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FRIDAY Vol. XXXXV No. 12957

March 22, 2024
Ramadan 12, 1445 AH

www.gulf-times.com 2 Riyals

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Sheikha Jowaher holds Iftar banquet for female teachers, principals

Her Highness the Consort of His Highness the Amir Sheikha Jowaher bint Hamad bin Suhaim al-Thani held yesterday at Lusail Palace an Iftar banquet in honour of a number of female teachers, school principals, and administrators of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education. **(QNA)**

Rain forecast today and tomorrow

Thundery rain with strong wind and high sea is expected today (Friday) and tomorrow. The Civil Aviation Authority (Meteorological Office), in a post on its X account, has urged everyone to be cautious and follow safety guidelines during thunderstorms and stressed the importance of receiving information from official sources. Today's temperature forecast is a minimum and maximum in the range of 17C-19C and 22C-26C, respectively.

Qatar's population rises to 3.12mn

Qatar's population has increased 4.91% by the end of February 2024 compared to the previous year, as per data from the Planning and Statistics Authority. At the close of last month, Qatar's population stood at 3.12mn, a significant rise from the 2.98mn recorded in February 2023. Breaking down the demographics, the population distribution for February 2024 portrays 2.224mn males and 904,188 females.

UN adopts global AI resolution

The United Nations General Assembly yesterday unanimously adopted the first global resolution on artificial intelligence (AI) to encourage protecting personal data, monitoring AI for risks, and safeguarding human rights. The nonbinding resolution, took three months to negotiate and also advocates strengthening privacy policies. The resolution is the latest in a series of initiatives by governments around the world to shape AI's development, amid fears it could be used to disrupt democratic processes.

EU leaders call for immediate truce

European Union leaders called yesterday for an "immediate" humanitarian pause in Gaza that would lead to a ceasefire. "Strong and unified statement of EU leaders on the Middle East at #EUCO tonight!" Charles Michel, the president of the council, posted on social media platform X. "The EU calls for an immediate humanitarian pause leading to a sustainable ceasefire." Meanwhile, the United States is submitting to the UN Security Council its draft resolution on the need for an "immediate ceasefire" in Gaza for a Friday vote, the US ambassador's spokesman said yesterday.

RAMADAN THOUGHT

And fear a Day (of Judgment) when a person shall not avail another, nor will intercession be accepted from him nor will compensation be taken from him nor will they be helped. (Qur'an 2: 48)

Prayer times

Fajr....4:19; Juma....11:01; Asr....3:08; Maghrib....5:49; Isha....7:19

Fasting times

Iftar today5:49pm
Imsak tomorrow.....4:08am

PM attends co-ordination meeting of Arab FM's

HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani participated yesterday in a co-ordination meeting between the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Qatar, the Arab Republic of Egypt, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, and the State of Palestine, which was held in the Egyptian capital Cairo. The meeting dealt with discussing the latest developments in the Gaza Strip and the occupied Palestinian territories, as well as ways to enhance regional and international efforts to reach an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, and facilitate the entry of humanitarian aid without obstacles.

PM attends meeting with Blinken

HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani took part in a meeting of the foreign ministers of Qatar, Egypt, the UAE, Jordan and Palestine with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, in Cairo yesterday. The meeting discussed the latest developments in the region, the affirmation of the Arab position calling for an immediate ceasefire and the sustainable humanitarian aid access to the Gaza Strip.

US, Arab nations urge immediate Gaza truce

●Gaps narrowing in Doha talks: Blinken

Reuters/AFP
Cairo/Gaza Strip

The US top diplomat stressed yesterday the need for an "immediate ceasefire" and a deal to free hostages in war-torn Gaza as he visited Egypt for talks with Arab envoys. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, on his latest Middle East crisis tour, was trying to shore up support for a truce as the Israel-Hamas war ground on and experts issued a further warning about the risk of famine in Gaza. Blinken said that "gaps are narrowing" in ongoing talks in Qatar aimed at reaching a ceasefire in Gaza and the release of hostages. The United States is "continuing to push for an agreement in Doha", Blinken said at a Cairo press conference, adding "it's difficult to get there, but I believe it is still possible".

A woman carries three babies as she reaches the central part of the Gaza Strip after fleeing the Al-Shifa hospital yesterday.

QU launches College of Sport Sciences

QNA
Doha

Qatar University (QU) announced the launch of the College of Sport Sciences yesterday, recognising the pivotal role of sports in enhancing the quality of life for individuals and communities and contributing to Qatar's overarching strategic vision.

At a press conference, QU said this decision marks the 12th addition to the university's esteemed colleges. The college will offer a Bachelor of Science programme in Sport Coaching and a Bachelor of Science programme in Sports Management.

The academic programmes will be available for both males and females, with an expected intake of 40 students for the academic year 2025/2026 for each programme.

The college will start accepting applications for student enrolment in Spring 2025, with classes commencing in Fall 2025.

QU pointed out that in the fall of 2026, the college will introduce minors in the main programmes: a minor in Sports Management, a minor in Sport Events Management & Facilities and a minor in Sports Marketing. As for the minors related to sports coaching, the college will offer a minor in sport coaching and a minor in sport coaching for special needs.

QU's Vice-President for Academic Affairs Dr Ibrahim al-Kaabi said: "We worked with relevant parties in the community, step by step, to ensure the suggestions of our stakeholders

were implemented in the formation of this college. We also collaborated with the Academic Planning and Quality Assurance Office, who assisted us with the procedures."

Al-Kaabi added that the university is keen to be in line with the state's strategy by establishing a college for sports sciences, explaining that the college's academic programme has undergone many procedures, through co-operation with the Academic Planning and Quality Assurance Office, in addition to co-operation with the university's strategic partners to submit a proposal suitable for the Board of Trustees.

For her part, QU's Associate Vice-President for Academic Planning and Quality Assurance Dr Mona al-Marzouqi said that the establishment of the College of Sports Sciences is a national project that supports the country's strategy for the sports sector, pointing to the design of the academic programmes that the college will offer based on the needs

of stakeholders in the sports field, as well as the international sports accreditation standards.

She emphasised that there are job opportunities for college graduates after co-ordination was made with stakeholders, including the Ministry of Sports and Youth, in addition to providing future government scholarships for students.

Dr al-Marzouqi said that the career opportunities that will be available to graduates of the College of Sports Sciences at Qatar University are varied, and will include sports activities co-ordinator, sales marketing co-ordinator, sports competitions and events co-ordinator, sports facilities and facility co-ordinator, physical fitness and special needs, community sports, and physical sports physiology.

Work has begun on the preliminary steps to establish the college, which include academic and administrative arrangements for the college and the logistical matters required for its operation.

Gazans mark Ramadan in despair

Reuters
Cairo

As talks progressed on securing a ceasefire, Gaza's Palestinians despaired at observing Ramadan without relatives who have been killed and lacking adequate food for their children.

In Gaza, Israel's offensive focused on the densely populated enclave, the only partially working medical facility in the north of the Strip, for a fourth day, and local residents said they had seen buildings inside the complex in flames.

With hunger spreading in the densely populated enclave, where five months of war have created critical food shortages, the head of the World Health Organisation (WHO) said only the expansion of land crossings into Gaza could prevent famine.

Blinken met Abdel Fattah al-Sisi in Cairo after ceasefire talks resumed in Qatar this week, centred on a truce of around six weeks that would allow the release of 40 Israeli hostages in return for hundreds of Palestinians detained in Israeli jails.

A statement issued by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said spy chief David Barnea would travel to Qatar today to meet mediators.

Barnea will meet his US counterpart CIA Director Bill Burns, Qatar's Prime Minister HE Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman al-Thani and Egypt's intelligence chief Abbas Kamel, it said.

Israel's offensive has now killed almost 32,000 Palestin-

Palestinian children wait to receive food cooked by a charity kitchen in Rafah.

US to prepare Gaza jetty by May 1

The United States is working hard to prepare a landing jetty which would facilitate aid to Gaza by sea, a senior US official said yesterday, saying it could be ready before May 1. "The US military is doing everything they can to accelerate the deployment of this capability, to make it operational prior to the May 1 target date that they've set," said Curtis Ried, Chief of Staff of the National Security Council.

ians, according to Gaza health authorities.

European Union leaders meeting in Brussels were also due to call for a ceasefire. EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell urged

a stronger message to Israel to protect civilians and said it had "the right to defend, (but) not to revenge".

Sisi stressed the need for a truce to address the escalating humanitarian crisis and warned of the dangers of a military operation in Rafah, echoing growing international concern.

The southern Gaza city is the last zone of relative safety for civilians and more than half the enclave's population is now sheltering there, pressed against the Egyptian border.

An Israeli official insisted Israel would take control of Rafah even if it caused a rift with the United States, saying that a quarter of Hamas's original fighting force was there.

"It's going to happen. And it will happen even if Israel is forced to fight alone," Strategic Affairs Minister Ron Dermer said in a podcast.

Uzbekistan top official meets Qatar’s diplomat



Assistant to the President of Uzbekistan, Saida Mirziyoyeva met with ambassador of Qatar to Uzbekistan Hassan bin Hamza Hashim. The two sides discussed bilateral co-operation. **(QNA)**

Official Amir sends cables of congratulations to president of Namibia

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani and His Highness the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani sent cables of congratulations to President of Namibia Dr Nangolo Mbumba 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 to Prime Minister Dr Saara Kuugongelwa-Amadhila on the occasion. **(QNA)**

Permanent representative of Qatar to UN meets UN official



HE the Permanent Representative of Qatar to the United Nations Sheikhha Alya Ahmed bin Saif al-Thani met with UN Special Co-ordinator for Lebanon Joanna Wronecka at the headquarters of the permanent delegation in New York. During the meeting, they reviewed the latest developments in Lebanon. HE the Permanent Representative of Qatar affirmed the country’s full support for the Office of the United Nations Special Co-ordinator’s work, which contributes to achieving security and stability in Lebanon. **(QNA)**

Amna Al Jaidah Hall sheds light on history of education in Qatar

QNA
Doha

HE the Minister of Social Development and Family Maryam bint Ali bin Nasser al-Misnad inaugurated the Amna Al Jaidah Hall with the permanent exhibition titled ‘Honour the Past, to Celebrate the Future: Qatar’s Educational Vision’ at Liwan Design Studios and Labs.

The exhibition is held in collaboration with Virginia Commonwealth University School of the Arts Qatar (VCUarts Qatar). It shows the legacy of Amna al-Jaidah, the founder and first principal of Qatar’s inaugural girls’ school, Banat El Doha, later renamed Umm Almo’mneen Primary School. This exhibition offers a compelling narrative that showcases the remarkable journey of female education in Qatar from 1938 to 2006, and meticulously highlights the profound impact this school has had on multiple generations of women. Visitors will get the chance to immerse themselves in the achievements of the school’s alumnae and witness the captivating evolution from its origin to its meta-

morphosis into Liwan – an innovative hub fostering creativity since 2019.

This exhibition is a culmination of a project from the Exhibition Design class at VCUarts Qatar, and it is the result of joint efforts among esteemed faculty members and talented students from VCUarts Qatar: Fatima Bader al-Siddiqi (content manager), Kaltham Eissa al-Fakhroo (graphic design lead), Adila Hayati (graphic designer), Amna al-Humaidi (graphic designer), Humyra Najdan (graphic designer), Maryam al-Majid (interior design lead), Zainab al-Saffar (interior designer), Haneen Darwish (interior designer), Ayah El Fihail (interior designer), Lolwa al-Thani (interior designer), and Israa Mahjoub (interior designer).

The students works were integrated so that the exhibition combines information and interactive programmes through videos and film materials that enhance the exhibitions message.

Acting Deputy CEO of Exhibitions, the Director of Central Exhibitions at Qatar Museums, and Professor at VCUarts Qatar, Sheikhha Reem al-Thani, stressed in a statement to Qatar News

Agency (QNA) the importance of this exhibition, as it pays tribute to Qatar’s educational legacy and encourages all alumni to actively preserve and celebrate their treasured memories.

“It was a special chance for VCUarts Qatar students to be involved in every step of creating the exhibition, from coming up with ideas to designing and setting up this nostalgic display. For our alumni community, it’s a unique opportunity to reconnect with the past and contribute to the story of our educational journey”, she added.

In a related context, Liwan has launched the second edition of ‘Liwan for Good’, a community-orientated charity event during the holy month of Ramadan, which seeks to bring together charitable institutions and local companies in an evening entitled “Giving”.

Liwan provides designers who join as members with state-of-the-art labs for pottery, leather-working, digital photography and prototyping, as well as private and shared studios. It also provides an integrated calendar of public programs, in order to increase awareness of local and global design thinking and its practices.

Deputy PM of Nepal meets Qatar’s envoy



Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Nepal Narayan Kaji Shrestha met with ambassador of Qatar to Nepal Mishal bin Mohamed al-Ansari. Relations between Qatar and Nepal were discussed during the meeting. **(QNA)**

‘Moroccan Night at Museum’ to celebrate Years of Culture

THE ‘Moroccan Night at the Museum’, which forms part of the Qatar–Morocco Years of Culture 2024, is set to take place on March 24, offering the community to spend an enchanting evening at the Museum of Islamic Art (MIA). The event, organised in collaboration with the Embassy of Morocco in Qatar, will be held from 8pm to 10pm at MIA’s Atrium and fourth-floor gallery space.

In a press statement, Qatar Museums noted that its Years of Culture initiative organises this event to mark Moroccan culture and traditions, and to explore the Berber Jewellery Collection from the Royal Palace exhibition at MIA. Guests will have a chance to enjoy traditional Moroccan tea and Ramadan sweets, music performances, and henna while learning more about the beautiful Amazigh jewellery on display at the museum – the first time the collection is exhibited outside of Morocco.

The display features more than 200 historical and culturally significant pieces from Morocco’s Oudayas, National Museum of Adornment in Rabat. Moroccan artist Othman Belkadi will also unveil a new oil painting inspired by traditional Amazigh jewellery.



Qatar mediation reunites new batch of children with families separated by Russia-Ukraine war

QNA
Doha

Qatar announced the success of its mediation in reuniting a new batch of children with their families as part of its ongoing efforts to reunite families separated due to the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. HE the Minister of State for International Co-operation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Lolwah bint Rashid AlKhater told QNA that the Embassy of the State of Qatar in Moscow hosts the representatives and facilitates their safe departure to Ukraine, while representatives of Qatar facilitate the safe departure of children from Ukraine to Russia via Belarus.

