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Hamad International Airport recognised as 'World's Best' again

Hamad International Airport (HIA) has again secured its position as the 'World's Best Airport' by the prestigious 2024 Skytrax World Airport Awards held at the Passenger Terminal Expo 2024 in Frankfurt, Germany. The airport also clinched the title of 'World's Best Airport Shopping' for the second time in a row and "Best Airport in the Middle East" for the 10th consecutive year. The HIA's recognition is based on meticulous assessments conducted by air travellers. They evaluated the airport's performance across key performance indicators and selected it as the best in the world amongst a group of over 500 global airport contenders. **Business P1**

Qatar's GDP has increased nearly 14-fold since 2000

Qatar's GDP has increased nearly 14-fold since 2000, HE the Minister of Finance, Ali bin Ahmed al-Kuwari has said.

He was attending 'Georgetown fireside chat' organised by Georgetown University in Washington, DC yesterday.

The event discussed Qatar's GDP growth, diversification plans and international investments journey, World Cup economic legacy and impact, GCC economic development and challenges to regional economic integration.

Explaining the growth of Qatar's GDP, al-Kuwari stressed the efforts made by Qatar to ensure financial sustainability as part of realising the goals of Qatar National Vision 2030.

He said, "The economic growth achieved by Qatar has been among the highest/strongest of any country globally in recent decades. Our GDP has increased around 14-fold since the start of the century."

During the fireside chat, al-Kuwari also discussed the economic legacy and impact of the World Cup, and pointed out that the completion of many major projects that preceded the World Cup enabled Qatar to gradually reduce budget allocations in major projects, while continuing to invest in vital projects across sectors such as education, healthcare and tourism.

This is in addition to expanding sustainable urban infrastructure in the country.

This discussion was on the sidelines of al-Kuwari's participation in the annual Spring Meetings of the World Bank Group and the International Monetary Fund, being held in Washington DC, between April 15 and 20.



HE Ali bin Ahmed al-Kuwari during the 'Georgetown fireside chat' organised by Georgetown University in Washington, DC.

Deputy PM meets US Centcom chief



HE the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defence Affairs Dr Khalid bin Mohamed al-Attia met here yesterday with the Commander of US Central Command General Michael Corella and his accompanying delegation. The meeting, which was attended by a number of senior officials from both sides, discussed topics of common interest, reviewed the co-operation between the two sides, and ways to strengthen and develop relations. **(QNA) Page 3**

Qatar in AFC U-23 Asian Cup quarters



Substitute Mohamed al-Mannai's header deep into the stoppage time helped Qatar edge Jordan 2-1 to enter the quarter-finals of the AFC U-23 Asian Cup at the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium yesterday. Al-Mannai's heroics helped the hosts register their second successive win in Group A, with Qatar taking on Australia in the final group stage match on Sunday. **PICTURE: Noushad Thekkayil Sport Page 1**

Kenya's military chief among 10 killed in crash

Kenya's military chief, General Francis Ogolla, was among 10 people killed when their military helicopter crashed shortly after take-off yesterday, President William Ruto announced. The aircraft, which had been on a visit to troops deployed in northwest Kenya to combat endemic cattle-rustling, came down just minutes after leaving Cheptulei Boys Secondary School in West Pokot County, Ruto said. Two soldiers survived the crash and were in hospital, he said, adding that an investigation team had been sent to discover the cause. **Page 8**

IMF revises down ME growth outlook

The International Monetary Fund said yesterday Middle East economies would grow at a slower pace this year than it previously projected as the war in Gaza, attacks on Red Sea shipping and lower oil output add to existing challenges of high debt and borrowing costs. The IMF revised down its 2024 growth forecast for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region to 2.7% from 3.4% in its October regional outlook. That would be an improvement from 1.9% growth in 2023. The downward revision was driven by conflicts in Sudan, the West Bank and Gaza, as well as oil production cuts by Gulf countries weighing on activity. "Assuming these factors ease in 2025, growth is forecast to strengthen to 4.2%," the IMF said.

Meta releases beefed-up AI models

Meta yesterday introduced an improved AI assistant built on new versions of its open source "Llama" large language model for powering the technology. Meta AI is smarter and faster due to advances in publicly available Llama 3, the tech titan said in a blog post. "The bottom line is we believe Meta AI is now the most intelligent AI assistant that you can freely use," Meta co-founder and chief executive Mark Zuckerberg said in a video posted on Instagram.

Israel in deadly Gaza strikes

● 11 bodies recovered ● West sanctions Iran

AFP
Jerusalem

Israel launched more deadly strikes on besieged Gaza yesterday as Western governments unveiled sweeping sanctions against Iran's military drone programme in response to the country's unprecedented attack on its arch enemy Israel.

Gaza's civil defence said yesterday it had recovered 11 more bodies in the southern city of Khan Yunis during the night.

Also bombed by Israel was the far-southern city of Rafah, where Gaza rescue teams recovered the corpses of eight family members, including five children and two women, from a single house, the civil defence service said.

A separate strike hit Rafah overnight, killing at least 10 people, relatives and neighbours told AFP as they searched for the remains of victims.

"All of a sudden, a missile hit them," said neighbour Abdeljabbar al-Arja, who spoke of finding the arms and feet of women and children.

World powers have been watching nervously since Israel vowed to retaliate against Iran for the weekend assault, with fears soaring that escalating tit-for-tat attacks could push the region towards wider war.

Further stoking tensions, Iran warned yesterday that if Israel struck Iranian atomic sites during its expected retaliation, Tehran would in turn target Israeli "nuclear facilities". **To Page 4**



A Palestinian boy carries a gas cooker as he walks amidst the debris of a destroyed building in the city of Nuseirat in the central Gaza Strip yesterday. **(AFP)**

Mideast on brink of 'full-scale regional conflict': UN chief

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres yesterday painted a dark picture of the situation in the Middle East, warning that spiralling tensions over the war in Gaza and Iran's attack on Israel could devolve into a "full-scale regional conflict."

Guterres also said Israel's military offensive had created a "humanitarian hellscape" for civilians trapped in the besieged Palestinian territory.

His speech came hours before a vote in the Security Council on a Palestinian bid for full UN membership - an initiative likely to fail, as the veto-wielding United States, Israel's main ally, has voiced its opposition.

"The Middle East is on a precipice. Recent days have seen a perilous escalation - in words and deeds," Guterres told a high-level Council meeting with several foreign ministers present, including from Jordan and Iran.

33,970 Palestinians killed so far

The health ministry in Gaza said yesterday that at least 33,970 people have been killed in the territory since Israel launched a military offensive.

Iran will make Israel 'regret' any reprisals

Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian yesterday warned that Tehran would make Israel "regret" any attack on his country in response to the Islamic republic's weekend barrage of missiles and drones.

Tehran's first-ever direct attack on Israel over the weekend came in the wake of a deadly attack on the Iranian consulate in Damascus, widely blamed on Israel. Nearly all of the projectiles were intercepted before reaching their targets.

"Iran's legitimate defence and counter measures have been concluded. Therefore, the terrorist Israeli regime must be compelled to stop any further military adventurism against our interests," the minister told the UN Security Council during a meeting on the Middle East.

"In case of any use of force by the Israeli regime, and violating our sovereignty, the Islamic Republic of Iran will not hesitate a bit to assert its inherent rights, to give a decisive and proper response to it, to make the regime regret its actions."

Israeli officials have not said when or where they would retaliate, but the country's military chief has vowed a response.

Amir-Abdollahian called Iran's actions "limited and proportionate," adding that until recently, Tehran had shown "considerable restraint."

US further restricts Iran delegation

The United States has imposed additional travel restrictions on the delegation of Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian while he visits New York for meetings at the United Nations, State Department deputy spokesperson Vedant Patel told reporters yesterday. The restrictions permit the delegation to move only within a two-block radius of UN headquarters, between the UN and Iran's mission and residence, and between the UN and the John F Kennedy Airport, Patel said.



Shura Council partakes in Arab Parliament meetings

The Shura Council participated yesterday in the meetings of the Permanent Committees of the Arab Parliament, which were held in Cairo ahead of the third general session of the fourth session of the third legislative term of the parliament, scheduled for Saturday. In this context, Sheikha bint Yousuf al-Jufairi, member of the Arab Parliament and member of the Committee on Social, Educational, Cultural, Women's, and Youth Affairs of the Arab Parliament, participated in the committee meeting. The meeting dealt with developments of the launch of the Arab Women's Parliamentary document and the social status report in the Arab world for 2023, and other topics related to community affairs in the Arab world. During the meeting, they also reviewed the draft vision of the Arab Parliament regarding the empowerment of Arab youth to contribute actively to development. **(QNA)**

Official

Amir sends cables of congratulations to president of Zimbabwe

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, His Highness the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani and HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani sent yesterday cables of congratulations to President of Zimbabwe Emmerson Mnangagwa on the anniversary of his country's Independence Day. **(QNA)**

Qatar affirms commitment to enhancing rights legislation

QNA
Geneva

Qatar reaffirmed its growing commitment to human rights, emphasising its legislative, legal, administrative, and other measures to enforce and develop these rights within the framework of comprehensive social development, noting that this interest is based on national references, foremost among them being Qatar National Vision 2030, the First National Development Strategy (2011-2016), and the Second National Development Strategy (2018-2022).

This came during Qatar's presentation of its 22nd and 23rd periodic reports to the 112th session of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in Geneva. The delegation of Qatar participating in the discussion was headed by Director of the Human Rights Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Turki bin Abdullah al-Mahmoud, and included several directors and experts from various gov-

ernment entities in the country. Al-Mahmoud said that the report presented to the committee was a culmination of consultative dialogue and co-operation in monitoring and implementing the convention across all concerned parties in Qatar. He noted that the report was prepared by the majority of government entities in the country through a national committee and a national working group tasked with preparing the report and responding to related inquiries.

He explained that Qatar has recently implemented significant legislative reforms, including amendments to the legal framework governing the rights of migrant labour, laws regarding property ownership for non-Qataris, the asylum law, domestic workers law, permanent residency law, and regulations governing the entry, exit, and residency of expatriates, as well as the establishment of the National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking under Cabinet decision no 15 of 2017.

This committee aims to coor-

dinate national efforts to monitor, prevent, and combat all forms of human trafficking, including preparing the national plan to combat human trafficking and publishing an annual report on the state's efforts to combat human trafficking. He affirmed the state's continued development of necessary plans and strategies to support and enhance women's roles in all fields, exemplified by the appointment of four women to the Shura Council, reflecting leadership's commitment to supporting women's contributions in all fields, particularly in the legislative body, and encouraging further progress toward enhancing women's full political participation in accordance with Article 34 of the Qatari Constitution, which guarantees equality among all citizens in rights and duties.

During the discussion, delegation members provided comprehensive responses to the committee's questions, highlighting the substantial progress made in all human rights legislation and the efforts to combat all forms of discrimination.

Shura speaker holds talks with French parliamentary delegation

QNA
Doha

HE the Speaker of the Shura Council, Hassan bin Abdullah al-Ghanem, met here yesterday with a delegation from the Senate of the French Republic, headed by Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and the Armed Forces in the French Senate Cedric Perrin, currently visiting Qatar.

During the meeting, they discussed a host of topics related to parliamentary co-operation relations between the two sides. They also exchanged views on a number

of topics of mutual interest. The meeting also touched on the humanitarian situation in Gaza, and the continuing aggression by Israeli forces against the Gaza Strip and the occupied Palestinian territories. HE the Speaker highlighted the efforts of Qatar, led by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, aimed at reaching a ceasefire.

