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Qatar landmarks lit in blue to mark Autism Awareness Day

As the world observed Autism Awareness Day yesterday (April 2), Qatar joined the global community in raising awareness and understanding about autism spectrum disorder (ASD). In Qatar, some of the participants joined the campaign by illuminating their buildings in light blue, the colour most commonly associated with Autism Awareness Day and autism awareness. The 2015 Building (Qatar Foundation Headquarters) was lit up in blue to mark World Autism Awareness Day, an initiative led by Renad Academy. Other Qatar Foundation buildings were also lit in blue, including the Education City Stadium, Sidra Medicine, and Qatar National Convention Centre. World Autism Awareness Day was created based on a proposal submitted by Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, Chairperson of Qatar Foundation, to the United Nations in 2007, and since 2008 it has taken place every year on April 2. Through awareness campaigns, educational initiatives, and community events, Qatar aims to enhance understanding and acceptance of individuals with autism, emphasising their unique strengths and abilities. By fostering a more inclusive society, Qatar endeavours to ensure that individuals with autism have access to the support and resources they need to lead fulfilling lives. Through education, advocacy, and support, Autism Awareness Day aims to promote early diagnosis and intervention, increase access to services and resources, and foster a more inclusive society where individuals with autism can thrive and reach their full potential. **Page 12**

Gaza damages estimated at \$18.5bn

The cost of damage to Gaza's critical infrastructure between October and January is estimated at about \$18.5bn, according to a joint World Bank and the United Nations report released yesterday. This is equivalent to 97% of the combined economic output of the West Bank and Gaza in 2022, the World Bank said in its interim damage assessment, which covers the period between the onset of the conflict on October 7 and the end of January. **Page 6**

Iran vows revenge for embassy attack

Iran said yesterday it would take revenge on Israel for an airstrike that killed two of its generals and five military advisers at its embassy compound in Damascus, raising the risk of further escalation in conflict in the Middle East. Israel has not claimed responsibility for the attack, which destroyed a consular building adjacent to the main embassy complex. **Page 6**

Istanbul apartment block fire kills 29

A fire that raged from the basement of a 16-storey block in central Istanbul left at least 29 people dead yesterday, with flames and thick smoke billowing for hours despite a massive emergency response. The fire began at 12:47 (0947 GMT). **Page 11**

Germany sees warmest March

Germany last month saw its warmest March since records began, the DWD weather office said, rounding off an unusually mild winter. At 7.5 degrees Celsius, the mean temperature was four degrees above the average for the internationally recognised reference period of 1961 to 1990, the DWD said.

RAMADAN THOUGHT

And be afraid of the Day when you shall be brought back to Allah. Then every person shall be paid what he earned, and they shall not be dealt with unjustly. (Qur'an 2: 281)

Prayer times

Fajr...4.05; Zuhr...11.37; Asr...3.06; Maghrib...5.54; Isha...7.24

Fasting times

Iftar today5.54pm
Imsak tomorrow.....3.54am

Worldwide condemnation as Israeli airstrike kills 7 aid workers in Gaza

Reuters/AFP
Cairo/Jerusalem

The US, France and Britain led international criticism yesterday of a deadly strike in the Gaza Strip that killed seven charity staff as they unloaded desperately needed aid brought by sea to the war-torn territory.

World Central Kitchen (WCK) — one of two NGOs spearheading efforts to deliver aid by boat — said a “targeted Israeli strike” on Monday killed Australian, British, Palestinian, Polish and US-Canadian staff.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken urged a “swift, impartial investigation” into the airstrike and said Israel needed to do more to protect innocent civilians. The Israeli military expressed “sincere sorrow” over the incident, which drew widespread condemnation and ratcheted up pressure for steps to ease the disastrous humanitarian situation in Gaza after nearly six months of war.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the Israeli airstrike was unintended and “tragic”, and the military pledged an independent inquiry. “We will do everything to prevent a recurrence,” he said.

Israeli President Isaac Herzog apologised for the air strike that killed the aid workers.

Herzog said he spoke to Jose Andres, the US-based celebrity chef who heads the aid group World Central Kitchen, to express his “deep sorrow and sincere apolo-

A person looks at a vehicle where employees from the World Central Kitchen (WCK), including foreigners, were killed in an Israeli airstrike, in Deir Al-Balah, in the central Gaza Strip yesterday.

gies over the tragic loss of life”.

WCK said they had been travelling in two armoured cars emblazoned with the charity's logo and another vehicle.

Britain summoned Israel's ambassador in London to express its “unequivocal condemnation of the appalling killing” of the WCK workers, three of whom were British nationals.

“Israel must urgently explain how this happened and make major changes to ensure safety of aid workers on the ground,” British Foreign Secretary David Cameron said in a post on X.

Israel must clarify the circumstances surrounding the deaths of seven people working for World Central Kitchen, Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said.

“I hope and demand that the Israeli government clarifies as soon as possible the circumstances of this brutal attack that has taken the lives of seven aid workers who were doing nothing more than helping,” Sanchez said after visiting the Jabal el-Husseini camp for Palestinian refugees in Amman.

Israel has long denied accusations that it is hindering the distribution of urgently needed food

aid in Gaza, which it has besieged in a war since October, saying the problem is caused by international aid groups' inability to get it to those in need.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Washington had spoken directly to close ally Israel's government and “urged a swift, thorough and impartial investigation to understand exactly what happened”.

Britain, Australia and Poland, countries which have generally been friendly towards Israel, all demanded action to protect aid workers.

Qatar condemns killing of WCK aid workers

Qatar strongly condemned the Israeli raid that killed a number of aid workers in the Gaza Strip, considering it a shocking crime that violated international laws and humanitarian norms. In a statement yesterday, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs affirmed Qatar's total rejection of the weaponising food against civilians in the war on Gaza, and stressed the need for aid to reach all areas of the Strip unhindered. The ministry reiterated the importance of strengthening regional and international efforts for an immediate and permanent ceasefire in Gaza, as well as ensuring accountability and non-impunity for all crimes committed as a result of the horrific war. **(QNA)**

Al Jazeera condemns Netanyahu statements

Al Jazeera Media Network has denounced the statements of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, in which he threatened to stop the channel's operations and accused it of harming Israel's security. The network said it sees this statement as nothing but a dangerous ludicrous lie. Al Jazeera said: “Netanyahu could not find any justifications to offer the world for his ongoing attacks on Al Jazeera and press freedom except to present new lies and inflammatory slanders.” **Page 2**

Home treatment service for cancer patients launched

QNA
Doha

Hamad Medical Corporation's National Center for Cancer Care and Research (NCCCR) has launched a new treatment service for Qatari patients with prostate and breast cancers.

Through the new service, patients will be given the prescribed chemotherapy injections at home on the scheduled dates according to the treatment plan by a trained nursing team affiliated with NCCCR.

Speaking to Qatar News Agency (QNA), Dr Mohamed Salem al-Hassan, CEO and Medical Di-

rector of NCCCR and Chairman Corporate Cancer Services at HMC, explained that the service was launched at the beginning of Ramadan, based on Qatar Cancer Plan 2023-2026 (QCP) which includes the provision of homecare services for some cancer patients.

Dr al-Hassan noted that the home treatment service will be provided to bedridden patients, patients over the age of 65, or pa-

tients who cannot reach the hospital to receive treatment. Those patients will receive treatment at home and not just care.

He added that a medical team consisting of doctors and nurses has been allocated to visit the patient at his home and evaluate the condition to provide injection at home; noting that the home treatment service is provided every Saturday.

Dr al-Hassan indicated that

the provision of home treatment for cancer patients was launched as part of the Qatar Cancer Plan which aims to treat all cancer patients in Qatar. The homecare service helped overcome one of the challenges to HMC, which is the inability of the elderly to come to the centre or the desire of some patients to receive treatment at home. He noted that 40 patients have benefited from the home chemotherapy service.

Pointing to the centre's future plans, Dr al-Hassan said that NCCCR seeks to provide this type of home treatment on a daily basis to all cancer patients and to include other types of cancers, in order to relieve cancer patients of the bur-

den of coming to the hospital to receive treatment. He noted that the centre launched another service for cancer patients last year, which is palliative homecare services for elderly patients whose treatment programmes have ended.

He also revealed many plans to increase the quality of cancer treatments, noting that Qatar Cancer Plan 2023-2026 aims to enhance the quality of current services, adopt innovative and patient-friendly technology, and introduce new national programmes for early cancer detection in Qatar.

Outpatient clinics at the National Center for Cancer Care and Research receive nearly 6,000 visitors per month.



Qatar, Uganda ink agreement to enhance labour relations



The governments of Qatar and Uganda have signed an agreement to enhance co-operation in the fields of labour and organise recruitment from Uganda. The agreement was signed by HE the Minister of Labour Dr Ali bin Smaikh al-Marri and Ugandan Minister of Gender, Labour and Social Development Betty Amongi. The agreement aims to enhance the strategy of the Ministry of Labour in attracting skilled and qualified labour and bolstering their presence in the local market, improving the productivity of the private sector, and upgrading the work environment. Under the agreement, the two parties will facilitate the procedures for recruiting skilled labour from Uganda and supply the local market with the required competencies, qualifications, experiences, and specialisations. The two sides will also review job opportunities available in Qatar and the skills and experiences required, and their availability in Uganda. **(QNA)**

Al Jazeera denounces Israeli statements threatening to ban network's broadcast

Al Jazeera Media Network denounced the statements of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, in which he threatened to stop the channel's operations and accused it of harming Israel's security. The network sees these statements as nothing but a dangerous and ludicrous lie.

In a statement, Al Jazeera said: "Netanyahu could not find any justifications to offer the world for his ongoing attacks on Al Jazeera and press freedom except to present new lies and inflammatory slanders." It said that his

statements come as part of a series of systematic Israeli attacks to silence Al Jazeera. Al Jazeera reiterates that such slanderous accusations will not deter it from continuing its bold and professional coverage, adding that it reserves the right to pursue every legal step. "Al Jazeera holds the Israeli prime minister responsible for the safety of its staff and Network premises around the world," it said in the statement.

The Israeli Knesset voted last night in favour of a law giving Netanyahu the authority to order the closure of foreign net-

works operating in Israel if it believes they pose harm to its security, foremost among them Al Jazeera.

The so-called "Al Jazeera law", which passed on Monday by 70 votes to 10, gives Netanyahu the authority to ban the targeted channel's broadcast, leading to the closure of its offices in Israel. Following the Knesset's passing of the law, Netanyahu said that Al Jazeera will not broadcast from Israel, indicating his intention to take immediate action to halt the channel's activities, accusing it of harming Israel's security.

Education minister highlights importance of social integration of students with autism

HE the Minister of Education and Higher Education Buthaina bint Ali al-Jabr al-Nuaimi highlighted the importance of effectively integrating students with autism into society and ensuring that they receive equal educational opportunities. This came during her visit to Al Hidayah Special Needs School on the occasion of the World Autism Awareness Day, as a reflection of the education ministry's constant interest in and care of students with special needs and the requirements for special education. During the visit, HE al-Nuaimi met with the school's officials and was briefed on its academic programmes and activities specifically tailored to enhance the skills of students with autism. She stressed the need for permanent co-operation between the ministry and all educational institutions on further developing education for students with autism. HE al-Nuaimi thanked the school's administration and staff for their outstanding efforts in creating a supportive and encouraging educational environment for students, underscoring her appreciation for their role in spreading awareness about autism and the need to socially integrate students with all kinds of special educational needs. **(QNA)**



EAA, partners launch campaign to support children in Gaza

Education Above All (EAA) Foundation has announced the launch of the 'Keswet Al Eid' campaign for children in Gaza to find immediate and practical solutions for providing humanitarian support in the Gaza Strip, and on the initiative of Her Highness Sheikhha Moza bint Nasser, Chairperson of EAA.

This programme is being carried out in partnership with the Qatar Red Crescent, Al-Mujadilah Centre and Mosque for Women, and Minaretein Mosque. The campaign will provide new clothes for infants and children. Donation collection will begin on the 24th day of Ramadan and continue until the first day of Eid al-Fitr. Collection points are at Al-Mujadilah Centre and Mosque for Women and Minaretein Mosque, Education City.

EAA CEO, Fahad al-Sulaiti, said: "EAA is making diligent efforts to provide humanitarian aid in the Gaza Strip. These efforts serve as a beacon of compassion and community spirit, encapsulating a profound commitment to humanity's interconnectedness. The act of giving, in its simplicity, becomes a conduit for hope and dignity, transforming each piece of clothing into a symbol of our collective resolve to mitigate suffering and elevate the human spirit. However, our vision transcends



the immediate warmth provided by these garments, delving into a broader spectrum of support, including mental health services, recreational activities, university scholarships, hygiene kits, youth initiatives, and meals for the displaced."

Faisal Mohamed al-Emadi, secretary-general of Qatar Red Crescent Society, said: "This is not the first co-operation between us, and it will not be the last, God willing. We intensify our efforts and sharpen our will to relieve our people in Gaza, and we never hesitate to participate in any action that supports their resilience and meets their basic needs in these difficult circumstances."

EAA, in partnership with UNFPA, and through the network of youth volunteers, is spearheading a transformative wave of initiatives, reaching thousands of children and youth with crucial support. From educational programmes to health and psychosocial interventions, these initiatives embody a

comprehensive response to the urgent needs of those affected by the ongoing crisis in the Gaza Strip.

As of March 1, 2024, more than 625,000 students in Gaza have no access to education, and 392 educational institutions have sustained significant damage. As many as 4,851 students and 239 teachers have been killed, IDP used 318 school buildings as shelters, and 142 of them were attacked. Currently, more than a million people are sheltering in 145 UN-RWA Schools. Nearly all the children in the enclave require mental health support.

