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Amir, Saudi crown prince emphasise de-escalation

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani discussed with his brother Crown Prince and Prime Minister of the sisterly Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Prince Mohamed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz al-Saud bilateral relations and ways to strengthen them, in addition to regional and international developments, particularly the situation in the Gaza Strip and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. This came during a phone call HH the Amir held with the crown prince. The two sides underscored the significance of de-escalation and avoiding the spillover of the conflict in the region, stressing the importance of ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and the Occupied Palestinian Territories to achieve a lasting and durable solution for the Palestinian cause, in pursuit of achieving enduring and comprehensive peace in the region. (QNA)

House Republicans announce vote for \$61bn Ukraine aid

The Republican leader of the US House of Representatives yesterday announced a weekend vote on massive new military aid including some \$61bn in long-delayed support for Ukraine, as well as billions for Israel and Taiwan. The move also sets up a showdown with House Speaker Mike Johnson's own far-right wing, which for months has been steered by Donald Trump into blocking aid to Kyiv. Along with the \$61bn for Ukraine, the bills would allocate more than \$26bn for Israel, including a key \$9.2bn in humanitarian aid for civilian-packed Gaza, which had been a key requirement for Democrats. The package also provides \$8bn for Taiwan, which China sees as part of its territory. Page 9

UNSC to vote on Palestinian membership

The UNSC is scheduled to vote Friday on a Palestinian request for full UN membership, said diplomats, a move that Israel ally the United States is expected to block because it would effectively recognise a Palestinian state. The 15-member council is due to vote on a draft resolution that recommends to the 193-member UN General Assembly that "the State of Palestine be admitted to membership of the United Nations," diplomats said.

Israel, Hezbollah in tit-for-tat attacks

Israel's Air Force said yesterday its fighter jets struck Hezbollah infrastructure north of Baalbek in eastern Lebanon amid concerns that increased exchanges of fire between Israel and Hezbollah could fuel further escalation. "Earlier this evening, IAF fighter jets struck significant Hezbollah infrastructure used by the terrorist organisation's aerial defence system in northern Baalbek," the statement said. The Hezbollah group said it attacked an Israeli army base near the border yesterday, with the latest in a series of tit-for-tat strikes wounding 14 soldiers, according to Israel's military.

Polish president to visit Trump

Polish President Andrzej Duda said yesterday that he would make a private visit to the apartment of former US president Donald Trump during his visit to New York.

Qatar condemns Israeli policy of collective punishment

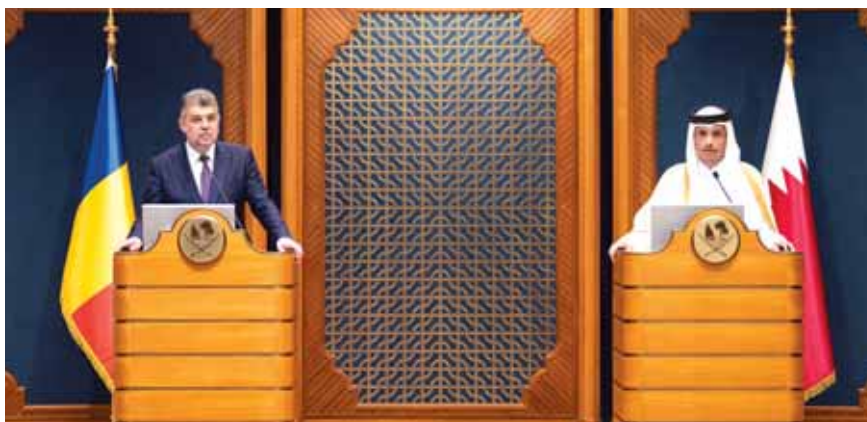
- Prime Minister urges world community to help stop war
- Romanian leader all praise for Qatar's mediation

HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani renewed Qatar's condemnation of the targeting and killing of civilians – regardless of their backgrounds, the continuation of the collective punishment policy followed by Israel towards the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip, and the ongoing escalation in the West Bank, which is increasing on a daily basis, causing more danger to the situation in the region.

In a briefing held yesterday with Prime Minister of Romania Marcel Ciolacu, the prime minister pointed out that Qatar had clearly warned, since the beginning of the events on October 7, of the expansion of the circle of conflicts (which is seen on various fronts today) and its direct relationship to the escalation and war on the Gaza Strip.

In this context, he called on the international community to assume its responsibilities and work to stop this war as well as the continuous targeting and killing of the Palestinian people in this manner, in addition to the policy of siege and starvation against them, and the use of humanitarian aid as a tool for political exploitation.

HE Sheikh Mohamed pointed out the differing international positions regarding



HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani with his Romanian counterpart Marcel Ciolacu during the briefing.

the situation in Gaza, deploring the double standards of some countries in evaluating conflicts. He also called on the international community to ensure that the standards be unified and applied on everyone, rather than being classified on the basis of identity of the aggressor and the victim.

He stressed that there will be no permanent solution or sustainable peace without the establishment of a Palestinian State

with East Jerusalem as its capital, on the borders of June 4, 1967, in accordance with the resolutions of international legitimacy and the Arab Peace Initiative.

In regard to the file of ceasefire negotiations and the release of hostages, the prime minister explained that the negotiations are going through a sensitive phase and some faltering, indicating that the negotiations – unfortunately – range between moving for-

ward and faltering. Qatar is making efforts to address this matter and move forward to put an end to the suffering of the Palestinian people and recover the hostages at the same time, he added.

"Qatar is an advocate of peace, not of war, and it demands that there be similar and compatible positions alongside it from the Israeli side, so that a solution can be achieved and the Palestinian people can live in safety," he continued.

During the briefing, the PM spoke about Qatari-Romanian relations, stressing that they are characterised by trust and keenness to exchange views on various issues in the Middle East and Europe. In this regard, he pointed out the continuous exchange and permanent political consultation between the two countries over the past years.

During the past few years, the two countries signed a group of agreements in several fields, including youth, sports, economy, health, medicine, culture, trade, industry, education and co-operation, he explained, adding that a memorandum of understanding was signed today regarding livestock and food security, which embodies the ambitions of the two countries to strengthen and develop the relations to broader horizons. To Page 6. (See also Page 3)

Cabinet approves draft laws, 6th Arab Ministerial Forum

HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani chaired the Cabinet's regular meeting held at its seat at the Amiri Diwan yesterday morning.

After the meeting, HE the Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Ibrahim bin Ali al-Mohannadi issued the following statement:

The Cabinet considered the topics on its agenda as follows:

First, the Cabinet was informed of the Shura Council's approval of a draft law repealing Law No. (2) of 1991 on the imposition of fees for the extraction of certificates issued by the Ministry of Interior and its affiliated bodies, and Law No. (7) of 1991

on the imposition of fees for the extraction of certificates issued by the Ministry of Defence.

Second, the Cabinet approved the draft decision of the Minister of Finance establishing departments in the administrative units that make up the General Authority of Customs and determining its terms of reference.

Third, the Cabinet approved hosting of the 6th Arab Ministerial Forum for Housing and Urban Development 2025.

Fourth, the Cabinet approved the following:

1- Draft grant agreement between Qatar Fund for Development (QFFD) in the State of Qatar and the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (G-CERF) 2024.

2- Draft basic contribution agreement to support UNRWAs regular resources for the years 2023-2024, between Qatar Fund for Development (QFFD) in the State of Qatar and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) 2023.

3- Draft memorandum of understanding on co-operation on mutual recognition of seafarers certificates between the government of the State of Qatar and the government of the Republic of Panama.

Fifth, the Cabinet took the necessary measures to ratify the following:

1- Memorandum of understanding for co-operation in the agricultural field between the government of the State of Qatar

and the government of the Republic of Tunisia.

2- Memorandum of understanding for co-operation in the field of information and communications technology between the State of Qatar and the Republic of Tunisia.

Sixth, the Cabinet reviewed the following two draft decisions and took appropriate decisions thereon:

1- Draft decision of the Minister of Environment and Climate Change on the protection of endangered species and their natural habitats.

2- Draft decision of the Minister of Environment and Climate Change on banning the import and circulation of some types of animals and plants and their parts. (QNA)

Israel ill-treats UN staff, Gaza detainees

The UN Palestinian refugee agency (UNRWA) said some of its staff members and other people detained by Israeli forces in Gaza were subjected to ill-treatment, including severe beatings and being forced to strip naked.

In a report published on Tuesday, UNRWA said that staff that were detained, in some cases while performing official duties, were "held incommunicado and subjected to the same conditions and ill-treatment as other detainees," which it said included several different forms of abuse.

The agency said staff members had said they were subjected to beatings and treatment akin to waterboarding, threats of rape and electrocution, and were forced to strip naked, among other forms of ill-treatment. (Reuters)

Israel destroyed thousands of frozen Gaza IVF embryos

When an Israeli shell struck Gaza's largest fertility clinic in December, the explosion blasted the lids off five liquid nitrogen tanks stored in a corner of the embryology unit.

As the ultra-cold liquid evaporated, the temperature inside the tanks rose, destroying more than 4,000 embryos plus 1,000 more specimens of sperm and unfertilised eggs stored at Gaza City's Al Basma IVF centre.

The impact of that single explosion was far-reaching – an example of the unseen toll Israel's six-and-a-half-month-old assault has had on the 2.3mn people of Gaza.

The embryos in those tanks were the last hope for hundreds of Palestinian couples facing infertility.

"We know deeply what these 5,000 lives, or potential lives, meant for the parents, either for the future or for the past," said Bahaeldeen Ghalayini, 73, the Cambridge-trained obstetrician and gynaecologist who established the clinic in 1997.

At least half of the couples – those who can no longer produce sperm or eggs to make viable embryos – will not have another chance to get pregnant, he said.

"My heart is divided into a million pieces," he said.

Asked yesterday by Reuters about the incident, the Israeli military's press desk said it was looking into the reports. Israel denies intentionally targeting civilian infrastructure.

Three years of fertility treatment was a psychological roller coaster for Seba Jaafarawi. The

retrieval of eggs from her ovaries was painful, the hormone injections had strong side-effects and the sadness when two attempted pregnancies failed seemed unbearable.

Jaafarawi, 32, and her husband could not get pregnant naturally and turned to in vitro fertilisation (IVF), which is widely available in Gaza.

Large families are common in the enclave, where nearly half the population is under 18 and the fertility rate is high at 3.38 births per woman, according to the Palestinian Bureau of Statistics. Britain's fertility rate is 1.63 births per woman.

Despite Gaza's poverty, couples facing infertility pursue IVF, some selling TVs and jewellery to pay the fees, Al Ghalayini said. To Page 6



Nitrogen tanks, where embryos were stored, lie at Al Basma IVF Centre, Gaza's largest fertility clinic which was struck by an Israeli shell in Gaza City. (Reuters)



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PM holds discussion session with Romania counterpart



HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani yesterday held an official discussion session with Prime Minister of Romania Marcel Ciolacu, who is visiting the country. During the session, they discussed relations between the two countries and ways to support and enhance them. They also discussed the developments in the region and ways for de-escalation and calm, particularly in ending the war in the Gaza Strip. HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs emphasised during the session that Qatari-Romanian relations are characterised by mutual trust and have witnessed significant development, especially in economic, commercial, and investment fields, in addition to co-ordination in energy, agriculture, tourism, and information technology sectors. HE Sheikh Mohamed stated that the region is going through sensitive conditions and has witnessed escalation in different ways in recent days, calling on all parties to reduce escalation and avoid slipping the region into a new cycle of conflicts. HE the Prime Minister also urged the international community to shoulder its responsibilities to stop the war and the continuous targeting of the Palestinian people in Gaza, as well as to stop using humanitarian aid as a tool for political blackmail. **(QNA)**



Amir receives message from transitional president of Chad



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani received a written message from Transitional President of Chad Lt Gen Mahamat Idriss Deby, pertaining to bilateral relations and ways to support and develop them. The message was received by HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Mohamed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh al-Khulaifi during his meeting with Director of the Civil Office at the Presidency of the Republic of Chad Idriss Youssouf Boy who is currently visiting the country. The meeting discussed a number of regional and international issues of common interest, especially the developments in the African continent. **(QNA)**

PM meets Turkish FM



HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani met with Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye, Hakan Fidan, who is visiting the country. The two sides discussed bilateral relations and ways to support and develop them and the latest developments in the region. The talks also covered ways to reduce escalation and bring calm, especially ending the war in the Gaza Strip, and the co-ordination of their shared humanitarian efforts in the enclave. HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs expressed Qatar's deep concern about the latest developments in the region, calling on all parties to achieve calm and exercise the utmost restraint. Stressing the need for joint action to de-escalate in the region and resolve disputes peacefully, HE Sheikh Mohamed reiterated Qatar's commitment to supporting all regional and international efforts aimed at achieving security and stability at the regional and international levels. **(QNA)**

Qatar participates in WHO meeting

QNA
Doha

Qatar participated in the fourth meeting of the Standing Committee on Health Emergency Prevention, Preparedness and Response at the World Health Organisation (WHO), which commenced its proceedings in Geneva yesterday. The meeting, which will last for two days, is conducted in a hybrid format combining in-person attendance with online participation.

