections, a "political earthquake". Varadkar, who is in his second stint as prime minister and at 45 remains one of Europe's youngest leaders, said he felt he was no longer the "best person" to lead the country. **Page 9**

Subianto is new Indonesia president

Indonesia's Prabowo Subianto has been elected president of the world's third-biggest democracy, the elections commission said yesterday, beating two rivals who have vowed to file legal complaints about the vote. The fiery defence minister and his vice presidential running mate Gibran Rakabuming Raka -- the eldest son of outgoing leader Joko Widodo -- already declared victory last month after unofficial counts showed them winning a majority.

Amir meets Kazakhstan PM

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani met at his Lusail Palace office yesterday with Prime Minister of the Republic of Kazakhstan Olzhas Bektenov on the occasion of his visit to the country, along with his accompanying delegation. The meeting touched on the bilateral relations and means to enhance them, in addition to a number of regional and international issues of joint interest. The meeting was attended by HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani. (QNA) **Page 4**

Blinken, Arab FM's to discuss Gaza today

Reuters
Cairo

Arab foreign ministers and a top Palestinian official will meet US Secretary of State Antony Blinken in Cairo today as he pushes for a pause in fighting between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza Strip during his latest tour of the region.

Blinken will meet foreign ministers from Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Jordan, as well as the Emirati international co-operation minister and the secretary-general of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation, according to an Egyptian foreign ministry note.

The note did not give details on the subject of the meeting, but Egyptian security sources said Arab nations would present plans for a political solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Such plans had been put on hold as mediators from Qatar,

◆ Massacre toll close to 32,000

Egypt and the US sought to secure a deal for a ceasefire in Gaza and for the release of Israeli hostages and Palestinian prisoners.

Blinken has said he would pursue conversations on arrangements for the governance, security and redevelopment of post-conflict Gaza, and for lasting regional peace during his tour.

Talks for a ceasefire deal continued in Qatar this week following failed attempts to secure an agreement ahead of start of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

Blinken arrived yesterday in the Middle East to bolster international efforts to secure a truce

in the Israel-Hamas war, as the threat of famine looms in besieged Gaza.

Global concern has mounted over the military conflict now in its sixth month, in which Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed to destroy Hamas.

The latest fighting included an Israeli assault on Gaza City's Al-Shifa hospital, a vast complex crowded with patients and people seeking refuge, where Israel says Palestinian militants are holed up.

Overnight bombings and battles across the territory killed 90 people, said the health ministry in Hamas-run Gaza, pushing the overall Palestinian death toll close to 32,000.

UN agencies have warned that Gaza's 2.4mn people are on the brink of famine, and UN rights chief Volker Turk said Israel may be using "starvation as a method of war".

Wounded Palestinians reunited in Doha

Qatar has announced its collaboration with the sisterly Republic of Türkiye in reuniting wounded Palestinians from the Gaza Strip with their relatives in Doha. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that a number of the wounded were receiving treatment in Türkiye, while their relatives were undergoing treatment in Qatar. The reunification of those wounded Palestinians will enable them to continue their treatment together in Doha, as part of the initiative of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani to provide treatment for 1,500 Palestinians from the Strip, the ministry said. Welcoming the wounded in Doha were ambassador of the Republic of Türkiye to Qatar Dr Mustafa Goksu and Director of the Office of the Minister of State for International Co-operation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Hamad Yousuf Ahmed Rashid al-Maliki. In a statement to QNA, HE the Minister of State for International Co-operation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Lolwah bint Rashid AlKhater expressed Qatar's thanks and appreciation to the Republic of Türkiye for its co-operation in overcoming difficulties to complete the reunification of the wounded from the Gaza Strip with their relatives in Doha. (QNA)

Strains come to the fore in US-Israel relations

Reuters
Cairo/Jeddah

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken arrived in Saudi Arabia yesterday, launching a tour of the Middle East to try to secure a ceasefire in the Gaza war as increasing strain showed in Washington's relationship with its ally Israel.

Following his visit to Saudi Arabia, Blinken is due in Egypt today and Israel on Friday.

The State Department announced Blinken's planned stop in

A man carries a child, who was injured in an Israeli air strike on a building, at the Al-Najjar hospital in Rafah yesterday

Israel only after he had arrived in Saudi Arabia. No explanation was immediately given for why it was omitted from the initial itinerary.

On Tuesday Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu rebuffed a plea from US President Joe Biden to call off plans for a ground assault of Rafah, the city on the southern edge of Gaza sheltering more than half the enclave's 2.3mn people.

Netanyahu told lawmakers he had made it "supremely clear" to Biden in a phone call "that we are determined to complete the elimination of these battalions in Rafah, and there's no way to do that except by going in on the ground".

Washington says a ground assault on Rafah would be a "mistake" and cause too much harm to civilians.

State Department spokesman Matthew Miller said one of Blinken's aims was to discuss with Israeli leaders how to defeat Hamas "including in Rafah, in a way that protects the civilian population, does not hinder the delivery of humanitarian assistance and advances Israel's overall security."

The public tension between the Biden and Netanyahu administrations has little precedent in Israel's history as a close ally of Washington since its founding in 1948.

RAMADAN THOUGHT

Ramadan is the month of patience, and the reward of patience is Paradise. It is the month of charity, and a month in which a believer's sustenance is increased. (Abu Daawood & Ibn Maajah)

Prayer times

Fajr...4.20; Zuhr...11.41; Asr...3.08; Maghrib...5.48; Isha...7.18

Fasting times

Iftar today5.48pm

Imsak tomorrow.....4.09am

Amir hosts Iftar banquet for ambassadors, diplomats, MoFA officials

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani held an Iftar banquet yesterday at Lusail Palace in honour of heads of the diplomatic missions accredited to the State of Qatar, along with the ambassadors of Qatar abroad and high-ranking officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, on the occasion of the holy month of Ramadan. His Highness the Personal Representative of the Amir, Sheikh Jassim bin Hamad al-Thani, HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani, alongside a host of Sheikhs, ministers and high-ranking officials attended the banquet. (QNA)



Qatar Airways team wins MoT Padel championship

HE the Minister of Transport Jassim bin Saif al-Sulaiti yesterday crowned the Qatar Airways (QA) team as champions of the third edition of the Minister of Transport's Padel Championship Cup. The QA team, according to a statement from the Ministry of Transport (MoT), defeated the Qatar Civil Aviation Authority (QCAA) team 2-0 in the final face-off held in Padel-In Aspire Zone amid large fan attendance. Apart from honouring the winners, HE the Transport Minister also appreciated the official sponsors Mwani Qatar and QTerminals and the gold sponsor Milaha. The final match was attended by HE the Minister of Environment and Climate Change Dr Abdullah bin Abdulaziz bin Turki al-Subaie, who is also the managing director and CEO of Qatar Rail, the direc-

tor-general of Qatar Aeronautical Academy Sheikh Jabor bin Hamad al-Thani, Mwani Qatar's CEO Capt Abdulla Mohamed al-Khanji, Milaha Group CEO Fahad Saad al-Qahtani, Mowasalat (Karwa) acting CEO Ahmad Hassan al-Obaidly and several officials from MoT and transportation industry. "We are pleased to have organised the Minister of Transport's Ramadan Padel Championship Cup for the third year in a row, particularly as this tournament comes in response to staff desire at entities working in the transportation sector," said the tournament manager Ali al-Emadi. This year's championship featured 37 teams from nine transportation entities: MoT, Mwani Qatar, QTerminals, Milaha, Qatar Airways, QCAA, Qatar Aeronautical Academy, Mowasalat (Karwa), and Qatar Rail.



Ministry holds panel discussion on family protection

QNA
Doha

THE Ministry of Social Development and Family (MoSDF) held yesterday a panel discussion under the theme of "protecting families and strengthening their bonds", in collaboration with the Human Rights Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Arab League. The event was attended by a host of researchers, professionals, alongside those interested in familial affairs, as well as representatives of the relevant centres and institutions. Hosted by Wifaq Family Consulting Centre, the panel discussion highlighted some issues facing families and ways to promote ties among family members so as to build a justice-based society that essentially maintains tight-knit families and their inveterate values. The panellists discussed multiple aspects related to the challenges facing families, as well as problems encountered by them and the factors of advancing them starting from the psychological ones until reaching the social, legal, political, and religious factors. HE the Assistant Undersecretary for Family Affairs Sheikhha Sheikhha bint Jassim al-Thani emphasised that family is the bedrock of communities, their advancement and development, indicating that the 3rd national strategy has been keen to accentuate this point in its multiple projects and initiatives. She pointed out that the cele-



bration of the International Day of Families this year will promote the notions related to the significance of families, as well as their impact on building the communities. For her part, Director of the Family Development Department Dhabiya al-Muqbali highlighted that the panel discussion came to complete the series of activities held by the ministry with the competent authorities to bolster the role of families, achieve the sustainable development and move forward to achieve the Qatar National Vision 2030. Al-Muqbali underscored the significance of promoting the familial engagement and supporting the family members to forge tangible and positive familial relationships, in addition to reinforcing cooperative relationships and fraternity among the family members to ensure satisfaction



and maintain the familial stability away from disputes and thorny issues. Doha International Family Institute, a member of Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Develop-

ment, is poised to host an international conference under the theme of family and major contemporary directions to mark the 30th anniversary of the International Day of Families.

Cabinet clears draft law on child rights

HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani chaired the Cabinet's regular meeting yesterday. Following the meeting, HE the Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Ibrahim bin Ali al-Mohannadi issued the following statement: The Cabinet considered the topics on its agenda as follows: First. Approval of a draft law promulgating the Rights of the Child Law, and referring it to the Shura Council. Second. Approval of the draft decision of the Minister of Transportation issuing the executive regulations of Law No 8 of 2019 regulating land transportation. Third. Approval of a draft Cabinet decision appointing the administrative units that comprise the General Authority for Real Es-

tate Sector Regulatory, and defining their jurisdiction. Fourth. Approval of: 1. A draft agreement between the governments of Qatar and Kazakhstan on establishing a long-term strategic partnership to develop projects in the field of priority industries. 2. A draft memorandum of understanding for co-operation in the fields of social development and the family between the governments of Qatar and Tajikistan. 3. A draft MoU for co-operation in academic accreditation and qualifications between the Ministry of Education and Higher Education in Qatar and the Association for the Advancement of International Business Schools in the US. 4. A draft MoU on sports co-operation between Qatar's Ministry of Sports and Youth and the Costa Rican Institute of Sport and Recreation. (QNA)



Jusour board meeting discusses labour market

THE Board of Directors of the Qatar Manpower Solutions Co. (Jusour) held its regular meeting yesterday, headed by HE the Minister of Labour and Chairman of Jusour's Board of Directors Dr Ali bin Smaikh al-Marri. The meeting covered the company's business plan and its efforts to develop the labour market in Qatar by providing job opportunities to attract the national workforce to contribute to economic development efforts in priority sectors and to achieve

the goals of the Third National Development Strategy that aims to prepare a highly productive skilled workforce. The meeting also touched on other topics notably expanding the participation of Qataris in various economic sectors, creating a base that is more motivated and competitive, raising the number of highly skilled workers in the labour market, in addition to increasing the number of Qataris in the private and joint sectors in line with the Qatar National Vision 2030. (QNA)

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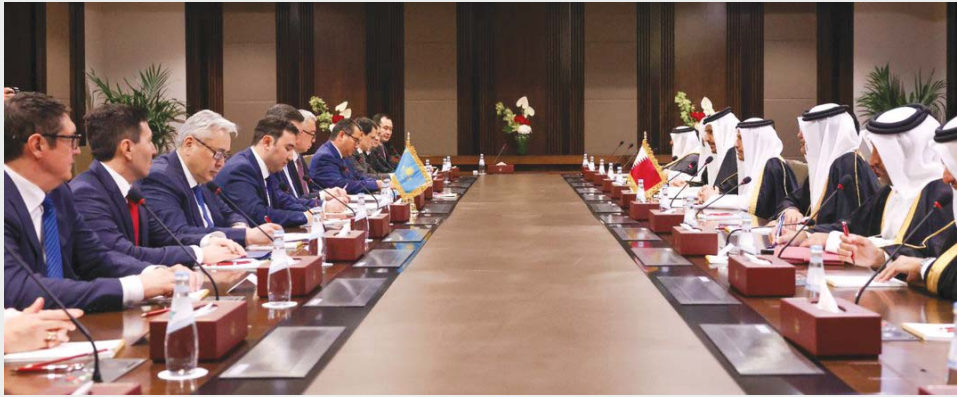
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PM holds talks with Kazakh premier



HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani held a session of official talks in Doha yesterday with Prime Minister of Kazakhstan Olzhas Bektenov. During the session, the two sides discussed co-operation relations between the two countries and ways to support and develop them, especially in economy, investment, and industries. Following the session, an agreement was signed between Qatar and Kazakhstan regarding a long-term strategic partnership to develop projects in the field of priority industries. The agreement was signed by the Qatari and Kazakh prime minister. Earlier, HE Sheikh Mohamed met with Prime Minister Bektenov. The two sides discussed bilateral co-operation relations and ways to support and develop them, and several topics of common interest. The Kazakh prime minister later left Doha after his official visit. **(QNA)**

Amir meets Kazakhstan PM



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani met at his office at Lusail Palace with Prime Minister of Kazakhstan Olzhas Bektenov on the occasion of his visit to the country along with his accompanying delegation. The meeting dealt with discussing bilateral co-operation between the two countries, the means to enhance them, in addition to a number of regional and international issues of joint interest. The meeting was attended by HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani. **(QNA)**

Baladna, Widam Food extends partnership

Baladna and Widam Food have announced the signing of a new partnership agreement aimed at extending the co-operation between the two parties and enhancing strategic integration for three more years, a statement from Widam Food said yesterday. The agreement, signed at a ceremony at Baladna headquarters, includes the continued availability of bull calves in the Qatari market to enhance the diversity of local food products. Baladna CEO Malcolm Jordan and Widam CEO Alnubi Salem al-Marri were the signatories. Al-Marri stressed the importance of the agreement in enhancing strategic integration between local companies



and promoting the country's self-sufficiency in local production. He pointed out that this partnership reflects the company's strategy in providing high-quality local products from various reliable sources. Jordan also stressed the importance of this agreement in supporting the key partnership in line with Baladna's and

Widam mission to deliver food security strategy for the country as well as providing a full circle sustainable business practice. This agreement comes as part of adopting global practices aimed at developing the available opportunities to achieve sustainable development and enhance the country's self-sufficiency.

QMC chief meets Iranian diplomat



HE the Chairman of Qatar Media Corp (QMC) Sheikh Hamad bin Thamer al-Thani met yesterday with Iranian ambassador to Qatar Ali Salehabadi. The meeting discussed media relations between the two countries and ways to boost them. **(QNA)**

Official

Amir congratulates Tunisian president on anniversary of Independence Day

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani and His Highness the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani sent yesterday cables of congratulations to Tunisian President Kais Saied on the anniversary of his country's Independence Day. HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani also sent a similar cable of congratulations to Prime Minister Ahmed Hachani. **(QNA)**

Amir sends cables of congratulations to Indonesia president-elect

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani sent yesterday a cable of congratulations to Prabowo Subianto on his election as President of Indonesia, wishing him success and the relations between the two countries more development and growth. His Highness the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani and HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani also sent similar cables of congratulations to Subianto. **(QNA)**

Call for voting for Qatari projects in WSIS Prizes 2024

The Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (MCIT) has called on citizens, residents, and all stakeholders in Qatar to participate in voting for Qatari projects nominated for the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) Prizes 2024, through the competitions voting link, before the deadline of the voting phase set on March 31. The ministry said that the competition, organised by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), represents a unique global platform for discovering and showcasing success stories in implementing the 18 action lines identified by WSIS outlined in the Geneva Plan of Action, to evaluate projects that leverage the power of ICT to advance sustainable development. This year's edition included the nomination of 12 Qatari

projects for (WSIS) Prizes 2024: 1- TASMU Digital Valley Ministry of Communications and Information Technology Category 1 "The role of governments and all stakeholders in the promotion of ICTs for development". 2- Qatar Atlas Planning and Statistics Authority Category 3 "Access to information and knowledge". 3- Mada Academy Mada Qatar Assistive Technology Center, Category 4 "Capacity building". 4- Cyber Eco National Cyber Security Agency Category 5 "Building confidence and security in use of ICTs". 5- e-Payment Platform Ministry of Communications and Information Technology - Category 6 "Enabling environment". 6- eJustice Qatar: Pioneering the Digital Frontier - Supreme Judiciary Court - Category 6 "Enabling environment". 7- Government Data Exchange Ministry of Communications

and Information Technology (MCIT) Category 7 "ICT applications: benefits in all aspects of life E-government". 8- Al-Nadeeb" General Authority of Customs - Category 8 "ICT applications: benefits in all aspects of life E-business". 9- Qatar Real Estate Platform the General Authority for Real Estate Regulation - Category 8 "ICT applications: benefits in all aspects of life E-business". 10- "Kawader" the Civil Service and Government Development Bureau Category 11 "ICT applications: benefits in all aspects of life E-employment". 11- QMC Tabie Qatar Media Corp Category 16 "Media". 12- Public Warning System Ministry of Interior Category 18 "International and regional co-operation". After the voting phase ends, five projects that received the highest number of votes in each of the 18 categories will

be selected from all nominated projects from different countries around the world. Subsequently, a team of experts affiliated with the ITU will conduct a comprehensive analysis of the top five voted projects in each category, and one winning project will be selected for each category. The winners will be announced and honoured as champions at this event. In the fifth and final stage of the competition, the official announcement will be made for the 18 winners, in addition to honouring them alongside the 72 champions who will receive certificates of excellence. This will take place during the ceremony of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) Prizes 2024, held on the sidelines of the World Summit on the Information Society Forum for the same year. Qatar is currently undergoing a

technological resurgence, leading to rapid growth in the information and communications technology (ICT) sector. This resurgence is aligned with the Qatar National Vision 2030, which prioritises digital innovation and aims to position Qatar as a regional leader in this domain. The ICT sector plays a crucial role in driving economic and social development, making significant contributions to the realisation of the Qatar National Vision 2030. The Digital Agenda 2030 serves as a comprehensive roadmap for Qatar's digital transformation. It comprises 6 primary pillars and 23 strategic initiatives aimed at fostering digital innovation, enhancing workforce skills in technology, improving e-government services, supporting technology entrepreneurship, and leveraging technology across various sectors. **(QNA)**

Snoonu is Distributing 2,000 Iftar Meals Daily to Qatar's Delivery Heroes



Snoonu, Qatar's leading tech startup, has significantly ramped up its efforts this Ramadan, distributing over 2,000 iftar meals each day to delivery drivers across the country. More than 16,000 meals have been distributed to drivers, with a daily distribution rate of approximately 2,000 meals. The initiative includes six Iftar stations located across Qatar in The Downtown Aspire, Katara, Al Sadd, Abu Hamour, Ar Rayyan, and Gharafa, open from 3pm-4pm.

Additionally, meals are directly delivered to driver accommodations for those unable to leave due to health issues or accidents. This initiative, a significant uptick in Snoonu's community support efforts, aims to ensure the welfare of its drivers and those from other delivery companies, epitomizing the essence of the holy month's spirit of giving and compassion. "Ramadan brings with it a reminder of our shared humanity and the strength of our collective actions. Our



drivers, the true backbone of Snoonu, work tirelessly to ensure our services reach every corner of Qatar," explained Hazar Al-Kilani, Snoonu's PR and CSR Manager. By establishing six strategically located Iftar stations across Qatar and making direct deliveries to driver accommodations, the company ensures that the spirit of Ramadan's giving is felt throughout the community. This outreach underscores Snoonu's commitment to social responsibility and communal welfare.

"By providing over 2,000 iftar meals daily, we not only express our gratitude but also reinforce our commitment to our drivers' well-being. This initiative embodies the essence of Ramadan—compassion, generosity, and unity. It's a privilege to be able to give back in a manner that aligns so closely with the values we hold dear at Snoonu," Al-Kilani added.



A benefactor has sponsored 1300 orphans Qatar Charity thanks supporters of campaign aimed at sponsoring 5,000 orphans



Qatar Charity (QC) extended its gratitude to all generous donors for their support to its campaign aimed at sponsoring 5,000 orphans, specifically thanking one benefactor who sponsored 1300 orphans in one go through this campaign. It praised the good response from the benevolent people in Qatar to the campaign.

The campaign was implemented during the first ten days of Ramadan as part of Qatar Charity's campaign "Endless Giving" for the current holy month. It received a significant response from the public, surpassing the targeted number of orphans (5000).

This campaign came under the slogan "Expand Your Family" and aimed to encourage families in Qatar to sponsor one or more orphans, considering them as sons or daughters within their family in terms of care and attention, after they have lost the warmth of parental care. The disasters and crises in recent years have increased the need to sponsor orphans.

Currently, Qatar Charity, through its "Rofaqa" initiative, sponsors orphans, needy families, individuals with disabilities, and students.

The campaign was implemented during the first ten days of Ramadan as part of Qatar Charity's campaign "Endless Giving" for the current holy month. It received a significant response from the public, surpassing the targeted number of orphans (5000).



It aspires to lead in promoting social solidarity, serving humanity, and achieving sustainable social development through comprehensive care programs.

At the conclusion of the campaign aimed at sponsoring 5,000 orphans, the total number of beneficiaries reached approximately 208,246 sponsored individuals.

On the sidelines of the campaign, a delegation from Qatar Charity, including several donors and sponsors, visited Pakistan to inspect the conditions of the

sponsored orphans and assess their needs. During the visit, an orphanage with a capacity for 150 orphans was inaugurated in the Shujaabad district of Punjab. Qatar Charity constructed and fully furnished the orphanage with the necessary equipment.

The delegation participated in preparing Iftar meals, alongside the sponsored children who enthusiastically assisted the delegation in cooking. They also spent enjoyable time together during a group Iftar event organized for them during the holy month.

During the visit, the delegation engaged with the sponsored orphans in various activities, including drawing and sports. The delegation enjoyed the delightful interaction of the children with these events and their contesting in sports and competitions. At the end, gifts were distributed to the children.

The visit had a positive impact on the orphaned children, who expressed their happiness and gratitude to the generous people of Qatar for their ongoing care and support.

'Charity Kitchen' seeks support to provide Iftar meals for low-income families



Qatar Charity (QC) has opened the door for the generous people of Qatar to actively participate in the 'Charity Kitchen' project, which is one of its Ramadan

families within Qatar. Qatar Charity has rented a kitchen for the whole month of Ramadan to provide Iftar meals for families with limited income, with the support of

the Qatar Charity's website and app:

The cost of a family Iftar meal for one day is 180 Qatari Riyals. Additionally, in-kind donations such as rice, meat, chicken, oil, vegetables, dates, sugar, bread, and milk can be contributed to the project. These donations are received at Gate 3 of Al Ahli Club from 1 PM to 5 PM and from 9 PM to 12 AM.

Every day, the kitchen strives to provide 200 family Iftar meals for low-income families. Qatar Charity encourages benefactors to multiply rewards by feeding the fasting persons during this holy month and making financial and in-kind contributions.

Qatar Charity has rented a kitchen for the whole month of Ramadan to provide Iftar meals for families with limited income, with the support of donors.

Every day, the kitchen strives to provide 200 family Iftar meals for low-income families.

initiatives. This comes as part of Qatar Charity's efforts to provide Iftar meals for a greater number of fasting individuals from low-income

donors. The project accepts financial contributions and in-kind donations.