Individuals looking to contribute and support 'Keswet Al Eid' can make contributions by donating new clothing items directly after Taraweeh prayer until midnight at designated clothes boxes located at Al-Mujadilah Center and Mosque for Women, and Minaretein Mosque in Education City. If preferred, online donations can be made by visiting: <https://donate.educationaboveall.org/>

Qatar University's special needs support centre marks Autism Awareness Day

QNA
Doha

Qatar University's Inclusion and Special Needs Support Center marked the International Autism Awareness Day, in a bid to boost societal awareness on autism and further integrate autistic children into society, enhance their self-confidence.

The celebration also sought to enhance the provision of psychological support and social care for autistic children and their families.

Head of Accommodation and Community Outreach at Qatar University, Professor Haya Ahmed al-Kuwari said that the Inclusion and Special Needs Support Center seeks to build bridges of diverse understanding and awareness inside and outside the campus, through co-operation with colleges on campus and holding aware-



ness workshops for teaching staff and students to raise awareness of the issues and challenges facing students, including students with autism disorder.

Meanwhile, Head of the Assistive Technology and Universal Design for Learning, Fatima Yousef al-Kuwari, confirmed that the centre is co-operating with relevant ministries and institutions in the country and a large number of higher education institutions in Qatar and the re-

gion with the aim of exchanging best practices and experiences and spreading awareness regarding the affairs of persons with disabilities.

Nujoud al-Maqati, a special needs specialist, said that the centre works to integrate students into university life in a comprehensive and effective manner to ensure equal opportunities and provide a supportive educational experience for students with autism spectrum disorder in their university career.

We extend our heartiest greetings to

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

His Highness
Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al Thani
Father Amir

His Highness
Sheikh Abdullah Bin Hamad Al Thani
Deputy Amir

and to all the honorable people of Qatar
on the occasion of

EID AL FITR

We hope for more returns of this memorable occasion and
wish that Qatar always enjoys security, welfare and prosperity
under the wise leadership of His Highness The Amir

QC distributes ‘Ramadan Supply’ as part of Endless Giving campaign

As part of its Ramadan campaign ‘Endless Giving’, Qatar Charity (QC) distributed ‘Ramadan Supply’, in co-operation with the initiative of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE) for the second consecutive year.

The MoEHE provided an opportunity for both government and private schools to participate in this initiative in collaboration with QC. So far, 95 elementary, preparatory, and secondary schools for boys and girls have taken part in the initiative.

It aims to promote the values of social solidarity and assist low-income families during Ramadan. It also instills values in students such as generosity, helping others, and more. Additionally, it involves students in humanitarian work, with 10 to 15 students from each school participating in the distribution throughout the holy month.

This initiative has been welcomed by the directors of the schools selected to participate in

this programme. In this regard, Zeinab al-Rayashi, the director of Al Wakra Secondary School for Girls, said: “We are pleased with the Ministry of Education’s selection of our school to participate in the ‘Ramadan Supply’ initiative, through which we aim to instill the noblest values like cooperation in students.”

Al-Rayashi added: “We involve both students and the administrative and academic staff, as well as parents, in this wonderful charitable initiative. We thank the Ministry and Qatar Charity for offering the opportunity to participate in this humanitarian endeavour during the blessed month.”

Mariam al-Muslimani, the Islamic education co-ordinator at Al Obeib Independent Primary School for Girls, commented: “Ramadan Supply is a wonderful humanitarian initiative that promotes the values of social solidarity and assists needy families. It also provides students with the opportunity to participate in



charitable activities. This initiative underscores the Ministry of Education and Higher Education’s keenness on nurturing the younger generations on the noble values of Islam.

Al-Muslimani explained: “The students and parents participated in providing food baskets containing essential supplies. The students competed with a spirit of co-operation and generosity to

offer the best during the month of goodness.”

Abdulrahman Mohamed al-Hajri, director of the Programmes and Community Development Department at QC, said: “We are

delighted to collaborate with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education in implementing their charitable initiative for the second year, in partnership with the students. Through this initiative, we aim to assist families with limited income by providing them with essential supplies and engage students in humanitarian and charitable work to acquaint them with the principles and values of charitable endeavours and instill the value of giving in their hearts.”

QC has launched its Ramadan campaign ‘Endless Giving’, targeting 4.2mn people within Qatar and in 40 countries around the world. The campaign aims to implement a range of seasonal and developmental projects, including Feed the Fasting, Eid Clothing, and Zakat al-Fitr, in addition to building the world’s largest multi-service city for orphans in Turkiye. This is contingent upon the expected donations and the anticipated support from benefactors for the campaign.

NHRC calls for urgent measures to tackle rising cases of autism across the world

QNA
Doha

The National Human Rights Committee (NHRC) yesterday participated in a webinar titled ‘Respecting and Upholding the Rights of People with Autism: National Human Rights Institutions’ (NHRIs) Perspective’. The event was organised by Oman Human Rights Commission in collaboration with the Asia-Pacific Forum via Zoom application to mark the World Autism Awareness Day 2024.

Addressing the webinar, HE Chairperson of the NHRC and GANHRI Maryam bint Abdullah al-Attayah affirmed that humanity is passing through a critical period of scientific and technological evolution in the third decade of the 21st century, however, the world is still oblivious to the autism disease amid the unprecedented mounting cases of autism worldwide, prompting a larger role in upgrading the recognition of the rights of People with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) that dramatically affects nearly 70mn people worldwide.

HE al-Attayah highlighted that based on the estimations of the World Health Organization (WHO), one in every 160 children suffers from ASD, along with 1 or 2% of the total population suffering from ASD.

She emphasized that these facts and plight have triggered numerous governmental and non-governmental institutions to operate in elevating the awareness about autism, noting that communities, in general, are increasingly aware of this disease and the importance of early detection so as to provide early intervention programs for training, education and support, given the increasing demand for enforcing the criteria that underscore equal opportunities and respecting the wide range of abilities, diversity and full engagement in the community.

Although most of the world countries have joined the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), but the needs of the people with ASD, along with their economic and social rights received uneven response, as per abilities of each country, HE al-Attayah pointed out, indicating that stemming from the need for developing the interest in persons with disabilities (PWDs), the Working Group on the Rights of PWDs was established at the GANHRI Bureau meeting held in Marrakesh, Morocco, in Oc-



Although most of the world countries have joined the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), but the needs of the people with ASD, along with their economic and social rights received uneven response, as per abilities of each country, HE al-Attayah said

tober 2018. She stressed that the rights of PWDs are of foremost priorities in the GANHRI’s current strategic plan, as well as the tripartite partnership between the UN Development Programme (UNDP), GANHRI and Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

HE al-Attayah called for thinking about people with ASD in the poor countries, as well as conflict and war-stricken countries, especially in light of the stigma and discrimination that afflict autism worldwide, along with the increasing challenges in countries that are beset by intricate situation or bereft of political and social stability, given the lack of data collection and autism-related research, in addition to the deterioration of the essential services and support.

HE Chairperson of the NHRC and GANHRI Maryam bint Abdullah al-Attayah reiterated the call on all parties and stakeholders to respect the CRPD and keep upgrading the awareness to formulate a superb framework for all countries whatever their situation is, highlighting that talk about respecting the convention, in question, should not be stopped, as all parties must provide everything possible for PWDs, such as morality and material.

She pointed out that the NHRIs-led role entails the respect of PWDs rights through altering the policies and engaging with the policymakers so as to urge them to enact the legislations that promote the rights and well-being of people with ASD, such as protection from violence and anti-discrimination laws, funding for support services, as well as policies that promote inclusive health, education, employment practices and community’s engagement in each country based on its economic capabilities.

HE al-Attayah elucidated that the NHRIs and the civil society organisations are striving to put the segments that need care among the foremost priorities to ensure that they are not left behind.

The webinar program included a range of themes, such as the significance of being aware of autism disease and its spectrums, the social consequences on the people with ASD and their families, with another theme tackling the rights of PWDs set out in the international laws, primarily the CRPD and challenges, alongside the theme of the best practices required to protect and promote the rights of people with ASD.

The virtual webinar was intended to be a platform for NHRIs to share knowledge and best practices pertinent to the protection and promotion of people with ASD to ensure high-quality life.

The webinar discussed the shared challenges and future orientations. It was aimed at raising the awareness and interaction with respect to the significance of the societal support for strengthening inclusiveness and accessibility.

LuLu observes World Autism Awareness Day



LuLu Hypermarket has announced its participation in commemorating World Autism Awareness Day by illuminating its building located on D-Ring Road in vibrant blue. This symbolic gesture is part of LuLu’s commitment to raising awareness and supporting individuals with autism. In addition to lighting up its building, as part of its Corporate Social Responsibility efforts, LuLu Hypermarket has also extended support to the Qatari Autism Society and other communities. This underscores LuLu’s dedication to making a positive impact in the lives of individuals and families affected by autism in Qatar. LuLu Hypermarket is honoured to stand in solidarity with the global community on World Autism Awareness Day. “Let’s join hands in supporting individuals with autism and making a meaningful impact in their lives,” Lulu said in a statement.



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How to apply: <https://qatar-weill.cornell.edu/>
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For inquiries:
Weill Cornell Medicine-Qatar, Office of Student Outreach and Educational Development
Email: enrichment@qatar-med.cornell.edu | Phone: 4492-8521

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PHCC warns against staying up late after Ramadan

After the holy month of Ramadan, many people experience sleep disturbances as a result of struggling to readjust to an early sleep routine and continue to stay up late.

This common behaviour not only poses risks to one's health but also brings about various detrimental physical, mental and social effects.

Dr Naela Darwish Saad, manager of the Umm Salal Health Centre and senior family consultant at PHCC, explained that insufficient sleep negatively affects one's performance at work or school, which can lead to decreased productivity, ineffective performance and a higher likelihood of making mistakes.

Inadequate sleep after Ramadan can have mental and neurological repercussions, resulting in an increased sleep-related issues like insomnia, ongoing fatigue, stress, memory lapses and depression. On the other hand, the negative physical consequences of staying up late include increased risk of chronic diseases such as



Dr Naela Darwish Saad

obesity, irregular blood sugar levels, hypertension, various cardiovascular conditions and strokes. It can also weaken the immune system, elevating the risk of diseases and infections.

Dr Naela added that staying up late may lead to various skin issues, including skin sagging, puffiness, red eyes, appearance of dark eye circles, lacklustre complexion and altered skin tone. Adequate sleep contributes to reducing the cortisol hormone production, as ele-

vated cortisol levels have negative effects on the skin collagen and protein, leading to collagen break down, wrinkles and premature ageing.

Insufficient sleep and continuous late nights can lead to social isolation and poor social connections.

It is widely known that these behaviours impact an individual's personality and increase tension within family members and relations.

To prevent these effects, it is crucial to organise the time after Ramadan and uphold healthy routines. This includes establishing a consistent sleep schedule, going to bed on the same time each night and waking up at regular hours. It is essential to ensure an adequate amount of sleep with a minimum of six hours per night, as the recommended sleep typically ranges from seven to nine hours as well as to ensure an enhanced sleep environment by keeping darkness and a suitable temperature in the bedroom along with maintaining healthy diets.

WCM-Q welcomes applications from Qataris, long-term residents for biomedical research training programme

Qatari nationals and long-term residents who have recently graduated from college are advised that applications are now open for the next cycle of Weill Cornell Medicine-Qatar's (WCM-Q) Biomedical Research Training Programme for Nationals 2024.

Applications to join the Weill Cornell Medicine-Qatar Biomedical Research Training Programme for Nationals can be submitted online until 12pm Doha time on April 28.

The programme has been carefully designed to equip college graduates with the key research skills and experiences to allow them to begin building successful careers in biomedical research.

The forthcoming cycle of this



ten-month training programme will run from September 1, 2024 until June 27, 2025. Participating graduates will work alongside WCM-Q's world-leading research scientists in the college's laboratories and will gain practical laboratory skills, research administration skills, and knowledge of how to conduct clinical research projects.

There will also be opportunities to contribute to ongoing sci-

entific studies being carried out at WCM-Q.

Although the programme is aimed at recent graduates who are interested in pursuing a career as a bench or clinical researcher, or a research administrator, applications from nationals are welcome irrespective of their discipline.

The training programme is a full-time, ten-month commitment and trainees receive a graduation certificate upon completion. All participating interns are paid a stipend as part of a comprehensive compensation package.

Interested applicants can contact the research training team for more information at brtp@qatar-med.cornell.edu



Qatar's faithful throng mosques to offer special night prayers

By Shafeeq Alingal
Staff Reporter

With Ramadan having entered the final ten days, mosques across the country are witnessing the faithful thronging to perform the Qiyam-ul-layl (voluntary night prayer).

"The last ten days of Ramadan is a divine opportunity to achieve the greatest benefit from Ramadan. Also, it's the opportunity for those who got less engaged in worship during the first two parts to benefit from the holy month. Attaching yourself to the mosque during the night lends a spiritual elevation," said Jabir bin Abdulrahman.

Mosques host special night prayers. Named Qiyam-ul-layl,

the prayer is considered by the faithful as one of the best acts of worship that bring one closer to Allah. "To stand in front of the almighty with devotion and dedication and listen to the Imam sweetly reciting the Qur'an make your nights worthwhile and filled with fervour," said Abdul Rasheed.

The last ten days of Ramadan are blessed by Allah with unique virtues. Among such virtues is that Laylat Al-Qadr (the Night of Decree) is among them. Many prefer to remain in the mosques to perform I'tikaaf (staying in mosque) and recite the Qur'an while expecting Laylat Al-Qadr. "I opt to stay some hours inside the mosque where I can draw myself close to Allah and gain such immense feeling about him," Jabir said.