Within this context, HE the Speaker emphasised the parliamentarians' leading role in influencing the political decision. He also urged the governments to take a decisive stance consistent with international legitimacy resolutions regarding the brutal massa-

ces committed by the occupation forces against defenceless civilians.

In turn, the French delegation praised Qatar's mediation efforts to end the war, as well as its regional and international role calling for resolving all disputes through dialogue and peaceful means. The delegation stressed that Qatar plays an important role as an impartial mediator to promote international consensus.

The meeting was attended by HE the Deputy Speaker of the Shura Council Hamda bint Hassan al-Sulaiti, a number of Shura council members and officials, and ambassador of France to Qatar Jean-Baptiste Faivre.



HE the Permanent Representative of Qatar to the UN Sheikha Alya Ahmed bin Saif al-Thani addressing the opening session yesterday through a recorded video.

Qatar 'a strong player to ensure gender equality globally'

By Shafeeq Alingal
Staff Reporter

“Qatar has been a strong player in the international efforts to ensure the implementation of gender equality, peace and security.” HE the Permanent Representative of Qatar to the United Nations (UN) Sheikha Alya Ahmed bin Saif al-Thani has noted.

Delivering a recorded video address at the opening session of Georgetown University in Qatar (GU-Q)'s Hiwaraat conference on 'Gender in Foreign Policy' yesterday, she stated Qatar is actively engaged in the negotiation and plans for the future while highlighting the country's efforts to achieve gender equality and empowerment of women in international level.

The conference, in the presence of diplomats, public officials, academics and students, discussed gender-informed approaches to

foreign policy and diplomacy, the role and risks of AI in policy and practice and gender aspects of foreign policy in conflict situations.

Androulla Kaminara, Distinguished-Diplomat-in-Residence, GU-Q, and former EU ambassador to Pakistan and Safwan Masri, dean, GU-Q, and Moza al-Hajri, student conference moderator, attended the opening session. HE Sheikha Alya noted that efforts have brought in changes in women's presence in international relations and diplomacy.

“There has been a dramatic change when it comes to the representation of women in diplomacy. The UN has played an important role in transformation,” she said noting that the rate of women's representation in the UN has gone up.

“A remarkable number of women have been appointed to the decision-making roles. Several resolutions were passed to

ensure gender equality and parity. The sustainable development goals can't be achieved without women's participation,” she said explaining that the adoption of various resolutions by the UN has resulted in the changes.

HE Sheikha Alya noted that June 24 of each year was declared by the UN as the International Day of Women in Diplomacy to ensure the participation of women in decision-making. “The day is celebrated to inspire the women,” she said.

HE Sheikha Alya explained that the adoption of the International Day to Protect Education from Attack marks a significant achievement in promoting and protecting girls' education. She also called for an immediate cease fire at Gaza saying that Qatar, with international partners, is taking up efforts to implement immediate ceasefire and ensure the delivery of basic services.

Bilateral talks held between Qatar and Japan in field of civil aviation



Bilateral talks were held between the civil aviation authorities of Qatar and Japan in Tokyo. The Qatari side was headed by In-Charge of Managing Qatar Civil Aviation Authority (QCAA) Mohamed bin Faleh al-Hajri, and the Japanese side by Director of Japan Civil Aviation Bureau Takahashi Yasuhiro. The talks resulted in positive outcomes, including an increase in transportation rights to Narita Airport in Tokyo, one of the main airports for passenger and cargo traffic, as seven passenger flights were added per week, bringing the total to 21 flights per week, along with the addition of 3 air cargo flights per week, which will help open new horizons of co-operation in the field of air transport and enhance economic activity and trade exchange between Qatar and Japan. The talks also included entering code-share arrangements between national carriers and carriers of other countries, discussing matters of common interest in the field of civil aviation and ways to develop bilateral relations between the two countries. **(QNA)**

Qatar set to host 5th meeting of SIFoCC

QNA
Doha

Qatar will host the fifth meeting of the Standing International Forum of Commercial Courts (SIFoCC). Scheduled on April 20 and 21 at Qatar University, this conference being held for the first time in the Middle East and North Africa. It marks a significant milestone for Qatar, as more than 170 guests from as many as 50 jurisdictions will convene. Notably, 70% of G20 countries are members of SIFoCC, ensuring a diverse representation across six continents. The previous edition of SIFoCC meetings were in London, New York, Singapore and Sydney, said the Qatar International Court and Dispute Resolution Centre (QICDRC); the host of the function.

“This assembly presents a

unique opportunity for productive discussions and collaborations aimed at advancing commercial dispute resolution practices and promoting the rule of law internationally,” said Faisal Rashid al-Sahouti, chief executive officer of QICDRC.

Founded in 2017 by, among others, Lord Thomas, former Lord Chief Justice of England and Wales (and himself a former judge of the Commercial Court in London), SIFoCC serves as a unique platform that brings together commercial courts from around the world to foster collaboration, share best practices, and advance the resolution of commercial disputes.

By facilitating dialogue and co-operation among its members, SIFoCC plays a pivotal role in promoting the rule of law and enhancing the business environment globally.

Through its initiatives, SIFoCC

strengthens the relationships between businesses and the legal framework within which they operate promoting a robust environment for commerce and investment worldwide.

The Qatar International Court and Dispute Resolution Centre (QICDRC) was established by Cabinet Decision No. 17 of 2012 in accordance with the provisions of Law No. 7 of 2005 (as amended) to be the final piece of Qatar's initiative to build a world-class international financial centre.

Designed to have international standards in dispute resolution, QICDRC is part of Qatar's strategy to attract international business and financial services to Qatar. QICDRC provides a modern, specialist civil and commercial court designed to hear cases quickly, economically and in front of internationally renowned, independent judges.

Sheikha Alya in New York meetings

HE the Permanent Representative of the State of Qatar to the United Nations Sheikha Alya Ahmad bin Saif al-Thani, met with President of the International Peace Institute Prince Zeid bin Ra'ad al-Husseini, at the headquarters of the permanent delegation in New York. During the meeting, HE the Permanent Representative of the State of Qatar to the United Nations renewed the State's continued support for the work of the institute to promote multilateral solutions and spread peace. For his part, the president of the International Peace Institute praised the leadership roles played by Qatar within the framework of international mediation. **(QNA)**



HE the Permanent Representative of Qatar to the United Nations Sheikha Alya Ahmad bin Saif al-Thani met with Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General to Libya Abdoulaye Bathily, at the permanent delegation's headquarters in New York. The meeting dealt with the latest developments in Libya, and ways to support the work of the United Nations mission to achieve lasting peace and stability in the country. **(QNA)**

Chief of staff meets US commander



HE the Chief of Staff of Qatar Armed Forces Staff Lieutenant-General (Pilot) Salem bin Hamad bin Aqeel al-Nabit met with Commander of US Central Command Lieutenant-General Michael Corella. The meeting dealt with discussing military co-operation and the means to enhance them. The meeting was attended by a number of ranking officers of Qatar Armed Forces. (QNA)

Minister meets president of Qatar International Court



HE the Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Ibrahim bin Ali al-Mohannadi met yesterday with President of Qatar International Court (QICDRC) Lord John Thomas. During the meeting, the two sides discussed legal relations between the Ministry of Justice and Qatar International Court, and ways to support legal and legislative co-operation between the competent authorities and centres related to the legal sector. (QNA)

Over 500 experts to attend Autonomous e-Mobility Forum

By **Joey Aguilar**
Staff Reporter

The Autonomous e-Mobility (AEMOB) Forum, set to take place from April 30 to May 2 at the Qatar National Convention Centre (QNCC), will bring together more than 500 industry experts, policymakers, and technology innovators from over 20 countries.

The event, hosted by the Ministry of Transport (MoT), seeks to spark discussions and initiatives concerning the convergence of driverless e-Mobility and sustainability – an increasingly vital global concern. “E-Mobility in the wider context of sustainability and energy diversification efforts has been central to governments’ and industry considerations for several years. From the onset, the AEMOB Forum in Qatar has been designed as a first-mover in creating a multilateral platform for constructive exchange in a sustainability innovation space that

is of utmost global importance,” HE the Minister of Transport Jassim bin Saif al-Sulaiti said in a statement, as he highlighted the forum’s role as a significant platform for international collaboration in addressing pressing sustainability challenges.

According to the organisers, the three-day forum will witness participants engaging in keynote addresses, panel discussions, and breakout sessions designed to explore the technological, policy, and research dimensions of autonomous e-Mobility.

The event also aims to facilitate knowledge-sharing, foster international relationships, and pave the way for the practical implementation of driverless e-Mobility solutions. Key speakers at the forum include prominent figures such as Mohamed Jaidah, group executive director of Jaidah Group; Ahmed al-Ansari, executive committee member of the Autonomous E-Mobility Forum; and Kai Keller, initiative lead at the World Economic Fo-



Ahmed al-Ansari

rum, among others. Organisers noted that these thought leaders will offer diverse perspectives on sustainable mobility’s future and autonomous technologies’ role in driving innovation. The forum will feature a two-day conference showcasing keynote sessions and panel discussions led by experts from around the globe. A one-day eco-system tour will see partici-



Kai Keller

pants visiting select locations in Qatar associated with sustainable transport initiatives. The event will culminate in a gala dinner and awards ceremony, celebrating outstanding contributions to autonomous e-Mobility.

Among the awards to be presented is the AEMOB Most Promising Start-Up Award, recognising innovative start-ups driving



Mohamed Jaidah

sustainability in the e-Mobility Award will honour individuals making significant contributions to sustainable innovation, while the AEMOB Tech Innovation Excellence Award will highlight groundbreaking technological advancements in the field.

MoT, in partnership with Mowasalat (Karwa) and Qatar



HE Jassim bin Saif al-Sulaiti

Foundation (QF), recently held a week-long demonstration of the country’s inaugural self-driving electric bus (e-Bus) at Education City. Beyond presenting cutting-edge technology and sustainable transport options, the event highlighted Qatar’s commitment to innovation, safety, and environmental stewardship in its transportation industry.

Qatar takes part in NAC-ICI Meeting

Qatar took part in a meeting between the North Atlantic Council (NAC) and the countries of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI). Jordan, Iraq and Kuwait also participated in the meeting. Ambassador of Qatar to the European Union and Nato, Abdulaziz bin Ahmed al-Malki presided over Qatar’s delegation to the meeting.

Delivering Qatar’s statement before the meeting, al-Malki said that the situation in the Middle

East, especially in Gaza and the Red Sea, requires collective efforts to maintain peace and security, especially at this critical time. He pointed to Qatar’s unwavering efforts to bring the war on the Gaza Strip to an end since this war erupted, highlighting Doha’s commitment to supporting all regional and international efforts to achieve regional and international security and stability.

He added that there is no possibility for lasting peace in the

region without a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that includes ending the Israeli occupation and establishing an independent Palestinian state, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative. He said that collective and unified efforts to maintain global peace and security are desperately needed, especially amid worsening threats and challenges across various parts of the world. (QNA)

Cyber Eco among four projects selected for WSIS 2024 Award

QNA
Doha

The National Cyber Security Agency announced that its Cyber Eco project has been selected as one of the top 4 projects to receive the Champions Award at the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) 2024 under the Building Confidence and Security in the Use of ICT category. The project garnered the highest public votes among the participating projects.

Competing against around 190 countries for the WSIS Champions Award, organised by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), a total of 1,049 projects were submitted, with 360 projects nominated for voting, and 59 projects winning across 18 champion categories.