HE AlKhater renewed the commitment of Qatar to its mediation efforts aimed at reuniting children separated from their families and ensuring their safety and well-being, pointing out that the mediation of Qatar includes obtaining the approval of the children’s families to transfer them to or from Ukraine and Russia, verifying their identity, co-ordinating with humanitarian organisations, and meeting their medical needs, in addition to the logistic arrangements for reuniting children with their families.

HE AlKhater also renewed Qatar’s appreciation for both Ukraine and the Russian Federation for their co-operation and commitment to ensuring the safety and security of these children and providing them with appropriate care, stressing that Russia provided appropriate care and treatment for the children during their period of their stay in Russia; away from their families. HE the Minister of State for International Co-operation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed Qatar’s thanks and appreciation to Children’s Rights Commissioner for the President of the Russian Federation Maria Lvova-Belova, and Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights Dmytro Lubinets for their great efforts during the mediation, which helped in the success of reuniting separated families.



Awqaf minister meets Islamic scholars



HE the Minister of Endowments and Islamic Affairs Ghanem bin Shaheen al-Ghanem received several scholars from the Islamic world. According to a statement from Awqaf, HE the Minister also met their accompanying delegation. The scholars are in Doha on Awqaf's invitation to participate in the Ramadan talk show 'Protect Them from Fear' and the ministry's other programmes during Ramadan. During the meeting, HE the Awqaf Minister stressed the importance of the vital role of scholars and muftis in serving society, directing people towards goodness and piety by the principles of Qur'an and Sunnah and promoting frameworks of tolerance and peaceful coexistence among all segments of society. The meeting also witnessed the exchange of views and discussions on current religious issues of concern to the Islamic world in general and the most prominent issues related to Islamic and legal rulings were reviewed in light of the current challenges and religious and social developments in the Islamic world.



Awqaf to continue support for QSRSN

The General Administration of Endowments at the Ministry of Endowments (Awqaf) and Islamic Affairs has announced the continuation of co-operation with the Qatar Society for Rehabilitation of Special Needs (QSRSN) to support people with disabilities. This was announced during a press conference attended by the department director Sheikh Dr Khalid bin Mohamed bin Ghanem al-Thani and QSRSN board member Talib Afifa. The support will be extended through the Endowment Bank for Health Care. Sheikh Dr Khalid said that the co-operation between the two parties has a role in developing communities and providing



opportunities for people with disabilities. Afifa expressed his gratitude for the endowment support for dozens of people with

disabilities. Last year, a total of 105 persons benefited from the projects implemented with the aid of the Endowment Bank for Health Care.

Qatar takes part in Dubai Holy Qur'an Award contest

Qatar, represented by the Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs, is taking part in the 27th Dubai International Holy Qur'an Award competition. According to a statement from Awqaf, Qatar is represented by Hamad Abdallah Tais al-Jumaili, nominated by the Department of Da'wa and Guidance. He is participating in the category of memorising the Holy Qur'an in full with Tajweed.

The delegation participating in the competition is headed by Faraj Saleh Mohamed al-Otaibi. The competition is from Ramadan 1-14. The Qatari participants have so far achieved good positions in this major competition. Contestant Anas Hashim Mohamed al-Mashhadani secured 11th place while Abdul Aziz al-Hamri won fourth place.



Hamad Abdallah Tais al-Jumaili

Qatar Tourism delights Palestine children with Gaza Buds Carnival

Qatar Tourism held several recreational and sporting activities and events for the Gaza children who were recently welcomed in Qatar due to the ongoing war in the Gaza Strip.

Themed 'Gaza buds carnival', the activities were held at the outdoor stadium in Al Thumama Complex, in collaboration with Orphan Care Center (Dreama). Running through March 23, the entertainment activities and events aim to meet children's psychological needs and provide children with an experience full of joy.

A statement from Qatar Tourism said it pays great attention to launching campaigns and developing community initiatives, in co-operation with public and private relevant authorities to ensure strengthening co-operation between these agencies and providing the optimal environment for implementing such initiatives.

Pan-Arab television channel Spacetoon proactively participated in this event by presenting shows and activities for children, such as games, colouring, face painting, and more. (QNA)



16 countries participate in Katara Ramadan open chess competition

The Katara International Ramadan Open Classic Chess Championship is set to conclude today at the Katara Multi-Purpose Hall (Building 15).

The Championship is organised by the Qatar Chess Association (QCA) and features the participation of 88 players representing 16 countries who aim to win the

prize of QR25,000. QCA's Executive Director Hamad al-Tamimi stated to Qatar News Agency (QNA) that the championship witnessed a strong showing during the last rounds and the winner is difficult to predict until the end of the 9th round.

Al-Tamimi added that Qatari players played well and that the

championship gave them the opportunity to face different types of players. The championship is one of the most notable events that the QCA organises.

It is held annually during Ramadan and has contributed to the emergence of many promising chess players in the past editions. (QNA)

Shafallah Center marks World Down Syndrome Day

QNA
Doha

Under the slogan 'Ending Stereotypes', Shafallah Center for Persons with Disabilities marked World Down Syndrome Day, which falls on March, 21 every year. World Down Syndrome Day aims to raise awareness of Down syndrome and how it occurs, and highlight the role of people with Down syndrome in societies and encourage them to continue studying or working.

In this context, Executive Director of the Shafallah Center Maryam Saif al-Suwaidi said that the slogan calls for an end to stereotypes, as they are harmful to people with Down Syndrome and intellectual disabilities. Stereotypes can prevent them from being treated like others, she added, noting that they are treated like children, belittled, sometimes excluded, treated poorly, or even abused.

Al-Suwaidi pointed out that a stereotype is a specific idea that people have about what someone or something looks like, adding that stereotypes can be positive, negative, or neutral, but they are often inaccurate, or simply wrong. Stereotypes are often based on limited information or personal experience, and can be

reinforced by the way something is represented in the media or through cultural messages, she said, adding that once a stereotype is formed, it can be difficult to change.

On this global occasion, Maryam Saif al-Suwaidi confirmed that the Shafallah Center renews its belief in the right of persons with disabilities to integrate as active individuals in society and the importance of providing special education services, training and rehabilitation, as well as demanding their rights and providing full support, guidance, and the necessary consultations to families.

She pointed out that the centre uses the latest scientific programs and studied methods, and also relies on highly experienced cadres who provide all educational, psychological, family counselling, rehabilitation, training, therapeutic, and other services in one place, which saves time and effort and achieves the desired results.

In another context, al-Suwaidi said that what distinguishes disability issues in Qatar is the actual interest of the wise leadership. Qatar is also keen to care for all categories suffering from disability, and strive to overcome all obstacles and challenges they face by issuing legislation and putting forward initiatives that concern them, in addition to rehabilitating and training them,

especially those with Down Syndrome, and working to integrate and empower them, which in turn made the Shafallah Center a model to be emulated in international circles in the field of care and attention to people with disabilities at all levels.

Al-Suwaidi added that the Shafallah Center adopted the latest strategies, which are based on scientific foundations that have proven successful in educating people with disabilities. At the top of these strategies was the adoption of the principles of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA), which is based on understanding the behaviour, analysing its function and then increasing it if it is desired by programmed reinforcement or decreasing it if it is not desirable by stopping its reinforcement.

She also noted that out of the Shafallah Center's belief in the importance of (ABA), the centre sought to adopt the Verbal Behavior Milestones Assessment and Placement Program (VB-MAPP) curriculum, which relies primarily on verbal behaviour with the aim of developing language and the various skills associated with it. This curriculum is considered one of the top approaches utilised by specialists in charge of members with disabilities to evaluate them and build their individual plan.

UDST-CPE launches free educational webinars to empower community

QNA
Doha

Continuing Education (CPE) at the University of Doha for Science and Technology (UDST) announced the launch of a series of free educational webinars as part of its ongoing commitment to community outreach and empowerment.

Designed to engage and inspire local community members, the webinar series aims to foster a deeper connection with the public while raising awareness about key topics across various fields of knowledge.

With an emphasis on addressing community needs, the webinars cover an array of carefully curated subjects including "Caring for the Elderly Physically and Psychologically," "Food Safety at Home," and "Postnatal Care for Mothers and Newborns."

The content, developed and delivered by esteemed subject matter experts commissioned by CPE, ensures high-quality, informative sessions for participants.

Hamad al-Kuwari, Director of CPE, emphasised the significance of these initiatives, stating, "CPE recognises the importance of reaching out to the community

Designed to engage and inspire local community members, the webinar series aims to foster a deeper connection with the public while raising awareness about key topics across various fields of knowledge

and sharing knowledge and expertise with a wider audience in an accessible and affordable format.

"With Ramadan being the time for refreshing our knowledge and giving back to our community, we can think of no better opportunity to launch these educational webinars."

Beyond community outreach, CPE has previously introduced technical content tailored for professionals, managers, and executives.

These resources, covering topics such as cybersecurity, python pro-

gramming, Excel functions, and time management, offer prospective participants insight into CPE's learning approach and material quality.

CPE is committed to providing effective, accessible professional education, training, and certifications accredited by leading international educational institutions. Its team of highly qualified educators and trainers takes a meticulous approach to curriculum development, supporting CPE's goal to position itself as the premier destination for continuing and professional education, training, and consultancy in Qatar.

Furthermore, CPE is dedicated to contributing to Qatar's socio-economic development and empowering its workforce.





World Water Day: Water anchor of peace, fuse of conflicts

QNA
Doha

With the development of societies and continuous growth of population, water necessity for human life and stability increases more and more every day around the world. More than 3bn people on the planet depend on water that crosses national borders. However, only 24 countries have co-operation agreements on all shared waters.

With the increasing impact of climate change and its wide repercussions on water resources, the need to unite countries to protect this vital resource is urgent and necessary. Qatar, along with the rest of the world, is celebrating World Water Day 2024

today, held under the theme ‘Water for Peace,’ to highlight its importance and inspire measures aimed at addressing the global water crisis.

Qatar is aware of the importance of water, the necessity of preserving it, rationalizing its consumption and managing its resources in a way that achieves sustainability, especially since these aspirations align with the Qatar National Vision (QNV) 2030 which aims to make sure that a decent living is provided to its people. The Standing Committee of Water Resources in Qatar proposes policies and strategies related to water resources, adopts plans, programmes and projects related to the management and development of these resources, and undertakes important initiatives related to en-

hancing water security and preserving groundwater reservoirs in the state.

Over the years, Qatar has launched many strategies that promote the sustainable and effective use of water to achieve water security. The state also works to provide high-quality water services and continuously aims to reach them to the best levels while taking into account local and international health and safety standards.

The Qatar General Electricity & Water Corporation (Kahramaa) has been able in the past years to meet the increasing demand for water in Qatar despite the rate of annual increase in water consumption. Kahramaa has also achieved its strategic goals of enhancing Qatar’s water security by increasing the capacity of the strategic water reserve

(SWR) and enhancing the ability to face emergency situations. Qatar aims to ensure that it fulfils its obligations as an active partner in the international community through its active membership in the Group of Friends of Water as well as the International Steering Committee of the International High-Level Conference on International Decade for Action ‘Water for Sustainable Development.’

At the end of next April, Doha will host the Water Sciences and Technology Association (WSTA) 15th Gulf Water Conference with a focus on the role of technology in the water sector through 74 specialised papers. World Water Day 2024 aims to highlight the important role of water in promoting peace and prosperity and preventing the outbreak of conflicts. Public health, food

and energy systems, economic productivity, and environmental safety depend on a well-functioning water system that is managed in an equitable manner.

When water is scarce or polluted and when people do not have equal opportunities to obtain water, tensions escalate between societies and countries. This requires various countries of the world to prioritise co-operation in the field of water. Although access to water is a human right, more than 2bn people live without safely managed drinking water services, leaving devastating effects on their personal lives and communities.

On the occasion of World Water Day 2024, United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres stated the following: “action for water is action for peace,

and today it is needed more than ever. Our world is in turbulent waters. Conflicts are raging, inequality is rife, pollution and biodiversity loss are rampant, and, as humanity continues to burn fossil fuels, the climate crisis is accelerating with a deadly force further threatening peace.”

“Dwindling supplies can increase competition and inflame tensions between people, communities, and countries. That is increasing the risk of conflict. I urge all countries to join and implement the UN Water Convention which promotes managing shared water resources sustainably,” Guterres added. A UN report on world water development for 2024 will be issued at the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco) headquarters in Paris today.

MoEHE holds panel discussion on empowering and integrating people with Down syndrome into society

QNA
Doha

The Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE) organised a panel discussion on empowering and integrating people with Down syndrome into society on the occasion of World Down Syndrome Day (WDSD) 2024 held under the theme ‘End the Stereotypes’.

An elite group of specialists in the fields of disability discussed the concept of Down syndrome, its causes, types, rates of its spread globally according to the World Health Organisation (WHO), its most prominent characteristics, the importance of early intervention when the disease is discovered, the services provided to this category of medical, psychological,

cal, and rehabilitation services at Hamad General Hospital and other specialised places, methods of treatment to alleviate complications or any other accompanying diseases and problems, facing the challenges of living with it in reality, and the role of the family and the importance of communication with schools.

Director of the Department of Special Education and Inclusive Education at the MoEHE Fatima Saeed Salem al-Saadi stated to Qatar News Agency (QNA) that the importance of these panel discussions is to increase awareness of Down syndrome and people with disabilities in general. Al-Saadi stressed the responsibility of all institutions and individuals to provide integrated services to people with Down syndrome so that they become active and in-

The panel focused on all the services provided to people with Down syndrome, the importance of supporting them, the role of the guardian as the primary member in providing assistance and enhancing the training and educational skills that the affected child receives, confirming the importance of collective and integrated efforts in this regard

dependent members of society. She explained that their goal is to integrate and empower this group and this can only be achieved by providing the correct services from the start such as diagnosis, evaluation, academic services, behaviour support and modification, and assistive technology, in addition to their participation in various community activities and events in accordance with their abilities and preparations.

The panel focused on all the services provided to people with Down syndrome, the importance of supporting them, the role of the guardian as the primary member in providing assistance and enhancing the training and educational skills that the affected child receives, confirming the importance of collective and integrated efforts in this regard.

Al-Saadi noted that providing integrated services to the Down syndrome group would empower and qualify them professionally

Red Sea fighting traps two oil ships in Houthi waters

Reuters
London

Two tankers, containing oil and toxic waste, are stuck in the Red Sea in the firing line between Western naval forces and Yemen’s Houthi militants despite repeated efforts by the United Nations to empty and move the ships to avoid a spill.

The vessels, one of which has been stranded for years, are near the port of Ras Issa from where Houthis launch missiles on ships passing through the Red Sea and where US missiles land as they target the Houthis.