The Ministry of Endowments (Awqaf) and Islamic Affairs has

allocated 189 mosques in various regions across Qatar for I'tikaaf (staying in the mosque) during the last 10 days of Ramadan. Awqaf published the list of the names of the mosques where worshippers can practice I'tikaaf. Awqaf has published a set of guidelines and urged the worshippers to follow them while going for I'tikaaf.

Meanwhile, scholars have urged the worshippers to make use of the last ten days of Ramadan and engage in good deeds.

Ali Mohyi al-Din al-Qaradaghi, president of the International Union of Muslim Scholars (IUMS), while talking to Qatar TV, urged the believers to increase good deeds and charity. "Islam recommends Muslims to pay Zakat al-Fitr during the last ten days of Ramadan to ensure that Zakat is paid properly," he said.

Awqaf's 'Little Muhaddith' competition concludes



The General Administration of Endowments at the Ministry of Endowments (Awqaf) and Islamic Affairs has concluded the tests for the fifth level in the 'Little Muhaddith' competition for boys and girls.

The 10th edition of the competition was organised in co-operation with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE). The public tests of the competition took place on March 31 for boys and on April 1 for girls.

According to a statement from Awqaf, 103 participants received full marks to win the prizes. These included 49 boys and 54 girls. Sheikh Dr Khalid bin Mohamed al-Thani, director general of the General Administration of Endowments, said the winners in

various categories will receive plaques and cash prizes.

He added that the competition witnessed a good response from students and the number of participants reached 8,713 from 480 public and private schools.

The 'Little Muhaddith' competition is organised under the supervision of Awqaf and the Ministry of Education and Higher Education. This is in co-operation with the Da'wah Department and Jassim Bin Hamad Secondary School for Boys as part of the endowment bank's projects to serve the Qur'an and Sunnah.

The competition aims at inculcating the love of the Prophet (peace be upon him) in the hearts of the participants while inculcating morals and tempting them to follow the model of the Prophet.

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الأولوية
AL-AWALIA

Invitation to Tender

Tender / Auction Number	Subject	Tender / Auction Document Fees (Non-refundable)	Tender / Auction Bond	Tender/Auction Offer	Closing Date
AL-AWALIA/TD/2024/16	Hiring of 11/6.6KV Transformer on Rental Basis for Secondary Substation D for Qatar Primary Materials Company ("Services")	500 QAR	11,000 QAR	Two Bids (Technical & Commercial)	17 Apr 2024 01:00 PM
AL-AWALIA/TD/2024/17	Call-Off Agreement for Supply and Delivery of MAN Trucks Spare Parts for Qatar Primary Materials Company ("Supplies")	1,000 QAR	27,000 QAR	Two Bids (Technical & Commercial)	17 Apr 2024 01:00 PM

In accordance with the following conditions:

- Tender Documents can be collected online by sending email to tender.doc@qpmc.qa along with requested documents in point No.2.
- Tender Documents will be shared only after delivery of Deposit Slip Stamped by Commercial Bank along with Authorization Letter to the delegated person signed by authorized person as per Computer ID. Copy of commercial Registration (CR), Business License and Computer ID.
- Bids are to be submitted in two sealed (in red wax) envelopes (Technical & Commercial) and addressed to Tenders and Auction Committee. Tender reference number and subject are to be clearly written on the envelopes, provided that the last date for submitting bids is one o'clock in the afternoon on the closing day. Any bids submitted after this date and time will not be accepted.
- Tenderers shall submit the proposals to our head office located at Lusail, Building No. 1038, St. No. 303, Burj Marina Tower, 17th Floor before the closing date. (To get the map of the new building, please scan the QR code below).
- Tender Fees are nonrefundable and can be transferred online to Account of Qatar Primary Material Company- Bank A/C (4050-65111-006) at Commercial Bank of Qatar. **IBAN No. (QA 18 CBQA 0000 0000 4050 65111 006)** Tender reference number and subject are to be written on the deposit slip.
- Tender Bond (Bank Guarantee/ Manager Cheque) must be valid for 120 days after closing date and must be submitted in separate & sealed envelope along with technical bid and a photocopy is to be attached with commercial bid. Bids without tender bond will be rejected.
- Bids must be valid for 90 days after the closing date.
- Any queries relating to the Tender Documents must only be raised in writing, preferably by email, to the address specified in the respective Tender Document. Any response issued by Qatar Primary Material Company will be in the form of a question and answer and will be distributed to all Tenderers without revealing the identity of the originator of the query(ies) in the Form of Tender Bulletins. Queries must be received at the address specified in the respective ITT Documentation at least five (5) calendar days prior to the tender closing date. Any queries received after such a date will be ignored.
- The amount of the Performance Bond to be provided by the awarded bidder is (10% of the contract value) and its validity period must remain valid under the contract implementation period and the guarantee period according to the terms of the tender.
- The Technical Bids shall be opened within one week of the closing date.
- Qatar Primary Material Company has the right, during the contract period, to request an increase or decrease in the amounts of the items, works or services by a percentage not exceeding (20%) of the contract value with the same conditions and prices, provided that the increase is of the same type of contracted items, works or services.
- Qatar Primary Material Company's tendering terms and conditions apply.
- For any inquiries about the tender except collecting the documents, please contact tender@qpmc.qa
- Location of the new building


SCAN ME

For further Inquiry, please send your queries at Fax Number: **44479559** or email to tender@qpmc.qa or visit Qatar Primary Material Company website @ www.qpmc.qa



The QIIB employees were presented with certificates of appreciation by chief executive Dr Abdulbasit Ahmad al-Shaibei.

QIIB honours outstanding employees

To foster commitment, creativity, and a stimulating work environment, QIIB recently recognised “outstanding” employees for their performance and contributions to tangible progress throughout the year 2023.

QIIB chief executive Dr Abdulbasit Ahmad al-Shaibei presented certificates of appreciation to the honoured employees at a ceremony hosted at the bank’s main headquarters at Grand Hamad Street, which was attended by senior bank executives.

“Honouring our distinguished employees is a testament to QIIB’s recognition and appreciation for their excellence, perseverance, and

outstanding performance,” Dr al-Shaibei said. “Celebrating our exceptional and persistent employees has become a tradition at the bank, fostering a spirit of initiative, innovation, and dedication,” he continued. “Our meticulous evaluation criteria contribute to cultivating a professional staff capable of fulfilling their duties to the utmost.”

“The recognised employees come from various departments and sectors of the bank and have been selected based on criteria such as outstanding performance and surpassing work objectives,” Dr al-Shaibei explained. “This ceremony not only applauds hard work and innovation but also affirms that distin-

guished employees consistently deserve recognition.”

“QIIB is dedicated to cultivating a motivating work environment for all its employees,” he added. “Recognising distinguished employees serves as an incentive for their colleagues, fostering healthy competition for excellence and achievement, ultimately benefiting both the bank and its employees.”

The honoured employees expressed their joy and gratitude for the recognition.

They particularly highlighted QIIB’s work environment, which they believe facilitates the discovery and nurturing of talents and achievement of job excellence.

Soft opening for Riviera Rayhaan by Rotana in Doha

Rotana, one of the region’s leading hotel management companies with over 100 properties in the Middle East, Africa, Eastern Europe, and Türkiye (Menat), has announced the soft opening of its first Rayhaan-branded property in Doha – the Riviera Rayhaan by Rotana.

In line with Rotana’s expansion goal of 30 planned openings by 2026, the new property introduces Rotana’s modern-design Rayhaan Hotels & Resorts brand to Qatar and adds 185 keys to Rotana’s extensive portfolio across the Menat region, increasing Rayhaan’s current operational key count to 2,265.

Commenting on the announcement, Rotana chief executive Philip Barnes said: “The opening of Riviera Rayhaan by Rotana in Doha marks a significant milestone for our ambitious growth strategy within the region.”

“Not only does this new offering cater to our guests’ ever-evolving travel preferences, but it introduces the Rayhaan Hotels & Resorts brand to a new market,” he said. “As we pursue our expansion strategy, we are excited about the opportunity to broaden our range of offerings in this dynamic city.”

Located on Salwa Road, the 4-star property is just 20 minutes from Hamad International Airport and steps away from Bin Mahmood Metro Station, positioning it as an ideal choice for both the discerning business guests and leisure seekers eager to explore the heart of Doha, it was explained in a statement.

The hotel features 185 rooms and suites: 129 standard rooms and 56 suites comprising Junior, one-, two-, and four-bedroom suites.

Each room is furnished with contemporary amenities, ensuring a blend of comfort and modernity.

Fadi Harb, general manager of Riviera Rayhaan by Rotana, said: “As we wel-



The Riviera Rayhaan by Rotana

come Riviera Rayhaan by Rotana to the vibrant city of Doha, we are delighted to embark on this exciting journey and provide our esteemed guests with unforgettable experiences by delivering exceptional accommodation choices, cuisine, facilities, and services which will ensure every guest truly feels at home with us.”

“Crafted as an ideal sanctuary for couples, solo travellers, and families alike, Riviera Rayhaan by Rotana offers everything needed for work, relaxation, and leisure,” he said.

Home to four unique dining outlets, every taste and occasion is catered for at Riviera Rayhaan by Rotana, from international and Mediterranean cuisine at Salvia restaurant, to light bites at Aroma Lobby Lounge; tapas, snacks, and desserts at Aquarius Pool Café, or, for a laid-back social occasion, guests can enjoy fine beverages at Al Majles Lounge.

Offering a host of wellness activities,



Riviera Rayhaan by Rotana features a spa and a pool, as well as a fully equipped gym.

The property also houses three meeting rooms with flexible set-up options and can accommodate up to 100 guests.

Rotana’s portfolio currently spans 19,761 keys and six superlative brands, including 1,293 keys across five hotels in Qatar, the statement added.



The QRCS housing project for IDPs in Yemen.

QRCS provides shelter for families in Yemen

The representative office of the Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS) in Yemen has completed the construction of 83 2BHK housing units, each 24sq m, as part of a project to shelter disaster-affected families in Taiz, at a cost of \$418,424 (QR1,525,155).

The project is aimed at encouraging internally displaced people (IDPs) to return to their home villages by providing safe and appropriate shelters that ensure protection against extreme winter and summer weather conditions.

Adel Mushamar, director of Al-Maafer District, lauded the project as a “vital step to help IDPs and victims of war to stabilise back home”.

“It is a culmination of the efforts made

by the local authority and executive unit, together with humanitarian partners,” he said. “I would like to thank the QRCS for this humanitarian intervention, and I hope that partners will pay more attention to this sector.”

Engineer Ahmed Hassan al-Sharaji, head of the QRCS office in Yemen, said: “Over the past couple of years, the QRCS has completed several shelter projects, which included the construction of 105 and 85 housing units for disaster-affected and poor people in Hadhramaut and Raymah, respectively.”

“In partnership with the United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), we implemented multiple shelter activi-

ties, including the construction of 350 makeshift shelters for IDPs in Maqbana, maintenance and renovation of 106 war-damaged homes in Al-Mudhaffar, maintenance and rehabilitation of 360 makeshift shelters at four camps in Marib Al-Wadi, and renovation of 80 shelters in Al-Hali in progress,” he said.

The QRCS office in Yemen had been selected among the top shelter providers in the country, according to the OCHA’s shelter cluster report on humanitarian partners during the first half of 2022.

This was the result of efforts made by QRCS personnel in Yemen to implement shelter projects, deliver on time, and actively engage in national and local shelter clusters.

Fans take advantage of good weather to mark Iftar at sea

Short cruises and fishing trips have been popular among Qataris and expatriates alike throughout the holy month of Ramadan.

Local Arabic daily *Arrayah* reported that it has been observed that such excursions are highly favoured by those who prefer to take their Iftar meal at sea with friends and family.

Some of them told the daily that fasting does not hinder them from going out and enjoying such amazing weather conditions.

Najib Toumat said that he is keen to go out with friends and did not stop doing so during Ramadan.

He said that everyone agreed to take their Iftar meal at sea at the sunset.

They usually head out two hours before Iftar time to avoid the mid-day sun.

Once it is time, they take a light Iftar meal.

Hamad al-Buainain said that he and his friends take all the necessary precautions to ensure a safe and secure trip at sea, such as registering their names at the coastal

and borders guard, maintaining a full fuel tank on the boat, checking that the engines work properly, and the necessary means of communication are good and functioning.

He said that the pleasant weather has made such trips even more enjoyable.

Abdulla al-Badr said that fishing fans often go out to sea before sunset to lay their fishing nets, returning hours later to collect them.

He added that during Ramadan most fishing fans avoid going to the sea in the morning or afternoon periods.

Al-Badr said that fans should go in groups, with at least one member having good experience of fishing and seagoing.

He said that this is very important especially during the fasting time, as some people may faint or get injured, so a companion should be ready to render assistance.

Nasser Mohamed said that he loves to fish using a rod, but during Ramadan he prefers to limit his fishing time to a maximum of four hours at sea, and breaking his fast while fishing at sunset.

Qatar travellers making plans for luxury, thrilling getaways this Eid

By Joey Aguilar
Staff Reporter

As the Eid al-Fitr holidays draw near, travellers from Qatar are eagerly preparing for their leisurely escapes, showcasing a range of preferences from luxurious indulgences to adventurous thrills, it is learnt.

According to prominent travel agencies in the country, their choices vary and reflect the diverse tastes and interests among citizens and residents.

Tawfeeq Travel Group chief executive Rehan Ali Syed shed light on the most sought-after destinations for both Qataris and residents.

“Everybody prefers to take short-haul flights for the short breaks so that they can spend more quality time with loved ones rather than spending time on long flights,” he said.

“Most popular destinations with the citizens and residents are Maldives, Dubai, Thailand, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Georgia, Switzerland, Vietnam, and Bali,” Syed added. “All these destinations can provide the most desired break with relaxation, good weather, shopping and fun activities.”

