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## Heavy storms, rains hit Gulf; Oman toll 18

• Dubai airport diverts all incoming flights

Dubai's major international airport began diverting all incoming flights yesterday as heavy rains lashed the city, causing widespread flooding.

The air hub, which had been expecting more than 100 flights yesterday evening, earlier briefly halted its operations in the chaos caused by the storm.

Dubai has been paralysed by the torrential rain that caused floods around the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, and left 18 dead in Oman on Sunday and Monday.

"Due to the continued exceptional weather event currently being experienced in the UAE, Dubai International is temporarily diverting inbound flights due to arrive this evening...until the inclement situation improves," a Dubai Airports spokesperson said.

Departures will continue, said the spokesperson, who earlier warned that roads around the airport have suffered major flooding and urged passengers to use public transport.

Unconfirmed images on social media showed planes taxiing across an apron flooded with standing water.

Similar scenes were repeated



Cars drive through a flooded street during a rain storm in Dubai yesterday.

across Dubai and elsewhere in the UAE.

Flagship shopping centres Dubai Mall and Mall of the Emirates both suffered flooding and water was ankle-deep in at least one Dubai Metro station, according to images posted on social media.

Roads and residential communities also suffered heavy flooding and many residents reported leaks from roofs, doors and windows.

Schools were shut across the UAE and were expected to remain closed today, when further storms are forecast. Dubai's government also extended remote working for its employees into Wednesday.

The Asian Champions League football semi-final between the UAE's Al Ain and Saudi side Al Hilal, due to be hosted in Al Ain, was postponed for 24 hours because of the weather.

Some inland areas of the UAE recorded more than 80mm of rain over 24 hours, approaching the annual average of about 100mm.

The weather board "urged residents to take all the precautions... and to stay away from areas of flooding and water accumulation" in a post on X.

Bahrain was also hit by heavy rain and flooding after being pummelled by thunder and lightning overnight.

The storms descended on the UAE, Bahrain and areas of Qatar after passing over Oman, where they caused deadly floods and left dozens stranded.

A child's body was recovered on Tuesday, bringing the death toll to 18 with two people missing, emergency authorities told the official Oman News Agency.

Nine schoolchildren and three adults died when their vehicles were swept away in flash floods, the news agency reported on Sunday. (AFP)

## Moderate rainfall in Qatar



A view of rain clouds above Doha's West Bay as seen from the Old Doha Port area yesterday.

PICTURE: Shaji Kayamkulam

By Joseph Varghese  
Staff Reporter

Moderate to heavy rains were recorded in various parts of Qatar for several hours from late on Monday, accompanied by strong winds.

While the northern region experienced heavy rains and hail, several other parts of the country, including Doha, received only scattered to moderate rain. Thundery rain was observed

in northern areas such as Shamal and Ruwais along with strong winds. According to Qatar Meteorology Department, the total rainfall was about 45mm in the early afternoon yesterday (Tuesday). Social media is abuzz with videos of heavy rains in the northern parts of the country as well as rough and turbulent waves in the sea.

The Met department said that thundery rain accompanied with hail was observed at several parts of the northern region. By

evening the department said that there could be thundery rains along with dusty winds.

Meanwhile, other parts of the country received moderate to scattered rain. In addition, most parts of Qatar experienced very heavy winds and the seafloor areas witnessed very rough and turbulent sea with high waves lashing the shores. However, most parts of Doha received only scattered rains and the traffic was normal with no major incidents. **To Page 12**

## PM, Blinken discuss Gaza truce, regional developments

HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani received yesterday a phone call from Secretary of State US Antony Blinken. The two sides discussed the latest developments in the region, and ways to de-escalate, especially ending the war in the Gaza Strip. HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs expressed Qatar's deep concern about the latest regional developments, calling on all parties to de-escalate and exercise the utmost restraint. Stressing the need for joint action to reduce escalation in the region and resolve disputes peacefully, HE Sheikh Mohamed renewed the Qatar's commitment to supporting all regional and international efforts aimed at achieving security and stability at the regional and international levels. (QNA)

## Qatar rejects US congressman's criticism of its Gaza mediation

The Qatari embassy in the US has expressed surprise at comments made by US Democratic congressman Steny Hoyer regarding the Gaza hostage crisis and his threat to "reevaluate" the US relationship with Qatar.

Refuting Hoyer's comments, Qatar's embassy in Washington issued the following statement:

"We read with interest Congressman Steny Hoyer's statement today regarding the Gaza hostage negotiations, but we are surprised by his threat to "reevaluate" the US relationship with Qatar.

"We share his frustration that Hamas and Israel have not reached an agreement on the release of the remaining hostages. This is a wrenching ordeal for their families, and for all of us. But Qatar is only a mediator - we do not control Israel or Hamas. Israel and Hamas are entirely responsible for reaching an agreement. Implicit in Congressman Hoyer's statement is the view that Hamas should not be in Qatar. It is certainly tempting to do as he suggests and walk away from seemingly intransigent parties.



Sheikh Meshal bin Hamad al-Thani, ambassador of Qatar to the US.

After all, neither of the warring parties does anything for Qatar. But it is useful to remember that Qatar's mediation role exists only because we were asked by the US in 2012 to play this role since, regrettably, Israel and Hamas refuse to speak to each other directly. Despite setbacks and challenges, our mediation has produced results, including ceasefires after violent crises in 2019 and 2021, and the release of over 100 hostages in the current crisis.

"Of course, recent progress has been slow, and Congressman Hoyer is not alone in his frustration.

"But blaming and threatening the mediator is not constructive, especially when the target is a friend and Major Non-Nato Ally that presently hosts 10,000 US troops and America's largest military presence in the Middle East?" **To Page 4**

## Israeli tanks push back into Northern Gaza

Reuters  
Cairo

Israeli tanks pushed back into parts of the northern Gaza Strip yesterday which they had left weeks ago, while warplanes conducted air strikes on Rafah, the Palestinians' last refuge in the south of the territory, killing and wounding several people, medics and residents said.

Tanks advanced into Beit Hanoun and surrounded some schools where displaced families have taken refuge.

Beit Hanoun, home to 60,000 people, was one of the first areas targeted by Israel's ground offensive in Gaza last October.

Many families who had returned to Beit Hanoun and Jabalia in recent weeks after Israeli forces withdrew, began moving out again because of the new

raid, some residents said. Palestinian health officials said an Israeli strike had killed four people and wounded several others in Rafah, where over half of Gaza's 2.3mn people are sheltering and bracing for a planned Israeli ground offensive into the city, which borders Egypt.

Palestinian health officials and Hamas media said an Israeli air strike had killed 11 Palestinians, including children, in the Al-Maghazi refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip.

The Palestinian health ministry said more than 33,000 Palestinians have so far been killed by Israeli fire since Oct 7, including 46 in the past 24 hours.

The Hamas-run interior ministry also said an Israeli air strike had hit a police car in the Tuffah district of Gaza City, killing four police officers and three civilian passers-by. **Page 4**

## Qatar celebrates its cultural heritage at Unesco HQ

QNA  
Paris

The Ministry of Culture organised on Monday a special celebration at the Unesco headquarters in France commemorating the 20th anniversary of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

The event was attended by President of the 42nd session of the General Conference, Simona Mirela Miculescu, Chairperson of the Unesco Executive Board, Vera El Khoury, and Director of World Heritage at Unesco Lazare Eloundou Assomo, along with several ambassadors and officials.

The event aimed to highlight Qatar's efforts in protecting and preserving intangible cultural heritage, as recognised by the convention's imperative to safeguard living heritage and enhance dialogue among



Guests and officials watch a Qatari artist at work during the special celebration organised by Qatar's Ministry of Culture at the Unesco headquarters in Paris.

peoples, cultural diversity, and human creativity.

In his speech at the ceremony, Assistant Undersecretary for Cultural Affairs at the Ministry of Culture, Dr Ghanim bin Mubarak al-Ali expressed delight to inaugurate the heritage and cultural exhibition to celebrate Qatar's heritage at Unesco headquarters in Paris.

Dr al-Ali elaborated that the exhibition, organised by the Ministry of Culture in conjunction with the 20th anniversary celebration of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, promotes dialogue among peoples, cultural diversity, and human creativity. It aims to increase awareness of the importance of intangible cultural heritage, which includes significant aspects of Qatar's heritage, such as crafts, industries, customs, and traditions.

He emphasised Qatar's commitment to safeguarding its intangible cultural heritage by promptly registering files on

Unesco's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, including "Al Majlis" and "Arab Coffee".

He added that the Ministry of Culture has been collaborating with a group of countries for months to prepare a file for the registration of "Al Bisht" on the list as well. "Al Bisht", along with "Al Sqarah" (falconry), "Al Majlis", and "Arab Coffee", represents rich elements of "our culture that reflect an inherited legacy passed down through generations to remain resilient against the threat of disappearance, serving as a conduit for the continuous creativity and engagement with our environment and history. The value of these registered heritage elements, along with others presented in this exhibition, does not stop at their benefit to our identity. Instead, they enhance the presence of our heritage within the framework of human heritage components, contributing culturally to enriching cultural diversity worldwide." **To Page 4**

## Romania PM arrives in Doha

Prime Minister of Romania Marcel Ciolacu arrived yesterday in Doha on an official visit to the country. The PM and the accompanying delegation were welcomed upon arrival at the Doha International Airport by Director of the Protocol Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Ibrahim bin Yousif Fakhro, ambassador of Qatar to Romania Osama bin Yousef al-Qaradawi, and ambassador of Romania to Qatar Nicusor Daniel Tanase. (QNA)



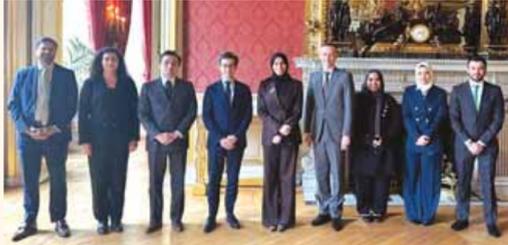
## Deputy PM meets US commander



HE the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defence Affairs Dr Khalid bin Mohamed al-Attiyah met with Commander of the US Air Forces Central Lieutenant-General Alexus Grynkewich and Major-General Derek France, the next Commander of the US Air Forces Central. During the meeting, they discussed topics of common interest as well as relations and ways to strengthen and develop them. The meeting was attended by a number of senior officials and officers from both sides. (QNA)

## AlKhatir in Paris meetings

HE the Minister of State for International Co-operation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Lolwah bint Rashid AlKhatir met yesterday in Paris with Cabinet Director of the French Minister of Foreign and European Affairs Luis Vassy and Director of the Crisis and Support Center of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs Philippe Lalliot. During the meeting, they discussed the developments in Sudan and ways to address them among the priorities of the international agenda. They also discussed the developments in the Gaza Strip and the occupied Palestinian territories, especially the entry of humanitarian aid into Gaza and the efforts of the two countries to increase their joint co-operation in that regard. In addition, they discussed the recent escalation in the region



and the latest developments in Lebanon. HE the Minister of State for International Co-operation voiced Qatar's thanks to France for hosting the Sudan conference, praising its success in collecting more than 2bn euros. She also voiced Qatar's deep concern regarding the developments in the region, urging all parties to stop the escalation, calm down, and

exercise the utmost restraint, renewing Qatar's commitment to supporting all regional and international efforts aimed at achieving security and stability at the regional and international levels. In turn, the French officials expressed France's thanks to Qatar for its new pledge during the conference in support of Sudan, in addition to its joint mediation efforts in Gaza.

HE the Minister of State for International Co-operation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Lolwah bint Rashid AlKhatir met yesterday with Minister of International Development of Canada Ahmed Hussen on the sidelines of the Paris Conference on Sudan, held in France. The meeting touched on co-operation between the two countries, particularly in development fields.



HE the Minister of State for International Co-operation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Lolwah bint Rashid AlKhatir met yesterday with President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Mirjana Spoljaric, on the sidelines of the Paris Conference on Sudan, held in France. During the meeting, they discussed the latest developments in the Gaza Strip and the occupied Palestinian territories, emphasising the importance of providing safe passages for evacuating the wounded and facilitating the entry of humanitarian aid into the Strip through various crossings without obstacles. (QNA)

## Defence minister receives phone call from US secretary of defence

HE the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defence Affairs Dr Khalid bin Mohamed al-Attiyah received a phone call from the United States Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin. During the call, they discussed the latest developments and the situation in the region. Both sides emphasised the importance of all parties exercising restraint and the necessity of de-escalation and calm. (QNA)

## Sheikha Alya meets Serbia special envoy

HE the Permanent Representative of Qatar to the United Nations (UN) Sheikha Alya Ahmed bin Saif al-Thani met with Special Envoy of the President of Serbia and President of the United Nations General Assembly's 67th session, Vuk Jeremic, at the headquarters of the permanent delegation in New York. During the meeting, the two sides discussed co-operation between Qatar and Serbia and ways to strengthen relations to foster the shared objectives of the two countries at the global level. (QNA)



## Shura attends IRENA Legislators Forum



The Shura Council participated in the 9th International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) Legislators Forum, held in the Emirati capital Abu Dhabi under the theme 'Building Blocks for a Renewable Future: Accelerating Progress Towards the COP28 Pledge'. Shura Council Members Ali bin Ahmad al-Kaabi and Mohamed bin Omar al-Mannai represented the council at the forum. (QNA)

## Qatar CSR Summit from April 30

By Joey Aguilar  
Staff Reporter

The Qatar CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) Summit's second edition will be held from April 30 to May 2 at the Qatar National Convention Centre, gathering leaders from notable local entities and renowned academic and humanitarian institutions.

Under the patronage of HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani, the event - themed 'The Future of CSR in a Circular Economy' - aims to promote the integration of CSR into businesses, advocate for inclusivity and equal opportunity, and lay the groundwork for holistic sustainable growth, among others.

In addition to a diverse roster of international participants, including UN Global Compact, Unesco, and the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the conference - organised by Qatar University (QU) as a component of the Qatar CSR National Programme - also features the Mena Business Schools Alliance for

Sustainability (Mebas) as its academic partner.

Organisers noted that the summit aims to explore how organisations can harmonise their economic, social, and environmental goals with their operational strategies, fostering a more sustainable and responsible business landscape. A major highlight of the summit will be the presentation of the CSR Person of the Year award during the opening ceremony, followed by a series of engaging discussions and keynote presentations, featuring prominent figures in the area of CSR.

Among the keynote speakers are: HE the Minister of Education and Higher Education Buthaina bint Ali al-Jabr al-Nuaimi and Ministry of Commerce and Industry's financial and administrative affairs director Mohamed Abdulrazaq al-Siddiqi.