The United Nations last year led efforts to remove a million barrels of oil from the decaying tanker, the FSO Safer, to a new tanker, the MT Yemen, in an operation that cost \$121mm. The UN had hoped to move the FSO Safer, which still



Decaying vessel FSO Safer is moored off Yemen’s coast in this undated screengrab taken from a video.

contains toxic waste water and oily residue, for disposal elsewhere and sell the oil aboard the MT Yemen.

Neither of the ships has moved since August as the Houthis and their foes in Yemen’s internationally-recognised government could not agree who should receive the money for the oil, a Houthi source speaking on condition of anonymity

told Reuters. The source also said there was no agreement to tow the ship away.

The UN Development Programme said it was in discussion “with all relevant parties in Yemen” about the handover of the vessel. “(UNDP) has not had any indication from the de facto authorities in Yemen of threats to

deliberately damage the vessel,” a UNDP spokesperson said, referring to the Houthis. A source with the internationally recognised Yemeni government, also speaking on condition of anonymity, said he believed the Houthis have refused to release either of the ships and were using them to increase their bargaining power.

A former supertanker built in the 1970s, the FSO Safer was converted into a floating storage and offloading facility for oil before the outbreak of civil war in Yemen in 2014. It is so decayed its rotting hull threatened to spill its cargo into the Red Sea.

Last year, the United Nations contracted Dutch-based SMIT Salvage, which removed the oil. Belgium’s Euronav provided the MT Yemen vessel. The toxic sludge and wash water used to scrub oil out of the tanker have still not been removed, a shipping source said.

At least 50 attacks on ships by Houthis: US official

The Houthi rebels have attacked civilian and military ships sailing off Yemen’s shores at least 50 times since their assaults began late last year, a senior US Defence Department official said yesterday. The Iran-backed Houthis have been striking merchant vessels transiting the vital Red Sea trade route for months despite repeated US and British air strikes against them. “In the Red Sea, the Houthis seek to affect this vital channel for global trade with at least 50 attacks against commercial shipping and naval vessels,” Assistant Secretary of Defense Celeste Wallander told lawmakers.

The Houthis began attacking ships in the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea in November, a campaign they say is intended to signal solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza. They have vowed to strike Israeli, British and American ships, as well as vessels heading to Israeli ports, disrupting traffic through the vital trade route off Yemen’s coasts. The Houthi attacks have sent insurance costs spiralling for vessels plying the key Red Sea trade route and prompted many shipping firms to take the far longer passage around the southern tip of Africa instead.

He asked not to be named due to the sensitivity of the matter and added that some 70,000 metric tonnes of residue were still onboard the FSO Safer.

A spokesperson for Boskalis, the parent company of SMIT salvage, said it had been contracted to remove the oil but not the Safer vessel. Belgium’s Euronav has

maintained a crew onboard the MT Yemen since August under its contract with the UN. “Once the handover process is complete, the crew will leave,” the UNDP spokesperson said. Euronav said it continued to assist the UNDP to safely handover the MT Yemen. It did not specify who might ultimately receive the ship.

Ramadan culinary traditions defy crisis to bring Libyans together

AFP
Tajura, Libya

Dressed in tracksuits with their sleeves rolled up, about 30 residents in Tajura, a suburb east of Libya’s capital, volunteer every day to cook and give away some 300 meals during Ramadan. The men of all ages join efforts to make Bazin – a Libyan barley-based dough served with a stew – as part of a campaign coupling social solidarity with culinary tradition to provide free meals for people fasting during the holy month.

Akin to Italian polenta or West African fufu, bazin, an originally Berber dish, is a classic family meal from Tripolitania, the historic northwestern region of Libya. It is also a symbol of sharing for Libyans, typically eaten by hand from a shared platter around which guests sit on the ground.

“In the old days, this dish was limited to the homes” where it was prepared by women and served “to relatives and neighbours,” said Salem Omrane, a chef at the initiative which took shape after the 2011 uprising that overthrew longtime dictator Moamer Kadhafi. “We offer these meals to everyone who comes,” the 60-year-old told AFP.

Next to him, men in groups of three revolve around a large pot with long sticks in hand, mixing the barley flour in boiling salted water. Once cooked, for at least an hour, the steaming-hot dough is kneaded and divided into smaller pieces, which are turned into



Volunteers serve to people portions of the traditional Libyan dish ‘Bazin’.



Volunteers cook together portions of the traditional Libyan dish bazin, in the coastal city of Tajura, east of Tripoli.

dome-like shapes, then placed in a bowl with a stew of beans, tomatoes and spices.

Meat, once essential, is absent due to its soaring prices. But the volunteers make do. “We went from a saucepan to a pot, then from a pot to two, and now we serve between 300 and 400 meals per day,” said Issam al-Tayeb, a

57-year-old resident of Tajura who came to help.

In the capital Tripoli, around 22km away, another culinary delicacy is making a resurgence this Ramadan: sfinz, a deep-fried, soft doughnut made with leavened dough, usually filled with an egg or dipped in honey. Once an affordable street food eaten on



An employee wraps freshly fried sfinz, a spongy fried bread that can be served plain or with eggs, in Tripoli.

the go, sfinz has become a luxury for many Libyans amid the soaring cost of living.

The country is still struggling to recover from the years of war that followed the death of Kadhafi in 2011. The North African country remains split between two rival administrations in Tripoli, in the west, and Benghazi in the east. Despite having the continent’s largest oil reserves and abundant natural gas deposits, enduring instability has undermined the economy and weighed heavily on

the standard of living in Libya. “Customers buy within their means,” said Mohamed Saber, who runs a sfinz shop on the outskirts of Tripoli.

“Today, a tray of eggs costs 20 dinars (around \$4), which has raised the price of egg sfinz to 3.5 dinars” from just a few pennies, he said.

Saber, a Tunisian who has lived and worked long enough in Libya to master its dialect, said “life for Libyans is hard now”.

Sfz merchants like Saber have traditionally come from neigh-

boursing Tunisia, home of the popular bambalouni doughnut, but in recent years they have become scarce in Libya. Now they are staging a comeback, despite competition from hamburger and shawarma vendors, for those who can afford it. Young and old queue up in front of Saber’s small shop. “It smells very good,” Mohamed al-Bouechi, a 69-year-old customer, said with a playfully remorseful tone.

“But to be honest with you, it’s not ideal for your health.”

Canvas of colours



The West Bay skyline as seen from a vantage point at the venue of Expo 2023 Doha, which concludes on March 28, after 179 days of horticultural excellence and attracting as many as 3mn visitors. PICTURE: Gulf Times news editor Bonnie James (Instagram: theexplorer7).

Global experiences empower GU-Q students with diplomatic knowledge

Two groups of Georgetown University in Qatar (GU-Q) students expanded their understanding of diplomacy, conflict management, and peacebuilding through real-world global experiences during this spring break.

Students in the women as changemakers experiential course travelled to Washington, DC, building their global networks, witnessing the dynamics of policymaking, and immersing themselves in the history and culture of the city.

The faculty-guided trip aimed to heighten their awareness of women's historical and contemporary role as changemakers. Students made lasting connections on the Georgetown main campus, with visits to the GU Women's Centre and Centre for Social Justice.

Interactions with scholars and diplomats, and a visit to the World Bank, highlighted women's role in global affairs.

The uniquely structured programme offers students of international affairs a global learning experience, explained Dr Christine Schiwietz, assistant dean, Curricular and Academic Advising at GU-Q, who co-led the trip with faculty and staff from GU-Q's Women's Centre and the Office of Student Life.

"Teaching our students to embrace their own role in fostering change is an important goal of the programme. The experi-

ence bridges their coursework in impactful ways, with opportunities to build camaraderie, understand new cultures, and be inspired to embrace their own strengths as leaders and changemakers," said Dr Schiwietz.

The Zones of Conflict, Zones of Peace programme offered 15 students studying post-Soviet Eastern Europe trips to Finland and Estonia, immersing them in the process toward peacebuilding and reconciliation.

For International Politics major Iman Nait Chalal, learning different perspectives about the conflict and its aftermath from people who experienced it helped her appreciate the importance of diplomatic communication.

"Meeting and exchanging ideas with all of these diverse, important people, such as members of parliament, people affiliated with Nato, and even students from the University of Helsinki, were the biggest highlights of the trip."

An intensive programme of activities around the capital cities of Helsinki and Tallinn included engagements with members of parliament, ministry officials, and ambassadors, as well as conversations with students and faculty from the University of Helsinki. Visits to museums and points of historical context further brought to life the region's past.



A group of students visited Finland and Estonia.

Women's Day at Pakistan International School Qatar

At the Pakistan International School Qatar, the Kindergarten, Primary wing, and Girls Wing came together to celebrate Women's Day with enthusiasm and creativity. Students and teachers commemorated the occasion by retelling the inspiring stories and achievements of influential women worldwide, including figures like Mother Teresa, Malala Yousafzai, and Benazir Bhutto. Students impersonated remarkable women such as Mohtarma Fatima Jinnah, Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, Sheikha Hanadi, and Buthaina al-Ansari, making insightful speeches on the significance of the day and the sacrifices women have made to reach their current standing. Honouring their mothers, students crafted cards and wristbands. The Kindergarten students presented cards to the Conventional Branch principal Dr Neelam Nisar.



EXPATRIATE ORGANISATIONS HOST IFTAR

Telangana Welfare Association-Qatar

The Telangana Welfare Association-Qatar (TWA-Q) hosted a community Iftar attended by almost 300 members at Umm Al Seneem Park in Ain Khaled, Doha. Indian ambassador Vipul was the chief guest. The other guests included Indian Community Benevolent Forum president Shanavas Bava, vice-president Deepak Shetty, general secretary Varkey Boban K, insurance and community welfare head Abdul Raoof Kondotty and Indian Cultural Centre managing committee member Satyanarayana Malireddy.



TWA-Q chairman Khaja Nizamuddin, president Mohamed Abdul Rauf and officials Naveed Dastagir, Ramesh Pitta, Mohamed

Shoieb, Mohamed Salahuddin, Nagaraju, Syed Bakar, Krishna, Gulam Rasool, Taha, Nadeem, Talha, Amer, Waseem and Feroz Mohamed were present.



Doha Toastmasters



Doha Toastmasters Club celebrated its Iftar get-together as meeting number 626. Three members who reached up to the division level in Toastmasters Annual Contests were feted. Veteran Toastmaster Rajeswar Sunderesan organised a cake cutting in their honour.

Kannoth Mahallu Committee Qatar Chapter

The Kannoth Mahallu Committee Qatar Chapter, a forum of expatriates from Kerala's Venkidengu panchayath in Thrissur district, conducted a family get-together and Iftar. The programme started with verses from the Holy Qur'an by Yassir M M, followed by a Ramadan message delivered by Zajeer Jouhari. Committee president Junaid V M presided over the function. Secretary Shebin Haneef welcomed the gathering

and vice-president Sathar Sulaiman proposed a vote of thanks. An Islamic quiz on the occasion saw Shakeela Haneena, Salma Mohamed Shereef and Mohsina Swalih bagging the first three positions, respectively. Abdul Jaleel M M controlled the quiz session. The officials who led the programme included Sathar Sulaiman, Shajudeen M M, Yassir M M and Shafir Khalid.



Sri Lankan Quantity Surveyors Forum



Over 500 members attended the annual Iftar gathering hosted by Sri Lankan Quantity Surveyors Forum. President Fawzan Rafeek, members Dr Thayabaran, Ahmed Mahir and Clean Nation leader Isham Marikar spoke.



30 participants attend Picpa orientation



The Philippine Institute of Certified Public Accountants (Picpa) Doha LLCG held the orientation for its 16th Batch of Certified Management Accountant (CMA) Review Study Group. Attended by around 30 participants, this marks the 8th year the organisation has been offering CMA review programmes. The CMA qualification is a globally recognised credential that consists of a two-part exam preparing finance professionals to enhance their skills in financial

accounting and strategic management. The average passing rate of Picpa participants in the CMA Exam Parts 1 and 2 are 81% and 96%, respectively. For its last exam window, Picpa Doha had a 100% passing rate in both exam parts. Beginning September 2024, minor updates and additions will be made in the CMA exams, as such, only the testing window of May/June 2024 remains for the current format.

Speeches on virtues of Ramadan



MES Indian School organised a session on the topic 'How to prepare for Ramadan'. Manasul Ansari and Mohamed Athar spoke on the values of Islam and the virtues of Ramadan. Students from grades IV to VIII attended the session. School officials and teachers were present. Usman Mayyeri, head of the Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies co-ordinated the event.

MES support staff member honoured

Rasiya Madhurakkuzhi, a member of the supporting staff at the Junior Section of MES Indian School was honoured with certificates and medals to acknowledge her seamless contributions spanning decades towards the long-term Indo-Qatar relationships at the community festival, 'Passage to India 2024' organised by the Indian Cultural Centre along with the embassy of India, in collaboration with the Qatar Museums and Museum of Islamic Art Park. Rasiya's unwavering commitment and tireless efforts in fostering a positive environment within the school community was appreciated. She also received the 'Resilient Women Award' at Cultural Forum Mall organised by Nadumuttam Cultural Forum. The school management and principal Hameeda Kadar congratulated her.



MES Olympiad winners feted

MES Indian School hosted the valedictory ceremony of its second Olympiad. Participants who made it to the main examination were honoured with certificates. Academics director Ashraf Sharafudheen was the chief guest. Sports director Badarudheen Gulam Mohiyudheen and principal Dr Hameeda Kadar were present. Boys' Section head marshal Mohamed Muaz welcomed the gathering and Girls' Section head marshal Fathima Shifa proposed a vote of thanks. The second edition of the MES Olympiad was co-ordinated by Boys' Section headmaster Jas M A and Girls' Section headmistress Soudha Jaleel with committee members.



Vietnam legislature names new acting president

Reuters
Hanoi

Vietnam's legislature yesterday appointed Vice-President Vo Thi Anh Xuan as acting head of state, after President Vo Van Thuong became the latest top official to fall amid an intensified

corruption crackdown by the ruling Communist Party. Thuong, 53, was removed from the powerful Politburo for unspecified violations of party rules, becoming the second president to exit in just over a year in Vietnam, where leadership changes have recently all been linked to a wide-ranging "blazing furnace" anti-bribery

campaign. Xuan, one of only a few women in senior positions in Vietnamese politics, steps in as president for the second time in just over a year. "The politburo has assigned Vo Thi Anh Xuan as acting president... until the National Assembly elects a new president, in accordance with Vietnam's constitution," reported

online newspaper *VnExpress*. The government also confirmed her appointment. The president holds a largely ceremonial role but is one of the top four political positions in the nation. Xuan filled the void in the six weeks after Nguyen Xuan Phuc stepped down as president last year for "violations and wrongdoing" by officials under his control.