This achievement reflects the efforts of the National Cyber Security Agency in Qatar to enhance cybersecurity and digital safety across all segments of society. The Cyber Eco project, focusing on field visits to schools, is one of the agency’s important initiatives aimed at raising awareness among students at various educational levels about cybersecurity and digital safety. It aims to enhance their capabilities for safe and effective use of the Internet, telecommunications, and modern information technologies.

On this occasion, Dalal Abdulaziz al-Aqeidi, who is director of national cyber excellence at the agency, emphasised the significance of this award as one of the most important global awards in the information and communication technology sector. The selection of the Cyber

Eco project is a recognition of the agency’s role in promoting cybersecurity stability and enhancing digital security indicators in the country.

The Cyber Eco project is a pioneering initiative aimed at enhancing cybersecurity and digital safety by providing educational training content to students in various schools through field visits, activities, and flexible events that resonate well with students, moving away from traditional teaching methods and content. It targets students in government and private schools at various educational levels, along with training teachers and educational staff, and involving parents in efforts to enhance digital safety, with the goal of achieving a safe digital environment for children, adolescents, and youth in Qatar.

Robotics Championship



The 16th edition of the Schools Robotics Championship, organised by Qatar Scientific Club under the Ministry of Sports and Youth, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, with support from the Social and Sport Contribution Fund (DAAM), will run from April 21 to 23. The competitions at the Lusail multipurpose sports hall, will see the participation of more than 2,000 students, from over 200 government and private schools (file picture).

QARS participates in commemorating World Amateur Radio Day

The Qatar Amateur Radio Society (QARS) participated in the celebration of the World Amateur Radio Day, which falls on April 18 of each year. On this occasion, a special celebration was held, organised by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), which included a video conference meeting for a number of amateur radio societies from various

countries of the world, followed by a call to four stations through the special transmitter for amateur radio broadcasting via the Qatari satellite EshailSat 2. On behalf of QARS, Vice-President of the Board of Directors of QARS Dr Ahmed Hamad al-Mohannadi participated in the celebration of World Amateur Radio Day. Celebrating this occasion, the

International Amateur Radio Union (IARU) decided to hold a special event with its member associations for two weeks lasting until April 25. Stations from all over the world, including a station affiliated with QARS will conduct special events and bilateral radio communications to draw attention to the H54A campaign.

QNL to organise forum on Heritage Management

By **Tawfik Lamari**
Staff Reporter

The Qatar National Library (QNL) has announced on its website that it is hosting the “Third Forum on Heritage Management: Digital Access and Artificial Intelligence Applications”, on September 15-16, 2024.

The forum aims to explore this important aspect of the digital transformation of archival materials and exchange experiences and ideas about it.

Traditional archives around the world cover huge and increasing amounts of historical data and information, which poses great challenges in preserving them

and making them available for sustainable use. Digital technology offers important opportunities to improve the management and accessibility of archives.

The forum seeks to achieve the following objectives: To introduce the reality of digital documentary heritage within the broader international context and in Arab countries; Familiarise participants with models of digital repositories for documentary heritage in governmental and private institutions within the cultural sector in Arab countries; Explore future projects aimed at enhancing the reality of digital heritage in Arab countries as well as to build a collaborative community to support the digitisa-



tion of documentary heritage and facilitate its accessibility for researchers. The topics will revolve around exploring the paths of digital transformation and their

potential implications for the future of traditional archives, examining models of digital repositories housing heritage resources within libraries, cultural institu-

tions and heritage organisations. In addition, it will address the challenges posed by the digital era to heritage: identifying risks, devising overcoming mechanisms, and proposing solutions.

It will also discuss the requirements to enhance the digitisation of heritage in Arab countries and outlining future perspectives and in enhancing digital information management for improved usability and accessibility of archives. It will also delve into the concept and reality of digital heritage, considering both theoretical and practical aspects in the context of the artificial intelligence (AI).

Qatar National Library has invited those wishing to participate to submit the abstract of their

contribution not exceeding one page by May 12, 2024.

Participants will be notified of the acceptance of their abstracts no later than June 23, 2024. Research proposals are accepted in both Arabic and English. For more details visit the following website: <https://events.qnl.qa/event/WLk2X/EN>

The forum targets heritage and historical sources officials, directors of the archives, documents and rare sources sectors in various ministries, government and private institutions, officials of digitising documentary heritage in libraries and cultural institutions, and experts in archiving heritage materials and rare documents.



PM: Qatar evaluating mediation to end war in Gaza, rejects attacks on its role

QNA
Doha

HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani reiterated Qatar's rejection of any defamation regarding its role in ongoing mediation efforts to end the war in Gaza, indicating that Qatar is assessing that mediation. During a joint press conference with Minister of Foreign Affairs of Türkiye Hakan Fidan, HE the PM said that negotiations for a ceasefire and the release of prisoners and hostages are at a sensitive and critical stage, and that Qatar has been working since day one of the war to stop it and release the hostages.

He added that Qatar has seen the misuse of this mediation and its employment for narrow political interests, adding that this in turn has necessitated a comprehensive evaluation by Qatar of its role.

Qatar engaged in the mediation process out of humanitarian, national, and patriotic considerations to protect the Palestinians, he said. HE the PM, however, lamented the political exploitation by some politicians with narrow interests, marketing their electoral campaigns through the defamation of Qatar's role.

He added that it was unacceptable and damaging for such statements to be made behind closed doors and publicly as they do not contribute positively and stressed Qatar's commitment to its role on humanitarian grounds, but noted that there are limitations to this role and the impact it can make, noting that Qatar will take the appropriate decision at the right time regarding this.

HE Sheikh Mohamed said during the press conference that the meeting with Turkish FM Fidan discussed strategic partnership and bilateral relations between the two countries, confirming that this visit is part of continuous co-ordination between the two sides on regional and international issues, as it comes amidst escalating tensions and sensitive conditions in the region.

He added that the visit provided an opportunity for detailed consultations on regional escalation, emphasising the need for parties to resort to de-escalation, reason, dialogue, and logical resolution of issues rather than resorting to the language of arms and violence. He said that Qatar has conducted intensive communications recently with



HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani addressing a joint press conference with Minister of Foreign Affairs of Türkiye Hakan Fidan.

all parties to try to contain the escalation, noting that co-ordination between Qatar and Türkiye is ongoing and continuous, expressing appreciation for the positions adopted by Türkiye, especially in supporting the Palestinian brothers.

Humanitarian crisis

HE the PM added that he discussed with the Turkish minister of foreign affairs the latest developments of the war in Gaza, the deteriorating humanitarian crisis, and the ongoing Israeli actions and assaults against the Palestinian people, HE the Prime Minister has called upon the international community to fulfil its obligations and intervene decisively to quell the aggression.

Speaking at a joint press conference alongside the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs, HE Sheikh Mohamed underscored the persistent urgency of addressing the Palestinian plight, emphasising the imperative of a just and comprehensive solution. He reiterated the necessity of establishing a Palestinian state based on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its rightful capital, in accordance with international resolutions.

Highlighting ongoing humanitarian efforts, he outlined discussions with the Turkish FM on relief initiatives for brothers in



“Negotiations for a ceasefire and the release of prisoners and hostages are at a sensitive and critical stage. Qatar has been working since day one of the war to stop it and release the hostages.”

— HE Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani

Gaza, as well as negotiations for a ceasefire and the release of prisoners and hostages. Emphasising Qatar's unwavering commitment to resolving the crisis and alleviating human suffering, he affirmed continued co-ordination with sisterly and friendly nations.

Expressing gratitude for Türkiye's pivotal role in the region, HE Sheikh Mohamed stressed the importance of sustained collaboration to achieve positive outcomes for all stakeholders.

Reflecting on Qatar's mediation efforts, the foreign minister acknowledged the significant challenges encountered in bridging the gap between conflicting parties. He highlighted Qatar's close partnership with the United States and Egypt in formulating constructive proposals, while emphasising the inherent limitations of the mediator's role.

Responding to journalists' questions regarding the recent

escalation, he disclosed ongoing diplomatic dialogue with both Iran and the United States, underscoring Qatar's proactive engagement prior to the outbreak of hostilities. He reiterated Qatar's persistent warnings about the destabilizing impact of the conflict on the wider region.

Rising tensions

Tensions are rising after the Israeli attack on the Iranian consulate in Damascus and the subsequent loss of Iranian officials, HE Sheikh Mohamed said calling on all parties involved to exercise restraint and prevent the situation from spiralling out of control. Addressing the alarming developments, HE the PM emphasised the urgent need for de-escalation, highlighting that, thus far, statements from both sides suggest a reluctance to escalate the conflict further.

Furthermore, he underscored the critical importance of com-



munication during this critical period, revealing ongoing dialogue between His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani and leaders of the Gulf Co-operation Council, Arab nations, and regional stakeholders. This concerted effort aims to navigate through the crisis and mitigate its potential fallout.

HE the PM echoed these sentiments, stressing the imperative of cohesive leadership and unified positions to avert the looming risks and perils that could engulf the entire region. With the spectre of wider conflict looming, concerted efforts to halt hostilities represent the most viable path towards de-escalation and peace.

For his part, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Türkiye affirmed his country's support for Qatar's massive efforts to achieve a ceasefire and bring peace to the Gaza Strip. During the press conference, FM Fidan stressed Türkiye's unwavering support for the establishment of an independent, sovereign Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital on the 1967 borders, and its contribution to achieve peace and make the Palestinian people access to their rights.

He added that the recent events in the region reinforce the importance of achieving unity among Palestinians and reaching just and lasting peace. The Turkish FM added that there is a joint co-ordination mechanism between Qatar and Türkiye on the Palestinian cause at the political and institutional levels, especially with regard to ceasefire efforts, the delivery of humanitarian aid, and achieving stability in the Gaza Strip.

He pointed out that his current visit to Qatar represented an opportunity to evaluate the

joint future steps to support the Palestinian cause and heal the wounds of the Palestinian people, warning that the continuation of crimes committed by Israel in the Gaza Strip poses great risks that may lead to a regional conflict in the region. The recent escalation witnessed in the region proved that there was a possibility for a regional war, he added.

The Turkish FM stressed the need for Israel to implement the UN Security Council resolution regarding the ceasefire in Gaza, take the temporary measures approved by the International Court of Justice, achieve an urgent ceasefire and bring in humanitarian aid, in preparation for work on implementing the steps aimed at a two-state solution.

Qatari-Turkish ties

On the Qatari-Turkish relations, FM Fidan said that relations between the two countries have reached a high level during the past years, noting the institutional development of Qatari and Turkish relations. There is a strategic goal for both sides to have the volume of trade exchange reach \$5bn, he said, highlighting that the current visit tackled the possibility of further increasing joint co-operation between the two countries in the field of investment, tourism and energy.

The Turkish FM pointed out that the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye ratified last February the trade and economic partnership agreement between Türkiye and Qatar, explaining that this would accelerate the achievement of goals in economic and trade relations between the two countries.

Fidan noted his country's keenness to strengthen commercial and institutional relations with Qatar and the GCC countries.

Heavy rainfall in Yemen



A man inspects a car flipped by floods caused by heavy rain in the port city of Mukalla, Yemen, yesterday.

Flood recovery at gradual pace as Dubai airport, roads still deluged

AFP
Dubai

Dubai airport, one of the world's busiest, witnessed major disruption for a third straight day yesterday after the heaviest rains on record drenched the desert United Arab Emirates. Emirates, Dubai's state-owned flagship airline, and sister carrier flydubai resumed check-ins after telling passengers to stay away on Wednesday, when thousands of delayed passengers clogged the airport.

The airport, which handles more international passengers than any other, hopes to resume "something approaching normality" within 24 hours, Dubai Airports CEO Paul Griffiths told AFP.