He outlined the distinct preferences among travellers from Qatar, citing two main categories: One settles towards luxury travel, indulging in opulent hotel stays, private transfers, and elite dining experiences.

Syed noted that destinations such as Courchevel (France), Greece, Switzerland, France, and the UK are favoured by this group while adventurous souls seek thrill and nature, opting for wildlife safaris, snorkelling, or diving expeditions in destinations like the Maldives.

He said that Qatar residents consistently seek brief getaways to destinations like Georgia, Vietnam, Thailand, and Kazakhstan, choosing locales with good weather and hassle-free visa procedures, with visa-on-arrival options often dictating their final travel decisions.

For those seeking alternative experiences away from the crowds, Syed suggested des-



Rehan Ali Syed

tinations such as Salalah in Oman, Albania, Skopje (North Macedonia), Kyrgyzstan (often dubbed the “Switzerland of Central Asia”), Armenia, and Tbilisi (Georgia).

Echoing similar sentiments, Alpha Travel general manager Khaled Rustom highlighted the growing interest in Far East destinations such as Japan, South Korea, and Vietnam, particularly during the cherry blossom season when nature showcases its most splendid colours.

He underscored the trend of European vacations and cruise bookings for the summer, noting that Qatari travellers are increasingly drawn to the allure of cruising, especially with the sight of major ships docking at Doha Port.

When asked about potential emerging destinations for Qataris, Rustom stressed the significant potential of European countries if visa processes were streamlined, advocating for online visa applications without the need for appointments.



Khaled Rustom



QatarEnergy LNG Tender Invitation

No.	TENDER NUMBER / DESCRIPTION	TENDER ISSUE PERIOD	TENDER FEE (QAR)	TENDER BOND (QAR)	TENDER CLOSING DATE
1	LTC/C/OFS/6514/24 CHARTER OF SELF-PROPELLED JACK-UP BARGE	28/03/2024 to 04/04/2024	0	5,000,000	30/04/2024

Scope of Work:

Charter of Jack Up Barge (s) from experienced, competent, and qualified Owner/Contractor, who shall provide Jack Up Barge(s) having inbuilt facility of accommodating approximately 150 Persons on Board (POB), not more than 10 years of age, in order to support all Company’s existing & future offshore operations and installations. The Charterer’s requirements of Jack up Barge are categorized as below: a) One DP2 Jack Up Barge to be mobilized with a Delivery Date of 1 January 2025 at Ras Laffan Port. b) Additional Jack Up Barge (s) availed through optional call-offs based on operational needs.

Bid Validity:

Bid should be valid for 270 calendar days from the Tender Closing Date.

Place for Tender Collection and Bid Submission:

ITT document for this tender will be available in QatarEnergy LNG website under Suppliers tab >Current Open Tenders. The bids shall be submitted through the QatarEnergy LNG online platform (SMART by GEP).

Note: Effective from 1st July 2023, bids received from Local Companies (established under the Laws of State of Qatar with local Commercial Registration) who are not in possession of an ICV score in the ICV portal by Bid Closing Date (or commercial bid submission date if separately mentioned/notified) will not be accepted. Local Company that has been established for less than 2 years and insurance companies are exempted from this requirement. For further details please visit ICV Digital Portal:- <https://icv.qa/US>

I'tikaaf in Ramadan

I'tikaaf means staying in the mosque for a specific purpose, which is to worship Allah.

It is prescribed in Islam and is mustahabb (recommended) according to the consensus of the scholars. Imam Ahmad said, as was narrated from him by Abu Daawood: "I have not heard from any of the scholars that it is anything other than Sunnah."

Az-Zuhri said: "How strange the Muslims are! They have given up I'tikaaf, despite the fact that the Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, never abandoned this practice from the time he came to Madinah until his death."

The benefits of I'tikaaf

There are many hidden benefits in the acts of worship and much wisdom behind them. The basis of all deeds is the heart, as the Messenger of Allah, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "In the body there is an organ which if it is sound, the entire body will be sound, and if it is corrupt, the entire body will be corrupt. That organ is the heart." [Al-Bukhari and Muslim]

What corrupts the heart most is distractions and preoccupations – such as food, drink, sex, talking too much, sleeping too much and socialising too much, and other distractions – which divert people from turning to Allah and cause the heart to be unfocused and unable to concentrate on worshipping Allah. So Allah has prescribed acts of worship, such as fasting, to protect the heart from the negative effects of these distractions. Fasting deprives a person of food and drink and sex during the day, and this denial of excessive enjoyments is reflected in the heart, which gains more strength for seeking Allah and frees it from the chains of these distractions which take a person from thinking of the Hereafter by occupying him with worldly concerns.

Just as fasting is a shield which protects the heart from the influences of physical excessive



indulgence in food, drink and sex, so I'tikaaf offers an immense hidden benefit, which is protection from the effects of excessive socialising. For people may take socialising to extremes, until it has a similar effect on a person to the effects of over-eating.

I'tikaaf also offers protection from the evil consequences of talking too much, because a person usually does I'tikaaf on his own, turning to Allah by praying Qiyaam al-Layl, reading Qur'an, making Dhikr, reciting du'aa, and so on.

It also offers protection from sleeping too much, because when a person makes I'tikaaf in the mosque, he devotes his time to drawing closer to Allah by doing different kinds of acts of worship; he does not stay in the mosque to sleep.

Undoubtedly a person's success in freeing himself from socialising, talking and sleeping too much will help him to make his heart turn towards Allah, and will protect him from the opposite.

The connection between fasting and I'tikaaf

No doubt when a person has all the means of purifying his heart by keeping away from all the things that can distract him from worship, this will be more effective in helping him to turn towards Allah with devotion and humility. Hence the Salaf regarded it as mustahabb to com-

bine fasting and I'tikaaf. Imam Ibn al-Qayyim said: "It was not reported that the Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, ever did I'tikaaf when he was not fasting. Indeed, 'Aa'ishah, may Allah be pleased with her, said: 'There is no I'tikaaf except with fasting.'" (Abu Daawood)

Allah did not mention I'tikaaf except in conjunction with fasting, and the Messenger of Allah, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, did not do I'tikaaf except in conjunction with fasting.

The view that fasting is a condition of I'tikaaf was narrated from Ibn 'Umar and Ibn 'Abbas. It was also the view of Malik, al-Awza'i and Abu Haneefah, and different opinions were narrated from Ahmad and Al-Shaafi'ee.

With regard to the words of Ibn al-Qayyim, "It was not reported that the Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, ever did I'tikaaf when he was not fasting", there is some room for debate. It was reported that the Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, did I'tikaaf in Shawwaal (Al-Bukhari and Muslim), but it was not proven that he was fasting on these days when he did I'tikaaf.

The most correct view is that fasting is mustahabb (recommended) for the one who does I'tikaaf, but it is not a condition of his I'tikaaf being valid.

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

UN-World Bank report estimates Gaza infrastructure damages at \$18.5bn

Reuters
Washington

The Gaza Strip suffered about \$18.5bn in damages to critical infrastructure in the first four months of the Israeli bombardment launched in response to the October first week Hamas storming of Israel, according to a joint World Bank and the UN report released yesterday.

The interim damage assessment report, which received financial support from the European Union, estimates the damages are equivalent to 97% of the combined GDP of the West Bank and Gaza in 2022 and left 26mn tonnes of debris and rubble that would take years to remove.

The report details the scale of infrastructure destruction in the Israel-Gaza war and the dire state of the population in the narrow coastal enclave where health facilities have been shattered, the population is starving and aid work is hampered.

The report found that damage to structures affects every sector, with housing accounting for 72% of the costs and public service infrastructure such as water, health, and education accounting for 19%, according to a statement from the World Bank.

Over a million people are without homes and 75% of the population is displaced, the World Bank said, adding that more than half the population of Gaza is on the brink of famine and the entire population is experiencing acute



food insecurity and malnutrition.

"Catastrophic cumulative impacts on physical and mental health have hit women, children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities the hardest, with the youngest children anticipated to be facing life-long consequences to their development," the World Bank said.

Palestinian group Hamas stormed Israel in the first week of October.

Israel's subsequent military as-

sault on Hamas-governed Gaza has killed over 32,000 people, according to the local health ministry, displaced nearly all of its 2.3mn population, put Gaza on the brink of starvation and led to genocide allegations that Israel denies.

Israeli leaders have said Hamas can end the war by surrendering, freeing all hostages it holds in Gaza and handing over for trial those involved in the October first week storming of the country.

Gaza dentist sets up tent to replace destroyed clinic



Palestinian dentist Najdat Saqr, whose clinic was destroyed during an Israeli bombardment, treats patient at a tent he set up, amid the ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas, in Nuseirat camp in the central Gaza Strip.

Reuters
Nuseirat Camp

His clinic destroyed during Israel's bombardment of the Gaza Strip, Palestinian dentist Najdat Saqr has retrieved equipment from the ruins and set up a tent to treat patients again.

"Around 80% of our work involves root canal treatment. As for anaesthesia, I do have this but it's about to run out," he said.

Saqr has just started seeing patients at the makeshift clinic he opened in a tent in Nuseirat refugee camp.

"After six months of war I decided that I must continue to work. Of course my (dental) centre was damaged from the bombardment – the Nuseirat roundabout was targeted repeatedly, resulting in damages to my centre," he said.

"I took one of the chairs from the

centre and I came here and set up a tent. I retrieved some equipment from under the rubble after (the centre) being targeted and I moved everything on a tuk-tuk from the clinic to here."

Israel has laid waste to the Gaza Strip since launching an offensive in response to the Hamas-led October first week storming of the country's south. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has said the health system in the Gaza Strip is barely surviving in the besieged territory.

Israel's offensive in the Gaza Strip has killed more than 32,000 Palestinians, health authorities in Gaza say.

Saqr's certificates of professional qualification hang proudly from the tent poles.

"I've got many certificates that I worked hard for, I grabbed them from my (damaged) centre, I thought I must have them here, hung behind me," he said.

In Gaza, Palestinians risk their lives in desperate rush for aid

Reuters
Cairo

Omar Deeb was nearly hit by Israeli tank fire while searching for food in Gaza, and then saw people killed around him when he set out once more to feed his family in the besieged enclave.

But like many Gazans who could soon face famine he has no choice but to embark on what he calls "death missions", risking his life to provide for his six children, who live in a school shelter.

"If I go, we eat. And if I don't, we don't eat," Deeb, 37, who lives in Gaza City, told Reuters over the phone.

Securing aid has become a life or death scramble in Gaza during a six-month-old Israeli ground and air campaign that has killed over 32,000 Palestinians and wounding more than 75,000, according to Gaza health authorities.

Israel is carrying out the offensive in retaliation for a Hamas storming of southern Israel in the first week of October.

The UN has warned of a looming famine and complained of obstacles to getting aid in and distributing it throughout Gaza. The US also says famine is imminent.

Deeb hasn't yet healed from wounds sustained when pieces of a building which were blown apart struck him as he tried grab flour from aid trucks entering northern Gaza. Deeb also came close to death two other times, he said, first on Feb 29 when the Gaza health ministry said over 100 people were killed by Israeli fire as they ventured to get aid.

Israel said the deaths were caused when people were trampled over or run over by trucks carrying aid.

On March 23, he said Israel opened fire at an aid drop point at Gaza's Kuwait roundabout, where several other people were killed around him, mostly members of the Popular Committees, a body formed of traditional family clans and factions to secure aid convoys.

DESPERATE AND HUNGRY

"Every time (I go) it feels like the last time," said Deeb.

"Therefore, I pay farewell to my wife and children. I ask my wife to forgive me, the children too," said Deeb, whose son aged five was killed in an Israeli strike on his house in December.

Contacted by Reuters, the Israeli military had no immediate comment on the Palestinian allegation that it puts seekers of aid in danger. On March 23, the Israeli



military said its forces had not fired at people in the aid convoy in the Kuwait roundabout incident, according to its preliminary findings.

Israeli officials say they have increased aid access to Gaza, are not responsible for delays and that the aid delivery inside Gaza is the responsibility of the UN and humanitarian agencies. Israel has also accused Hamas of stealing aid, a charge Hamas denies.

Underscoring the chaos in Gaza, citizens from Australia, Britain and Poland were among seven people working for celebrity chef Jose Andres' World Central Kitchen who were killed in an Israeli airstrike in central Gaza on Monday, the NGO said.

"The last time I ate meat, it was

chicken – it was a week before the war," said Deeb.

Desperate and hungry, thousands like Deeb head to aid drop points when night falls to secure some flour or canned food. They learn about incoming drops from aid truck drivers who phone it in to their relatives, who in turn spread the word.

"When the aid trucks reach Deir Al-Balah in central Gaza, my neighbour's relative (the driver) gives him a call, and we rise up to go, regardless of what time it is," he said.

When Deeb and others scramble to aid drop spots, others like Abu Mahmoud, a member of the Popular Committees, beat their way to the food with sticks to try to keep order.

Some other members, mostly from Hamas, have guns.

With Israeli forces sworn to eliminate Hamas, it has become highly risky for anyone linked to the group to emerge into the open to protect aid deliveries to civilians, so the job is being done by the popular committees.

Gaza has several large traditional family clans, some of them widely believed to be heavily armed.

A former Hamas-hired public servant, Abu Mahmoud has

survived death in both locations mentioned by Deeb. At one of those incidents he lost three of his friends, he told Reuters.

These men see their risky mission as no less important than fighting Israel, says Abu Mahmoud, a father of five.

"It is a mission to martyrdom," said Abu Mahmoud, who declined to give his full name for fear of Israeli reprisals.

Sources in the Popular Committees put the number of members who had been killed in the past month at about 70.

According to sources in the clans and the popular committees, these 70 were killed by Israeli strikes in different aid drop locations.