Thuong was widely regarded as being close to ageing General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong, Vietnam's most powerful figure and architect of an anti-graft campaign that intensified recently. The party's central committee on Wednesday accepted Thuong's resignation and removed him from the politburo, its top decision-making body, and his

position of head of the National Defence and Security Council. About 88% of lawmakers supported his removal as president in yesterday's vote. The committee said Thuong's shortcomings "had negatively impacted public opinion, affecting the reputation of the party, state and him personally" without elaborating on what he had done wrong.

China considering maritime talks with Australia

Reuters
Beijing

China is considering launching talks on maritime affairs with Australia, a foreign ministry spokesperson said yesterday, as increased tension among several nations bordering the South China Sea threatens regional security. The ministry announced the talks on the final day of a visit to Australia by China's Foreign Minister, Wang Yi, who met his counterpart and other leaders of the country this week to discuss trade and differences over regional security.

Australia and China, its largest trading partner, are rebuilding ties after relations hit a low in 2020 when Canberra called for an independent investigation into the origins of Covid-19, and Beijing responded with barriers to trade.

Most have been lifted since a change in the Australia government two years ago.

Maritime issues have been a hot-button topic between China and Australia amid growing confrontations in the vital economic waterway that China claims almost in its entirety, despite overlapping claims by many Southeast Asian nations.

"Both sides agreed to restore and establish dialogue in various fields," said Lin Jian, the foreign ministry spokesperson, in response to a query on the visit, adding that both are also considering launching talks on maritime issues.

Other areas in which both will look to promote co-operation include diplomacy, trade, technology, education and law enforcement, he added.

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has said the country is concerned about unsafe and destabilising behaviour in the South China Sea amid confrontations between Chinese and Philippine vessels in disputed waters. The two have had altercations over disputed atolls, most notably the Second Thomas Shoal.

In November, Australia also criticised China for an "unsafe and unprofessional" naval interaction between their vessels that injured Australian military divers.

In a joint statement this month, Australia and the Asean regional grouping said all countries should refrain from unilateral action in the South China Sea that endanger peace, security and stability in the disputed area.

China claims sovereignty over almost the entire South China Sea, angering neighbouring countries, which dispute some boundaries they say cut into their exclusive economic zones.

In a readout yesterday of a meeting with the premier of New South Wales in Sydney, Wang said many Australians from the government and various sectors support the improvement and development of bilateral relations.

"The greatest feeling from this visit to Australia is that both the Australian ruling party and opposition party, the business and strategic circles, officials and ordinary people support the strengthening of dialogue and co-operation between China and Australia in various fields," he said.

Waiting for help



Rohingya refugees stand on a capsized boat before being rescued in the waters of West Aceh, Indonesia, yesterday.

Australia says BAE to build fleet of nuke-powered subs

AFP
Canberra

Australia yesterday said the UK's BAE Systems would build a fleet of nuclear-powered submarines, a key step in fulfilling the landmark AUKUS security pact between Canberra, London and Washington.

Australia's Submarine Agency said BAE would produce the state-of-the-art vessels, which will be delivered from the early 2040s.

The agency didn't reveal the exact number of submarines that will be built or financial details of the deal, but Australian defence officials have said the country would get at least five of the

SNN-AUKUS class subs at a cost of billions of dollars.

The first of the vessels are expected to be built in Britain, and later ones at a shipyard in Adelaide, South Australia.

The deal is central to an effort to overhaul Australia's military, as AUKUS members seek to check Chinese military expansion in the Asia-Pacific.

The subs will be quieter and stealthier than Australia's existing fleet, and capable of deploying over vast distances without surfacing, posing a potent threat to any foe.

Although the subs will not carry nuclear weapons, the technology underpinning their nuclear-propelled engines has been a tightly

held secret between the US and Britain for more than 60 years.

More details are expected when Australian and British defence and foreign ministers meet jointly in Adelaide today.

But the scale of the project is vast, and questions have been growing about whether Australia – with limited nuclear experience and a relatively small navy – can pull it off.

Australian officials believe some 20,000 workers will be needed for the homegrown nuclear industry – among them an army of technicians, metal workers, electricians and welders.

Australia has struggled to maintain a fleet of ageing diesel-electric subs plagued by design flaws and cost blowouts.

20 Chinese warplanes 'detected around Taiwan since nightfall'

Taiwan's defence ministry said late yesterday that 20 Chinese military aircraft had been detected around island since nightfall, after it announced the second-highest number of planes earlier in the day. "Overall 20 PLA aircraft... were detected from 1930 (1130 GMT) yesterday," the ministry of national defence said, adding that it was monitoring the situation. In the 24 hours leading up to 6am Thursday, the ministry also detected five naval ships operating around Taiwan, it said. Taiwan's armed forces have "monitored the situation and employed (patrol) aircraft, navy vessels, and coastal missile systems in response to the detected activities". In two other 24-hour periods in late January and early February, the ministry detected 33 Chinese warplanes around the island, the highest number this year. Those detections followed the January 13 presidential election won by current Vice-President Lai Ching-te, whom Beijing dislikes.

Philippine president meets Blinken



Philippine President Ferdinand 'Bongbong' Marcos Jr. and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken meet at the presidential palace in Manila, Philippines, yesterday.

IMF, Lanka reach staff-level deal for \$337mn bailout

Reuters
Colombo

The International Monetary Fund and Sri Lanka have reached a staff-level agreement on economic policies to conclude the second review of a four-year bailout programme, the global lender said yesterday.

The review, once approved by the IMF's board, will release \$337mn in funding for the island nation.

Sri Lanka defaulted on its overseas debt in May 2022 after a severe shortage of foreign exchange reserves triggered the worst financial crisis since independence from Britain in 1948.

It has since made progress on about \$11bn of bilateral debt restructuring and hopes to have agreements in place with all

key creditors, including bondholders, by May at the latest, Foreign Minister Ali Sabry said last month. "Macroeconomic policy reforms are starting to bear fruit," the IMF said in the statement.

"Sustaining the reform momentum and addressing governance weaknesses and corruption vulnerabilities are critical to put the economy on a path towards lasting recovery and stable and inclusive growth."

The IMF said Sri Lanka had made progress on implementing its reform agenda with commendable outcomes including rapid disinflation, robust reserve accumulation and initial signs of economic growth.

It said the next steps were to finalise agreements with the official creditors and reach Agreements in Principle with the main external private creditors.

Foreign firms make contingency plans after Hong Kong security law

Reuters
Hong Kong

Vague provisions in Hong Kong's new national security law around state secrets and links to foreign entities have put on edge many global businesses in the financial hub, with some consultants and hedge funds updating contingency plans and seeking legal advice in a bid to counter this political risk.

Several corporations, worried about data security, are now treating Hong Kong, once a major Asian base for multinationals, in the same way as mainland China and shielding information about the

rest of the company from teams there, said an executive with decades of experience as an adviser to international firms.

Another executive said his hedge fund was seeking legal advice on how to deal with regulators and other government officials because of the state secrets provisions.

"It boils down to a lack of trust in the Hong Kong government, that is beholden to China," said a foreign executive who attended a recent meeting with senior Hong Kong officials.

The three executives, like the more than a dozen businesspeople Reuters spoke to, declined to be identified due to the sensitivity around security issues.

On Tuesday, Hong Kong's legislature unanimously approved the law, which updates a broader national security law imposed by China four years ago and comes with stiffer punishments for crimes including sedition and external interference.

The law takes effect tomorrow. The Hong Kong General Chamber of Commerce, among other business associations, has said it would make Hong Kong "a safer destination for local and foreign businesses and professionals operating there."

Citing national stability, Hong Kong and Chinese government officials have also defended the law from foreign criticism, saying it was no more severe than legislations in

other countries including the US, Britain and Singapore.

Some lawyers, however, said the sweeping definitions for several crimes around interference by so-called external forces, espionage and what constitutes a state secret, among others, had created uncertainty.

The businesspeople interviewed said the law potentially diminishes Hong Kong's international role as it appears to hew closer to the tighter national security regime of Chinese President Xi Jinping.

"For the international business community and financial investors, Hong Kong's common law tradition and rule of equity are as important as the free information flow and

currency convertibility," said Weiheng Chen, senior partner at US-based law firm Wilson Sonsini.

"So how this legislation will be implemented within the existing common law system shall be closely monitored and assessed," said Chen, who also heads the Greater China practice.

The lack of clarity around the terms and the implementation of the law was precisely what drove a hedge fund to update their contingency plans, an executive said.

"We're urgently seeking advice on two key points – does our research of companies and individuals stray into risky areas, and how can we safely manage any relationships with foreign government-

linked wealth funds. That includes how we share and store that research," the executive said.

"We'd like to stay in Hong Kong, but Singapore is our back-up if we need be," they added.

Last year, the Chinese authorities tightened access to information including what's available on Chinese corporate databases, and clamped down on due diligence firms, arresting five executives at the Beijing office of US-based Mintz Group.

A corporate investigator in Hong Kong for around 20 years said work that might no longer be viable could include looking into fraud or due diligence cases, as these discreet probes often scrutinise assets and companies.



Delhi chief minister held in graft probe

AFP
New Delhi

The top politician in India's capital New Delhi was arrested yesterday in a graft probe his supporters say is aimed at sidelining opponents to Prime Minister

Narendra Modi ahead of national elections.

Arvind Kejriwal, Delhi's chief minister and a key leader in an opposition alliance challenging Modi in next month's polls, was detained after several hours of questioning by the enforcement directorate, India's main financial crimes agency.

"We made it clear from the beginning that if needed, Arvind Kejriwal will run the government from jail"

The government of Kejriwal, himself an anti-graft campaigner, has been accused of corruption in the allocation of licences and a

probe in the matter has already seen two of his top allies jailed.

Delhi Education Minister Atishi Marlena Singh confirmed the arrest and said Kejriwal remained the state's chief minister.

"We made it clear from the beginning that if needed, Arvind Kejriwal will run the government from jail,"

she said. She described his arrest as a "political conspiracy" orchestrated by Modi's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

"I want to tell Prime Minister Modi that Arvind Kejriwal is not just a human but an idea," Singh said. "If you think that by arresting one Arvind Kejriwal you can

finish that idea, you are wrong." Kejriwal had resisted multiple summons from the enforcement directorate to be interrogated as part of the probe. He is among several prominent opposition leaders subject to criminal investigations that supporters say are politically motivated.

India 'reversed decision on laptop licensing policy after pressure from US'

Reuters
New Delhi/Washington

India reversed a laptop licensing policy after behind-the-scenes lobbying by US officials, who however remain concerned about New Delhi's compliance with WTO obligations and new rules it may issue, according to US trade officials and government e-mails.

In August, India imposed rules requiring firms like Apple, Dell and HP to obtain licences for all shipments of imported laptops, tablets, personal computers and servers, raising fears that the process could slow down sales. But New Delhi rolled back the policy within weeks, saying it will only monitor the imports and decide on next steps a year later.

The US government e-mails - obtained under a US open records request - underline the level of alarm the Indian curbs caused in Washington, and how the US scored a rare lobbying win by persuading Prime Minister Narendra Modi's usually inflexible government to reverse policy.

US officials have often been concerned about India's sudden policy changes which they say create an uncertain business environment.

India maintains it announces policies in the interest of all stakeholders and encourages foreign investments, even though it often promotes local players over foreign ones.

Some of the language in the documents was blunt, despite the bonhomie often displayed by both sides in public.

US officials were upset India's

changes to laptop imports came "out of the blue", without notice or consultation, and were "incredibly problematic" for the business climate and \$500mn worth of annual US exports, the documents and e-mails showed.

Research firm Counterpoint estimates India's laptop and personal computer market to be worth \$8bn annually.

US Trade Representative Katherine Tai met Indian Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal in New Delhi on August 26, soon after the policy was announced. Although the US-TR's public readout said Tai "raised concerns" about the policy and "noted" that stakeholders needed to be consulted, she privately told Goyal during the meeting that the US wanted India to "rescind the requirement", a USTR briefing paper showed.

India's "surprise" announcement "prompts US and other firms to think twice about doing business in India," stated the "talking points" of her briefing paper.

Around the same time, a US diplomat for trade in New Delhi, Travis Coberly, told his USTR colleagues that Indian officials had conceded the sudden rollout of the laptop licensing policy was a mistake.

India's IT ministry "understands they (India) screwed up. They admitted as much. American companies here have been hammering them about this," he wrote.

Coberly did not immediately respond to a request for comment. The US embassy in New Delhi declined to comment on "private diplomatic communications", redirecting queries to the Indian government.

India's IT ministry did not respond to a request for comment.

In response to Reuters queries, Brendan Lynch, acting assistant US trade representative for south and central Asia, said the USTR was satisfied that the current monitoring system so far had a minimal impact on trade but it was still closely tracking India's scrutiny of imported devices to make sure it was implemented in line with WTO obligations and was "not having a real negative impact on the trade relationship."

Goyal's commerce ministry said in a statement that Tai "did raise some concerns" during their August meeting and New Delhi had "conveyed India's security concerns" at the time. It did not elaborate on why it reversed its decision or on the US e-mails.

Three Indian officials, including two from the commerce ministry who spoke on condition of anonymity since they were not authorised to comment, said New Delhi did not reverse its policy under any US pressure and took the call as it realised local manufacturing of laptops and tablets wasn't significant at this stage.

While Tai was on her New Delhi visit, a US embassy press officer in New Delhi wrote an e-mail to colleagues flagging caution when US officials speak to the press - another sign of how sensitive New Delhi can be.

If asked about the laptops move, the US government's line is: "The (Indian) government has the right, and the responsibility, to design a trade policy that is responsive to the needs of the people of India," the e-mail said.



Congress party president Mallikarjun Kharge (centre) addresses a press conference along with party leaders Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi at the Congress party headquarters in New Delhi yesterday.

Congress accuses Modi of 'crippling' it ahead of polls

AFP
New Delhi

India's opposition yesterday said the government's freezing of its bank accounts has left it with no money to fight the heavily funded ruling party in marathon general elections that begin next month.

"Our entire financial identity has been erased," said Congress Party leader Rahul Gandhi, 53, the scion of the family that dominated Indian politics for decades after independence.

"We have no money to campaign, we cannot support our candidates. Our ability to fight elections has been damaged."