Some 1,244 flights were cancelled and 41 diverted on Tuesday and Wednesday, after torrential rains flooded the Middle East financial centre including its homes, malls and offices, and highways.

Traffic congestion remained severe on Thursday, two days after the storms, with at least one major road completely blocked by water and multiple junctions cut off by flooding.

Climate experts say the rains, the UAE's heaviest since records began 75 years ago, are consistent with changes caused by global warming. "There's no news here," Karim Elgendy, associate Director at the Buro Happold engineering consultancy and associate fellow at Britain's Chatham House think tank, told AFP. "We are expecting an increase in variability of rainfall, which means more extreme events, more drought and an increase in intensity of rainfall when it does rain."

Dubai airport has witnessed



Residents move their belongings on a kayak at a flooded residential complex following heavy rainfall, in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, yesterday.

chaotic scenes with crowds of marooned travellers clamouring for information about their flights. Even as Emirates and flydubai resumed check-ins, more than 200 departures were listed as delayed or cancelled on the airport's website. Griffiths said it was "challenging" to get the airport fully functional, with supplies and staff also held up on flooded roads.

"Getting supplies through, people and all of the necessary things to the airport to help the schedule recover, was a massive challenge because all of the roads were blocked," he said in an interview.

"We just hope that the level of customer care that we've been able to provide will go some way to mitigate the impacts that we had to customers. But obviously we're deeply distressed by all of the disruption and concern that we've created," he added.

One elderly couple's 14-hour flight from Brisbane took 24 hours on Tuesday after it was diverted, and they were then unable to reach their hotel because of the flooding. "It's just the start of our holiday and I feel like going home - and I don't know how to do that either," Julie, 72, told AFP through tears.

"When they landed the plane on this airfield that was deserted, there was no terminal, there were no other planes and I thought we had been hijacked by terrorists," she added, without giving her surname.

Although schools and public sector offices have been closed until next week, traffic returned to the roads with some motorists, finding their route blocked, driving the wrong way down highways. Supermarkets had empty shelves as deliveries failed to arrive, and retail staff reported having to stay overnight or sleep at hotels because they could not get home. "We're working but the problem is we're not receiving chicken," said one employee at a chicken restaurant that had no chicken or fries on display. "The delivery cannot come here because of the flood."

In the Arjan district, a man used a canoe to paddle passengers across a flooded street. With taxis hard to book and hail, private motorists were stopping at queues of people and offering rides for high prices. British visitor Chris Moss, 30, was one of those looking for a cab as he tried to reach the airport and locate his lost luggage.

Israel in deadly Gaza strike

From Page 1

And more than six months into the bloodiest ever Gaza war, the Israeli army said it had bombed dozens of targets in the territory.

The Islamic republic last weekend carried out its first ever attack to directly target its regional foe but Israel, backed by its allies, intercepted most of the 300 missiles and drones, and suffered no deaths.

Iran's attack was retaliation for an April 1 air strike, widely blamed on Israel, which levelled its consulate in Damascus and killed seven Revolutionary Guards.

The United States, Israel's top ally and military supplier, has made clear it won't join any Israeli attack on Iran, instead unveiling new sanctions yesterday against the country's military drone programme.

"We are holding Iran accountable" US President Joe Biden said, adding that he had discussed ramping up economic pressure on

Tehran with other leaders at a G7 meeting in Capri, Italy.

The US sanctions target 16 people and two entities involved in producing the drones used in Iran's attack, as well as companies providing parts to the country's steel industry.

Washington added that the United Kingdom would impose sanctions on Iran's drone and missile programme, which was also the target of promised sanctions announced by the European Union on Wednesday.

US broadcaster ABC News, citing three unnamed Israeli sources, reported that Israel had "prepared for and then aborted retaliatory strikes against Iran on at least two nights this past week".

A high-ranking Iranian general warned Israel against attacking Iran's nuclear sites.

If this did happen, then "the nuclear facilities of the regime will be targeted and operated upon with advanced weaponry," said Ahmad Haghtalab, the head of

Iran's Nuclear Protection and Security Corps.

However, Tehran has also sought to calm tensions through indirect diplomatic channels with its other major adversary, the United States.

Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, in New York for a UN meeting, said Iran had "tried to tell the United States clearly" that it is "not looking for the expansion of tension in the region".

Israel has faced growing global opposition to the relentless war that has reduced vast areas of Gaza to rubble, while its 2.4mn people have suffered under an Israeli siege that has blocked most water, food, medicines and other vital supplies.

Yet Iran's attack on Israel "is succeeding in taking the focus, particularly the media spotlight, off of the Gaza famine and the Gaza war," Roxane Farmanfarmaian, a Middle East and North Africa specialist at Cambridge University, told AFP.



Eid celebrations

Hundreds attend Indonesia embassy event



In celebration of Eid al-Fitr, the Indonesian embassy in Doha held a community gathering on April 12 with the title "Halal bil Halal: Silaturrahim of Indonesian Community in Qatar". Nearly 800 Indonesian expatriates attended the activity, led by ambassador Ridwan Hassan and his wife, Lita Hassan. In his speech, Hassan expressed his appreciation to the Indonesian community who have been involved in building excellent relations between Indonesia and Qatar. The ambassador cited the need for greater

synergy between the community and the Indonesian embassy to enhance the bilateral co-operation between Indonesia and Qatar. "I always say that the Indonesian people are an important element in Indonesia's diplomatic work in Qatar," Hassan said. Halal bil Halal is a form of Indonesian tradition celebrating Eid al-Fitr. During this event, Indonesian people often visit family and relatives to forgive and pray for each other. "Even though we live far from Indonesia, we would like to maintain this tradition," said Ali Murtado, head of Division for Socio-Culture

Co-operation at the embassy. Traditional Indonesian food such as satay, yellow rice, mixed ice and various other Indonesian traditional snacks was provided at the event. Not only Indonesian citizens, several foreign citizens who have become friends of Indonesia also attended the Halal bil Halal activity. "We express our gratitude to the Qatari government for providing the best service to the Indonesian community in Qatar," said the envoy.



"Halal bil Halal: Silaturrahim of Indonesian Community in Qatar" at the embassy recently.

Qatar Parakkadavu Welfare Association organises trip



Qatar Parakkadavu Welfare Association (QPWA) hosted an Eid trip. Flagged off by president M P Mohamed, the trip was attended by a large number of members and their families. Various games were played between Al Janoub and Al Bayt teams with the latter emerging winner on the basis of total points. Al Bayt captain Ashraf K received the trophy from Mohamed. Anchor Shemeem Usman and programme co-ordinator Hashim Abdulla conducted the cultural performances and games. General secretary Ismail V P welcomed the gathering and treasurer Abbas T P proposed a vote of thanks.

Bihar Social Forum-Qatar hosts get-together



Bihar Social Forum-Qatar (BSF) organised an Eid & Holi get-together featuring dance, music and mimicry performances. Indian ambassador Vipul, Indian embassy first secretary Dr Vaibhav Tandale, Indian Community Benevolent Forum vice-president Deepak Shetty and community leaders including Jawed Ahmed, Gautam Singh, Shahabuddin Ahmad and Dr Nadeem Jilani were present. The event was organised by BSF founder Irfan Ansari, president Satyendra Pathak, management committee members Dilnawaz Ali, Mohamed Azharuddin, Abdul Rahman, Imteyaz Alam, Mazharul Haque, Saddam Ansari, Imam Hussain, Arvind Yadav, and Ayaz Ali Khan.

ICBF bids farewell to key official

The Indian Community Benevolent Forum (ICBF) organised a farewell for its treasurer and domestic workers' welfare head Kuldeep Kour Bahl who is leaving Doha to join her family in Dubai.

Indian ambassador Vipul, ICBF president Shanavas Bawa, vice-president Deepak Shetty, Indian Cultural Centre president A P Manikantan, Indian Sports Centre president E P Abdulrahman, ICBF advisory council chairman S A M Basheer, former presidents Nilangshu Dey and Ziad Usman and senior community leaders Harish Kanjani and K S Prasad lauded



her enriching journey with ICBF over the past three-and-a-half years, expressing gratitude for the opportunity to serve the community. She was honoured with mementos by ICBF managing committee, associated

organisations, and friends. Managing committee members Zareena Ahad, Abdul Raouf Kondotty, Shankar Goud, Sameer Ahmed, and Kulwinder Singh co-ordinated the function and secretary Mohamed Kunhi proposed a vote of thanks.



Envoy interacts with Indian fishermen community in Qatar

Indian ambassador Vipul interacted with Indian fishermen working in Qatar, during an Eid al-Fitr event organised by Indian Community Benevolent Forum (ICBF), Indian Cultural Centre and Qatar Tamizhar Sangam (QTS).

The event brought together about 160 fishermen as well as many community members and guests. A total of 250 food kits were distributed to the fishermen on the occasion, providing vital support to those in need.

Ambassador Vipul, Dr Vaibhav, first secretary, Indian embassy alongside ICBF officials and other distinguished guests, attended the event.

In his speech, ambassador Vipul underscored the significance of the food kits distributed to the fishermen.

The highlight of the event was the interaction between the ambassador and the fishermen, as



Indian ambassador Vipul speaking at the event.

well as the symbolic handover of the kits. The event was co-ordinated

by ICBF and QTS managing committee members, along with community volunteers.



ANGER

China accuses US of hypocrisy over Biden claims

Beijing yesterday accused the US of hypocrisy in response to accusations by President Joe Biden that China is "xenophobic" and "cheating" on trade. "I would like to ask him: are you talking about China or the US itself?" foreign ministry spokesman Lin Jian said. In a speech Wednesday to union members, Biden called for a hike in steel tariffs on China, accusing it of cheating as he courted blue-collar voters on an election campaign trip to the battleground state of Pennsylvania. "They're not competing, they're cheating. They're cheating and we've seen the damage here in America," Biden said at the United Steelworkers union headquarters in Pittsburgh.

RULING

Japan court denies fishing rights to Ainu people

A court in Japan dismissed a bid by Ainu Indigenous people to reclaim rights over river fishing for salmon, an official said yesterday. It was the first court decision on Indigenous rights related to Ainu people. Ainu history includes decades of discrimination and forced assimilation, and Japan did not legally recognise them as Indigenous people until 2019. Japan's fishery resources protection law in principle bars people from catching salmon in rivers regardless of their ethnicity. The plaintiffs said years of established tradition in parts of a river on Japan's northern island of Hokkaido should make them exempt.

LAW AND ORDER

Australian police solve cocaine on beach mystery

Australian police have arrested a man they allege was behind a failed drug import plot that resulted in mysterious cocaine bricks washing up on east coast beaches for months. A 36-year-old Queensland man is allegedly the head of a domestic crime network and played a key role in the collection and distribution of tonnes of cocaine across the country, Australian Federal Police said yesterday. But the man's criminal actions unravelled when 900kgs of cocaine was unable to be collected at sea. About 256kgs of that product washed up in bricks on the shores of popular beaches from late 2023. The man was arrested on Wednesday.

MEMORABILIA

Princess Diana's dresses on display ahead of auction

Shoulder-padded, daffodil yellow and accented with gleaming gold buttons - a very of-its-time suit Princess Diana wore during her 1989 trip to Hong Kong is now among six outfits on display in the former British colony. The collection of dresses, shoes and handbags - some of which are familiar fashion moments from the Princess of Wales - is part of a 12-day exhibit at a Hong Kong mall which launched yesterday. They will then be on display in Ireland at another exhibit before going on auction on June 27. The yellow suit, designed by Catherine Walker, is estimated to fetch up to \$50,000 at the auction block.