Abu Mahmoud said the main obstacle to getting the aid to northern Gaza has been Israeli attacks which killed or wounded several of them everyday.

Another problem is big crowds of people who rush to get aid. Sometimes there are greedy thieves, not hungry Gazans, residents and members of the popular committees say.

"Our mission is very risky, we can't open fire at people, we don't want that. So mostly some fire into the air to disperse the thieves," said Abu Mahmoud.



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Qatar Charity's Ramadan
Page in Cooperation with
Gulf Times



Qatar Charity hosts 'Ramadan Ghabga' for sponsored 'Future's Leaders'

Qatar Charity (QC) organized a 'Ramadan Ghabga' (banquet) for those sponsored under its 'Future's Leaders' program. This comes as part of its Ramadan activities and under the sponsorship of Dukhan Bank. The banquet was attended by Mr. Yousuf bin Ahmed Al-Kuwari, CEO of Qatar Charity, as well as many of its officials and sponsored individuals along with their families. A group of media personalities and influencers, as well as many students and officials from Awsaj Academy and Tariq Bin Ziad School were also present at the event.

Students from Awsaj Academy and Tariq Bin Ziad School showcased a diverse array of performances at the event, earning admiration and active engagement from the sponsored individuals, both male and female, as well as their mothers.

During his speech at the event, Mr. Faisal Rashid al-Fehaida, CEO's assistant for the Programs and Community Development sector at Qatar Charity, expressed his delight in participating with the



sponsored 'Future's Leaders' in the Ramadan banquet. He considered it a significant occasion for meetings and communicating with them.

He further stated, "Through the 'Future Leaders' program, we are committed to ensuring comprehensive social care for everyone sponsored under this program, providing them with the necessary support as a humanitarian duty. We take pride in our sons and daughters who excel academically and practically, uphold noble values, demonstrate good behavior, and develop their abilities and talents. We hope that everyone will follow the example of these outstanding individuals to create a brighter and more successful future."

He also encouraged them to engage in volunteer work and serve others and the community, extending sincere thanks and appreciation to the partners and supporters of the 'Future's Leaders' program.


On behalf of Awsaj Academy, student Fatima Saad Al-Muhannadi delivered a speech, stating, "We are committed to instilling values of compassion,

generosity, and giving in our students. We are grateful for the opportunity provided by Qatar Charity to collaborate in this endeavor."

Tangible Difference


Dr. Maha Al-Romaihi is the director of Tariq Bin Ziad School, a member of Qatar Foundation, expressed, "We recognize the importance of deep community engagement and collaboration to support those in need. This is why we are always delighted to participate in Qatar Charity's events."

She added, "We unite with Qatar Charity, our faithful partner, in our shared mission in the fields of education and humanitarian work. Qatar Charity has been an invaluable ally in our efforts to raise awareness and provide volunteering opportunities for our students and staff." She also highlighted the school's commitment to deepening its relationship with Qatar Charity and exploring new opportunities for collaboration to make a tangible difference in the lives of those in need.



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ROW

Taiwan on alert over China civilian drone incursions

Taiwan said soldiers on one of its frontline islands just off China's mainland were on heightened alert following what it called provocations by Chinese civilian drones. Taiwan's military said in a statement that soldiers stationed on Erdan island had been required to "increase their vigilance in surveillance" in response to "Chinese netizens frequently using drones to provoke". Erdan, which lies 5km from the Chinese coast, is part of Taiwan's frontline Kinmen Island chain. The Kinmen Defence Command also said in a statement that it will enhance the training of soldiers on the handling of drones, including taking "appropriate countermeasures depending on the level of threat".

CRACKDOWN

Four Indonesians held over Rohingya refugees smuggling

Four Indonesians have been arrested in connection with the smuggling of dozens of Rohingya refugees whose boat capsized in waters off the archipelago's westernmost coast last month, police said yesterday. Authorities rescued 69 Rohingya refugees last month off the western coast of Aceh province. Police in Aceh province said three alleged middlemen were rescued as part of the group and then arrested. A fourth was arrested after the other suspects were questioned. The men had allegedly travelled out to sea to pick up the refugees, on board another boat from Bangladesh, with the aim of transporting them to Malaysia.

CRIME

Malaysia arrests Israeli with guns; hunt for more suspects

Malaysia's security forces have launched a manhunt for more suspects after arresting an Israeli man with six handguns and 200 bullets, police said yesterday. "We are looking for more than two people and it includes both locals and foreigners," police inspector-general Razarudin Husain told reporters. The Israeli man, identified by police as Shalom Avitan, was arrested on March 27 at a hotel in the capital Kuala Lumpur following a tip-off. Police said Avitan arrived on March 12 with a French travel document. After his arrest, he told authorities he had come to Malaysia to look for another Israeli due to a family dispute.

LAW AND ORDER

Thai court issues arrest warrant for senior cop

A Thai court yesterday issued an arrest warrant for one of the kingdom's most high-profile officers, over allegations of money laundering, police said. Thai media said yesterday that Surachate Hakparn, the kingdom's deputy national police chief, had reported to the Tao Poon district police station in the capital Bangkok after receiving the arrest warrant. "The court has issued him an arrest warrant," Sarawut Bootdee, an officer involved in the investigation, said. The allegations include money laundering and conspiring to commit crimes, police said. Surachate has previously denied all allegations.

Manila discusses China's 'aggressive' actions with top US security adviser

Reuters
Manila

The Philippines yesterday said its national security adviser and his US counterpart discussed "coercive, aggressive and deceptive actions" by Beijing in the South China Sea, as a diplomatic row intensifies between the two Asian neighbours. Philippine national security adviser Eduardo Ano "expressed his appreciation for the US' continued assurances and reaffirmation of its ironclad commitment" to their alliance, the Philippine National Security Council said in a statement. The phone call on Monday was on the heels of a series of maritime run-ins and heated verbal exchanges between China and the Philippines that has triggered concern about an escalation at sea.

President Ferdinand Marcos Jr said last week there would be "countermeasures" against aggression by China's coastguard, while Beijing accused the Philippines of treachery and reneging on a promise to tow away an old naval vessel grounded intentionally on a disputed shoal. Manila denies ever making that pledge. Philippine Defence Secretary Gilberto Teodoro told Filipinos in an open letter yesterday to "not fall into the trap set by Chinese propaganda". China claims almost the entire South China Sea as its territory, policed by an armada of coast-guard vessels, some more than

1,000km away from its mainland. China has maintained its responses have been appropriate in the face of Philippine encroachment. The rows come at a time when the Philippines and US are deepening military ties, frustrating China, which sees Washington as interfering in its back yard. The Philippines has insisted it never agreed to tow away the BRP Sierra Madre, which has been guarded by a handful of soldiers since it was grounded at the Second Thomas Shoal 25 years ago. China has been accused of blocking resupply missions to those troops. The former spokesperson of Rodrigo Duterte, the previous president, has confirmed there had been an informal "gentleman's agreement" with China to keep the status quo at the shoal, but not to tow the ship away. NSC spokesperson Jonathan Malaya said the Marcos government had not seen any document to support China's claim of a Philippine promise to remove the ship. Meanwhile the US, Australia, Japan and the Philippines are planning anti-submarine drills in the South China Sea on April 7, Kyodo news agency reported yesterday. It would mark the first such full-fledged exercise for the navies of the four countries in those waters and is likely aimed at demonstrating solidarity with the Philippines against China's growing assertiveness, Kyodo said, citing multiple people familiar with the matter.



Students use umbrellas to protect themselves from the sun as they line up to wait for their classes outside their school in Manila yesterday.

Philippine schools suspend classes over heat danger

AFP
Manila

Hundreds of schools in the Philippines, including dozens in the capital Manila, suspended in-person classes yesterday due to dangerous levels of heat, education officials said. The country's heat index measures what a temperature feels like, taking into account humidity. The index was earlier forecast to reach the "danger" level of 42C in Manila for yesterday and 43C today, with similar levels in a dozen of other areas of the country, the state weather forecaster said. Local officials across the main island of Luzon, the central islands, and the southern island of Mindanao suspended in-person classes or shortened school hours to avoid the hottest part of the day, education ministry officials said. The department of education was unable to provide an exact number of schools affected. March, April and May are typically the driest months of the year for swathes of the tropical country. This year conditions have been exacerbated by the El Nino weather phenomenon. Primary and secondary schools in Quezon, the most populous

part of the capital, were ordered to shut while schools in other areas were given the option by local officials to shift to remote learning. Some schools in Manila also reduced class hours. A heat index of 42-51C can cause heat cramps and exhaustion, with heat stroke "probable with continued exposure", the weather forecaster said in an advisory. Heat cramps and heat exhaustion are also possible at 33-41C, according to the forecaster. The orders affected hundreds of schools in the Mindanao provinces of Cotabato, South Cota-

bato and Sultan Kudarat, as well as the cities of Cotabato, General Santos and Koronadal, Zamboanga regional education ministry spokeswoman Rea Halique said. Five schools in Mindanao's Zamboanga region also shut schools for the day, though local officials in the area did not recommend the suspension of in-person classes in other schools, the ministry said. "At the Pagadian City Pilot School one (kindergarten) student and two in the elementary school suffered nosebleeds," Zamboanga regional education ministry official Dahlia Paragas said.

the recovery would make little difference for many of those who were still suffering from the crisis. More than 5.5mn Sri Lankans - or a quarter of the country's population of 22mn - were living below the poverty line of \$3.65 a day, the World Bank said. That compared to 11.3% in 2019, before the crisis hit. "The modest economic recovery will be insufficient to reverse welfare losses experienced during the crisis," the bank said, estimating poverty would stay above 22% until 2026. Utility price rises and government revenue measures meant household budgets would "remain stressed", it added. The bank warned that Sri Lanka must carry out a "deep debt restructuring" and restore its access to international financial markets, blocked since it defaulted on its \$46bn foreign debt in April 2022.

Japan health supplements tied to 157 hospitalisations

Japanese dietary supplements at the centre of an expanding health scare have now been linked to at least 157 hospitalisations, a health ministry official said yesterday. The figure reflects an increase from the 114 hospitalisation cases that Kobayashi Pharmaceutical said on Friday were linked to its products containing red yeast rice, or "beni koji". A Kobayashi spokeswoman confirmed the latest hospitalisation cases. On Friday, Kobayashi said it was investigating five deaths potentially linked to the dietary supplements, which are meant to lower cholesterol. The government and the company are probing whether the supplements caused the deaths and other health problems, mostly with kidneys. Kobayashi Pharmaceutical announced on March 22 that it was recalling three kinds of over-the-counter tablets containing "beni koji" after customers reported kidney problems.

JAL initiation ceremony



Newly-hired employees of Japan Airlines (JAL) attend the company's initiation ceremony at a hangar of Haneda airport in Tokyo, Japan.

Sri Lanka 'recovering but poverty enduring'

AFP
Colombo

Crisis-hit Sri Lanka will return to growth this year, the World Bank said yesterday, but around a quarter of the country's citizens will remain living in poverty. The Indian Ocean island nation was hammered by its worst-ever economic crisis in 2022, when it ran out of foreign exchange and protests over the resulting shortages of food, fuel and pharmaceuticals forced its president to resign. Sri Lanka's economy shrank by 7.3% that year, followed by another contraction of 2.3% in 2023. But in a new report the World Bank said Sri Lanka's GDP was expected to stabilise this year, projecting growth of 2.2%. Even so, the bank warned that

the recovery would make little difference for many of those who were still suffering from the crisis. More than 5.5mn Sri Lankans - or a quarter of the country's population of 22mn - were living below the poverty line of \$3.65 a day, the World Bank said. That compared to 11.3% in 2019, before the crisis hit. "The modest economic recovery will be insufficient to reverse welfare losses experienced during the crisis," the bank said, estimating poverty would stay above 22% until 2026. Utility price rises and government revenue measures meant household budgets would "remain stressed", it added. The bank warned that Sri Lanka must carry out a "deep debt restructuring" and restore its access to international financial markets, blocked since it defaulted on its \$46bn foreign debt in April 2022.

N Korea fires medium-range ballistic missile

AFP
Seoul

North Korea fired a medium-range ballistic missile yesterday, with South Korea, the US and Japan conducting a joint aerial exercise involving nuclear-capable B-52H bombers just hours later. Pyongyang's latest launch comes less than two weeks after Kim supervised a solid-fuel engine test for a new intermediate-range hypersonic missile (IRBM), with experts suggesting yesterday's launch could be of the same weapon. Seoul's military said the mis-

sile, launched early yesterday, flew around 600km before splashing down in waters between South Korea and Japan. The joint chiefs of staff said the military was analysing the launch, with a defence official telling the Yonhap news agency that it had likely involved a hypersonic warhead "on top of the delivery system used in the engine test last month". North Korea has long sought to master more advanced hypersonic and solid fuel technologies, to make its missiles more capable to neutralise South Korean-US missile defence systems and threaten America's regional military bases. In January, Pyongyang said it had

launched a solid-fuel IRBM tipped with a hypersonic warhead, then last month flagged the successful engine test of the "new-type intermediate-range hypersonic missile". Hypersonic missiles are faster and can manoeuvre mid-flight, making them harder to track and intercept, while solid-fuel missiles do not need to be fuelled before launch, making them harder to find and destroy, as well as quicker to use. Seoul's defence ministry said it conducted a joint aerial exercise with Washington and Tokyo yesterday involving a nuclear-capable B-52H bomber and F-15K fighter jets near the Korean peninsula. The drill aimed to "improve joint readiness against the North's nuclear and missile threats," it said. The launch yesterday "appears to be part of Pyongyang's missile development blueprint, including hypersonic weapons," said Han Kwon-hee of the Korea Association of Defence Industry Studies. It seems Kim is developing such technology domestically, rather than with Russian help "given the sensitive nature of the weapons", he added. The US as well as Germany condemned the missile test, with a state department spokesperson

saying that such launches violate UN Security Council resolutions and "pose a threat" to North Korea's neighbours. Germany's foreign ministry "strongly" condemned the "illegal launch", urging Pyongyang to enter negotiations with Seoul and Washington to dismantle its nuclear and missile programmes. The test comes just days after a Russian veto at the United Nations ended UN expert monitoring of North Korean sanctions violations, amid a probe into alleged arms transfers between Moscow and Pyongyang. North Korea has yet to comment on the development.