Several of the party's bank accounts were frozen in February because of the alleged late filing of tax returns.

Congress claim the tax department's sanctions are politically motivated, to hobble it from mounting a challenge to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

"Last week, we received another notice from the tax authorities that dates back to our filings from

1995-96," Gandhi told reporters in New Delhi. "We don't even have money to print publicity material!"

"Twenty percent of India votes for us and we can't even pay two rupees for anything. It has been orchestrated to cripple us in the elections," Gandhi said

Most opinion polls are predicting an easy election win for Modi and his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

In a rare public appearance, former Congress chief Sonia Gandhi, 77, Rahul's mother, too said the tax penalty was "part of the systemic efforts to cripple" the party.

The BJP was quick to deny Gandhi's charges, saying the Congress was guilty of tax evasion and had to face action because of that.

Nearly a billion Indians will vote to elect a new government in a month-and-a-half-long election starting on April 19, the largest democratic exercise in the world.

India's democratic credentials have come under scrutiny, with critics accusing the government of politicising the justice system.

India's main financial investigation agency, the enforcement directorate, has launched probes

into at least five state chief ministers or their families, all belonging to the BJP's political opponents.

Rahul Gandhi criticised "institutions which are supposed to protect the framework of democracy" for not speaking up, singling out the Election Commission for not intervening.

"There is no democracy in India today," he alleged.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, 81, said the lack of funds had made it "helpless" ahead of the elections. "There is no level playing field," said Kharge.

According to the latest official financial disclosures to the Election Commission, BJP funds are nearly 10 times that of Congress.

The gulf dramatically widened after Modi's government introduced contentious electoral bonds in 2017, allowing unlimited anonymous donations.

Last month, the Supreme Court outlawed the scheme as unconstitutional and asked for donor and receiver details to be made public.

Released details showed BJP was by far the single-largest beneficiary, with just under half of all donations, totalling around \$730mn.

China opposes US remarks on Arunachal Pradesh

China strongly opposes the US saying Arunachal Pradesh is part of India, a spokesperson for the Chinese foreign ministry said, as tensions simmer over a contested border. "Delimitation of China-India boundary has never been completed," said Lin Jian at a regular press briefing when addressing a query on the ongoing tensions around the undemarcated border. "The China-India border issue is a matter for China and India, it has nothing to do with the US," Lin said. "Everyone knows that the US has always used indiscriminate means to provoke and use other countries' disputes to serve its own selfish geopolitical interests."

Earlier this week, India's foreign ministry said the state will always be an "integral and inalienable part of India". The US government said it recognises Arunachal Pradesh as part of India and "strongly opposes" any unilateral attempts to advance territorial claims there.

Britain's Queen Camilla visits Belfast



Britain's Queen Camilla poses with First Minister of Northern Ireland Michelle O'Neill, Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland Emma Little-Pengelly and Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Chris Heaton-Harris, as she attends an event hosted by The Queen's Reading Room to mark World Poetry Day at Hillsborough Castle, during her visit to Northern Ireland, in Belfast, Northern Ireland, yesterday.

India's Zomato scraps green uniform plan after backlash

Reuters
New Delhi

India's largest food delivery firm Zomato has ditched plans for green uniforms for a new vegetarian-only service, citing concerns the country's vast vegetarian population might then shun its regular service.

The decision was taken less than 24 hours after Zomato CEO Deepinder Goyal announced a green-coloured "Pure Veg" fleet, different from its normal red, to bring orders from vegetarian-only restaurants - a move that sparked widespread criticism and some praise, both mostly on social media.

"This will ensure that our red uniform delivery partners are not incorrectly associated with non-veg food, and blocked" by

gated communities, Goyal said on X, announcing the scrapping of the green uniform.

"Our riders' physical safety is of paramount importance to us. We now realise that even some of our customers could get into trouble with their landlords, and that would not be a nice thing if that happened because of us," he said.

More than one-third of India's 1.4bn people is estimated to be vegetarian - the world's largest percentage of people who don't eat meat or eggs - as they follow diets promoted by groups within Hinduism and other religions.

Some vegetarians choose not to eat in restaurants that also serve meat and don't rent out houses to meat-eating tenants.

Differing views on food choices have sometimes sparked violence.

Prince Harry's landline calls bugged by Murdoch papers: lawyers

Reuters
London

Rupert Murdoch's British tabloid papers bugged Prince Harry's landline phones and accessed the messages on the pager of his late mother Princess Diana, the British royal's legal team told London's High Court yesterday.

Harry, the younger son of King Charles and the late princess Diana, and more than 40 others are suing News Group Newspapers (NGN) over accusations of unlawful activities by journalists and private investigators on its

tabloids, the Sun and the now-defunct News of the World, from the mid-1990s until 2016.

In a ruling last July, judge Timothy Fancourt said Harry could take his claims of unlawful information gathering to trial, but his allegations of decades-old mobile phone hacking were thrown out for being filed too late.

In a hearing at the high court yesterday, Harry's lawyers sought to amend his lawsuit in light of that ruling, and to add other, new allegations.

These include further claims that the Sun ordered private investigators to target his then girlfriend and now wife Meghan

in 2016, and accusations of widespread bugging of his calls.

"The claimant also brings a claim and seeks relief in relation to the interception of landline calls, the interception of calls from cordless phones and analogue mobile calls, and the interception of landline voicemails, as distinct from phone hacking," his lawyers' said in court documents.

The claim also includes allegations relating to Diana who "was under close surveillance and her calls were being unlawfully intercepted by (NGN), which was known about by its editors and senior executives".

NGN is objecting to the addition of what it called a "huge number of new allegations" for numerous reasons including that they were made too late, lacked evidence, and related to phone-hacking claims which had already been dismissed.

"They cover time periods falling outside the scope of the current pleading and the generic statements of case, and in many cases relate to allegations which have been well-publicised for as long as 30 years," NGN's lawyers said in court filings.

In 2011, NGN apologised for widespread phone-hacking by journalists at the News of the

World, which Murdoch shut down following a public backlash. NGN has since settled more than 1,300 claims but the group has always rejected allegations of any wrongdoing by Sun staff.

On Wednesday, lawyers for Harry and the other claimants told the court that Murdoch and other senior executives were involved in the cover-up of widespread wrongdoing, and they had given false evidence to courts, parliament and a public inquiry.

NGN says some claimants are simply using the lawsuits, expected to go to trial in January next year, as a means to attack the tabloid press, and that al-

legations against its current and former staff were "a scurrilous and cynical attack on their integrity".

Since stepping down from royal duties in 2020 to move to California, Harry has turned his focus onto battling the British press which he says has intruded into his private life since he was a child, spreading lies about him and those close to him.

In December he won a lawsuit against Mirror Group Newspaper over allegations of phone-hacking and unlawful activities, with the judge agreeing senior figures had been aware of what had been going on.

Europe frets over arming Ukraine, itself against Russia

AFP
Brussels

EU leaders grappled at a summit meeting yesterday with how to get more weapons to Ukraine's outgunned forces while also re-arming their own countries in the face of Russia's emboldened President Vladimir Putin. More than two years into Moscow's war against its neighbour, Kyiv's troops are struggling to hold back the Russian army as Western deliveries of ammunition have faltered.

Putin has tightened his iron grip over his country by winning a new six-year term at elections after opposition was crushed.

Addressing the EU's 27 leaders via videolink, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky told them the shortfall in ammunition facing his troops was "humiliating" for Europe.

"Europe can provide more – and it is crucial to prove it now," he said, also calling for additional air-defence systems in the wake of a large-scale strike on Kyiv.

As a \$60bn package remains stalled in Washington, the EU leaders debated a plan to use profits from €200bn in frozen Russian central bank assets on weapons for

Ukraine. The proposal could unlock some €3bn (\$3.3bn) a year for Kyiv, but leaders were not expected to give the final go-ahead yesterday.

That would come on top of more than €33bn that the EU says it has provided towards arming Ukraine since the Kremlin invaded in February 2022.

Germany's Chancellor Olaf Scholz, who had been cautious about undermining EU markets, threw his weight behind the plan as legally sound.

But the Kremlin warned it would use legal and "other methods of retaliation" to hit back.

Alongside the efforts to get more weapons to Kyiv, the EU is also scrambling for ways to boost Europe's defence industry to be able to arm Ukraine and build up its own forces.

Brussels has put forward a raft of proposals aimed at ramping up capacity but there are complaints that Europe is still not moving fast enough.

While Russia has put its economy on a war footing, the EU has fallen well short of a promise made last year to supply Ukraine with a million artillery shells by this month.

But the Czech Republic has spearheaded its own initiative aimed at getting hundreds of thousands of shells available around the



French President Emmanuel Macron (centre) reacts as he speaks with fellow EU leaders before a European Council summit at the EU headquarters in Brussels yesterday. (AFP)

world to send to Kyiv.

France and Estonia have pitched the idea of using joint borrowing – similar to the massive package of support the EU came up with during the Covid pandemic – to fund defence spending.

But a majority of member states, led by so-called "frugal" countries such as Germany, are unwilling to

go anywhere near that far.

"If that doesn't fly, then propose something else, some other solution that we can solve this problem, because there is a big problem of funding the defence industry," said Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas.

Instead, the discussion was set to focus on getting the EU's lend-

ing arm, the European Investment Bank, to expand its funding for the sector.

At the moment, the bank is limited to investing in only a small number of "dual-use products" that can have both military and civilian functions.

While the response to the conflict in Ukraine dominated the

summit, EU leaders were also looking for a united stance on the war in Gaza, with United Nations chief Antonio Guterres in attendance.

Diplomats say an overwhelming majority of countries support a call for an "immediate humanitarian pause" in Israel's offensive and a warning for it not to launch a ground operation in Rafah.

But Irish premier Leo Varadkar said staunch Israeli allies the Czech Republic and Austria were reluctant to back that wording, in the latest obstacle to EU unity on the issue.

"The response to the appalling crisis in Palestine has not been Europe's finest hour, quite frankly," he said.

Closer to home, EU leaders look set to give the green light to opening membership talks with Bosnia, as Russia's war has sparked a push to expand the bloc.

Diplomats said that the Balkan state would likely get an agreement on launching talks, but they could only start in earnest when the country had passed more reforms.

"It's a two-step approach," Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte said.

"Yes, opening membership talks, but also, yes, working on all the outstanding issues before we can take the next step."

US warns Pakistan on ties over election irregularities

AFP/Reuters
Washington

The United States has said that relations with Pakistan will suffer if it does not probe irregularities in last month's election and rerun votes if needed.

Donald Lu, the top US diplomat for South Asia, told lawmakers that the United States had "serious concerns" about the conduct of the February 8 election and ongoing disruptions of media and social media, including a prolonged shutdown of X.

"The Election Commission of Pakistan, should it find that these irregularities are substantiated, should rerun elections where there's been interference," Lu told a sometimes raucous hearing of a House Foreign Affairs subcommittee.

"We have enjoyed 76 years of partnership with this country. It will be an impediment to our relationship if Pakistan does not have a democratic process that upholds its own constitution," Lu said.

Lu said the United States was not considering any major new military sales to Pakistan, a Cold War ally whose army and intelligence apparatus has long played a dominant role in politics and whose past links with Afghanistan's Taliban soured ties with Washington.

Ahead of the election, former prime minister and cricket star Imran Khan was jailed and barred from running, with his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party subject to a crackdown.



Donald Lu, the top US diplomat for South Asia, testifying before the House Foreign Affairs subcommittee.

Pakistan rejects US warning

Pakistan's government yesterday dismissed a warning from the United States that relations between the two countries would suffer if it did not probe irregularities in last month's election. Mumtaz Zahra Baloch, the spokeswoman for Pakistan's Foreign Ministry, said the warning from Donald Lu, the top US diplomat for South Asia, "reflects a misunderstanding of Pakistan's political situation and electoral laws".

"We hope to engage in political discussion with the United States to address misunderstandings so that our two countries continue to move forward for regional co-operation," she told reporters in the capital, Islamabad.

Khan's candidates nonetheless won more seats than any party, but rival Shehbaz Sharif became prime minister in a shaky coalition between two dynastic parties.

Khan, who was controversially removed as prime minister by a parliamentary vote two years ago, has frequently criticised the US

military and has alleged that the United States engineered his removal.

Khan's supporters have cited a leaked Pakistani diplomatic document that said that Lu had voiced alarm over the then prime minister's relationship with Russia. Lu, who was repeatedly disrupted at the hearing by pro-Khan

demonstrators, strongly denied that he ever tried to remove Khan.

"This conspiracy theory is a lie. It is a complete falsehood," he said.

"We respect the sovereignty of Pakistan. We respect the principle that Pakistan – Pakistani people – should be the only ones choosing their own leaders through a democratic process."

Lu, a career diplomat, said that he has received death threats and his family has been threatened over the allegations.

"The Election Commission of Pakistan, should it find that these irregularities are substantiated, should re-run elections (in constituencies) where there has been interference," Donald Lu, the State Department's top official for South and Central Asia, told a congressional panel.

"We have never used the term 'free and fair' in the characterisation of this election," Lu testified.

"We have expressed serious concerns about the pre-election environment: violence that occurred – terrorism and political violence," he said. "We have expressed concern about the failure to register individual candidates and political parties, the mass arrests of those in opposition, the shutdown of Internet, and censorship and pressure placed on journalists."

Britain and the European Union have also expressed concern about reported irregularities and urged a probe. United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres expressed concern about violence and the suspension of mobile communications services.

US averts partial govt shutdown

■ Congress advances \$1.2tn package

Reuters
Washington

After days of delay, US congressional leaders unveiled a \$1.2tn bipartisan spending measure for defence, homeland security and other programmes early yesterday, giving lawmakers less than two days to avert a partial government shutdown.

The Republican-controlled House of Representatives will vote on the sprawling package today, leaving the Democratic-majority Senate only hours to pass the package of six bills that covers about two-thirds of the \$1.66tn in discretionary government spending for the fiscal year that began on October 1.

Democratic Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer wasted no time in urging his fellow senators to act quickly once the legislation arrives from the House.

Since the fiscal year began on October 1, Congress has had to pass four temporary funding bills to avert government shutdowns because of unresolved battles over spending priorities and the size of annual appropriations.

"Once the House acts the Senate will need bipartisan co-operation to pass it before Friday's deadline and avoid a shutdown," Schumer said in a Senate speech.

The Congressional Budget Office warned that US deficits and debt will grow considerably over the next 30 years, forecasting that the nation's \$34.5tn national debt, which currently represents about 99% of GDP, could grow and rise to 166% of GDP by 2054.