Indonesian President Joko Widodo (right) meets China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi (second right) at the Merdeka Palace in Jakarta.

Beijing, Jakarta want regional peace, stability: China minister

Reuters
Jakarta

China and Indonesia have pledged to strengthen economic ties and maintain peace and stability in the region, China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi said yesterday after a meeting with his Indonesian counterpart, Retno Marsudi, in Jakarta.

Wang also called for all parties in the Gaza conflict to exercise restraint, and said the US should support a United Nations resolution for a ceasefire in Gaza.

"Both ministers expressed resentment over the humanitarian disaster due to the Palestine-Israel conflict. We agree that the UN Security Council resolution on a ceasefire must be fully implemented and without any condition," Wang said after the meeting, in

remarks that were translated into Indonesian. Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi said she hoped China would "would use its influence to prevent escalation" in Gaza, emphasising the need for a two-state solution.

Indonesia and China, its largest trading and investment partner, are seeking to further strengthen economic ties through deepened investment in infrastructure, downstreaming, food sustainability and Indonesia's energy transition, Retno said.

Chinese investment in Indonesia reached more than \$7.4bn last year, she added.

Wang is scheduled to attend the China-Indonesia High-Level Dialogue Co-operation Mechanism meeting with several senior Indonesian ministers in Labuan Bajo today to discuss further co-operation in more detail.

During the bilateral meeting both countries pledged to maintain peace in the Indo-Pacific region, with Yang saying he expected that negotiations on the code of conduct on the South China Sea could be accelerated.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) and China have for years been trying to create a framework to negotiate a code of conduct, a plan dating as far back as 2002. But progress has been slow despite commitments by all parties to advance and expedite the process. Wang also met Indonesia's outgoing President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo, discussing further economic partnerships, including possible investments in the transportation sector in the country's new capital and the petrochemical industry in North Kalimantan province, Retno said, without elaborating.

Thousands evacuated as volcano erupts in Indonesia, sparks tsunami threat alert

AFP
Manado, Indonesia

Indonesian rescuers raced to evacuate thousands of people yesterday after a volcano erupted five times, forcing authorities to close a nearby airport and issue a warning that the crater collapsing into the sea could cause a tsunami.

Mount Ruang's crater flamed with lava against a backdrop of lightning bolts overnight after eruptions pushed an ash column more than a mile into the sky and forced authorities to raise their alert to the highest level of a four-tiered system.

Taka, a local fisherman, was at sea helping people to safety by boat when the crater unleashed a fiery orange column.

"There was a mix of fire and rocks. Lava flowed in various directions," he said.

The volcano sits on a remote island in Indonesia's outermost region and has a peak 725 metres above sea level. It was still billowing a column of smoke up to 800 metres high yesterday morning, officials said.

Houses on Tagulandang, another remote island nearby, were riddled with holes from falling volcanic rocks yesterday, rescuers said, and residents were preparing to leave at least temporarily.

"The road condition... is covered by volcanic material," rescuer Ikram Al Ulah said from the Tagu-

landang seaport.

"Many people are still wandering around. Maybe to evacuate precious goods from their house."

There were no reports of deaths or injuries but authorities said they were rushing to evacuate more than 11,000 residents from the area around Tagulandang, home to about 20,000 people.

Tourists and residents were warned to remain outside a 6km exclusion zone.

Some residents were already trying to flee in a panic, according to officials.

"People evacuated on their own... due to the volcano's eruption and small rocks that fell," local search and rescue agency official Jandry Paendong said in a statement yesterday.

"The people scattered to find evacuation routes."

He said 20 staff were helping evacuate residents along the coastline near the volcano on rubber boats.

Authorities also evacuated a prison on Tagulandang, ferrying 17 inmates along with 11 officials and 19 residents by boat to Likupang seaport in northern Sulawesi island, according to Ikram.

More than 800 people were initially taken from Ruang to Tagulandang after the first eruptions overnight Tuesday, before further eruptions on Wednesday prompted evacuations from that wider zone.

Those displaced gathered at temporary shelters on Tagulan-

dang and were given mats, blankets and masks by authorities.

The navy sent a warship to deliver aid and help the evacuation effort, it said yesterday, while North Sulawesi police sent dozens of officers.

The warship evacuated 195 people from Tagulandang to Bitung, a coastal city in North Sulawesi, yesterday evening, a navy spokesperson said.

Authorities also warned of a possible tsunami as a result of the eruptions.

"The communities in Tagulandang island (need) to be on alert for... (a) tsunami caused by the collapse of the volcano's body into the sea," volcanology agency head Hendra Gunawan said in a statement.

The authorities' fears were compounded by previous experience.

The crater of Mount Anak Krakatoa between Java and Sumatra islands partly collapsed in 2018 when a major eruption sent huge chunks of the volcano sliding into the ocean, triggering a tsunami that killed more than 400 people and injured thousands.

Indonesia, a vast archipelago nation, experiences frequent seismic and volcanic activity due to its position on the Pacific "Ring of Fire".

Mount Ruang's eruption led to the closure of Sam Ratulangi International Airport in Manado city, located more than 100kms from the volcano, until midnight yesterday.

Stabbed bishop forgives attacker

A Sydney bishop brutally stabbed during a live-streamed sermon yesterday said he is recovering and forgives his attacker, declaring: "You are my son."

Bishop Mar Mari Emmanuel was slashed in the head and chest by a 16-year-old suspect on Monday, sparking a riot by followers in western Sydney.

"I am doing fine, recovering very quickly," said the bishop. Emmanuel has an online following of almost 200,000. "There is no need to be worried or concerned," the bishop said in a YouTube video released yesterday, with audio of his voice accompanied by a photo of him in vestments.

"I forgive whoever has done this act and I say to him: You are my son, I love you and I will always pray for you. And whoever sent you to do this, I forgive them as well."

The teenage suspect was taken to a Sydney hospital after the attack.



New Zealand's Prime Minister Christopher Luxon (left) talks with Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos at the Malakanang presidential palace in Manila yesterday.

Philippines, New Zealand to deepen defence co-operation

Reuters
Manila

Philippines President Ferdinand Marcos Jr and New Zealand Prime Minister Christopher Luxon yesterday agreed to deepen defence co-operation and expressed serious concern over the South China Sea, where the Philippines and China have had maritime run-ins.

China claims almost the entire South China Sea, a conduit for more than \$3tn in annual ship commerce.

The Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei have competing claims over some parts of the South China Sea.

Marcos and Luxon also "recognised the importance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait", according to a joint statement.

The Philippines and New Zealand will elevate their relations to

a "comprehensive partnership" in 2026, Luxon told a joint press conference. The countries also committed to concluding a Status of Visiting Forces Agreement, allowing joint military exercises and humanitarian missions.

Earlier the Philippines foreign ministry said Manila's decision to ramp up ties with Japan and the US at a recent summit was a "sovereign choice" for the country. The ministry made the remarks in response to China's comments opposing the trilateral meeting.

US President Joe Biden hosted President Marcos and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida in Washington last week where the three leaders jointly expressed their "serious concerns" over China's actions in the South China Sea. The Philippine foreign ministry said the trilateral grouping would promote peace and economic growth in the Indo-Pacific and should not be considered a threat.

Solomons' PM contender vows to abolish China security pact

AFP
Honiara

A leading contender to become the Solomon Islands' next prime minister has vowed to rip up a security pact with China, as the Pacific nation began counting votes yesterday in a pivotal general election.

The unfolding contest has cast the spotlight on China's efforts to stamp its mark on the South Pacific, and has been pitched in part as a referendum on Beijing's growing influence in the country.

Prominent opposition figure Peter Kenilorea further underlined the

stakes by pledging to scrap a contentious security pact inked with China in 2022.

"If we are in government, we will abolish the security treaty," leadership aspirant Kenilorea said from his village base on the island of Malaita.

"We don't think that it's beneficial to the Solomon Islands," the former top diplomat said.

Incumbent Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare has championed deeper ties with Beijing since coming to power in 2019.

He has praised Chinese aid, trade and investment as the key to lifting living standards in one of the poorest nations in the world.

The centrepiece of Sogavare's

embrace was a 2022 security pact that has seen rotating teams of Chinese police deployed in the archipelago.

The US and Australia - two of Solomon Islands' traditional security partners - fear this pact could one day pave the way for a Chinese military base.

Kenilorea, a former United Nations official, lamented his country's uneasy position in the middle of the world's two largest military and economic powers, China and the US.

"We don't have natural enemies," he said.

"It has put us on the map for the wrong reasons. To raise tensions unnecessarily here, in the geopolitical

scheme of things, is something we don't really need."

Ballots were trucked into a heavily guarded counting centre in the capital Honiara yesterday morning, watched over by international teams of uniformed Fijian soldiers and Australian police.

Startling and unproven claims of foreign interference upped the ante for what was already billed as Solomon Islands' most crucial vote in a generation.

State-backed Chinese news outlets have pushed reports that the US might orchestrate riots and unrest to block Sogavare from returning to power. US ambassador Ann Marie Yastishock has denounced such ru-

mours as "blatantly misleading".

"We strongly refute allegations being made in known propaganda outlets that claim USAID and the US government has sought to influence the upcoming election in Solomon Islands," she said in a statement.

If Sogavare fails in his bid to return as prime minister, it would not necessarily spell the end of China's ambitions in Solomon Islands.

While his most prominent rivals view Beijing with a mix of scepticism and alarm, there is no shortage of other candidates who are happy with the status quo.

China has paid tens of millions of dollars into a discretionary development fund used by Solomon Islands'

politicians during the last term of government, according to Australian researchers.

Critics suggest this fund was essentially a means to curry favour with key members of the government. Candidates have begun winging their way back to Honiara in anticipation of the backroom bartering that will decide the new government.

Once the parliament's 50 members are decided, they will begin negotiating behind closed doors to cobble together a ruling coalition.

Prolonged and secret discussions have stoked unrest in the past, as voters begin to suspect the involvement of foreign interests.

COMMENT

India 'ready to ease economic impact of Iran-Israel conflict'

India is prepared to take adequate steps to mitigate any impact of the Iran-Israel conflict on its economy and will "remain alert", Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said yesterday. "Can't say that we are fully ready. As developments unfold, we are preparing to take adequate steps in India's interests," Sitharaman told the CNBC Awaaz news channel in an interview. The conflict has not yet significantly impacted global oil prices. However, any escalation of tension in the Middle East could raise India's oil import bill. India is the world's third biggest oil importer, and ships in about 85% of its oil needs from overseas.

PEOPLE

Indian crew member from seized ship returns home

An Indian woman who was a crew member on the MSC Aries container vessel seized by Iran on April 13 has returned to the country, India's foreign ministry said yesterday. The ministry said that its mission in Tehran is in touch with 16 other Indian crew members still aboard the vessel which was seized by Iran's Revolutionary Guards in the Strait of Hormuz. "The crew members are in good health and in contact with their family members in India," the ministry said in a statement. The vessel was seized days after Tehran vowed to retaliate for a suspected Israeli strike on its consulate in Damascus on April 1.

DECISION

Scotland ditches target to cut greenhouse gas emissions

Scotland yesterday scrapped its target to cut climate-damaging greenhouse gas emissions by 75% by 2030, but said it still intends to meet a 2045 net zero target. The move came in response to a critical report published last month by the independent Climate Change Committee (CCC), which said Scotland was so far behind that meeting the 2030 target was no longer credible. "We accept the CCC's recent re-articulation that this parliament's interim 2030 target is out of reach," Mairi McAllan, the Net Zero Secretary for Scotland's devolved government, said. McAllan said Scotland was constrained by cuts to the capital funding it receives from the British government.