Financial donations to the kitchen can be made through



Second Annual ACS EdTech Conference: Spearheading educational excellence

ACS Doha concluded its Second Annual ACS EdTech Conference, a resounding success that underscores its steadfast commitment to educational advancement, a statement said yesterday. Hosted at the ACS Doha campus in collaboration with ECIS and KidZania, and sponsored by NEOM and ManageBac, the event showcased pioneering strides in educational technology and strategies. Educators from around the globe converged to participate in workshops tailored to explore the latest educational tools and advancements. These sessions empowered educators with the knowledge and skills to enhance student learning experiences and leverage technological innovations for effective lesson planning. Highlighting the conference was an esteemed lineup of international keynote speakers and panellists, including luminaries such as professor Dr Ger Graus



OBE and Ben Mason, CEO and founder of Global Bridge. Their insights and expertise enriched discussions on the evolving landscape of education and technology. Dr Susan Borden, head of School at ACS Doha, said: "The Annual ACS EdTech Conference underscores our dedication to spearheading educational excellence. Through collaborative efforts with ECIS,



KidZania, and the support of NEOM and ManageBac, we provided a platform for educators to explore cutting-edge practices and technologies." Joanne Whitson from ECIS echoed this sentiment, emphasising the power of collaboration in shaping the future of education. She remarked, "This conference exemplifies the transformative potential



of collective endeavours, fostering an environment where educators can exchange ideas and contribute to pedagogical evolution." The conference agenda encompassed diverse topics, including eSports and Gamification in K-12 Education, Data Science in STEAM Education, and AI-driven Personalised Learning Paths. Panels

delled into the efficacy of personalised learning methodologies, assistive technologies, and immersive STEM projects. A standout feature of the event was the inauguration of ACS Doha's E-sport & Innovation Center, a state-of-the-art facility designed to inspire creativity and technological exploration among students. This centre serves as a dynamic hub where students can engage in gaming, technology, and entrepreneurship, fostering essential skills for the digital age. ACS Doha also announced the Second Annual ACS Future Skills 2040 event, scheduled for April 24 at ACS Doha's Theater. Professor Dr Ger Graus OBE and Ben Mason will headline the event, promising insightful discussions on the future landscape of skills and education, the statement added.

talabat, EAA launch donation drive for Gaza

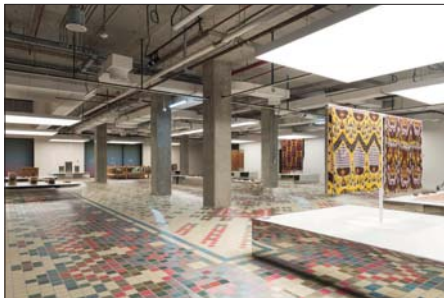


talabat, the region's leading platform for everyday deliveries, has launched a series of charity campaigns in collaboration with Education Above All (EAA), dedicated to providing aid in Gaza during the holy month of Ramadan. From the provision of hot meals and hygiene kits to offering mental health and psychosocial support, talabat and EAA are committed to making a meaningful impact by extending a helping hand to those in need, a statement said. The comprehensive range of initiatives include meals for 2,500 children at a cost of QR520, provision of mental health and psychosocial support to 51,000 children for QR160 per person, hygiene kits for 18,000 women for QR400, Ramadan dessert distribution for QR25 per person, Iftar family meals for QR150, and many more initiatives to those living in Gaza. How to Donate: 1. Hop onto talabat, 2. Select "Donate"; 3. Choose "Education Above All"; 4. Browse and select one or more donation items listed below "Rebuilding Hope" These initiatives reflect that talabat and EAA are aligned in their mission to extend assistance, boost community engagement, and spread the message of hope during difficult circumstances, the statement added.

Design Doha launch week attracts 22,000 visitors

The launch of Design Doha, under the leadership of Qatar Museums (QM) Chairperson, HE Sheikha Al Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, witnessed a roster of special events and exhibition premieres, attracting some 22,000 visitors throughout the week. Led by artistic director Glenn Adamson, Design Doha's opening week commenced on February 24 with events taking place at Msheireb, a creative neighbourhood that nurtures collaboration, creativity, and innovation.

The launch of Design Doha's exhibitions, activations, installations, and programmes played a crucial role in further activating the district as an artistic hub, attracting creative tourists, designers, and artists from across Qatar. Present among them were notable figures such as Franck Millot, director of Paris Design Week; Qatari-businessman Wissam al-Mana; and co-director of Zaha Hadid Architects, Woody Zao. The inaugural week of Design Doha culminated with a gala dinner and prize giving ceremony on February 28 at Barahat Msheireb, which was opened by prominent Qatari architect Ibrahim al-Jaidah. During the ceremony, Fabraca Studios, Fadaa, Sayar & Garibeh, and Abeer Seikaly were each awarded the Design Doha Prize – an initiative established to provide recognition and support for exceptional designers in the categories of product design, interior design, furniture design, and craft.



Crafting Uzbekistan

The winners were selected among almost 600 applicants. Looking back at the success of opening week, Fahad al-Obaidly, head of Programmes, deputy director of Programmes and Partnerships for the Design Doha Biennial, said: "Design Doha is already proving its purpose as a dedicated platform for cultivating creativity and design excellence, providing creatives and institutions with a space to showcase their designs and ideas. By attracting international attention and facilitating collaborations within the design community, the biennial is poised to stimulate various sectors of Qatar's economy, including tourism, hospitality, and creative industries. We are proud of what the initiative has achieved in its inaugural edition and are incredibly excited to see what the future holds."

Highlights of Design Doha opening week included the opening of several exhibitions. The anchor exhibition, Arab Design Now, a regional survey of more than 70 Arab designers featuring 38 commissioned works opened



Cultural Kinship

at M7 and will run until August 5, as well as five additional exhibitions which remain open until March 30. These exhibitions are Colours of the City: A Century of Architecture in Doha (open until April 30); Weaving Poems (open until April 30); 100/100 Hundred Best Arabic Posters Round 04 (open until August 5); Crafting Uzbekistan: Tradition in Threads (open until March 30), and Cultural Kinship (open until March 30). Three commissioned works were unveiled, Desert by Amine El Gotaibi (The Ned Doha), Doha Dragon by Joris Laarman (Msheireb), and Afterimage of the Beginning by Choi Byung Hoon (National Museum of Qatar). The unveiling of Design Doha exhibitions and installations coincided with the launch of the Design Doha Forum, the headline programming event for Design Doha which welcomed 62 industry experts from around the world to share their experience and knowledge in the field of design.

QU launches website for Class of 2024 graduation



Qatar University (QU) has launched a website for the Graduation Ceremony of Class of 2024 under a special tab on its official website. Featured are information on a number of topics related to the main ceremonies of the graduation event and the details of the individual college ceremonies. QU has urged all Class of 2024 graduates to observe important instructions that have been officially published recently, whether on the

ceremony's website or through the official social media platforms. The graduation ceremony is a celebrated annual event at QU, since its inception in 1977 and aims to celebrate students graduating from bachelor and postgraduate degrees. The graduates will complete the final step in their university journey in the presence of QU president Dr Omar al-Ansari, QU vice-presidents and officials, faculty, in addition to VIP guests and family members.

QU faculty member receives Star of Excellence Award

Dr Hazem Elewa, associate professor and head, Clinical Training and Education at QU's College of Pharmacy, alongside a team of experts, has been recognised with the Star of Excellence Award at the 11th Stars of Excellence event for his project titled "The First Anticoagulation Drive-up Service in the Middle East and North Africa Region." The honour was in the category of 'Excellence in Health: Clinical Practice Award'. The project represents a paradigm shift in the delivery of anticoagulation therapy, particularly in the context of Covid-19 pandemic. The initiative aimed to address the challenges faced by patients requiring routine anticoagulation monitoring. Dr Elewa and his team conceptualised the Anticoagulation Drive-up Service, offering patients the opportunity to undergo checks without leaving the safety of their vehicles. This innovative approach not only mitigated the risk of exposure to infectious agents but also garnered widespread appreciation from both patients and healthcare providers. During the Covid-19 pandemic, stringent



Dr Hazem Elewa with the Star of Excellence Award.

regulations were enforced in Qatar to curb the spread of the virus, including social distancing measures and the adoption of telemedicine for outpatient consultations. The implementation of the drive-up service aligned perfectly with these guidelines, ensuring continuity of care while prioritising patient safety. The success of the drive-up service was

further validated by a comprehensive evaluation of anticoagulation quality outcomes. With high levels of patient and staff satisfaction, coupled with positive clinical outcomes, the Anticoagulation Drive-Up Service has now been established as the new standard of care, symbolising a significant milestone in healthcare innovation in the region.

HBKU college co-hosts Mena conference

Hamad Bin Khalifa University's (HBKU) College of Law collaborated with Sohar University and the Association of Environmental Law lecturers in Middle East and North African Universities (ASELLMU) to jointly host the 5th Mena Environmental Law and Policy Scholars' Conference recently in Sohar, Oman. Organised under the theme "Environmental Law and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Legislation Towards a Sustainable Economy in the Mena Region," the conference brought together leading envi-



ronmental educators, administrators, and legal practitioners to exchange knowledge, experience,

and learn from each other on how to advance the attainment of the SDGs in the Mena region by the

global target date of 2030. Speakers from HBKU College of Law included dean Susan I. Karama-

nian, Dr Damilola S. Olawuyi, professor of law and Unesco Chair on Environmental Law and Sustainable

Development at HBKU, and chair of ASELLMU, and Tasniem Ahmed Elyass Hussain, third year Juris Doctor student and research fellow to the Unesco Chair at HBKU. A significant outcome of the conference was the official adoption of a work plan of environmental training and education which will include focused research in five thematic areas: Technology and the Green Economy; Business, Human Rights and the Environment; Environmental Dispute Resolution; Food, Agriculture and Water Security; and Energy and Natural Resources.

Dadu partners with Baladna to host Ghabga dinner



In the spirit of the holy month of Ramadan, Dadu, Children's Museum of Qatar held a series of Ghabga dinners on Friday, supported by Baladna.

The event featured a range of activities and cultural festivities, including a red carpet reception where families could have their photos taken; an interactive culi-

nary session led by a professional chef, demonstrating how to make traditional dishes for Iftar and Ghabga; a children's culinary station, teaching children basic recipes such as zataar; cultural crafts and activities, such as henna painting and Fawazer storytelling; festive decoration making (Fanoos); a photobooth featuring an



Dadu, Children's Museum of Qatar held a series of Ghabga dinners on Friday, generously supported by Baladna.

array of fun props, and Fawazeer games.

Two further Ghabga dinners will be held, on March 21 and 22, from 8.30pm-10.30pm at Dadu Gardens, located at Al Bidda Park.

Awqaf authorises QC and QRCS to receive Zakat al-Fitr

The Department of Zakat Affairs at the Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs (Awqaf) has authorised the Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS) and the Qatar Charity (QC) to receive Zakat al-Fitr during Ramadan.

In a statement issued by Awqaf, the department urged Muslims to pay Zakat al-Fitr through the channels to help the administration deliver it to those who deserve it within Qatar at the specified time before the Eid prayer.

The Zakat Affairs Department director Saad Imran al-Kuwari said more efforts are exerted annually before and during the blessed Ramadan to provide the best services to those who pay Zakat and the beneficiaries.

The department, earlier this month, set the amount of Zakat al-Fitr at QR 15 and said it must be paid before the Eid al-Fitr prayer. The department explained that the basic principle of Zakat al-Fitr is to take it out from the staple food item of most people, which is rice, and the amount is 2.5kg, with the possibility of paying it in cash at a value of QR15.

Regarding the administration's



Saad Imran al-Kuwari

preparations to receive Zakat from individuals and companies, al-Kuwari explained that the department communicates with the taxpayers on an ongoing basis through various communication tools to pay the Zakat on their money and Zakat al-Fitr. "The department has been receiving Zakat al-Fitr from the public since the first day of Ramadan. The Department of Zakat Affairs also calculates the Zakat of small and medium-sized private companies, not listed on the stock exchange based on their request.

