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Gunmen kill 40 in attack at Moscow concert hall

Forty people were killed in a shooting at the Crocus City Hall concert centre near Moscow yesterday, state news agency TASS reported, citing information from Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB). More than 100 people had been injured in the same incident, TASS reported. Five gunmen dressed in camouflage clothing opened fire with automatic weapons at people at the concert. Russian media reported a second blast at the venue and there were reports that some of the gunmen had barricaded themselves somewhere in the building. It was not immediately clear who the gunmen were. (Reuters)

Qatar slams shooting

Qatar has expressed its strong condemnation of the shooting incident that took place in a concert hall near Moscow, leaving dozens killed and injured. In a statement yesterday, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs renewed Qatar's firm position on rejecting violence and terrorism, regardless of the motives and reasons. The ministry expressed Qatar's condolences to the families of the victims and the government and people of Russia. (QNA)

Catherine, Princess of Wales, has cancer

Catherine, Princess of Wales, yesterday announced that she has cancer and is in the early stages of chemotherapy, asking for "time, space and privacy" as she completes her treatment. Kate, as she is widely known, said the discovery of cancer, after successful abdominal surgery in January, was "a huge shock" but she was "well and getting stronger every day". The disclosure came after royal officials said in early February that King Charles III was being treated for cancer. Like Charles, the princess, whose husband Prince William is heir to the throne, did not disclose the exact nature of the cancer. (AFP) Page 9



Allah accepts only the repentance of those who do evil in ignorance and foolishness and repent soon afterwards: it is they whom Allah will forgive and Allah is Ever All-Knower, All-Wise. (Qur'an 4:17)

Prayer times

Fajr...4:18; Zuhr...11:41; Asr...3:08; Maghrib...5:49; Isha...7:19

Fasting times

Iftar today5:49pm
Imsak tomorrow.....4:07am



Katara general manager Prof Dr Khalid bin Ibrahim al-Sulaiti receiving the classification certificate and shield from Alecco director general Dr Mohamed Ould Ammar in Tunis.

Katara is Cultural Heritage City of Arabian Horses

The Arab Organisation for Education, Culture, and Science (Alecco) announced that Katara - the Cultural Village has been selected as the Cultural Heritage City of the Arabian Horses. The honour is in recognition of Katara's sustained efforts in promoting and preserving the cultural heritage related to the Arabian horses.

This announcement was made during a ceremony at the organisation's headquarters in Tunis, the capital of Tunisia. Katara general manager Prof Dr Khalid bin Ibrahim al-Sulaiti received the classification certificate and shield from Alecco director general Dr Mohamed Ould Ammar, in the presence of Qatar's deputy ambassador to Tunisia Fahd bin Khalifa al-Attiyah and a number of other dignitaries.

Prof Dr al-Sulaiti said the achievement reflects the unique excellence that Katara has achieved in hosting major cultural and heritage festivals and championship in the field of horses and equestrianism, embodying the close con-

nection of Arabs with horses and reflect their continuous efforts to preserve the cultural heritage of the Arabian horses and pass it on to the future generations.

He pointed out that Katara was the first station of the Arabian horses tour, with the slogan "Agreed Beauty," and later launched at various Arab and Western capitals. He highlighted Katara's initiatives, including hosting the Katara International Arabian Horse Festival for the years 2021, 2022, 2023, and 2024, as well as hosting the World Championship for Original Arabian Horse Beauty (2023-2024).

He also pointed out Katara's establishment of the Katara Biodiversity Genome Programme (Arabian Horses) and a centre for Arabian horse breeds, as well as publications on Arabian horses in various languages and Al Jazeera magazine for Arabian Horses. Besides, Katara organises a wide range of events, workshops, and art exhibitions related to the beauty of Arabian horses, featuring local and international artists.

Russia, China veto US bid on Gaza 'ceasefire' at UN

AFP UN, US

Russia and China yesterday vetoed a US-led draft resolution at the Security Council on a ceasefire in Gaza, joining Arab countries in saying it did not pressure Israel, with Moscow accusing Washington of a "hypocritical spectacle."

The US, Israel's main ally which has vetoed previous ceasefire calls, put forward the resolution in which the Security Council would have supported "the imperative of an immediate and sustained ceasefire" and for the first time condemned the October 7 attack by Hamas.

Veto-wielding Russia and China were joined in opposing the resolution by Algeria, the current Arab nation on the Security Council, which co-sponsored a new, tougher resolution that is expected to come to a vote today and risks a US veto.

Russia's ambassador, Vasily Nebenzia, said that the US text would have done nothing to rein in Israel and mocked Washington for speaking of a ceasefire after "Gaza has been virtually wiped off the face of

the Earth." "We have observed a typical hypocritical spectacle," he said.

Nebenzia said the US draft was intended to "play to voters and throw them a bone in the form of some kind of a mention of a ceasefire in Gaza." The resolution will "ensure the impunity of Israel, whose crimes are not even assessed in the draft."

The draft had stopped short of explicitly demanding that Israel immediately end its campaign in Gaza. In the delicate language of Security Council resolutions, the draft "determines" the "imperative" of an "immediate and sustained" ceasefire.

It linked a ceasefire to ongoing talks, led by Qatar with support from the US and Egypt, to halt fighting in return for Hamas releasing hostages.

China's representative, Zhang Jun, said the draft "dodged the most central issue, that of a ceasefire" through its "ambiguous" language.

"Nor does it even provide an answer to the question of realising a ceasefire in the short term," he said.

On a visit to Israel, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Russia and China "cynically vetoed" a resolution that had "strong support." "I think we were trying to show the international community a sense of urgency about getting a ceasefire," Blinken told reporters.

Russia, China and Algeria said that a resolution should stop Israel from a threatened offensive in the city of Rafah, where more than 1mn Palestinians have sheltered.

Hamas welcomes position of China, Russia

Hamas voiced "appreciation" yesterday after Russia and China vetoed a US-led draft resolution on a Gaza ceasefire at the UN Security Council.

"We express our appreciation for the position of Russia, China and Algeria who rejected the biased American resolution of aggression against our people," the Palestinian group said in a statement. Hamas said the draft contained "misleading wording that is complicit" with Israel and "grants it cover and legitimacy to commit a genocidal war against the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip." (AFP)

Blinken warns Israel of global isolation

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken warned Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu yesterday that Israel risked further global isolation if it went ahead with plans for a ground assault on the Palestinian city of Rafah in the Gaza Strip. Blinken met one-on-one with Netanyahu during a peace mission to the Middle East at a time of strain in relations over Israel's assault in Hamas-ruled Gaza. "We share Israel's goal of defeating Hamas... though, a major military ground operation in Rafah is not the

way to do it," Blinken told reporters in Tel Aviv. "It risks killing more civilians, it risks wreaking greater havoc with the provision of humanitarian assistance, it risks further isolating Israel around the world and jeopardising its long-term security and standing," Blinken added. Netanyahu said earlier that Israel would go it alone if Washington remained opposed to plans to push into Rafah against the territory's southern border fence, where more than a million Gazans have taken refuge in makeshift shelters. (Reuters)

Golden Spider Silk pioneers keen to collaborate with Qatar

By Joey Aguilar
Staff Reporter

Nicholas Godley and Simon Peers, the innovative minds behind the marvel of spider silk textiles, have expressed keen interest in partnering with a country like Qatar to pioneer the biomedical use of what they described as "the material of the future".

Speaking during a media tour of the 'Golden Spider Silk' exhibition at the Museum of Islamic Art on Tuesday, the duo disclosed their aims for possible future partnerships



Simon Peers (left) and Nicholas Godley at a media tour of the 'Golden Spider Silk' exhibition at MIA on Tuesday.

PICTURES: Thajudheen



The duo's efforts yielded four stunning textiles crafted solely from spiders' silk: an embroidered cape, a brocaded weave lamba, sheer taffeta, and a satin weave shawl.

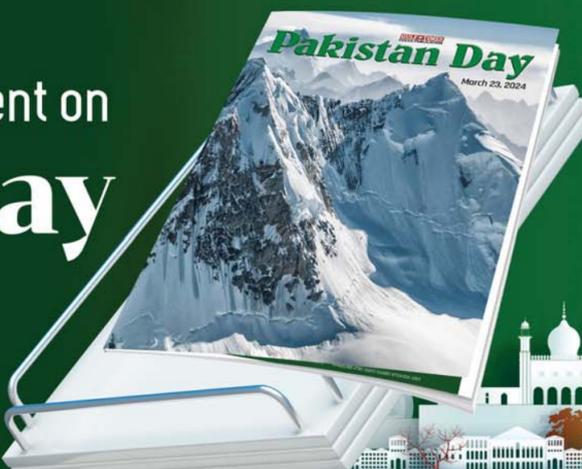
and highlighted Qatar's forward-looking approach towards biotechnology and medical science as a prime reason for their interest.

"If we commercialise this, we would want to do it in a place like Qatar, that is looking to the future and interested in biotechnology and medical science. This would be a wonderful project in Qatar, absolutely," Godley said.

"I am amazed how much Qatar has done, I got to know Qatar mostly, like everyone else, because of the World Cup, and coming here for the first time, I am amazed at how beautiful and how organised and environmentally conscious, everything is in Qatar. To Page 12

Today's **GULF TIMES** includes a 28-page supplement on **Pakistan Day**

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Official

Amir condolences with Saudi King Salman

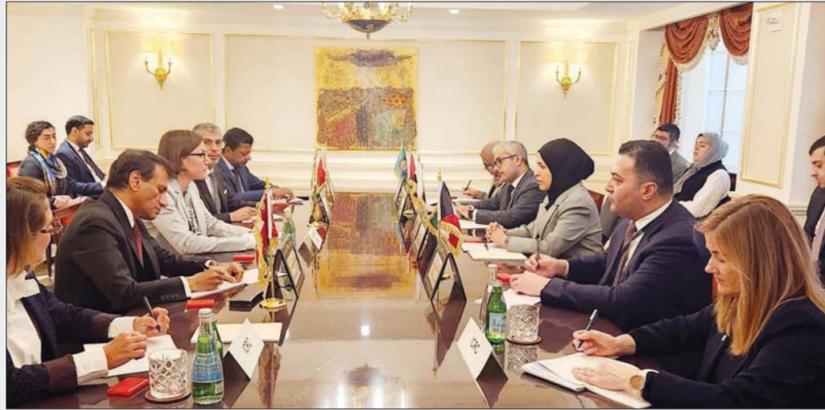
His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, His Highness the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani and HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani sent cables of condolence to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman bin Abdulaziz al-Saud of the sisterly Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, on the death of Prince Khalid bin Faisal bin Abdullah al-Abdulrahman al-Saud. (QNA)

Qatar condemns blast in Afghanistan

Qatar has expressed its strong condemnation of the bombing that occurred in Kandahar Province, southern Afghanistan, which caused deaths and injuries. In a statement yesterday, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs reiterated Qatar's firm position of rejecting violence and terrorism, regardless of the motives and reasons. The ministry expressed Qatar's condolences to the families of the victims and to the government and people of Afghanistan, and its wishes for a speedy recovery for the injured. (QNA)

Qatar chairs meeting of GCC permanent representatives to UN with ICRC president

Within the framework of Qatar's presidency of the 44th session of the Supreme Council of the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC), HE the Permanent Representative of Qatar to the UN Sheikh Alya Ahmed bin Saif al-Thani, held a meeting that brought together the Permanent Representatives of the GCC countries to the UN and President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Mirjana Spoljaric Egger. During the meeting, which was held at the headquarters of the permanent delegation in New York, the ICRC president provided a detailed count on the important role of the committee in delivering humanitarian aid to civilians in the Gaza Strip and Sudan, in response to the deteriorating humanitarian conditions in the



two regions. For her part, HE Sheikh Alya affirmed that the GCC countries welcomed the joint work and co-ordination with the ICRC to expand the scope of humanitarian aid and facilitate its delivery to civilians in need, especially in light of the recent statements of the UN secretary-general about the inevitability of famine in northern Gaza.

The virtues of charity

Charity has a great significance in Islam; it is one of the clearest indications and most truthful signs of the sincerity of one's faith, as souls were created to love money and strive to save it. If someone spends his money and contradicts his instinct, then this is a proof that he has a good faith and a sound belief.

Regarding this, the Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam (may Allah exalt his mention), said: "...and charity is a proof"; which means it is proof of sound faith - that is, if he intends it for the sake of Allah, The Almighty, and not for showing off or for enhancing one's reputation.

This is why many texts show the virtues of charity and spending for the sake of Allah, The Almighty, and urge the Muslim to give charity, seeking the reward from Allah, The Almighty.