Jack Saba, general manager of Mubadara for Social Impact will deliver a speech on "Fostering Social Change: Mubadara's Leadership in Qatar's CSR Landscape". Additionally, representatives from industry giants such as QNB and Ooredoo will share insights on their respective CSR initiatives. The summit will fea-

ture panel discussions on pertinent topics such as 'The Circular Economy: The Potential for Sustainable Enterprises and Decent Jobs,' facilitated by respected institutions, including ILO, the Ministry of Labour, and QU's College of Business and Economics. This session will focus on crucial aspects of the circular economy, including government policies, investment acceleration, and job creation.

A workshop, titled 'Labour Issues in Responsible Supply Chain Management,' will provide insights into sustainable supply chain practices, citing the importance of inclusive economic growth and decent work in alignment with Sustainable Development Goal 8. With an array of participants including professionals, industry leaders, academics, and stakeholders from around the globe, organisers noted that the Qatar CSR Summit serves as a prime platform for dialogue, collaboration, and growth in CSR practices. Themes ranging from environmental sustainability to ethical supply chains will be explored, reflecting the evolving landscape of corporate responsibility.

## Ashghal uses latest technologies to monitor waterlogging

The Public Works Authority (Ashghal) is using the latest technologies to monitor the drainage networks and roads to ensure they are free from waterlogging. "Drainage Networks Operations and Maintenance Department monitors the operational status of all rainwater drainage networks and uses the systems to send work teams to quickly respond to areas of water accumulation," engineer Abdullah Waleed al-Jundi told Qatar TV yesterday.

Sewage water networks, expressways, main roads and tunnels are monitored by the department by using the latest technology and cameras, he explained. The Drainage Networks Operations and Maintenance Department operates and maintains the treatment and pumping stations and sewage, groundwater and treated water networks. It manages and operates the maintenance workshops for sewage networks.

The department is responsible for carrying out emergency maintenance, responding to customer complaints and monitoring all the equipment used to maintain the sewage systems. The technical specifications related to project contracts for the maintenance of sewage systems are prepared by the



A centre of Ashghal's Drainage Networks Operations and Maintenance Department.

department. Ashghal takes several measures to ensure there is no rainwater accumulation on roads around Qatar. The Mesaimmer Surface and Groundwater Drainage Tunnel Project ensures the proper discharge of surface water and rainwater. Ashghal identifies rainwater catchment points (hotspots) and implements interim solutions until the permanent network is implemented and fully operated.

Overland pipes with pumps are installed to clear water from streets and drain it into lagoons away from residential areas.

Ahead of the rainy season, Ashghal develops a mechanism to overcome rainwater-related issues and intensifies training for its staff members to help them improve the



Eng Abdullah Waleed al-Jundi

complaint redress time and ensure fast response in dealing with water accumulation.

As part of its role to raise awareness and continuously communicate with the public, Ashghal launches awareness campaigns on precautionary measures that are to be taken before and during rains.

## Mol issues tips and guidelines for safe driving in rain



The Ministry of Interior (MoI) has issued a set of guidelines for safe driving in rain. These include maintaining a safe distance from other vehicles, replacing worn out windshield wipers, no overtaking, reducing speed, gradual braking and not using hazard lights without a valid reason. The MoI has also urged the public to abstain from marine activities. "Due to the expected heavy rainfall and strong winds, we urge participants in water and land activities to cancel all activities at sea and in coastal areas for everyone's safety," MoI urged.

# AAM backs Toyota Gazoo Racing at 2024 World Endurance Championship in Qatar

**A**l Abdulghani Motors (AAM) has made a significant stride in promoting environmentally conscious racing by offering robust backing to the Toyota Gazoo Racing team at the 2024 World Endurance Championship in Qatar, a statement said yesterday.

Top executives from AAM joined by company's senior management and employees were present at the championship alongside representatives from Toyota Motor Corporation (TMC) and Toyota Gazoo Racing Europe.

The event showcased the pivotal role of AAM in leveraging media platforms to educate the public about hybrid electric vehicle technology's benefits in enhancing fuel efficiency and curbing emissions. It spotlighted how hybrid electric vehicles can excel in motorsports, underscoring Toyota's commitment to innovation in this domain. This collaboration marks the continuation of a fruitful 60-year partnership between AAM and TMC.

The Toyota Gazoo Racing team demonstrated its prowess with two cars, Car #7 GR010 driven by Mike



Conway, Kamui Kobayashi, and Nick de Vries, and Car #8 GR010 driven by Sebastien Buemi, Brendon Hartley, and Rio Hirakawa. These high-performance Toyota GR010 hybrid electric vehicles operate on 100% renewable energy from biofuels, slashing carbon emissions by at least 65%.

At the championship, the GR Pavilion showcased an impressive lineup of exclusive cars, including the GR Corolla, GR Supra, GR 86, and GR Yaris, alongside the remarkable GR010. Visitors enjoyed various engaging activities, such as the GR simulation, interactive photo booths, cafe, and contests,

culminating in the unveiling of the prestigious GR Yaris Cup, set to debut in November 2024.

Abdulghani Nasser al-Abdulghani, CEO of AAM, expressed pride in supporting the Toyota Gazoo Racing team, affirming their commitment to motorsport enthusiasts. He highlighted the lead-



ing position of AAM in the automotive industry and its dedication to delivering top-notch products, services, and fun to drive vehicles.

Firas Mufti, head of Motorsport and Special Projects at AAM, commended Toyota's efforts in advancing sustainable mobility and fostering a greener future through motorsport participation.

Toyota's engagement in motorsports spans Formula 1, the World Endurance Championship, and the Nürburgring 24 Hours race.

In April 2015, the establishment of the "Toyota Gazoo Racing" divi-

sion aimed to consolidate the company's motorsport endeavours. Guided by the motto: "We Gain Experience on the Roads to Build Better Vehicles," Toyota emphasises its commitment to developing cutting-edge technologies gleaned from challenging competitions, ensuring driving pleasure, adventure, and freedom for all. Notably, the Toyota Gazoo Racing team has clinched numerous victories with the high-performance Toyota GR010 hybrid electric car since its debut in 2021, triumphing in 16 out of 19 races, the statement added.



## QC thanks supporters of 'Endless Giving' campaign

**Q**atar Charity (QC) has thanked the supporters of its Ramadan campaign, 'Endless Giving,' which benefited over 6.7mn people in Qatar and 41 other countries, a statement said yesterday.

The campaign, supported by individuals, companies, and commercial entities in Qatar, involved the 'Feed the Fasting' and food security projects in Palestine, as well as developmental projects in Qatar and around the world, in addition to sponsoring 9,500 orphans and other vulnerable persons.

In addition, about 615,000 individuals benefited from the Zakat al-Fitr project, and around 9,500 children from the Eid Clothing and Eid Gifts for orphans and children from low-income families. Eid gifts were also provided to over 16,000 children in the Gaza Strip.

Ahmad Yousef Fakhroo, CEO's assistant for the Resources Development and Media Sector at QC, extended his sincere thanks and gratitude to the generous people of Qatar and the world for their noble contributions, which have played a significant role in alleviating the suffering of the targeted groups, including internally displaced persons (IDPs), refugees, the needy, those with limited incomes, and humanitarian cases. He indicated



that their contributions have made a difference in their lives, bringing smiles to the faces of their children.

Fakhroo explained that the projects of the 'Endless Giving' campaign were implemented in Qatar and 41 countries worldwide, with a focus on regions suffering from crises and disasters, including Gaza, Palestine, Sudan, northern Syria, Somalia, Rohingya refugees, and others. He also extended special thanks to the donors for their participation in supporting the construction of the world's largest multi-service city for orphans (Al Hayah City) and for their generous donations during the '27th Night Challenge,' which col-

lected over QR50mn.

He expressed his pride in the trust QC receives from generous people and their ongoing support for its projects throughout the year. Under the Ramadan campaign, the projects, including 'Feed the Fasting' (food packages and ready-to-eat meals), Eid clothing, Eid gifts for orphans and children from low-income families, and Zakat al-Fitr, were implemented.

Additionally, 5,306 developmental projects were executed in various fields including health, education, water, sanitation, food security, economic empowerment, mosque construction, housing for the needy, multi-service centres, and others, the statement added.

## Innovation by Design Summit at MDD to gather luminaries

By Joey Aguilar  
Staff Reporter

**I**nnovation by Design Summit 2024 is all set to debut on April 24, bringing together more than 400 luminaries, including thought leaders, innovators, artists, creators, business magnates, and entrepreneurs at Msheireb Downtown Doha (MDD)'s Doha Design District.

The event, organised by Msheireb Properties in collaboration with Fast Company Middle East, aims to spark a transformative dialogue on the power of design and explore its potential for change.

The day-long summit will tackle a diverse array of topics, ranging from sustainable materials to the global impact of the region's design language - influenced by the vibrant creativity at the heart of MDD.

A highlight will be the inaugural edition of the Msheireb Awards in Design, recognising the innovators and visionaries shaping the landscape of Qatar and beyond.

Blending art, architecture, design, and sustainability, organisers noted that the summit promises to be more than just a conference but a dynamic melting pot of ideas. It will feature sessions, panels, debates, and workshops, offering attendees a comprehensive and influential experience.

Set against the backdrop of the Doha Design District, renowned as a unique hub for creatives, this summit is poised to be a must-attend for those eager to explore emerging trends and be part of the global design community.

The schedule and programme of activities include speaking sessions and panel discussions with prominent speakers, including Faysal Tabbarah, associate dean and Professor of Architecture,

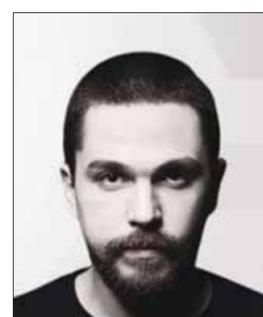


Nasser Abulhasan



Faysal Tabbarah

**The event, organised by Msheireb Properties in collaboration with Fast Company Middle East, aims to spark a transformative dialogue on the power of design and explore its potential for change**



Ahmad Kattan

American University of Sharjah; Nasser Abulhasan, principal, AGI Architects; and Ahmad Kattan, concept designer and architect; among others.

"Can Design Save the World?" will explore how design can change minds and perhaps even the planet itself while "Can We Adopt Sustainable New-Age Materials?" focuses on the possibilities of adopting sustainable materials and their impact on global sustainability efforts.

"Mind the Artificial Intelligence (AI) Gap: Deciphering Content and Business Realms" by Dr Mario R Garcia, CEO and founder of Garcia Media, will unravel the mysteries behind AI and its influence on content creation

and corporate strategies. "Circular Design in Practice - Transforming Waste into Resources" by Arthur Huang, founder of Miniwiz will lead attendees through practical strategies for implementing circular design principles, turning waste into valuable resources.

A discussion, titled "Fireside Chat: How Can Museums Use Technology to Become Immersive?" will look into the transformative journey of museums as they integrate technology to create immersive experiences for visitors.

"Are We Designing for the Experience Economy?" will dissect the strategies needed to exceed expectations in the experience economy.

## GU-Q conference to examine gender in foreign policy

**G**eorgetown University in Qatar (GU-Q)'s Hiwaraat conference on 'Gender in Foreign Policy' will take place tomorrow on campus. The conference will consider how to improve foreign policy and practice by gender-informed approaches across a multiplicity of contexts including in the use of AI, and examine the specifics of gender in conflict situations with a focus on Afghanistan, Gaza, and Ukraine.

It will convene seasoned diplomats and distinguished foreign policy leaders, including public officials both from the Global North and South, academics, policy experts, and students.

The conference will open with remarks by ambassador Androulla Kaminara, GU-Q Distinguished-Diplomat-in-Residence, and by Dr Safwan Masri, dean of GU-Q. HE Alya Ahmed bin Saif al-Thani, the permanent representative of Qatar to the United Nations (UN) in New

York, will deliver a message to the conference.

Four thematic sessions will highlight mutually related topics at the intersection of gender and diplomacy. In the first session, moderated by ambassador Kaminara; Dalia Grybauskaitė, former president of Lithuania; and Ghulam Hoosein Asmal, ambassador of South Africa; will address why gender still matters in foreign policy.

The second session, moderated by GU-Q professor, Mehran Kamrava, will focus on diplomatic practice, featuring distinguished Georgetown University professor and former ambassador of the US to the Netherlands, Dr Cynthia Schneider, Wendy Gilmour, Assistant Secretary General at Nato and former high commissioner to Pakistan, and Dr Cristian Tudor, European Union resident ambassador and head of the EU Delegation to Qatar.

**The conference will consider how to improve foreign policy and practice by gender-informed approaches**

The role and risks of AI in foreign policy and diplomacy will be discussed in the third session, informed by the expertise of Dr Nathaniel Raymond, executive director of the Humanitarian Research Lab at Yale School of Public Health; Dr Michail Bletsas, director of Harvard University Media Labs; Dr Jamie Olsen, professor of philosophy and manager of Instructional Design and Educational Continuity at GU-Q; and Col Simon Maina, director of Cybersecurity, AI, and Emerging Technologies in the office of the National Security Adviser to the president of Kenya.

The final session introduced by Natalie A Baker, deputy chief of mission, US embassy in Qatar,

and moderated by dean Masri will reflect on gender in conflict situations, with a focus on Afghanistan, Gaza, and Ukraine. Speakers will include: Kuzmenko Andrii, ambassador of Ukraine; Raffaella Iodice, EU chargée d'Affaires, EU Delegation to Afghanistan; Nada Tarbush, counsellor and permanent Palestinian Observer Mission to the UN in Geneva; and Dr Sultan Barakat, professor of public policy at Hamad Bin Khalifa University.

'Gender in Foreign Policy' is the seventh event in GU-Q's signature Hiwaraat series, launched in the fall of 2023. The conferences have connected diverse voices from the Global South and the Global North to tackle timely, cross-cutting topics through a multidisciplinary lens, including the invasion of Iraq, Islamophobia, the political stalemate in Afghanistan, water security in the Gulf, the role of energy in our everyday lives, and the future of Palestine.



Dalia Grybauskaitė  
former President of Lithuania

Androulla Kaminara  
Former EU Ambassador to Pakistan



Cristian Tudor  
EU resident Ambassador and Head of the EU Delegation to the State of Qatar

Natalie A. Baker  
Deputy Chief of Mission, U.S. Embassy in Qatar

# Qatar touristic spots delight Hungarian family

By Tawfik Lamari  
Staff Reporter

Qatar is not only attractive for GCC visitors for family tourism but is also attracting more and more Europeans for the same brand and more.

Gulf Times met Hungarian Janos Litvak, a mechanical engineer and a car enthusiast in trendy Msheireb Downtown Doha (MDD), who is visiting Qatar with his family this time following his daughter Hanga Litvak's visit last year to Doha and other touristic attractions.

Janos Litvak said: "After seeing the photos and videos brought back by my daughter in addition to what I saw on TV, the level of security and cultural events during the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022,

I decided with my wife Melinda Litvak-Balla that we should treat ourselves to a nice holiday in Qatar this year. We flew on Qatar Airways in a direct flight from Budapest to Doha and we were very pleased with the quality of the timely service, the excellent food and the entertainment on board as well as the games and presents given to my young son Janos (Junior) for whom it is a dream come true. Upon arrival at the airport (Hamad International Airport, HIA) we were immediately met by our hotel limousine service and we were nicely surprised by the warm welcome and that what is in the catalogue matches the truth.