"The department provides this service to companies and businessmen believing in its vital role

in serving society. The department currently has 33 offices and fixed collection points, which are spread in vital areas of the country such as markets, commercial complexes and near major mosques," he said. Zakat payers can contact the express collector during Ramadan on (55199996) and (55199990). Two collectors are ready to reach the donors to receive their Zakat during official working hours. The public can pay the Zakat on their money and Zakat al-Fitr through the Zakat Affairs Department application on smartphones as well.

They can pay Zakat through direct transfer by accessing the websites of the banks in which the department has accounts.

Al-Kuwari said the legal specialists in the department are ready to receive communications related to calculating the Zakat of individuals, economic institutions and companies of various types. "The Department provides this service to those wishing to serve throughout the year during the official working hours. In Ramadan, these communications are received from 9am to 2pm," he said.

QU launches Ramadan Water Polo Championship

The Sports Affairs Department at Qatar University (QU) has launched the Ramadan Water Polo Championship at the Aquatic Sports Complex, in collaboration with the Qatar Swimming Association for Water Polo.

Dr Senaid al-Marri, director of Sports Affairs Department at QU, said: "This championship has a long history, which I remember from my university days between 2001 and 2005."

Explaining that this is the third consecutive year of the current series, the official said the Sports Affairs Department is planning short-term courses in swimming for students, staff and their children in the near future.

Khalifa al-Mohanadi, a member of the Board of Directors of the Qatar Swimming Association, highlighted the event's importance in their sports calendar and thanked QU for providing all facilities to ensure its success. The championship, comprising four rounds, begins with qualifiers, with teams divided into four groups competing for the finals.

Walid Desouqi, head of the Males' Sports Teams



Department at QU Sports Affairs, said: "The event witnessed the participation of several teams, including two Qatari national teams, the QU team, and the 'Oryx' team, consisting of veteran players. A team from Kuwait is also participating for the first time in Qatar. The QU's pools and facilities have been fully equipped this year, enabling them to host international and global tournaments."

Food safety inspection intensified ahead of Garangao



The Ministry of Municipality has intensified its efforts to tighten health supervision on all food establishments and outlets across the country in preparation for the Garangao night. Accordingly, all municipalities have completed their preparations to celebrate this occasion by carrying out an extensive inspection programme covering malls, shops selling nuts and sweets, and warehouses and factories producing these food items. The campaign aims at ensuring the health and safety of food products within the local market according to the stipulation of Law No 8 of 1990 Regulation of Human Food Control.

Common mistakes during fasting

Some seemingly innocent errors made by a fasting person can actually affect his fasting.

Not sniffing water during ablution

Neglecting the order to sniff during ablution to the extent of violation by just washing the tip of their nose. A person is required not to exaggerate during sniffing, if he is fasting, but not to violate by leaving it altogether either. The Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam (may Allah exalt his mention), said: "Exaggerate while sniffing unless you are fasting." Imam As-San'ani, may Allah have mercy upon him, said: "The narration is evidence to exaggerate the sniffing when not fasting. Exaggeration is forbidden when fasting in case something comes down the throat and ruins the fasting."

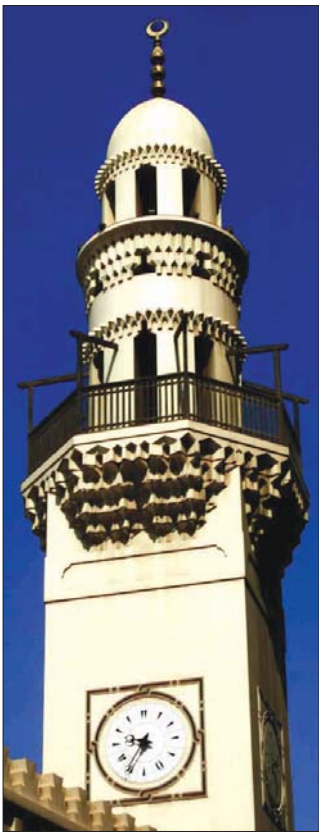
Having Suhoor early

Having Suhoor (the pre-dawn meal) early is another violation. By doing that we are rejecting a lot of rewards. The Sunnah states that a Muslim should delay the Suhoor in order for him to be following the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam. Anas, may Allah be pleased with him, said: "We had Suhoor with the Prophet and then prayed."

Delaying the call for Maghrib prayer

From the violations that some people do in Ramadan is that they only call for prayer when it becomes completely dark. They are not satisfied with the complete setting of the sun and claim that it is better to be cautious. This is against the Sunnah. The Sunnah is to call for prayer when the sun sets completely without regard to anything else. Allah Says (what means): "Then complete the fast till the night [i.e. sunset]." [Qur'an; 2:187]

Allah made the end of fasting when the night begins, that is when the sun completely sets. The Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "If night comes from this side, day goes from that side and the sun has gone, then



break your fast." [Al-Bukhari and Muslim]

Delaying breaking the fast

Some people fall into the trap of delaying the breaking of their fast. Two points are relevant here: first delaying breaking the fast can delay Maghrib prayer or cause you to miss it altogether - which is worse. Therefore, a Muslim must eat on time in order to be able to catch the congregational Salah with other Muslims. Second, delaying Iftar is a contradiction to the Sunnah and an agreement with the Christians and the Jews based on the following: Sahl Ibn Sa'd, may Allah be pleased with him, narrated that the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "People will continue to be upon virtue as long as they hasten the Iftar." [Al-Bukhari and Muslim].

He also narrated that the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "My nation is still

following my Sunnah as long as they don't wait for the stars to break their fast." [Ibn Hibban] Abu Hurayrah may Allah be pleased with him narrated that he Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "Our religion will stay visible as long as people hasten breaking their fast because the Jews and Christians delay."

The guilt associated with waking up in Janabah

Another violation is the great guilt that fasting people feel if they wake up in Janabah (defilement due to sleeping with one's spouse). To those we say there should be no guilt, complete your fast. The Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, used to be in Janabah when dawn came and he would take a bath and fast.

Shaykh Abdul-Azeez Ibn Baaz, may Allah have mercy upon him, was asked if a fasting person has a wet dream on a Ramadan morning, does it ruin the fast and does that person have to take a bath? He replied that wet dreams do not ruin the fast because it is not a voluntary act and that a bath is necessary if semen is secreted. It's okay to delay the washing until Zuhur prayer if the wet dream occurred after Fajr salah. The same goes for Janabah.

Feeling guilty in tasting food

Some women are reluctant to taste their food in case they ruin their fasting. There is no need for this reluctance as long as no food is swallowed. Ibn 'Abbas, may Allah be pleased with him, said: "It is okay to taste the food." [Al-Bukhari]. Shaykh 'Abdullaah Ibn Jibreen, may Allah have mercy upon him, was asked: "Can a cook, while fasting, taste the food being cooked to make sure it is good?"

He replied: "It's okay to taste the food when necessary by placing it at the tip of the tongue to know its sweetness, saltiness or the like. Nothing should be swallowed but it should be spit out. That will not ruin the fast."

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

Qatar Charity campaign hosts Iftar gatherings for students in Ghana

Qatar Charity (QC), as part of its 'Endless Giving' campaign, (QC) has been organising group Iftars for university students, boarding school students and worshippers at mosques in Ghana since the beginning of Ramadan, a statement said.

Additionally, food packages containing essential supplies are distributed to needy families. It is anticipated that the number of beneficiaries from the 'Feed the Fasting' project in Ghana will exceed 60,000.

The project implementation continues across 56 distribution centres in the Greater Accra, Northern, Ashanti, and Eastern regions. A total of 700 families benefit from the food baskets. During the holy month, QC's Ghana Office also implements the Zakat al-Fitr and Eid Clothing Distribution projects for sponsored orphans.

Salifu Yahaya Dangma, president of the Muslim Students Association at the University of Ghana, expressed gratitude to QC for its support to Ghanaian students by providing exceptional Iftar meals at the university dormitories since the beginning of Ramadan.

He indicated that this assistance not only helps the students observe fasting but also enables



them to focus on their academic pursuits. He also highlighted QC's support for underprivileged students through scholarships that cover tuition fees to build their future.

The Imam of a mosque in Ac-

cra clarified that a significant number of members of the Muslim community in the neighbourhood benefit from the Iftar meals provided by QC during Ramadan.

At the Iftar meal distribution centre in Kumasi, a city in Ghana, several students expressed their satisfaction with the delicious Iftar meals provided by QC. Abu Bakr Salatu Ziba, director of Force Senior High Technical School, expressed his delight at the presence of QC's team and their support for fasting students residing in the school's dormitory through the distribution of Iftar meals.

Waseef hosts Iftar tents



Waseef, a pioneer in property and facility management services, is hosting Iftar tents, organised by Qatar Charity at Barwa Village Al Wakra, targeting workers throughout the holy month of Ramadan, a statement said yesterday.



Saudi Arabia announces \$40mn donation to UN agency for Palestinians

AFP
Riyadh

Saudi Arabia announced yesterday it will donate \$40mn to the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, which has faced massive funding cuts and calls for its abolition spearheaded by Israel.

The King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Centre (KSrelief) said the funds would support UNRWA's "humanitarian relief efforts in the Gaza Strip", where the Israel-Hamas war has raged for more than five months. "The funding will provide food for more than 250,000 people and tents for 20,000 families," KSrelief said in a statement.

The UN agency, created in 1949, has come under heavy scrutiny after Israel accused about a dozen of its employees of involvement in the October first week storming by Hamas fighters into southern Israel. Multiple countries have suspended their aid, although the UN has said that Israel has not provided it with any evidence

for the allegations. The UN has launched both an internal and an independent investigation into the claims. "It is crucial to address the desperate needs of the people in Gaza," said KSrelief chief Abdullah al-Rabeeah. UNRWA head Philippe Lazzarini said the donation "reflects the solidarity that the kingdom

has always shown Palestinians". UNRWA employs around 30,000 people in the occupied Palestinian territories – including 13,000 in Gaza – as well as neighbouring Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. Lazzarini, a veteran of UN and other humanitarian missions, said last month that he believed Israel's aim was "destroying

UNRWA", long at the forefront of relief efforts and education in Gaza. Humanitarian aid efforts have intensified in recent weeks, including airdrops and the launching of a maritime humanitarian corridor from Cyprus, but the UN and other aid agencies warn that these are insufficient to meet the desperate needs in Gaza.



People stand next to the remains of a vehicle, which was destroyed in an Israeli airstrike, in Jenin, in the occupied West Bank, yesterday.

Israeli air strike in West Bank kills three Palestinian fighters

Reuters
Jenin

Israeli forces killed three Palestinians and wounded another in an air strike in the occupied West Bank city of Jenin yesterday, the Palestine health ministry said, in what Israel's military said was an operation targeting Palestinian fighters. The Israeli military said an aircraft struck four Palestinian fighters in a car in the Jenin area, among them two senior Islamic Jihad members who had led attacks on Israelis. Mahmoud Ghrayyeb, a resident of the Jenin refugee camp who said he witnessed the incident through a surveillance camera, said the strike hit the car around 5:37pm when traffic was busy ahead of Iftar, the meal that breaks the fast during the holy month of Ramadan. "We saw limbs flying onto the street," he said. "A man and his wife were in another car driving

past, they were saved by a miracle." Footage from Ghrayyeb's CCTV, shared with Reuters, showed a car on a busy road suddenly engulfed by a flame and veering off. Another car that was seen approaching from the opposite direction then stops and retreats. As night fell, firefighters arrived at the scene and people inspected the car, seen burned down to the frame. Since the Gaza war broke out in October, Israel has stepped up military raids in the West Bank, where violence had already been surging for over a year. UN records show that at least 358 Palestinians have been killed there by Israeli forces or settlers since October first week last year, a quarter of them children. Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem are among territories Israel occupied in the 1967 Middle East war and where some Palestinians have taken up arms to resist Israeli military rule.