One of the specific characteristics of the righteous servants of Allah, The Almighty, is spending on the poor and the needy; Allah, The Almighty, Says what means: {Indeed, they were before that doers of good. They used to sleep but little of the night. And in the hours before dawn they would ask forgiveness. And from their properties was [given] the right of the [needy] petitioner and the deprived.} [Qur'an 51:16-19]

Allah, The Exalted, has promised - and He is the Generous who

does not break His promise - to compensate those who spend for His Sake. Allah Says what means: {Say, "Indeed, my Lord extends provision for whom He wills of His servants and restricts [it] for him. But whatever thing you spend [in His cause] - He will compensate it; and He is the best of providers"} [Qur'an 34:39]

Allah also promised to multiply their rewards many times; Allah, The Almighty, Says What means: {Who is it that would loan Allah a goodly loan so He may multiply it for him many times over? And it is Allah who withholds and grants abundance, and to Him you will be returned.} [Qur'an 2:245]

Giving money is one of the types of Jihad striving in the cause of Allah, The Almighty; rather, Jihad with one's own money precedes Jihad with one's own self in all the verses that mentioned Jihad except in one place in the Qur'an.

Also, the Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "Fight the polytheists with your wealth, yourselves, and your tongues." [Abu Daawood]

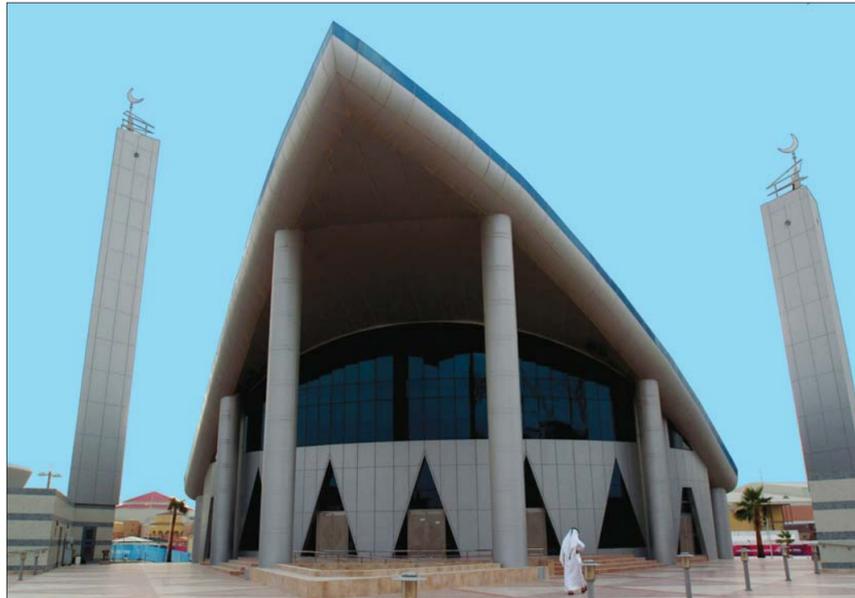
There are many Ahadith narrations in the Prophetic Sunnah which encourage giving charity and clarify that its reward is a comfort to the eye of the believers and a delight to their hearts. These Ahadith mention that charity is one of the best acts of worship that is beloved to Allah, The Almighty.

Ibn 'Umar, may Allah be pleased with him, narrated that the Messenger of Allah, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "The most beloved acts of worship to Allah are: happiness that you bring to a believer's heart, relieving his distress, paying off his debt or driving away his hunger." [Al-Bayhaqi] [Al-Albaani: Hasan]

Charity elevates its giver to the highest rank; the Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "This worldly life is for four categories of people: a man to whom Allah has given wealth and knowledge, so he fears his Lord, maintains ties of kinship with this money, and he knows the rights of Allah regarding it, this one is truly in the best rank..." [At-Tirmithi]

Charity protects its giver from calamities and misfortunes, and saves him from distress and hardship; the Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "Performing good deeds protects from bad ends and calamities, and those who act righteously in this world will be the good people in the Hereafter." [Al-Haakim] [Al-Albaani: Saheeh]

Consider this Hadith which signifies the multiplied reward of charity: The Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "No one gives charity out of his honest earning - and Allah accepts only what is from lawful earning - but The Most Merciful accepts it with His right hand even if it is only a



date, and then fosters it as one of you fosters a colt or a young she-camel, till it becomes like a mountain or even greater." [Muslim]

Charity extinguishes sins, and expiates evil deeds; the Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "Charity extinguishes sin as water extinguishes fire." [At-Tirmithi]

It is one of the greatest causes for attaining blessings in money, the increase of provision, and compensation from Allah, The Almighty, with what is best. The Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "Allah The Almighty

Says, 'O son of Adam, spend and I will spend on you.' [Muslim]

It is also protection from the punishment of Allah; the Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "Protect yourselves from the Fire, by giving in charity even half a date." [Al-Bukhari]

Spending in charity is an indication of the sincerity of one's faith, strength of certitude, and having good expectations from the Lord of the worlds. Besides, it has many other virtues which make the believer look forward to the reward of Allah, The Almighty, and over-

look the whispers of the devil who frightens him with poverty, and beautifies for him stinginess and miserliness. Allah, The Almighty, Says what means: {Satan threatens you with poverty and orders you to immorality, while Allah promises you forgiveness from Him and bounty. And Allah is all-Encompassing and Knowing} [Qur'an 2:268] We ask Allah, The Almighty, to enable us to spend for His Sake, and to protect us from being stingy, for He is able to do all things.

Article source: <http://www.is-lamweb.net/emainpage/>

Qatar fully committed to implementing disaster risk reduction policies: official

QNA
Doha

HE the Director of Public Security, the Vice-Chairperson of the Supreme Council for Civil Defence Maj Gen Abdullah Mohamed al-Suwaidi affirmed Qatar's commitment to implementing disaster risk reduction policies and its endeavour to enhance international co-operation in this field.

He also stressed the state's keenness to continue working to achieve the goals and objectives

of the Sendai Framework and the Arab Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction 2030, and to continue promoting and developing Arab policies in this context.

He made these remarks on the occasion of the Arab Day for Disaster Risk Reduction, which falls on March 21 of each year, and which is celebrated this year under the theme 'Resilient Arab Infrastructure Resistant to Disasters'. Qatar pays special attention to developing societies capable of resilience and flexibility and reducing disaster risks, HE al-Suwaidi said noting the consist-

ency of the Qatar National Vision 2030 with its leading role in implementing its commitments in the 2030 Sustainable Development Plan and implementing disaster risk reduction policies, which resulted in significant progress in implementing sustainable development work.

He added that Qatar has worked to modernise its organisational structures to manage national risks, and has taken a number of measures, including the establishment of the Supreme Council for Civil Defence, which works to build a culture of

preparedness and investment in the areas of disaster risk reduction, increase the states ability to manage disaster recovery, and provide greater flexibility and resilience to face disasters.

He also pointed out that the state has established a general framework for disaster management, conducted a comprehensive assessment of national risks, prepared a register for vital infrastructure, and strengthened national action and joint efforts among all concerned parties in the state to implement work strategies to reduce disaster

risks. He stressed Qatar's keen attention to building capacities in the field of disaster management under the supervision of the Supreme Council for Civil Defence, addressing issues of environmental importance, ensuring a flexible and resilient infrastructure, and adopting environmentally friendly solutions through diversifying energy sources and investing in solar energy.

HE Maj Gen al-Suwaidi praised the Arab efforts that seek to enhance joint action to face disaster risks and reduce their



HE Maj Gen Abdullah Mohamed al-Suwaidi

effects under the umbrella of the Arab League, lauding the keenness to implement national programmes, exchanging experiences, and cooperating with regional and international organisations.

QU's Ramadan campaign hosts scholarly lecture

Within Qatar University (QU)'s Ramadan campaign (Our Ramadan is light and knowledge), the Public Relations and Communications Administration and the Mishkat Qur'an Club organised a lecture titled 'Qur'anic Arts in Ramadan Nights' presented by Sheikh Dr Mohamed al-Barrak.

A large number of QU faculty members, students, and graduates attended the lecture, which addressed insights into the profound impact of the Qur'an on the human soul and daily life. The scholar discussed the importance of the Qur'an in daily lives, the reasons for the revelation of some verses, and the importance of benefiting from Qur'anic stories.

Sheikh al-Barrak encouraged students to contemplate the meanings of the Qur'an and recite it during the blessed month of Ramadan. He said: "I was honoured to receive an invitation from the



Some of the attendees at the event are seen with Sheikh Dr Mohamed al-Barrak and QU officials.

Public Relations and Communications Administration at QU and the Mishkat Quran Club to present this lecture, which was done in collaboration with Abdullah Darwish Fahroo Mosque and in coordination with the Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs.

"These activities are related to the Qur'an and Islamic religious occasions such as the blessed month of Ramadan, and they en-

courage students to engage with the Book of Allah and make the best use of this month. Such activities are very distinguished, and the initiative for such popular activities is commendable, whether at the university level or at the student club level."

In a statement on the occasion, Eatidal al-Qatami, director of Public Relations and Communications at QU, said: "The lecture

'Qur'anic Arts in Ramadan Nights', presented by Sheikh al-Barrak, was a unique opportunity to explore the aesthetics of the Qur'an and its impact on our spiritual and practical lives."

Abdullah al-Subaie, president of the Mishkat Quran Club, commented, "Mishkat Club always seeks to connect QU affiliates with the Qur'an, and it seeks to achieve this vision by holding various



Dr Ibrahim al-Ansari honouring Sheikh Dr Mohamed al-Barrak (right).

events and activities throughout the academic year. For the blessed month of Ramadan, it has a special significance and status in the life of every Muslim, as it is the station of spiritual provision for the rest of the year. It is where hearts draw from its Qur'anic breaths, its spir-

itual atmosphere, and its refreshing and beautiful breezes."

At the end of the lecture, Dr Ibrahim al-Ansari, dean of the College of Sharia and Islamic Studies at QU, honoured Sheikh al-Barrak and urged students to contemplate the meanings of the Qur'an.

*In the name of God, the most gracious, the most merciful
"Oh reassured soul, return to your Lord, satisfied and pleasing,
so enter among My servants and enter My Paradise"*

**The Executive Manager, Editor-in-Chief,
and all employees of the**

GULF TIMES



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Gulf Publishing and Printing Company

extend their sincere condolences and
heart-felt sympathy to

**HE ABDULLAH BIN
KHALIFA AL-ATTIYAH**

Chairman of the Board of Directors

on the sad demise of his granddaughter

**ALIA BINT NASSER BIN ABDULLAH
BIN KHALIFA AL-ATTIYAH**

May God bless the deceased with His vast
mercy, make her dwell in His spacious
Paradise, and grant her family and loved
ones patience and solace.

**"Truly! To Allah we belong and truly,
to Him we shall return."**



QU's IPE Office promotes teamwork in healthcare

With 381 students and 43 facilitators from disciplines including Nursing, Health Sciences, Medicine, Dental Medicine and Pharmacy, the event was a melting pot of diverse perspectives

Qatar University's (QU) Health sector, through its Interprofessional Education (IPE) Office, hosted an event to foster effective teamwork and communication within the healthcare realm.

With 381 students and 43 facilitators from disciplines including Nursing, Health Sciences, Medicine, Dental Medicine and Pharmacy, the event was a melting pot of diverse perspectives. The contributors from the University of Calgary in Qatar added further richness to the discussions, emphasising the global relevance of interprofessional collaboration. The IPE activity was designed to underscore the importance of team communication and decision-making within any health setting.

In his introduction, the lead facilitator, Dr Alaa Daud (assistant dean for Student Affairs at QU's College of Dental Medicine) presented a film clip narrating a real-life scenario in an operating room, illustrating how the ab-



sence of proper communication, leadership and assertiveness can precipitate faulty decisions with potentially serious and in the field of health, fatal consequences.

Subsequently, students gathered in their interprofessional groups to engage in a case-based

discussion focused on instances of faulty communication within health teams. They proposed suggestions aimed at ensuring clear and accurate communication among health team members under all circumstances.

Reflecting on her experience as

a facilitator in this activity, Prof Fadwa Naji al-Halaiga from the College of Nursing at QU said that empowering the students to be accountable and responsible team members is an important outcome of IPE.

Marian Kapiri, research analyst

and scientific writer at QU Health, said: "As a facilitator for this IPE activity, I witnessed the power of effective communication and teamwork in shaping future health professionals. Addressing misconceptions, fostering leadership and promoting assertiveness are pivotal

for students navigating the complex health services landscape."

Zainab AlMuhsin, a student at the College of Pharmacy at QU, said that participating in IPE has been a crucial aspect of her academic journey. Ayatallah Elkholy, a nursing student at the University of Calgary in Qatar, recalled that her experience with IPE events has been immensely impactful, contributing significantly to each student's development in unique and positive ways.



Qget holds Iftar gathering



Members of the Government Engineering College Thrissur Alumni, Qatar chapter (Qget) convened for an Iftar event titled 'Punyavilavu 2024'.

The event at MES Indian School was attended by about 250 people, comprising members and their families.

Qget president Tomy Varkey welcomed the gathering. Firoz P T delivered a Ramadan message, underscoring the importance of perseverance and maintaining spiritual and physical purity.

Senior members Mathew Francis, Saleem, Rajan C K, John E J, Sherif, Abdul Aziz, Joy, P K

The event at MES Indian School was attended by about 250 people, comprising members and their families

Mohamed and general secretary Gopu Rajasekhar spoke. Event co-ordinator Ilyas Saleh proposed a vote of thanks.