"Some hours later we are in MDD talking to Gulf Times. I can't wait to see the sports cars exhibitions. I found Souq Waqif amazing, it is like in the movies

about Arab traditional towns but it is well preserved, clean, and people and visitors are so relaxed and I love it. After a traditional dinner in Souq Waqif, we strolled to MDD."

His wife Melinda Litvak-Balla, a professional photographer said: "We like the eating options in Souq Waqif, the popular souvenir stalls and its arcades as it is nearby our hotel we will come back to enjoy the sight of the gleaming white mosques, and we are also going to visit the history museums housed in Arabic-style mansions. To learn about Qatari family life in Radwani House, I am looking forward to taking some beautiful photos. It is for this reason that we brought along my mother Katalin Balla, and father Sandor Balla, because they like history and Arabic tra-

ditional buildings. They are already thrilled with Souq Waqif and its wonderful souvenir and gold shops. We are also looking forward to our visit to the desert to get a camel ride, experience the dune bashing and hopefully see the sunset there."

Their daughter Hanga said: "I am very pleased to be back in Qatar, I love the atmosphere in Souq Waqif and MDD and the easy going lifestyle, people look very happy and relaxed, it is a unique experience for me. I am also looking forward to visit some of the malls for shopping, MIA, Qatar Museums but most importantly the beach and the desert for camel riding. I also love the falcon tradition here, these birds are amazing and I want to show them to my younger brother Janos and take him to the Sports Museum."



The Litvak-Balla family at the MDD.

# UN says Israeli forces taking part in settler attacks on Palestinians



Relatives mourn during the funeral of Omar Hamed, who was killed during clashes with Israeli settlers, in the village of Baytin, near Ramallah in the occupied West Bank, on Sunday.

Agencies  
Geneva

The UN voiced grave concern yesterday over escalating violence in the West Bank, demanding that Israeli security forces "immediately" stop supporting settler attacks on Palestinians in the occupied territory, AFP reported.

With the Gaza war raging, the United Nations rights office decry that Palestinians in the West Bank had been "subjected to waves of attacks by hundreds of Israeli settlers, often accompanied or supported by Israeli security forces (ISF)".

"The Israeli security forces must immediately end their active participation in and support for settler attacks on Palestinians," rights office spokeswoman Ravina Shamdasani told reporters in Geneva.

"Israeli authorities must instead prevent further attacks, including by bringing those responsible to account."

She stressed that "those reasonably suspected of criminal acts, including murder or other unlawful killings, must be brought to justice through a judicial process that complies with international human rights standards, following a prompt, impartial, independent, effective and transparent investigation".

Shamdasani pointed out that following the killing of a 14-year-old Israeli boy from a settler family at the weekend, "four Palestinians, including a child, were killed and Palestinian property was destroyed in revenge attacks".

The UN rights office, she said, had received information that "armed settlers and Israeli forces" had entered a number of towns and villages.

"Dozens of Palestinians were reportedly injured, including through the use of firearms, by settlers and ISF, and hundreds of homes and other buildings, as well as cars, were torched," she said.

"Three Israeli soldiers suffered injuries after they were hit with stones," she added. The UN also highlighted reports that settlers had established at least two new outposts in recent days in the Jordan Valley and South Hebron Hills.

The outposts, she said, were "near Palestinian communities which have been repeatedly attacked by settlers in the past months and are at imminent risk of being forcibly transferred from their homes and land". "Israel, as the occupying power, must take all measures in its power to restore, and ensure, as far as possible, public order and safety in the occupied West Bank," she said.

**CURBS ON GAZA AID**  
Israel is still imposing "unlawful" restrictions on humanitarian relief for Gaza, the UN human rights office said yesterday, despite assertions from Israel and others that barriers have eased, Reuters reported.

Israel's offensive in the Gaza Strip triggered by Hamas' deadly cross-border storming in the first week of October has turned much of the Gaza strip into a wasteland, with hundreds of thousands of people now displaced and crowded into disease-ridden shelters.

# Qatar rejects US congressman's criticism of its Gaza mediation

From Page 1

"And we should be honest about what it means to give up on the mediation and walk away. As to that, we will quote Sen. Chris Murphy's remarks on the Senate floor last week: "I understand the discomfort of an ally having a relationship with Hamas. It has come at the request of the US and at the request of Israel, and is absolutely

vital to protecting our ability to get hostages out."

You want to make sure the hostages never leave? Then cut off Qatar's role as an intermediary.

The embassy statement added: "As always, we will confer closely with our colleagues in the US, and others in the region, to agree on the best path forward. For now, Qatar is not giving up hope on the hostages."

# Qatar to take part in Aswan Int'l Women's Festival

The eighth session of the Aswan International Women's Festival is set to kick off Saturday in Aswan city of Egypt.

The event will feature 76 films, including two Qatari films produced in collaboration with a number of countries. The

six-day event will feature competitions that vary between long and short movies, Euro-Mediterranean and the Egyptian film, in addition to a special programme for a film that primarily aims to support the Palestinian cause, along with another Sudanese film, with each including five

movies. The list of long films includes ten movies, among them the stunt movie: *Behind the Scenes*, jointly produced by Qatar, Morocco, Tunisia, Belgium, France and Norway, co-directed by the Tunisian director Afef Ben Mahmoud and Moroccan director Khalil Benkirane. (QNA)

# Qatar celebrates its cultural heritage at Unesco HQ

From Page 1

Al-Ali said that intangible cultural heritage occupies a significant place in Unesco's work, as evidenced by the legislative framework established by the 2003 Convention for its protection. He pointed out that Qatar believes that this heritage, passed down through generations and constituting a diverse cultural legacy for humanity, contributes to building a community's self-identity, thereby enhancing dialogue with other societies.

He explained that cultural heritage and dialogue are interrelated, and protecting cultural heritage ensures the sustainability of dialogue and enables people to reach the horizon of sustainable development. He called for collective efforts to strengthen the belief of generations in our cultural heritage, hoping that the exhibition would be a means of cultural rapprochement.

In a speech at Unesco headquarters, ambassador of Qatar to the French Republic, Sheikh Ali bin Jassim al-Thani, expressed his pleasure to attend the cultural exhibition organised by the Ministry of Culture of the State of Qatar to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage.

He added that Qatar's deep interest and steadfast commitment to the principles enshrined in the convention are not merely symbolic, but an integral part of Qatar's vision and national aspirations.

The ambassador emphasised the wise government's keenness to preserve the national identity of Qatar, and to achieve this goal, Qatar National Vision 2030 is considered a shining beacon towards sustainable development and the preservation and promotion of culture globally.

He noted that from traditional customs to culinary traditions and handicrafts, Qatar's intangible cultural heritage is a source of pride, perseverance, and community unity. In this regard, it will be essential to recognise other aspects of Qatar's rich intangible heritage and protect them. To this end, Qatar has recently proposed additional features of its heritage to be safeguarded, including henna, an ancient tradition cherished for its aesthetic and social importance, in addition to prioritising the preservation of the heritage, skills, and ancient practices associated with the traditional attire known as "Al Bisht" and the Qatari traditional dance, known as 'Al Ardah,' as a candidate for inclusion in the list. He added that Qatar has proposed adding the traditional Qatari women's attire known as "Al Nashl" to the nomination list, along with Arabic calligraphy, a shared heritage among Arab countries.



He looked forward to Unesco's support in adding these elements to Qatar's intangible heritage list, ensuring a comprehensive approach to safeguarding Qatar's cultural heritage for future generations. He stressed that Qatar's commitment to the convention reflects its commitment to international co-operation and solidarity in preserving cultural heritage through active participation in Unesco's efforts to protect intangible cultural heritage and contributing to a global dialogue that transcends borders and promotes understanding, tolerance, and mutual respect among nations.

HE the Permanent Representative of Qatar to Unesco Dr Nasser bin Hamad al-Hanzab expressed pride in celebrating Qatar's rich culture and heritage at the Unesco headquarters, which reflects Qatar's commitment to promoting the goals and values of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, which Qatar ratified in 2008.

He added that since joining Unesco, Qatar has worked diligently, guided by its deep belief in noble goals, to enhance international peace and security through its areas of expertise, achieve sustainable development goals, promote concepts of coexistence among different cultures, and empower local communities through culture, adding that in today's era of rapid communication, there are modern challenges that profoundly impact the present and future.

He emphasised that Qatar, through

the implementation of economic, social, and cultural development plans at the national level under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, aims to achieve the goals of its Qatar National Vision 2030, adding that preserving its cultural heritage is a fundamental pillar for enhancing its culture as one of the essential elements of development at the national and international levels, and reinforcing its values that embody its Qatari, Arab, and Islamic identity while remaining open to others.

He pointed out that at the international level, Qatar, through the Ministry of Culture, works to enhance dialogue between different cultures, through Unesco and other international multilateral institutions, to strengthen communication bridges among the world's peoples and promote understanding and peace through various cultural domains.

Dr al-Hanzab continued that to enhance intangible heritage, Qatar has begun completing several national and joint files for registration on the list of intangible heritage, to introduce the world to its ancient heritage and the role of the Qatari society in revitalising it for future generations.

An exhibition highlighting Qatari cultural heritage was held on this occasion. The exhibition featured the "Majlis" in addition to a showcase of crafts and traditional industries that shed light on these crafts and industries and recognised their practitioners. The exhibition also included falconry, which was registered on the list in 2015, as well as folk arts that presented maritime arts displays, including "Al Fajri Art," to showcase the richness and diversity of Qatari culture. Additionally, a section of Qatari traditional culinary arts was presented, showcasing distinctive dishes from Qatari cuisine. The exhibition also included a pavilion displaying photographs highlighting Qatar's achievements in safeguarding intangible heritage.



## TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

| Sl. No. | Tender No.   | Subject   | Tender Fees | Closing Date |
|---------|--------------|---|-------------|--------------|
| 1       | AT/C/1082/24 | Supply & Delivery of Fresh Fruits & Vegetables for one year on call-off basis     | 500.00      | 9.05.2024    |
| 2       | AT/C/1083/24 | Supply & Delivery of fresh local fish for one year on call-off basis              | 300.00      | 9.05.2024    |
| 3       | AT/C/1084/24 | Supply & Delivery of various food & beverage items for one year on call-off basis | 500.00      | 9.05.2024    |

The tender documents are available for collection from the Finance Department (Tel.: 44465612) of The Torch Doha upon presentation of a formal letter of authorization on Company letterhead, copy of the Commercial Registration and a non-refundable fee as specified above.

The closing time will be at 12.00 noon on the closing date mentioned above, any offer arriving thereafter will not be considered.

Tenders are to be submitted in duplicate in a sealed envelope (Commercial envelope only) addressed to The Chairman, General Tender Committee, The Torch Doha and deposit in the tender box available at The Torch Doha Purchasing Office located in Al Waab Street, Aspire Zone.

# S Koreans still seek answers 10 years after Sewol ferry disaster

Reuters  
Ansan, South Korea

South Korea remembered the 304 people, most of them school children, who died on the Sewol ferry on the 10th anniversary of its sinking yesterday, with families calling for a proper apology for the unnecessary

deaths of their loved ones. Many parents attended a memorial service in the city of Ansan, home of the 250 children who died on the ferry during a school excursion, while another 37 family members boarded a Coast Guard ship that sailed to the scene of the disaster, marked by a lone buoy, and held a memorial at sea.

"Every single day of the 10

years has been painful, unbearable time," Kim Jong-gi, who lost his daughter Soo-jin, said at the memorial, adding that those responsible for the disaster had yet to be held accountable.

On the morning of April 16, 2014, the Sewol sank with 476 passengers and crew on board. Of the 304 people killed, 250 were students from the Danwon High

School in Ansan.

The scenes of the 6,800-tonne vessel sinking on live TV stunned the country. Disbelief turned to outrage as it emerged the captain and crew had abandoned the ship, and that the children were told to stay in the cabin and wait for rescue.

Rescuers were slow to arrive, and were largely ineffective when

they got there. Coast guard officials were put on trial for negligence, but they were acquitted.

Investigations found that the ship's structure had been illegally modified and that it had been overloaded. When it went into a turn, the vessel's speed and load caused it to capsize. The captain is serving a life sentence and other members of the crew are also in jail. No one

else has been prosecuted, an issue of contention for the victims' families a decade on. President Yoon Suk-yeol offered his condolences. "May the victims rest in peace, and I offer my deep condolences to the bereaved families," he said.

Memorials were held throughout the country including at the port of Mokpo in the south where the wreckage of the Sewol is on display.

# French hero invited to stay in Australia permanently

Reuters  
Sydney

Australia has invited a French national who confronted a knife-wielding attacker during a rampage in a Sydney mall to stay in the country permanently, heeding calls from the public who had hailed him a hero who deserved citizenship.

A video of Damien Guerot, a construction worker, confronting the assailant Joel Cauchi with a bollard during Saturday's attack in Sydney went viral on social media.

Six people were killed and 12 wounded in the attack at the beachside mall, one of the city's worst violent crimes in recent years. Cauchi, who police said appeared to have been targeting women, was shot and killed by Inspector Amy Scott, who confronted him solo during his rampage.

As the city mourned the victims and cheered the heroes who emerged from the incident, there were growing calls to give Guerot, whose visa expires in a month, the right to remain in the country.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said Guerot was welcome to stay.

"You're welcome to stay for as long as you like," Albanese told a press conference, in reply to a question about his heroics.

"This is someone who we would

welcome becoming an Australian citizen, although that would of course be a loss for France. We thank him for his extraordinary bravery," he said.

Reuters could not reach Guerot for a response to the Prime Minister's comments.

Viral videos circulating on social media show Guerot, wearing a white T-shirt and black trousers, standing at the top of an escalator holding up a bollard and trying to throw it at Cauchi.

Albanese said his act prevented the perpetrator from getting on to another floor and potentially inflicting further carnage.

Another video showed him chasing behind Inspector Amy Scott, who shot the attacker dead, holding a chair as a potential weapon.

Guerot who spoke to Channel Seven earlier this week said he was on his way to the gym when the attack started. He and his friend, Silas Despreaux, were just acting on adrenaline, he said.

"I don't know, we just (thought) we need to do something to catch him," Guerot said. "You cannot think in that moment, it's adrenaline."

His heroics was quickly followed by an online petition calling for Guerot to be granted Australia citizenship, describing his actions as "a true act of Australianism" that saved lives.



NSW police deputy commissioner Peter Thurtell, NSW police commissioner Karen Webb, NSW Premier Chris Minns, and NSW ambulance commissioner Dr Dominic Morgan speak to the media at a news conference, following an attack in a church in western Sydney, at Surry Hills Police Station, Sydney, Australia, yesterday.