Canadian freeze on new arms export permits to Israel to stay

Canada has not approved new arms exports permits to Israel since January 8 and this freeze will continue until Ottawa can ensure the weapons are used properly, Foreign Minister Melanie Joly said, Reuters reported from Ottawa. Export permits that were approved before January 8 remain in effect, she said in an e-mailed statement. The political survival of the minority Liberal government depends on support from the left-leaning New Democrats, who are pressuring for a tougher line with Israel over the Gaza conflict. "Canada has one of the most rigorous export permit regimes in the world. There are no open permits for exports of lethal goods to Israel," Joly said. "Since January 8th, the government has not approved new arms export permits to Israel and this will continue until we can ensure full compliance with our export regime." Canadian law bars the export of weapons if they could be used in "a serious violation of international humanitarian law" or "serious acts of violence against women and children". Canada's parliament passed a non-binding motion on Monday on the Gaza conflict which called on the government to "cease the further authorisation and transfer of arms exports to Israel". Canada, a minor supplier of arms to Israel, last week said it had paused non-lethal military exports since January because of the rapidly evolving situation on the ground. Earlier this month pro-Palestinian and human rights advocates filed a lawsuit to stop Ottawa allowing the export of military goods and technology to Israel. Since the Hamas storming of Israel in the first week of October, Canada had authorised at least C\$28.5mn (\$21mn) worth of new permits, more than the value of such permits allowed in the previous year, they said.

Reuters
Nakhon Ratchasima

Britain's Foreign Secretary David Cameron yesterday said it was vital for a pause in fighting between Israel and the Hamas group to enable the release of hostages in Gaza, but a lot of conditions first needed to be met for a lasting ceasefire. Speaking to Reuters during a trip to Thailand, Cameron said storming of Israel by Hamas fighters last year was wrong, and the only way for the Palestinian people to have a future was with the group out of the picture. "Crucially what we must try to do is to turn that pause into a permanent sustainable ceasefire," Cameron said in an interview during a visit to a Thai air force base. "We will only do that if a whole lot of conditions are fulfilled... we've got to get Hamas leaders out of Gaza, we have to dismantle the fighters' infrastructure." His remarks come as Washington launches a new diplomatic push for a ceasefire in the nearly six-month-old war, to free hostages and bring in food aid to ward off famine in the Palestinian enclave. Secretary of State Antony Blinken will visit the Middle East this week, where he will meet senior leaders of Egypt and Saudi Arabia to "discuss the right architecture for a lasting peace", though made no mention of a stop in Israel. Yesterday, Cameron signed a document upgrading ties with the Southeast Asian nation to a 'strategic partnership', making Britain the first European country to do so, according to a Thai government statement. Other countries that have a strategic partnership with Thailand include the United States, China, Japan and Australia. Cameron was in Nakhon Ratchasima in northeastern Thailand inspecting Gripen fighter jets built by Sweden's Saab in collaboration with British firms. He hoped Thailand would procure more, in an unspecified deal that he said would be worth £400mn (\$508.64mn) to the British economy.



People inspect the rubble and debris of a building that collapsed following an Israeli air strike in the Rafah refugee camp in the southern Gaza Strip, yesterday.



Women react during the funeral of Palestinian men from an array of clans and factions, who secure aid convoys in Gaza, after they were killed in an Israeli strike, in Gaza City, yesterday.

Cameron said Britain wants to expand its engagement with Asia, citing the country's association with the Australia-led AUKUS security pact and its membership of the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pa-

cific Partnership (CPTPP) as examples of London's pivot towards the region. "We are here to stay. We think it is important for Britain's prosperity, for our security and partnering with countries like Thailand make sense," he said

Cameron also said a bloody conflict in military-ruled Myanmar was now a "multifaceted civil war" and there was a need for former colonial ruler Britain, Southeast Asian bloc Asean and other countries to step up and help end the fighting.

French helicopter destroys Houthi drone

Reuters
Athens

A French Navy helicopter destroyed a Houthi combat drone in the southern Red Sea to protect merchant ships, the

EU's mission in the Red Sea, known as Aspidex, said yesterday. A French destroyer warship detected an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) of the Houthis flying near commercial vessels, according to a statement from Aspidex' headquarters in the Greek town of Larisa. The French warship's heli-

copter, "patrolling in the area, was guided by the destroyer to engage and destroy the drone with its machine gun," it said. Aspidex was launched in February to help protect the key maritime trade route from drone and missile attacks by Yemen's Houthi militia, who say they are retaliating against Israel's war on Gaza.

Senegal heads for wide open presidential poll on Sunday

AFP
Dakar

Seven million Senegalese are due to head to the polls on Sunday to vote in a wide open presidential election following weeks of chaos and uncertainty. Whoever comes out on top will be tasked with steering the traditionally stable West African nation out of years of turmoil, and managing revenues from recently discovered oil and gas reserves. The 18 men and one woman have until tomorrow to finish a raucous two-week campaigning period, which was dramatically shortened after a last-minute change to the election date.



Supporters wait before a campaign meeting of Amadou Ba, candidate of the Alliance For the Republic Party (APR), designated by former president for the Presidential elections, in Diourbel.

The election race was also fired up by a rapidly-passed amnesty law that led last week to the release from prison of Bassirou Diomaye Faye and the charismatic Ousmane Sonko, figureheads of the anti-establishment opposi-

tion. Although Faye is Sonko's deputy, the former is on the ballot because the latter has been barred from standing. In voters' eyes, they come as a package deal. They plan "to share resources

fairly. What belongs to Senegal should be left to Senegal, that's patriotism," said 38-year-old teacher Gnima Mane in the southern city of Ziguinchor. For the first time in Senegal, the incumbent will not feature on the ballot, with the candidate selected by outgoing President Macky Sall's governing coalition up against 18 rivals. In the central town of Diourbel, many people have faith in Sall's candidate, Amadou Ba. "We have new streetlights, roads and a grass stadium," said high school student Ousseynou Diene during a rally for Ba. Senegal has traditionally been considered a beacon of democracy and stability in coup-hit West Africa.

SA court orders partial freeze on Zuma's accounts

A South African bank yesterday announced a partial freeze on accounts of ex-president Jacob Zuma, two months ahead of a general election in which he is hoping to relaunch his political career, AFP reported from Johannesburg. The First National Bank (FNB) said a court ordered the measure over a dispute related to money spent by the 81-year-old to renovate his home and install a swimming pool when he was president. "FNB was instructed by the High Court to place a hold on outgoing payments from former president Zuma's FNB accounts. The accounts are not closed as incoming payments are unaffected," the lender said. The partial account freeze is likely to further taint the reputation of graft-accused Zuma, who has joined an opposition group seeking to cut into the vote share of his old home, the African National Congress (ANC). Zuma's new party, uMkhonto We Sizwe (MK) or Spear of the Nation, reacted angrily, saying the measure was politically motivated. "It's clear that the ANC is behind all of this," MK spokesman Nhlamulo Ndhlala told AFP, adding the ruling party was trying "to humiliate" its former boss. FNB said the court order, issued at the end of February, was the result of legal action taken by the liquidators of another bank, which is owed money by Zuma. "This instruction from the court results from the process currently being managed by the VBS Bank liquidators, and FNB was legally required to comply. Former president Zuma's recourse now lies with the courts and VBS liquidators," it said. The dispute relates to a decade-old scandal over the improper use of public funds to refurbish Zuma's massive Nkandla homestead in his home province of KwaZulu-Natal.

Irish Prime Minister Leo Varadkar unexpectedly quits

Reuters
Dublin

Leo Varadkar yesterday said he would step down as Ireland's prime minister in a surprise move, saying the country's coalition government would stand a better chance of re-elect-

tion under another leader. Varadkar said he had asked his Fine Gael party to elect a new leader ahead of its annual conference on April 6, following which parliament would vote on that person succeeding him as prime minister. The shock departure of Varadkar, who became prime minister

in 2017 and returned to the premiership just 15 months ago, does not automatically trigger a general election. A vote must be held by March 2025. "My reasons for stepping down are both personal and political," Varadkar, 45, told a hastily arranged news conference at government buildings in Dublin, sounding emotional as he spoke.

"But after careful consideration, and some soul searching, I believe that a new Taoiseach (prime minister) and a new leader will be better placed than me to achieve that (the coalition government's re-election)." His successor will have 12 months to try to claw back the

wide opinion poll lead the main opposition Sinn Fein party, the former political wing of the Irish Republican Army, have over both Fine Gael and their main coalition partner Fianna Fail. Polls suggest the current three-party coalition also stands a chance of being re-elected. Higher Education Minister Si-

mon Harris, the country's health minister during the Covid-19 pandemic, is the clear favourite to take over from Varadkar. Other contenders include Enterprise Minister Simon Coveney, a former deputy prime minister, Public Expenditure Minister Paschal Donohoe and Justice Minister Helen McEntee.

Modi speaks to Putin, Zelensky ahead of Ukraine minister's visit

Reuters
New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi yesterday held separate phone calls with Russian President Vladimir Putin and Ukraine's Volodymyr Zelensky and discussed strengthening ties with both, ahead of a visit by the Ukrainian foreign minister to New Delhi. India has traditionally had close economic and defence ties with Moscow and has refrained from criticising Russia over its February 2022 invasion of Ukraine, instead increasing purchases of Russian oil to record levels. Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba will visit India next week as Kyiv looks to build support for its peace plan, two Indian officials aware of the matter said. It will be the first visit by a top Ukrainian official since Russia's invasion. Modi phoned Putin to congratulate him on his victory in Russia's weekend presidential election, and the two leaders also discussed Ukraine, the Kremlin said in a statement. The Indian government in its own statement said that Modi had reiterated India's "consistent position in favour of dialogue and diplomacy as the way forward" in the Ukraine crisis, and that the leaders agreed to deepen bilateral ties. Modi later said in a post on social media platform X that he also spoke to Zelensky on strengthen-

ing ties between India and Ukraine and conveyed "India's consistent support for all efforts for peace and bringing an early end to the ongoing conflict." "Ukraine is interested in strengthening our trade and economic ties with India, particularly in agricultural exports, aviation co-operation, and pharmaceutical and industrial product trade," Zelensky said on X, following the call. Kuleba's visit comes at the invitation of his Indian counterpart, Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, after a phone call between Modi and Zelensky at the start of the year, one of the officials said. Both officials spoke on condition of anonymity. Kyiv's peace plan calls for the withdrawal of all Russian troops from Ukraine, restoring the country's 1991 post-Soviet borders and a process to make Russia accountable for its actions. Zelensky stressed the importance of India's participation in the first peace formula summit planned for later this year in Switzerland. Apart from talks with Indian officials, Kuleba is also set to "review the India-Ukraine inter-governmental commission," one of the officials said, referring to a panel charged with keeping up the two nations' economic, cultural and technological ties. India's foreign ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Zelensky said the commission session was to happen "in the nearest future."

Thai PM meets \$500,000 albino buffalo



Thai Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin (centre) took the bull by the horns yesterday as he welcomed an unusual visitor to his offices - an enormous white buffalo that recently sold for \$500,000. The bulky bovine, named Ko Muang Phet, hit the mainstream media last week with its big-ticket sale, and earned a trip to Government House to meet Srettha. Standing six feet tall, the four-year-old albino from western Phetchaburi province weighs 1.4 tonnes - almost three times more than the average buffalo.

India's Reliance 'refusing Sovcomflot oil shipments'

Reuters
New Delhi/Moscow

India's Reliance Industries, operator of the world's biggest refining complex, will not buy Russian oil loaded on tankers operated by shipper Sovcomflot (SCF) after recent US sanctions, according to two sources familiar with the matter. The development adds to oil export problems for Russia as its oil firms may face difficulties finding ships to sell surplus oil after

recent Ukrainian drone attacks on the state's refineries. Russian companies are already struggling to collect payments for oil exports due to banking restrictions. The US has imposed wide-ranging sanctions on Russia since its invasion of Ukraine two years ago. In February, the US imposed sanctions on Sovcomflot and 14 crude oil tankers involved in Russian oil transportation. Reliance, a large buyer of Russian Urals oil, has requested that the new supplies not be shipped by Sovcomflot-operated tankers, according to the sources, who declined to be

named due to the sensitivity of the matter. Sovcomflot and Reliance representatives didn't respond to Reuters' requests for comment. Meanwhile, more Indian refiners plan to shun the use of Sovcomflot vessels, which may weigh on India's import of Russian oil and leave Russia with fewer outlets to place its flagship product, three sources in India's government and refining sector said. Indian refiners, seeking to avoid any backlash from Washington, are being "extra cautious" due to tighter scrutiny of Russian oil deals by banks and US authorities.