It also comes just over a week before South Korea votes in a general election, in which the party of hawkish President Yoon Suk-yeol, who has taken a tough line with Pyongyang, is seeking to win back control of the parliament. "The Kim regime prioritises advancing its military capabilities and doesn't care to stay quiet during the South Korean legislative election campaign," said Leif-Eric Easley, a professor at Ewha University in Seoul. "But firing an intermediate-range missile lacks the shock value of a full-range ICBM launch or a nuclear test, so it's unlikely to swing any National Assembly seats."

WEATHER

India forecast to see more heatwaves during April-June

India is likely to experience more heatwave days than normal between April and June, the weather office said yesterday, potentially hitting agricultural production and hampering government efforts to bring down food inflation. A heat wave for the third year in a row could dent production of wheat, rapeseed and chickpeas, and also lift power demand above supply during the summer season. India is the world's second largest wheat producer. In the April-June period various parts of the country could record 10 to 20 heatwave days compared to the normal four to eight days, a India Meteorological Department official told a news conference.

TRAGEDY

Four children killed in bus accident in northern India

Four children were killed and 12 injured when a school bus overturned in Barabanki district in India's northern state of Uttar Pradesh, a police official said. The injured were rushed to the nearest healthcare facility, said Ajay Singh, a local police officer. Singh said the children were returning from a picnic at a zoo in state capital Lucknow and the accident occurred when the bus driver took measures to avoid colliding with a motorcycle rider. In total, 42 children, four teachers, a bus driver, and a conductor were in the bus at the start of the journey. Further details on the bus and the incident were not immediately available

DECISION

Kannada language added to Vatican News feed

The Vatican said yesterday it would begin translating its news stories into Kannada, making the Indian language the 53rd used by the Vatican's media outlet. The addition of Kannada - spoken by an estimated 40mn people in and around the southern Indian state of Karnataka - helps the church better communicate with its followers on the continent where Catholicism is expanding. "News about the Pope, the Vatican, the universal church and the world will be of great interest and importance for the local church," said the Archbishop of Bengaluru, Peter Machado, in announcing the new addition on Vatican News.

TRADE

India sunflower oil imports hit second-highest level

India's sunflower oil imports rose by 51% in March from the previous month to reach the second highest level on record, as lower prices led refiners to increase their purchases, while reducing buying of rival palm oil, five dealers said. Lower palm oil purchases by India, the world's biggest importer of vegetable oils, could cap the rally in benchmark Malaysian palm oil futures that are trading near their highest in a year. Higher sunflower oil purchases will help to reduce sunflower oil inventories in the Black Sea region. March sunflower oil imports surged 51% month-on-month to 448,000 metric tonnes, the second highest on record, according to estimates .

India's top yoga guru faces judges' ire in misleading adverts case

Yoga guru Baba Ramdev and his co-founder Acharya Balkrishna were present in the Supreme Court when judges issued their warning in contempt proceedings against their firm Patanjali Ayurved

Reuters
New Delhi

India's top court yesterday warned the nation's most popular yoga guru and his company of stern legal action for not complying with its directive to stop advertisements saying traditional ayurvedic medicines can fully cure some diseases.

"Shall we assume that every act that is archaic should not be (enforced)? Your apology is not persuading this court. We think it's more of a lip service"

Yoga guru Baba Ramdev, dressed in a saffron-coloured robe, and his co-founder Acharya Balkrishna were present in the Supreme Court when the judges issued their warning in contempt proceedings against their firm Patanjali Ayurved, which sells hugely popular ayurvedic medicines.

The case relates to the Indian Medical Association's allegations that Patanjali disparages conventional medicines and continued publishing ads that said traditional

medicines offered a "permanent solution" for blood pressure and asthma, despite an assurance given to court last year to stop them.

The court said it was not convinced by the company's apology and must explain in detail why it continued with its ads.

"Be ready for the consequences... take this contempt seriously," justice Hima Kohli told Ramdev and the company's lawyers in court.

Though the judges did not say what action they could take against Ramdev, a contempt of a court directive under Indian law attracts a jail term of up to six months and a monetary penalty.

A Patanjali spokesperson said it will comply with the court's order.

Court papers show Patanjali last month filed an "unqualified apology" for the ads to the judges, with its lawyers again seeking forgiveness during yesterday's hearing. The judges however were upset the company's written apology described some of Indian drug laws as "archaic".

"Shall we assume that every act that is archaic should not be (enforced)?" justice Kohli said. "Your apology is not persuading this court. We think it's more of a lip service."

Ramdev has a huge following in India and offers yoga and ayurvedic cures for many illnesses through his TV shows.

He has often faced the ire of doctors and activists who accuse the firm of making incorrect assertions about medicinal efficacy, an allegation he denies.

Wetland wash



A herd of wild Asiatic elephants bathe at Khamrenga wetland in Thakurkuchi village, on the outskirts of Guwahati, India.

China's renaming of 30 places in Arunachal 'senseless': India

Reuters
New Delhi

India rejected China's renaming of about 30 places in its northeastern Himalayan state of Arunachal Pradesh yesterday, calling the move "senseless" and reaffirming that the border province is an "integral" part of India. Beijing says Arunachal Pradesh, which its calls Zangnan, is a part of South Tibet - a claim New Delhi has repeatedly dismissed. China similarly ratcheted up tensions a year ago by giving Chinese names to 11 locations in the state.

Troops of the nuclear-armed

neighbours engaged in minor scuffles along their disputed frontier in the state in December 2022, and tensions eased after extensive military and diplomatic talks. Yet the state is frequently the cause of friction between the Asian giants whose ties have nosedived since a bloody border clash between their troops in the western Himalayas in 2020. China, in a statement on Saturday, said it had standardised the names of about 30 places in what it calls South Tibet, "in accordance with the relevant regulations on place name management of the State Council". "Assigning invented names will not alter the reality that Arunachal Pradesh is,

has been, and will always be an integral and inalienable part of India," foreign ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said yesterday.

On Monday, Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaisankar told reporters that "changing names will not do anything".

"If I change the name of your house, does it become my house?" he said.

Last month, following a visit by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the state to inaugurate infrastructure projects, China had said it was opposed to his activities in the region. India termed the arguments "baseless". The US also weighed in on the

issue, saying it recognised Arunachal Pradesh as Indian territory and "strongly opposed" any unilateral attempts to make claims on it by military or civilian "incursion or encroachments".

China had opposed these remarks, saying the matter "has nothing to do with the US".

India and China share a 3,800km border - much of it poorly demarcated - over which they also fought a bloody war in 1962.

Twenty Indian soldiers and four Chinese troops were killed in hand-to-hand combat in 2020, prompting both countries to fortify positions and deploy extra troops and equipment along the border.

Ministry, watchdog step in as Vistara cancellations surge

India's civil aviation ministry yesterday said it was monitoring a surge in flight cancellations by Vistara as the airline grapples with a shortage of pilots, while the aviation regulator has sought daily information on flight disruptions. Vistara, owned by the Tata group and Singapore Airlines, cancelled over 50 flights on Monday, with around 160 delayed, news channel NDTV reported.

The airline operates more than 300 flights a day, according to its website. Airlines have to comply with the norms of the directorate general of civil aviation (DGCA), the Indian aviation regulator, to ensure passenger facilitation in case of cancellations or delay of flights, the ministry of civil aviation said in a post on X. The DGCA has asked the airline to submit daily information and details on flights that are being cancelled and delayed. Vistara did not comment when asked for details on flight disruptions.

Poll posters appear



Women walk past an election banner of Congress party's leader Rahul Gandhi, installed along a road on the eve of his nomination filing for the upcoming India's general elections, in Wayanad, Kerala, India, yesterday.

India delays proposed hike in road toll charges

Reuters
New Delhi

India yesterday put on hold a proposed hike in road toll charges, in a move that will be welcomed by millions of motorists, truckers and commercial vehicle owners just ahead of a general election.

The annual hike in road toll charges would have benefited highway operators like IRB Infrastructure Developers and Ashok Buildcon while putting an extra burden on commuters and businesses who could see freight rates rise as a result. "The revision of user fee (toll) rates with effect from April 1 has been put on hold after taking permission from the Election Commission," a senior official at National Highways Authority of India said. India will hold a general elec-

tion in seven phases from April 19 to early June. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his regional allies are aiming for a comfortable win. Highway operators have already put notices in local newspapers about hikes in toll charges of 3% to 5% at nearly 1,100 toll plazas from April 1. Toll charges are revised annually in line with inflation. Opposition parties and commuters had criticised the proposed toll hikes as both tolls and fuel prices have gone up significantly since Modi came to office. The government says hikes in toll charges and taxation on fuel products help pay for the expansion of national highways.

Separately, the election commission also allowed the government to put on hold the proposed annual hike in electricity tariffs till the completion of the election process, the government statement said.

Wheat traders told to avoid buying as India looks to shore up stocks

Reuters
Mumbai/New Delhi

India has asked global and domestic trade houses to avoid buying new-season wheat from local farmers to help the government-backed Food Corporation of India (FCI) procure large quantities to shore up its depleting reserves, sources said.

India, the world's biggest wheat consumer and grower after China, banned exports in 2022 and is keen to bolster stocks and tame prices that surged after dry weather hurt output in 2022 and 2023.

Rising wheat prices forced the government to sell record quanti-

ties to boost local supplies, leading to a drawdown in reserves essential for the world's biggest food welfare programme, which entitles nearly 800mn to free grain.

The government has asked private traders to stay away from wholesale markets where farmers usually sell their produce to FCI or private traders, said traders and government sources, who declined to be named as they were not authorised to talk to the media.

The government informally asked private traders to avoid buying wheat at least in April, the sources said, its first such guidance since 2007. Wheat procurement starts tapering off after mid-May.

"We are not going to buy in April.

We will wait until May. Except for processors and small traders, everyone is likely to follow the government's lead," said a Mumbai-based trader with a global trade house.

Traders active in India's grain markets include Cargill Inc, Hindustan Unilever, ITC Ltd, Louis Dreyfus Company and Olam Group. The government has asked the top wheat-growing states to ensure that private traders do not get in the way of FCI's plans to buy at least 30mn metric tonnes this year, the sources said.

In 2023, FCI bought 26.2mn metric tonnes of wheat from local farmers, below its target of 34.15mn metric tonnes.

Because of last year's lower

purchases, wheat inventories in government warehouses fell to 9.7mn metric tonnes at the start of March, the lowest since 2017.

Lower wheat inventories tend to stoke open market prices.

Despite falling inventories, New Delhi has resisted calls for wheat imports as overseas purchases tend to anger farmers who form an influential voting bloc.

Millions of Indians will vote in the parliamentary election, which will be held from April 19.

India's lower wheat stocks could force New Delhi to import 2mn metric tonnes of the grain this year, according to a United States Department of Agriculture report last week. FCI is focused on Ut-

tar Pradesh, a top producing state which has historically contributed less than 2% to FCI's wheat procurement, with the state government asking railways not to provide freight cars to big traders in April, the sources said.

Uttar Pradesh has asked local authorities to ensure that big traders do not get to buy large quantities of wheat, according to a government letter addressed to district officials.

FCI recently started buying new wheat from farmers at a state-set Rs2,275 (\$27.29) per 100kg against open market rates of around Rs2,500.

Meanwhile, the Indian sugar industry has urged the government to

allow exports of 1mn metric tonnes of the sweetener as unseasonable rainfall in key cane-growing states leads to increased production and supplies.

The country is likely to produce 32mn tonnes of sugar in the current marketing year ending September 30 against local demand of 28.5mn tonnes, the Indian Sugar & Bio-Energy Manufacturers Association (ISMA) said yesterday.

Higher production is expected to increase stocks in the country to 9.1mn tonnes by the end of the current marketing year, up from the last year's 5.6mn tonnes, creating space to allow exports of 1mn tons, according to an association statement.

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GULF TIMES

Continued yen depreciation keeps policymakers of Japan on guard

Just as the yen has been grappling with continued depreciation, so the currency's weakness is now seen as problematic, with Japanese firms having shifted production overseas and the economy heavily reliant on imports for goods ranging from fuel and raw materials to machinery parts.

The yen has been one of the worst performers this year among major currencies against the US dollar, falling more than 6%. That's mainly because of the wide gap in interest rates between Japan and the US.

Even after the recent historic rate hike, Japan's new policy rate is by far the lowest in the developed world, at a range of between 0% and 0.1%.

The yen's trajectory will largely depend on the trajectory of the interest rate gap.

Bank of Japan Governor Kazuo Ueda has made it clear Japan's overall policy settings will remain accommodative, meaning he's unlikely to raise rates fast or by a lot.

Even after the recent historic rate hike, Japan's new policy rate is by far the lowest in the developed world, at a range of between 0% and 0.1%

latest wage hikes in decades for the coming fiscal year.

Wage gains exceeding inflation may give consumers more confidence about spending. Prime Minister Fumio Kishida hopes one-off tax cuts starting in June will support consumer sentiment, too.

Investors and economists are split over whether the BoJ is finished with raising interest rates this year or will make another move. Ueda has said if inflation runs hotter than expected, another rate hike would be on the table.