# Church stabbing was terrorist act, says Australian police

Reuters  
Sydney

Australian police yesterday said a knife attack on a bishop and some followers in Sydney was a terrorist act motivated by suspected religious extremism, as the country reeled from a second stabbing incident in three days.

At least four people were wounded in the attack, including Bishop Mar Mari Emmanuel when a man lunged at him with a knife during a service live-streamed on Monday.

The incident at the western Sydney suburb of Wakeley triggered clashes outside the church between police and an angry crowd of the bishop's followers who demanded

the attacker be handed over to them.

Police arrested a male teenager at the scene and were forced to hold him at the church for his own safety.

"We believe there are elements that are satisfied in terms of religious motivated extremism," New South Wales state police commissioner Karen Webb said.

"After consideration of all the material, I declared that it was a terrorist incident." Police said there was premeditation as the male attacker travelled to the church, far from his home, with a knife. But Webb said police at this early stage of the investigation believe the attacker was acting alone.

The church in a statement called the attack an isolated incident and said it was awaiting the police find-

ings into the motive of the attacker.

"The church denounces retaliation of any kind," it said.

Emergency crews said they attended to around 30 people after the clash outside the church, and seven were taken to hospitals with injuries. Several police were also hospitalised with injuries and 20 police vehicles were damaged, Webb said.

It was the second major stabbing attack in just three days in Australia's most populous city after six people were killed and 12 injured in a knife attack at a beachside mall in the Bondi area on Saturday.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said there was no place in Australia for violent extremism.

"We're a peace-loving nation. This is a time to unite, not divide, as

a community, and as a country," he said during a media conference.

Bishop Emmanuel's live-streamed sermons attract a global audience and his video clips rack up hundreds of thousands of views online. He became well known for his hardline views during the pandemic when he described lockdowns as "mass slavery," media reported at the time. Australia's spy chief said he would check people close to the attacker to rule out any further threats to the community.

"It is prudent that we do this to determine there's no threats or immediate threats to security. At this time, we're not seeing that," said Mike Burgess, director-general of security for the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation.

## Seoul summons Japanese diplomat over disputed islands

South Korea's foreign ministry summoned a Japanese diplomat yesterday to protest against a claim in Japan's annual diplomatic policy Bluebook on a group of islands at the centre of a long-standing territorial dispute, a ministry spokesman said.

Ties between the two countries have improved in recent years, but the neighbours are at odds over the sovereignty of the islands - called Dokdo in South Korea and Takeshima in Japan - that lie about halfway between them. South Korea's foreign ministry earlier said it "strongly protests" against the Japanese claim on the islands that were historically and geographically its sovereign territory. Japan said in the Bluebook that the islands are its territory based on historical facts and under international law. Tokyo had told Seoul its position on the islands was unacceptable, Japan's top government spokesperson, Yoshimasa Hayashi, said.

## Official visit



Singapore's Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan (left) arrives for a bilateral meeting with Philippine Foreign Secretary Enrique Manalo (second right) at a hotel in Manila yesterday.

## Suspended judge cannot be deported: Kiribati court

Reuters  
Tarawa

A Kiribati court has ruled that a high court judge in the Pacific Island nation who has been suspended by the president cannot be deported to Australia where he was born until parliament considers the findings of a tribunal examining a complaint against him.

The attempted deportation two years ago of David Lambourne, a judge who is married to Kiribati's opposition party leader, sparked a judicial crisis in the Pacific Island nation in a case closely watched by the United Nations and international legal groups.

A resident of Kiribati for 30 years, Lambourne has been living there without a visa or salary since 2022 when President Taneti Maamau suspended him.

Maamau then suspended all three Court of Appeal judges and the chief justice after they ruled Lambourne should not be deported.

Kiribati will hold national elections this year, and Lambourne appeared in court last month seeking to have his suspension overturned.

One attempt at forced deportation amid legal proceedings in August 2022 failed when a Fiji Airlines pilot refused to accept Lambourne on the plane against his will.

In his ruling yesterday, High Court commissioner Aomoro Amten said that although Lambourne's suspension is valid, it was unconstitutional to withhold his salary, and he must not be deported until parliament considers the outcome of a tribunal that is yet to deliver a report.

# Chinatown fearful ahead of Solomon Islands' crunch vote

AFP  
Honiara

Merchants in Solomon Islands' gritty Chinatown were yesterday preparing for the prospect of post-election violence, fearful the district will again be targeted if the Pacific nation re-elects a pro-Beijing leader.

Mobs tore through the shopping district during riots in 2019 and 2021, their anger fuelled in part by China's growing sway over the government.

On the eve of national elections, Chinatown shopkeeper Ruth Maetala said she would be shuttering her

second-hand clothing store until the dust settled from voting.

"We are closing from tomorrow until Friday. Just watching out for anything," she said.

Ethnic violence prompted an Australian-led peacekeeping mission in Solomon Islands from 2003 to 2017, and Beijing flew out scores of ethnic Chinese people in 2006 after riots following general elections.

But the 2021 unrest was particularly harrowing.

At least three people died and whole blocks of Chinatown were torched and still sit blackened and derelict today.

Locals now simply call it "the burning".

"I opened two weeks before the burning," said Maetala. "There was fire all over this place."

Solomon Islanders have slowly moved back into the Chinatown neighbourhood, which sits on the outskirts of the steamy capital Honiara. But only a handful of businesses owned by Chinese expats remain, along with the decaying concrete husks of stores that have been stripped, trashed and daubed with graffiti. "Waku go home," reads one spray-painted message, using the local pidgin phrase for a Chinese resident. The few Chinese merchants who stayed keep their heads down and are reluctant to talk to the media.

"The Chinese businesses cannot come back, because there's no house for them, there's no buildings to run their business," said Robinson Seni, a security guard who protected a strip of shops during the unrest.

Store owner Talina Anderson said she would be paying "a few locals" to watch over her business "just for safety" during the election period.

"I have a few employees who were financially hit by the last riots," she said. "They lost their jobs, they had no money."

A temporary steel fence has even been hastily erected around China's embassy in downtown Honiara ahead of the vote.

Prime Minister Manasseh Soga-

vare has forged deep ties with Beijing since his election in 2019.

A security pact followed in 2022, alarming Western rivals anxious at the prospect of a permanent Chinese military presence in the South Pacific.

While Sogavare plans to bring Beijing further into the fold if he is re-elected, his main rivals are deeply sceptical of China's influence.

A torrent of Chinese aid and investment has flowed into the country during Sogavare's five years at the helm, funding a 10,000-seat athletics stadium and a medical centre still under construction.

Some living in the hardscrabble settlements outside central Honiara

have questioned whether this money has made much of a difference.

"So my country is really poor, yeah. It's not good (that it has) stayed like this," banana seller Tina said from her wooden stand on the side of the road.

Solomon Islands, with a population of about 720,000 people, is one of the least-developed nations in the world.

Election eve in Solomon Islands sees desperate political operatives make last-ditch bids to nakedly buy off voters.

A 24-hour campaigning blackout and toughened electoral laws have been put in place to try and stamp out the dirty political tactics.

# Australia's Great Barrier Reef struggles to survive

AFP  
Lizard Island, Australia

Australia's famed Great Barrier Reef is suffering one of the most severe coral bleaching events on record, leaving scientists fearful for its survival as the impact of climate change worsens.

For 33 years marine biologist Anne Hoggett has lived and worked on Lizard Island, off Australia's northeast tip.

She affectionally dubs it "Blizard Island". The only relief from the wind and teeming showers is in the powder blue waters, where sea turtles and tiger sharks rove along the Great Barrier Reef.

As Hoggett snorkels, schools of fish swim gracefully, feeding on the coral or darting between it. Some are as small as her little finger, others the colour of fire.

But thanks to climate change, it is becoming a watery graveyard of bleached reef.

"We don't know yet if they've already sustained too much damage to recover or not," said Hoggett.

The world is currently experiencing its second major coral bleaching event in 10 years, the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) announced Monday. Coral bleaching occurs when water temperatures rise more than 33.8 degrees Fahrenheit.

"As the world's oceans continue to warm, coral bleaching is becoming more frequent and severe," said NOAA's Derek Manzello.

In a bid to survive, the coral expels microscopic algae, known as zooxanthellae, which it needs to live.

If high temperatures persist, the coral eventually evicts most of the zooxanthellae, turns white, and dies. Since February, ocean temperatures around Lizard Island have been up to two degrees Celsius warmer than the average.

Hoggett estimates about 80% of the coral is already dead.

Often dubbed the world's largest living structure, the Great Barrier Reef is a 2,300km long expanse housing a stunning array of biodiversity, including more than 600 types of coral and 1,625 fish species.

It is vital to the health of the ocean and Australia's tourism industry, netting billions of dollars every year.

But repeated mass bleaching events have robbed the reef of its wonder, turning banks of once-vibrant corals to a sickly ashen white.

In March, Australian reef authorities announced another mass bleaching event was underway, the fifth in eight years.

Through aerial monitoring, they found more than 600 reefs have experienced bleaching.

Ten percent of the area is classed as suffering extreme bleaching, when more than 90% of corals are distressed and unlikely to survive.

Just nine weeks ago, the reef off Lizard Island was healthy and vibrant, Hoggett said.

Now, she points to the fluorescent pink and blue coral. Despite its initial beauty, that means the coral is highly stressed and expelling the healthy algae it needs to survive.

Elsewhere, white coral is covered in a fluffy, brown algae -- a sign it is dead.

When Hoggett first arrived on the island three decades ago, bleaching would occur every 10 years or so. Now, it is happening every year.

Mass bleaching events along the reef occurred in 1998, 2002, 2016, 2017, 2020, 2022 and now 2024.

She is heartbroken.

"The only time we've seen bleaching this bad was in 2016, when just about everything died," Hoggett said.

"It's anybody's guess as to how many of these corals that are still alive now will be able to survive and recover."

While reefs can recover from bleaching, the window of recovery between events is narrowing.

As the planet continues to warm, bleaching is forecast to reduce global coral cover by 95% if temperatures warm by about two degrees.

If the rise is up to 1.5 degrees above pre-industrial levels, bleaching will spread to 70%.

Even if all countries deliver on their climate commitments, the world would still be on track for two degrees or more of warming.

## Heat and dust



A gust of wind blows dust and leaves into the air as a storm approaches after a heat wave in Dhaka, Bangladesh, yesterday.

# Germany's Scholz lobbies Xi to improve market access

Reuters  
Beijing

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz lobbied for better market access for German firms in China in talks with Chinese President Xi Jinping yesterday and urged him to exert pressure on Russia to withdraw its forces from Ukraine.

The talks with Xi capped a three-day tour of China during which Scholz walked a tightrope, conveying growing concerns in Europe about Beijing's economic policies and support for Russia while also promoting business ties with Germany's largest trade partner.

The visit was the first since Berlin agreed a China strategy outlining the need to reduce strategic dependencies on Chinese goods, and since the European Union launched several investigations into whether Chinese manufacturers are dumping subsidised goods on its market.

Scholz, who met for more than three hours with Xi, before later seeing Premier Li Qiang, said he had pressed the case for China to guarantee German firms equal market access, the protection of intellectual property and a reliable legal system.

"I expressed my concern ... that unilateral economic policy decisions in China are creating major structural difficulties for companies in

Germany and Europe," he said, noting he hoped this would quickly lead to practical solutions.

On the EU anti-subsidy investigations, Scholz said the bloc should not act out of protectionist self-interest but competition should be fair and that it is important to establish processes to ensure this. He said he discussed with Xi the role of the World Trade Organisation.

Xi showed little willingness to make concessions, saying Chinese green tech exports have "not only enriched global supply and alleviated inflationary pressure, but also contributed greatly to the response to climate change".

"(Germany and China) should be vigilant against rising protectionism," Xi said.

Scholz was joined on his trip by senior German executives, such as Ola Kallenius, chairman of Mercedes-Benz, and Oliver Zipse, chief executive of BMW, underlining the importance of the Chinese market to Europe's largest economy. Sino-German commercial ties should not only be cultivated but expanded, Mercedes-Benz CEO Ola Kallenius told German broadcaster ARD in Beijing yesterday.

"Withdrawing from such a large market is not an alternative, but rather strengthening our position," he said about the company's strategy in China, the world's second largest economy.

BMW CEO Oliver Zipse expressed a similar view. "We actually see more opportunities

than risks," he told the ARD news programme Tagesschau.

Xi told Scholz that China and Germany have "huge potential" for cooperation in both traditional fields such as machinery manufacturing and automobiles and emerging fields including green transformation and digital artificial intelligence.

China has also lifted restrictions on imports of beef and apples from Germany, Scholz said.

Critics worried that the trip - Scholz's longest bilateral visit anywhere since taking office in 2021 - is a sign Germany is not serious about diversifying trade and will continue to prioritise short-term financial gain over long-term security.

Regarding Russia's two-year-old full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Scholz said he asked Xi "to exert pressure on Russia so that (President Vladimir) Putin finally calls off his insane campaign, withdraws his troops and ends this terrible war".

Both leaders agreed they rejected attacks on nuclear facilities such as nuclear power plants, Scholz said, alluding to strikes on the Zaporizhzhia complex in Russian-held southern Ukraine that the two sides have blamed on each other.

But Xi appeared to dismiss a peace summit in Switzerland requested by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy and scheduled for June that Russia has made clear it will not attend.

## Philippines seizes 1.8 tonnes of meth in drug bust

The Philippines has seized 1.8 tonnes of crystal methamphetamine, President Ferdinand Marcos said yesterday, describing the bust as a record and the "right approach" to the drug war.

Police found the illegal drugs, estimated to be worth more than \$230mn, on Monday during a search of a van in Batangas province, south of Manila. The driver was arrested.

Marcos inspected the drug haul yesterday and said it was the "biggest shipment of shabu ever caught" in the Philippines.

Shabu is the local name for cheap and highly addictive crystal meth. It was not clear if it was a record value or quantity of drugs.

"But not one person died, no one died, no gunfight, no one got injured," Marcos told reporters. "We did the operation carefully. That's the right approach, for me, that should be the approach in the drug war."

## National Security Education Day



Children play with a toy gun at a carnival to mark the National Security Education Day in Hong Kong, China.

## Sri Lanka debt talks stall as deadline looms

AFP  
Colombo

Bankrupt Sri Lanka yesterday said it had failed after three weeks of talks to reach an agreement with its sovereign bondholders, a key condition for maintaining an International Monetary Fund bailout.

The talks with a majority of sovereign bondholders ended inconclusively, the finance ministry said, ahead of a June deadline for the island to restructure its bilateral and private debt.

"Despite constructive discussions, the parties did not come to an agreement on restructuring terms," the ministry said in a 19-page statement outlining the offers and counter offers at the table.

Sri Lanka secured a \$2.9bn four-year bailout loan from the

International Monetary Fund in March last year after defaulting on its external debt in 2022 during an unprecedented economic crisis.