The attendees also had the op-

portunity to delve into the heart of community farming at the school, through the "Grow Your Green Food (GYGF)" initiative spearheaded by Qget.



WMC-Qatar organises Iftar meet



The World Malayalee Council (WMC) - Qatar Province organised an Iftar for its members, families and friends to mark the holy month of Ramadan. The event at the Indian Cultural Centre (ICC) had Indian ambassador Vipul, as the chief guest. M I Fareed, a guest, shared insights on the significance of Ramadan, emphasising its values of self-discipline, charity and spirituality. Several prominent community leaders and office bearers of the apex bodies under Indian embassy participated. WMC-Qatar Province chairman V S Narayanan, president Suresh Kariyad, vice-president Sam Kuruvila, general secretary Kajal, vice-chairmen Ziad Usman, Jeby K John, and treasurer John Gilbert co-ordinated the event.

Amuaaq hosts community Iftar



The Aligarh Muslim University Alumni Association Qatar (Amuaaq), an associate organisation of the Indian Community Benevolent Forum (ICBF), organised its traditional community Iftar at the Box Park in Old Doha Port.

Indian embassy first secretary Sachin Dinkar Shankpal was the chief guest and ICBF's former president Nilangshu Dey, the guest of honour. ICBF vice-president Deepak Shetty, Bazm e Sadaf chairman Shahabuddin Ahmad, Jharkhand Association president Tanveer Ahmad and Maulana Niyyaz Falahi, Janab Rahmatullah Asari Sahab and Shabbir Ahmad were special guests.

Ghazala Yasmeen conducted the Ramadan Quiz activity supported by other ladies. Children

participated in Ramadan-themed card and lantern decorating activities. They were provided with goody bags.

"We should take the momentum forward and work for the purity of soul and enhancement of Taqwa"

Maulana Fayyaz Falahi spoke about the importance of the holy month of Ramadan and Zakat. He mentioned that Ramadan is a wonderful opportunity to repent for sins and wrongdoings. "We should take the momentum forward and work for the purity of soul and enhancement of Taqwa!"

The programme was co-ordinated by Amuaaq officials M Faisal Naseem, Mamnoon Bangash, Dr Ashna Nusrat, Gazala Yasmin,

Saima Rafat, M Farman Khan, Farrukh Farooqi, Dr Mohamed Nayeem, Abad Khan, Imaduddin Ahmad, Dr Imran Mumtaz, Dr Sufia and Dr Intekhab Alam.

Advisory and Board members Tanveer Ahmad, Sanjeev Kumar Sharma, Syed Shahabuddin, Pramod Kumar, Mohamed Yawer Hussain, Mansoor Alam, Jarrar Ahmad, Waqar Ahmad, Dr Imtiyaz Salim, Dr Mosharrif Shamim, Dr Sikandar, Dr Rizwan, Dr Mazhar Salim, Majid Ali, Moamin Alvi, Mohd Irfan, Syed Shahabuddin, Mansoor Alam, Danish Ali Khan, Omar Kafil, Afsar, Irfan Ansari, Momin Alvi, Anish, Yusuf, Hashim, Shafiqat Nabi, Rashid Chishti and many more community representatives graced the occasion. Amuaaq president Dr Nadeem Zafar Jilani and chairman Jawed Ahmad spoke.





Podar Pearl School organises KG Graduation Day



Podar Pearl School held its Graduation Day for the Kindergarten students who graduated to the Primary school. The event themed around 'Community Helpers,' and honoured the vital roles various professionals play in society. "It was indeed a memorable and spectacular event that celebrated the achievements of young learners while instilling in them the value of service and contribution to society," a statement said. President Sam Mathew, Board of Directors and the principal felicitated the students with graduation certificates.



MES holds Ramadan quiz competition



To enable students to be aware of the fundamental knowledge of Islamic values and the holy month of Ramadan, the Qur'an, and the life of the Holy Prophet (PBUH), the Department of Urdu, Arabic and Islamic Studies at MES Indian School organised an intra-school quiz competition for juniors and seniors.

The following are the winners.

In Seniors section, Aalyah Nabeel, Hafza Kazi Asma, Mohamed Arif, Tahira Tarique, Saifana Fathima, Dilfa Rahim, Hana Fathima and Alisha Ajmal bagged the first position. Ahmad Faisal, Abdul Rahman and Huzaifa Mohamed Nazim secured the second position. Mohamed Patel, Abdul Hadi, Abdul Aziz and Siddiq Ahmed won third place.

In the Juniors section, Mo-

hamed Ammar Mujeeb, Waseem Abdul Lateef and Mohamed Sajjad Ibnu Jaffere bagged the first position. Fudail Ahmed Shaik, Mohamed Umair Mujeeb and Nasih Hassan Jouhar secured the second position, while Aaisha Fathima Basheer, Ka-deeja Neha and Afizah bagged the third place. Principal Dr Hameeda Kader has congratulated the winners.

NIS Kindergarten hosts graduation day



Noble International School (NIS) Kindergarten hosted its 17th graduation day ceremony at Al Wukair campus. Chairman Hussain Mohamed U, general secretary Basheer K P, treasurer Showkath Ali Taj, secretary Mashood V C, transport director Moideen R S, principal Shibu Abdul Rasheed, vice-principals, heads of sections, parents and teachers were present. The tiny tots performed dances. Kindergarten section head Asma Roshan proposed a vote of thanks.



PISQ students participate in activities at Expo 2023 Doha



A group of over 100 students from Grade 5, along with teachers and the environmental manager from Pakistan International School Qatar (PISQ) participated in the flower plantation and colouring activities at Expo 2023 Doha, fostering awareness about sustainable environment while promoting creative expression.

Picpa launches 'Biggest Loser' fitness programme

The programme promotes health awareness and fitness across the accountancy profession in Qatar, running until June 2024.

Laboratory tests and work-out



sessions would be held to ensure the health status and safety of participants.

Only five out of 20 registrants qualified in the fitness programme based on the as-

essment done by partners Kathryn Fajardo, Marivel Pagoyanan, Anneth Lumanao, Alfredo

Lumanao and Jeremy Santiago. They will be assisted and guided on their fitness journey

by fitness mentors Jefferson Lacson, Lyn Cabiggat, Angeli Molina and Rhea Boribor.



Expression of support for Palestinians in Jordan, Yemen



Demonstrators carry flags and banners during a protest in support of Palestinians in Gaza, amid the ongoing conflict between Israel and the Palestinian group Hamas, in Amman, Jordan, yesterday. **Right:** Yemenis lift placards and flags of Palestine as they march in the Houthi-run capital Sanaa, yesterday, in support of Palestinians amid the ongoing conflict.



Gaza cancer patients fear Israel move to return them to conflict zone

AFP
Jerusalem

In a small hotel near the Augusta Victoria Hospital in Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem, where she received radiation therapy for breast cancer, Palestinian Rim Abu Obeida waits anxiously.

She is among a group of Palestinian patients living in limbo while a top Israeli court weighs whether they can be sent back to war-torn Gaza now that their treatment is completed.

Like dozens of Gazans before the Israel-Hamas war erupted, she was granted permission to leave the territory for care because hospitals in the Gaza Strip did not have the necessary equipment.

"This week, we were suddenly told we had to return to Gaza. This is sending us to hell, to death!" Abu Obeida said.

If she is forced to leave she won't have much to return to - her house in southern Gaza's Khan Yunis has been destroyed in Israeli's offensive against Hamas.

The roughly 20 patients from Gaza, most of them battling cancer, have been receiving treatment in Tel Aviv and east Jerusalem for the past six months.

Cogat, the Israeli defence ministry body that governs civilian affairs in the occupied Palestinian territories, said this week that because the patients "don't need any continued medical treatment they are being returned to the Gaza Strip."

But at the last minute, the Israeli Supreme Court, responding to a petition by the NGO Physicians for Human Rights, suspended Cogat's order.

The court is expected to deliver a ruling in the case, though the timeline is unclear. The government has until April 21 to file its arguments.

In the next room along from Abu Obeida, Manal Abu Shaaban was busy stashing food into her bags.

"I have rice, sugar, all the things they are deprived of there. I hope they won't stop me from bringing them in," she said.

Abu Shaaban, a breast cancer patient like Abu Obeida, said she was not opposed to returning, but she knew the security situa-



Palestinians Rim Abu Obeida (left) and Manal Abu Shaaban from the Gaza Strip sit on a bench in a small hotel near the Augusta Victoria Hospital in east Jerusalem, where they received radiation therapy, yesterday.

tion meant she would be unable to reach her home in Gaza City, in the besieged territory's north.

"I want to go back. But to my home, in my house! Not in Rafah, in the south, where they want us to go, I don't know anyone there," she said.

Large swathes of the north have been flattened by Israeli bombardment and a UN-backed assessment said the area faces famine by May unless substantially more aid reaches it.

Meanwhile, in Gaza's south up to 1.5mn displaced Palestinians are crammed into Rafah and live under the threat of a full-scale Israeli ground offensive.

Asked about the fate of the patients who face being returned to Gaza, Augusta Victoria Hospital director Fadi Mizyed paused for a few seconds. "I don't know. They will go back in a war zone, they will be at risk, they will be living in catastrophic conditions," he said.

"The situation in Gaza is beyond description, with no guaranteed healthcare services that can do what is needed for any cancer patients."

"We said we don't think it's the right thing to do but at the end of the day it's not our call," he added.

The war in Gaza was triggered by Hamas' surprise October first week storming of southern Israel.

Israel's retaliatory campaign to destroy Hamas has killed at least 32,070 people in Gaza, mostly women and children, according to the health ministry in the Hamas-run territory.

While fighting rages, Mizyed

said, the patients facing a possible return to Gaza are conflicted.

"On one hand they want to go back to see their families and to be closer to their families, even if the conditions are unthinkable," he said.

On the other, they know that to go back is to risk death "not only from the cancer but from the war as well".

According to the United Nations, fewer than one-third of hospitals in Gaza are even partially functioning.

Hospitals have been frequent targets of the Israeli military, which accuses Hamas of using them as command centres.

Ahmad Said, a 60-year-old patient also treated at Augusta Victoria, which was set up to serve Palestinians, previously lived near Al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza City, the territory's largest.

Witnesses this week reported air strikes and tanks near the sprawling medical complex crowded with displaced people - the latest instance of Israeli operations in the area.

Israeli troops previously raided Al-Shifa in November, sparking international outcry.

Said said his house, like so many others, had been destroyed, and that some of his relatives were living in tents in Rafah.

If forced to leave east Jerusalem, he would like to join his daughter in Canada.

He is adamant that he has no desire to go back to Gaza. "Why would you want to transfer us to a dangerous place?" he asked.

GCC chief stresses need to end racial discrimination against Palestinians

The Secretary-General of the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC), Jassem Mohamed Albudaiwi emphasised the necessity for the international community to take the necessary measures to end the suffering of the Palestinian people from the afflictions of Israeli racial discrimination, committed on a daily basis against the Palestinian people.

The statement was made on the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, observed on March 21 each year.

The GCC Secretary-General referred to the tragic situation in the Gaza Strip and the persecution, discrimination, and racial segregation suffered by the Palestinian people, which is based on dominance, imposition of restrictions, deprivation, differentiation, and serious violations of human rights and international law by the

Israeli occupying forces. Albudaiwi affirmed the commitment of the GCC member states to the provisions of the Declaration of Human Rights of the Co-operation Council, which guarantees rights enshrined in their constitutions and national legislation.

He specifically referred to Article 2 of the Declaration, which states that "people are equal in human dignity, rights and freedoms, and they are equal before the law without discrimination based on origin, sex, religion, language, colour, or any other form of discrimination." He also stated that the leaders of the GCC countries believe in the dignity of human beings and respect for their rights, stressing their commitment to their protection as guaranteed by Islamic law, as well as the principles laid out in the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

"The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, which all the GCC member states have ratified, has also played a role in shaping the GCC countries' legislative and regulatory frameworks that are aimed at combating racial discrimination, hatred and prejudice, as well as promoting a culture of tolerance, coexistence, justice, and equality in their societies," Albudaiwi said.

He commended the role played by the GCC countries in the process of achieving lasting peace, which is primarily based on equality and non-discrimination. Additionally, he encouraged the international community to recognise the importance of eliminating all forms of discrimination and in taking strict measures to eliminate the causes, conditions that create racial discrimination worldwide. (QNA)

Finland to resume funding to UN Palestinian refugee agency

Finland will resume funding to the UN agency for Palestinian refugees UNRWA, Foreign Trade and Development Minister Ville Tavio announced yesterday, AFP reported from Helsinki. Finland suspended its yearly funding of 5mn euros in January, following Israel's allegations that 12 of the UN agency's 30,000 employees were involved in the Hamas storming of Israel in the first week of October. Some 15 countries including Britain, Germany, Japan and the US paused funding following the accusations. Australia, Canada and Sweden, which were among those states,

announced earlier this month they were resuming aid. "Improvement of UNRWA's risk management, meaning preventing misconduct and initiating close monitoring, provides us with sufficient guarantees at this point for resuming the support," Tavio said in a statement. Ten per cent of the Finnish funding will be allocated to risk management, the minister said. Israel's bombardment of Gaza since Hamas' fighters storming has killed almost 32,000 people, according to the health ministry in the Hamas-run territory. UNRWA is the largest aid organisation in Gaza.