The delegation of Qatar is led by HE the Minister of Public Health Dr Hanan Mohamed al-Kuwari, who is also the chair of the WHO Executive Board, utilising remote communication technologies. The meeting discusses several important topics, including updated information on ongoing public health emergencies of international concern. Additionally, the meeting discusses enhancing the WHO Health Emergencies Programme and its oversight, reviewing updated information on health emergency



HE Dr Hanan Mohamed al-Kuwari

preparedness, response, resilience, including health threats requiring additional preparedness, as well as updated information on the response to ongoing major health emergencies, the status of implementation of recommendations by the Independent Oversight and Advisory Committee for the WHO Health Emergencies Programme, updated information from the Secretariat of the Global Preparedness Monitoring

Board, and the unified procedures for extraordinary meetings of the Standing Committee.

It is worth noting that the Standing Committee on Emergency Preparedness and Response is tasked with several key functions, notably reviewing the WHO Health Emergencies Programme and providing guidance and recommendations to the WHO Executive Board as necessary.

Environment minister meets Greek counterpart



HE the Minister of Environment and Climate Change Dr Abdullah bin Abdulaziz bin Turki al-Subaie has met with Greek Minister of Environment and Energy Theodoros Skylakakis on the sidelines of participation in the 'Our Ocean' conference, which concluded in the Greek capital yesterday. The meeting discussed several common topics, primarily ways to achieve sustainable development between the two countries, environmental preservation and climate change issues. **(QNA)**

'Qatar making constant efforts to combat human trafficking crimes'

QNA
Muscat

HE the Minister of Labour and Chairman of the National Committee for Combating Human Trafficking, Dr Ali bin Smaikh al-Marri, has said that Qatar is making continuous and growing efforts to combat human trafficking crimes, starting from a commitment to Islamic Sharia laws that prohibit all forms of human degradation.

HE the Minister of Labour led the delegation of Qatar participating in the fifth session of the Government Forum to Combat Trafficking in Persons in the Middle East, held on April 17-18 in the Sultanate of Oman. The fifth session of the forum, held under the theme "Combating Human Trafficking through Labour Legislation and Procedures," was attended by ministers and heads of relevant agencies from the Gulf Cooperation Council states, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, the Arab Republic of Egypt, the United States, the United Kingdom, and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

During his speech in the opening session, he highlighted that the National Committee for Combating Human Trafficking in Qatar works on co-ordinating various agencies to monitor, prevent, and combat human trafficking, in addition to training efforts and capacity building of national cadres and law enforcement officials.

He noted that the Ministry of



HE Dr Ali bin Smaikh al-Marri speaking at the event.

Labour has implemented many initiatives to raise community awareness and activate the role of labour inspection by providing them with trafficking indicators to monitor cases and enhance community awareness of regulatory, legal, and procedural aspects, thereby safeguarding human dignity and protecting rights.

HE the minister explained that the legislative updates in the work environment in recent years have considered combating all practices associated with human trafficking, whether it involves forced labour or any practices that may entail such exploitation, both within the state and in labour-exporting countries.

HE Dr Ali bin Smaikh al-Marri emphasised that the phenomenon of human trafficking has become a global issue posing a threat to all societies and represents a significant challenge to the will of the international community. He pointed to the need for international efforts to be combined to combat this phenomenon through

enhancing the mechanism of consultation and co-operation based on unified action among states and all parties concerned with combating it in the Middle East region.

He also stated that Qatar has strengthened the framework of international co-operation in facing common challenges by supporting the United Nations plan to combat human trafficking since its launch.

The forum addresses topics related to forms of human trafficking in the work environment, alongside reviewing some experiences in the Middle East regarding combating human trafficking issues and attempting to reduce them. The forum also features participation from a group of international and regional experts specialised in combating human trafficking, as well as representatives from committees concerned with combating human trafficking in member states of the permanent secretariat of the Government Forum to Combat Trafficking in Persons in the Middle East.

QPO's 15-year milestone festival from today



Mohamed Saleh

By Joey Aguilar
Staff Reporter

The Qatar Philharmonic Orchestra (QPO) is set to mark its 15-year journey with a three-day grand musical festival from today at the Qatar National Convention Centre's (QNCC) Auditorium 3.

In a statement, QPO noted that it will shine the spotlight on some of its most talented soloists in a concert titled 'Pearls of the Philharmonic'. Breaking away from tradition, this concert will offer a platform to showcase the brilliance of various performers with-in QPO.

Under the baton of the German conductor Elias Grandy, renowned for his dynamic and precise interpretations, the concert will be a

journey through a diverse selection of solo repertoire. From the classical elegance of Mozart to the fiery passion of Ravel, QPO said the programme showcases the orchestra's versatility and virtuosity.

The lineup of performers include Aura Lorena Manescu, Egle Valute, Shaza Oweda, Georges Yammine, Mohamed Oweda, Ji-hoon Shin, Mohamed Saleh, Miroslav Stoyanov, Gideon Seidenberg, Richard Alonso Diaz, Alexander Kamenarov, Georgi Varbanov, and Anca Bold.

The programme will include masterpieces such as Carl Maria von Weber's enchanting overture from 'Oberon', Maurice Ravel's virtuosic 'Tzigane', and Jules Massenet's evocative 'Méditation' from 'Thaïs'. The audience will also be treated to Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's charming 'Rondo

in C Major' and Balys Dvarionas' poignant 'Pezzo Elegiaco'.

Adding a touch of Latin flair, the concert will feature Enrique Crespo's vibrant 'Escenas Latinas' alongside Antonio Vivaldi's timeless 'Violin Concerto in G Minor'.

After an intermission filled with musical delights, including works by Beethoven, Weber, Mozart, Morricone, and Reznick, the evening will conclude with a flourish, leaving the audience spellbound.

The concert's second day commences with a family-friendly concert titled 'Mozart: A Musical Sitcom', offering a one-of-a-kind musical journey enriched with 18th-century attire and characters from Mozart's era, brought to life by QPO's Cinemoon Ensemble and esteemed guests.

Part of concert's day two brings

the audience to the Royal courts of the Renaissance era, immersing themselves in the timeless works of the Baroque period of classical music. The performance will feature compositions by revered European composers who served in Baroque courts, including Bach, Händel, Lully, and Corelli.

Joining forces for this event are QPO's Doha Baroque Ensemble, along with oboist German Diaz Blanco, bassoonist Daniel Hrinđa, and the Qatar Concert Choir, under the baton of conductor and harpsichordist Christoph Teichner. QPO's grand finale offers a musical voyage across the globe, showcasing exceptional compositions from every country the orchestra has visited in the past, including Syria, England, the USA, France, Italy, Germany, Russia, and China.



Shaza Oweda

CRA president meets Romanian counterpart

President of Communications Regulatory Authority (CRA) Ahmad Abdulla al-Muslemami met yesterday with president of Romania's communication regulatory authority (ANCOM) Valeriu Stefan Zgonea. The meeting touched on aspects of co-operation in regulating the telecommunications and information technology sector. (QNA)



QU college discusses role of AI in sports medicine at IOC meeting

Qatar University's (QU) College of Medicine participated in the 7th International Olympic Committee (IOC) World Conference on Prevention of Injury and Illness in Sport, held recently in Monaco featuring nearly 5,000 attendees.

The triennial conference, scheduled ahead of the Paris 2024 Olympics, provided a unique opportunity for the global sport and exercise medicine community to meet face-to-face. Among the guests were Prince Albert II of Monaco and HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, president of the Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC), and first vice-president of the Association of National Olympic Committees, who participated in the meeting of the 141st International Olympic Committee (IOC) Session.

Yusra Magdi Mekki, a fifth-year medical student at QU, in collaboration with Aspetar Orthopaedic and Sports Medicine Hospital, presented a 90-minute symposium on 'Friend or foe? The role of Artificial Intelligence in the quest to protect athletes' health and prevent injury and illness'.



Yusra Magdi Mekki at the symposium.

Mekki's was one of the 40 proposals accepted by the IOC out of a total of 400. She spoke about wearing two hats as a researcher who combines her medical training from QU with expertise in developing machine learning and extended reality solutions for healthcare.

She also presented her latest single-author article published for *Cell*, titled 'Physicians should build their own machine learning models'. *Cell* has seen contributions from the likes of Andrew Ng at Stanford, often known as the 'father of Artificial Intelligence'.

Dr Susu Zughair, associate professor at the Department of Microbiology, College of Medicine, and Mekki are heavily involved in leading the national

Qatar AI and XR in Healthcare Interest Group at QU.

Dr Khalid Bashir, head of Clinical Academic Sciences Department at the College of Medicine, stated that Mekki also enlightened faculty members on the application of AI in medical education. "As a direct result, I have integrated AI into our teaching methodologies for the year 6 clerkship and intend to employ it in the final OSCE assessment."

Dr Paul Dijkstra, head of Medical Education at Aspetar, said: "We feel honoured to have been part of the diverse invited faculty from all over the world, representing the pre-eminent international authorities in injury and illness prevention. We are especially thrilled to

for the first time ever, present a symposium on 'The role of AI to protect athletes' health and prevent injury and illness'. I chaired this symposium that involved faculty from Aspetar: Dr Pieter D'Hooge, chief medical officer; Professor Marco Cardinale, director of Research; Bart De Witte, the founding CEO of Hippo AI Foundation; and QU medical student, Yusra Mekki.

Dr Dijkstra added: "Based on the feedback, this symposium laid the foundation for AI in the field and spotlighted important areas, including ethics, open source, leadership, and authentic collaboration, which will open the doors for the medicine and medical community to focus on and develop."

Doha to host Gulf Water Conference

The 15th Gulf Water Conference will be held in Doha from April 29-30 under the patronage of HE the Minister of State for Energy Affairs and Cabinet Member Saad bin Sherida al-Kaabi. To be organised by the Qatar General Electricity and Water Corporation (Kahramaa) in collaboration with the Water Science and Technology Association and Secretariat General of the Gulf Co-operation Council, the conference will feature 20 speakers and 50 research papers.



According to a Kahramaa statement, the conference will discuss topics such as the ways of reducing carbon emissions in the water sector of the GCC and the effective management of the municipal water sector in collaboration with the Arab Countries Water Utilities Association.

It will explore the prospects of water science and technology research in collaboration with the Unesco office in Cairo and the use of technology to bridge the data gap for the effective management of agricultural water in co-operation with the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO).

emerging technologies used in various water sectors, increase awareness of them and understand their advantages, challenge and limitations. "The participants will endeavour to present technological solutions applied in the region and internationally to address the challenges that face the water sector," he said.

The sessions will also cover topics related to the privatisation of the water sector and regulatory aspects and will address water information systems for integrated water management in collaboration with the Unesco office in Doha while covering the study of antimicrobial resistance in municipal wastewater in co-operation with the United Nations Environment Programme.

"The rapid developments in modern technologies in all aspects of water informatics, the current massive amount of data coming from all types of devices, the increasing capacity of computers, and the emergence of new technologies such as artificial intelligence, the Internet of Things, cloud analytics and the general digital transformation of the council's states will revolutionise all sectors and the water sector system will be no exception," he added.

Kahramaa president, engineer Issa bin Hilal al-Kuwari, said there are efforts to harness technology to improve the water sector and enhance the management of water resources. "With co-ordination, we can effectively implement these innovations. This conference is an invitation to share expertise and discuss the region's latest technologies, benefits, and challenges," al-Kuwari said.

The conference will address six main themes, which collectively focus on the integrated management of water resources, desalination sector management, surface water and groundwater management, sewage water management (treatment and reuse) as well as household water management and agricultural water management.

He also stated that the conference welcomes all participants and invites fruitful discussions related to the future of the water sector and modern technology in the Gulf region. Prof Waleed al-Zubari, vice-president of the Water Science and Technology Association, head of the Scientific and Training Committee, and the dean of the Graduate Studies College at the Arabian Gulf University, said that the conference primarily aims to review the current and

Three training courses will discuss the role of the salinity agriculture approach in sustaining agricultural production in the arid GCC countries, organised by the International Center for Biosaline Agriculture. The courses include also the design of sanitation safety plans.

QatarDebate participates in ECOSOC Youth Forum in NY

QatarDebate is participating in the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Youth Forum, taking place at the United Nations headquarters in New York (NY). An annual initiative by the president of ECOSOC, the forum serves as a platform for economic dialogue engaging young leaders from around the world together with policymakers and experts from political and apolitical backgrounds to discuss solutions to the challenges affecting youth well-being.

It also serves as a unique space for young people to share their vision and actions as well as provide an opportunity to advance youth solutions.

HE the Permanent Representative of the State of Qatar to the United Na-

tions Sheikhha Alya Ahmed bin Saif al-Thani took part in QatarDebate's dialogue session on natural gas being key to a transition towards green energy, during which she praised QatarDebate's role in enriching dialogue and empowering the youth, highlighted the significance of the sessions topic, and noted Qatar's efforts in confronting climate change.

HE Sheikhha Alya added that the youth chose peace as the session's main focus, given that the world has become a small global village with open horizons. In turn, Director of Programs at QatarDebate Abdulrahman al-Subaie stressed the importance of this dialogue session in revitalising dialogue and yielding implementable and innovative ideas, highlighting the

importance of consolidating cognitive awareness among young people to push them towards innovation and excellence. Al-Subaie added that without reaching a common understanding and finding precise and well-thought solutions, it would not be possible to hold an enriched and open dialogue nor empower minds.