MUSIC

McCartney and Lennon sons team up for new single

James McCartney and Sean Ono Lennon, sons of The Beatles songwriting icons Paul and John, have teamed up to record a single paying homage to the star-studded London neighbourhood of Primrose Hill. McCartney announced the release of his single on X (formerly Twitter). "Primrose Hill" is here! Today I am so very excited to share my latest song co-written by my good friend @seanonlennon," he wrote. "With the release of this song it feels like we're really getting the ball rolling and I am so excited to continue to share music with you." Beatles fans will hear echoes of his father's work in McCartney's song.



Polling and police officers travel in a boat with election materials to reach a remote polling station ahead of the first phase of India's general election in the Majuli district, in the northeastern state of Assam, India, yesterday.

India's ruling party snaps up bulk of election props

In the months to the run-up, the BJP has snared the largest share of reservations for domestic private helicopters to fly its leaders to all corners of the far-flung nation, an industry official said

Reuters
New Delhi

Campaigning is gathering pace in India's general elections, the world's largest with nearly a billion eligible voters, as the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party races ahead of its opponents in cornering resources, from helicopters to online advertisements.

Voting starts today, with ballots to be counted on June 4 in the weeks-long elections, at which the BJP seeks its most decisive victory yet, riding India's best-funded campaign led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who is seen winning a third term.

In the months to the run-up, the BJP has snared the largest share of reservations for domestic private helicopters to fly its leaders to all corners of the far-flung nation, an industry official said.

"The largest party has more campaigning to do because of the share of their election touring," said Rajesh Bali, managing director of the Business Aircraft Operators Association.

"They are covering more areas."

Demand for helicopters, the preferred vehicle of canvassing politicians, has risen about a third from the last elections in 2019, Bali said, with the BJP making up more than 60% of election activity, followed by the opposition Congress.

That figure excludes arrangements for Modi, who has crisscrossed India ahead of the polls, as his travel is officially managed by the government.

India has a registered fleet of about 250 civil helicopters, official data shows, 26 owned by the government or its units.

The BJP spent about Rs782mn (\$9.4mn) on helicopters and aircraft during state campaigns, compared to Rs214.4mn by the Congress, or just over a quarter of its rival, in fiscal 2022-23, official audited reports showed in January.

Opposition predicts a comfortable win for Modi, but Congress says the election is closer than how it's been projected.

More resources offer a clear advantage by helping to improve visibility in the race, said Ashok Lavasa, a former election commissioner.

"I don't know, in the real world, how much visibility impacts the voter's mind," he said. "But I am sure if that was not the case, they would not be doing this kind of expenditure."

In 2024, the BJP is also the top political advertiser on search giant Google, data shows.

Modi's party accounted for

nearly a third of the total spend of Rs1.38bn (\$16.16mn) on 119,387 political advertisements on Google this year, the Google Ads Transparency Center says, or Rs432mn.

In contrast, Congress spent less than a quarter, at Rs110mn.

Facebook has shown similar trends, with Modi's party doling out Rs81mn for Facebook pages against the Congress expenditure of nearly Rs26mn, as it is unable to match the BJP's poll war chest.

The BJP spent Rs8.6bn on election-related ads and publicity while the Congress spent about Rs767mn in the last fiscal year 2022-23, audited party reports show.

The largest beneficiary of a now-scrapped controversial funding mechanism of electoral bonds, the BJP got over half the donations of Rs120.1bn from the time the instruments were launched until the March 2023 end of the fiscal year.

As the party's main funding channel, the bonds accounted for more than half the contributions it received over the past five years, except for fiscal 2020-21.

That year's donations were disrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic, the party's audited annual reports show.

Congress, the only party to offer significant competition nationally for the BJP, has accused Modi of trying to cripple it financially ahead of the polls by briefly freezing its accounts in an income-tax case.

Poll officials travel across hills, rivers to reach voters

Reuters
Nongrait, India

India was yesterday preparing for the world's largest general election, as polling officers clambered up hills, travelled deep into areas riven by violent insurgencies and crossed rivers to reach millions of voters across the sprawling nation. The first vote in the seven-phase election will be cast today, with results set for June 4, as Prime Minister Narendra Modi looks set to win a historic third term in the face of a stragglng opposition challenge.

The Election Commission has to set up more than 1mn polling stations for the nearly two-month duration, with 15mn officials and se-

curity personnel fanning out for the task. "Whether the polling officers have to climb down mountains, go through rivers or fly by choppers, the Election Commission is doing its job to ensure that nobody misses out on their voting rights," said W Moning Belgit, one of its officials.

He was speaking after having led a small crew that trekked for hours yesterday to reach 139 voters in a remote, hilly village in the eastern state of Meghalaya.

His team went up 12km of mountains, climbed down hundreds of steps and crossed a river to reach the village of Nongriat, where they will set up a polling booth under the thatched roof of a school.

In today's first phase of voting in 21 states and territories, as many as

102 constituencies will exercise the franchise, from a total of 543 in the lower house of parliament.

The effort is the "world's largest election mobilisation exercise of man and material", the Election Commission said in a social media post on Wednesday.

Scores of polling officers have been flown to remote areas in the rugged Himalayas and the central Indian constituency of Gadchiroli-Chimur, beset by Maoist violence, to which 850 polling staff are being sent, the poll body said.

Besides the insurgents, officers must keep a lookout for a wild elephant roaming the Gadchiroli area after killing two farmers, although trackers are trying to keep it from further mayhem, the *Indian Express* newspaper said.

Prince William returns to public duties



Britain's Prince William, Prince of Wales helps to load trays of food into vans during a visit to Surplus to Supper, a surplus food redistribution charity, in Sunbury-on-Thames, Surrey, England, yesterday. It was William's his first public engagements since his wife Catherine revealed a shock cancer diagnosis.

UK hopes Rwanda migrant bill will pass next week

AFP
London

The UK government intends to get controversial and much-delayed legislation to send undocumented migrants to Rwanda through parliament early next week, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's spokesperson said yesterday.

Parliament's two chambers are engaged in a standoff over the proposed law, which Sunak says will deter asylum seekers from crossing the Channel from France in small boats.

The House of Lords again failed to approve the bill on Wednesday, sending it back to the lower House of Commons for a fourth round of legislative to-and-fro.

"It is obviously frustrating that the bill did not pass," Sunak's

spokesperson told reporters.

"Our intention now is to get this done on Monday," he said, adding: "We don't want to see anymore delay."

The legislation is the British leader's answer to a Supreme Court ruling last year that sending migrants to Rwanda was illegal under international law.

The new bill would compel judges to regard the east African nation as a safe third country and gives ministers the power to disregard sections of international and British human rights law.

The spokesperson predicted MPs will reject two amendments sought by the Lords when the Commons considers them on Monday.

One seeks exemption from deportation for people who worked with the UK military overseas, such as Afghan interpreters.

Fossils of colossal snake unearthed in India mine

Reuters
Washington

Fossil vertebrae unearthed in a lignite mine are the remains of one of the largest snakes that ever lived, a monster estimated at up to 49 feet in length - longer than a T. rex - that prowled the swamps of India around 47mn years ago.

Scientists said yesterday they have recovered 27 vertebrae from the snake, including a few still in the same position as they would have been when the limbless reptile was alive. They said the snake, which they named *Vasuki indicus*, would have looked like a modern-

day large python and would not have been venomous.

The mine is located in the Panandhro area of the Kutch district in western India's state of Gujarat. Lignite is the lowest grade of coal.

"Considering its large size, Vasuki was a slow-moving ambush predator that would subdue its prey through constriction like anacondas and pythons. This snake lived in a marshy swamp near the coast at a time when global temperatures were higher than today," said Debajit Datta, a postdoctoral researcher in palaeontology at the Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee (IITR) and lead author of

the study published in the journal *Scientific Reports*.

Because of the incomplete nature of the Vasuki remains, the researchers gave an estimated length range of 36-49 feet and a rough estimate of a metric tonne in weight.

Vasuki rivals in size another huge prehistoric snake called Titanoboa, whose fossils were discovered in a coal mine in northern Colombia, as announced in 2009.

Titanoboa, estimated at 42 feet long and 1.1 metric tonnes, lived 58-60mn years ago. The reticulated python is the longest extant snake, sometimes measuring 20-30 feet.

"The estimated body length of Vasuki is comparable to that of Ti-

tanoboa, although the vertebrae of Titanoboa are slightly larger than those of Vasuki. However, at this point, we cannot say if Vasuki was more massive or slender compared to Titanoboa," said palaeontologist and study co-author Sunil Bajpai, a professor at IITR.

These huge snakes lived during the Cenozoic era, which began after the dinosaur age ended 66mn years ago.

Perhaps the largest-known Tyrannosaurus rex is a specimen named Sue at the Field Museum in Chicago, at forty-and-a-half feet long, though a T. rex would have been more massive than these snakes.

The biggest Vasuki vertebra was around four-and-a-half inches wide. Vasuki appears to have had a broad, cylindrical body perhaps around 17 inches wide. The skull was not found.

"Vasuki was a majestic animal," Datta said. "It may well have been a gentle giant, resting its head on a high porch formed by coiling its massive body for most parts of the day or moving sluggishly through the swamp like an endless train. In some ways it reminds me of (fictional giant snake) Kaa from *The Jungle Book*."

The researchers are not sure what prey Vasuki ate, but considering its size it could have in-

cluded crocodylians. Other fossils in the area included crocodylians and turtles, as well as fish and two primitive whales, *Kutchicetus* and *Andrewsiphius*.

Vasuki was a member of the Madtsoiidae snake family that appeared roughly 90mn years ago but went extinct about 12,000 years ago. These snakes spread from India through southern Eurasia and into north Africa after the Indian subcontinent collided with Eurasia around 50mn years ago, Bajpai said.

This was a dominant snake family during the dinosaur age's latter stages and into the early Cenozoic before its diversity dropped, Bajpai added.



Kenyan military helicopter crash kills defence chief, senior officers

AFP/Reuters
Nairobi

Kenya's defence chief and nine other top brass were killed yesterday in a military helicopter crash in a remote area of the country, President William Ruto said.

"Today at 2.20pm, our nation suffered a tragic air accident ... I am deeply saddened to announce the passing of General Francis Omondi Ogolla," Ruto told reporters.

The president, who had convened an urgent meeting of the National Security Council after news of the accident emerged, said nine other "gallant military

personnel" on board were also killed. Two soldiers survived the crash and were in hospital, Ruto said.

He said that the Kenya Air Force has dispatched an air investigation team to establish the cause of the crash, which took place in Elgeyo Marakwet county, about 400km (250 miles) northwest of the capital Nairobi.

The helicopter crashed shortly after take-off from Chesegeon, where he and his entourage had been visiting a school, Ruto said.

"A distinguished four-star general has fallen in the course of duty and in the service of the country," he said. "Our motherland has lost one of her most valiant generals, gallant officers, service men and woman."

Ruto announced three days of mourn-

ing from today, with official flags flying at half-mast.

He said that Ogolla, 61, had left Nairobi yesterday morning on an air force Huey helicopter to visit troops deployed in the North Rift area in Operation Maliza Uhalifu (Operation End Crime in Swahili), and other sites.

Kenyan authorities have long battled insecurity in the Rift Valley region, with armed bandits and cattle rustlers running rampant.

"The helicopter burst into flames after crashing and it had more than 10 senior commanders on board including General Ogolla," a police officer had told AFP earlier. "They were in the area on a security mission because there are KDF (Kenya Defence

Forces) soldiers deployed in the region, he said. Ogolla was appointed Chief of the Defence Forces by Ruto in April last year after a stint as deputy.