TRAGEDY

Two students killed, 23 injured in Nigeria food stampede

At least two students died and 23 were hurt in a crush in central Nigeria yesterday as a huge crowd gathered for food handouts at a university, a spokesman said, AFP reported from Kano, Nigeria. Thousands of students at Nasarawa State University, Keffi, surged and broke through gates where the state government was distributing bags of rice. Nigeria has been grappling with soaring food prices since the government withdrew a petrol subsidy and floated the naira currency in a bid to shore up the economy. Inflation has reached a three-decade high of 31.7%, making basic items inaccessible for many Nigerians, most of whom live on less than \$2 a day.

CRIME

Steinhoff ex-CEO found dead

The former chief executive of South African multinational retailer Steinhoff had been notified of an arrest warrant against him shortly before he was found dead in what local media called a suicide, the elite Hawks police unit said yesterday, Reuters reported from Hermanus, South Africa. Warrants were issued for Markus Jooste, 63, and his former colleague Stephanus Grobler on Wednesday, the same day Jooste was handed a hefty fine for accounting fraud by the Financial Sector Conduct Authority (FSCA), the Hawks said. Jooste was found, reportedly with a gunshot wound, at Kwaaiwater, and later died on the way to the hospital. Local media said he had shot himself.

Egypt frees two Al Jazeera journalists

Reuters
Cairo

Egypt has freed the last two Al Jazeera journalists who remained in detention in the North African country, the Doha-based network said yesterday.

One of the journalists, Bahaa Eldin Ibrahim, had returned home after being freed, his wife Mona Gamal Eldin confirmed. The head of Egypt's journalism syndicate posted a photo on Facebook of the second journalist, Rabie el-Sheikh, at his home.

The journalists, both Egyptian, had been held in pre-trial detention for about four years.

The release of Ibrahim and Sheikh follows Egypt's freeing of Al Jazeera journalists Hisham Abdelaziz in May 2023, and Ahmed al-Nagdy in September 2022. Mona Gamal Eldin told Reuters that she learned of the decision to release her husband on Wednesday. Gamal Eldin, who had not seen her husband since December 2018 and had last spoken to him on the day of his arrest in February 2020, said the decision to free them was unexpected.

"I prayed for his release every day and never lost hope," she said.

Uganda's President Museveni promotes son to military chief

AFP
Kampala

Uganda's veteran leader, Yoweri Museveni, has appointed his son to head the country's defence forces, the East African nation's government said, capping a dizzying rise for Muhoozi Kainerugaba.

The announcement by the defence ministry late on Thursday followed years of speculation that Kainerugaba, whose social

media outbursts have sparked diplomatic uproars, was being groomed for the top job.

Although the 49-year-old general has in the past denied claims he intends to succeed his father - one of Africa's longest-serving leaders - he has enjoyed a rapid climb through Uganda's army ranks. In a now-deleted post on X last year, Kainerugaba said he intended to run for president in the 2026 elections.

He also appeared to take a dig at his father, writing: "How many



Muhoozi Kainerugaba

agree with me that our time has come? Enough of the old people ruling us. Dominating us. It's time for our generation to shine.

Retweet and like." Following a row in 2022 over a post by Kainerugaba threatening to invade Kenya, Museveni, 79, sought to rein in his wayward son by telling him to stay off social media when it comes to affairs of state.

Museveni, who apologised to Kenya over the outburst, has nevertheless defended his only son as a "very good general" and promoted him to that rank just days after the row erupted.

Thursday's announcement was part of a reshuffle within the gov-

ernment, with the former army chief General Wilson Mbasu Mbadi appointed to serve as the junior minister for trade.

Opposition politicians condemned the move to promote Kainerugaba. David Lewis Rubongoya, secretary-general of the National Unity Platform (NUP) party, called it "a sad day for our country".

Another opposition lawmaker, Ibrahim Ssemujju Nganda, accused Museveni of treating the country as "a personal enterprise of his family".

Philadelphia man released after 44 years in prison may face new trial

Reuters
Philadelphia

William Franklin, recently released after serving 44 years in prison when his murder conviction was overturned, could face another trial as Philadelphia prosecutors press forward with their case. The judge who freed him, however, seemed inclined to let Franklin to try to restart his life, suggesting Friday that she was open to loosening the rules on his home confinement and allow him to take a job at age 77.

Franklin's 1980 conviction, based on tainted testimony, was

overturned after the lone eyewitness against him recanted. His case dates to a high-crime era when police and prosecutors were so intent to sew up unsolved homicides that they coerced vulnerable witnesses to fabricate stories and frame innocent Black men.

Many such cases have been exposed by District Attorney Larry Krasner, a former defence attorney, since he was elected in Philadelphia in November 2017. Krasner's office has exonerated 43 wrongfully convicted prisoners - 38 of them Black, three Latino and two white. But Krasner's office has so far told the court it will seek a new trial for Franklin.

A spokesperson for the District Attorney's Office declined to comment. During a hearing Friday, Franklin requested permission to leave his home to go daily to a job he has been offered helping former inmates reintegrate into their communities. "I have no doubt that he would really be able to help a lot of people," Common Pleas Court Judge Tracy Brandeis-Roman said in court. But she put off a decision to give prosecutors more time to consider after Joseph Duffy, an assistant to District Attorney Krasner, said he had only received the request the night before.

"He has not been exonerated," Duffy said, noting his office has ap-

pealed Brandeis-Roman's order overturning the conviction. "He still faces charges of first-degree murder," Franklin's defence attorney, Joe Marrone, had said he hoped prosecutors would drop the case on Friday. During Friday's hearing Marrone said prosecutors had little evidence on which to base a new trial.

Before the hearing, Franklin greeted Reginald Haines, a former parole officer who would be his boss if he were allowed to work at a programme run by a group called Mothers in Charge. "I'm good, Reg," Franklin told him. "I just don't understand why they're fighting me. Everybody in the world sees that it's wrong." Philadelphia's criminal

justice system became known for "testilying," an insider's term made prominent by the Philadelphia Inquirer's investigative reporting in which police and prosecutors manipulated witnesses into framing the innocent, then leveraged their commissions of perjury or other crimes to force them to stand by their stories.

Franklin and his co-defendant Tillery were convicted of the 1976 poolroom shooting that killed Joseph Hollis and wounded John Pickens. Franklin said he had frequented the poolroom before but was not there at the time of the shooting. Three and a half years passed without an arrest until po-

lice picked up Franklin based on the statement of Emmanuel Claitt, who would later tell the trial court that he saw Tillery kill Hollis and Franklin wound Pickens.

But Claitt, who was in prison with several open cases against him when he first implicated Franklin and Tillery, told an investigator for Tillery in a 2016 videotaped statement that he lied at trial and was never at the poolroom.

"If right is right, right will prevail because the DA knows that they lied and they got me to lie," Claitt said on the video. "And I want to free my conscience. I can't live with myself knowing I did that."

Claitt died in 2020.

Hardline Republicans' hopes dashed as US Congress pushes funding bill forward

Reuters
Washington

US Representative Chip Roy, one of the most prominent hardline Republicans in Congress, pulls no punches when it comes to how frustrated he is about the \$1.2tn spending package that lawmakers are working to pass before midnight on Friday.

"Everyone that I know and trust about the border, about overall spending, see it as a complete and total failure and a capitulation by Republicans. And (Republican) leadership worked the deal, so it's on leadership," Roy told reporters. "Republicans should reject it," added the Texas Republican, vowing that he would not back the reelection campaigns of any fellow party member who votes for it.

Roy is part of a small band of hardliners in the Republican-controlled House of Representatives who sought the last 14 months in a bare-knuckle effort to push Congress further to the right, railing against the Democratic-majority Senate and many of their House Republican colleagues.

The House approved the legislation Friday on a 286-134 vote, with more support from Democrats than the majority party, sending it on to the Senate, which would also have to pass it for President Joe Biden to sign it into law. Passage of the \$1.2tn bill funding the government through Sept 30, without any major hardline policy concessions, marks their defeat - for now. Soon after Republicans



The US Capitol in Washington, DC. The US House of Representatives voted March 22 to approve a sprawling \$1.2tn package to fund the government, provoking an angry response from conservatives and kicking off a race against the clock in the Senate to ensure the lights stay on past a midnight deadline.

took narrow control of the House in January 2023, party hardliners led by members of the House Freedom Caucus began pushing to reset spending to pre-pandemic levels, stop the flow of migrants across the US-Mexico border and end diversity programmes in federal agencies, including the Pentagon.

Hardliners shuttered the House floor repeatedly and blocked Republican spending bills they disliked. Ultimately, some of their number ousted Republican House Speaker Mike Johnson's predecessor, Kevin McCarthy, after he moved a bipartisan stop-gap bill to avert a government shutdown.

But the bill on track to pass follows the broad outlines of a bipartisan spending deal worked out between McCarthy and Biden last May.

In an echo of McCarthy's ouster last year, the spending bill's House passage on Friday prompted hardline Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene to introduce a measure to oust Johnson. Greene, however, said she would not push for an immediate vote. "I filed a motion to vacate today. But it's more of a warning than a pink slip," she told reporters.

Hardliners last year also rejected a major bipartisan border bill that would have imposed new limits on immigration, after Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump voiced opposition to it. House passage of the spending bill provided another illustration of how their tactics undercut their party's narrow 219-213 majority by forcing Johnson to turn to Democrats to approve the legislation. The bill won the votes of 185 Democrats and 101 Republicans.

Did hardliners achieve any substantial successes during those months of infighting and chaos? "No," replied Representative Ken Buck, a hardline Republican who voted for McCarthy's ouster. "The border is the same, which was the major issue that people wanted policy changes on. And the spending levels are absurd."

House Republican leadership defended the bill as their best option in a divided government, where Democrats hold a Senate majority as well as the White



US Rep Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-GA) leaves the US Capitol Building after a vote on a funding bill that would avert a government shutdown in Washington, DC.

House. "Seventy percent of the bill is defence, including the largest pay raise our troops have had in decades," House Majority Leader Steve Scalise, the chamber's No. 2 Republican, said in response to hardline criticism.

"At a time when the world is on fire more than ever, we need to make sure that we're properly funding our nation's defence and supporting our troops, who deserve that pay raise," McCarthy's ouster by eight hardliners, including six Freedom Caucus members, paralysed the House for weeks in October until Republicans settled on Johnson as a replacement. In the end, the hardliners said that move hurt their cause.

"It really set us back, and these spending negotiations are indicative of that," said Representative Byron Donalds, one of roughly

three dozen Freedom Caucus members. Like Roy, he voted against McCarthy's ouster. Their Democratic colleagues agreed. "It clearly exposes the Republican caucus for being a very unstable majority, if you can even call it a majority," said Democratic Representative Gerry Connolly.

Hardliners insist their efforts have been fruitful, saying the current bill keeps nondefence spending flat, targets unspent Covid-19 funds, drains funds earmarked for the Internal Revenue Service and ends taxpayer funding for the main UN relief agency for Palestinians in Gaza.

"What happens now as the fight over fiscal 2024 spending comes to an end? 'Focus on 2025. We have to start trying to put the genie back in the bottle,'" said Donalds.

US appeals court directs probe of juror bias in Boston Marathon bomber's case

A federal appeals court directed a trial judge to assess whether two jurors in Boston Marathon bomber Dzhokhar Tsarnaev's 2015 trial were biased and should not have been seated, creating grounds potentially to overturn his death sentence.

The Boston-based 1st US Circuit Court of Appeals stopped short of granting Tsarnaev's latest bid to overturn his death sentence for his role in the 2013 attack that killed three people and wounded 260

others. But on a 2-1 vote, the panel concluded that a trial judge did not adequately investigate Tsarnaev's claims of juror bias. Tsarnaev had argued that two jurors at his trial lied about whether they discussed the case on social media before being seated. The US Supreme Court had not addressed that argument when it restored Tsarnaev's death sentence in March 2022, after the 1st Circuit set it aside in an earlier ruling in 2020, prompting a new round of arguments before the

appeals court. Lawyers for Tsarnaev, 30, said one juror was told by a friend on Facebook to "get on the jury" and send Tsarnaev "to jail where he will be taken care of," while the second juror retweeted a Twitter post that called Tsarnaev a "piece of garbage." US Circuit Judge William Kayatta, writing for the majority, said a trial judge's earlier investigation into Tsarnaev's plausible claims of juror bias "fell short of what was constitutionally required."

He said that conclusion on its own does not necessarily mean a new trial was needed to determine whether Tsarnaev deserved the death penalty or life in prison for his crimes, but did necessitate an inquiry into whether either juror should have been excused. "If and only if the district court's investigation reveals that either juror should have been stricken for cause on account of bias, Tsarnaev will be entitled to a new penalty-phase proceeding," Kayatta wrote.