Refugees rescued as boat capsizes



An Indonesian resident transports Rohingya Muslim refugees to the Samatiga District Office after Indonesian fishermen rescued dozens of Rohingya after high tides capsized their boat in waters off the West Aceh, in Aceh province, Indonesia, yesterday. The boat was carrying more than 100 Rohingya refugees.

Catherine's medical record breach claim being probed

Reuters
London

Britain's data watchdog said it was looking into a report that staff at the hospital where Catherine, Princess of Wales, underwent abdominal surgery in January had attempted to access her private health records. The report in the Daily Mirror said managers at the London Clinic, where King Charles was also treated in January, were investigating claims that at least one member of staff had been caught trying to access Catherine's medical notes. A spokesperson for the information commissioner's office said yesterday: "We can confirm that we have received a breach report and are assessing the information provided."

Catherine, 42, had surgery for a non-cancerous but unspecified condition during her stay of around two weeks in the hospital. The London Clinic said in a statement regarding the media coverage that all its staff were acutely aware of their ethical and legal duties in regard to patient confidentiality. "We have systems in place to monitor management of patient information and, in the case of any breach, all appropriate investigatory, regulatory and disciplinary steps will be taken," chief executive Al Russell said in a statement. Catherine stepped back from official duties and Kensington Palace has said she is not expected to return to royal engagements until April. Any confidentiality breach of the princess's health records was "a matter for the London Clinic", her office said.

Vietnam president resigns amid major graft purge

Vietnam's President Vo Van Thuong has resigned after just one year in the job, the ruling Communist Party announced yesterday as the country mounts a sweeping anti-graft purge. The party said Thuong was guilty of "violations and shortcomings" and his resignation was accepted by the central committee. The 53-year-old's dramatic fall comes as Vietnam undergoes major political upheaval, with his predecessor forced out in an anti-corruption drive that has seen several ministers fired and top business leaders tried for fraud and corruption. A statement on the party's website said Thuong had violated unspecified "regulations" and failed to set a proper example as head of state. "Comrade Vo Van Thuong's violations and shortcomings have caused bad public opinion, affecting the reputation of the party, state and himself," said the statement, reported by Vietnam News Agency.

Australia hosts China FM, sees 'stability' in ties

AFP
Canberra

China and Australia claimed to have stabilised long-strained relations after talks in Canberra yesterday, despite evident tensions over a high-profile prisoner, trade and a new crack-down in Hong Kong. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi visited Australia for the first time since 2017, a trip designed to draw a line under disputes related to everything from the origins of Covid-19 to military deployments. The meeting was framed by warm words, with Wang saying the

two sides had "broken the ice", and that "mutual trust" and "good momentum" were slowly building. Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong praised renewed "stability" in relations and said it was crucial to recognise "how much progress we have made in a short period of time." There was even a tacit commitment to extending the Australian sojourn of two giant pandas loaned by China in 2009 - a favourite tool of Beijing diplomacy. But years of tensions and a fundamental disagreement about the shape of the Asia-Pacific region could not be papered over. "We discussed the sentencing of

Dr Yang Hengjun. I told the foreign minister Australians were shocked at the sentence imposed," Wong told reporters after the meeting. Jailed Chinese-Australian writer Yang Hengjun - also known as Yang Jun - was in February handed a suspended death sentence after a Beijing court found him guilty of espionage. He vehemently denies the charges. Wong also raised concerns about human rights in Xinjiang, Tibet and Hong Kong, where pro-Beijing lawmakers on Tuesday passed national security reforms that will further criminalise dissent. An Australian foreign minis-

try official said Wong had warned the reforms would "further erode rights and freedoms", breach international commitments and have "far-reaching impacts, including on individuals in Australia." The remarks are unlikely to have gone down well with Wong's Chinese guest. Beijing has described similar criticism from Britain, the US and the European Union as "slandering and smearing." As the foreign ministers met, protesters gathered on the lawns of Australia's parliament, drawing attention to alleged human rights abuses within China. A small group of demonstrators

later clashed with police outside the Chinese embassy, brandishing Tibetan flags and shouting "free Tibet" as they rushed towards the building's front gates. Australia's relationship with China began unravelling in 2018, when Canberra excluded telecommunications giant Huawei from its 5G network on security grounds and later passed laws on foreign interference. Then in 2020, Australia called for an international investigation into the origins of Covid-19 - an action China saw as politically motivated. In response, Beijing slapped trade restrictions on a slew of Australian exports.

Most of those barriers have been gradually wound back as relations have been repaired. Wang said a final decision on ending tariffs would be made at the end of the month, signalling restrictions could soon be lifted. Wong said the talks had also touched on the global nickel market, which has been upended by a surge in exports from Indonesia - enabled by massive Chinese investments and a revolution in refining techniques. Prices have fallen about 40% in the past year alone, prompting many once-dominant Australian firms to rethink projects or write down the value of their assets.

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GULF TIMES

Negative rates era unlikely to be revisited soon

Eighteen months after Europe ended its decade-long experiment with negative interest rates, the Bank of Japan has done the same with its first rate hike in 17 years. It marks the end of an era few expect to see again.

Brought in after the late 2000s global recession and debt crisis, negative rates turned money orthodoxy on its head by charging banks to park deposits with their central bank rather than paying them interest for doing so.

The aim was to encourage enough bank lending to kick-start growth in moribund post-crisis economies and ward off the threat of deflation. Most policymakers now conclude they didn't work as well as planned and that, in any case, things have moved on.

"The days of ultra-low rates are over," Agustín Carstens, general manager of the Basel-based Bank for International Settlements, said this week in a wide-ranging policy speech.

"Inflation will partly depend on factors that are not under central banks' control," he said, citing rising trade tensions, ageing populations and climate change among global factors that could keep prices – and thus borrowing costs – higher.

In the early 2010s, the world's big three central banks – the BoJ, European Central Bank and US Federal Reserve – all cut rates to rock-bottom.

Policymakers are still dealing with the distortions created by negative rates, not least a financial system awash with trillions of dollars of cheap money and excess funds

buyers to lend them money. The act of saving earned little reward, prompting tabloid campaigns against negative rates in Germany and Switzerland. Yet it became clear the policies were not having the desired effect. While ECB studies suggest negative rates did add about 0.7 percentage points to growth in loans each year, that wasn't ever enough to bring eurozone inflation up to the central bank's target of around 2%.

Some critics of negative rates argue that lack of access to credit was never the main reason for Europe's sluggish recovery and that deeper problems – such as lack of competitiveness and public investment – were outside the domain of monetary policy.

"It's a bit like when you have a hammer and everything looks like a nail," said Dirk Schumacher, head of European macro research at Natixis.

"There's only so much central banks in the end can do to spur growth, and they clearly ran into the limit here."

The Fed, which held rates above but close to zero, similarly found its efforts to cure roughly a decade of below-target inflation yielded only slow and often unsatisfactory results.

Ultimately, the world was bounced out of the low-inflation era by supply chain snags created by the Covid-19 pandemic, compounded by the massive fiscal stimulus programmes of rich nations and energy shocks linked to the Ukraine war.

The Bank of Japan remains far behind other central banks, which have hiked rates at unprecedented speed to stifle these new inflationary pressures and only now are starting to think a cautious easing might be possible. But policymakers are still dealing with the distortions created by negative rates, not least a financial system awash with trillions of dollars of cheap money and excess funds which banks can simply park with the central bank for an easy profit.

Just as worrying has been the impact on fiscal policy across the world, encouraging governments to amass record debts – borrowing that was initially cheap but which has become more expensive as interest rates rose to more normal levels.

"The post-GFC (global financial crisis) low interest rate environment flattered fiscal accounts," said BIS's Carstens.

"Fiscal authorities have a narrow window in which to get their house in order before the public's trust in their commitments starts to fray."

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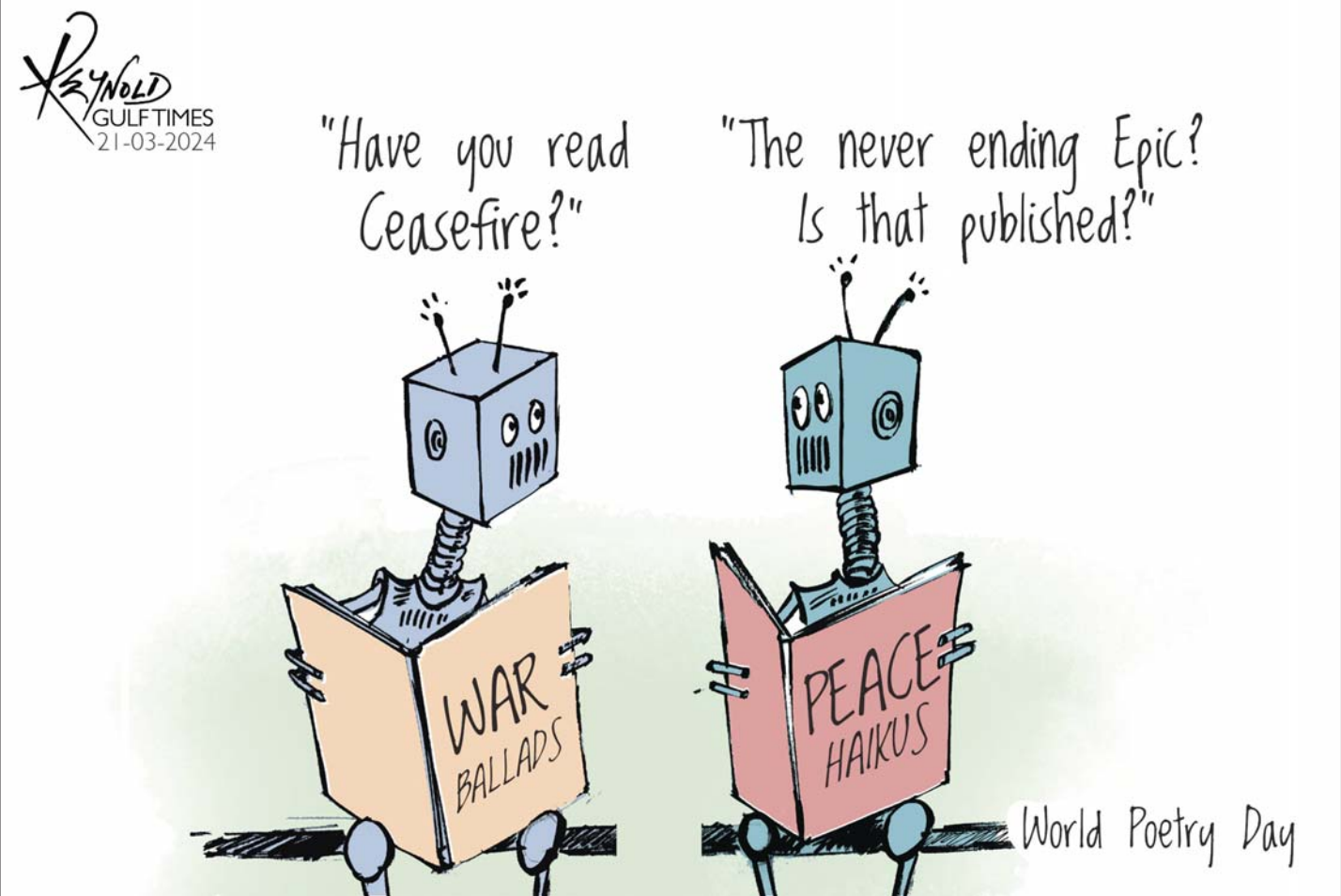
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Italian bond party turns blind eye to deficit disasters

By Stefano Rebaudo and Antonella Cinelli
Milan/Rome

'Don't worry, be happy' sums up the current approach of financial markets to Italian debt, with investors determined to lock in high returns on Rome's government bonds and turning a blind eye as its public finances veer out of control.