The session aimed to highlight the vital role of natural gas in serving as a bridge to transition from reliance on fossil fuels to renewable energy sources, underscore the role of the youth in intergovernmental consultations regarding the Summit of The Future, facilitate a discussion to address global challenges and accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. (QNA)

Hala Kazim is NU-Q's graduation speaker

Counsellor and author Hala Kazim will address Northwestern University in Qatar's (NU-Q) Class of 2024 on May 6, a statement said yesterday. The graduation speaker will attend the annual commencement ceremony at the Qatar National Convention Centre.

An artist turned certified life coach and counsellor, Kazim has dedicated her career to promoting social service, women's well-being, and self-empowerment in the Arab world. Since 2010, her award-winning Journey Through Change programme has helped women improve their lives through counselling, coaching, workshops, lectures, and other team-building initiatives.

Over the past decade, Kazim has gained regional prominence on social media for focusing on positive transformation. For her digital success and impact, she received the Most Influential Arab Woman DIAFA Award 2022, as well as one of the most influential social media personalities in the Arab world in 2015.

Kazim is the author of *Hala and Change* and *Hala and Life* and the recipient of numerous other awards. These include the Arab Woman of the Year Awards (2017 and 2018), the Emirates Award for Creativity in the field of Com-



Hala Kazim


munity Service (2014), Sheikh Mohamed Bin Rashid Award for Best Business Woman of the Year (2013), among others.

"Kazim's journey underscores the transformative impact media, particularly social media, can have in shaping narratives and driving societal change," said Marwan M Kraidy, dean and CEO of NU-Q.

More calls for ambulance during rain

The Ambulance Service of Hamad Medical Corporation recorded about 10% increase in the calls for help on Tuesday, when it rained in Qatar. Ali Darwish, assistant executive director of the Ambulance Service, told local Arabic daily *Arrayah* that these calls were about mild to moderate cases. There were no calls relating to problems associated with rain and strong winds.

In view of the rain and strong winds, more 4x4 vehicles were diverted to relevant areas. Road accidents, which resulted from rain and the instability of some vehicles, were all minor collisions. The official also lauded the role of the helicopter ambulance in responding to some calls during windy and rainy conditions, transferring patients from difficult to reach locations to the emergency department.



قطر للطاقة
QatarEnergy

The General, Limited Tenders Committees and Supply Chain Department announces the following Tenders:

Important Notice:
Suppliers and Contractors who are already registered with QatarEnergy via Mushtaryat Portal can "Buy Tender Online and download Tender Document" from QatarEnergy website (Mushtaryat Portal).

Effective from 1st July 2023, Bids from Local Suppliers and Contractors (companies established under the Laws of State of Qatar) who are not in possession of an ICV score in the ICV portal (https://icv.qa/en-US) by Tender Closing Date (or commercial bid submission date if separately mentioned/notified) will not be accepted. Local Companies that have been established for less than 2 years are exempt from this requirement.

Sl. No.	Tender No.	Tender Sale Period Start Date	Tender Sale Period End Date	Tender Closing Date	Tender Bond	Bond Curr.	Tender Fee	Fee Curr.
1.	LT24MT0030	16.04.2024	22.04.2024	13.05.2024	15,000.00	QAR	N/A	

Title of Tender: SUPPLY OF 30" PIPE, CS, SML/SAW, STDSCB, PIPE_WALL, THK 9.53MM, PIPE_OVERALL_DIA 762MM OD, PIPE_END_DATA 1/16IN ROOT FACE BEVELLED 30DEG ANGLE, PIPE_MATL_SPEC API SPEC 5L GDE X60.

Mid-Tender Meeting Location: To be advised if required

Mid-Tender Meeting Date & Time: To be advised if required

* Tender documents can be purchased and downloaded from QatarEnergy Website-> Supply Management-> Tenders page during the Tender Sale Period mentioned above against each Tender. Request for issuance of Tender after the specified Tender Sale Period will not be entertained.

* Always refer to QatarEnergy Website (www.qatargenergy.qa) -> Supply Management -> Tenders page for up to date information on QatarEnergy Tenders. Subscribe to Tender Alert to receive notification in your email on new Tenders.

* Changes to Tender Sale Period and Bid Closing Date will be updated in QatarEnergy website/Mushtaryat Portal only.

* Brief Scopes of Work for the above tenders are posted on the QatarEnergy website/Mushtaryat Portal.

* Suppliers and Contractors who are in possession of a valid SAP ID issued by QatarEnergy are instructed to maintain their Company Registration and Communication details upto date and valid via QatarEnergy Mushtaryat Portal on urgent basis.

* No queries will be entertained, or bids received, from entities who have not purchased tender documents in compliance with the above provisions.

* QatarEnergy invites all prospective Suppliers and Contractors interested to participate in QatarEnergy Tenders to register online and obtain a QatarEnergy SAP Vendor Code, a mandatory requirement for the issue of Tender Documents by QatarEnergy.

* Prospective Qatar based Suppliers and Contractors interested to participate in future QatarEnergy Tenders shall obtain an ICV score. Relevant information pertaining to ICV, ICV Scorecard, ICV Certification, and ICV Guidelines are available on the ICV Digital Portal - https://icv.qa/en-US

HMC clinic to manage patient flow with new approach

By Joseph Varghese
Staff Reporter

The Qatar Ambulatory Pulmonary sleep disorder clinic is implementing a new approach to managing patient flow by integrating telemedicine follow-up and overbooking strategies to optimise technology and operational efficiency, ensure timely consultations and improve patient experience.

The strategy outlined in the *Qatar Medical Journal* – ‘Tele-

medicine: Potential impact of the future improved accessibility and waiting list to HGH Sleep Clinics through overbooking strategy, Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC), Qatar’ and published on QScience.com highlights that the overbooking strategy, combined with telemedicine, can help streamline virtual appointments and ensure efficient use of healthcare professionals’ time. It further points out that this can ultimately reduce waiting times and improve accessibility for patients seeking sleep-related healthcare services.

According to the article by a group of researchers from HMC, telemedicine usage is predicted to enhance care quality and reduce healthcare spending by 32%, boosting patient satisfaction, community trust, and teamwork, thereby reducing hospital resource burden and costs.

The article points out that with the wider use of telemedicine, the hotline service can also be established to optimise clinic efficiency, improve resource utilisation, and minimise waiting time for suboptimal diagnostic

and therapeutic sleep tests. Thus, telemedicine has become a transformative force in healthcare.

The telemedicine strategy can be used for virtual consultations and follow-up appointments reducing in-person visits. In addition, remote monitoring devices are another method to control the waiting time of the consultations. Home sleep apnea testing devices can be used for remote monitoring allowing electronic sharing with healthcare providers.

This can also optimise scheduling with overbooking of ap-

pointments. It offers flexible appointment times for wider patient schedules. It also helps to strategically overbook slots to maximise utilisation of available time slots. It also leads to online appointment system user friendly platform and utilise automated reminders via email or SMS.

With the implementation of the strategy at the Qatar Ambulatory Pulmonary sleep disorder clinic, a multidisciplinary team was formed to review the clinic’s current practices and identify barriers to patient flow. A strategy was chosen

to integrate overbooking and telemedicine follow-up.

Staff education and training were also provided.

The team collaborated with HMC Nasmak to evaluate patient feedback and improve the patient experience.

They also communicated with clinical informatics team to create encounters, improve electronic communications, and manage appointment systems. Monthly data collection was conducted to evaluate clinical performance and update practice.

QTerminals signs accord to become training partner of Feyenoord Club

QTerminals, a leading international ports and terminals operator in Qatar, will be the official training partner of Feyenoord Club, Rotterdam, for 2024-27.

In this regard, QTerminals has entered into an agreement with the club, implying that the former will have its logo on the training kit for the next three years, a statement issued in Doha said yesterday. In addition, QTerminals will play a crucial role in supporting Feyenoord’s community programmes.

“This new partnership with QTerminals speaks volumes about the level of trust and appreciation the corporate sector has for the path the club has been on for the last couple of years. It furthermore illustrates Feyenoord’s longstanding ties with the companies that call the port, the city of Rotterdam and the region as a whole their home,” said Feyenoord’s CCO Ruud van der Knaap.

Highlighting that more than 300 businesses from the Greater Rijnmond area have partnered with Feyenoord, putting the club at the centre of the biggest corporate network in the region; he said: “Interest in the business opportunities we offer continues to grow and one of the more



Neville Bissett, QTerminals group chief executive officer (L), and Ruud van der Knaap, Feyenoord’s CCO, ink pact.

noteworthy aspects is that companies – as QTerminals – are especially keen on the many successful community programmes Feyenoord runs on a daily basis.”

Andre Kramer, chief executive officer of QTerminals Kramer Rotterdam, said: “With this multi-year partnership, we want to strengthen our long-term bond with Feyenoord and enhance our presence in the Port of

Rotterdam, Europe’s largest container port.”

Kramer Group, of which QTerminals became a majority shareholder in August 2023, has been a member of Feyenoord’s partnership family since 2010. QTerminals Kramer Group operates in six locations in the Port of Rotterdam, five of which are situated at the Maasvlakte and one at the Eem/Waalhaven.

Closure of Al Waab Intersection on Sabah Al Ahmad Corridor



Ashghal understands the inconvenience caused by construction works in residential areas, and we thank you for your cooperation.

The Public Works Authority (Ashghal) has announced a temporary closure of Al Waab Intersection on Sabah Al Ahmad Corridor for 48 hours from 2am on April 19 to 2am on April 21, while keeping the free right turns and the flyovers open to traffic. The closure in coordination with the General Directorate of Traffic is to carry out some maintenance works for the junction. During the closure, road users can use the adjacent junctions as shown on the map. Ashghal will install road signs advising motorists of the temporary closure and requested all to follow them and abide by the speed limit to ensure safety.

Alfardan Automobiles launches the all-new BMW X2

Alfardan Automobiles, the official importer of BMW Group vehicles in Qatar, showcased the epitome of power and precision with the launch of the all-new BMW X2 in the market.

Launched in the picturesque setting of The St Regis Doha’s Asateer Ramadan tent, guests and media partners alike had the opportunity to witness the first public appearance of the all-new BMW X2 in Qatar, showcased by Alfardan Automobiles.

The BMW X2, a vehicle concept that introduced the Sports Activity Coupé (SAC) for the premium compact segment, has now evolved into a more distinctive, sportier, and forward-looking second generation. With its significantly larger dimensions and a pronounced coupé silhouette, it offers a unique mix of sportiness and everyday practicality.

The BMW X2 – with its characteristic design and outstanding performance – boasts a powerful 201 hp engine with 221 nm torque, with a top speed of 231 km/h. Sprinting from 0-100 km/h in just 7.4 seconds, its adaptive M suspension, and high-performance M Sport braking system guarantee a sporty drive paired with agile handling.

Set atop 20” M light alloy wheels, featuring the BMW Iconic Glow and adaptive LED headlights, the new BMW X2 xDrive20i is sure to make an impact with powerful lines and an athletic presence.

Inside, both the driver and passengers will experience true comfort with an impressive panoramic sunroof that offers an open-top atmosphere in every seat, ambient lighting and sports seats. The latest BMW X2 also features the BMW head-up display for driving ease, BMW curved display, wireless charging and an expanded range of digital services.

The standard assistance systems for automated driving and parking available in the all-new BMW X2 increase comfort and safety both in everyday driving and on longer journeys. Standard features include the latest version of the front collision warning system, Cruise Control with brake function, Speed Limit Info and Lane Departure Warning with lane return. The Parking Assistant including Reversing Assist Camera and Reversing Assistant also forms part of the standard equipment roster.

The BMW iX2, an electric version of the X2, will be available in the Qatar market from June. This fully electric SUV coupe marries the distinctive silhouette and innovative BMW Iconic Glow with the cutting-edge eDrive technology, marking a leap forward in electric mobility.



Al Jazeera English channel wins 'Broadcaster of the Year' award

Al Jazeera English channel was named 'Broadcaster of the Year' at the 2024 New York Festivals TV & Film Awards for the eighth consecutive year, a statement said yesterday.

The channel collected an array of gold, silver and bronze medals for its news and programmes coverage. The 'Broadcaster of the Year' award, goes to the media organisation that wins the highest number of gold medals.

The awards featured entries from over 50 countries, covering content screened on the US and international broadcasters including ITV, BBC, NBC and CBC.

Al Jazeera English won a total of six gold medals, including one for its news coverage of the Sudan conflict in 2023. Al Jazeera English's Witness' film *Rescue Mission* Gaza also earned a gold.

The other gold medals went to episodes from the *Fault Lines* and *101 East* documentary strands. The channel also won six silver and eight bronze medals, for episodes from the news-analysis



show *The Listening Post* and the environment-focused series *Earthrise*.

"We are delighted to be named Broadcaster of the Year by the New York Festivals TV & Film Awards," said Issa Ali, acting managing director of Al Jazeera English.

Other divisions in the Al Jazeera Media Network also won top awards. The Al Jazeera Investigative Unit won three golds for its film *Gold Mafia - The Laundry Service*. Al Jazeera Digital's ex-

plainer show "Start Here - On the Road" also won a gold.

All content was screened and judged by the New York Festivals TV & Film Awards Grand Jury of over 200 producers, directors, writers and other creative media professionals from around the globe.

Al Jazeera English in recent years has won three Royal Television Society awards, a Peabody and several Emmy awards, among other awards.