Prosecutors and defence lawyers did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Tsarnaev and his older brother Tamerlan detonated two homemade pressure-cooker bombs near the Boston Marathon's finish line on April 15, 2013. Tamerlan Tsarnaev died four days later after a shootout with police. Jurors found Dzhokhar Tsarnaev guilty on all 30 counts he faced and said six warranted the death penalty, which was later imposed. - Reuters

Across US, homeless initiatives highlight a growing crisis

Reuters
Miami

US state and local governments pushed ahead this week with divergent strategies to deal with the country's homeless crisis, aiming either to raise more funds to address the issue or to empower authorities to rid public places of its visible signs.

In California, voters narrowly approved a ballot measure that prioritises funding for homeless services. In Chicago, voters appeared to reject a tax increase on property transfers worth more than \$1mm, spelling the defeat of a plan that may have raised \$100mm a year to benefit the city's burgeoning population of residents without stable housing.

In Florida, Governor Ron DeSantis instead advanced a get-tough policy, signing legislation on Wednesday that bans people from camping on city sidewalks, parks and other public places.

Likewise, Kentucky's legislature has pushed ahead with an anti-crime bill that includes a similar camping ban while also expanding the "stand your ground" rights of citizens to use force against trespassers.

The coast-to-coast activity re-

flects concerns that the problem of homelessness is getting worse. In many US cities and towns, it's commonplace to see destitute people living in the open, with tents pitched on city sidewalks or roaming the streets, pushing politicians to take action. More than 653,000 people experienced homelessness in the United States in 2023, a 12% increase over the previous year, according to a US Housing and Urban Development report.

Homeless advocates and policy experts say a permanent solution lies in finding more affordable housing. Crackdowns may satisfy the public's desire for government to do something about the problem, they say, but clearances are not a long-term solution. "It's unfortunate to see elected officials focus on the one thing that absolutely doesn't work, which is criminalisation," said Jesse Rabinowitz, campaign and communications director for the National Homelessness Law Center.

"Some cities in some states have put in a significant amount of funding, but we're trying to make up for 40-plus years of underfunded housing programs. That's not going to happen overnight."

DeSantis said his state was taking a different approach than California, where the state has spent

more than \$20bn on housing and homelessness programmes since the 2018-19 fiscal year but still has more than 180,000 homeless people. "Florida will not allow homeless encampments to intrude on its citizens or undermine their quality of life like we see in states like New York and California," DeSantis said in a statement upon signing the bill.

The US Supreme Court may soon define the limits of local government crackdowns. The justices are scheduled to hear arguments on April 22 in an Oregon case that may determine the legality of enforcing anti-camping laws and other regulations affecting homeless people when there is nowhere for them to go.

The new Florida law bans homeless people from camping in public places and, in a nod to existing federal court guidelines, directs the Department of Children and Families to authorise temporary campsites when homeless shelters reach capacity. The proposed Kentucky bill, which a House committee approved last week, has especially alarmed homeless advocates by expanding the state's "stand your ground" laws, authorizing citizens to use physical force to prevent criminal trespass. If also justifies deadly force against someone who is "attempting to dispossess"

someone of his or her dwelling, or while committing other crimes. "Society has the right to protect itself from the criminal element," state Representative Jared Bauman, the main sponsor, said in a debate on the legislation.

On the funding side, California's March 5 ballot measure passed but the margin was so narrow that it took two weeks to count mail-in votes and determine a winner. The tight vote in the heavily Democratic state may reflect voter frustration with previous efforts to solve what appears to many to be an intractable problem.

Democratic Governor Gavin Newsom, who has made the issue a political priority, declared the vote a "huge victory" as it authorises a \$6.4bn bond measure to fund housing and mental health and drug abuse treatment. Even so, Newsom has also supported giving local governments the authority to crack down on camping. In a legal brief, he asked the conservative-majority US Supreme Court to take up the Oregon case, saying lower court rulings have "paralysed" efforts to address unsafe and unsanitary encampments.

In Chicago this week, voters appeared to have rejected a ballot measure that would raise funding for programs to benefit homeless



A person walks past another sitting on a suitcase near a cart full of belongings in Los Angeles.



A woman pushes a cart near tents on a sidewalk in Los Angeles.

people. It seeks to raise the real estate transfer tax on properties valued at more than \$1mm while cutting the tax for the majority of Chicagoans. The measure was los-

ing by 7 percentage points with 87% of the vote in and thousands of mail-in votes yet to be counted. Proponents called the results disappointing but had yet to concede.



Philippines accuses Chinese vessel of trying to stop scientists

AFP
Manila

The Philippine Coast Guard yesterday accused a Chinese vessel of “dangerous manoeuvres” as it attempted to block Filipino scientists from reaching a reef in the South China Sea.

The incident happened near Sandy Cay reef, several kilometres from the Philippine-held Thitu island in the contested Spratly Islands, where the two countries have repeatedly clashed in recent months.

Confrontations between Chinese and Philippine vessels, including collisions, in the strategic waterway have strained relations

between Manila and Beijing, which have a long history of maritime territorial disputes.

In the latest incident, a boat belonging to the Philippine Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources was taking marine scientists to the reef when a China Coast Guard vessel crossed its path, coming as close as 330 feet to the boat, Philippine Coast Guard spokesman

Commodore Jay Tarriela said.

Tarriela said the China Coast Guard vessel sounded a siren for more than 30 minutes to draw the attention of “Chinese maritime militia” boats in the area.

However, the China Coast Guard said that 34 Filipinos had “illegally” landed on the reef it calls Tiexian Jiao and the Philippines calls Pagasa Cay 2.

Chinese “law enforcement officers” landed there, where they “investigated and handled (the situation)”, China Coast Guard spokesperson Gan Yu said in a statement.

“That’s another lie coming from the Chinese coast guard,” Tarriela said.

Tarriela said the scientific team spent four hours at two reefs and

was able to complete its mission, despite the presence of Chinese vessels and a Chinese military helicopter circling overhead.

China claims almost the entire South China Sea, including the Spratly Islands, brushing off rival claims from countries including the Philippines and an international ruling that its assertion has no legal basis.

China tries to block NGO tribute to dead dissident at UN

AFP
Geneva

China yesterday tried to block a statement before the UN Human Rights Council about a dissident who was detained and died after trying to travel to the council a decade ago.

Beijing used procedural moves to object to a statement presented on behalf of dozens of rights groups paying tribute to Cao Shunli, who was detained as she attempted to travel to Geneva ahead of a UN review of China’s rights record.

After being held for several months without charge, she fell gravely ill and died on March 14, 2014. “Cao’s courage inspires defenders globally, so let her legacy and name resonate in this room until there is accountability for all victims of reprisals,” said a Chinese human rights defender whose identity was not given.

Speaking on behalf of 37 non-governmental organisations – including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and the International Service for Human Rights – she included a short silence, which she said was in honour of Cao.

She also urged the diplomats in the room to “mirror the courage of all human rights defenders and victims of reprisals and always stand in solidarity with them?”

China’s representative, Han Xincheng then demanded the floor, complaining that the NGO speaker

was using her time “to observe silence and provoke confrontation”, and asked the council president halt her intervention.

North Korea’s representative, deputy ambassador Pang Kwang Hyok, also chimed in, asking that the council president “ensure that the speaker strictly observe the rules of procedure, by respecting dignified sovereign states and polite manner”. The European Union, along with the US, Canada and Britain defended the NGOs’ right to speak.

Human Rights Council members “have no authority to dictate the content of NGO statements”, US representative Kaitlin Sandin told the gathering.

“It is essential to protect freedom of expression in this forum, which includes the right to express oneself through silence,” she said, also highlighting that the NGO speaker had not requested that others join in a moment of silence.

Council president Omar Zbier of Morocco said the procedural rules needed to be clarified, but in the end allowed the NGO speaker to complete her statement.

She did so, speaking in Chinese. “Dearest Big Sister Cao, rest in peace; there will be light at the end of the night,” she said, to loud applause. China’s effort yesterday to block the statement mirrored its response 10 years ago to another NGO attempt to hold a moment of silence in the council for Cao, although that time the disruption lasted for over an hour.

Strong quake near Indonesia’s Java island



Patients receive medical attention after being evacuated from the Airlangga university hospital in Surabaya yesterday, following a 6.4 magnitude offshore earthquake near Indonesia’s Java island. The tremors were felt in the capital Jakarta and forced residents of another city to flee their homes. The quake had a depth of approximately 8kms, and struck off Java island’s northern coast near Bawean island at about 0852GMT, the US Geological Survey said.

Dozens of Rohingya feared dead at sea as Indonesia ends search

AFP
Meulaboh, Indonesia

Dozens of Rohingya refugees are feared dead or missing after their boat capsized off Indonesia’s westernmost coast this week, the UN said yesterday, as local rescuers called off the search despite survivor accounts that many were swept away.

The mostly Muslim Rohingya are heavily persecuted in Myanmar, and thousands risk their lives each year on long and expensive sea journeys, often on flimsy boats, to try to reach Malaysia or Indonesia.

Authorities staged a dramatic rescue on

Thursday of 69 Rohingya who had been adrift at sea for weeks before their boat and another trying to help them capsized a day earlier, with many found clinging to the hull of an overturned vessel.

Survivors told local authorities that as many as 151 refugees were onboard the boat.

“When we were on the sea, at that time, we felt like we will die, everyone will die,” survivor Rehena Begum, 33, said through a translator at a shelter in Aceh, her voice trembling.

“There were many people dying. Many females, many children were dying in front of us.” If those still missing are confirmed to have died, it would represent the biggest loss of life

for the Rohingya at sea this year, according to the UN refugee agency (UNHCR). “The fear is for those out of the 151, that haven’t been so far rescued, is that those lives have been lost or they have gone missing,” UNHCR spokesman Babar Baloch said. UNHCR representative to Indonesia Ann Maymann pleaded “for the search efforts to continue in hope of finding survivors” in a post on X.

But local authorities nixed the search earlier yesterday because there was no list of passengers. “The search ended on Thursday. All Rohingya refugees on top of the boat yesterday have been rescued,” Mohamed Fathur Rachman, an official from the search and rescue agency in Aceh, said through a spokesperson.

40 fires set in night of arson across Thailand

Attackers set fire to shops, cars and utility poles in at least 40 locations across Thailand’s deep south in the early hours of yesterday, authorities said, killing at least one person in a co-ordinated wave of arson. The attacks occurred at around 1am across four southern provinces of Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat and Songkhla. The area along the border with Malaysia has seen a decades-long, slow-burn insurgency. The one person reported killed yesterday was a female migrant worker from Myanmar who died from an explosion, Thai authorities said.

“The perpetrators want to disrupt the peace,” Colonel Eakvarit Chobchoophol, a spokesman for the military’s Internal Security Operation Command for the southern region said. “They are attacking the local economy and targeting utilities.”

New Apple retail store in Shanghai



Apple’s chief executive officer Tim Cook (C) gestures next to senior vice-president of retail Deirdre O’Brien (left) during the opening of the new Apple retail store in Shanghai. Chinese Apple fans jostled to enter the smartphone maker’s newest store as it opened – but they were upstaged by dozens of retirees eager to nab commemorative freebies.

Ex-lawmaker accused of murder in Philippines held

AFP
Manila

A Filipino former congressman accused of organising the killing of a provincial governor has been arrested at a golf driving range in East Timor, the Philippine department of justice said.

Arnolfo Teves was the alleged mastermind of the March 2023 attack, which killed Roel Degamo, then-governor of the central province of Negros Oriental, and nine others.

Police in East Timor detained Teves at a golf driving range in the capital Dili on Thursday after Interpol issued a “red notice” for his arrest, the justice department said in a statement.

Teves is in custody awaiting extradition to the Philippines where he faces “multiple murder charges”, the statement said.

President Ferdinand Marcos hailed the arrest of Teves, who has previously denied involvement in Degamo’s murder.

“I assure the Filipino people that we will spare no effort in ensuring that justice will prevail in this case,” Marcos said in a statement, vowing to “take all necessary actions to bring him back to the country so he can face the charges filed against him”.

Gunmen wearing military-style uniforms entered Degamo’s home and opened fire on March 4, killing nine, including the governor, in the country’s deadliest political attack in years.

A 10th victim died two months later.

Eleven suspects were arrested over the assault in the sugarcane-growing heartland of the Philippines.

A 12th suspect was killed in a shoot-out.

Australia, UK vow AUKUS nuke-powered subs will be built

AFP
Adelaide, Australia

Australia and Britain yesterday said that a landmark deal to develop AUKUS nuclear-powered submarines would go ahead, despite mounting fears about costs, capabilities and the possible return of Donald Trump.

Under the fledgling AUKUS deal, the two countries along with the US have pledged to beef up their military muscle in a bid to counter China’s rise.

Defence chiefs this week unveiled ambitious plans to supply

Australia with a fleet of nuclear-powered submarines, a key pillar of the agreement.