The budget deficit in the euro zone's third largest economy stood at 7.2% of output last year, data showed this month, more than double the estimated average of 3.2% for the 20-nation bloc and massively overshooting for a second consecutive year.

Yet the gap between the yield on Italy's sovereign bonds and equivalent German paper – a closely-watched sign of investor confidence in riskier Italian assets – narrowed last week to 1.15 percentage points (115 basis points), a 26-month low.

So what is going on, and how long will it last?

Most analysts say the outperformance of Italy's bonds is driven mainly by interest rate expectations and European Central Bank policy, and has little to do with Rome's economy and public finances.

"The spread keeps tightening as investors rush to lock in yields close to levels not seen for over a decade," said Erjon Satko, rate strategist at BofA.

With markets pricing in ECB interest rate cuts from June, potential buyers are lured by the returns still offered by Italian BTP bonds and see country risk capped by the prospect of ECB measures to reduce spreads if needed.



Italy's new Economy Minister Giancarlo Giorgetti shakes hands with Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni during the swearing-in ceremony at the Quirinale Presidential Palace in Rome on October 22, 2022. (Reuters/file photo)

The central bank has never used its Transmission Protection Instrument introduced in July 2022 to avoid market fragmentation, but the very presence of the backstop is driving investor behaviour.

"We are now in what I call a nationalisation of the European bond market where a market maker – the ECB – can potentially stop any speculation against sovereign debt," said Christopher Dembik, senior investment advisor at Pictet AM.

"Investors know it's always a bad idea to bet against a central bank ... we are in a completely new paradigm, a new world," he said, adding the market will continue to ignore Italy's fundamentals for the foreseeable future.

Some other analysts are less upbeat. Commerzbank said in a note to clients on Friday Italy's bond rally is likely to peter out in the second half of the year due to a worsening outlook for growth and public debt.

Citibank also warned this month that the recent decline in Italy's

debt-to-GDP ratio, which has helped reassure investors Rome is a safe bet, "is bound to ease, if not reverse, in the coming years due to stubbornly high funding needs."

At €2.9tn (\$3.16tn), Rome's debt is one of the largest in the world, amounting to 137% of gross domestic product at the end of last year, the second highest ratio in the euro zone after Greece's.

Despite this debt mountain, as soon as Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni took office in 2022 she hiked the following year's budget deficit target to 4.5% of GDP from the 3.4% goal she inherited from her predecessor, former ECB chief Mario Draghi.

The fiscal gap eventually came in at 7.2%.

The ratios from 2020-2023 were an eye-watering 9.4%, 8.7%, 8.6% and 7.2%, levels not seen in Italy since the mid-1990s.

Yet markets, which in previous years hammered Rome at the slightest hint of fiscal ill discipline, totally shrugged off this month's €39bn deficit miss.

"If we had had a negative surprise like this a year and a half ago, while interest rates were rising, it could have had a different impact," said Filippo Mormando, fixed income strategist at Spanish bank BBVA.

The main reason for Rome's deficit overshoots is a tax relief scheme for green home improvements that has proved infinitely more costly than anticipated.

Introduced in 2020, the so-called 'Superbonus' was originally supposed to cost €35bn over 15 years, but the Treasury now estimates a staggering €150bn have already been spent.

Most worrying is that the scheme will weigh on public accounts through 2035 as beneficiaries continue to deduct the building work from their tax bills, exerting steady upward pressure on the public debt. Italy's debt-GDP measure has declined from a 2020 peak due to the post-pandemic growth rebound and the surge in inflation. Both factors have now all but disappeared.

"The debt ratio is likely to increase significantly from now on without a noticeable reduction in the budget deficit," said Commerzbank analyst Marco Wagner.

Analysts see Italian growth of just 0.7% this year, versus Rome's official 1.2% forecast.

Yet for now, even if they are dancing on an Italian Titanic, bond investors seem determined to keep on dancing.

"We are in a cycle of portfolio adjustment that began at the end of last year and will last for weeks if not months," said BBVA's Mormando. "That means there will continue to be plenty of buyers of Italian debt." – Reuters

The spirit of generosity in Ramadan

By José Benzaquén Perea
Ambassador of Peru

There's no nobler gesture than offering charity and generosity to others, especially during the holy month of Ramadan. During my time here in Qatar, I've witnessed acts of kindness that have profoundly impacted me. We are called upon to share, whether little or much, with those less fortunate.

This holy month of Ramadan, a month of fasting, praying, and reflecting on the principles of the Islamic faith, reminds us every year of what truly matters.

As Ramadan arrives, it serves as a powerful reminder that life is more than just the daily routine. It brings upon us peace, dedication, patience, and gratitude. This holy month encourages us to think beyond ourselves, nurturing our inner soul and body while fostering compassion for others.

Through thankfulness for all we have, both spiritual and material, this holy month of Ramadan leads us to a way of life filled with peace, union, and happiness. It reunites us with family and friends, reminding



us of those who surround us on this path of life.

I've seen how possessions are shared with those in need, a testament to the values instilled by faith in a higher power. It's a way of giving back, guided by the beliefs and principles we've received throughout life, shaped by our parents, family, and community.

The act of giving leaves an imprint on our hearts, strengthening our desire to serve others. In this sacred month, the pursuit of spiritual purification and connection with God intensifies.

We observe greater empathy in people, which drives the strengthening of community relationships; an improvement in self-esteem and strengthens our feeling of solidarity with our peers; results – I believe – of a deeper spiritual connection.

Our faith is solidified by the knowledge of a supreme creator and protector. Prayers and meditations become tools for growth, transforming us into agents of social justice and equality. Acts of giving and sharing express gratitude for our

blessings and motivate us to act in good faith towards loved ones, both near and far.

Contributing to the prosperity of others cultivates sensitivity towards those facing hardships and injustice. Generosity, a practice for all, compels us to share what we have, however much or little, fostering peace across the globe.

Furthermore, communal bonds are strengthened, promoting a sense of belonging. It's a reminder of our inherent human desire for connection, sharing food with joy and familiarity.

I have observed that during this holy month, Ramadan becomes a time for mutual care, support, and solidarity, especially for those struggling to find peace and harmony.

Let happy days prevail. Together, we can face challenges, deepen our faith, and experience inner growth. This month presents a golden opportunity for self-reflection, seeking ways to improve and achieve personal victories that enrich our families, communities, and even countries.

Let's reaffirm our collective commitment to a better world, built on security, peace, and freedom. Ramadan Kareem!

‘The more you do it, the easier it gets’

■ Winner of Abel mathematics prize, 72, speaks about his passion and fun life

AFP
Paris

For Michel Talagrand, who won the Abel mathematics prize yesterday, maths provided a fun life free from all constraints — and an escape from the eye problems he suffered as a child.

“Maths, the more you do it, the easier it gets,” the 72-year-old said in an interview with AFP.

He is the fifth French Abel winner since the award was created by Norway’s government in 2003 to compensate for the lack of a Nobel prize in mathematics.

Talagrand’s career in functional analysis and probability theory saw him tame some of the incredibly complicated limits of random behaviour.

But the mathematician said he had just been “studying very simple things by understanding them absolutely thoroughly.” Talagrand said he was stunned when told by the Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters that he had won the Abel prize.

“I did not react — I literally didn’t think for at least five seconds,” he said, adding that he was very happy for his wife and two children.

When he was young, Talagrand only

turned to maths “out of necessity,” he said.

By the age of 15, he had endured multiple retinal detachments and “lived in terror of going blind”.

Unable to run around with friends in Lyon, Talagrand immersed himself in his studies.

His father had a maths degree and so he followed the same path. He said he was a “mediocre” student in other areas.

Talagrand was particularly poor at spelling, and still lashes out at what he calls its “arbitrary rules”.

Especially in comparison to maths, which has “an order in which you do well if you are sensitive to it,” he said.

In 1974, Talagrand was recruited by the French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS), before getting a PhD at Paris VI University.

He spent a decade studying functional analysis before finding his “thing”: probability.

It was then that Talagrand developed his influential theory about “Gaussian processes,” which made it possible to study some random phenomena.

Australian mathematician Matt Parker said that Talagrand had helped tame these “complicated random processes”.

Physicists had previously developed



French mathematician Michel Talagrand seen after being awarded yesterday. (AFP)

theories on the limits of how randomness behaves, but Talagrand was able to use mathematics to prove these limits, Parker said on the Abel Prize website.

“In a sense, things are as simple as could be — whereas mathematical objects can be monstrously complicated,” Talagrand said.

His work deepening the understanding of random phenomena “has become essential in today’s world,” the CNRS said, citing algorithms which are “the basis of our weather forecasts and our major linguistic models”.

Rather than creating a “brutal transformation”, Talagrand considers his discov-

eries as a collective work he compared to “the construction of a cathedral in which everyone lays a stone”.

He noted that French mathematics had been doing well an elite level, notching up both Abel prizes and Fields medals — the other equivalent to a maths Nobel, which is only awarded to mathematicians under 40.

“But the situation is far less brilliant in schools,” where young people are increasingly less attracted to the discipline, he lamented.

The new Abel winner admitted that maths can be daunting at first, but re-emphasised his belief that it gets easier the more you do it. He advised aspiring mathematicians not to worry about failure.

“You can fail to solve a problem 10 times — but that doesn’t matter if you succeed on the 11th try,” he said.

It can also be hard work. “All my life I worked to the point of exhaustion — but I had such fun!” he said.

“With maths, you have all the resources within yourself. You work without any constraints, free from concerns about money or bosses,” he added.

“It’s marvellous.” Talagrand will receive his prize, including a kr7.5mn (\$705,000) cheque, in Oslo on May 21.

Russian rescuers scramble to save 13 trapped under gold mine

AFP
Moscow

Russian rescuers were scrambling to save 13 workers trapped inside a giant gold mine near the Chinese border for more than 48 hours, with officials warning of a “difficult situation.”

Russia has said the miners have been stuck since Monday after a rockslide covered them in rubble at the Pioneer mine in the Far Eastern Amur region.

The mine is one of the largest in the world and one of the most productive in Russia.

“The situation at the mine is difficult but all the measures will be taken to find and save people,” the deputy head of Russia’s emergency ministry, Anatoly Suprunovskiy, said.

Specialists were working “round the clock”, removing more than “3,100 cubic metres of soil” and pumping out “more than 1,200 cubic metres of water”, he added.

Authorities said it could take between up to three days to drill deep enough to get to the miners, thought to be around 125 metres underground.

Regional governor Vasily Orlov has said there has been no contact with the miners but officials believe they are alive. Orlov said “the most experienced” experts from Siberia’s Kuzbas mining region had arrived yesterday to help the rescue operation. They joined a team of more than 100 other rescuers already working at the site. The



In this grab from a handout footage released by the Russian Investigative Committee, the rescue operation is underway at the Pioneer gold mine in the Amur region. (AFP)

emergency ministry published a video of rescuers trudging through a light layer of snow in the giant remote mine — wearing white helmets with headlamps.

Officials have already opened an investigation for a suspected breach of safety rules. Lax safety measures have often led to deadly accidents in Russian mines and factories.

The Kremlin said Tuesday President Vladimir Putin “gave the order to take all necessary measures to save the miners”. Authorities have posted aerial photographs showing the scale of the rescue mission in the giant remote mine, which is surrounded by deserted steppes.

Orlov said earlier yesterday that

rescue teams had began drilling a hole to try to reach the miners.

“Even if the passage does not lead to people it will be possible to lower a camera into it to assess the situation and lay communication lines,” he explained.

Later, he said a second well was being drilled into the shaft of the mine to “more accurately assess the situation inside”.

Medics are waiting on standby at the top of the mine, he added.

Orlov said the trapped miners were workers from other regions.