Qatar Charity returns children of displaced Sudanese to schools

As part of its series of humanitarian interventions in Sudan, Qatar Charity (QC) provided new shelter centres for displaced people in schools in the city of Port Sudan, the capital of Red Sea State, by providing tents to prepare schools and to resume education in the city.

Governor of the Red Sea State, General Mustafa Mohamed Nour, thanked Qatar and QC for providing humanitarian aid in various fields such as education, shelter, food and environmental sanitation. Director of the Education Sector and Minister in Charge of the Red Sea State, Hashim Ali Issa, lauded the efforts of QC for its contribution to the start of the school year and in overcoming the difficulties facing the displaced by providing them with shelter.

Naji Mansour, director general of the Sudanese Coalition for Education, said that the issue of sheltering the displaced in schools was



one of the obstacles preventing the resumption of the educational process, and he thanked QC and all the institutions who contributed to sheltering the displaced.

In a related context, Al-Tom Bakhit, deputy commissioner for Humanitarian Aid in the Red Sea

State, said QC was one of the first organisations to provide tents to prepare schools for study, and also provided urgent and continuous humanitarian support in the city, confirming the registration of all displaced children in the state's various schools.

Qatar attends meeting ahead of Arab-Chinese Co-operation Forum

Qatar participated in the Arab co-ordination meeting at the level of permanent representatives to the Arab League, yesterday, at the headquarters of the League's General Secretariat in Cairo, to prepare for the 10th session of the ministerial meeting of the China-Arab States Co-operation Forum scheduled for May 30. Deputy Permanent Representative of Qatar to the Arab League Khalid Abdullah al-Ibrahim represented Qatar at the meeting.



The Arab League, in a statement, mentioned that the meeting discussed several topics of interest to Arab countries, including the Palestinian issue. The session took place under the chairmanship of Mauritania, which currently heads the ministerial session of the Arab League. The statement also noted that the 10th session of the ministerial meeting of the China-Arab States Co-operation Forum marks the 20th anniversary of its establishment. (QNA)

Israel destroyed frozen IVF embryos

From Page 1

At least nine clinics in Gaza performed IVF, where eggs are collected from a woman's ovaries and fertilised by sperm in a lab. The fertilised eggs, called embryos, are often frozen until the optimal time for transfer to a woman's uterus. Most frozen embryos in Gaza were stored at the Al Basma centre.

In September, Jaafarawi became pregnant, her first successful IVF attempt.

"I did not even have time to celebrate the news," she said.

Jaafarawi worried: "How would I complete my pregnancy? What would happen to me and what would happen to the ones inside my womb?"

Her ultrasound never happened and Ghalayini closed his clinic, where an additional five of Jaafarawi's embryos were stored.

As the Israeli attacks intensified, Mohamed Ajjour, Al Basma's chief embryologist, started to worry about liquid nitrogen levels in the five specimen tanks. Top ups were needed every month or so to keep the temperature below -180C in each tank, which operate independent of electricity.

After the war began, Ajjour

managed to procure one delivery of liquid nitrogen, but Israel cut electricity and fuel to Gaza, and most suppliers closed.

At the end of October, Israeli tanks rolled into Gaza and soldiers closed in on the streets around the IVF centre. It became too dangerous for Ajjour to check the tanks.

Jaafarawi knew she should rest to keep her fragile pregnancy safe, but hazards were everywhere: she climbed six flights of stairs to her apartment because the elevator stopped working; a bomb levelled the building next door and blasted out windows in her flat; food and water became scarce.

Instead of resting, she worried. "I got very scared and there were signs that I would lose (the pregnancy)," she said.

Jaafarawi bled a little bit after she and her husband left home and moved south to Khan Younis. The bleeding subsided, but her fear did not.

They crossed into Egypt on November 12 and in Cairo, her first ultrasound showed she was pregnant with twins and they were alive.

But after a few days, she experienced painful cramps, bleeding and a sudden shift in her belly. She made it to hospital, but the miscarriage had already begun.

"The sounds of me screaming and crying at the hospital are still (echoing) in my ears," she said.

The pain of loss has not stopped. "Whatever you imagine or I tell you about how hard the IVF journey is, only those who have gone through it know what it's really like," she said.

Jaafarawi wanted to return to the war zone, retrieve her frozen embryos and attempt IVF again.

But it was soon too late. Ghalayini said a single Israeli shell struck the corner of the centre, blowing up the ground floor embryology lab. He does not know if the attack specifically targeted the lab or not.

"All these lives were killed or taken away: 5,000 lives in one shell," he said.

In April, the embryology lab was still strewn with broken masonry, blown-up lab supplies and, amid the rubble, the liquid nitrogen tanks, according to a Reuters-commissioned journalist who visited the site.

The lids were open and, still visible at the bottom of one of the tanks, a basket was filled with tiny colour-coded straws containing the ruined microscopic embryos. (Reuters)

FROMM. unveils its 'Oasiblu' at Milan Design Week 2024

FROMM., a luxury contemporary furniture and accessories brand founded in Doha's Msheireb and Italy's Milan, and renowned for its fusion of cross-cultural design and craftsmanship, is prepared to engage the public with an exclusive experience that integrates distinctive designs during Milan Design Week 2024.

"The showroom in Via Savona, 35 - Milan, welcomes visitors into an enchanting ambiance, surrounded by the allure of Arico's artistic imagination," a statement said yesterday. "Inspired by the oasis scenery, the 'Oasiblu', designed by Arico for FROMM., creates a dreamy blue realm where collection items seamlessly blend within the Blue Oasis.

"Guided by the designer's imaginative touch, visitors embark on a journey to explore FROMM. and its commitment to innovation and contemporary aesthetics within its hidden oasis - a magical escape where joy and tranquillity flourish amidst mesmerising sights of blue and gold. As visitors wander through palm-filled landscapes, they are led to discover FROMM.'s secret oasis during Milan Design Week 2024.

"Exhibits include the new Dining table and chairs from the Shurooq collection: Sofra Dining Table and Sanad Chair/ Armchair and from the 'Ottoman Dream Collection' the PAVO armchair and sofa, presented for the first time in Italy, along with other selected items.

"For the second consecutive year at Milan Design Week, FROMM. will present a curated selection of their offerings at the prestigious Rossana Orlandi Gallery. The display will feature the 'Haima' Armchair, boasting an exclusive leatherette shell, and the 'Pavo' Sofa - both proudly 100% crafted in Italy. Rossana Orlandi herself has handpicked these items from FROMM.'s range. The gallery is celebrated as a key stage for global design, providing a unique showcase for FROMM.'s creations."



US embassy in Doha to launch 'Spring of Jazz' concert series

This April and May, US Embassy Doha will honour the musical tradition and power of jazz with US talents of Supernova and Birkhead, a statement said yesterday.

US ambassador to Qatar Timmy Davis emphasised that "The Spring of Jazz celebrates the transformative power of music to bring people together. From the streets of New Orleans to the stages of Qatar, the freedom of jazz music breaks boundaries and fosters cross-cultural connections. I am thrilled to bring this uniquely American art form hailing from my home state of Louisiana to Qatar."

In collaboration with Georgetown University in Qatar (GU-Q), the "Spring of Jazz" series begins on April 21, with a concert at the PUE Theater in Education City. Guests are invited to experience the sounds of hard bop, modal, fusion, and avant-garde jazz with Supernova, led by visionary drummer and composer Nasar Abadey. Admission is free



Brent Birkhead

with registration at <https://www.qatar.georgetown.edu/event/nasar-abadey-supernova/>

Dr Safwan Masri, dean of GU-Q, said: "One of the most dynamic, creative, and expressive forms of music, jazz is a uniquely American genre, pioneered by African Americans and treasured as a national heritage. We are honoured to co-host Supernova right here in Education City, where the hallmarks of jazz, including the coalescence of individual and collective expressions,

are a beautiful metaphor for what occurs in our classrooms and across the partner universities."

The musical journey continues in May with Birkhead, led by woodwind artist and composer Brent Birkhead, who will bring Washington, DC's jazz heritage to Doha through school workshops and public concerts at the Katara Opera House on May 30 and 31. The band will perform a diverse repertoire that spans traditional jazz to contemporary grooves.

Birkhead will also delve into the genre's rich heritage and its impact on artistic expression with a special event at The Ned Doha. Ticket registration for Birkhead's events will open in May. The US embassy is bringing Birkhead to Doha via the American Music Abroad (AMA) flagship music exchange programme that reaches audiences in more than 30 countries each year. Over 110 AMA bands have travelled to more than 130 countries around the world, including Qatar, since 2012.

Qatar condemns Israeli policy

From Page 1

Today, there was a chance to discuss the regional developments that the Middle East is going through, especially since the region is experiencing sensitive circumstances and a dangerous escalation, the PM indicated, calling on all parties to reduce the escalation and spare the region from sliding into a new cycle of conflicts.

His counterpart Romanian Prime Minister Marcel Ciolacu said his visit to Doha sends a strong message indicating that his country stands alongside Qatar, the US and partners in the European Union to support peace efforts and restore security in the Middle East.

He stressed the need for all countries to adopt a balanced stance and work to encourage dialogue and restraint to avoid dangerous events in the region, and for diplomacy and dialogue to be stronger than weapons.

In this regard, he hailed the role of Qatari mediation over the years in dealing with complex international files, which contributed to reducing the

escalation in and outside the region, emphasising Romania's readiness to join relevant regional and international efforts to become part of a constructive solution, in order to avoid expanding the conflict in the Middle East.

The Romanian leader expressed appreciation for Qatar's efforts, which demonstrated its important role in the region, especially regarding the release of hostages in the Gaza Strip, including Romanian citizens. He pointed out that these efforts led to the safe return of Romanian citizens to their homes, commending Qatar's support for Romania during the coronavirus pandemic, which strengthens the friendly bilateral relations and their ability to build an in-depth partnership centred around strategic projects of mutual interest, in fields such as transportation, energy, economy, agriculture and digitalisation.

He also expressed the hope that Romania would be the gateway to Qatari investment in the European Union, and that such co-operation would continue for the benefit of the two friendly countries and their people. (QNA)

Education ministry organises third edition of 'Developmental Mathematics Day' event

The Ministry of Education and Higher Education organised the third edition of the Developmental Mathematics Day event with the participation of over 150 teachers from various government schools, along with representatives from the Mathematics Department in the foundation programme and the National Center for Educational Development at Qatar University.

The event aims to enhance methods of teaching mathematics effectively and more engagingly, aiming for a better understanding to improve students' performance and academic achievement in mathematics.

Somaya al-Tamimi, a mathematics guidance consultant at the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, emphasised the importance of mathematics in daily life and community development, noting that teaching mathematics is a shared responsibility for everyone, including teachers, researchers and officials. She added that it is crucial for stakeholders to work earnestly to develop teaching methods that encourage students to learn with interest and passion.

The Developmental Mathematics Day event included several topics such as lectures, training workshops on distinguished practices, the role of in-class and out-of-class activities in enhancing



students' academic achievement, employing modern technology and artificial intelligence in mathematics teaching, and the impact of classroom practices on teaching enhancement. (QNA)



Mahmoud Oroq (left), the father of Palestinian boy Zein, who was wounded after he was hit by aid airdropped on Gaza and later succumbed to his wounds, looks on as he sits next to his father near their house which was hit in an Israeli strike, amid the ongoing conflict, in Gaza City.

After surviving air strike Palestinian boy dies seeking aid

Reuters
Gaza

When an Israeli air strike destroyed his family's home in November, Zein Oroq was pinned under rubble.

He was wounded but survived, while 17 members of his extended family died.

But Zein, 13, would later suffer a cruel fate in Gaza, where Palestinians face severe shortages of medicine, food and water in a deepening humanitarian crisis.

The population of the tiny enclave, where Israel and the Palestinian group Hamas have been fighting for more than six months, is at risk of famine.

Last week, during an air drop of aid, the teenager was struck by one of the packages as he

rushed to try to get a can of fava beans, some rice or flour.

"The first time, when the house was hit by a strike, he came out from under the rubble with wounds in his head, hand and leg, God saved him," said Zein's grandfather, Ali Oroq.

The grandfather, standing by a large pool of wastewater, recalled how Zein would swim in a pond to get a meal from the air drops, and how he should have been sitting at a desk in school getting an education instead.

But, with mediators failing to secure a truce and Israel and Hamas braced for more war in Gaza, which has been rendered a wasteland by the fighting, his luck eventually ran out.

"While parachutes were falling, an aid box hit his head, also the stampede of people who were heading towards the box did not pay attention to the boy

- they were also hungry," said his father Mahmoud.

"So, his head was cut and wounded, he got fractures in the pelvis, skull and abdomen and with the flow of people, the pressure increased on him."

Zein was taken to hospital, where he succumbed to his wounds on Sunday in the chaos of a war that began when Hamas fighters stormed Israel in the first week of October.

Israel responded with a fierce offensive that has killed more than 33,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza's Hamas-run health authorities, and turned much of densely populated strip, home to 2.3mn people, into rubble, twisted steel and dust. "My son is so precious, he was my support, my entire life, my first joy in this world, my biggest child, may he rest in peace," said Mahmoud.