Ratings agencies have also warned that Congress's repeated brinkmanship could hurt the US government's creditworthiness.

The compressed schedule raised the risk of at least a brief partial shutdown after a Friday midnight

deadline. Any one senator can erect procedural hurdles to slow final passage of the 1,012-page bill.

"There will be no time to read the text, to vet it with our staffs and our constituents, to debate the bill and offer amendments to improve the bill," said conservative Republican Senator Mike Lee, as he criticised the wide-ranging bill.

House Speaker Mike Johnson touted what he called a series of wins for Republicans, from higher spending for US defence and border security to a cutoff of US funding for the main United Nations relief agency that provides humanitarian assistance to Palestinians in Gaza.

"This FY24 appropriations legislation is a serious commitment to strengthening our national defence by moving the Pentagon toward a focus on its core mission," Johnson said in a statement released along with the text of the legislation.

Democrats said they blocked some Republican cuts and policy measures and touted funds aimed at lowering childcare costs, supporting small businesses and fighting the flow of the opioid fentanyl.

"We defeated outlandish cuts that would have been a gut punch for American families and our economy – and we fought off scores of extreme policies that would have restricted Americans' fundamental freedoms," said Senator Patty Murray, the Democratic chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee. With a slim 219-213 House Republican majority, Johnson will have to rely on Democratic votes to pass the bill.

Besides the departments of Homeland Security and Defence, the bill would fund agencies including the State Department and the Internal Revenue Service as it girds for its April 15 taxpayer filing deadline.

'Goon Squad' torture defendants get 100-plus years' imprisonment

A federal judge in Mississippi yesterday began sentencing the last of six white ex-lawmen who pleaded guilty to last year's "Goon Squad" torture and sexual abuse of two Black men, leaving the defendants with combined prison terms totalling more than a century. The six men will still face sentencing on state charges for their roles in the home-invasion assault, which has stood out among dozens of racially charged US police misconduct cases in recent years for the chilling nature of its calculated brutality. The two victims, Michael Corey Jenkins and Eddie Terrell Parker, were handcuffed, stripped naked, beaten, sexually assaulted and subjected to electric Taser shocks and waterboarding as the officers

screamed racial slurs at them, according to accounts filed by prosecutors in the case. The two-hour ordeal in January 2023 began when the six officers stormed into the house without a warrant, ostensibly looking for illegal drugs, and ended in a mock execution that left Jenkins gravely wounded from a gunshot to the mouth, court records showed. The former lawmen referred to themselves as members of "the Goon Squad," a group that routinely used excessive force, according to the case record. All but one were members of the Rankin County Sheriff's Office. The case finally brought national attention to what Rankin County residents say has been decades

of abuse perpetrated by patrol officers and detectives in the sheriff's department against poor people, white and Black, in central Mississippi. The wider pattern was documented in late November 2023, a few months after the six defendants had pleaded guilty to federal and state charges, in a joint inquiry by the *New York Times* and the Mississippi Center for Investigative Reporting. The defendants were sentenced this week for federal felony offences to which they pleaded guilty last summer, including civil rights conspiracy, deprivation of rights under colour of law, conspiracy to obstruct justice and obstruction of justice. Brett McAlpin, former chief

investigator for the sheriff's department, was sentenced yesterday to more than 27 years in prison. US District Judge Tom Lee was expected to sentence the final defendant, Joshua Hartfield, an ex-officer from the police force in Richland, Mississippi, later in the day. Christian Dedmon, who prosecutors considered the ringleader of the raid in January, received the longest prison term so far, 40 years, when sentenced on Wednesday. Hunter Elward, who fired the gunshot that wounded Jenkins, was given 20 years on Tuesday. Jeffrey Middleton, 46, a sheriff's lieutenant at the time of the raid, was sentenced on Tuesday to 17.5 years. Daniel Opdyke received the same sentence on Wednesday.

Russia fires missiles at Kyiv

Russia fired more than 30 missiles at Kyiv early yesterday, the largest attack on the Ukrainian capital in weeks after Russian President Vladimir Putin vowed retribution for escalating strikes on Russia's border regions. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky called on the West to deliver air defence systems after the attacks, which wounded 17 in Kyiv and the surrounding region. A later missile strike on the southern city of Mykolaiv killed one woman and injured six when it hit an industrial site, Ukraine's emergency services agency said. "Such terror continues every day and night," Zelensky said in a Telegram post yesterday. "It is possible to put an end to it through global unity... Russian terrorists do not have missiles capable of bypassing Patriot and other leading world systems," he said. "This protection is required in Ukraine now. From Kyiv to Kharkiv, Sumy to Kherson, and Odesa to the Donetsk region. This is entirely possible if our partners demonstrate sufficient political will." For weeks a vital \$60bn US military aid package for Ukraine has been blocked in Congress amid domestic political arguments.

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GULF TIMES

Why have developing countries soured on multilateralism?

Multilateralism is waning, and one of the world’s leading multilateral institutions, the World Trade Organisation, is in crisis, because the United States has been blocking new appointments to its dispute settlement mechanism’s Appellate Body since 2018. In the run-up to the WTO’s 13th Ministerial Conference last month, some optimists hoped to see progress on specific issues, such as an agreement not to impose tariffs on digital commerce, but expectations were generally low.

The pessimists were right. India led the charge against extending a moratorium on e-commerce tariffs, and only a last-minute deal prolonged it for another two years. After that, it is expected to expire. India and its allies celebrated the outcome as a victory. For the first time in years, the culprit undermining the WTO was not the US but developing countries (including Indonesia, South Africa, Brazil, and others).

True, what happened with digital commerce is characteristic of the usual conflicts that play out during trade negotiations. Free trade always produces winners and losers. Digital commerce may be in the interest of businesses in advanced economies as well as consumers and businesses in low- and middle-income countries; users of an app, game, or other software product made in a different country may pay lower prices in the absence of tariffs. But domestic producers will reliably demand protection from imports, and governments will see tariffs as a promising way to boost revenues. While these issues are typical, developing countries’ opposition to an extended digital-tax moratorium is emblematic of a deeper problem: namely, the growing impression that the WTO has nothing to offer them anymore. The assumption is that it unilaterally serves the interests of big businesses rather than of the average person in a low- or middle-income country.

But is this true? In fact, recent research shows that poverty reduction in the past three decades has been more likely in developing countries that are well integrated into the international trade system – as measured by the number of signed trade agreements and access to large, lucrative export markets. In this sense, the multilateral trade system has indeed benefited the developing world.

Recent research shows that poverty reduction in the past three decades has been more likely in developing countries that are integrated into the global trade system

International integration is particularly important for smaller economies. Unlike India and China, countries such as Thailand, Kenya, and Rwanda cannot fall back on large domestic markets. No wonder opposition to trade deals so often comes from larger developing countries such as India, Indonesia, and Brazil. They can afford to turn their back on international trade if the terms of the proposed deal are not enticing enough.

But even these countries appreciate the benefits of participation in global trade.

India, for example, used the closing of the Ministerial Conference to reaffirm its commitment to negotiation and multilateralism, in principle. The question, then, is why developing countries have such a negative view of the WTO specifically.

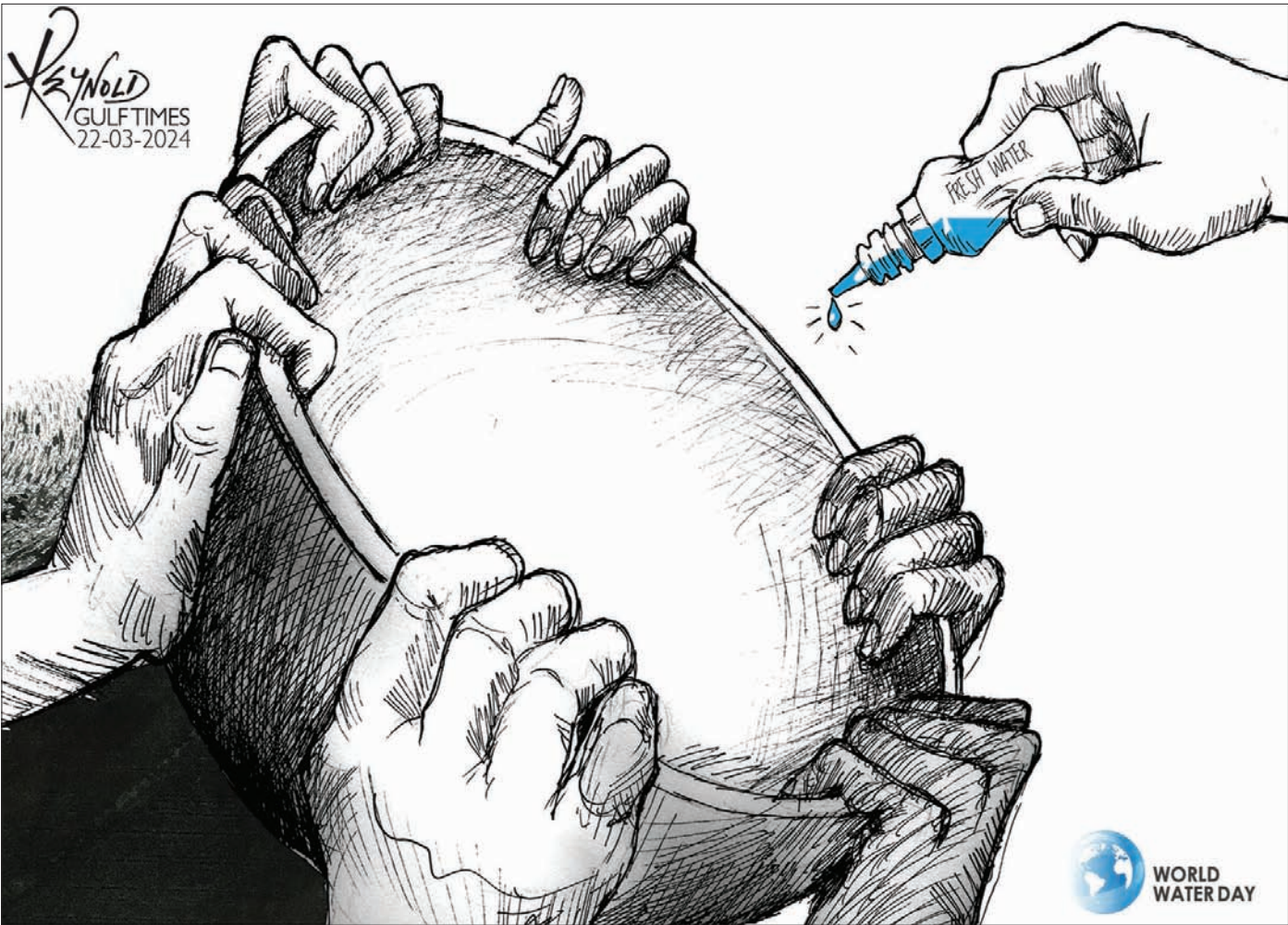
Their dissatisfaction dates back to 1995, when the WTO succeeded the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. At the time, developing countries felt that they had just been pressured into signing a trade-related intellectual property rights (TRIPS) agreement that would yield big payoffs for multinational corporations without offering many benefits to their own populations.

Another ongoing source of tension is agriculture, where developing countries traditionally have a comparative advantage. Existing trade agreements continue to permit high-income countries to subsidize local producers and impose tariffs on imports. Various other rules, escape clauses, and notification requirements have created de facto loopholes that only countries with abundant resources are able to exploit.

For example, fishing subsidies (another area of major contention) are permitted under certain conditions. But monitoring fishing stocks to prove that such conditions are being met is prohibitively expensive for most developing countries. They therefore have good reason to complain that international trade rules are biased against them.

Looking ahead, a potentially bigger issue concerns advanced economies’ efforts to link trade agreements to labour and environmental standards, such as through the European Union’s proposed Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM). While well-intentioned, advanced economies must recognise that their efforts to address climate, labour, and human-rights issues could have serious distributional consequences, potentially coming at the expense of many developing countries.

This is especially true of climate change. Low-income countries may have the most to lose from the consequences of climate change, but they are understandably reluctant to impede their own growth to fix a problem caused by richer countries’ past sins. — Project Syndicate



In the US, Big Tech disrupts energy sector: A new era for utilities

By Todd G Buchholz and Michael Mindlin
San Diego

If John D Rockefeller were around today, he’d be fastening a Google Nest – the pioneering smart thermostat – into the wall of his home. The notoriously thrifty oil baron would have jumped at the chance to save on his monthly energy bill.

Traditional energy companies, from ExxonMobil (the direct descendant of Rockefeller’s Standard Oil Company) to local utilities, have begun to embrace Big Tech, brimming with both hope and trepidation. Will companies like Google, Amazon, and Meta put the meter reader and his bosses out to pasture? Who wins if they do?

Big Tech has already shown a propensity to disrupt. Just 25 years ago, a “googol” – the inspiration for the search engine’s name – was an unfathomably large number, a cloud was a billowing puff in the sky, and 5G was the row in which you parked your car at the garage. In the intervening decades, tech companies have upended industries both at the enterprise and retail levels.

Consider pharmacies, which relied on the patience of shoppers to wait days for a prescription and stand in queues to retrieve them. Now companies like Hims & Hers will confidentially overnight drugs to calm your nerves, grow your hair, or put you in the mood. Meanwhile, One Medical, which Amazon purchased last year, offers 24-hour on-demand virtual care and same- and next-day appointments – quite a feat considering the average wait time to see a physician in major American cities is more than three weeks. No wonder the profit margins of brick- and-mortar drugstores have fallen, plunging Rite-Aid into bankruptcy.

Just as the world needs better access to medical care, it also needs more efficient and reliable power. Too many people are sitting in the dark too often, and for too long. Even in developed countries like the United States, the average duration of a blackout doubled between 2013 and 2021, from 3.5 hours to more than seven

hours, while their frequency jumped by nearly 20%. Not surprisingly, Americans are taking a dimmer view of their local utilities, with 71% saying they would switch providers, while businesses complain that power outages cost them \$150bn per year.

That doesn’t mean utilities deserve all the blame. In the US, local and state politicians and regulators dictate profits and prices, while delaying capital upgrades. The US Department of Energy spends around five years assessing a new project before approval, leaving roughly 2,000 gigawatts of annual capacity waiting in the queue.

Fast-growing trillion-dollar tech companies cannot afford to lose power, so they are taking matters into their own hands. Amazon’s clean-energy portfolio, which comprises solar and wind projects in more than 20 US states and 27 countries, is now big enough to power 7.2mn American homes each year. In Nevada’s Blue Mountain geothermal field, Google is partnering with clean-energy start-up Fervo to power the tech behemoth’s data centres by tapping the heat trapped below Jurassic rocks.