The key point will be whether consumption recovers. That would make it easier for the BoJ to raise rates again, as it could claim that resilient domestic demand fuelled by wage hikes is making demand-led inflation sustainable.

If consumption fails to pick up despite wage growth, the economy will lose momentum, making it harder for the BoJ to justify another hike.

Japan last intervened in October 2022 as the yen plumbed lows near 152 per dollar. It was then estimated to have spent as much as ¥9.2tn (\$60.78bn) defending the currency.

Japan's finance minister, who is in charge of currency policy, has been issuing stronger and stronger verbal warnings meant to put a floor under the yen, but authorities haven't taken direct action in the market. US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said last year that any intervention by Japan to prop up the yen would be understandable if it were aimed at smoothing out volatility — not at affecting the absolute level of the exchange rate.

But yen-buying intervention is more difficult than yen-selling. While Japan holds nearly \$1.3tn in foreign reserves, these could be substantially eroded if Tokyo intervened heavily repeatedly, leaving authorities constrained over how long they can defend the yen.

Japanese authorities also consider it important to seek the support of Group of Seven partners, notably the US, if the intervention involves the dollar.

Washington gave tacit approval when Japan intervened in 2022. There is uncertainty on whether the same will happen when Japan next considers intervention.

A looming US presidential election may discourage Japanese authorities from stepping in, given the risk of drawing unwanted attention and criticism from Washington as market meddling.

The yen has long been the currency of choice for investors undertaking carry trades, which involve borrowing in a low-yielding currency like the yen to invest in higher yielding counterparts like the US, or Canadian dollars.

But the yen's enduring volatility and weakness could undermine its appeal as a funding currency.

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Why is Europe moving rightward?

By Federico Fubini
Rome

In the run-up to the European Parliament elections this June, the nativist right seems poised to gain ground across the continent, especially in key countries. Though the chauvinist wave extends from Portugal to Scandinavia, it is being driven mainly by right-wing parties in five core EU members that rejected nationalism more than 70 years ago.

In Italy, a politician with a neo-fascist background, Giorgia Meloni, has been prime minister since 2022 and remains popular. In The Netherlands, the radical xenophobe Geert Wilders' party came in first in the election last November and also remains popular (though it has failed to win enough support from other parties to form a government).

In France, Marine Le Pen's National Rally is the front-runner, with nearly 30% approval. In Belgium, the far-right Flemish party Vlaams Belang is ahead and surging in the polls. And in Germany, Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) has emerged as the second-strongest party. Among the European Union's original members, only tiny Luxembourg still boasts a strong centrist politics.

True, some of these parties have barely disguised racist agendas, whereas others have managed to establish respectable conservative reputations. Meloni has been pro-Western in her foreign policy and seemingly pragmatic in her day-to-day domestic dealings. Her strategy of moderation has been so successful that Le Pen is now openly emulating it. The AfD, by contrast, has doubled down on extremism.

Nonetheless, when asked recently about the common factors propelling right-wing forces across Europe, Meloni did not mince words: "Clearly, Europe's answers to citizens are not working."

But is this true? Immigration, economic hardship, and rising inequality are generally what drive voters to the extremes, but these problems have all subsided somewhat in recent years. Asylum seekers' arrivals are currently well below the last decade's average, and European societies welcomed millions of Ukrainian refugees without much controversy.

Nor do economic factors explain current opinion polls. Though inflation has dented purchasing power, especially in Italy and

Germany, the EU experienced far worse economic conditions after the 2008 financial crisis. Employment today is at a multi-decade peak in most EU countries, including the founding members, and inequality has also somewhat moderated. In France, the Gini index (which measures income inequality) has been falling since 2010, and similar trends can be found across most other core EU countries.

There will always be reasons for economic and political dissatisfaction. In The Netherlands, some voters worry that immigrants will burden the welfare system and compete for scarce affordable housing. Italy has long suffered from economic malaise and weak growth, and Germany increasingly looks like the sick man of the world economy.

So, some other undercurrent must be propelling the nationalist right's widespread appeal. One clue is that most of the hard-right parties — regardless of whether they are pro-Russia or not — started surging noticeably in the polls after Vladimir Putin ordered his full-scale invasion of Ukraine. That may have triggered a reaction beyond the immediate sense of insecurity, as Europeans awoke to the potential unravelling of the post-Cold War political order.

European political orders have always drawn their legitimacy not just from power or institutions, but also from shared values. At least since the Congress of Vienna (1814-15), the "unifying force" in European politics, as Henry Kissinger saw it, was the collective belief in the system's ideals. Thus, the political order of Metternich's Europe rested on monarchs who agreed on the need to suppress bourgeois ideals. Post-Versailles (1919) Europe, by contrast, never achieved much ideological unity or shared sense of legitimacy, ending in the absolute disorder of a world war.

After World War II, a unifying force returned to (western) Europe in the form of the Cold War, when the goal was to minimise Soviet influence and pursue continuous, albeit slow, economic integration. After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, creating a united — and politically and economically liberal — Europe became the mission. Europeans even wagered that they could influence the rest of the world through the "Brussels effect", a regulatory floor that attracts global compliance in the interest of simplicity. The bloc's overall strategy reflected underlying values that gained traction among the public when it delivered

stability and prosperity.

But now, Putin's war on Ukraine, turmoil in the Middle East, and the prospect of Donald Trump's return to the White House are weakening the pillars of European stability. Sensing a sea change, voters are turning to parties that don't traditionally identify with the system. Fears that the post-1989 order is crumbling have led voters to ask themselves: "Are we really on the right side of history, as we were told? Were we lied to?"

Recent geopolitical changes thus have eroded the system's perceived legitimacy. Russia's assault on Ukraine made clear that Europe is only partly sovereign, and the vaunted "Brussels effect" has failed to materialise in the global net-zero transition. Other large countries ignore Europe's claim to climate leadership, because they know that it lacks the necessary technological prowess. And on migration, the EU has consistently failed to find a common approach to addressing the issue vis-à-vis countries of origin.

True, nativists like Meloni sometimes appear to become more moderate once in power. But rather than embracing the system's values, they may be subtly changing them. While presenting herself as reassuringly urbane, articulate, and supportive of Ukraine, Meloni has quietly staffed every bureaucratic post available with party loyalists. Moreover, she is pushing a constitutional reform that looks like a power grab (it would severely downgrade both the president and the parliament), as well as forging alliances with unsavoury figures such as the French xenophobe Eric Zemmour, and the Spanish far-right leader Santiago Abascal. She has also been on good terms with Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, although she is critical of his pro-Russia leanings.

The Meloni model is starting to look like a template for the nationalist right to win office and then change the EU from within. But if geopolitical insecurity is indeed at the heart of Europe's right-wing turn, those who oppose it must recognise that the EU cannot be defended on the basis of the status quo. They will need to make the case that security and sovereignty require even greater political integration. — Project Syndicate

• Federico Fubini, an editor-at-large at Corriere della Sera, is the author, most recently, of *Sul Vulcano*.

Modernity of cities in Qatar: A visit to Al Ruwais

By José Benzaquén Perea
Ambassadors of Peru

This past weekend, we were delighted to visit a city showcasing admirable modernity, a hallmark of Qatar's development in recent decades.

We ventured north, 154km from the capital Doha, to reach the city of Al Ruwais, nestled along the Arabian Gulf. Our first impression was the ease of navigating the well-signposted and secure transportation routes.

During our short trip, we witnessed a landscape that clearly exemplified the country's remarkable progress, achieved in harmony with environmental protection. We were particularly fascinated by the transformation of once-desert land into flourishing green spaces resembling giant oases. This transformation fosters a unique flora and fauna in this part of the world.

We were hosted by a gracious individual, Ali Hussein al-Sada, who expressed immense pride in his family's centuries-old roots in the region. He shared stories of their traditional



A view of the Al Ruwais port.

customs and values, reflecting a time when the challenges of daily life were vastly different. Al-Sada embodied the genuine kindness characteristic of those who persevere in their pursuit of progress, a hallmark of developed nations like Qatar.

Our tour of Al Ruwais revealed a thriving city with well-planned and aesthetically pleasing architecture. The city boasts visitor attractions that seamlessly blend with the maritime landscape, a testament to the enduring traditions of a culture deeply connected

to the sea — a connection that historically facilitated communication and trade with other territories.

We were impressed exploring the Al Mina Market at Ruwais Port. It offers a fascinating range of goods brought in by traders from across the region, reflecting Qatar's rich maritime trading history.

We had the unforgettable experience of witnessing how the ecological process of reforestation has fostered the adaptation of fauna and flora similar to those native to the peninsula, including a remarkable variety of birds from other continents.

Furthermore, we visited a treasure trove of knowledge — a library housing countless publications that highlight Qatar's rich Arab historical and cultural heritage, alongside a diverse collection of written works.

The city's distinctive port was truly admirable. Here, deep-draft wooden boats continue to ply the waters, carrying on the proud legacy of Al Ruwais' ancestors in Qatar's north.

Finally, the typical city of Al Ruwais deserves to be visited.

Biden, Xi clash over trade restrictions

However, both seek to manage tensions as US officials head to China

AFP
Washington

President Joe Biden and Xi Jinping clashed in a telephone call yesterday about US trade restrictions on technology and on Taiwan, but they looked to manage their tensions, with two top US officials to head shortly to Beijing.

The telephone conversation was the two leaders' first direct interaction since a summit in November in California that saw a marked thaw in tone, if not the long-term rivalry, between the world's two largest economies.

Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen will leave today and visit both Guangzhou, the southern city emblematic of China's manufacturing power, and Beijing, with Secretary of State Antony Blinken due in China in the coming weeks, officials said.

"Intense competition requires intense diplomacy to manage tensions, address misperceptions and prevent unintended conflict. And this call is one way to do that," a US official said in a briefing to reporters.



US President Joe Biden greets Chinese President Xi Jinping before a meeting during the APEC Leaders' week in Woodside, California on November 15, 2023. (AFP)

The official said the talks were not aimed at resolving differences, and the two leaders were open about heated disagreements. Xi accused the United States of creating economic risks with Biden's sweeping ban on high-tech exports.

"If the United States insists on sup-

pressing China's high-tech development and depriving China of its legitimate right to development, we will not sit idly by," Xi warned, according to Chinese state media.

Biden rebuffed his appeal, with the White House saying he told him "the

United States will continue to take necessary actions to prevent advanced US technologies from being used to undermine our national security, without unduly limiting trade and investment."

Xi, China's most powerful leader in decades, has solidified power at home and taken a tough approach in Asia.

But US observers see Xi as eager to temper the friction with the United States as China weathers rough economic headwinds.

At the California summit, he agreed to two key asks by the United States — curbs on precursor chemicals to fentanyl, the synthetic painkiller behind a US overdose epidemic, and restoring dialogue between the two militaries to manage crises.

Xi may also see more opportunity for co-operation with Biden, who faces a rematch in November's presidential election with Donald Trump, who has cast China as an arch-enemy.

Biden has preserved or even accelerated some of Trump's tough measures, but has also identified areas of common interest, such as fighting climate change.

The White House said Biden pressed Xi to ensure "peace and stability" across the Taiwan Strait ahead of the inauguration on May 20 of President-elect Lai Ching-te.

China has denounced Lai, a long-time

supporter of a separate identity for the self-ruling democracy claimed by Beijing, but US officials have been cautiously optimistic that China's military moves ahead of the inauguration will not go beyond past practice.

In the phone call, Xi told Biden that Taiwan remains an "uncrossable red line" for China, according to state media.

The United States has voiced growing alarm over rising Chinese moves against the Philippines in the dispute-rife South China Sea.

The Biden administration, while maintaining dialogue with China, has put a strong focus on supporting allies.

In the midst of the diplomatic flurry with China, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida will pay a state visit to Washington next week, with Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos joining for three-way talks.

Blinken also visited the Philippines last month where he reaffirmed US commitments to defend the ally.

Blinken and Yellen will both be paying their second visit to China in less than a year, marking a return to more routine interactions between the powers.

Blinken's trip last year was the highest-ranking by an American in five years, following the Covid pandemic and soaring tensions under Trump.



Family members of pupils of the primary Viertola comprehensive school make their way to enter the school after a child opened fire and injured other children yesterday in Vantaa, outside Helsinki. (AFP)

School shooter, 12, kills fellow student

A 12-year-old opened fire yesterday at a school north of the Finnish capital Helsinki, killing a fellow student and seriously injuring two others before being taken into custody, police said.

The Viertola school in Vantaa, Finland's fourth-largest city, has around 90 staff and 800 pupils in grades one to nine, or aged 7-15.

"Today, after 9am, a shooting incident took place at a school...in which a sixth grader, a student of the school, died," Ilkka Koskimaki, chief of the Eastern Uusimaa police department, told a press conference, adding that two others were "seriously injured".

Police had earlier said that both the suspect and the injured were 12 years old. They have opened an investigation into murder and attempted murder.

The child who was killed died at the scene, and the suspect had already left the school by the time police arrived.

The suspect, who was carrying a gun, was arrested in a "calm manner" around 10am and had admitted being the shooter in a preliminary interrogation.

Ilta-lehti newspaper published a video filmed from a passing car showing two police officers pinning down a child by the side of a road in a residential area.

Owing to the suspect's young age, police said the child would not be held in custody, but would be turned over to social services after being interviewed.

Pak ruling coalition wins Senate polls

Pakistan's ruling coalition seized a majority in Senate polls yesterday, unofficial results showed, after the election commission delayed the vote in a province controlled by loyalists of jailed ex-premier Imran Khan. Polls for half the Senate's 96 seats are held every three years, elected by lawmakers from Pakistan's four provincial assemblies and the lower house of parliament.

Early results returned by provincial election commissions showed the ruling coalition had taken most of the seats that were up for grabs. Eighteen senators from Punjab and Balochistan stood unopposed. The results will be confirmed by the central election commission in the coming days.