Ruto told journalists last May that he appointed Ogolla despite him being among those who tried to overturn his narrow election win against opposition leader Raila Odinga in 2022.

"When I looked at his CV, he was the best person to be (a) general," Ruto said, adding his decision went against the wishes of many people.

A trained fighter pilot, Ogolla joined the KDF in April 1984, rising through the ranks to command the Kenyan Air Force in 2018, a post he held for three years.

Taliban take two TV channels off the airwaves

Two Afghan television channels have been taken off the airwaves for "violations against Islamic and national values", a Taliban government spokesman said yesterday.

Rights monitors warn Taliban authorities have been cracking down on the media since their return to power in 2021 as they enforce an austere vision of Islamist rule.

Ministry of information and culture spokesman Khubaib Ghufan said that the "Barya" and "Noor" TV channels had been suspended on Tuesday for failing to abide by "journalistic principles".

"They had programmes creating confusion among the public and their owners are abroad," he told AFP. "The media violation commission suspended their operations."

He said that "their owners have even taken stands as opponents" of the Taliban government and "until their owners come here, and answer the questions posed to them, their operations will be suspended".

The Afghanistan Journalists Centre (AFJC) said in a statement that Afghanistan's media commission had repeatedly warned "Barya" for airing remarks by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a once-powerful warlord and former prime minister, about the Taliban government.

"Noor" had received warnings because it broadcast music and the uncovered faces of female presenters, the AFJC said.

The "Barya" channel is owned by Hekmatyar's son Habiburrahman Hekmatyar.

"Barya had religious and national values in mind, not Taliban values," Habiburrahman Hekmatyar, who lives in exile and whose father has increasingly found himself at odds with Taliban authorities, said on social media platform X. "The only thing you won't see from us is silence."

The "Noor" channel is owned by Salahuddin Rabbani, who also lives in exile and served as Afghanistan's foreign minister under the former US-backed government from 2015 to 2019.

His father, Burhanuddin Rabbani, was president of Afghanistan in the 1990s but fled the country as the Taliban surged to power for the first time and ruled from 1996 to 2001.

Burhanuddin Rabbani was assassinated in 2011 by a bomber, posing as a Taliban peace envoy.

The AFJC said the suspension of the two channels "infringes on the country's mass media laws and is a blatant attempt to suppress freedom of the press".

Curbs introduced by Taliban authorities have effectively banned music, while the ministry for promotion of virtue and prevention of vice issued an order in May 2022 for women TV presenters to cover their faces.

Reporters Without Borders (RSF) said last month that Afghanistan's media landscape is being "suffocated by repressive Taliban directives".

Many journalists fled Afghanistan, fearing repercussions for their reporting as the Taliban's two-decade insurgency ended with the collapse of the foreign-backed government in August 2021.

Many of those who remained have been detained by Taliban authorities since their return.

Trump's hush money trial loses two jurors

Reuters/AFP
New York

The judge overseeing former US president Donald Trump's criminal trial dismissed two jurors yesterday, as lawyers struggled to assemble a panel of 12 jurors and six alternates for one of the most high-profile trials in American history.

Justice Juan Merchan excused one juror after prosecutors said he may not have disclosed prior brushes with the law.

Merchan did not specify why he dismissed that juror.

The judge had previously excused a juror who said she felt intimidated because some personal information had been made public.

She said family, friends and colleagues had contacted her after deducing she was on the jury.

"I don't believe at this point that I can be fair and unbiased, and let the outside influences not affect my decision-making in the courtroom," the juror said.

The two removals mean that five people so far have been selected for the jury.

A unanimous verdict will be required to convict Trump and prosecutors and his attorneys are subjecting prospective jurors to intensive questioning as they seek to fashion a panel to their liking.

Potential jurors are being grilled, for example, about their media consumption, political donations, education and whether they have ever attended a pro- or anti-Trump rally.

About half of the first batch of 96 jurors ushered into the courtroom yesterday were immediately excused after stating they would be unable to be fair and impartial in a case involving one of the most famous and controversial men in the country.

Trump, seated at the defence table in a dark suit and blue tie, turned around to watch them file out of court.

The latest decisions by the judge highlighted the extraordinary pressures around the first criminal trial ever of a former US president.

Trump is one of the most controversial figures in American politics, and roughly half of the 192 potential jurors screened so far in heavily Democratic Manhattan have been dismissed after saying they could not impartially assess his guilt or innocence.

The Republican presidential candidate in the November 5 election is accused of covering up a \$130,000 payment his former lawyer Michael Cohen made to an adult entertainment actress for her silence before the 2016 election about an encounter that she says they had a decade earlier.

Trump has pleaded not guilty to 34 counts of falsifying business records brought by Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg and denies any such encounter with the actress.

He has also pleaded not guilty in three other criminal cases against him in Washington, Georgia and Florida.

The New York trial could be the only one he faces before the election.

A conviction would not bar Trump, the Republican presidential candidate in the November 5 election, from running for or taking office.

Trump says, without providing evidence, that all four criminal cases are part of a broad-ranging effort by allies of Democratic President Joe Biden to hobble his candidacy.

Officials in some of those cases have reported receiving death threats and harassment after being criticised by Trump.

Merchan has taken steps to shield jurors in the case from harassment, saying that they will remain anonymous except to Trump, his lawyers and prosecutors.

Yesterday he said he would prohibit news outlets from reporting on aspects of potential jurors' employment.

Trump's behaviour and the heightened public interest in the case could put jurors' safety at risk, said Michigan State University law professor Barbara O'Brien.

"These are just people showing up doing their civic duty," she said. "They're not voluntarily injecting themselves into a public conversation."

Merchan has imposed a partial gag order on Trump, who has criticised him, witnesses, and prosecutors and their relatives.

Prosecutors say that Trump has violated the gag order seven times since they flagged three potential violations on Monday, and have asked Merchan to impose fines or other penalties.

Yesterday prosecutor Christopher Conroy pointed to posts about former Trump attorney Cohen, who is expected to be a star prosecution witness, and a post saying that undercover liberal activists had been lying to the judge to try to get on the jury.

One of Trump's lawyers, Emil Bove, said those posts "do not establish any willful violations" of the gag order.

Trump has been ordered by the judge to attend every day, forcing the scandal-tainted real estate tycoon to exchange the campaign trail for the unglamorous confines of a rundown courthouse.

Ecuador mayor shot dead days before national anti-crime referendum

The mayor of a small mining town in Ecuador was shot dead on Wednesday, just days before a national referendum on whether to take tougher measures against crime, authorities said.

Jose Sanchez, mayor of Camilo Ponce Enriquez canton in the southern province of Azuay, "was shot and killed", the mayor's office announced on its Facebook page.

Sanchez, 52, was exercising at night accompanied by his bodyguards when gunmen opened fire, according to a police post published on X. He is the fourth Ecuadorian mayor to be assassinated in a year, and the second in less than a month. -AFP

Reuters photographer wins 2024 World Press Photo of the Year award

Reuters
Amsterdam

Reuters photographer Mohamed Salem won the prestigious 2024 World Press Photo of the Year award yesterday for his image of a Palestinian woman cradling the body of her five-year-old niece in the Gaza Strip.

The picture was taken on October 17, 2023, at Nasser hospital in Khan Younis in southern Gaza, where families were searching for relatives killed during Israeli bombing of the Palestinian enclave.

Salem's winning image portrays Inas Abu Maamar, 36, sobbing while holding Saly's sheet-clad body in the hospital morgue.

"Mohamed received the news of his WPP award with humility, saying that this is not a photo to celebrate but that he appreciates its recognition and the opportunity to publish it to a wider audience," Reuters Global Editor for Pictures and Video, Rickey Rogers, said at a ceremony in Amsterdam.

"He hopes with this award that the world will become even more conscious of the human impact of war, especially on children," Rogers said, standing in front of the photo at the Nieuwe Kerk in the Dutch capital.

Announcing its annual awards, the Amsterdam-based World Press Photo Foundation (WPP) said it is important to recognise the dangers facing journalists covering conflicts.

It said 99 journalists and media employees had been killed covering the war between Israel and Hamas since the Palestinian militant group's attack on October 7 and Israel responded by launching a military offensive in Gaza.

"The work of press and documentary photographers around the world is often done at high risk," said Joumana El Zein Khoury, the organisation's executive director. "This past year, the death toll in Gaza pushed the number of journalists killed to a near-record high. It is important to recognise the trauma they



This picture taken on October 17 last year by Reuters photographer Mohamed Salem shows Palestinian woman Inas Abu Maamar, 36, embracing the body of her five-year-old niece Saly, who was killed in an Israeli strike, at Nasser hospital in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip.

have experienced to show the world the humanitarian impact of the war."

Salem, a Palestinian aged 39, has worked for Reuters since 2003. He also won an award in the 2010 World Press Photo competition.

The jury said Salem's 2024 winning image was "composed with care and respect, offering at once a metaphorical and literal glimpse into unimaginable loss."

"I felt the picture sums up the broader sense of what was happening in the Gaza Strip," Salem said when the image was first published in November. "People were confused, running from one place to another, anxious to know the fate of their loved ones, and this woman caught my eye as she was holding the body of the little girl and refused to let go."

Salem's wife had given birth to their child days before the pho-

tographer took the shot.

The photograph is "profoundly affecting", said jury member Fiona Shields, head of photography at Guardian News & Media.

The jury selected the winning photos from 61,062 entries by 3,851 photographers from 130 countries.

GEO photographer Lee-Ann Olwage of South Africa won the story of the year category with images documenting dementia in Madagascar.

The long-term projects category was won by Alejandro Cegarra of Venezuela for the series *The Two Walls* for the *New York Times*/Bloomberg.

Ukrainian photographer Julia Kochetova won the open format award with *War is Personal*, which documented the war in her country by weaving together pictures, poetry, audio and music in documentary style.

Landmine blast kills 10 in northeast Nigeria

AFP
Kano

A vehicle transporting local traders hit an improvised landmine killing at least 10 people and wounding 23 in an area of northeast Nigeria battling a long-running religious militant conflict, three paramilitary sources said yesterday.

The convoy of farmers and fishermen left the garrison town of Monguno on Wednesday on their way to Lake Chad when vehicle ran over a mine believed to have been planted by Islamic State-linked Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) militants, the sources said.

Militants have been driven back from territory they controlled a few years ago in Nigeria's northeast Borno state but they still carry out ambushes and target convoys travelling out of towns protected by army garrisons.

"The vehicle hit the explosive planted on the dusty road around Mosquito camp, 3km outside Monguno around 9.30am, causing an explosion that ripped through the vehicle," said Musa Kaka, a member of a militia group that helps the army. "We recovered 10 dead bodies and 23 injured victims from the scene."

The dead were buried on Wednesday while the injured were taken to hospital in the town, said Bello Adamu, another militiaman who gave the same toll.

Another militia leader, Umar Ari, also confirmed the casualty figure.

Nigeria's military gave no immediate statement on the incident.

ISWAP is active along the 70km highway between Monguno and Baga, on Lake Chad, carrying out regular attacks on civilian and military convoys.

Monguno, 140km north of Borno state capital Maiduguri, is home to tens of thousands of internally displaced persons (IDPs) who fled their homes to escape religious militant attacks and live in sprawling camps.

ISWAP, which split from mainstream rival group Boko Haram in 2016, is now the dominant faction active in the Lake Chad area.