Failing to meet the June deadline for a restructure would halt future bailout payments.

Sri Lanka's offer of a 28.8% haircut on its estimated \$12.5bn in outstanding International Sovereign Bonds (ISBs) was rejected by bondholders.

They instead proposed only giving discounts on the debt if Sri Lanka failed to meet economic growth targets set by the IMF.

The government said it was willing to consider the counterproposal of bondholders "subject to being provided with more details".

There was no immediate reaction from bondholders who have grouped themselves into a "Steering Committee" to negotiate a restructuring deal.

# US envoy visits DMZ on heavily-fortified Korea border

AFP  
Seoul

The US ambassador to the United Nations visited the heavily-fortified border between North and South Korea yesterday, urging Pyongyang to return to talks as global enforcement of UN sanctions stumbles.

Linda Thomas-Greenfield arrived in South Korea on Sunday on a trip aimed at keeping up pressure on the nuclear-armed North after Russia last month used its UN veto to effectively end UN monitoring of violations of the raft of sanctions on Kim Jong-un's regime.

Experts have said the shift was a significant victory for Kim, who has recently ramped up ties with Moscow including, Washington and Seoul have claimed, sending Russia weapons for use in Ukraine.

"The US harbours no, no hostile intent towards the DPRK," Thomas-Greenfield said at the demilitarised zone (DMZ) between the two Koreas, referring to the North by the acronym of its official name.

"We have held the doors open for meaningful diplomacy and we remain open to dialogue, real, productive dialogue without preconditions," she said.

"All the DPRK (has) to do is say yes and show up to the table," she

added. Washington and Seoul have condemned Moscow for its move at the United Nations, calling it "irresponsible".

Kim met Russian President Vladimir Putin in September last year, with Pyongyang's leader declaring Moscow ties his country's "number one priority".

Seoul has since claimed that the North has sent 7,000 containers of arms to Russia.

"This is clearly a concern of ours," Thomas-Greenfield said, when asked about North Korea-Russia ties.

"It is certainly the reason we're seeing Russia protect the DPRK in the council vetoing the 1718 Panel



US ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield talks with a group of young North Korean defectors at the American Diplomacy House in Seoul, South Korea, yesterday.

of Experts resolution, blocking efforts to hold the DPRK accountable for numerous violations of resolutions in the council," she said.

This year, Kim has declared Washington's security ally Seoul his country's "principal enemy", jettisoned agencies dedicated to reunification and outreach, and threatened war over "even 0.001mm" of territorial infringement.

Pyongyang has also been making efforts to strengthen ties with its most important ally, Beijing. Last week, it received a visit from China's third highest-ranking official and called the bilateral relationship an "eternal friendship".

**TRAGEDY**

**Woman, five children dead after boat capsizes in Kashmir**

A woman and five children were killed yesterday after a boat ferrying them across a swollen river capsized in Kashmir, officials said. Rescuers in rubber boats joined by marine commandos and divers were searching for three others believed to have been aboard. Residents said the remaining missing were schoolchildren on their way to class when the boat overturned in the Jhelum river in the city of Srinagar. "Six died in the accident, another six were rescued and three are still missing," Srinagar district magistrate Bilal Mohi-ud-Din Bhat said. "Our information so far is that 15 people were on the boat," he said.

**DATA**

**India's sugar production slips, mill closures climb**

Indian mills produced 31.09mn metric tonnes of sugar between October 1 and April 15, down 0.5% from the previous year due to lower output in the key producing southern state of Karnataka, a leading industry body said yesterday. Sugar mills are closing their operations at a higher pace than last year and so far, 448 mills have closed compared to 401 a year ago, the Indian Sugar & Bio-Energy Manufacturers Association (ISMA) said. Western state of Maharashtra has produced 10.9 million tonnes of sugar so far this season, while northern state of Uttar Pradesh has churned out 10.1 million tonnes, the ISMA said.

**ECONOMY**

**UK unemployment rises as wage growth eases**

British unemployment has risen as wage growth has eased, official data showed yesterday, leaving the door open for an interest rate cut according to analysts. The UK unemployment rate rose to 4.2% in the three months to the end of February, up from 3.9% in the three months to January, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said in a statement. "We are now seeing tentative signs that the jobs market is beginning to cool," said Liz McKeown, ONS director of economic statistics. The ONS added that average regular pay growth, excluding bonuses, dipped to 6% from 6.1%.

**SETBACK**

**UK's upper house delays Sunak's Rwanda scheme**

Britain's upper house of parliament again proposed changes to Rishi Sunak's divisive law to send asylum seekers to Rwanda, delaying one of the prime minister's flagship policies he hopes could help change his party's electoral fortunes. Sunak has invested huge political capital in the Rwanda scheme before an election later this year he is predicted to lose, saying it will help meet his pledge to stop thousands of people arriving in Britain without permission in small boats. The House of Lords for a third time sought to make changes to the new legislation after the House of Commons rejected its second set of proposals on Monday.

# Two arrested for shooting at superstar's Mumbai home

AFP  
Ahmedabad, India

Two members of a notorious criminal gang were arrested by Indian police yesterday for firing at the home of Bollywood actor Salman Khan in retaliation for the superstar's killing of two antelopes.

The Bishnoi gang, accused of several murders and extortion rackets, hails from a wider desert-based sect that worships the animal.

Khan, 58, has been in the cross-hairs of the group since 1998 for shooting two blackbucks on a recreational hunting trip.

The gang's jailed leader Lawrence Bishnoi has threatened Khan with assassination in the past.

Two men on a motorbike shot at Khan's first-floor apartment during the early hours of Sunday in the upscale Mumbai neighbourhood of Bandra, also firing several rounds in the air before fleeing.

Khan, who is always guarded by armed policemen owing to threats to his life, was home when the gunshots were fired.

The two men aged 24 and 21 were arrested yesterday in the western state of Gujarat, police said.

"We were able to locate the two accused near a temple," Kutch district police officer Mahendra Bagaria said.

"One of our teams reached the temple and nabbed the accused." Members of the Bishnoi com-

munity pursued a criminal case against Khan for the blackbuck shooting for 20 years.

Khan was sentenced to five years in jail by a local court for violating the Wildlife Protection Act in 2018.



**Khan has been in the crosshairs of the group since 1998 for shooting two blackbucks on a hunting trip**

But the penalty was suspended on appeal just days after Khan was sent to prison, prompting Lawrence Bishnoi to warn soon afterwards that his gang would take the law into their own hands.

The gang leader has been accused of orchestrating several murders including the killing of popular Indian rapper Sidhu Moose Wala in 2022.

Khan has starred in nearly 150 films and television shows since his first hit in the 1980s, and remains one of Bollywood's most bankable figures. But his personal life has long been dogged by controversy. In 2002 he allegedly ran over five people sleeping on the sidewalk in an upmarket Mumbai neighbourhood, killing one, in a late-night hit-and-run.

**Rahul campaigns in Kozhikode**



Rahul Gandhi, a senior leader of India's main opposition Congress party, waves to supporters during an election campaign rally ahead of general election, in Kodyathur in Kozhikode district in the southern state of Kerala, India, yesterday.

# 29 Maoist rebels slain in clash with Indian security forces

AFP  
Jagdalpur, India

At least 29 Maoist insurgents were killed in a shootout with security forces yesterday, police said, one of the deadliest days in the long-running conflict.

The guerrillas were killed in a remote part of the central state of Chhattisgarh, which has seen a number of deadly assaults on Maoist forces this year. The insurgents, who are known as Naxalites and say they are fighting for the rural poor, have carried out guerilla attacks since 1967. Security has been stepped up in Chhattisgarh ahead of a marathon six-week general election beginning on Friday. All 29

died in Kanker district, south of the state capital Raipur.

District police chief I K Elesela confirmed yesterday's toll, saying the rebels had been pursued in a joint operation between police and the paramilitary Border Security Force (BSF).

"One BSF soldier and a Kanker police officer have sustained bullet injuries," he said.

A large quantity of weapons, including four automatic firearms, had been recovered from the dead, he said.

Elesela earlier told local media that Shankar Rao, a top rebel commander who was the subject of a \$300,000 reward for information leading to his capture, was among those killed.

A BSF statement said the operation had been running since Monday evening to intercept the

Maoists after learning of their movements near the village of Binagunda. Bastar district police inspector-general Sundarraj Pattilingam said three members of the government security forces had been wounded in the skirmish.

"But they are walking," he said. Yesterday's clash was the second of its kind this month, after the killing of 13 Maoist rebels during a shootout in Chhattisgarh on April 2.

Around 80 Maoists have been killed in India this year, according to police figures, the vast majority in that state.

India has deployed tens of thousands of security personnel to battle Maoist rebels across the insurgent-dominated "Red Corridor", which stretches across central, southern and eastern states but has shrunk in size.

**'Rare' Churchill portrait goes on display**

One of the best surviving portraits of Winston Churchill has gone on show in the former British prime minister's birthplace, ahead of going under the hammer in June, Sotheby's announced. The painting of the World War II leader by artist Graham Sutherland, part of a commission to mark Churchill's 80th birthday in 1954, is on display at Blenheim Palace until Sunday. The painting went on public view yesterday in the very room where Churchill was born in 1874 at the Oxfordshire home of the Churchill family, according to Sotheby's. It will also go on display at the auction house's New York premises for two weeks in early May and at its London showroom from May 25 to June 5, before being offered for sale on June 6. Sotheby's estimates it will fetch up to \$996,000. "Focused solely on the head, Sutherland pours his energies into a dextrous, painterly analysis of the man during an incomparably challenging period of his life," the auctioneers said.



Andre Zlattinger, Sotheby's head of Modern British and Irish Art poses with a portrait, a surviving study of Winston Churchill, at Blenheim Palace, north of Oxford, home to the Duke of Marlborough and Churchill's family home, yesterday.

# Indian yoga guru seeks court mercy in ads case

Reuters  
New Delhi

Indian yoga guru Baba Ramdev yesterday said he made a mistake and apologised to a court for defying its orders to stop misleading advertisements that claim his traditional ayurvedic medicines can cure chronic diseases like diabetes.

Ramdev, dressed in a saffron-coloured robe, pleaded before two Supreme Court judges with folded hands and said he felt provoked to react after his firm Patanjali Ayurved's hugely popular medicines were called "pseudoscience" by critics, but added he was not justifying his action.

The Supreme Court has previously refused to accept two formal apologies from Ramdev and his firm's co-founder Acharya Balkrishna, made through their

lawyers, in the contempt case and also admonished the head of a state drugs regulator for not taking legal action against the firm.

"I want to say we made a mistake," Ramdev told the judges in the packed courtroom. "What we said at the time should not have been said."

He added that millions of people follow him and he would be "mindful of these things going forward".

The case against him relates to the Indian Medical Association's allegations that Patanjali disparages conventional medicines and continued publishing the misleading ads.

Ramdev has a huge following in India and performs yoga on TV shows. He repeated claims about his traditional medicines at a press briefing last year, a day after the court barred Patanjali from publishing such ads.

# UK parliament debates law phasing out smoking

AFP  
London

The UK parliament yesterday kicked off its first debate on Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's planned flagship legislation to prevent young people from smoking, despite opposition from many in his own Conservative Party.

The law would ban the selling of tobacco products to anyone born after January 1, 2009 - effectively raising the smoking age by a year each year until it applies to the whole population.

"This has the potential to

phase out smoking in young people almost completely as early as 2040," the government said when it unveiled the plan, calling the move "historic".

While the law looks set to pass thanks to support from opposition parties - including Labour, which is expected to win a general election due this year - Sunak faces the prospect of a rebellion from backbench Tory MPs.

The beleaguered leader has little political capital to expend within his fractured party as he struggles to revive its fortunes following months of dire polling.

Smoking is the UK's biggest preventable killer and opinion polls show that around two-thirds of people in the UK back a phased smoking ban.

However, libertarian-leaning MPs on the right of the ruling Conservatives, including former prime minister Liz Truss, have branded the move an attack on personal freedoms.

Conservative MP Simon Clarke told BBC radio that he was "both sceptical and downright opposed" to the plans.

"I think that an outright ban risks being counterproductive, I think it actually risks making smoking cooler, it certainly risks

creating a black market, and it also risks creating an unmanageable challenge for the authorities," he said.

Former prime minister Boris Johnson also said at an event in Canada last week it was "mad" that the party of Winston Churchill was "banning cigars".

Opening the debate for the government, Health Secretary Victoria Atkins told the House of Commons that there is "no liberty in addiction".

"Nicotine robs people of their freedom to choose. The vast majority of smokers start when they are young, and three quarters say that if they could turn back the

clock they would not have started," she said.

MPs were due to vote on whether to approve the plans for the next stage of the legislative process.

Conservative MPs have been given a free vote, meaning they are able to defy the government without fear of being suspended from the party.

Westminster watchers will closely study the size of the rebellion to see what it suggests about Sunak's authority, amid reports that some cabinet members are considering voting against.

The proposed ban was supposedly inspired by a similar plan

in New Zealand which was later dropped.

Official figures show smoking causes about one in four deaths from cancer and leads to 64,000 deaths in England per year.

"If parliament passes this new bill, it will put the UK at the very forefront of the fight to eradicate one of the most harmful inventions of modern times," said Lion Shahab, co-director of the tobacco and alcohol research group at University College London.

The legislation also seeks to clamp down on young people vaping by restricting flavours and packaging to make less appealing to children.



Former president Donald Trump speaks as attorney Todd Blanche looks on, on the second day of his trial at Manhattan Criminal Court, New York City, yesterday.

# Trump trial not a referendum on his presidency: prosecutor

Reuters  
New York

Donald Trump's criminal trial on charges stemming from hush money paid to a porn star is not a referendum on his presidency, a prosecutor told prospective jurors yesterday in asking whether they could put personal politics aside.

Trump's defence lawyer, in his opportunity to question prospective jurors, pressed them for their opinions on the former US president.

Jury selection for Trump's trial got underway on Monday. He faces 34 felony counts of falsifying business records to cover up a hush money payment to porn star Stormy Daniels shortly before the 2016 election. Daniels says she had an encounter with Trump about a decade before-hand.

Trump has pleaded not guilty and denies an encounter took place. The Republican presidential candidate has called the case, brought by Democratic Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg, a partisan witch hunt meant to interfere with his campaign to unseat President Joe Biden, a Democrat, in the Nov 5 election.

Manhattan Assistant District Attorney Joshua Steinglass told the 18 prospective jurors who remained of an initial pool of 96 that the case had nothing to do with their personal politics.

"This case is really not about whether you like Donald Trump," Steinglass said. "This case is about the rule of law and

whether Donald Trump broke it." The proceedings so far have underscored the challenges of choosing a jury of 12 residents of heavily Democratic Manhattan who can try the case fairly and impartially.

Roughly half of 96 potential jurors summoned on Monday were dismissed after saying they could not impartially judge the polarising businessman-turned-politician. Those who remained largely said they could put any opinions they have aside and be fair to both sides.