Arab League appeals for end to Gaza massacre

The League of Arab States affirmed in Cairo yesterday that containing the deterioration in the security situation in the region begins with putting an end to the massacres that the Israeli entity continues to commit in the Gaza Strip on a daily basis, implementing the Security Council resolution calling for an immediate ceasefire, and bringing in humanitarian aid to the population living on the brink of famine.

Secretary-General of Arab League Ahmed Aboul Gheit met with Head of Mission and Chief of

Staff of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation (UNTSO) Patrick Gauchat. During the meeting, Aboul Gheit said that the escalation could get out of control, threatening security in the entire region.

He stressed that political solutions remain the best way to achieve security for all parties, but it remains difficult to reach such solutions with the Israeli occupation's insistence on continuing to target Palestinians. Gauchat gave a detailed presentation on the conditions and confrontations on

the various fronts monitored by the UN Monitoring Mission, including the Blue Line, which represents the armistice line between Lebanon and occupied Palestine.

During the meeting, the two sides exchanged views on the regional situation in light of the war that the Israeli occupation continues to wage against the Gaza Strip in defiance of international law and international humanitarian law, as well as against the backdrop of the dangerous escalation and successive security tensions at more than one level. (QNA)

Dubai roads, airport reel from floods after record rains

AFP
Dubai

Dubai's giant highways were clogged by flooding and its major airport was in chaos as the Middle East financial centre remained gridlocked yesterday, a day after the heaviest rains on record.

Tailbacks snaked along waterlogged, six-lane expressways after up to 259.5 millimetres of rain, the most since records began 75 years ago, fell on the desert United Arab Emirates on Tuesday. At least one person was killed after a 70-year-old man was swept away in his car in Ras Al Khaimah, police said.

Power outages were reported around Dubai, which was dotted with flooded areas and submerged and abandoned cars. One road tunnel near the airport was completely flooded to a depth of several metres (yards).

As sunny skies returned yesterday, a day after torrential downpours and rolling black clouds, stories emerged of residents stuck in cars and offices

overnight. "It was one of the most horrific situations I had ever experienced, because I knew that if my car broke down, it would sink and I would drown with it," said one worker in his 30s, who did not want to give his name, after his 15-minute commute had turned into a 12-hour saga on flooded roads.

"I was very afraid," he added. Schools will remain closed in Dubai until next week, authorities said, underscoring the difficulty of the clean-up.

One householder, also requesting anonymity, said he made a small detour on his way home on Tuesday to buy McDonald's for his children, only to get stuck in traffic and finally arrive - empty-handed - six hours later.

"I can understand that the country can't deal with rain on this scale, but the lack of transparency and real-time information is disappointing," he said.

Passengers were warned not to come to Dubai airport, the world's busiest by international traffic, "unless absolutely necessary", an official said.

Hezbollah strike injures 14 soldiers in Israeli base

Lebanon's Hezbollah group said it attacked an Israeli army base near the border yesterday, with the latest in a series of tit-for-tat strikes wounding 14 soldiers, according to Israel's military, AFP reported from Beirut. Israel and Hezbollah, a Hamas ally, have been exchanging near-daily cross-border fire since the Palestinian group stormed southern Israel in the first week of October, triggering war in the Gaza Strip.

Haniyeh to visit Turkiye this weekend: Erdogan

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said yesterday he would host a leader of Palestinian group Hamas, Ismail Haniyeh, in Turkiye this weekend, AFP reported from Istanbul. "The leader of the Palestinian cause will be my guest this weekend," Erdogan, an outspoken critic of Israel's conflict in Gaza, told lawmakers. "Even if only I, Tayyip Erdogan, remain, I will continue as long as God gives me my life, to defend the Palestinian struggle and to be the voice of the oppressed Palestinian people," the president said.

New Saudia hypermarket opens in Al Thumama

The Saudia Group of Companies has opened a new hypermarket on Umm Al Shuwail St, Al Thumama. The grand opening ceremony took place at the new shop premises on April 14.

Sheikh Ali Abdulla Ahmed Ali Al Thani inaugurated the shop with a ribbon cutting ceremony in the presence of Chairman & Managing Director N K Musthfa Sahib, Directors Rashid Musthafa, Salman Musthafa, Faisal Musthafa, Jassim Musthafa, Shuhaib Musthafa, Mohamed Jamsheer, Group H R Manager Rayees K, Operation Manager Joby Vallikadan, General Manager M K Abdul Rahman, Finance Managers Vinod T V and Sreeraj K S, Purchase Manager Manoj P V and other dignitaries.

The inauguration ceremony was followed by a tailored tour of the shop for the guests, along with a reception. The public exhibited immense support and enthusiasm for their fresh shopping spot in Thumama.

Conveniently situated in a central location, the shop is easily accessible to the public, and its generous parking space adds to its appeal.

The hypermarket has opened its doors, offering a comprehensive range of essentials including fresh fruits, vegetables, groceries, health and beauty products, fresh fish and meat, baked goods, roasted coffee, household items, home furnishings, perfumes, clothing, footwear, novelty items, toys, school and office supplies, as well as mobile phones and accessories, all at highly competitive prices.





Harry 'may have to settle Murdoch lawsuit after Grant deal'

Reuters
London

British actor Hugh Grant has settled a lawsuit against the publisher of Rupert Murdoch's tabloid newspaper, *The Sun*, he said yesterday, while the lawyer for Prince Harry said the royal could

also be "forced" to agree a deal. Grant, alongside King Charles' son and others, was suing News Group Newspapers (NGN) for alleged widespread unlawful information gathering, including landline tapping, burglary and "blagging" confidential information about him. His case was one of several which

were eligible to go to trial at London's High Court in January, but the actor said he had reluctantly settled with NGN because he could be left with a multi-million pound legal bill if he rejected their offer now, even if he later won the lawsuit.

"News Group are claiming they are entirely innocent of the things I had accused the *Sun* of doing,"

Grant posted on X. "As is common with entirely innocent people, they are offering me an enormous sum of money to keep this matter out of court." Grant, famous for films such as *Love Actually*, *Paddington 2* and *Notting Hill*, said if he was awarded less in damages after a trial than NGN had offered him now, he would be liable to pay the fees of both

sides' lawyers. "Rupert Murdoch's lawyers are very expensive," Grant said. "So even if every allegation is proven in court, I would still be liable for something approaching 10 million pounds in costs. I'm afraid I am shying at that fence."

David Sherborne, the lawyer for both Grant and Harry, told a hearing at the high court in London yester-

day that the prince and other claimants also face a similar predicament and have settlements "forced" upon them.

"The Duke of Sussex is subject to the same issues that (actress) Sienna Miller and Hugh Grant have been subject to, which is that offers are made (which) make it impossible for them to go ahead," Sherborne said.

Australia govt unveils new defence strategy

AFP
Sydney

Australia yesterday unveiled its first National Defence Strategy, signalling a new focus on deterring China's "coercive tactics" in a region seen as lurching towards conflict.

The 80-page document offers a gloomy assessment of Pacific security and sets out a massive increase in defence spending to retool Australia's military to cope.

"The optimistic assumptions that guided defence planning after the end of the Cold War are long gone," said Defence Minister Richard Marles, presenting the new strategy.

Warning that "China has employed coercive tactics in pursuit of its strategic objectives," the text describes an Australia vulnerable to foes strangling trade or preventing access to vital air and sea routes.

"We are a maritime trading island nation," Marles said.

"The invasion of Australia is an unlikely prospect in any scenario, precisely because so much damage can be done to our country by an adversary without ever having to step foot on Australian soil," he said.

So instead of focusing on maintaining a military that can do a range of tasks almost anywhere in the world, Marles said there would be a laser focus on building a deterrent force that can protect Australia's interests in its immediate region.

At the centre of the strategy are plans to develop a fleet of stealthy

nuclear-powered submarines, to triple key missile capabilities and develop a large surface combatant fleet.

"Having the most capable Navy in our history will be at the heart of our projection and our strategy of denial," Marles said.

The strategy boils down to making any attack against Australia's interests prohibitively expensive and risky.

As a share of GDP, defence spending is set to increase from about 2% today to 2.4% within a decade.

That will only fuel an arms race that is taking place across the Pacific, with China, South Korea and Japan all piling more money into defence.

According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, military spending in Asia and Oceania has increased 45% since 2013.

Given that backdrop, Australia predicts an increased risk of conflict in the Taiwan Strait, the South and East China Seas or on the border with India.

Marles said that old assumptions about how much time Australia would have to prepare for war were gone.

"Australia no longer has the luxury of a 10-year window of strategic warning time for conflict," he said, upending long-held belief.

Asked about Canberra's strategy at a regular briefing, Beijing urged Australia to "refrain from making accusations against China at every turn".

"China poses no threat to any country," foreign ministry spokesperson Lin Jian said.

India election preparations



Polling officers and porters carry Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) and Electronic Voting Machines (EVM) as they climb down stairs on a mountain to reach a remote polling station, ahead of the first phase of the election, in Shillong in the northeastern state of Meghalaya, India, yesterday.

Tesla's Musk 'likely to unveil \$2bn-\$3bn India investment'

Reuters
New Delhi

Tesla chief Elon Musk is set to announce an investment in India of \$2bn-\$3bn, mainly for building a new factory, when he visits New Delhi next week to meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi, two sources familiar with the discussions said.

Musk will meet Modi on Monday during his India trip, when the billionaire is expected to unveil his plans to enter the world's third-larg-

est auto market where electric car adoption is still in its infancy.

India's EV market is small but growing and dominated by local carmaker Tata Motors. EVs made up just 2% of total car sales in 2023, but the government is targeting 30% of new cars to be EVs starting 2030.

Musk's visit comes as Tesla battles slowing sales in the major markets of the US and China, and has this week announced layoffs affecting 10% of its workforce.

Details of Musk's India visit are closely-guarded, with the CEO only publicly confirming

on his social media platform X that he will meet Modi in India. The two sources said Musk will likely give an investment figure for India without sharing details such as a timeline or an Indian state where the plant will be built.

Tesla did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

For years, Musk opposed India's high import taxes for EVs and lobbied for a change. India's government in March unveiled a new EV policy lowering import taxes to 15% from as high as 100% on some models if a carmaker invests at least \$500mn and sets up a factory.

UK trade union law breaches workers' rights: top court

British trade union law unlawfully fails to protect workers from sanctions short of dismissal for going on strike, the United Kingdom's Supreme Court ruled yesterday in a significant victory for workers' rights. Fiona Mercer, a care-worker and trade unionist, took legal action against her employer after she was suspended in 2019 during planned strike action. In 2022, the Court of Appeal in London ruled British trade union law may be incompatible with the European Convention on Human Rights but nonetheless dismissed Mercer's case after an intervention by the government. But yesterday, after a five-year legal battle, Britain's highest court upheld Mercer's appeal on trade union rights. Mercer said she was "delighted" with the ruling, while her trade union, Unison, called it "a victory for every employee who might one day want to challenge something bad or unfair their employer has done".

Hundreds evacuated as volcano erupts



At least 800 people in Indonesia's North Sulawesi province have been evacuated after multiple eruptions of the area's Ruang volcano, which for days has spewed lava and ash clouds into the sky, the country's volcanology agency said yesterday. The volcano, located on Ruang island about 100km from the provincial capital Manado, has erupted more than three times since Tuesday.

X blocks India poll posts after takedown orders

AFP
New Delhi

Social media platform X has blocked several posts in India containing political speech after authorities ordered their takedown ahead of a six-week general election that starts tomorrow.

X, owned by Tesla boss Elon Musk and formerly known as Twitter, said the posts would be withheld from Indian audiences until the election was over despite its disagreement with the order.

"In compliance with the orders, we have withheld these posts for the remainder of the election period," X said in a statement posted to the platform.

"However, we disagree with these actions and maintain that freedom of expression should extend to these posts and political speech in general."

The posts by elected politicians, political parties and candidates made unverified claims about the private lives of their opponents, which India's election commission said violated its code of conduct. The platform's announcement of its compliance with the order came the same day X's Brazilian office said it would abide by a court direction to block disinformation-spreading users in that country.

Musk had earlier threatened to disregard the Brazilian court's order.

The billionaire is expected to meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi in India this month to discuss major investment plans in the country.

India, the world's biggest democracy, regularly ranks among the top five countries globally for number of requests made by a government to remove social media content.

Jailed Myanmar leader Suu Kyi moved to house arrest

AFP
Yangon

Jailed Myanmar democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi has been moved from prison to house arrest, a military official said yesterday, as the junta announced a heatwave had prompted measures to protect inmates.

The 78-year-old Nobel laureate is serving a 27-year sentence for a host of criminal convictions ranging from corruption to breaching Covid-19 rules.

Suu Kyi has largely been hidden from view since the military de-

tained her as they seized power in a 2021 coup, and she has reportedly suffered health problems.

A military official, speaking on condition of anonymity because he is not authorised to speak to the media, said Suu Kyi and former president Win Myint had been moved from prison to house arrest.

Junta spokesman Zaw Min Tun said that a spell of hot weather had prompted authorities to take measures to protect vulnerable detainees.

"Not only Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and U Win Myint but also some old prisoners were given necessary care because of very hot weather,"

Zaw Min Tun said. The temperature in capital Naypyidaw, where Suu Kyi is believed to be in custody in a specially constructed compound, hit 41C (105.8F) yesterday, with even hotter weather forecast for the coming week.

The junta also announced yesterday that 3,300 prisoners would be freed as part of a regular amnesty to mark the country's new year festival.