Unlike a utility saddled with old plants that need to be decommissioned, tech companies can start anew. The average age of an oil-burning steam-turbine plant in the Midwest is pushing 70 years. In fact, Whiting, Wisconsin, runs a hydropower facility built in 1891 – 40 years before actor Boris Karloff was hooked up to lightning-conducting electrodes in the original *Frankenstein*.

Although self-interest motivated tech companies to create new power supplies, they have their sights set on residential consumers. Fortunately, Big Tech is already welcome in the home. Amazon evolved from delivering brown boxes of books to answering questions with Alexa and recording doorbell activity with Ring cameras.

Google recently merged Nest Renew, its service to help users optimise their electricity usage, with the software business OhmConnect to align the energy consumption of households across the country. The new company, Renew Home, will pay people to lower their thermostats

and turn off their lights during peak hours or even, when combined with artificial intelligence-enabled weather forecasting, before lightning storms strike.

Executives at traditional electric utilities should respond to these free-wheeling, free-spending technical wizards by rewatching *The Godfather, Part II*, and heeding mob boss Michael Corleone’s advice: “keep your friends close, but your enemies closer.” At the same time, they should focus on communicating better with their customers. Has your utility ever sent you a newsletter, a movie link, or a dozen roses? Or does it come to mind only when you have a complaint, whether about the lights going off or a meter reader skulking in the backyard?

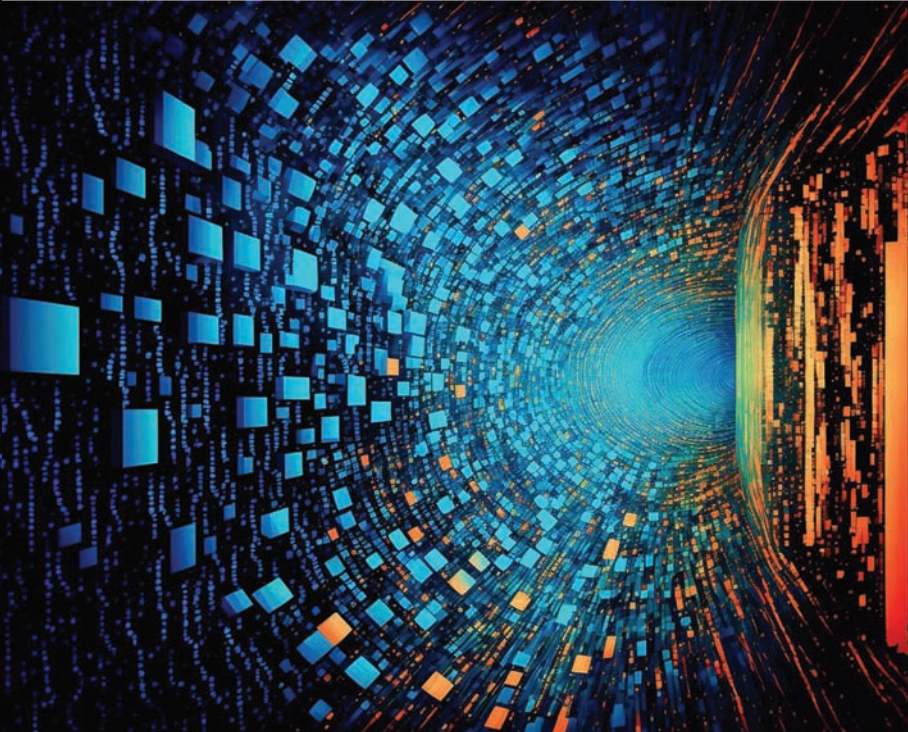
Lastly, utilities should work with Big Tech to boost efficiency. A few weeks ago, Southern Company announced a deal with Samsung SmartThings to create an innovation laboratory aimed at prodding communication among smart refrigerators, dishwashers, and garage-door openers in an effort to save power. In San Diego, the utility company Sempra is partnering with Fermata Energy so that electric vehicles can sell their battery power back to the grid when demand peaks.

Ever since the age of Rockefeller and Thomas Edison, utilities were the Steady Eddie of investments, the clichéd favourite of dividend-seeking widows and other risk-averse investors. Whether or not the climate is getting warmer, the sector is getting hotter. And as Big Tech enters, sparks are beginning to fly. — Project Syndicate

• Todd G Buchholz, a former White House director of economic policy under President George HW Bush and managing director of the Tiger hedge fund, is the recipient of the Harvard Department of Economics’ Allyn Young Teaching Prize. He is the author of New Ideas from Dead Economists, The Price of Prosperity, and co-author of the musical Glory Ride.

• Michael Mindlin is a venture-capital and growth-equity investor focusing on energy and enterprise software.

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A call for return and reform

These days, the Muslims around the globe are busy fasting the noble month of Ramadan. Of this month, Allah says (what means):

“The month of Ramadan [is that] in which was revealed the Qur’an, a guidance for the people and clear proofs of guidance and criterion. So whoever sights [the new moon of] the month, let him fast it; and whoever is ill or on a journey - then an equal number of other days. Allah intends for you ease and does not intend for you hardship and [wants] for you to complete the period and to glorify Allah for that [to] which He has guided you; and perhaps you will be grateful.” [Qur’an 2: 185]

The Messenger, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, would congratulate the Muslims at the approach of this month in order to make them aware of its magnificence and the great opportunities it contained. He, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, would address his Companions, may Allah be pleased with them, during this time thus: “The month of Ramadan has approached you - a blessed month in which Allah has made fasting an obligation, opened wide the gates of Paradise, locked up the gates of Fire, and chained the demons, and in it there is a night better than one thousand months -- so whosoever is deprived of its good is truly deprived.” [Ahmad]

How can the believers not rejoice and congratulate each other at the opening of the gates of Paradise and the locking up of the doors of Hell? How can any wise person waste away this time when the devils are chained?

To live through the month of Ramadan is a great blessing from Allah which must not be taken for granted and for which one ought to pray and strive. This is made clear in a narration of the Messenger, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, in which he was told about two men who embraced Islam together, one of whom was more diligent in piety and died a martyr, while the other died a year later of natural causes -- and then a friend of theirs saw in a dream that the one who died later naturally was called into Paradise before the other one - upon which the Messenger, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, ascribed this preference to the extra year of praying and Ramadan fasting that the latter had had. [Ahmad and Ibn Majah]

In other words, since the latter one had had a bit longer life and had the opportunity to witness one more year of fasting and praying than the other, he acquired more righteous deeds than the one who tried harder and died a martyr earlier. This narration reminds us of what a great blessing every single day of life is for a believer -- and of what a great reward obtained from the obligatory acts of praying and fasting.

That is why the early Muslims would pray to Allah to extend their stay in this life such that they witness the following month of Ramadan. Mu’alla ibn Al-Fadhl, may Allah have mercy upon him, said that our righteous predecessors, may Allah be pleased with them, would supplicate to Allah almost six months before Ramadan to make them reach it, and would supplicate six months after it asking Him to accept their hard work in it.

Yet, many a procrastinator wastes away this blessed month



The newly-opened Ahmed Abdul Rahman Musa Al Ishaq Mosque in Lusail's Ghar The'ileb area.

and hopes to repent, reform and fast in the future while wasting away the days and nights of this month in pursuit of the trivialities of this world.

Let us take a few moments in the following to reflect on a few aspects of the golden opportunity this blessed month offers.

A month of training and discipline, not of eating and diversion!

Allah Almighty says (what means):

“O you who have believed, decreed upon you is fasting as it was decreed upon those before you that you may become righteous.” [Qur’an 2:183]

This verse teaches us that the purpose of fasting is the realisation of the goal of attaining piety. It is only appropriate that anyone who witnesses this month should succeed -- as one narration of the Prophet says, “Be his nose cut off in humiliation if a man [let him be humiliated who] sees the month of Ramadan but fails to have his sins forgiven.”

During this month, ourselves are trained to do good and abandon evil -- and these selves that learn to avoid even permissible things during this month are therefore more likely to avoid evil things after this training is over.

Alas, many of us are unaware of these blessings and this wisdom, and fail to train our selves properly, sometimes getting worse in wanton luxury, laziness and wastefulness in a month which was given to teach them in self-control and discipline. We find that many Muslims increase their consumption of luxuriant foods and drinks in this month rather

than train their souls and bodies to live on a little and focus on spiritual pursuits, as if Allah made this month the month of eating and not fasting! The media in the Muslim world, alas, often aggravate the attitude of wastefulness and diversion -- and are found polling people about their favorite foods during the month of Ramadan, as if Allah has singled this month out not for abstinence but for eating in abundance! Who are these deprived people condemned by the Prophet, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, if not those who find new ways to divert themselves with special television shows and movies during this month, as unfortunately is the case in many Muslim communities today?!

The sanctity of this noble month

One of the unfortunate phenomena in our contemporary Muslim societies during this month is the open and brazen-faced violation of the sanctity of this month -- as the sacredness of this month is made light of and new ways are found to spend time during it. One of the ways in which this sanctity is violated is how the producers of television shows in the Muslim world compete in producing special programs of diversion in this month rather than repent and save the world from their evil at least during this month! But no, they rather double and treble the production of their evil so that the heedless Muslims be even more heedless and have even less time for reflection, repentance, regret over their sins and reform of their character! Rather, these traders in lust and beautifiers of desire excel during

this month. Alas, their devils have been chained during this month -- but who will chain them?!

They and us -- weeping over our condition

Whoever reflects for even a moment about the way the early Muslims lived and worshipped and how we live and worship will see an enormous chasm and weep over our condition. Ibn Rajab, may Allah have mercy upon him, said that Al-Hasan ibn Saalih, may Allah have mercy upon him, sold a bondswoman of his to someone, and in her new house she woke up in the middle of the night and called out to the people of the house asking them to perform prayer, so they said: “Is it time for the Fajr prayer?” Upon which she said: “Why? Do you not perform except the obligatory prayers?” Then she returned to her earlier master and complained that she cannot live with people who do not perform except the obligatory prayers.

How many of us perform prayer at night regularly during the month of Ramadan, let alone during the other months? Even the few hours during the last ten nights of Ramadan seem so heavy to us!

The month of generosity and giving

Another blessing of the month of Ramadan is the increase in brotherhood, mutual love, care, and generosity and charity towards the poor and the needy. The meetings of the Suhoor, the pre-dawn meal, and the Iftar, the post-dusk breakfast, are supposed to be the epitome of joy and manifestations of brotherly

and familial love and rejoice. At these times, the Muslims who have these blessings are supposed to think and care about those less fortunate than them, those who do not have loving fathers and mothers to care for them and provide them with nutritious meals and soothing comfort, those women who no longer have caring husbands to provide for them and protect them, those families that do not have the wherewithal to afford such meals. These meals are supposed to be meals of gratitude and meals of sharing, not of decadent luxury and wastefulness. These meals are supposed to be simple and modest because they are accompanied by charity and giving and sharing anything that is not necessary ought to be given away to the poor and the needy.

Those who fast during the day and experience the pangs of pain are supposed to remember the hunger and deprivation of those who starve out of poverty and helplessness. Those who pray during the night next to each other are supposed to be one brotherhood -- all members of which are like one body, and when any of its members gets hurt, all the rest of the body feels the pain. Hence, these nightly prayers in congregation remind the believers of each other and their rights upon each other. None of the Muslims, therefore, is forgotten, and no one overeats, overspends, or overindulges -- because they give all they can in charity to those who need it.

Yet, is this what really happens?!

How far have we come from the teachings of the Prophet, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, who said that you are not a believer

if you sleep well-fed while your neighbor is hungry -- how many believers are hungry, deprived and needy while many overspend and waste away their food and clothing in ostentation and wanton competition?! There are Muslim countries in which tons of food is wasted away annually, enough to feed a continent of hungry people, and then there are Muslim regions in which people routinely starve to death or kill and get killed for scrapes of food! This is the state of the followers of the Prophet, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, who was more generous than the wind which indiscriminately gives anyone and everyone. Ibn ‘Abbaas, may Allah be pleased with him, narrated that “the Messenger of Allah, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, was the most generous of people, and he, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, was at his most generous during Ramadan... at that time the Messenger of Allah would be more generous than the blowing wind.” [Al-Bukhari and Muslim]

Our example, the Messenger, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, would give the last morsel of food that he, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, had, and the last piece of clothing that he, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, had on. While we Muslims today have become some of the most divided nations in which the disparity of the wealth in the world is the greatest!

The month of reform

The month of Ramadan is the time of holding ourselves accountable, reforming ourselves and returning to our Lord before we are held accountable and have no chance of reform or return.

To those of us who are heedless of Allah and are lost in the deceptions of this world, this is the chance to turn about and return to the Most Generous Lord.

To those who are given to usurp others’ rights by hurting or killing them or stealing from them, now is the chance to return and repent.

To those who are given to sexual promiscuity, seeking enjoyment in illicit sights and pleasures, and wanton display of their beauty that Allah has prohibited, now is the chance to purify themselves and return to Allah.

To those given to drinking and drugs and the wasting away of their wealth, minds and time, now is the time to give up their evil ways and return to their Most Merciful Lord.

To those who deal in interest and take it lightly, now is the chance to purify their wealth and cease their war against Allah Almighty and His Messenger, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, before it is too late.

To those who are disobedient and uncaring towards their parents, now is the chance to repent and beg for the Mercy of Allah and make up to their parents.

To those who are hateful of other Muslims and sow seeds of division between them for the mean gains of this world, now is the time to repent and review their deeds.

To us all, now is the time to repent and return.

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



Generosity during Ramadan

Spending charity removes sins as water extinguishes fire ... charity extinguishes the wrath of Allah... charity shades the person on the Day of Resurrection. There are many other great virtues for spending in charity, and since Ramadan is the month of generosity, we will address this topic from three different perspectives:

Generosity during Ramadan:

Ramadan is the month of obedience and the performance of good deeds, and the Prophet, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, was the best of mankind and the most obedient to his Lord, yet he used to increase his acts of worship during this blessed month. Imaam Ibn al-Qayyim, may Allah have mercy upon him, said: “The Prophet, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, was the most generous of all people, but the time he spent the most was during the month of Ramadan, and he used to increase his recitation of the Qur’an, prayers, mentioning Allah and *I’tikaaf* (i.e. residing in the mosque with the intention of worship)”

The companions were distinctly generous during the month of Ramadan. Imaam Ibn al-Qayyim said: “There is a difference between being generous in charity and being wasteful: a generous person spends his charity in proper channels, whilst the wasteful person might spend extravagant -

ly in places where it is not needed, and be very poorly in places where spending is direly needed.”