“The three governments involved here are working at pace to make this happen,” Australian Defence Minister Richard Marles told reporters yesterday.

“This is going to happen and we need it to happen,” he added.

Barely two years old, there are already signs that AUKUS and its central project could be under threat.

Some fear Trump could jettison the pact if he wins this year’s presidential election, returning to his “America first” style of foreign policy.

UK foreign secretary David Cameron suggested that “brilliant” AUKUS and other alliances like Nato – which he dubbed “the most successful defence alliance in history” – needed to be fighting fit come US election time.

“I think whoever is president, the best thing we can do is to get those alliances, to get those projects into the best possible shape so whoever is the new president can see that they’re working,” Cameron said.

He added that the nuclear-powered submarines deal was “a huge project, a huge undertaking, but absolutely essential for our security”, adding that he had “total

confidence” that the deal would go ahead. With potential flashpoints emerging across the globe, and China taking an increasingly aggressive stance in the Taiwan Strait, visiting UK Defence Minister Grant Shapps said AUKUS was as crucial as ever.

After decades of relative peace, Shapps said the planet was slowly shifting from a “post-war” era to a “pre-war” footing.

“We are living in more dangerous times,” he said during a tour of the Osborne Naval Shipyard in south Australia.

UK defence contractor BAE Systems has been enlisted to help construct Australia’s fleet of

nuclear-propelled submarines. Australia hopes to have eight nuclear-powered vessels in the water by the 2050s – a mix of the new AUKUS-class subs built at home and in the UK, and Virginia-class vessels purchased from the US.

Marles said a “drumbeat” of AUKUS-class submarines would then continue to roll off Australian production lines “every few years” in perpetuity.

“There is no country in the world which has obtained the capability to build nuclear-powered submarines, which has then turned that capability off,” he said.

“We will see submarines being

produced here on an enduring basis.” Although the financial details of the BAE deal are under wraps, Australian defence officials want to initially build at least five AUKUS-class nuclear-powered subs at a cost of billions of dollars.

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

BAE Systems, one of the largest defence contractors in Europe, said it was “already making good progress on the design and development of the next generation submarine”.

Russia jobs scam traps Indians on Ukraine war frontlines

Thomson Reuters Foundation
Poshwan, India

When Raja Begum heard an Indian had died in Ukraine, she collapsed to the ground, convinced it was her missing son – one of dozens of young men lured to Russia on the

promise of jobs, then sent to fight in the Ukraine war.

"I can't stop thinking about the last message my son sent," said Begum, 60, who has not heard from the 31-year-old tech graduate since January – just weeks after he left the family's village in Kashmir to head to Moscow.

Indian federal investigators say

a major human trafficking network duped at least 35 men, who expected to work as "helpers" in the Russian army, and the case has increased concern about online scams targeting desperate jobseekers in India.

India's urban unemployment rate stands at 6.6% after dropping in recent years, but rural joblessness and high rates of casual labour remain

a problem – especially among the young – driving many to seek better-paid opportunities abroad.

The country's large population and tough job market make it fertile ground for trafficking rackets that often use social media to recruit and tap into jobseekers' despair, cybersecurity experts say.

"(They) often create a sense of

urgency or desperation in their victims, making them more likely to act quickly and without thinking critically," said Sheikh Asif, a cybersecurity expert and founder of Manchester-based Thames Infotech.

Begum's son Azad Yousuf Kumar, previously a tube-well digger, was searching for jobs online when

he stumbled upon a YouTube post promising a job and permanent residency in Russia, his elder brother, Sajad Kumar, said.

Some of the men were also offered admission to "dubious private universities" along with "free discounted visa extensions" to draw them in, according to India's Central Bureau of Investigation.



AAP supporters protest against the arrest of Delhi's Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, in New Delhi yesterday.

Delhi chief minister remanded to ED custody

AFP
New Delhi

Top Indian opposition politician was remanded in custody yesterday following his overnight arrest in a case supporters say is aimed at sidelining challengers to Prime Minister Narendra Modi before next month's election.

Arvind Kejriwal, chief minister of the capital Delhi and a key leader in an opposition alliance formed to compete against Modi in the polls, was detained late Thursday in connection with a long-running corruption probe.

He is among several leaders of the bloc under criminal investigation and one of his col-

leagues described his arrest as a "political conspiracy" orchestrated by the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Kejriwal was brought before a New Delhi court yesterday which ruled he should stay remanded in the custody of the enforcement directorate, India's main financial crimes investigation agency, until at least March 28. "My life is dedicated to the country, whether I am inside or outside," Kejriwal told reporters while being led into the courtroom before the hearing began.

Shadan Farasat, a member of Kejriwal's legal team, said colleagues were considering their next course of action after the ruling.

His Aam Aadmi Party (AAP),

maintains that Kejriwal has not resigned his office as chief minister despite his arrest.

"We made it clear from the beginning that if needed, Arvind Kejriwal will run the government from jail," Delhi Education Minister Atishi Marlena Singh told reporters. Hundreds of supporters from Kejriwal's AAP took to the streets yesterday to condemn the leader's arrest, with police breaking up one crowd of protesters who attempted to block a busy traffic intersection.

Several demonstrators were detained, including Singh and Health Minister Saurabh Bhardwaj. Rallies in support of Kejriwal were held in numerous other big cities around India.

Princess reveals cancer diagnosis

Reuters
London

Catherine, Britain's Princess of Wales, yesterday said she was undergoing preventative chemotherapy after tests taken after she had major abdominal surgery in January revealed that cancer had been present.

Kate, 42, the wife of heir to the throne Prince William, spent two weeks in hospital in January after undergoing what her office said at the time was successful, planned surgery for an unspecified but non-cancerous condition.

However, in a video message, Catherine, dressed in jeans and a jumper and looking pale and tired, said subsequent tests had revealed cancer had been found. She said she was well and getting stronger.

"My medical team therefore advised that I should undergo a course of preventative chemotherapy and I am now in the early stages of that treatment," Catherine said in the video which was filmed on Wednesday. "This of course came as a huge shock, and William and I have been doing everything we can to process and manage this privately for the sake of our young family."

The news is the latest major health blow for the British royal family after King Charles revealed in February that he too was to have treatment for cancer, meaning he has had to postpone his public royal duties.

Catherine's office, Kensington Palace, said it would give no further details about the type of cancer that had been found, saying the princess had a right to medical privacy. It said she was on a recovery pathway and the preventative chemotherapy had begun in February. After her op-



Britain's Catherine, Princess of Wales, announces she is undergoing preventative chemotherapy after cancer was found to have been present, following her abdominal surgery in January.

eration, the palace said the princess, still popularly known by her maiden name Kate Middleton, would not return to official duties until April. But her absence from public life has provoked intense speculation and wild rumours on social media.

She and William had wanted privacy about the cancer until their children, Prince George, 10, Princess Charlotte, 8, and Prince Louis, 5, began their school holidays which started yesterday.

"It has taken me time to recover from major surgery in order to start my treatment. But, most importantly, it has taken us time to explain everything to George, Charlotte and Louis in a way that is appropriate for them, and to reassure them that I am going to be OK," she said.

"As I have said to them; I am well and getting stronger every day by focusing on the things that will help me heal; in my mind, body and spirit." Catherine has not appeared at a public event since December 25.

However, a video filmed last Saturday by a member of the public which was published by the Sun

newspaper showed Catherine looking healthy, walking and carrying shopping bags alongside her husband at a farm shop in Windsor, near to their home.

"We hope that you will understand that, as a family, we now need some time, space and privacy while I complete my treatment," Catherine said.

"My work has always brought me a deep sense of joy and I look forward to being back when I am able, but for now I must focus on making a full recovery."

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said the princess should be afforded the privacy to focus on her treatment and be with her family.

"The Princess of Wales has the love and support of the whole country as she continues her recovery," Sunak said in a statement.

"She has shown tremendous bravery with her statement. In recent weeks she has been subjected to intense scrutiny and has been unfairly treated by certain sections of the media around the world and on social media."

Police intervene as duo turn car into 'helicopter'

Indian police seized a DIY car project from two enterprising brothers who had modified their small Suzuki hatchback to resemble a helicopter, an effort to make money by renting it out to wedding parties. Ishwardin and Parmeshwardin Prajapati spent nearly \$3,000 to attach small rotor blades to the roof of the car and fabricate a metal tail imitating a chopper. The extensive modifications took several weeks at a workshop in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, local media reports said. The brothers planned to charge Rs5,000 (\$60) a day to couples tying the knot, providing a distinctive mode of transport on their wedding days. However their plans crashed around when police seized the "car copter" while it was being taken to get a finishing coat of paint. The vehicle was seized for not adhering to road rules and unauthorised modifications, the India Today news network reported.

Local elections campaign launch



Britain's Prime Minister Rishi Sunak (centre) introduces East Midlands mayor candidate Ben Bradley (centre left) to employees during the launch of the local elections campaign, at a bus depot in Heanor, northern England, yesterday.

Modi in Bhutan to shore up ties with eye on China

AFP
New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi landed in Bhutan yesterday for a two-day state visit to the tiny but strategic Himalayan nation also being courted by China.

Modi was accorded a red-carpet welcome upon his arrival at the Paro airport. He was warmly received by Tshering Tobgay, prime minister of Bhutan, at Paro airport and accorded a ceremonial welcome. Landlocked Bhutan, known for its policy of prioritising "Gross National Happiness" over growth, has long been regarded by New Delhi as a buffer state firmly within its orbit. India is determined not to let China gain further footholds across what it sees as its natural sphere of influence, following trade and infrastructure

deals Beijing sealed over the years with other neighbours.

"The visit is in keeping with the tradition of regular high-level exchanges between India and Bhutan and the government's emphasis on its Neighbourhood First Policy," said a statement from Modi's office announcing his arrival. India effectively over-saw Bhutan's foreign policy until 2007, the year before the kingdom's first multi-party elections.

Bhutan does not have formal diplomatic relations with China but the two countries inked a "co-operation agreement" last October after talks over their long-disputed frontier.

A December report from Britain's Chatham House think tank included satellite photographs it said showed an "unsanctioned programme of settlement construction" by China in Bhutan's northern frontier region.

Simon Harris set to be Ireland's youngest PM

AFP
Dublin

Simon Harris, set to become Ireland's youngest ever taoiseach (prime minister), will hope his social media skills and fresh face can save his party's flagging fortunes as elections loom.

Already dubbed by media the "TikTok Taoiseach" the 37-year-old beats the previous record holder, predecessor Leo Varadkar, who was 38 when he took the top job in 2017.

After Varadkar's shock resignation on Wednesday, Harris leapt from the blocks in the race for leader

of the centre-right Fine Gael party and by default prime minister.

By Thursday lunchtime he had secured endorsements by a majority of party colleagues, prompting rivals to rule themselves out – and effectively ending the leadership contest before it had even begun.

With no other candidates expected to emerge before nominations close on Monday, pundits described Harris's apparent uncontested procession to the leadership as a "coronation": "I'm in, I'm ready to step up, and I'm ready to serve," he told the public broadcaster RTE's evening news programme after officially announcing his candidacy.

Harris's inevitable election as

taoiseach when the Dail (Irish parliament) returns from recess on April 9 crowns a meteoric ascent.

Born in 1986, he grew up in the small coastal town of Greystones near Dublin, the son of a taxi driver.

He dropped out of a journalism and French college course in Dublin after one year to focus on an already promising politics career.

Harris entered politics by campaigning for autism services for his autistic younger brother, later founding a charity.

He joined the youth branch of Fine Gael at the age of 16 and quickly rose through the party ranks. A county councillor aged 22, he was elected to parliament as a 24-year-old in 2011

– at the time the youngest MP and titled "Baby of the Dail".

He was appointed health minister in 2016 aged just 29.

"In many ways, my career has been a bit odd,...., life came at me a lot faster than I expected it to," he told *Hot Press* magazine in a 2022 interview.

Harris served as health minister for over four years including during the Covid pandemic during which his communication skills were praised despite heavy criticism over nursing homes deaths and occasional gaffes.

He can be an "awful old idiot at times" he said after remarking that Covid-19 refers to 18 previous coro-

naviruses rather than the year it first occurred. He was also embroiled in controversies around new hospital projects while a threatened opposition no confidence vote over overcrowding on wards led Varadkar to call an election in 2020 where Fine Gael slumped to third place.

A father-of-two and married to a cardiac nurse, Harris's prominence on social media especially TikTok has made him one of the most visible politicians in Ireland.

He has been higher education minister since 2020 and even critics concede he is a talented communicator.

With 1.4mn "likes" on TikTok, and hundreds of thousands of fol-

lowers on both X and Instagram, he posts content almost daily to his audience.

Some of his videos and remarks have been seen as trying too hard to appeal to the younger generation.

During one stormy parliamentary committee meeting, Harris told the group: "Chillax – I think everyone needs to take a step back here".

"All the young people know what 'chillax' is," he said in parliament the next day.

With his youth and slick communication skills his opponents jibe that he is "Leo 2.0", a continuation of a "metropolitan" style of politics that is out of touch with the wider electorate.