Outside Yangon's Insein Prison, about 200 to 300 relatives and friends waited to greet prisoners as they were taken out of the compound in buses.

It was not immediately clear how

long Suu Kyi would be allowed to remain under house arrest beyond the heatwave, or whether the move represented an official reduction in her sentence.

Local media reported that during her months-long trial, Suu Kyi had suffered dizzy spells, vomiting and at times had been unable to eat because of a tooth infection.

Her son Kim Aris said in February that she was still being held at the special compound in Naypyidaw.

The compound had no air conditioning in the searing heat and the concrete cells leaked during the monsoon, according to Australian economist Sean Turnell, a former

advisor to Suu Kyi's government who was detained there for months.

Suu Kyi spent about 15 years under house arrest at her family's colonial-era lakeside mansion in the commercial hub Yangon after she shot to fame during huge demonstrations against the then-junta in 1988.

Yesterday's prisoner amnesty includes 13 Indonesians and 15 Sri Lankans who will be deported, the junta said.

Remaining prisoners will have their sentences cut by one-sixth, the junta said in a statement, except for those convicted of serious offences, including murder, terror-

ism and drugs charges. Myanmar's military ousted Suu Kyi's civilian government in a lightning coup in February 2021, ending the country's 10-year experiment with democracy after decades of army rule.

The coup triggered a huge outpouring of public opposition, which the military attempted to crush with force, unleashing a spiralling conflict that has left more than 4,800 civilians dead.

The army is now struggling to maintain its grip on the country in the face of resistance from civilian anti-junta fighters and long-established ethnic minority armed groups.

LEGAL
US Supreme Court widens scope of workplace bias suits

The US Supreme Court yesterday made it easier to bring certain workplace discrimination lawsuits in a ruling that gave a boost to a St. Louis police officer who claimed she was transferred to an undesirable new role because of her sex. In a case testing the scope of federal workplace protections, the justices ruled 9-0 to throw out a lower court's decision to dismiss the lawsuit brought by the officer, Jatonya Muldrow, and directed it to reconsider the matter. Muldrow has claimed she was transferred out of a police intelligence unit by a new supervisor who wanted a male officer in the position.

SPACE
Nasa Mars helicopter sends last message to Earth

Nasa's Ingenuity Mars helicopter has transmitted its final message to Earth and will now serve as an immobile data-gathering unit on the red planet's surface, the space agency said yesterday. The tissue box-sized aircraft made history by achieving the first powered flight on another planet after hitching a ride under the belly of the Perseverance rover, which first lifted off the surface on April 19, 2021. "A long goodbye," Nasa said on social media site X. Originally intended only to prove flight was possible in the ultra-thin Martian atmosphere through five test runs, Ingenuity defied all expectations. It was deployed a total of 72 times.

PROPOSAL
Planned Disneyland expansion in California clears major hurdle

Plans to expand the Disneyland Resort cleared a major hurdle yesterday, as local officials endorsed a new blueprint governing the development of Walt Disney's Southern California theme parks over the next 40 years. The Anaheim city council approved a plan, called DisneylandForward, that one researcher estimated would create as many as 4,520 construction jobs per year of development and an additional 26,764 parks-related positions over the coming decades. A second procedural council vote, to consider zoning changes, revisions in the city's development agreement with Disney and an analysis of environmental impacts, is scheduled for May 7.

MEDIA
Canada public broadcaster to lay off fewer than expected staff

Canada's public broadcaster will cut fewer positions than expected this year thanks to an infusion of state funding, management told employees yesterday. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, branded as CBC/Radio-Canada, announced last December it would cut 600 jobs or 10% of its workforce in 2024. "Since then, we have reduced our workforce by 141 employees and eliminated 205 vacant positions," management said in the letter, adding that it was no longer planning any "major additional cutbacks this year." On Tuesday the federal government announced in its budget additional funding of C\$42m this year for the broadcaster.

Trump 'keen on new middle-class tax cut if elected'

Reuters
Washington

US Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump has indicated to advisers he is keen on a new middle-class tax cut should he return to the White House, two people familiar with the discussions said, an initiative that could appeal to voters but could also worsen America's yawning budget deficit.

Among the ideas that advisers have presented to the former president is a cut to the federal payroll tax, said one of those people, a move that could lower the flow of money into the Social Security and Medicare trust funds and open Trump to criticism from Democrats that he is torpedoing the safety net for elderly Americans.

Trump has signalled that he is open to the idea, though he has made no commitments, that person added.

Trump's economic team proposed slashing the payroll tax in 2020 as a way to jumpstart the economy during the worst of the Covid-19 pandemic, but his administration settled for temporarily allowing deferrals in payroll tax payments.

The recent conversations indicate that his economic advisers are still seeking a payroll tax cut, even though the economy is much healthier than it was four years ago, when it was hit hard by the pandemic.

Other ideas that Trump's close

economic advisers are discussing include an increase in the so-called standard deduction on year-end tax returns and a cut to the marginal income tax rate for middle-income households, one of the people with knowledge of those conversations said. It was unclear if either of those ideas had been presented to Trump directly.

The tax cut talks are relatively informal and are broadly aimed at the middle class rather than at households earning below a specific income level, both of the people with knowledge of the conversations said. How ambitious any tax measure will be ultimately depends on the make-up of the next Congress.

Legislators generally must approve significant tax overhauls, though certain tweaks to the tax code can be carried out by executive action. Among the people who are involved in conversations around tax policy are conservative economist and long-time Trump adviser Stephen Moore and Fox News host Larry Kudlow, who served as the director of the National Economic Council under Trump, those people added. Both men regularly speak to the former president.

Taken as a whole, the conversations indicate that Trump and his advisers are serious about substantial tax cuts if he beats Democratic President Joe Biden in the November general election.

While new tax cuts could spur short-term economic growth, economic experts say they also risk stoking already-high inflation and

further blowing out America's public debt, which currently stands at over \$34tn.

The discussions also occur at a time when the economy is running relatively hot, with some experts saying this is not the time to discuss further stimulus.

The International Monetary Fund this week revised its forecast for 2024 US growth upward to 2.7% from the 2.1% projected in January, while job growth beat expectations in March.

"When President Trump is back in the White House, he will advocate for more tax cuts for all Americans and reinvigorate America's energy industry to bring down inflation, lower the cost of living, and pay down our debt," said Karoline Leavitt, a Trump campaign spokesperson.

Trump has already indicated he plans to extend the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (TCJA) if he returns to office, a 2017 measure he signed which cut corporate and individual tax rates and increased family tax credits, among other measures.

Biden has proposed extending certain elements of the TCJA before it expires in 2025, though he has put forward several new tax proposals, like a 25% minimum levy on individuals with wealth of over \$100mn.

Andrew Lutz, an associate director for economic policy at the Bipartisan Policy Center, a Washington think tank, said even a partial extension of the TCJA would raise questions about budgetary discipline.

Plastic waste artwork



A visitor snaps a photo of artist Benjamin Von Wong's plastic waste installation on New York City's High Line park, in New York, US.

House Republicans announce vote for \$61bn in Ukraine aid

AFP
Washington

The Republican leader in the House of Representatives yesterday announced a vote on a massive new military aid package that includes some \$61bn in long-delayed support for Ukraine, as well as billions for Taiwan.

The move could finally get much-needed help to outgunned Ukrainian forces as they battle Russian invaders.

But it also sets up a showdown with Johnson's own far-right wing, which for months has been steered by Donald Trump into blocking aid to Ukraine.

"We expect the vote on final passage on these bills to be on Saturday evening," Speaker Mike Johnson announced.

Along with the \$61bn for Ukraine, the bills include \$8bn for Taiwan, which China sees as part of its territory and has vowed to retake - by force if necessary.

For months Johnson has faced huge pressure from the White

House and much of Congress to allow the lower house to vote on aid to Ukraine that was already approved in the senate.

Johnson had refused to allow a vote on that \$95bn package in the House. Instead he is pushing this separate package - which the White House has appeared to give the cautious nod to, even as Biden has said he needs to study it more closely.

It remains unclear if Johnson's aid bills would pass the House or the Democratically controlled Senate.

Woman wheels corpse into Brazil bank to sign for loan

A woman brought a 68-year-old man in a wheelchair into a bank branch and tried to get him to sign for a loan, but he had been dead for hours, Brazilian police said yesterday.

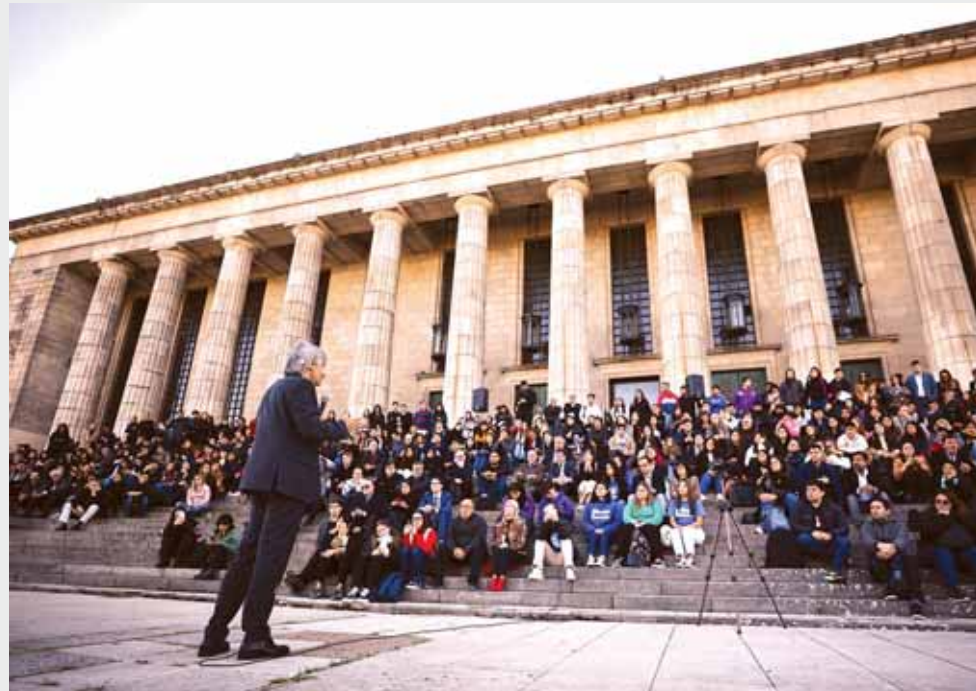
Erika Vieira Nunes wheeled the cadaver into the bank in a Rio suburb and told the teller the man wanted a loan for 17,000 reais (\$3,250), security camera video showed. She held a pen and moved his hand forward to no response.

"Uncle, are you listening? You need to sign," she said, according to the security video, suggesting she sign for him.

"He doesn't say anything, that's just how he is," she said, adding: "If you're not okay, I'm going to take you to the hospital."

Bank staff became suspicious as the man's head kept falling back and they called the police who arrested the woman on the spot and charged her with fraud. The corpse was taken to the morgue.

Argentina education cuts opposed



Buenos Aires Law School Dean, Leandro Vergara, holds a lesson in the street in the run-up to a national strike on April 23, against Argentina's President Javier Milei's policy of cuts in public education, in Buenos Aires, Argentina, yesterday.

Police arrest six linked to Canada's largest gold heist

Reuters
Brampton, Ontario

Police in Canada and the US have arrested six people and are seeking three others in connection with the theft of over C\$22mn (\$16mn) in gold and cash from an Air Canada cargo facility last year.

In what authorities described as the largest gold heist in Canadian history, suspects including an Air Canada employee forged an airway bill to steal the cargo that had arrived in Toronto from Zurich in April 2023.

The cargo contained 6,600 gold bars weighing 400kg, worth over C\$20mn, and C\$2.5mn in foreign currency, the Peel regional police told reporters at a briefing.

The suspects have been hit with more than 19 charges by the authorities, who recovered

1kg of gold and approximately C\$434,000 in Canadian currency, police said.

The stolen gold may have been melted and reconstituted, making it difficult to track down, police said.

Police also recovered some 65 firearms that investigators allege were purchased from the proceeds of the theft.

"We believe that they've melted down the gold and then the profits they got from the gold, they use to help finance the firearms," detective sergeant Mike Mavity said.

Five suspects were arrested in Canada and conditionally released. One suspect, originally from Brampton, Ontario, was arrested in Pennsylvania along with the firearms and remains in custody in the US. Canada-wide warrants have been issued for the remaining three suspects, police said.

Biden denies China trade war on trip to US steel heartland

AFP
Pittsburgh

US President Joe Biden yesterday denied there was a trade war with China, despite calling for a hike in steel tariffs as he courted blue-collar voters in the battleground state of Pennsylvania.

Biden was unveiling the latest in a series of protectionist measures in a campaign speech to United Steelworkers union in Pittsburgh, on the second day of a three-day swing through the state he narrowly won from Donald Trump in 2020.

The 81-year-old was set to call

for a tripling in tariffs on Chinese steel and aluminium, saying that Beijing was undercutting US production by manipulating Chinese products.

Democrat Biden and Republican Trump are promising to revive American manufacturing as they compete for vital working- and middle-class voters in the US Rust Belt ahead of a tight November election.

Beijing reacted furiously after Washington said it was also launching a probe into Chinese shipbuilding following a complaint by unions including United Steelworkers.