The Pakistan People's Party (PPP), the second-largest coalition partner, are expected to appoint the leader of the Senate, after securing the most seats. The vote in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Provincial Assembly was postponed due to a delay in reserved seats for women and religious minorities being appointed, the election commission said.

"The Constitution has been violated multiple times in this country," chief minister of the province Ali Amin Gandapur told media.

"I want to make it clear that in this province we will fight, like our leader."

Clashes after Turkiye annuls mayoral candidate's victory

Turkiye's election officials have overturned the election of mayoral candidate in the eastern city of Van, his party said yesterday, triggering protests and clashes with police as opposition politicians criticised the move.

Police used tear gas and water cannon to break up a demonstration in Van, where the DEM party said its candidate in Sunday's municipal elections was ruled ineligible at the last minute. Demonstrations were also held in economic hub Istanbul. The ruling was "unacceptable", Istanbul's re-elected mayor Ekrem Imamoglu, seen as a likely presidential candidate in the next election, posted on X.

He called on the government and electoral commission to "respect the people's will".

During nationwide municipal elections Sunday, DEM's Abdullah Zeydan had garnered over 55% of the vote in Van, which lies on Lake Van around 80km from Turkiye's eastern border with Iran. His exclusion left the way clear for the candidate from President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) to take the mayorship with just 27% of the vote, DEM added in a statement.

DEM said that just two days before the vote, the justice ministry had reversed a court decision that restored Zeydan's right to stand for election. Zeydan had been elected to parliament on the HDP (now DEM) ticket in 2015, but arrested in 2016 with a dozen other deputies after criticising the army's aerial bombardments of outlawed Kurdish militants in the southeast.

Speaking to reporters during a rally outside the Supreme Election Board in the capital Ankara DEM co-chair Tuncer Bakirhan told reporters that Van had suffered a "political coup".

Istanbul apartment fire leaves 29 dead



Firefighters intervene at the site of a burnt residential building in Istanbul yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
Istanbul

A fire that raged from the basement of a 16-storey building in central Istanbul killed at least 29 people yesterday, with flames and thick smoke billowing for hours despite a massive emergency response.

Rescue efforts had ended by early evening, the city governor's office said, and eight people were arrested over the blaze that began in a basement where builders had been renovating a nightclub.

The fire in the Gayrettepe neighbourhood of the city's Besiktas district began at 12:47 and was put out by late afternoon, the office of regional governor Davut Gul said.

An AFP reporter saw three exhausted firefighters sat on the ground with smoke-blackened faces and equipment as they recovered from the effort.

As well as the 29 killed, one

hurt person was still being treated in hospital, Gul's office said.

It was not immediately clear whether the victims died from smoke inhalation or from the flames.

"An investigation has been opened into the fire that occurred in...Istanbul," Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya posted on X.

TV images from the scene showed large flames roaring from lower-storey windows, spewing a column of thick black smoke that hugged the building's facade.

All the men working on the site had died, the governor's office said, without specifying whether they accounted for all of the victims. The toll rose throughout the afternoon, with most of the 12 people initially reported seriously hurt then succumbing to their injuries despite hospital treatment.

"I've lost four friends," local man Fikret Kaya told AFP as firefighters were leaving the scene, but could not say any more.

Not far from him, a woman

wearing a black cap was weeping with her head in her hands.

The venue, a popular Gayrettepe nightspot called "Club Masquerade", boasted several stages and regularly gave live concerts.

Its licence was first issued in 1987 and renewed in 2018, governor Gul said, adding that the club was "maintained and renovated".

But local media reported that the owners had not secured a permit for the work on the 1,500-capacity club, that it lacked emergency exits and that basement columns had been removed, leaving it vulnerable to earthquakes.

Those arrested included the club's owner and manager, as well as the head of the metal-working company carrying out the renovation work.

Istanbul's newly re-elected mayor Ekrem Imamoglu, who rushed to the scene, said "the fire is under control. Let's hope there are no further victims", offering his condolences to the relatives of the dead and injured.

Pakistan canvasses interest in purchase of stake in flag carrier

Pakistan is putting on the block a stake ranging from 51-100% of loss-making national carrier Pakistan International Airlines, the privatisation panel said yesterday, as part of reforms urged by the IMF.

The disposal of the flag carrier is a step past elected governments have steered away from as likely to be highly unpopular, but progress on the privatisation will help cash-strapped Pakistan pursue further funding talks with the IMF.

In a newspaper advertisement, the panel set a deadline of May 3 to receive statements of interest in PIA, which has piled up arrears of hundreds of billions of rupees, and it appointed EY Consulting as the financial adviser for the deal.

"The restructured PIA is being offered to potential investors in its 'debt-lite' new structure for a 51%-plus stake," the Privatisation Commission said in a website presentation.

The panel aimed to sign a share price deal by June 24, after completing all



steps in the transaction, it added.

"The restructured PIA provides an opportunity to invest in a full-service airline."

PIA's 23% share of Pakistan's aviation market is the biggest, and the airline could grow further to exceed historic levels of 30%, the panel said.

With a fleet of 34 aircraft comprising 17 Airbus A320s, 12 Boeing B777s and 5 ATRs, the airline loses traffic to Middle Eastern carriers, who have a market share of 60%, because of an absence of direct flights to destinations.

The carrier has air service pacts with 87 countries, and landing slots at key

destinations such as London Heathrow.

The re-organisation of the business will separate the aviation-related aspects from non-core components, so freeing the operating subsidiary of a large portion of legacy debt.

The restructuring will move out Rs603bn (\$2.2bn) of liabilities, leaving Rs203bn (\$730mn) on the balance sheet for the acquired business.

The presentation added that PIA broke even at earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, amortisation, and restructuring or rent costs (EBITDAR) level in 2023, which the panel projected to continue in 2024.

Besides the losses and debt, however, global aviation regulators have questioned PIA's governance and safety standards for some years.

In 2020, after a PIA plane crash in Karachi killed nearly 100, followed by a fake pilot license scandal, the European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) banned the airline from its most lucrative routes in Europe and Britain.

The ban continues, costing the airline annual revenue of nearly Rs40bn, the government has told parliament.

"PIA plans to restore its network, starting routes into the United Kingdom, Western Europe and the United States," read the investment presentation.

The offer of the stake, which carries management control, follows Pakistan's agreement to fiscal discipline plans with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), from which it secured a \$3bn bailout in June. Pakistan is now looking to start talks with the lender for a medium-term programme key to shoring up an economy bedevilled by high inflation, low reserves of foreign exchange and high external financing needs.

The IMF wants reforms to State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) that more clearly define ownership and government roles. Shares of the airline dropped 7.5% in intra-day trade to hit the lower limit, after soaring more than 403% in the last six months. - Reuters



Qatar National Convention Centre



Education City Stadium



Sidra Medicine

QF headquarters lit in blue for World Autism Awareness Day

The 2015 Building (Qatar Foundation headquarters) was lit up in blue yesterday to celebrate World Autism Awareness Day, an initiative lead by Renad Academy, a specialised school under Qatar Foundation (QF)'s Pre-University Education.

Renad Academy supports children with autism in collaboration with the Special Schools and Special Educational Needs (SEN) Services at the QF that includes Awsaj Academy, The Learning Centre and the Ability Friendly Programme.

The initiative aims to spread awareness

and encourage community members to accept and support people with autism.

Other QF buildings lit in blue included the Education City Stadium, Sidra Medicine, and the Qatar National Convention Centre.

By lighting buildings in blue, the QF participated in the global campaign to raise awareness about autism.

World Autism Awareness Day was created based on a proposal submitted by Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, the QF Chairperson, to the United Nations in 2007.

Since 2008 it has taken place every year on April 2.

Traditional Qatari Ramadan cuisine gracing tables

Banquets vary during the holy month of Ramadan in each country, as Muslims of all regions rejoice to celebrate.

Traditional dishes tend to be unique, distinct and unaffected by globalisation, or by the process of acculturation between countries and peoples.

Among the Qatari pioneers who carried the torch of introducing Qatari cuisine regionally and globally is Qatari author and presenter of cooking programmes chef Aisha al-Tamimi (pictured).

She has accumulated experience for decades, whether by presenting cooking programmes on Qatar TV or other satellite channels across the region, or by cooking on board Qatar Airways in first and business class.

Al-Tamimi told the Qatar News Agency (QNA) that, considering the great demand for traditional dishes that she recently received after presenting her cooking to her family as well as various foreign communities in several events, she chose to share her experience with the world through her book *Mawaed (Traditional Qatari)*, the second edition of which was launched last year.

She said that she always works to spread the culture of Qatari cuisine and introduce its components, whether through participation in international festivals or exhibitions.

Al-Tamimi stressed that food is an important component of civilisation as well as the cultural heritage of all peoples of the world.

Cuisine is not merely food, she stressed, but rather a social heritage full of life experiences inspired by the past, especially when combined with the holy month of Ramadan, where *thareed* and *harees* are the main dishes on the Qatari table.

- QNA



Ramadan Sports Fest at Aspire Zone concludes



The Aspire Zone Foundation has concluded its Ramadan Sports Festival, which saw the participation of more than 650 male and female athletes, who competed across five categories: Men's, Women's, Youths (males & females), and Special Needs.

As part of the co-operation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Aspire Ramadan Festival witnessed the continuation of Embassies Football Tournament Six-a-side on a natural grass pitch with the participation of 12 teams.

Team Jordan succeeded in winning the title by defeating Team Iran with a score of 5-0.

The Table Tennis (Special Needs) Tournament, in collaboration with the Qatar Paralympic Committee, the Qatar Social and Cultural Centre for the Deaf, the Qatar

Social and Cultural Centre for the Blind, witnessed intense competition among players during the matches, held at the Women's Sports Hall with the participation of 42 players across five categories for differently abled individuals (standing, sitting, visual, and cognitive).

This falls within the Aspire Zone Foundation's effort to provide an opportunity for all members of the community to enjoy the atmosphere of sports during Ramadan, regardless of their skills and physical abilities.

At the conclusion of the competitions, Ibrahim al-Hammadi claimed the first place in the cognitive disability category, with Mohamed Moussa taking second place, and Mohamed al-Mahmoud securing third place.

In the seated disability category competitions, Ikrami Ahmed claimed the first place, Ahmed al-Kubaisi came in second, and Abdulrahman Sami took third.

In the competitions of the hearing impairment category, Ebrahim Massad Toufiq clinched the first place, Rupa Mangalath secured second place, and Shivas Kondabolu took third place.

In the physical impaired (standing) category, Khalifa al-Nuaimi clinched the first place, Ali Rashid secured second place, and Fawzi Jouahi came in third.

In the seated disability category, Ahmed Issa claimed the first place, and Mohamed al-Kubaisi secured second place.

The 3X3 basketball tournament for men and women witnessed strong participation from all teams, in collaboration with Qatar Basketball Federation. It took place at the Woman's Sports Hall from March 18-20.

In the men's competition, Team Jags clinched the first place, with Qatar Foundation (QF) coming in second, and Doha Suns securing third place.

At the individual level, Sergjan Toilek won the Best Dunk award, while Andrius Banyas claimed the Best Three-Point Shooter award.

The women's tournament witnessed the participation of eight teams of adults and seven youth teams.

The results of women's competitions were as follows: Katara Team in the first



Snapshots from the Aspire Zone Foundation's Ramadan Sports Festival.

place, Al Gharafa Team in second place, and SportsLab securing third place.

At the individual level, Josette Anaswem won the best Three-Point Shooter award.

For youth competition results, SportsLab team claimed first place this time, with Al Gharafa coming in at second place and the QF team in third place.

This year the Aspire Ramadan Festival hosted the five-a-side hockey competitions with the participation of 150 male and female players of various ages.

The competitions were divided into three categories - men, youth, and women - with matches held at the public courts of the foundation.

In the men's category, Team Messaied emerged as champions after defeating Team Lusail 2-1 in the final match.

In the youth category, Team Al Sadd emerged victorious over Team Al Wakrah in the final match with a score of 1-0.

Mohsen Salman al-Sharshani, from the Qatar youth national team, claimed the top scorer title in both the men's and youth competitions.

In the women's and girls' category, Team United emerged as the sole victor over Doha Team in the final match with a score of 4-0.

The table tennis tournament for men and women took place at the tennis court in the women's sports hall from March 16-22, featuring 11 players from various age groups of both genders.

In the men's competition, David Raducan took the first place over Elias Ljume, Alexey Smirnov secured the first place over Ainesh Batnike, Kamondanai Singrikarn won the first place over Mark Grero, and Daniel Baker emerged victorious over Yousef al-Musallami.

In the women's competition, Yasmine Qasi Abdullah clinched the first place over



Anaya Rawalji, Eva Savinao won the first place over Lina Ramadan, and Henrietta Anna Boxsack secured the first place over Aya Sweid.

The foundation organised the Padel tournament competitions for women, held from March 15-17 at the Padel IN courts.

The team of Badria al-Jassar and Marwa Bagthothi claimed the first place, while the team of Buthaina al-Kuwari and Rawda al-Suwaidi secured the second place. The third place was won by the team of Mona al-Attiyah and Noor al-Kuwari.

Aspire Zone Foundation chief marketing officer Nasser Abdullah al-Hajri stated that the 2024 festival aimed to fulfil its objectives by providing a comprehensive version of activity and vitality for sports enthusiasts.

They found in the fields and facilities of the Aspire Zone Foundation, he said, the opportunity to practice their favourite sports through 10 tournaments for various categories under the supervision of a professional team of organisers and international-standard courts.

Al-Hajri added that the festival, with its diversity and carefully chosen timing, along with its attention to all details, has made Aspire Zone Foundation the premier destination for athletes in Qatar. - QNA