"I don't think it matters what my political beliefs are, or in relation to the defendant," said one woman, a high school teacher who lives on Manhattan's Upper West Side and enjoys reading and hiking.

Trump's defence lawyer Todd Blanche, in his chance to question jurors, said he did not care about jurors' politics but wanted to get a sense of whether they could be fair to Trump as an individual.

"It's extraordinarily important to President Trump that we know that we're going to get a fair shake," Blanche said.

Several prospective jurors said they did not have strong opinions about Trump, or said their opinions were not relevant to the case.

"If we were sitting in a bar, I'd be happy to tell you," said one jury candidate, a man who works at a bookstore and enjoys going to Broadway shows. "But in this room, what I feel about President Trump is not important." Trump, wearing a blue tie, looked toward the panel gathered in the jury box

as Blanche questioned them.

The hush money case is one of four criminal indictments he faces, which stem from alleged mishandling classified information and trying to overturn his 2020 loss to Biden. He has pleaded not guilty in those cases, which may not go to trial before the election.

Though the New York case is centred on events that took place more than seven years ago, prosecutors are trying to hold Trump accountable for more recent conduct as well.

On Monday, they asked Justice Juan Merchan to fine Trump \$1,000 for each of three social media posts this month that criticised Daniels and Michael Cohen, Trump's former fixer who is expected to be a prominent witness in the trial.

Under a gag order imposed by Merchan, Trump is barred from making statements about witnesses, court staff and family members that are meant to interfere with the case.

Trump's lawyer Todd Blanche said the former president was only responding to their criticism of him.

"A finding of criminal contempt, imposition of sanctions, and stark warnings from this Court are the minimum remedies necessary to achieve this indispensable objective," prosecutors wrote in a court filing made public yesterday.

Merchan said he will consider the fines on April 23.

Jury selection is expected to consume the rest of the week, and the trial is scheduled to last through at least May.

## US high court hears challenge to law used against Trump, Capitol rioters

AFP  
Washington

A divided US Supreme Court heard arguments yesterday in a case that could lead to the dismissal of some of the charges filed against former president Donald Trump and hundreds of his supporters who took part in the January 2021 attack on the Capitol.

Special Counsel Jack Smith has slapped the 77-year-old Trump with four felony charges related to efforts to overturn the results of the 2020 election he lost to Democrat Joe Biden.

Several of the conservative justices on the nation's highest court appeared to be sceptical yesterday of the filing of obstruction charges against Trump and other participants in the assault on the Capitol.

The Republican presidential candidate is charged with conspiracy to defraud the US, conspiracy to obstruct an official proceeding and obstruction of an official proceeding – the session of Congress held to certify Biden's victory.

Trump is also charged with conspiracy to deny Americans the right to vote and to have their votes counted.

Joseph Fischer, a former police officer, is among hundreds of Trump supporters facing or convicted of obstruction charges and is seeking to have them tossed out, which could have a knock-on effect for all of the cases – including Trump's.

A district court judge, a Trump appointee, agreed to dismiss Fischer's obstruction charges on the grounds the law used was intended to prosecute financial crimes – specifically the destruction of documents during the 2001 Enron scandal – and did not apply to his conduct on January 6.

That ruling was reversed by an appeals court in a 2-1 decision.

The Supreme Court, which has a 6-3 conservative majority, including three justices nominated by Trump, devoted 90 minutes to hearing Fischer's appeal.

Jeffrey Green, Fischer's attorney, told the justices that "attempts to stop a vote count or



Supporters of defendants including Micki Witthoef, the mother of Ashli Babbitt, who was killed on January 6, 2021, sing outside the Supreme Court in Washington, DC, yesterday.

something like that is a very different act than actually changing a document or altering a document" as the law was applied in the Enron case.

Justice Sonia Sotomayor, a liberal, pushed back against Green's reading.

"There is a sign in the theatre – you will be kicked out of the theatre if you photograph or record the actors or otherwise disrupt the performance," Sotomayor said.

"If you start yelling, I think no one would question that you can be expected to be kicked out under this policy.

"It's not the manner in which you obstruct, it's the fact that you've obstructed."

Justice Neil Gorsuch, a conservative, expressed concerns with the potential application of the law.

"Would a sit-in that disrupts a trial or access to a federal courthouse qualify?" Gorsuch asked. "Would a heckler in today's audience qualify?" "Are those all federal felonies subject to 20 years in prison?" Solicitor General Elizabeth Prelogar, representing the government, said the examples were not comparable with what happened on January 6.

"It's in a fundamentally different posture than if they had stormed into this courtroom, overrun the Supreme Court police and required the justices and other participants to flee for

their safety," Prelogar said.

In Fischer's case, she said, he "specifically intended to prevent Congress from certifying the vote and so used his actions to obstruct that proceeding." Prelogar also noted that of the 1,350 people charged in connection with the Capitol riot, only around 350 were charged with obstruction.

The court is expected to issue a ruling by the end of its term in June – four months before the November 5 election in which Trump is expected to face Biden again.

Trump's trial on the election interference charges had been scheduled to begin on March 4 but is on hold pending a Supreme Court examination of Trump's claim that as a former president, he is immune from criminal prosecution. The court is to hear arguments on the immunity claim, which has been dismissed by two lower courts, on April 25.

There are a total of four criminal cases hanging over Trump and jury selection began in the first one in New York on Monday.

In that case, Trump is accused of falsifying business records in a pre-2016 election scheme to cover up an alleged encounter with a porn star.

Trump's lawyers have sought to delay his court cases until after the election, when he could potentially have the federal charges against him dropped if he wins.

## Body of fourth worker killed in US bridge collapse recovered

AFP  
Washington

The body of a fourth construction worker who died after a bridge collapsed when it was struck by a container ship in the US city of Baltimore last month has been recovered, officials said.

The Francis Scott Key Bridge, a major transit route into the busy city and port of Baltimore, collapsed on March 26 when the Dali container ship lost power and collided into a support column, killing six roadway construction workers.

The Key Bridge response team's Unified Command said it had recovered the body of the "fourth missing construction worker" on Sunday at the site of the bridge

collapse. "Unified Command salvage teams located what they believed to be one of the missing construction vehicles and promptly notified" Maryland state police, according to a statement.

Authorities "responded and located a deceased victim trapped inside the vehicle," it added, without identifying the deceased.

Mexico's Foreign Minister Alicia Barcena said Monday that the body of Mexican national Carlos Daniel Hernandez, who had worked on the bridge, was recovered. "Carlos Daniel represents our Mexican workers in the US," she wrote on social media site X.

Another Mexican national identified as 35-year-old Alejandro Hernandez Fuentes was also killed. His remains were located soon after the collapse, as were those of 26-year-old Guatemalan

Dorlian Ronial Castillo Cabrera. Dive teams recovered the body of another missing worker, 38-year-old Maynor Yasir Suanzo-Sandoval, on April 5, Unified Command said this month.

The 1,000-foot (300-metre) Dali ship had managed to issue a Mayday call in the moments before the collision which gave police time to stop traffic on the bridge, likely saving lives.

But an eight-man construction crew repairing potholes on the bridge could not be reached in time, and plummeted with the tons of concrete and twisted steel into the Patapsco River.

Two workers were rescued alive, one briefly hospitalised and the other uninjured. The FBI has launched a criminal probe targeting the container ship, US media reported on Monday.

## Venezuela shuts Ecuador diplomatic missions over raid

AFP  
Caracas

Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro said yesterday he had ordered the closure of his country's diplomatic missions in Ecuador after a raid on the Mexican embassy in Quito.

Maduro said he has ordered "diplomatic personnel to return to Venezuela immediately...until international law is restored in Ecuador."

He was speaking during a virtual summit of CELAC, the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, in which presidents from across the region are mulling possible sanctions against Ecuador.

Ecuadoran security forces stormed the Mexican embassy on April 5 to arrest former Ecuadoran vice president Jorge Glas,

who is wanted on corruption charges and had been granted asylum by Mexico.

Maduro demanded that Glas be freed from the maximum-security prison where he is now being held and handed over to Mexico.

The rare incursion on diplomatic territory sparked an international outcry, and led Mexico to break ties with Ecuador, pulling its diplomats out of the country.

Mexico has filed a lawsuit against Ecuador at the International Court of Justice in The Hague, saying it wants the country suspended from the United Nations.

Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador said the goal of the suit was "that this doesn't repeat itself in any other country in the world, that international law is guaranteed."

## Nasa confirms space station debris hit Florida man's home

AFP  
Washington

An object that crashed from the sky into an American man's home was a hunk of debris ejected from the International Space Station, Nasa confirmed.

The strange tale came to light last month when Alejandro Otero of Naples, Florida posted on X that a metallic item "tore through the roof and went (through) 2 floors" of his house, almost striking his son, on March 8.

It occurred at a time and location that closely matched official predictions for the atmospheric burn-up of a cargo pallet fragment carrying old batteries that was jettisoned from the orbital outpost in 2021, making it a likely match, according to space watchers.

Nasa, which subsequently collected the object from Otero for analysis, confirmed in a new blog post that the predictions were true.

"Based on the examination, the agency determined the debris to be a stanchion from the Nasa flight support equipment used to mount the batteries on the cargo pallet," it said.

"The object is made of the metal alloy Inconel, weighs 0.7 kilograms, is 4 inches (10 centimetres) in height and 1.6 inches in diameter."

The US space agency also pledged to investigate how the debris survived being fully destroyed in the atmosphere, adding it would update its engineering models accordingly.

"Nasa remains committed to responsibly operating in low Earth orbit, and mitigating as much risk as possible to protect people on Earth when space hardware must be released," it said.

A report by specialist news outlet Ars Technica last month said that while the batteries were owned by Nasa, they were attached to a pallet structure launched by Japan's space agency – potentially complicating liability claims. Past examples of manmade human space debris hitting Earth include part of a SpaceX Dragon capsule landing on an Australian sheep farm in 2022. Skylab, the United States' first space station, fell on Western Australia. More recently, China has been criticised by Nasa for allowing its giant Long March rockets to fall back to Earth after orbit.



This handout from Nasa shows recovered stanchion from the Nasa flight support equipment used to mount International Space Station batteries on a cargo pallet that survived re-entry through Earth's atmosphere on March 8, 2024, and impacted a home in Naples, Florida.

## Georgian lawmakers press forward with 'foreign agent' bill

Georgian lawmakers agreed yesterday an early draft of a controversial "foreign influence" bill, sparking fresh street protests against the legislation criticised for mirroring a repressive Russian law.

The bill has sparked outrage in Georgia and concern in the West, with many arguing it undermines Georgia's bid for European Union membership.

Lawmakers voted 78 to 25 to approve the draft bill for further debate.

Whistling and shouting, "No to the Russian law!" thousands rallied in the evening outside the parliament building in Tbilisi, blocking traffic on the main thoroughfare of the Georgian capital.

Riot police cordoned off entrances to the legislature and demonstrators briefly scuffled with them, attempting to push against the police line, an AFP journalist witnessed.

"Georgians will never accept this Russian law," said one of the demonstrators, university student Kote Tatishvili. "We, peaceful demonstrators, will prevail, we will force Russian stooges in the (ruling party) Georgian Dream to withdraw the law."

On Monday, police detained 14 demonstrators as some 10,000 people took to the streets.

The European Union has called on Tbilisi not to pass the legislation, saying that it contradicts the democratic reforms the country is required to pursue to progress on its path towards EU membership.

Renewing Brussels' criticism of the proposals, EU chief Charles Michel said yesterday: "The draft Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence is not consistent with Georgia's EU aspiration and its accession trajectory."

It "will bring Georgia further away from the EU and not closer", he wrote on X, formerly Twitter.

The ruling Georgian Dream party controls 84 seats in the 150-member legislature and can pass the law without opposition backing.

If adopted, the bill will require any independent NGO and media organisation that receives more than 20% of funding from abroad to register as an "organisation pursuing the interests of a foreign power".

That was a change from last year's proposal, which used the term "agent of foreign influence".

The term "foreign agent" is rooted in the Soviet past and suggests such people are traitors and enemies of the state.

A similar law is used in Russia to punish government critics and suffocate independent media. - AFP

## Italy's Turin orders outdoor smokers to keep their distance

The northern Italian city of Turin has banned outdoor smoking unless other people are at least 5m away, in what Mayor Stefano Lo Russo called a "common sense" decision.

"It is about respecting those who do not smoke, and in some ways also about promoting a culture of respect," Lo Russo, who is from the centre-left Democratic Party, told a local radio station yesterday.

Those who flout the regulation risk a €100 (\$106) fine. The ban covers cigarettes, cigars, pipes, heated tobacco products and e-cigarettes, according to a resolution approved by the city council on Monday.

It says people may smoke closer to others "with their explicit consent", while it bans open-air smoking outright in the presence of children and pregnant women.

Turin is not the first major Italian city to restrict outdoor smoking. In 2021, Milan prohibited it at bus stops, taxi ranks, stadiums, parks and cemeteries. - Reuters

## Milan design fair opens with sustainability and David Lynch



A security guard stands near an installation part of the exhibition 'Making Sense of Colour', a collaborative project between Google and Chromasonic at Garage 21 in Milan, as part of the Fuorisalone 2024 event, on the eve of the Milan Design Week.

One of the world's leading design events, the Salone del Mobile, opened in Milan yesterday, marked by sustainability, craftsmanship and two "thinking rooms" from David Lynch.

Immersive experiences, new editions of iconic furniture and pop colours from the 1970s are also set to define this year's fair, featuring around 1,950 exhibitors - including a third from outside Italy.

Sustainability, the environment and social responsibility are again a big theme, Maria Porro, head of the Salone, told AFP. Shapes are "inspired by the organic world", colours are dominated by natural shades from dark brown to sage green and cobalt blue, she said.

Leading materials include "natural fibres and recycled ones, materials that meet high standards of sustainability as

well as design and functionality".

However, Porro said the bright colours of the 1970s would also return, as part of a wider retro spirit as Italian brands bring furniture from that period up to date.

Among the fair's main attractions are two identical "thinking rooms" designed by Lynch, conceived as symbolic doors through which a visitor must pass to become immersed in the exposition.

The 78-year-old US filmmaker is best known for his movies, often unsettling portraits of American life, but has also been designing furniture for over two decades.

Last year more than 300,000 visitors came from 181 countries - with Chinese buyers also returning following an absence caused by the coronavirus pandemic. - AFP

# Spire collapses as Copenhagen's historic stock exchange burns

Reuters/AFP  
Copenhagen

A fire that ripped through Copenhagen's Old Stock Exchange, one of the Danish capital's most famous landmarks, was brought under control yesterday after the flames toppled its spire.

The fire broke out in the 17th century Dutch Renaissance-style building yesterday morning.

It was quickly engulfed in flames while thick grey smoke rose above the city in scenes reminiscent of the 2019 blaze at Paris' Notre-Dame Cathedral.