Anas, may Allah be pleased with him, said: “The Prophet, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, was the bravest person and the most generous.” [Al-Bukhari & Muslim]

Ibn ‘Abbaas, may Allah be pleased with him, stated: “The Prophet, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, was the most generous of all the people, and he used to reach the peak in generosity in the month of Ramadan when Jibreel met him. Jibreel used to meet him every night of Ramadan to teach him the Qur’an, and when he met him, he, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, would be more generous than the strong uncontrollable wind (i.e. in readiness and haste to do charitable deeds)” [Al-Bukhari & Muslim] Ibn Hajar, may Allah have mercy upon him, said commenting on this narration: “This added generosity resulted from the virtue of the month, the one with whom he reviewed the Qur’an and the thing being reviewed (i.e. the Words of Allah)”

Imaam Ibn al-Qayyim, may Allah have mercy upon him, counted ten levels of generosity, and they are as follows:

Sacrificing ones soul: Getting killed for the sake of Allah is the most paramount rank.

Utilising ones position: This is the

second best rank as in this case generosity makes a person favor fulfilling the needs of others over his personal interest and status.

Sacrificing comfort: A generous person exhausts himself and sacrifices his comfort and sleep for others.

Offering ones knowledge: This is one of the noblest ranks of generosity, and it is better than sacrificing ones wealth because knowledge is more honorable than wealth. Never will a stingy person be able to benefit from any knowledge if he possessed any, and it is from the wisdom of Allah that He only grants this knowledge to generous people who will be willing to offer it to others and benefit them with it. Generosity in this field is to teach the one who asks you what you know and to answer people’s queries.

Utilising one’s prestige: This is by interceding to people and facilitating their affairs with those in charge.

Sacrificing physically: Abu Tharr, may Allah be pleased with him, reported that the Messenger of Allah, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, said: “When you get up in the morning, charity is due from every one of your joints. There is charity in every ascription of glory to Allah (i.e. by uttering *Subhaan Allah*); there is charity in every declaration of His Greatness (i.e. by uttering *Allahu Akbar*); there is charity in every utterance of praise of Him (i.e.

by uttering *Al-Hamdulillaah*); there is charity in every declaration that none is worthy of worship except Allah (i.e. by uttering *Laa ilaaha ilAllaah*); there is charity in enjoining good; there is charity in forbidding evil. Two *Rak’ah* of *Dhuhaa* (Forenoon prayer) is equal to all this (in reward)” [Muslim]

Sacrificing one’s honour: This is by forgiving someone for badmouthing and backbiting you. This reflects ones purity in the heart and grants peace of mind and serenity.

Being patient: This is another honourable rank that benefits the person more than sacrificing his wealth. This rank grants the person support from Allah and leads to others holding him in high esteem, as only selected people are able to endure patiently when others harm them.

Being cheerful with others: Abu Tharr, may Allah be pleased with him, reported that the Messenger of Allah, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, said: “Do not belittle any good deed, even meeting your Muslim brother with a cheerful face” [Muslim] This is one of the heaviest deeds on the scale.

Not longing to possess what others have: This is the best type that reflects ones contentment with the decrees of Allah and imposes ones respect on others.

Delaying Zakaah until Ramadan:

Allah has prescribed *Zakaah* on those whose wealth reaches a certain amount and made paying *Zakaah* one of the pillars of Islam. When a full lunar year elapses whilst one possesses such wealth, then he is obliged to pay *Zakaah*. In case of agriculture, it is due when plants yield fruits. It is not permissible to pay it in payments, nor is one allowed to delay *Zakaah* until the month of Ramadan unless there is a dire need. Ibn Qudaamah and Ash-Shaaff’ee, may Allah have mercy upon them, are of the opinion that: “*Zakaah* must be paid immediately when it becomes due and one is not permitted to delay it whilst able to unless he fears a certain harm to afflict him due to paying it.”

When asked about delaying the payment of *Zakaah* until the month of Ramadan, Shaykh al-‘Uthaymeen, may Allah have mercy upon him, said: “*Zakaah*, like any other good deed, is preferred in virtuous times unless it becomes due, then a person must pay it immediately. If one’s full lunar year elapses on the month of Rajab, for example, then he should not delay it until Ramadan and must pay it in Rajab.”

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



Qatar Foundation event marks World Down Syndrome Day with activities



Qatar Foundation's (QF) Ability Friendly Programme marked World Down Syndrome Day with activities designed to foster inclusivity, celebrate diversity, and enhance accessibility amid a host of entertainment for people of all ages at an event in Oxygen Park in Education City.

Amid a family-oriented environment, the event aimed to increase awareness and support for those with Down syndrome, ultimately promoting greater understanding and acceptance within the community. A variety of child-friendly activities were included, from an inflatable castle and sports, to face painting and a solidarity walk.

Maha Omar Kamel, who attended the event with her son, a child with Down syndrome, said: "Finding activities where my son can interact with others has always been a challenge. This event, promoting inclusivity and acceptance for people with Down syndrome, not only aids us, the parents, but also provides our children with a platform to enjoy and share a delightful day together."

"I wish for participation in this day to extend beyond just individuals with Down syndrome and their families, embracing all members of society regardless of age. It's important for everyone to learn about and celebrate this group, participating as a unified community."

Kamel noted that stigma still surrounds people with Down syndrome, continuing to be a challenge for both the parents and their children, but believes events like this play a crucial role in



raising awareness for everyone. "It's not just for us," she said. "It's also for new mothers who will have children with Down syndrome, or whose children have friends in this group."

Rawida Gharizi, who attended the event with her daughter Maysoon Maamoun, who also has Down syndrome, expressed her happiness at seeing her daughter actively participating in the event's activities, especially the face painting segment, which reflects her daughter's passion for art.

She said: "My daughter often expresses herself through drawing and art,

and seeing her at the event doing something she loves is wonderful. It's clear that the variety of activities offered has allowed everyone here today to engage in something they're passionate about."

"Engaging in these activities plays a crucial role in enhancing their emotional health, providing a substantial uplift in their morale. It offers not only a sense of joy and fulfilment, but also contributes positively to their overall psychological state, fostering a feeling of well-being and happiness."

Gharizi pointed out that her daughter tends to be shy, and rarely interacts with

others, saying: "My daughter is usually quite reserved and seldom engages so directly with others. Yet, the event marks a significant turning point for her, highlighting the essential role such activities have in enhancing the self-confidence of individuals with Down syndrome."

Nigel D'Souza, events and programme coordinator at the Ability Friendly Programme, expressed his views on the World Down Syndrome Day, saying: "It's an avenue to celebrate people with Down syndrome and their achievements. We have some good athletes with Down syndrome in the program, who also have other talents in music, singing, and more."

D'Souza highlighted the event's role in promoting awareness, describing it as "a fun way to spread awareness." He further elaborated on the broader significance of such events, stating: "Hosting public inclusive events plays a crucial role in raising understanding. It provides a unique opportunity for the community to unite, enjoy, and maybe even experience something memorable together."

Addressing the issue of societal stigma, D'Souza noted: "There is sometimes a stigma associated with some families who have members with the disability, so having events and days like this is showing the community that people with Down syndrome are an equal part of our society, who may have similar dreams and aspirations. Hopefully, through more events like this, we can remove that stigma."

Garangao celebrations across Doha

By Joey Aguilar
Staff Reporter

The vibrant streets of Doha are set to come alive with Garangao celebrations from today (Friday), offering families and children the opportunity to immerse themselves in an array of traditional activities. Running until March 24, the festivities promise a blend of cultural experiences and joyous revelry. Kicking off the celebrations is the Ramadan Nights at Al Shaqab's Longines Indoor Arena, which began yesterday and will continue until Sunday. Running from 8pm to 12 midnight, the event invites people to bring along friends and family. According to Qatar Museums, the Garangao night at Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art's outdoor space today (March 22) will be a highlight for children. The event features an array of drop-in activities such as printmaking, storytelling, bag-making, and henna printing, all while indulging in traditional dishes that showcase Qatar's rich culture. Following this, a similar celebration will be held at the National Museum of Qatar tomorrow (March 23). The Fire Station: Artist in Residence will also host a Garangao activity on the same day, promising attendees a wide range of activities, performances, and delectable local cuisine. Doha Municipality is extending an invitation to the public to participate in a Garangao celebration at New Slatia Park tomorrow (March 23), further enhancing community engagement in the festivities. Popular locations across Qatar such

Garangao celebration at Mathaf today.

NMoQ to mark Garangao tomorrow (March 23).

as Msheireb Downtown Doha's Sahat Al Nakheel, Expo 2023 Doha at Al Bidda Park, Lusail Boulevard, and Old Doha Port will also play host to joyful Garangao gatherings. Major malls will also host special evenings planned for today (March 22) and Sunday. Visitors can expect

a series of activities, traditional games, and a variety of treats from 7 pm until midnight. In addition to Garangao, traditional games, including dama and carrom, are scheduled at Katara - the Cultural Village from March 26 to 28, promising further excitement for enthusiasts. Meanwhile, sports enthusiasts can gear up for the Ramadan Duathlon event at Lusail International Circuit, starting today (March 22) and running until March 29. Organised by the Qatari triathlon team and sponsored by Qatar Tourism, the event, features run and bike components, ensuring an exhilarating challenge. Workshops such as Arabic calligraphy are set to be held on March 28 and insightful lectures related to Ramadan by Farhat Naik and Sheikh Abdur Raheem McCarthy are scheduled at Souq Al Wakrah Hotel on March 26 and March 29, respectively, adding an educational dimension to the festive season.

Qatar Museums debuts vibrant spring programme

Qatar Creates, the year-round national cultural movement that curates, promotes, and celebrates the diversity of cultural activities in the country, recently launched its programme for showcasing art, culture, and creativity.

Working with partners in museums, film, fashion, hospitality, cultural heritage, performing arts, and the private sector in Qatar, the Qatar Creates platform amplifies the voice of Qatar's creative industries, directly connecting audiences to events.

Highlights of Qatar Creates February 2024 include Electric Idyll by Pipilotti Rist, Public Panel Talks, Al Journal by Liwan Studio and Labs, Open Day at Fire Station: Artist in Residence, Good Finds Market by Torba Market x Fire Station: Artist in Residence.

Qatar Museums (QM) opened Electric Idyll – the first survey exhibition dedicated to renowned contemporary Swiss artist Pipilotti Rist (b. 1962) in the Mena region – at the Fire Station: Artist in Residence in Doha on February 23. Designed as a single, comprehensive installation spanning the more than 650sq m exhibition space of the Fire Station's Garage Gallery, Electric Idyll presents a diverse collection of some of the artist's most celebrated works combined with new participatory pieces created specifically for this exhibition. The exhibition will remain on view through June 1.

The series of public panel talks under Qatar Creates Week activities at The National Museum of Qatar (NMoQ), features Art for Tomorrow talks, organised by the Democracy and Culture Foundation. Featuring renowned figures from the local and international arts scene, along with acclaimed art practitioners, industry experts and patrons, the conversations will highlight a variety of perspectives exploring the impact of art on culture. Speakers included Michael Govan, director of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, architect and urban planner, Stefano Boeri and author Kara Vander Weg.



Electric Idyll exhibition by renowned contemporary Swiss artist Pipilotti Rist on view at the Fire Station: Artist in Residence.

Liwan Design Studios and Labs launched the first printed edition of Al Journal – a captivating compilation of essays, articles, and visuals that delve into contemporary design themes across the Southwest Asian and North African region and beyond.

Qatar Creates opened the exhibition The Voyager is the Narrator: New York & Paris Residency Exhibition, housed in galleries 3 and 4 at Fire Station. On view to the public until April 20, the exhibition offers a captivating journey through the distinctive perspectives and creative expressions that have emerged from New York and Paris.

The participating artists from Paris are Ibrahim Albaker, Voyyyd, Fatima Ahmed, Lolwa Almeghaiseb and Maryam AlTajer, and the participating artists from New York are Almaha Nasser, Said Alkhulaifi, Zainab Alshibani, and Wadha Almesallam.

Fire Station: Artist in Residence partnered with Torba Market on the Good Finds Market, presenting a fresh lineup of vintage and second-hand stallholders, handmade ceramics, limited-edition art pieces, unique jewellery, craft and stationery, and food and drink.

Water solutions seminar highlights innovations for sustainable agriculture in Qatar

The Unesco Chair at the Center for Advanced Materials (CAM) at Qatar University (QU) recently hosted a panel discussion session on 'Water Solutions for Sustainable Agriculture in Qatar' at Expo 2023 Doha.

The event brought together leading experts, researchers, and stakeholders to address pressing challenges related to water scarcity and agricultural sustainability in Qatar. The aim was to address the critical challenges of water scarcity and sustainability in agriculture in Qatar.

Prof Syed Javaid Zaidi, Unesco Chair in Water Technology, chaired and moderated the seminar.



The distinguished speakers include Mubarak al-Nasr, CEO of Ras Abu Fontas Desalination Plant, Qatar Electricity and Water Company (Kahramaa); Dr Jenny Lawler, senior research director, Qatar Energy and Environmental Research Institute, Hamad Bin

Khalifa University; and Prof Sami al-Sayadi, director of the Sustainable Development Center, QU.

Al-Nasr provided an in-depth overview of Ras Abu Fontas's extensive experience in water desalination and treatment. He emphasised the company's pivotal role

in ensuring uninterrupted water supply during major international events, such as the FIFA World Cup and Asian Cup, highlighting their commitment to water quality and environmental sustainability.

Al-Nasr elaborated on the company's expansion projects, water

provision for agriculture, and the implementation of thermal power generation to reduce electricity consumption.

The seminar showcased groundbreaking initiatives and technologies aimed at addressing water scarcity, soil salinity, and climate change impacts on agriculture. Discussions revolved around water desalination, groundwater treatment, smart agriculture technologies, and soil management practices tailored to Qatar's unique environmental challenges.

Emphasising the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration, Prof Mariam al-Maadeed, vice-

president for Research and Graduate Studies at QU, highlighted successful partnerships between academia, industry, and government entities. These collaborations are crucial for fostering innovation, implementing scalable solutions, and ensuring long-term sustainability in Qatar's agricultural sector, she noted.

Dr Mohamed Irshidat, director of CAM at QU, highlighted the importance of aligning research with Qatar's sustainability objectives. "Our research initiatives are key to fostering sustainable water solutions for agriculture that support the Qatar National Vision 2030," he commented.