Biden won the coveted backing last month of the union, and has

opposed a bid by Japan's Nippon Steel to take over the Pittsburgh-based US Steel in a further attempt to woo them.

"No trade war," Biden said when asked by reporters if he was worried about the potential for a standoff with Beijing during a stop at a coffee shop in his hometown of Scranton, Pennsylvania.

Biden has visited Pennsylvania more than any other state as he bids for a second term that would also prevent a Trump comeback to the White House.

On the first day of the trip on Monday he visited his birthplace of Scranton, stopping by his childhood home while taking aim at Trump as

an elitist billionaire, as the tycoon languished in his New York hush money trial.

His campaign released an ad on Tuesday featuring a unionised steelworker hailing his policies.

At stake are the crucial ballots of the blue-collar voters who helped propel Trump and his nationalist agenda to power in 2016, and whom Biden wrested back four years ago.

Despite huge differences with election rival Trump on everything, Biden's trade policies have increasingly echoed elements of his "America First" rival's.

But unlike Trump, Biden has invested huge amounts in infrastruc-

ture and green projects since taking office, hoping that it will bring manufacturing and production of key goods like steel back to the US.

The Biden administration views China's practices as a barrier to that.

China accounts for about half of global steel production, while exporting the metal at a significantly lower cost than US steel prices, a senior US official told reporters.

"Chinese policies and subsidies for their domestic steel and aluminium industries mean high-quality US products are undercut by artificially low-priced Chinese alternatives produced with higher emissions," the White House said

in a statement. The US Trade Representative said separately it was launching its probe into China's trade practices in the shipbuilding, maritime and logistics sectors.

US unions had slammed "unreasonable and discriminatory" policies and practices used by Beijing to dominate these industries.

Beijing said it firmly opposes the probe, with China's commerce industry calling it "full of false accusations, misinterpreting normal trade and investment activities as harming US national security and corporate interests, and blaming China for its own industrial problems."



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GULF TIMES

Facebook news block leads to political risks

Since Meta blocked links to news in Canada last August to avoid paying fees to media companies, right-wing meme producer Jeff Ballingall says he has seen a surge in clicks for his Canada Proud Facebook page.

"Our numbers are growing and we're reaching more and more people every day," said Ballingall, who publishes up to 10 posts a day and has some 540,000 followers.

"Media is just going to get more tribal and more niche," he added. "This is just igniting it further."

Canada has become ground zero for Facebook's battle with governments that have enacted or are considering laws that force internet giants — primarily the social media platform's owner Meta and Alphabet's Google — to pay media companies for links to news published on their platforms. Facebook has blocked news sharing in Canada rather than pay, saying news holds no economic value to its business. It is seen as likely to take a similar step in Australia should Canberra try to enforce its 2021 content licencing law after Facebook said it would not extend the deals it has with news publishers there. Facebook briefly blocked news in Australia ahead of the law.

The blocking of news links has led to profound and disturbing changes in the way Canadian Facebook users engage with information about politics, two unpublished studies shared with Reuters found.

"The news being talked about in political groups is being replaced by memes," said Taylor Owen, founding director of McGill University's Centre for Media, Technology and Democracy, who worked on one of the studies.

Where once news posts on Facebook garnered between 5mn-8mn views from Canadians per day, that has disappeared

The lack of news on the platform and increased user engagement with opinion and non-verified content has the potential to undermine political discourse, particularly in election years, the studies' researchers say.

Both Canada and Australia go to the polls in 2025.

Other jurisdictions including California and Britain are also considering legislation to force internet giants to pay for news content. Indonesia introduced a similar law this year. In practice, Meta's decision means that when someone makes a post with a link to a news article, Canadians will see a box with the message: "In response to Canadian government legislation, news content can't be shared."

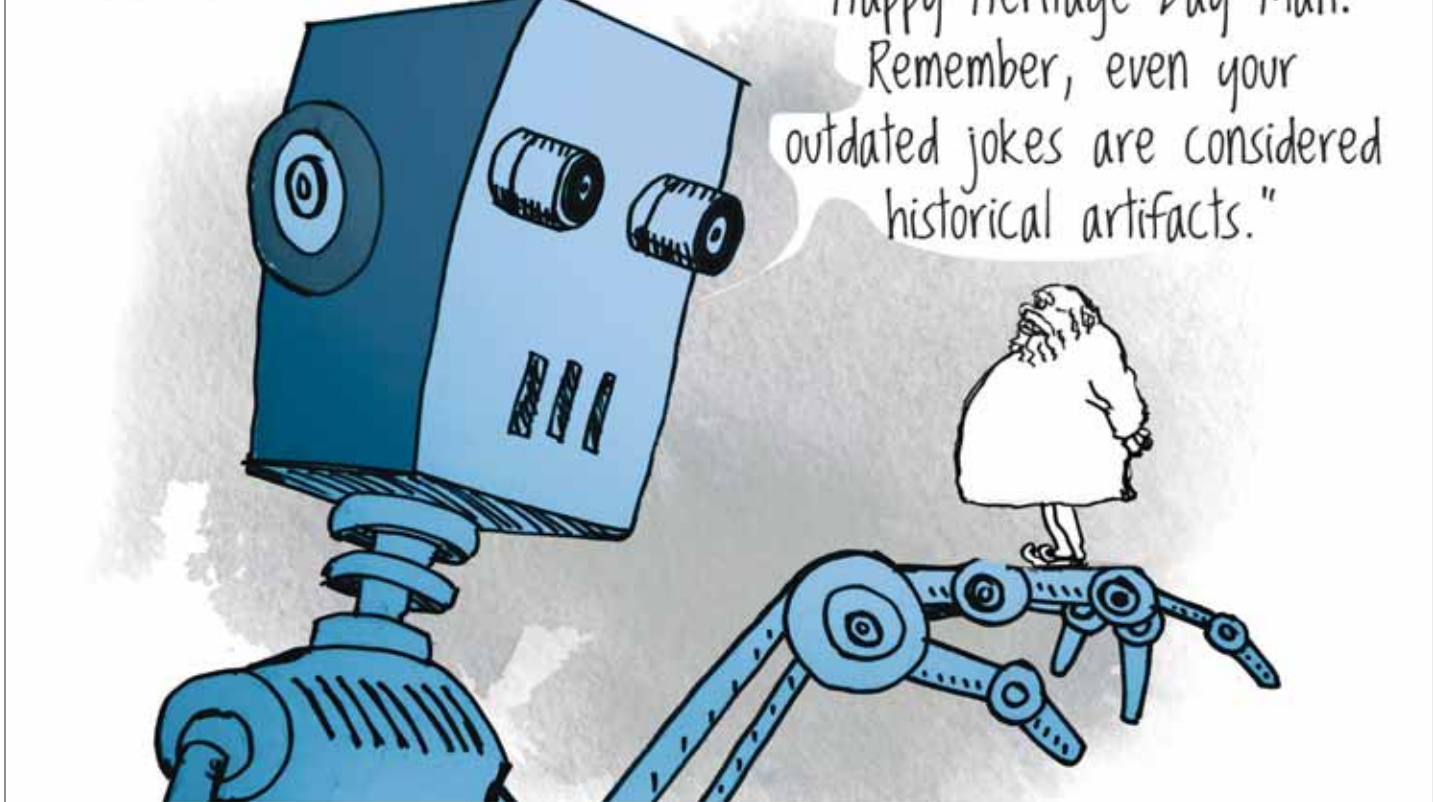
Where once news posts on Facebook garnered between 5mn and 8mn views from Canadians per day, that has disappeared, according to the Media Ecosystem Observatory, a McGill University and University of Toronto project. Although engagement with political influencer accounts such as partisan commentators, academics and media professionals was unchanged, reactions to image-based posts in Canadian political Facebook groups tripled to match the previous engagement with news posts, the study also found. The research analysed some 40,000 posts and compared user activity before and after the blocking of news links on the pages of some 1,000 news publishers, 185 political influencers and 600 political groups.

A Meta spokesperson said the research confirmed the company's view that people still come "to Facebook and Instagram even without news on the platform."

Canadians can still access "authoritative information from a range of sources" on Facebook and the company's fact-checking process was "committed to stopping the spread of misinformation on our services", the spokesperson said. A separate NewsGuard study conducted for Reuters found that likes, comments and shares of what it categorised as "unreliable" sources climbed to 6.9% in Canada in the 90 days after the ban, compared to 2.2% in the 90 days before.

"This is especially troubling," said Gordon Crovitz, co-chief executive of New York-based NewsGuard, a fact-checking company which scores websites for accuracy. Crovitz noted the change has come at a time when "we see a sharp uptick in the number of AI-generated news sites publishing false claims and growing numbers of faked audio, images and videos, including from hostile governments...intended to influence elections."

Canadian Heritage Minister Pascale St-Onge in an emailed statement to Reuters called Meta's blocking of news an "unfortunate and reckless choice" that had left "disinformation and misinformation to spread on their platform...during need-to-know situations like wildfires, emergencies, local elections and other critical times". Asked about the studies, Australian Assistant Treasurer Stephen Jones said via e-mail: "Access to trusted, quality content is important for Australians, and it is in Meta's own interest to support this content on its platforms." — Reuters



Bright prospects for Chinese economy



By Cao Xiaolin
Ambassador of China to Qatar

Against the backdrop of the turbulent geopolitical landscape and a sluggish global economy, China's economy, instead of showing signs of faltering recovery or deflation, has achieved high-quality growth.

In 2023, China's GDP grew by 5.2% year-on-year, with the corresponding economic growth in volume exceeding RMB 6tn yuan. The added value of China's manufacturing industry accounted for around one-third of the global total, and China contributed 32% to the global economic growth.

As stated in the recently issued Report on the Work of the Government 2024, China seeks to achieve a GDP growth rate of around 5% for 2024, once again demonstrating to the international community the bright prospects of China's sustained economic growth. The bright prospects of China's economy benefit from stable economic policies. Under the strong leadership of the Communist Party of China, China is committed to advancing Chinese modernisation on all fronts through high-quality development, integrating the current goals with long-term needs, and ensuring the continuity, stability and consistency of macro policies.

When pursuing economic development, China stands firm in choosing not to adopt a deluge of strong stimulus policies, and not to seek short-term growth while accumulating long-term risks. Instead, China focuses on comprehensively deepening reform and opening up across the board, continuously optimising the economic structure, and maintaining steady economic growth with a stable employment,

A promising future for China-Qatar co-operation

price level and foreign exchange. The bright prospects of China's economy benefit from its solid fundamentals. In terms of domestic demand, China possesses a vast market featuring a population of 1.4bn with GDP per capita exceeding US\$12,000. In China, there are now over 400mn people in the middle-income bracket, and the number is expected to reach 800mn in the next decade or so, generating strong impetus for upgrading consumption. Moreover, China's rural vitalisation strategy in progress will create greater demand. In terms of the industrial base, China is the only country with industries across all categories in the UN industrial classification. The added value of China's manufacturing industry accounts for around 30% of the global total, ranking first in the world for 14 consecutive years. China is also home to over 200 mature industry clusters. In addition, with its huge data output and rich data resources, China has the second largest data mine in the world, which builds a solid foundation for the IT industries including big data and cloud computing. The bright prospects of China's economy benefit from new growth drivers. China's demographic dividend is turning into talent dividend. China now ranks first in the world in terms of the size of talent pool, human resources in science and technology and the total number of researchers.

China's total input in research and development and investment in the high-tech sector has been growing at double-digit rates for several years, which accelerates the formation of new quality productive forces. New technologies, including artificial intelligence and blockchain, are being applied at a faster pace. New products and new business forms such as intelligent terminals, robots and telehealth keep emerging.

China is also cultivating large-scale new growth drivers in sectors such as green infrastructure, green energy, green transportation and green lifestyle. This will generate investment and consumption

markets with an estimated size of RMB10tn yuan annually, and promises huge potential.

The bright prospects of China's economy benefit from its increasingly optimised business environment. The report on China's business environment in 2023 shows that over 90% of companies surveyed rated China's business environment as 'satisfied' or above. China actively promotes trade and investment liberalisation and facilitation, with overall tariff level cut to 7.3%, relatively on par with the developed members of the WTO. Over the past five years, the rate of return on Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in China was 9.1%, much higher than the US and European countries. Many foreign-funded businesses continue to hold optimistic view on China, keep investing in China, and further deepen their trade exchanges with China. Last year, newly established foreign-invested enterprises in China rose to nearly 54,000, up around 40% over 2022, and the number of newly established businesses by the United States, European countries and Japan in China is on the rise. In 2023, China's FDI in actual use stood at RMB 1133.9bn yuan, remaining at an historical high. The so-called 'foreign capital fleeing China' is nothing but a lie.

Holding a vast economy, China always places its own development in the context of human development, advocating universally beneficial and inclusive economic globalisation. China stays committed to being a sincere friend and a faithful partner of all countries on their paths of development, while firmly rejecting the moves including decoupling, cutting off supply chains, and the 'small yard, high fence' strategy. China never engages in economic coercion or financial extortion. Beijing always believes that pursuing protectionism is like locking oneself in a dark room. While wind and rain may be kept outside, that dark room will also block light and air.