There were no reports of casualties.

The Borsen building, close to the Christiansborg parliament and seat of government, was commissioned by King Christian IV and built between 1619 and 1640. It is one of Copenhagen's oldest and best known landmarks.

Housing a vast art collection, it was being renovated to celebrate its 400th anniversary.

Video showed the flaming spire breaking in half as it tumbled down, a chunk crashing to the ground next to a fire truck.

Emergency services, employees from the Danish Chamber of Commerce, including its CEO Brian Mikkelsen, and even passers-by were seen carrying paintings away from the building in a race to save historic artefacts from the flames.

Soldiers of the Royal Life Guards helped to cordon off streets and secure valuables.

"Everybody is crying at the Danish Chamber of Commerce right now," Mikkelsen, told reporters, shaking his head in disbelief. "It's our cultural heritage that I'm looking at. It's 400 years that have shaped Danish cultural history and the society we live in today."

The fire had been brought under control but firefighting would continue throughout the night, Copenhagen fire department chief Jakob Vedsted Andersen told reporters in the afternoon.

"Unfortunately we didn't succeed. A large part of the Stock Exchange is badly damaged by fire, but many of the valuables have been saved," he said.



Plumes of smoke billow from the historic Borsen stock exchange building in central Copenhagen.

The Danish Chamber of Commerce, which has owned the building since 1857, was working on restoring it to the style of Denmark's King Christian IV, who had it constructed in the 17th century.

The building no longer houses the stock exchange but serves as the Chamber of Commerce headquarters.

It was clad in scaffolding when the fire broke out, making it harder for the emergency services to get through to the flames, while the copper roof trapped the heat.

Several hundred pieces of art and artefacts including paintings, mirrors, chandeliers and timepieces were saved by firefighters before flames destroyed most of the interior.

Among the works saved were paintings by Denmark's Peder Severin Kroyer, a 19th century impressionist, said Camilla Jul Bastholm of the National Museum of Denmark.

Parts of the roof had collapsed and the fire spread to several floors of the building. It was not clear what caused the blaze. Police said they would begin investigat-

ing as soon as they could gain access.

"Horrible pictures from the Borsen. So sad. An iconic building that means a lot to all of us ... our own Notre-Dame moment," Defence Minister Troels Lund Poulsen wrote on X.

"This is our Notre-Dame! This is a national treasure," local resident, 45-year-old Elisabeth Moltke, told AFP.

"It pains us all to see the Bourse in the middle of Copenhagen in flames. It is our shared cultural heritage," Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen told public broadcaster DR.

Frederiksen lamented the "hundreds of years of history going up in flames". Schoolteacher Elisabeth Handberg said she and her pupils had watched the smoke from their classroom window.

"At first I couldn't believe it was true," she said. "I'm hoping it will be rebuilt, it can't be any other way."

Software engineer Thor Koustrup, 23, stopped to watch the blaze on his way to work. "I can feel it hitting me inside," he said.



Flames rise from the Dragon Spire of the Stock Exchange in Copenhagen.

Chamber of Commerce chief executive Mikkelsen said that the board had already decided they would rebuild the Stock Exchange.

The building was originally built for trading in goods such as tea and spices.

The spire was shaped as the tails of four dragons intertwined, symbolising the protection of the gold that trade would generate for Denmark.

The spire also had three crowns at the top, symbolising the kingdoms of Denmark, Norway and Sweden.

"An important part of our architectural heritage was and still is in flames," King Frederik wrote in a post. "For generations, the characteristic dragon spire has helped to characterise Copenhagen as the 'city of towers'."

The nearby finance ministry was evacuated as a result of the fire, police said.

## Italy's Prime Minister Meloni sues again for defamation

An Italian court gave the green light yesterday to a fresh defamation case brought by Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni (pictured), this time against a historian who called the far-right leader a "neo-Nazi at heart".



Left-wing classicist Luciano Canfora, 81, made the comments during a school debate in Bari, southern Italy, in April 2022 - six months before the Brothers of Italy leader took office following a historic election win.

The trial is set to open October 7, with Meloni seeking €20,000 (\$21,260) in damages.

Meloni last year successfully sued journalist Roberto Saviano for criticising her stance against migrants in December 2020, with an Italian court handing him a suspended fine of €1,000.

She has also brought a suit against the frontman of British rock band Placebo, after he called her "racist" and "fascist" during a performance in Italy in July 2023. That trial has yet to get underway.

Meloni had posted a video of Canfora speaking on Facebook, alongside a comment condemning his "unacceptable words" which she said amounted to "vulgar propaganda to young students".

Speaking to AFP ahead of yesterday's hearing in a tribunal in Bari, Canfora - a former professor in Greek and Latin philology at the University of Bari who is well-known in Italy - was unrepentant.

"When you say neo-Nazi, you don't think of someone who is perpetrating crimes, or murders, you think of someone who still has some ideas, some mental attitudes that hark back to the past," Canfora said.

He noted that in her 2021 autobiography *I am Giorgia*, Meloni wrote about having "taken up the baton" of Italy's post-war far-right leaders, including Giorgio Almirante.

Almirante was one of the founders of the now-defunct Italian Social Movement (MSI), a party formed by supporters of Fascist dictator Benito Mussolini after World War II.

He was also an official of the Italian Social Republic (RSI), a wartime Nazi-controlled puppet state.

Meloni's Brothers of Italy is a political descendant of the MSI, although she told parliament when she took office that she had "never felt sympathy or closeness to undemocratic regimes ... including Fascism".

Canfora has been supported by many Italian and foreign intellectuals in fighting his case, with French left-wing newspaper *Liberation* organising a petition to support him. - AFP

## Ukraine identifies nearly 37,000 missing, says figure likely higher

Ukraine said yesterday that it had identified almost 37,000 people, including military personnel, who are unaccounted for since Russia's invasion began in February 2022, warning the actual figure may be "much higher".

Calculating the exact number is difficult, as Russian forces occupy around a fifth of the country and neither side regularly releases data on casualties.

"Almost 37,000 people are considered missing - children, civilians and military. These figures may be much higher," Ukraine's human rights ombudsman Dmytro Lubinets said.

He said Ukraine and the Red Cross had identified about 1,700 people "illegally detained" by Russia, which he accused of "abducting civilians" since 2014, when war with Moscow-backed

separatists in the country's east first broke out.

Human rights groups have accused Russia of forced disappearances and abducting children in occupied areas, accusations the Kremlin has rejected.

Large swathes of Ukrainian territory have remained under Russian occupation since the beginning of the war, which has devastated whole towns and cities and killed thousands.

The United Nations' human rights office said in its March report that since Russia's invasion, at least 10,810 people had been killed, including over 8,000 in areas controlled by Ukraine.

The actual number of casualties is likely "considerably higher" and difficult to verify, as independent observers are blocked from accessing occupied areas, it added. - AFP



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**GULF TIMES**

# \$100 oil doing the rounds amid supply shocks, geopolitical fears

Oil markets have largely shrugged off Iran's unprecedented attack on Israel.

In fact, prices fell by about 1% a barrel on Monday and continue to dip for a second day on Tuesday as concerns about Middle East supply eased, while stronger than expected US retail sales dampened investor hopes for demand-spurring cuts to interest rates.

But over the weeks, the oil market has gone from languid to lively, with Brent futures blowing past the key \$90-a-barrel threshold as critical gauges flash steadily more bullish signals.

The surge in headline prices – with Brent now up 18% this year – has been driven by a combination of supply constraints including Opec+ curbs, robust demand, and wider geopolitical risks, especially in the Middle East.

Many refined-product markets are also strong, with gasoline posting big gains.

As traders weigh the possibility that \$100-a-barrel crude could make a comeback, the momentum is diverting their attention from the possibility of a cease-fire in the Middle East, as well as the impact of higher prices on refinery margins.

In a wider sense, the foundations of oil's persistent rally go deeper: Global supply shocks that are intensifying fears of a commodity-driven inflation resurgence.

A recent move by Mexico to slash its crude exports is compounding a global squeeze, prompting refiners in the US – the

## Global supply shocks are intensifying fears of a commodity-driven inflation resurgence

world's biggest oil producer – to consume more domestic barrels. American sanctions have stranded Russian cargoes at sea, with Venezuelan supply a potential next target.

Houthi rebel attacks on tankers in the Red Sea have delayed crude shipments. And despite the turmoil, Opec and its allies are sticking with their production cuts.

It all adds up to a magnitude of supply disruption that has taken traders by surprise. The crunch is turbocharging a rally ahead of the US summer driving season, threatening to push Brent crude, the global benchmark, to \$100 for the first time in almost two years.

That's amplifying the inflation concerns clouding US President Joe Biden's reelection chances and complicating central banks' rate-cut deliberations.

Crude markets in Europe, meanwhile, are pressured higher by the Houthi attacks in the Red Sea, which sent millions of barrels of crude on a detour around Africa, delaying some supplies for weeks.

Disruptions to a key North Sea pipeline, unrest in Libya and a damaged pipe in South Sudan also contributed to the rally, while US sanctions have deprived Russia of tankers that previously transported its oil to buyers including India.

It's a stark contrast from just a few months ago, when oil plunged to multi-month lows as US production climbed and Russian seaborne crude exports ratcheted higher despite sanctions, which have since been expanded.

The US Energy Information Administration, after forecasting global inventories to remain unchanged this quarter, now predicts they'll fall by 900,000 barrels a day. That's the equivalent to the production from Oman.

Looking ahead, the world's biggest commodity traders are increasingly confident of a bullish oil market into the second half of the year after prices pierced \$90 a barrel for the first time in months.

For sure, oil's see-saw trajectory is a double-edged sword. Lower prices would mean major oil producing countries will lose money regardless of the market share they enjoy. The Gulf countries produce oil at the lowest cost; but due to high government spending, they need higher prices to balance their budgets.

But big importing nations such as China, India and Germany could get some relief from falling energy bills.

And cheap oil can also cut investments to develop new oil and gas fields. Oil companies say global energy future envisages rising demand and population growth, making oil an important fuel for decades to come.

The world is in need of a stable oil market with price equilibrium.



# The world can't afford to ignore poorest countries

By Indermit Gill and M Ayhan Kose  
Washington, DC

**T**hey are home to a quarter of humanity – 1.9bn people. They possess prized natural resources, including one-fifth of the world's copper and gold reserves, as well as many of the rare metals essential for the transition to clean energy. Their working-age populations are set to expand for the next five decades amid demographic decline nearly everywhere else. Yet a historic reversal is underway among the world's 75 countries eligible for grants and low-interest loans from the World Bank's International Development Association.

For the first time this century, the income gap relative to the wealthiest economies is widening in roughly half of IDA countries. And while these countries are midway through what could be a lost decade, the rest of the world is largely averting its gaze. IDA countries have an extreme-poverty rate eight times higher than the global average. They account for 70% of all extreme poverty, and they are home to 90% of people facing hunger or malnutrition. Many of their national governments, meanwhile, are paralysed, and half are either in debt distress or at high risk of it.

The flow of foreign capital has largely dried up for IDA countries. In 2022, for the first time in 16 years, private creditors took more in principal repayments than they put in via loan disbursements to IDA governments and government-

guaranteed entities. Financing from foreign governments dwindled to an 11-year low. The remaining lifeline has been multilateral development banks, especially the World Bank, which provided more than half of the \$26bn in loans that IDA governments received from multilateral creditors in 2022.

We are witnessing a dangerous retreat from the principles upon which much of the global economic architecture was built after World War II. Back then, the wealthiest economies wisely recognised their interest in improving the welfare of the weakest. The 17 donor countries that made their first financial contributions to the IDA in 1960 believed that an acceleration of "economic and social progress in the less-developed countries is desirable not only in the interests of those countries but also in the interests of the international community."

The global prosperity that followed validated this insight. Three of today's global economic powerhouses – China, India, and South Korea – are former IDA borrowers whose growth has transformed them into important IDA donors.

Of course, the path to prosperity is rarely linear. Progress often occurs in fits and starts, with some countries advancing and then regressing. But there is no doubt that the IDA's consistent support for the weakest economies has done immense good for the world. In all, 36 countries that once were IDA borrowers no longer depend on it, with a dozen "graduating" in the last two decades alone.

Today's IDA countries account

for a mere 3% of global GDP. Yet their economic potential is considerable, owing to the demographic dividend inherent in their population growth. These countries will have deep reserves of young workers at least through 2070, long after working-age populations in other countries have dwindled.

IDA countries are endowed with a trove of mineral deposits that are crucial for the world's transition to clean energy – including silicon in Bhutan and manganese in Ghana. Most IDA countries are also well placed to take advantage of solar energy, with long-term daily generating potential among the highest in the world.

But IDA countries will enjoy neither durable growth nor stability unless they can make productive jobs readily available for young people entering the workforce, and that will require substantial investment in health and education. Moreover, lasting benefits from their natural-resource wealth will remain out of reach without government institutions capable of nimbler economic management.

Ensuring that IDA countries achieve their full potential will require a concerted effort involving vigorous domestic reforms and stronger financial and policy support from abroad. South Korea, India, and China have shown that when countries undertake the ambitious reforms needed to accelerate investment, a kind of economic magic occurs: productivity surges, incomes rise, and poverty falls. Investment needs in IDA countries are immense. In some, improving access to electricity and basic sanitation facilities will require

infrastructure investments exceeding 10% of GDP.

On average, each IDA country today has succeeded at least once over the past 50 years in achieving sustained investment acceleration. But that is only slightly more than half the average of earlier groups of IDA countries. To raise their game, today's IDA countries will need to bolster fiscal and monetary frameworks, ramp up cross-border trade and financial flows, and improve the quality of institutions.

Global assistance will also be essential. IDA countries deserve financial support from abroad and fresh policy solutions to make the transition to clean energy. Already, climate change is making them pay a steep penalty for others' sins. They also need an improved global debt-restructuring system. The current framework consigns them to an indefinite purgatory. And they need global help to tackle food insecurity, especially now that faraway international conflicts and trade disruptions have added to the problem.

In the coming decades, the world will need to summon every available reserve of economic potential to achieve universal peace and prosperity. It cannot afford to turn its back on a quarter of its people. – Project Syndicate

• Indermit Gill is Chief Economist and Senior Vice-President for Development Economics at the World Bank.

• M Ayhan Kose is Deputy Chief Economist and Director of the Prospects Group at the World Bank.

## Three of today's global economic powerhouses - China, India, and South Korea - are former IDA borrowers whose growth has transformed them into important IDA donors



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# The world's coral reefs are bleaching

By Gloria Dickie and Alison Withers  
London

**H**uge stretches of coral reef around the world are turning a ghostly white this year amid record warm ocean temperatures.

On Monday, the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration confirmed the world's fourth mass global bleaching event is underway — with serious consequences for marine life and for the people and economies that rely on reefs.

Here's how warming affects coral reefs and what the future might hold for these fragile underwater ecosystems.