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GULF TIMES

China doubles down on green tech and the energy transition



By Stuart P.M. Mackintosh
Washington DC

Amid an onslaught of grim climate news, China's recent decision to pursue a faster green transition is a rare bright spot. In early March, at the annual National People's Congress, Premier Li Qiang announced that the country would accelerate investment in clean-energy projects. The plan is for a "new trio" of industries – solar panels, electric vehicles (EVs), and lithium batteries – to drive economic growth, replacing the "old trio" of clothing, furniture, and appliances. Although investment in the targeted industries will not be enough to reverse the country's ongoing economic slowdown, the West should appreciate the implications of Li's announcement.

A global green transition is already well underway; at this stage, countries and firms are largely on board with the shift to clean energy. According to the International Energy Agency, annual additions to renewable capacity increased by nearly 50% in 2023, to 507 gigawatts, the fastest growth rate in the past two decades. The European Union, the US, and Brazil, in particular, installed record amounts of renewable-energy capacity. But China experienced the largest growth by far, commissioning as much solar PV in 2023 as the entire world did in 2022, and increasing its wind capacity by 66% year on year.

China's decision to ramp up spending could further accelerate this epochal shift and help achieve long-term climate goals by bringing forward the peak in fossil-fuel use and lowering greenhouse-gas emissions. Moreover, it suggests that place-based industrial policies are facilitating, not impeding, decarbonisation. US President Joe Biden ushered the world into a new era of industrial policy when he passed his \$800bn Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), which includes \$391bn in energy and climate spending, and his \$1.2tn Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL). This strategy pushed the EU to implement its own raft of green subsidies. And now, China is addressing its economic woes by channelling even more resources into decarbonisation.

At the same time, an increased supply of low-cost green products from China – a likely outcome of the country's bet on emerging technologies – would not flow to the US, owing to its embrace of industrial policy. The US government has already imposed tariffs on strategic Chinese imports. And with the IRA and the BIL pumping massive sums into domestic clean-energy manufacturing and deployment, the Biden administration is considering new protectionist measures to prevent China from undercutting the US market.

This is frustrating for ardent advocates of free trade, as it means that cheap Chinese solar

panels, EVs, and batteries will not be available in America any time soon. A Donald Trump victory in November would only make things worse: the former president has proposed a staggering 60% tariff on all Chinese imports.

Although the energy transition is coming at a high price for Americans, it is a price worth paying. By defending its domestic industries, the US government will likely divert Chinese products to other countries, especially in the developing world, which would allow consumers to buy clean-tech products at low prices. More importantly, if developing countries seize this opportunity, they could accelerate their own green transitions.

For example, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, whose plan for reaching net-zero emissions by 2070 is highly insufficient, should take advantage of China's green-tech surge. In the short term, that means using Chinese products to plug the gaps in India's clean-energy industry. Modi should also convince Chinese companies to build additional production facilities in India, which would facilitate technology transfer, create jobs, and lower the cost of green tech.

African leaders should likewise electrify their economies using China's green products and technologies. Just as many African countries have leapfrogged to mobile networks, skipping landline development, they must do the

same with clean energy, bypassing fossil fuels. While certainly a challenge, such an approach is well-suited for a continent with abundant solar and wind resources and a need for distributed-energy solutions. Moreover, African countries with a large supply of rare earths should work with Chinese firms to move up the value chain and create more jobs.

Whenever CEOs and policymakers meet at climate conferences or in Davos, a common refrain is that the green transition must be just. That would require \$1tn in annual clean-energy investment in low- and middle-income countries – a seven-fold increase from current levels.

While there is a desperate need for more financing, China's increased investment in clean energy could be an important part of the solution.

Ultimately, China and the US (as well as the EU) must reach an agreement on what constitutes fair and free trade of green goods. But in the meantime, given the existential imperative to achieve net-zero emissions, we should welcome China's investment plans, even as we worry about their implications for US industry. For now, I can drive an American-made EV from Ford or Tesla, but I hope one day to have the option of purchasing an EV built by China's BYD. Either way, I will be on the road to a less polluting future. – Project Syndicate

• Stuart P.M. Mackintosh is Executive Director of the Group of Thirty.

The great central bank policy reversal kicks off

The world's biggest central banks are on the starting line of reversing a record string of interest rate hikes but the way down for borrowing costs will look very different from the way up.

There will be no floodgates or fireworks. Instead, banks on opposite sides of the Atlantic are likely to move in the smallest increments with periodic pauses, fearing that ultra-low unemployment could rekindle inflation rates still above their targets.

The eventual bottom for interest rates is also set to be far higher than the historic lows of the last decade and mega-shifts in the structure of the global economy could put borrowing costs on a higher path for years to come.

Central banks started to jack up rates from late 2021 as post-pandemic supply constraints and surging energy prices on Russia's war in Ukraine sent inflation into double-digit territory across much of the world.

This seemingly synchronised response tamed prices and inflation will be just above or already at target – 2% for most big economies – this year.

"The bottom line is that across the OECD, central banks... are softening up again, or are about to do so," investment bank Macquarie said in a note to clients.

Indeed, the Swiss National Bank became the first major central bank ease policy on Thursday with a surprise 25 basis point cut to its key rate as inflation is already in the 0% to 2% target range.

"Across the OECD, central banks... are softening up again, or are about to do so"

The move also ends rampant investor speculation that policymakers will be hesitant to move before the US Federal Reserve since any rate cut is certain to weaken a currency and push up imported inflation.

The European Central Bank is bound to be next in June after incessantly repeated references to that meeting painted the bank into a corner.

The Fed and the Bank of England both hinted they could be next but have kept their language sufficiently vague to make moves in either June or July possible, provided data do not upset plans.

Still, investors expect the Fed, the ECB and the BoE to each deliver only 75 basis points of cuts by the end of this year, in three 25 basis point moves, tiny changes compared to rate hikes in 2022 when they sometimes increased rates by that much in a single day.

The pricing also suggests cuts at just three out of the five meetings each will hold between June and the end of the year, so pauses are also on the cards.

To be sure, these banks are not the first to cut rates. Some emerging market economies, like Brazil, Mexico, Hungary and the Czech Republic have all cut rates already, but financial markets take their cue from the major central banks, so their influence on financial instruments is oversized.

The Federal Reserve could in fact end up being the outlier this time.

The US economy is chugging along and the Fed even upgraded its growth projections this week, meaning it may end up cutting rates when growth remains strong, or delaying cuts if inflation proves stubborn. In Europe, data continues to paint a bleak picture, with activity stabilising at a low level.

The US election in November adds to the Fed's dilemma. Policymakers do not want to be seen interfering with the vote, so if they cut, they need to do it well clear of November.

Fed Chair Jerome Powell in congressional testimony earlier this month said policymakers would "keep our heads down and do our jobs" ahead of the elections.

Where rate cuts could end in either 2024 or 2025 remains far too uncertain but policymakers appear confident that the ultra low rates – negative in some cases – will not be revisited. – Reuters

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AI could help eliminate tuberculosis

By Mohamed Yassin
Geneva

Groundbreaking new technologies seem to be emerging with increasing frequency nowadays. Since its launch in November 2022, OpenAI's generative artificial intelligence chatbot, ChatGPT, has become a global sensation, attracting more than 100mn users and inspiring numerous imitators. The technology's fast-evolving capabilities have also commanded the attention of world leaders, dominating discussions at both the UN Climate Change Conference in Dubai (COP28) and the annual meeting of the World Economic Forum in Davos.

It is not difficult to understand why. By harnessing AI tools developed by private companies like OpenAI, governments and civil-society organisations could make significant strides toward tackling global challenges like climate change and economic inequality. Similarly, they could revolutionise how we fight infectious diseases, ensuring that life-saving care reaches those who need it most.

Tuberculosis is a prime example. TB, a preventable and curable disease, claims an average of more than 3,000 lives per day. Although the mechanisms of TB transmission are well understood, and highly effective treatment regimens – including new and improved medications – are available worldwide, TB still led to 1.3mn deaths globally in 2022.

AI tools could play a major role in the global effort to end TB. To this end, the Global Fund to Fight Aids, Tuberculosis, and Malaria is pursuing public-private



partnerships with the goal of developing and deploying innovative digital public-health tools. During a recent trip to Bangladesh, for example, I encountered a team of healthcare providers from the public and private sectors, along with local community partners, who are using digital X-rays, AI, and telemedicine to facilitate rapid TB screening. Patients whose X-ray results show signs of TB could immediately submit sputum samples for analysis and receive treatment at the community level, free of charge.

Similar initiatives are being launched around the world. In Pakistan's Punjab province, the humanitarian aid organisation Mercy Corps uses AI tools to identify "hot spots" – remote or rural areas where TB cases might go undetected – and set up mobile health camps to deliver diagnostic and treatment services directly to local residents. In the Padre de la Vega prison in Paraguay, healthcare

workers use Fujifilm ultralight portable X-ray machines and AI technology to provide rapid and precise TB screening.

Likewise, physicians at Cambodia's National Center for Tuberculosis and Leprosy Control in Phnom Penh bring portable Delft X-ray machines to nearby provinces to screen individuals unable to travel to the capital. And in Indonesia, a new partnership between the Global Fund, Siemens Healthineers, and the country's national TB programme aims to scale up early detection efforts by combining deep-learning AI technology and X-ray analysis to enable radiologists to read scans remotely.

Targeted, innovative projects such as these are crucial to overcoming persistent inequities that fuel the spread of infectious diseases: poverty, conflict- and weather-related displacement, overcrowding, and limited access to health facilities. Moreover, they are laying

the groundwork for resilient health systems capable of meeting every person's needs. For example, in addition to TB screenings, Pakistan's mobile health camps offer essential services focusing on women and young children.

These examples underscore the importance of fostering collaboration among companies, industry leaders, governments, and local health providers to devise innovative ways to address solvable problems like TB. That is why the Global Fund, which contributes 76% of all international financing to end TB, also allocates more than \$150mn annually to develop digital tools aimed at promoting equity and helping remote communities access critical healthcare services.

But much more is needed. Devising targeted, effective, and sustainable solutions requires active engagement with local communities to mitigate a wide range of other public-health threats, such as pandemics and antimicrobial resistance. This is why it is crucial to have committed partners who can envision and develop cutting-edge digital tools.

By leveraging AI to augment local medical expertise, we have an opportunity to overcome TB once and for all. In a world brimming with innovative ideas and emerging technologies that until recently were beyond our imagination, ending this global scourge, and perhaps others, is finally within reach. – Project Syndicate

• Mohamed Yassin, a public-health physician and infectious disease epidemiologist with over 25 years of experience in treating and researching tuberculosis, is Senior TB Adviser at the Global Fund to Fight Aids, Tuberculosis, and Malaria.

TRAGEDY

Three dead as migrant boat runs into trouble off Spain

Three people died and seven were listed as missing when a dinghy carrying migrants across the Mediterranean from Algeria ran into trouble off southern Spain, maritime rescue officials said yesterday. Rescuers found the semi-sunken dinghy with two survivors and three bodies some 26 nautical miles south of the southern city of Motril yesterday, Spain's maritime rescue service wrote on X. The two survivors said the boat had been carrying 12 people when it set sail from Algeria six days ago, leading the authorities to suspect seven people may have fallen into the sea, it said.

BRIEF LABEL

Montenegro court delays tycoon's extradition

Montenegro's top court decided to delay the extradition of Terraform Labs co-founder Do Kwon to South Korea until it clarifies prosecution complaints about the legality of its extradition ruling, the court said. The Supreme State Prosecution Office had filed a request challenging the shortened procedure that led to the court's ruling earlier this month approving Kwon's extradition to South Korea to face criminal charges relating to the collapse of his crypto enterprise. The country's top prosecutor also challenged some procedures relating to the extradition order. Kwon, who has been held in Montenegro since his arrest last March, has denied wrongdoing.

FALLOUT

Dutch PM to meet Xi as chip export policy strains ties

The Dutch prime minister will travel to Beijing next week for a meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping on "economic ties", the Dutch government said, a meeting likely to be strained over computer chip export policy matters. The Dutch government this year began denying licences for ASML, the biggest supplier of equipment to computer chip makers, to export many of its products to China, following pressure from the US. ASML dominates the global market for lithography systems, multi-million dollar tools essential in helping to create the circuitry of computer chips. One of Xi's top policy goals has been to help China build up its domestic chipmaking industry.

REPORT

Worrying biodiversity loss in Finnish coastal waters

Habitats and organisms in Finland's coastal waters are threatened by biodiversity loss, with some key species in worrying decline, Finnish experts said in a report. With its brackish, shallow waters and coastline covering over 46,000kms Finland's Baltic Sea waters are home to organisms adapted to conditions found nowhere else in the world. A decline of keystone species such as bladder wrack, eelgrass and the blue mussel were a cause for concern, the authors noted. Eutrophication - the excess input of nutrients into the sea from sources such as agricultural run-off, forestry and waste waters - formed the main threat to marine biodiversity, said the report.