China always believes that only by deepening practical co-operation, pursuing co-operation through consultation and keeping

all participants motivated can the fruits of development benefit all countries and peoples. China is actively promoting the high-quality joint construction of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), building a new platform for international economic cooperation and injecting new impetus into the global economy. As of now, China has conducted more than 3,000 co-operation projects with relevant parties, and catalysed investment of nearly \$1tn under the BRI. The high-quality development of China's economy provides a significant strategic opportunity for Qatar as well. This year marks the 10th anniversary of the establishment of strategic partnership between China and Qatar. Over the past decade, under the strategic guidance of His Excellency President Xi Jinping and His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, the mutually beneficial co-operation between China and Qatar has been increasingly expanded. China has been Qatar's top trading partner and top destination of exports for many years. Qatar has remained China's second-largest source of LNG imports.

Doha has become a must-visit destination for many Chinese tourists. Qatar Airways carries over 10,000 passengers every week from China to destinations worldwide. The Qatar National Bank holds an optimistic outlook on the prospects of China's economic development. It has become a firm consensus among Qatar's business community to follow the trends of the times and strengthen economic co-operation with China. Qatar officially launched its Third National Development Strategy of Qatar National Vision 2030 in January this year. This strategy shares similar notions, goals and timelines with China's Vision 2035. Embarking on our respective fast paths for national rejuvenation, China and Qatar are fully capable of further synergising our development strategies to foster new drivers of practical co-operation, achieving complementary growth in sectors including manufacturing, energy, technology, finance and green development, and building a brighter future for China-Qatar economic co-operation.

Qatar is among the first countries to ink co-operation documents under the BRI with China. China is willing to sign the plan for implementing the joint construction of the BRI with Qatar at an early date, drawing up a roadmap for the two countries' co-operation under the BRI. It will set a good example for high-quality joint construction of the BRI between China and the GCC states, the Middle East countries and the Arab countries.

The tremendous potentials of China's economy present an ever-promising prospect for the practical co-operation between China and Qatar. Let us join hands to build a brighter future for China-Qatar strategic partnership!

In terms of the industrial base, China is the only country with industries across all categories in the UN industrial classification. The added value of China's manufacturing industry accounts for around 30% of the global total, ranking first in the world for 14 consecutive years

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Wheat harvest in Lahore



Farmers harvest a wheat field on the outskirts of Lahore, Pakistan, yesterday.

Court orders Pakistan to restore social media site X

AFP
Karachi

A Pakistan High Court ordered the government yesterday to restore access to social media platform X within a week, a lawyer said, after more than two months of disruptions.

The platform, formerly known as Twitter, has been rarely accessible since February 17, when jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's party called for protests against a government official's admission of vote manipulation in the February election.

Pakistan's communications authority later acknowledged in court papers that it had been ordered by the Interior Ministry to shut the site down.

"The Sindh High Court has given the government one week to withdraw the letter, failing which, on the next date, they will pass appropriate orders," said Moiz Jaaferi, a lawyer challenging the ban.

The court's decision is expected to be published in the coming hours.

The Interior Ministry said X was blocked on security grounds, according to a report submitted to Islamabad High Court in a separate challenge to the shutdown and shared with media.

"It is the sole prerogative and domain of the federal government to decide what falls within the preview of terms of 'defence' or 'security' of Pakistan and what steps are necessary to be taken to safeguard National Security," said the report, submitted by Interior Secretary Khurram Agha.

Both the government and the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) had for weeks refused to comment on the outages. The interior ministry suggested intelligence agencies were behind the order.

The closure of a social media service "when there is request from any security or intelligence agency" is "well within the scope of provisions of the PTA act", the report said.

Digital rights activists said it was designed to quash dissent after February 8 polls that were fraught with claims of rigging.

"The X block seems to be intended to discourage the democratic accountability that a platform with instant updates of real time information enables, especially at a time when a controversial election with strong allegations and evidence of rigging surfaced," expert Usama Khilji said.

Access to X has been sporadic, occasionally available for short cycles based on the internet service provider, forcing users to use virtual private networks.

Mobile internet services were cut across Pakistan on election day, with the interior ministry citing security reasons.

It was followed by a long delay in issuing voting results, giving rise to allegations of rigging.

Khan's opposition party had already faced heavy censorship in the weeks before the election, banned from television channels and from holding rallies, forcing its campaign online. Despite the crackdown, his party won the most seats but were kept from power by a coalition of rival parties that had the backing of the military.

Russian missile barrage kills 17 in Ukraine city

AFP
Chernigiv

Three Russian missiles crashed into Ukraine's historic city of Chernigiv yesterday, killing 17 people, as officials pleaded for more air defence systems from allies.

Pools of blood gathered on the street at the scene of one strike, where rescuers searched for survivors in the rubble and carried away the wounded on stretchers, official images showed.

Buildings and cars across the centre of the northern city were destroyed in the strike.

President Volodymyr Zelensky, who has urged allies to send more missiles to thwart Russian aerial attacks, said Ukraine lacked the weapons it needed to intercept the three missiles that struck Chernigiv.

He said he had spoken to Nato Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg about the strike and asked for "immediate steps" to bolster Ukraine's air defences.

Resident Olga Samoilenko said how she ducked with her children into the corridor of their apartment building for protection when the first missile exploded.

"Our neighbours were already there. We started shouting for everyone to fall to the floor. They did. There were two more explosions. Then we ran to the parking lot," the 33-year-old said.

The official death toll grew to 17 during the day, while emergency services said 60 people — including three children — had been wounded. "Search and rescue operations are ongoing," their statement added.

Mayor Oleksandr Lomako said more than a dozen buildings had been damaged in the attack while other officials said dozens of vehicles, and medical and educational facilities were also damaged.

A 25-year-old policewoman on sick leave was among those killed after suffering a severe shrapnel injury, the interior minister announced. AFP journalists at the



Ukrainian rescuers clear the rubble of a destroyed building following a missile attack in Chernigiv, yesterday, amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

scene saw a body being pulled from the rubble and an eight-storey hotel building gutted by the strike where municipal workers were using a crane to clear debris.

Nearby apartments, a beauty salon and beer shop were among structures whose windows had been blown out by the attack.

The Chernigiv region, which borders Belarus to the north, was partially occupied at the beginning of the Russian invasion but has been spared fighting for around two years since Russian forces retreated.

Zelensky blamed Russia for the attack but also said the West should do more to help defend Ukraine's skies.

"This would not have happened if Ukraine had received sufficient air defence equipment and if the world's determination to resist Russian terror had been sufficient," he said.

Echoing the comments, Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba suggested in a social media post that Ukraine should enjoy the same cover from aerial attacks as Israel.

"In the Middle East, we saw what reliable protection of human lives from missiles looks like," he added, referring to the interception of Iran's drone and missile

barrage on Israel last Saturday.

Kuleba thanked Germany for agreeing to supply Ukraine with another Patriot air defence system and said he would appeal to other countries at a G7 meeting this week for more weapons.

A growing chorus in Ukraine has been appealing to allied countries for more sophisticated air defence weapons to ward off Russian strikes on key infrastructure.

Poor weather as well as Russian attacks on Ukrainian power plants have left thousands in the war-scarred country with limited electricity supplies.

Chernigiv lies some 145 kilometres north of Ukraine's capital, Kyiv, and had a pre-war population of around 285,000 people.

The city — home to some of Ukraine's oldest churches — lies hundreds of kilometres from the front line but has occasionally been targeted in long-range Russian strikes.

In August last year, seven people were killed in a Russian missile attack on a theatre hosting an exhibition on drones.

The city was badly damaged when Russian tanks swept into Ukraine from Belarusian territory in February 2022 and besieged the city until April that year.

Widow of Navalny hires bodyguard after hammer attack on activist

Reuters
London

Yulia Navalnaya, the widow of Russian opposition politician Alexei Navalny, said in an interview with *Time* magazine published yesterday that she had hired a bodyguard following a hammer attack on a senior ally of her late husband.

A hammer-wielding assailant attacked Leonid Volkov, a Navalny aide, outside his home in Vilnius, Lithuania, in March, breaking his arm and pounding his leg with a series of blows.

Lithuania's counter-intelligence service accused Russia's intelligence services of being behind the attack. The Kremlin declined to comment but said people should respect and listen to President Vladimir Putin rather than be afraid of him. Yulia Navalnaya, who lives outside Russia and has said she will take up her husband's battle against Putin, said the incident had prompted her to increase her personal security measures.

"We have thought about some new security protocols. To be honest, I don't really like to go around with a bodyguard," Navalnaya, who was speaking in Vilnius, told *Time*. "Alexei and I never had security, and I think I inherited some of that courage, that cavalier attitude from Alexei. But when you're too cavalier, you can make a wrong move. So, for now, my colleagues have asked me to go around with a bodyguard." "We don't know what will come next, and taking such risks is definitely not a good idea." Navalny, Putin's most prominent domestic critic, died in February in an Arctic prison. Russian authorities have outlawed Navalny's movement as extremist.

Denmark's treasured stock exchange to be rebuilt after fire

Reuters
Copenhagen

Denmark's Old Stock Exchange will be rebuilt after a devastating fire destroyed half the building and damaged much of the rest, the owner of the Copenhagen landmark said yesterday.

The blaze ripped through the 400-year-old structure on Tuesday, toppling its spire and also triggering the collapse of a large roof section, in scenes reminiscent of the 2019 fire at Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris.

In parts of the building only outer brick walls remained as everything else had burnt up, while some of the sections still standing had floors that were waterlogged from efforts to put

out the fire, according to reporters briefly allowed inside.

A strong smell of burnt wood filled the air, and long tubes of bright-white led-lights were laid out in the remaining dry sections as workers entered to remove office furniture that survived the fire.

Among the parts lost in the blaze was the large hall which in the 17th century had housed the stalls of commodities traders, said the Danish Chamber of Commerce, which owns the building.

As the flaming spire slammed into the ground, its ornamented metal tip that had sat 52 metres (179 feet) above street level of the Dutch Renaissance-style building was recovered and will eventually resume its rightful place, the Chamber said.

"At six o'clock this morning I met a fireman who gave me this... the top of the stock exchange," Chamber CEO Brian Mikkelsen told Reuters, holding the metal piece in the air.

"It gives me hope because we have decided to rebuild the stock exchange because it's part of European history as a trading continent," he said.

Mikkelsen declined to comment on the building's insurance policy. The building no longer houses the stock exchange but serves as the Chamber of Commerce headquarters.

A bouquet of sunflowers had been laid in front of the building, which had been undergoing extensive restoration when the fire broke out.

Police investigating the incident said it could take months to



A fire crew member stands inside a damaged portion of the Old Stock Exchange building, in Copenhagen, yesterday.

determine the cause. No one was hurt in the blaze.

The loss of the 17th century landmark was a sad moment for the capital, teacher Eva Simoni Lomholdt, 58, told Reuters.

"My first thought was I hope that they rebuild it, it's never going to be the same but it's iconic to Copenhagen and Denmark."

Emergency services were joined by passers-by on Tuesday in carrying paintings away from the building shortly after the fire broke out in a race to save historic arte-

facts from the flames. "When the building was on fire yesterday we were saving almost all of the valuables in there. Things that were 300-400 years old and part of our national heritage," the chamber's Mikkelsen said.

Employees and firefighters knew what to get out as they already had a "worst case" emergency plan in place, he said.

While the fire was largely out, efforts to quell any remaining embers would continue at least until today morning.

Croatia ruling conservatives win most seats, but not majority: exit poll

AFP
Zagreb

Croatia's ruling conservative party won the most seats in a parliamentary election yesterday, but not enough to form a government alone and less than in the previous vote four years ago, an exit poll showed.

The Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) won 58 seats in the 151-member assembly, according to the poll by Ipsos agency. In the previous 2020 vote, the HDZ won 66 seats.

A centre-left coalition led by the Social Democrats (SDP) won 44 seats, the survey showed. The right-wing Homeland Movement and green-left Mozemo ("We Can" in Croatian) parties

followed with 13 and 11 seats, respectively.

Turnout was high after a bitter campaign between the incumbent conservative Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic and left-wing populist President Zoran Milanovic, who campaigned despite a court warning.

The showdown came as the European Union nation wrestles with corruption, a labour shortage, the highest inflation rate in the eurozone and illegal migration.

By 1430 GMT, two and a half hours before polls closed, turnout was above 50%, the state electoral commission said. This compared with 34% at the same time during the previous election in 2020.

For months, Plenkovic and his HDZ seemed poised for an easy victory that would secure his



Supporters of Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) party react to the preliminary results of the parliamentary election, in Zagreb, yesterday.

third term as premier. But in mid-March, Milanovic made the shock announcement that he would challenge Plenkovic and become candidate for the Social Democrats.

The Croatian presidency is a

largely ceremonial office for a person without a political affiliation.

Labelling the elections a "referendum on the country's future", Milanovic, 57, urged citizens to "go out and vote for anyone but

the HDZ". Calling Plenkovic the "godfather of crime" Milanovic highlighted the recent appointment of the country's new chief prosecutor, a judge with alleged ties to corruption suspects.

Corruption has long been the Achilles heel of the HDZ. Several of Plenkovic's ministers have stepped down following accusations and the anti-graft fight was key to Croatia's bid to join the EU in 2013.

Milanovic canvassed across Croatia despite the country's top court ruling that he could only stand in the election if he steps down as president first.

Plenkovic — who has served as premier since 2016 — accused his rival of violating the constitution, engaging in hate speech and called him a "coward" for not resigning.

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