The state-owned *Izvestia* newspaper quoted a relative of one of the miners who said she was from Sibay — a small town in the Urals region

of Bashkortostan region. “From our town, from Sibay, there are four people there,” the woman, named as Rimma Akhmadeyeva told the paper. “The town is small, everyone knows each other. My phone is exploding and on social media (people are) writing, supporting (us),” she added.

“We still hope for a good end, that they are alive.”

On Tuesday, Russia’s Emergencies Minister Alexander Kurenkov said: “People who are under the rubble know that people are coming to help them.”

The rescuers were trying to work at “maximum speed” to get through “100-200 metres” every two hours.

7 militants killed in bid to storm Gwadar Port

AFP
Quetta

Security forces killed at least seven militants yesterday as they tried to storm the offices of a Pakistan port considered a cornerstone of China’s investment in the nation, officials said.

Pakistan has for decades battled a simmering insurgency in southwestern Balochistan province, where separatists hostile to Islamabad have often targeted foreign investment projects.

Local official Saeed Ahmed Umrani told AFP seven militants had been killed in an attempt to “infiltrate” the compound of Balochistan’s Gwadar Port Authority.

Gwadar Port, which sits on the Arabian Sea, is managed by a Chinese firm and considered the crown jewel of Beijing’s investment in Pakistan under its gargantuan Belt and Road infrastructure project.

An army source who asked to remain anonymous also said seven militants had been killed, alongside four soldiers defending law-enforcement posts inside the compound.

“The terrorists attacked with grenades, rocket launchers and Kalashnikovs,” he said. “The area is cleared now.”

Chief minister of Balochistan province Saffraz Bugti said on social media platform X that

eight militants had been killed.

The attack was claimed by separatist group the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) in an email statement, and spokesman Jeey-and Baloch said military intelligence offices had been targeted.

“The operation was launched at 3:30pm and is still underway”, he said in a message sent early yesterday evening.

Last August, the BLA also claimed an attack on a convoy carrying Chinese engineers to the port. Ethnic Baloch separatists have long claimed their communities are not getting a fair share of wealth from the region, which sits atop huge reserves of natural resources.

They have frequently targeted Pakistani security forces protecting foreign investment projects.

China has inked over \$2tn in contracts around the world under its Belt and Road scheme, but projects in Pakistan have been plagued by security concerns.

In 2022, a BLA suicide bomber killed four people, including three Chinese language teachers, in Karachi city.

A year earlier, a bus carrying engineers to a construction site near a dam in northwestern Pakistan was hit by a bomb, killing 13 people including nine Chinese workers.

Islamabad has been accused of committing abductions and extrajudicial murder of Baloch citizens in retaliation for their campaign of separatism.

12 killed in Pakistan mine collapse

The bodies of ten more miners were pulled from a collapsed coal pit in southern Pakistan yesterday, officials said, bringing the death toll to 12 after the rescue bid ended.

A gas explosion rocked the private coal pit in the mining region of Khost on Tuesday evening, trapping the workers hundreds about 800 feet below ground.

“The rescue effort has concluded with the recovery of all 12 dead bodies,” Abdul Ghani Baloch, chief inspector of mines for Balochistan province, told AFP.

“Two bodies were recovered during the night, with the remaining 10 retrieved early in the morning.”

2 women get death sentence over ‘blasphemy’ murder

Two Pakistani women have been sentenced to death for murdering their madrassa teacher who they accused of committing blasphemy, police said yesterday. Blasphemy is an incendiary charge in Muslim-majority Pakistan, where even unproven allegations of insulting Islam have provoked

deadly vigilantism. Police said the “three female students allegedly slaughtered their local female cleric over blasphemy allegations” in northwestern Dera Ismail Khan city in March 2022. A district judge “handed down the death penalty to two local madrasa students and a life sentence to one upon

proving their involvement in the murder,” local police official Mohamed Haris told AFP. The pair sentenced to death are aged 23 and 24 whilst the one sentenced to life in jail is 16, he said. The death penalty is technically allowed in Pakistan — and courts regularly hand down the sentence — but there

have been no executions since 2020, according to Amnesty International. Before that executions of women were not frequent, but many female inmates have languished on death row for years. Pakistan has been hit by a spate of high-profile blasphemy cases in recent weeks. In February, police were

forced to intervene in the eastern city of Lahore when a woman wearing a shirt adorned with Arabic calligraphy was surrounded by a mob accusing her of blasphemy. The crowd of men said the clothing depicted the Qur’an but it was in fact emblazoned with the Arabic word for “beautiful”.

Google hit with €250mn fine in French news copyright fight

French regulators said yesterday they were fining Google €250mn (\$272mn) for breaching commitments on paying media companies for reproducing their content online and for using their material for its AI chatbot without telling them. Google had made commitments in 2022 to negotiate fairly with French news organisations, a year after the Competition Authority hit the US tech giant with a €500mn fine over the long-running dispute.

Organisations representing French magazines and newspapers — as well as Agence France-Presse (AFP) — had lodged a case with the regulator in 2019. Under its commitments, the US tech giant has to provide news groups with a transparent offer of payment within three months of receiving a copyright complaint.

But the regulator said yesterday it was imposing the new fine on Google for “failing to respect” four of the seven

commitments made in 2022 and not negotiating in “good faith” with news publishers. The US tech giant also used content from press agencies to train its artificial intelligence platform — Bard (now known as Gemini) — without notifying them or the authority, the regulator said. Google failed to provide publishers and news agencies a technical solution allowing them to object to the use of their content, “hindering” their ability to negotiate remuneration, it added. The watchdog said Google had agreed to “not dispute the facts” as part of the settlement process and proposed “a series of corrective measures” in response to the failings identified by the authority. In a statement, Google said the fine was disproportionate and did not “sufficiently take into account the efforts we have made to answer and resolve the concerns raised — in an environment where it’s



very hard to set a course because we can’t predict which way the wind will blow next.”

“We’ve settled because it’s time to move on,” the company said, noting that it had signed “a significant number of licencing agreements” with 280 French news publishers under the European Copyright Directive.

The EU created in 2019 a form of

copyright called “neighbouring rights” that allows print media to demand compensation for using their content. France has been a test case for the EU rules and after initial resistance Google and Facebook both agreed to pay some French media for articles shown in web searches.

“Reliable, sourced and trustworthy information is priceless but it has a cost. The Competition Authority reminded Google of this today,” said Marina Ferrari, the French government’s secretary of state for digital affairs.

Former AFP head Pierre Louette, now chief executive at newspaper group Le Parisien-Les Echos, said: “It would be better to have even higher fair remuneration for publishers rather than continuing to pay fines to the state.” Google said that since the law came into effect, “a lack of clear regulatory guidance and repeated enforcement actions have made it hard to navigate

negotiations with publishers”. The tech company also said “more clarity” was needed regarding which media it must pay as they can include everything from general news outlets to specialist nautical publications or listings and comparison sites.

“It is now time for greater clarity on who and how we should be paying so that all parties can plan a course towards a more sustainable business environment,” Google added. Other European Union countries have also challenged Google over news content.

Spain’s competition watchdog launched an investigation into Google last year for alleged anti-competitive practices affecting news agencies and press publications. In 2022, Germany’s antitrust regulator shelved an investigation into Google’s News Showcase service, after the tech giant made “important adjustments” to ease competition concerns.

Qatari houses distribute free Iftar meals



Throughout the holy month of Ramadan, some Qatari households distribute free Iftar meals to a large number of expatriate workers. While a number of Qatari families prefer to distribute these meals at their houses, others donate to charities who undertake the distribution on their behalf.

Arabic poetry: adorning life with wisdom, beauty, and eloquence

World Poetry Day will be celebrated today as a form of creative expression and a representation of linguistic and cultural identity. This literary art has values that are shared by all people and contribute to building bridges of love, dialogue and peace.

The day was first declared by the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco) on March 21, 1999, to support linguistic diversity, give endangered languages more opportunities to be used as well as honor poets and their creativity.

In a statement to Qatar News Agency (QNA), Qatari poet and writer Mohamed Ibrahim al-Sada said that poetry is a mirror that reflects the feelings of the poet towards others as well as himself, his surroundings, homeland, opinions and beliefs.

Poetry has the ability to fill the soul with positive feelings through words that carry deep meanings expressed in beautiful rhythm, al-Sada said.

He added that since some poems date back hundreds of years,

they can tell us a lot about the past such as people's journeys, ways of living, characteristics and experiences. They also document events and battles thus contributing to the study of history.

When it comes to Arabic poetry, al-Sada explained that it heavily features descriptions of nature and its beauty and focuses on human relationships with poems about love, brotherhood, pride, sorrow and more.

Other poets and writers such as Dr. Al Siddiq Omar Al Siddiq, Adi Wuld Adab and Issa Al Sheikh Hassan stated to QNA the importance of World Poetry Day in shedding light on the efforts of poets in preserving the Arabic language and enhancing its cultural content.

They praised the role of modern Arabic poetry in promoting the concepts of beauty, dialogue, solidarity and coexistence and the updating of its styles and themes.

The writers also highlighted the contribution of Arabic poetry to the culture as well as the Arab civilisation's part in adorning life with wisdom, beauty, and eloquence. (QNA)

QM Venice show to reveal new voices in film, video from Arab world, Global South

Qatar Museums (QM) has announced plans for a major exhibition to coincide with the 60th International Art Exhibition at the Venice Biennale, bringing the visions of dozens of filmmakers and video artists from the Middle East, Africa and Southeast Asia to the art world's most prestigious stage.

The exhibition, titled 'Your ghosts are mine: Expanded Cinemas, Amplified Voices,' on view at ACP-Palazzo Franchetti from April 19 to November 24, will present a journey in moving images through contemporary experiences of community life and memory, transnational crossings and exile.

The exhibition is produced by QM and co-organised by Doha Film Institute (DFI), Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, and the future Art Mill Museum in collaboration with ACP Art Capital Partners.

The exhibition is curated by Matthieu Orléan with the collaboration of Majid al-Remaihi and Virgile Alexandre, with exhibition design by architects and spatial designers Cookies (Federico Martelli and Clément Périssé). The advisory committee includes DFI CEO Fatma Hassan Alremaihi, Zeina Arida and Catherine Grenier. Project management is by Minas Stratigos and Khalifa al-Thani is the exhibition manager.

The exhibition will offer an all-encompassing journey through 10 galleries, each dedicated to themes such as deserts (cradles of civilisation and places of re-birth), ruins (relics of culture), women's voices, borders (demarcations between allowed and forbidden places) and exile, as experienced through selected films supported, co-financed or initiated by DFI and video works from the collections of Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art and the future Art Mill Museum.



Morad Mostafa, I Promise You Paradise 2023.



Ramata-Toulaye Sy, Banel & Adama 2023.



Sophia Al Maria Black Friday, 2016 Film.

Fares Fayyad), Senegal (Ramata-Toulaye Sy), Yemen (Shaima al-Tamimi) and more than a dozen other countries, as well as video works by artists Wael Shawky, Lida Abdul, Hassan Khan and Sofia al-Maria.

In a press statement, QM and DFI Chairperson HE Sheikha Al Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani said: "Opening at the same time as the Venice Art Biennale and continuing throughout the presentation of the Venice Film Festival, Your ghosts are mine will open the eyes of multitudes of international viewers to the ideas, the feelings, and above all the artistic visions of today's filmmakers from the Arab world and neighbouring regions. By presenting this exhibition, Qatar Museums advances its key mission of encouraging understanding across borders through cultural exchange, while the Doha Film Institute fulfils its mandate to nurture and promote the rising talents of our region."

Promotion available at all Safari outlets on: 21-03-2024

 <p>22.75 QR</p> <p>لحم محلي بالاعظم ١ كجم Local Beef With Bone 1kg</p>	 <p>19.25 QR</p> <p>جمبري عماني طازج ١ كجم Fresh Prawns Oman 1kg</p>	 <p>24.75 QR</p> <p>بومفريت أسود عماني طازج ١ كجم Fresh Black Pomfret Oman 1kg</p>
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