Ukraine to drop Russia business blacklist after backlash

Reuters
Kyiv/Berlin

Ukraine will scrap its "sponsors of war" blacklist, the centrepiece of its campaign to pressure companies doing business in Russia, after a backlash from countries from Austria to China, two people familiar with the matter said.

The end of the blacklist, which has embarrassed around 50 major companies identified as operating in Russia and indirectly helping the Kremlin's war in Ukraine, represents a climbdown by Kyiv as it seeks to maintain fragile international support.

Critics say the name-and-shame campaign was brash and subjective, while backers say it laid bare how industry stayed loyal to Moscow.

The people said Ukraine would scrap not only the list, but also a related website that gives detailed information about individuals under Western sanctions, companies and the origin of Russian weapons parts.

B4Ukraine, a coalition of civil society groups, said the demise of the list was disappointing, and that most governments had done little to pressure companies to cut ties to Russia.

Karin Doppelbauer, an Austrian lawmaker with the liberal Neos party, criticised the government in Vienna for exerting pressure over

the blacklist. "The government has to understand that any cosy relationship with Putin is over," she said.

While some companies changed course in their business dealings with Russia as a result of appearing on the list, the majority instead expressed indignation and sometimes used political pressure to get off the blacklist.

Getting rid of the list means companies that are not under Western sanctions may face little public pressure to leave Russia.

People familiar with the talks leading to the dismantling of the list said that there had been concerted pressure from countries, angered by the naming of their companies.

"It's China, but not only China," said one person with direct knowledge of the matter, also pointing to pressure from France to remove retailer Auchan and Leroy Merlin, a home improvement and gardening retailer, from the list.

Beijing, a major consumer of Ukrainian grain, demanded in February that Kyiv remove 14 Chinese companies from the list to "eliminate negative impacts".

Although China is seen as an ally of Russia, Kyiv has said it hopes the world's second largest economy will take part in an summit it is organising in the coming months of world leaders to advance President Volodymyr Zelensky's vision of peace.



National Police of Ukraine officers inspect the site of a missile strike in Zaporozhye yesterday.

Russia admits 'state of war' amid huge strikes on Ukraine

Reuters
Kyiv

Russia pounded Ukrainian power facilities yesterday in an attack described by Kyiv as the largest airstrike on its energy infrastructure in two years of war, and portrayed by Moscow as revenge for Ukrainian attacks during its presidential election.

The missile and drone attack hit a vast dam over the Dnipro river, killed at least five people and left more than a million others without power, forcing Kyiv to seek emergency electricity supplies from Poland, Romania and Slovakia, Kyiv officials said.

The strikes, which Kyiv said caused blackouts in seven regions, revived memories of the winter of 2022-23 when Moscow regularly bombed Ukraine's power grid.

The Russian defence ministry said the airstrike was carried out in retaliation for Ukrainian shelling and cross-border raids last week

as Russians took part in an election that handed President Vladimir Putin a fifth term.

"The world sees the targets of Russian terrorists as clearly as possible: power plants and energy supply lines, a hydroelectric dam, ordinary residential buildings, even a trolleybus," Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said.

Condemning the attack, Ukrainian Energy Minister German Galushchenko said: "The goal is not just to damage, but to try again, like last year, to cause a large-scale failure of the country's energy system."

Russia denies deliberately targeting civilians although the war that began with its full-scale invasion in February 2022 has killed thousands of people, uprooted millions and destroyed towns and cities.

Moscow says Ukrainian power facilities are legitimate targets and that such attacks are aimed at weakening Kyiv's military.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told a Russian publication yesterday that Moscow saw itself as in a "state of war" because of the West's

intervention on Kyiv's side. The comment marked a rhetorical break from the "special military operation" language that Moscow officials have used throughout the invasion, in an apparent move to prepare Russians for a longer and harder struggle.

European Union Council president Charles Michel said Russia's comments about war with Europe showed the importance of the EU building its own defence industry.

Two people were killed in the western Khmelnytskyi region and three in Zaporizhzhia in the southeast, including at least one at the dam, said the local administration and general prosecutor's office. Twenty-six people were reported injured. Ukraine's largest dam, the DniproHES in the city of Zaporizhzhia, was hit eight times, an official from the Ukrainian prosecutor's office said. The state hydropower company said there was no risk of a breach. The company's director, Ihor Syrota, said both its power blocks and the dam itself had been damaged. One of the blocks sustained two direct strikes, he said.

French news editor suspended over Macron-related headline

The news editor of a regional French daily has been suspended after a front-page headline critical of President Emmanuel Macron, management said yesterday, causing outrage across the newsroom. Macron on Tuesday launched a major operation against crime in Marseille and elsewhere. Following Macron's Marseille visit, *La Provence* daily published a front page Thursday showing two people, watching a police patrol. The accompanying headline said "He's gone, but we're still here". On the basis of the front page, *La Provence's* news editor Aurelien Viers was suspended for a week, for failing to follow its "values and editorial line", said the paper's managing editor Gabriel d'Harcourt. In an article inside Thursday's *La Provence*, the front-page quote was actually attributed to a poor Marseille resident. He said that the city had "found the means necessary to protect the president during his visit. He's gone, but we're still here".

Farmers protest in Berlin



Farmers queue with their tractors in front of Brandenburg Gate in Berlin, Germany, yesterday as they demonstrate against plans to scrap diesel tax subsidies for agriculture vehicles.

Apple, Google, Meta 'set to face probes under new law'

AFP
Brussels, Belgium

Apple, Google and Meta are set to face the EU's wrath next week as Brussels prepares to hit the tech giants with probes into potential violations of a landmark law, sources close to the matter said yesterday.

The European Commission, the EU's powerful antitrust regulator, has been in talks in the past months with the titans about complying with the Digital Markets Act (DMA), which came into force in early March.

The DMA demands online platforms open up digital markets to greater competition - and the commission has vowed its impact would be far-reaching.

"Apple has done more with

the DMA in 10 days than in 10 years with antitrust," the EU's internal market commissioner, Thierry Breton, told CNN.

For example, Apple has been forced to allow developers to create their own rival marketplaces to the US giant's App Store. But the company still faces accusations that the changes are complicated and come with unfair fees - and has not done enough to avoid European regulators' scrutiny.

The investigation into Apple is expected to look into how the company prevents application developers from communicating for free with iPhone users, a source said. A similar violation led the EU to slap Apple with a 1.8bn-euro (\$1.95bn) fine earlier this month, which the company is appealing. The EU probe into Meta will likely focus on how the US company uses Facebook and

Poland's Tusk faces questions over election promises

Reuters
Warsaw

Poland's Prime Minister Donald Tusk hit his first 100 days in office yesterday with solid public support but facing criticism for failing to meet a host of election promises.

He blames the delays largely on the dire state of affairs left by his predecessors.

With local and European elections on the horizon, the fact that more than half of voters are dissatisfied with the pace of delivery on campaign promises poses a headache for a government whose

election spurred hopes of radical change among voters weary of eight years of turbulent nationalist rule.

"Certainly we can see a slower pace of fulfilling the election promises than was indicated in before the election," said Bartosz Tekielski, 23, who works in a jewellery shop in central Warsaw.

"I am not surprised. Poland since it became a free country has never had a government that stuck to its promises 100%."

The former European Council president swooped into power in December on a promise to undo democratic backsliding and repair relations with Poland's Western allies who said Warsaw had sub-

verted the rule of law and women's and minority rights.

According to poll aggregators, Tusk's KO remains ahead of PiS while the three groups that form the coalition government have over 50% combined. However, two recent polls put PiS in first place.

In a post on social media platform X, Tusk pointed to "record debt, omnipresent corruption, depraved media, a partisan prosecutor's office (and) chaos in the courts," among a list of unwanted inheritances from PiS.

A government source said the administration knew that decisions like delaying doubling the tax-free limit to 60,000 zlotys

(\$15,200) would be very unpopular but that they were necessary due to the bad state that PiS left the public finances in.

Not everybody sees it that way. "This is a lie," PiS chairman Mariusz Blaszczak said. "We left the public finances in good shape".

Another factor has been divisions within the broad pro-European coalition that propelled Tusk to the head of government.

While critics say most of Tusk's 100 promises for his first 100 days remain unfulfilled, he has delivered on a key pledge - unblocking billions in European Union funds that had been frozen due to concerns over the rule of law under PiS.

According to a United Surveys poll for RMF FM and Dziennik Gazeta Prawna daily, voters see this as his biggest achievement, with over 60% of respondents saying his handling of the issue was a success. They are also positive about the way in which the government has improved Poland's international relations.

However, lawyers have questioned why Brussels decided to unfreeze the cash before judicial reforms were completed.

"(Unfreezing the funds) is very bad for Poland because now I don't believe there is a great motivation to introduce the changes that are necessary," said Krzysztof Izdeb-

ski, policy director at the Stefan Batory Foundation think-tank.

KO rejects such criticism, saying the decision to unblock the funds resulted from a recognition in Brussels that Warsaw was committed to restoring the rule of law despite resistance from supporters of the old government in powerful positions such as PiS ally President Andrzej Duda.

"It's obvious there are obstacles like the president, the behaviour of some prosecutors or people in the judiciary system, but there were several meetings at the European level where the progress and the changes were shown," said KO lawmaker Agnieszka Pomaska.

Garangao celebrations today at Al Shaqab



Al Shaqab, a world-class facility built on Qatar's Arabian horse heritage and a leading global centre for equine professionals, will conclude its Ramadan Nights programme today.

Over three evenings from 8pm to midnight, the itinerary featured fun heritage activities, including Arabian

ditional games, Medoud, and many more activities including traditional food and beverages.

"On the final day Ramadan nights, we will be hosting a momentous Garangao celebration where children will have an opportunity to decorate and customise their Garangao bags before they collect their goodies," a statement said.

"At Al Shaqab, you and your family will enjoy the traditional festive atmosphere that reflects the ancient traditions and revives popular heritage amid songs that bring back memories of the beautiful past. It is a chance for today's children to experience the beautiful days of yesterday's children and their society.

"Al Shaqab's impressive facilities, distinctively designed in the shape of a horseshoe, cover 980,000sq m. With a state-of-the-art Main Arena comprising both an indoor and outdoor venue capable of holding over 5,000 spectators, Al Shaqab is part of Qatar's growing reputation on the world stage that showcases its ability to host major international sports event at the highest level," the statement added.

Children petting an Arabian horse at the Ramadan Nights programme at Al Shaqab yesterday. **PICTURES:** Shaji Kayamkulam



Horse shows, lantern workshops, tra-



Katara Ramadan activities prove popular

The diverse activities held at Katara - Cultural Village during the holy month of Ramadan has been attracting an increasing number of visitors. On Thursday evening, Katara Amphitheater hosted a religious lecture by Kuwaiti Muslim Scholar Sheikh Othman al-Khamis. The lecture discussed various religious values and the importance of maintaining a pious heart. Katara creativity hall hosted a poetry forum to mark the World Poetry Day. Many poems were recited celebrating a number of themes related to Ramadan.



Golden Spider Silk pioneers keen to collaborate with Qatar

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"And for a good reason too, Qatar is using its resources not for today but for the future and so if spider silk is a material of the future, it should definitely be done in a country that values the future and is interested in the future," Godley said.

"The door is always open for future collaborations. Certainly, we had discussions with commercial collaborators, with scientists."

He highlighted the huge potential of spider silk for biomed-

cal purposes rather than as a mere fashion item, noting the unique properties that make it ideal for such applications.

"Spider silk as a material could be commercialised and will be commercialised for biomedical uses," he said, pointing out that the prospect of collaborating with Qatar opens new doors and opportunities.

Regarding the challenges in producing the textiles, Godley described their journey as arduous - spending two decades of continuous research and testing. He said

their meticulous efforts yielded four stunning textiles crafted solely from spiders' silk: an embroidered cape, a brocaded weave lamba, sheer taf-feta, and a satin weave shawl.

He said about 70 people worked in spider silk extraction and creating the pieces in Madagascar, while others served as weavers.

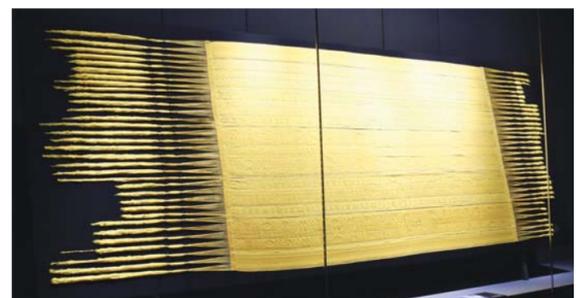
However, Godley noted that their current focus is to showcase their work to the public, noting that the impact their creations have on people is insightful, often leaving a lasting impression.

"When people see it, they never

forget it," he said, adding that he met individuals who, even 10 years later, still vividly remember seeing their work exhibited in major cities such as New York and London.

He said the British ambassador to Qatar attended the exhibition's opening at MIA recently, and noted that he had seen these works in London 11 years ago.

Godley hopes that visitors to their exhibition in Doha would similarly remember the experience and that the city would become a significant part of spider silk history for people around the world.



PICTURE: Thajudheen