## What are corals?

Corals are invertebrates that live in colonies. Their calcium carbonate secretions form hard and protective scaffolding that serves as a home to many colourful species of single-celled algae.

The two organisms have evolved over millennia to work together, with corals providing shelter to algae, while the algae remove coral waste compounds and deliver energy and oxygen back to their hosts.

## Why do corals matter?

Coral reefs cover less than one percent of the ocean floor, but have out-sized benefits for marine ecosystems and economies.

A quarter of marine life will depend on reefs for shelter, finding food or spawning at some point in their lives and coastal fisheries would struggle without corals.

Every year, reefs provide about \$2.7tn in goods and services, from tourism to coastal protection, according to a 2020 estimate by the *Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network*. About \$36bn is generated by snorkelling and scuba diving tourists alone.

Coral reefs also help coastal communities by forming a protective barrier against storm surges and large waves. This helps to avoid property



Marine biologist Anne Hoggett snorkels to inspect and record bleached and dead coral around Lizard Island on the Great Barrier Reef, located 270km north of the city of Cairns. (AFP)

damage for more than 5mn people worldwide, a 2022 study in the journal *Marine Policy* found.

## What is coral bleaching?

When water temperatures rise, jewel-toned corals get stressed. They cope by expelling their algae — causing them to turn bone white.

Most corals live in shallow waters, where climate-driven warming is most pronounced.

Whether a coral becomes heat-stressed depends on how long the high temperatures last, and how much warmer they are than usual.

Scientists have found that corals generally begin to bleach when surrounding waters are at least 1C warmer than the maximum average temperature — or the peak of what corals are used to — and persist for four or more weeks.

## What is going on with ocean temperatures this year?

This year has seen an explosive and sustained bout of ocean heat as the planet deals with the effects of both climate change and an El Nino climate pattern, which yields warmer seas.

In March, global average sea surface temperature (SST) reached a record monthly high of 21.07C (69.93F), according to the EU Copernicus Climate Change Service.

"There's been a pretty large step change in the global average SST this year," said Neal Cantin, a coral biologist with the Australian Institute of Marine Sciences. "We're certainly in a new regime. Corals clearly aren't keeping up".

As the El Nino weakens, scientists say some of that ocean heat should diminish. But overall ocean warming will continue as climate change intensifies.

## Do all bleached corals die?

Corals can survive a bleaching event if the surrounding waters cool and algae return.

Scientists at the Palau International Coral Reef Center estimate that it takes at least nine to 12 years for coral reefs to fully recover from mass bleaching events, according to research published in 2019.

Disruptions such as cyclones or pollution can slow the recovery.

"Bleaching is like a fever in humans," said ecologist David Obura, director



Another view of the bleached and dead coral around Lizard Island on the Great Barrier Reef. (AFP)

of Coastal Oceans Research and Development in the Indian Ocean East Africa. "We get a fever to resist a disease, and if the disease is not too much, we recover. But if it is too much, we die as a result."

Scientists caution that corals this year have faced harsher and more prolonged high temperatures than ever before.

"What is happening is new for us, and to science," said Lorenzo Alvarez-Filip, a coral reef ecologist at the National Autonomous University of Mexico. "We cannot yet predict how severely stressed corals will do even when they survive the stress event, or how coral recovery will operate."

## What happens to dead corals?

Dead reefs can still offer shelter to fish or provide a storm barrier over several years for coastal communities.

But eventually, these underwater graveyards of calcium carbonate skeletons will erode and break apart.

"It might take 10, even 20 years to see these consequences," Alvarez-Filip said.

## What can be done to help save reefs?

The best chance for coral survival is for

the world to cut greenhouse gas emissions to limit climate change.

Many scientists think that at just 1.2C of warming above preindustrial level, the world has already passed a key threshold for coral reef survival. They expect between 70% and 90% of the world's coral reefs will be lost.

Scientists and conservationists are scrambling to intervene.

Local communities have cleanup programmes to remove litter from the reefs to reduce further stresses. And scientists are breeding corals in labs with the hopes of restoring degraded reefs.

However, none of this is likely to work to protect today's corals from warming waters. Scientists are therefore trying to plan for the future by bringing coral larvae into cryopreservation banks, and breeding corals with more resilient traits.

Obura said that while it's important that scientists investigate such interventions, breeding genetically engineered corals is not the answer to climate change. "We have to be very careful about stating that it's the solution and that it's saving corals reefs now," he said.

"Until we reduce carbon emissions, they won't save coral reefs." — Reuters

# Peru pollution ruling a 'gigantic step' for environmental justice

By Anastasia Moloney  
Bogota

**A** court's ruling that residents of a polluted Peruvian mining town have the right to a healthy environment could be a milestone for similar cases in Latin America, though the blighted community still faces hurdles in its fight for justice.

The Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR) ruled in March that Peru had failed to regulate a 100-year-old smelter complex in the Andean town of La Oroya and stem pollution that contaminated the air, water and soil for decades, harming local people's health.

"This case is the first time that the court is...really recognising a connection between the health of an environment and the health of human communities," said Jacob Kopas, senior attorney at the Earthjustice environmental group, who has been working on the case for over a decade.

The ruling, which is binding and cannot be appealed, paves the way for other pollution-hit communities in Peru and across Latin America to seek justice, and could also influence future climate change litigation in the region, Kopas added.

"Now with this precedent, we can point to it and say yes you have access to justice — this has been recognised as a human rights violation," said Kopas.

The ruling by the Americas top human rights court ordered Peru to pay damages to residents affected by toxic pollution stating that victims should receive at least \$30,000 each in damages, with the most vulnerable receiving \$50,000.

It also ordered the government to assess the current state of contamination in La Oroya, set up air pollution monitoring and alert systems, provide free medical care to the victims and publicly acknowledge its wrongdoing.

The complex, which is currently operated by Metalurgica Business Peru SAC, a firm that counts former workers among its shareholders, will be able to continue operating.

Liliana Avila, a lawyer with the non-profit Interamerican Association for Environmental



Peruvian environmental campaigner, Yolanda Zurita, a petitioner in the La Oroya case.

Defense (AIDA) who represented the La Oroya plaintiffs before the Costa Rica-based court, said the ruling was a "milestone that is a gigantic step in advancing environmental justice in Latin America."

But Yolanda Zurita, one of 80 petitioners in the case, said her fight would now switch to ensuring victims get the compensation ordered by the court.

"The next process is to demand that the state complies with the ruling. It will be difficult but not impossible," the 65-year-old environmental campaigner told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

"Our fight, our resistance is for the well-being of future generations so they can have a better quality of life," she said.

Peru's Environment Minister Juan Carlos Castro told local media after the ruling that government attempts over the years to stop pollution in La Oroya had been difficult because the smelter was a key source of jobs.

"We're a country that adheres to the Inter-American Court and we are going to respect what it says, as long as the agency (Justice Ministry) of our country determines it in this way," Castro added.

For a century, La Oroya's 30,000 inhabitants have shared their town with the smelter complex that began operating in 1922 and continues to churn out metals including gold, silver, lead, zinc and copper.

The case included evidence given by La

Oroya residents of skin, heart and stomach problems, chronic headaches, respiratory illnesses, along with lead poisoning they blame on the gray smog caused by the smelter that sits in the middle of the town.

The court said it had corroborated that exposure to lead, cadmium, arsenic and sulphur dioxide posed a significant risk to local residents, who did not receive adequate medical attention from the government when they became ill.

"It is sufficient to establish that the State allowed the existence of levels of contamination that put people's health at significant risk," the ruling said.

Nearly all the children in the case had high lead levels in their blood, many times higher than World Health Organisation guidelines, according to Earthjustice.

The court ruling could inspire more communities in Peru and beyond to bring pollution cases against governments.

Zurita said she had already received calls from other community leaders across Peru, who are suffering from similar types of industrial and water pollution caused by mining, asking for advice about how to develop a legal case and bring it to court.

"The seeds have been sown for others to resist," she said.

While the La Oroya case was the IACHR's first such ruling, it is among an increasing number of environmental lawsuits brought by citizens against governments in Latin America that hinge on human rights law.

The region has been at the "vanguard" of the concept of a healthy environment, with some countries recognizing the right in their constitutions, said Kopas.

The court ruling will reverberate in court decisions and influence constitutional law linked to environmental issues, he added.

"Pretty much every case in Latin America we are going to be working on from here on now, we are going to cite this case," he said. "When the (IACHR) orders something, governments basically know that this is not going to go away."

"We are hoping that this will be a wake-up call for a lot of countries that you can't ignore the human health impacts of pollution going forward." — Thomson Reuters Foundation

# Why Trump could be president again despite his legal troubles

By Jack Queen  
Washington

**R**epublican presidential candidate Donald Trump is standing trial in New York on charges that he illegally covered up a hush money payment to a raunchy star.

But what happens if the jury convicts the former US president and the judge imposes a sentence before the November election?

## Would Trump go to prison?

It is not yet known what sentence, if any, the judge may impose if Trump is convicted.

Prosecutors have charged Trump, who has pleaded not guilty, with 34 felony counts of falsifying business records. The maximum sentence for the charge is 1-1/3 to four years in prison, but in cases involving prison time, defendants are typically sentenced to a year or less.

But Trump would be a first-time offender for a nonviolent crime, and it is rare for people with no criminal histories who are charged solely with falsification of business records to be sentenced to prison in New York. Punishments like fines or probation are more common.

If punished beyond a fine, Trump could be placed under home confinement or subjected to a curfew rather than imprisoned. As a former president, he has a lifetime Secret Service detail, and the logistics of keeping him safe behind bars could be complicated.

Trump could also be released on bail while appealing a conviction.

## Could Trump still be president if convicted?

Yes. The US Constitution only requires that presidents be at least 35 years old and US citizens who have lived in the country for 14 years.

Neither a criminal conviction nor a prison sentence would affect Trump's eligibility for office. In theory, he could be sworn in from jail, prison or home confinement if he were to win the election after being convicted and sentenced.

He could not pardon himself in the hush money case since he is charged with state rather than federal crimes and presidential pardon power only applies to the latter.



Former president Donald Trump sits in the courtroom during the second day of his criminal trial at Manhattan Criminal Court in New York City. (AFP)

## What's the impact of a conviction on the election?

Trump has used the four criminal cases against him to his fundraising advantage, claiming they are part of a political conspiracy. His campaign's financial filings last year showed surges in donations following his indictments.

But only half of Republicans in a Reuters/Ipsos poll in February said they would vote for Trump if a jury convicted him.

A Reuters/Ipsos poll this month found a firm majority of voters viewed the New York criminal charges against Trump as serious. About a quarter of Republican respondents to the April poll said they would not vote for Trump if he were convicted of a felony crime by a jury.

## What about the other cases?

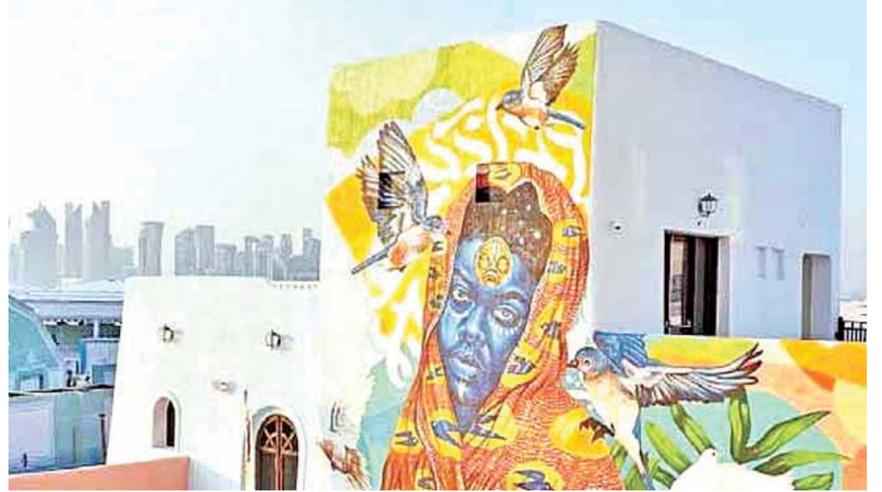
Trump has been charged in Georgia and Washington over his efforts to reverse his 2020 election loss to Democrat Joe Biden and in Florida over his handling of classified documents upon leaving office. It is unclear if any of those cases will go to trial before the November 5 election.

Because the Washington and Florida cases were brought in federal court, Trump could end them if he wins the election by appointing an attorney general who could dismiss them. He could also potentially pardon himself.

The Georgia and New York cases were both brought in state courts, so Trump could neither pardon himself nor end the cases by firing the prosecutors who brought them. — Reuters



The smelter complex in the Andean highland town of La Oroya, Peru.



# Artists say murals, graffiti are positive art forms in Qatar

Adorning various locations across Qatar with graffiti and murals celebrating local themes enhances the artistic and creative environment, a number of Qatari painters and artists have said.

Speaking to local Arabic daily *Arrayah*, they stressed that the support of graffiti and mural artists would certainly contribute to enhancing the beauty of the streets and various areas.

Hayfaa al-Khuzai said an increasing interest was seen in murals and graffiti during the period before the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, as the country got decked up to receive international tourists.

"This initiative reflected positively on the overall aesthetic scene of the country, and drew the attention of the world to Qatar," she said. "It helped shed more light on participating local artists, and constituted an active platform to exercise and display their creativity."

Hassa Kala sees a need for more Qatari artists to be engaged in this field so they can express the national identity in their works, giving tour-

ists some insight about the local culture.

Eman al-Hydous stressed there is a need to pay more attention to murals and 3D paintings at key public spaces, especially since Qatar is known worldwide and many tourists come to the country.

"This has to go side by side with the massive urban development of the country, she said. "More focus should be given to the themes that convey different stories from the Qatari heritage and history."

Hassan Bujassum remarked that the murals and graffiti in public areas should focus on themes inspired by the local environment.

Mariam al-Mulla said murals would certainly reflect the bright image of Qatar and shed more light on its development, history and heritage throughout the past and the present.

Issa al-Malki said that there is a need to maintain the various shapes and types of artistic works across the country, not just the murals, as these help express the local identity in different forms of creativity.



Traffic was lean since most offices and schools functioned remotely. **PICTURES:** Shaji Kayamkulam  
Left: Strong winds lashed Qatar since Monday evening.

## Moderate rainfall witnessed in Qatar

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With the Eid holidays coming to an end, it was expected that all the students would start their academic session yesterday.

However, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education had warned about the adverse weather conditions and instructed educational institutes to provide classes online for the day.

Financial institutions, such as banks, worked remotely with most branches closed for the day and only select branches, mostly located in malls, open.

Various parts of the region have been experiencing heavy rains for the past several days.

Parts of Oman, the UAE and Saudi Arabia witnessed very heavy rain.



A message board on a Doha road, displaying rain warning from Ashghal, urging motorists to slow down.



The ornamental palms on Doha Corniche sway in strong winds yesterday.