Dengue cases surge by nearly 50% in Americas

Dengue cases have created an "emergency situation" in the Americas, although cases in hotspots Argentina and Brazil appear to have stabilised, the head of the Pan American Health Organisation (PAHO) said yesterday.

PAHO, a United Nations agency, has confirmed more than 5.2mn cases of dengue across the Americas this year, an over 48% jump

from the 3.5mn cases the group reported late last month.

More than 1,800 people have died from the mosquito-borne viral illness, up from over 1,000 deaths reported last month in the year through March.

"We have an emergency situation" PAHO Director Jarbas Barbosa said in a press briefing.

The countries so far hit the hardest in the current outbreak,

Argentina and Brazil, "still have a very strong transmission", he said, adding that "in recent weeks there seems to be a stabilisation, or even a reduction" in the countries' cases.

Barbosa warned that supply of an existing dengue vaccine is "very limited" and even widespread vaccination would not have an immediate impact on interrupting the ongoing outbreak.

"The dengue vaccine can play an important role in reducing severe cases of deaths, but it will take time until the effects of the vaccine can be reflected in the decrease in dengue cases," Barbosa said.

Dengue symptoms include fever, headaches, vomiting, skin rashes, as well as muscle and joint pain. In some cases, it can cause haemorrhagic fever, resulting in bleeding that can lead to death. - Reuters



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GULF TIMES

After long peace, Big Tech faces US antitrust reckoning

After more than a decade of leaving Big Tech largely to itself, US antitrust enforcers have cranked up the heat, with several high-profile cases underway that could radically change the way the industry's giants do business.

Launched under both the Trump and Biden administrations, five major cases from the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) and the Department of Justice (DOJ) are moving forward against major US technology companies – including two against Google that could see the company split up.

The most recent came in March against Apple by the FTC, which alleges the iPhone maker abuses its dominance of the premium smartphone sector.

Washington had largely remained silent on Big Tech cases since its wars with Microsoft that began in the 1990s and ended in a settlement in the early 2000s, after a bruising battle with the DOJ.

Inspired by moves in Europe and elsewhere, the new generation of cases allege that the practices of tech giants including Amazon and Meta stifle competition, harm consumers, and warrant significant changes in business operations.

The cases are on different timelines, before different federal judges and are based on a wide variety of allegations. With appeals, the lawsuits could drag on as long as a decade.

The first case in the campaign, launched in 2020 against Google over its search engine, could have an initial decision as early as the end of this year.

Recently, the EU hit Apple with a €1.8bn fine for preventing music streaming services from offering subscription options outside of App Store

In the second Google case, also brought by the DOJ, the company is targeted for its dominance of the digital advertising sector. Amazon and Meta meanwhile face cases with the FTC.

The suits have drawn applause from lawmakers, with frustration over the power of big tech companies running high with the public.

But many in the business community and legal profession have balked, seeing the lawsuits as legally thin or politically motivated.

The heads of the FTC and the DOJ's antitrust section adamantly stand by their cases, seeing their mission as a means to protect consumers.

"It's always good to kind of look at the actual facts rather than go off of the vibes," FTC chair Lina Khan told a conference in Washington, organised by the American Bar Association, in response to her critics.

"We're really addressing the pain points that affect people's lives including health care and digital (tech), but way, way beyond that," she said.

Instead of getting bogged down in legal theory, Khan said the FTC's cases were "fit for purpose in the year 2024."

"That means... not relying on outdated assumptions and theories that are clearly contravened with what we're seeing with our own eyes," she added.

In an informal survey of 19 top antitrust scholars by University of Michigan Law professor Daniel Crane, a majority of respondents believed the cases would be difficult to prosecute.

"Gathering the overall sense, it's fair to say that there is an expectation that more of the cases will lose than win," Crane wrote, with the Google cases seen as the government's strongest and Amazon as the weakest.

Khan's critics point to widespread opinions in the legal community that the Biden administration's cases walk on thin legal ground.

"I'm kind of exasperated by these lawsuits, because they seem highly motivated, rather than based on sober legal and economic analysis," said Michael Santoro, a professor of management at Santa Clara University, who was not part of the survey.

A senior executive from a tech giant, on condition of anonymity, said that "ultimately they are turning antitrust law upside down."

Speaking in Washington with her US counterparts, the EU's competition czar Margrethe Vestager said she wished she had been more on the offensive in her earlier antitrust decisions.

"If I were to redo it, I would have been bolder, because we don't have a lot of time. Concentration is increasing in every jurisdiction," she said.

Vestager, in office for almost a decade, has pursued her own wave of cases against tech companies that have been accused of being far-fetched or legally creative.

In its latest tech-related decision, last month the EU hit Apple with a €1.8bn (\$1.9bn) fine for preventing music streaming services from offering subscription options outside of its App Store. — AFP



The kind of Bretton Woods institutions that we need

By Joaquim Levy, Axel A Weber and Siddharth Tiwari
Washington, DC

On the 80th anniversary of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, we should reflect on what these Bretton Woods institutions have achieved since World War II. In addition to supporting unprecedented levels of global growth and poverty reduction, they have helped address and overcome myriad economic and financial crises. Now, we have an opportunity – and a duty – to take stock of their institutional mandates and ensure that they are equipped to meet the urgent challenges of the twenty-first century.

It is widely recognised that the "global commons" issues that transcend national borders (including climate change, pandemics, and migration) present the greatest challenge to the current multilateral architecture. Given the urgent and existential nature of the climate challenge, the imperative for collective action is urgent. Yet progress has been too slow.

A new report from the Bretton Woods Committee's Multilateral Reform Working Group addresses the causes of this impasse and seeks a path forward. We identify "gaps" (in governance, implementation, and accountability) in both the public and the private sector, and we show why only a system-wide approach to reform will suffice.

Rejecting the idea that new institutions might be created to fill these gaps, we conclude that the IMF and the World Bank are best placed to play a leadership role, owing to their global membership, financial firepower, and weighted voting structures. The recent G20 Independent Expert Group on Multilateral Development Banks has drawn similar conclusions, as has the Bridgetown Initiative. Without detracting from their existing mandates, the Bretton Woods institutions need to be further empowered.

On the public-sector side, the gap in governance stems from the lack of a coordinating function within the global commons, especially when it comes to financial and economic policies to address climate change. To fill this gap, we propose creating ministerial-level decision-making "councils" at both the IMF and the World Bank. Given adequate political heft, these councils would address what is missing in the current architecture. The IMF's two existing ministerial bodies, the International

Monetary and Financial Committee and the Development Committee, are currently advisory; but they could transition to a decision-making role.

The new councils would be more inclusive, giving more voice to middle- and low-income countries (MLICs). Member states would vote proportionally according to their quota share, but they would do so individually, rather than by constituency (as is the case under the current model). This would also enable "coalitions of the willing" to form around specific issues.

A second major public-sector gap concerns implementation. Though many efforts to address global challenges are underway, their disparate nature means that the whole is less than the sum of the parts. The Bretton Woods institutions must be empowered to support MLICs as they work toward national goals such as expanding green energy, phasing out coal, accelerating climate-adaptation programmes, and protecting forests.

To that end, the IMF can help shape and assess the fiscal and financial frameworks according to which green policies and investments are adopted and implemented in advanced and developing economies. The World Bank can help with financing adaptation efforts, designing energy strategies, and introducing financial instruments to facilitate climate-change mitigation in co-ordination with other multilateral bodies and the private sector. And regional multilateral development banks can expand their role by helping countries de-risk investments in climate-related projects.

The third gap concerns accountability and how we measure impact. Accepting the principle that what gets measured gets done, we recommend that the IMF and the World Bank's existing evaluation arms (working with their peers in partner institutions) start conducting systematic reviews of climate financing and implementation plans.

That brings us to the private sector, which also has an indispensable role to play. Most greenhouse-gas emissions emanate from publicly listed corporations and state-owned enterprises, and the bulk of climate financing will need to come from the private sector, including asset managers. The IMF and the World Bank again are uniquely positioned to help governments implement common standards, practices, and instruments, ultimately ensuring that private-sector efforts are aligned with global goals.

Filling gaps in the private sector's current

approach will require mandatory global disclosure standards (along the lines of what the International Sustainability Standards Board has proposed) to ensure accurate measures of private entities' carbon footprints, net-zero goals, and corresponding asset allocations. Mandatory disclosure would provide more accurate price signals to capture the true costs of fossil fuels, as well as foster more public- and private-sector collaboration.

The IMF could further incorporate such monitoring in its surveillance work. Already a vocal proponent of carbon taxes, the Fund can offer objective assessments of the global macroeconomic and trade implications of cross-border carbon-adjustment taxes, the potential international sharing of their proceeds, and how such taxes can complement global carbon markets. Moreover, together with the World Bank, the IMF can develop tools to help MLICs respond to these regimes.

Throughout their 80-year history, the IMF and the World Bank have demonstrated their ability to adapt to changing global circumstances. In the face of increasingly complex global challenges, both must evolve to capitalise on their respective comparative advantages. In the case of climate change, especially, we believe they are the only global institutions that can mobilise public- and private-sector responses at the necessary pace and scale.

To fulfil these augmented roles, both institutions will need additional financial capacity. If they can focus on closing gaps in public- and private-sector governance, implementation, and accountability, they will amplify their own impact and secure future paid-in capital from their shareholders. We hope that all 190 member states meeting in the coming days for the IMF and World Bank Spring Meetings will recognise the need to strengthen both bodies. — Project Syndicate

• Joaquim Levy, a former finance minister of Brazil, is Co-Chair of the Bretton Woods Committee Multilateral Reform Working Group and a former chief financial officer at the World Bank Group.

• Axel A Weber, Co-Chair of the Bretton Woods Committee Multilateral Reform Working Group, is a former chairman of UBS Group and president of the Deutsche Bundesbank.

• Siddharth Tiwari, principal author at the Bretton Woods Committee Multilateral Reform Working Group, is a former senior official at the Bank for International Settlements and the International Monetary Fund.



An atrium is seen at the World Bank headquarters in Washington. (Reuters)

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The QM highlights ongoing excavations and conservation efforts at Al Zubarah archaeological site as it marks World Heritage Day 2024.
PICTURES: QM



QM marks World Heritage Day with focus on Al Zubarah archaeological site

By Joey Aguilar
Staff Reporter

Qatar Museums (QM) shines a spotlight on the nation's inaugural Unesco World Heritage Site, Al Zubarah, highlighting ongoing excavations and conservation efforts to mark World Heritage Day 2024.

In a post on its social media pages, the QM noted that in 2023, numerous visitors witnessed the restoration endeavours firsthand, underlining Qatar's commitment to preserving its rich cultural heritage.

In collaboration with the Arab Regional Centre for World Heritage, the QM recently held a three-day workshop aimed at bolstering the protection and conservation of world heritage sites in the country.

Titled *Mechanisms and Concepts of the 1972 World Heritage Convention and the 1954 Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict*, the workshop brought together heritage professionals to enhance their skills and capacities, fostering a more robust framework for heritage preservation.

Qatar's Ministry of Culture also marked the 20th anniversary of the "2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2008" with a special event.

At the Unesco headquarters in Paris, Qatar unveiled an exhibition showcasing its cultural herit-

age, featuring "The Majlis: A Social and Cultural Space", traditional crafts, falconry, popular arts, culinary arts, and achievements in heritage preservation.

Qatar also launched various initiatives to promote co-operation and harmony among state institutions dedicated to safeguarding intangible cultural heritage.

Several significant elements, including falconry, Arabic coffee, the Majlis, and the palm tree, have been proposed for inclusion on Unesco's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

In addition, Qatar spearheaded the effort to nominate the "Bisht" for inclusion on Unesco's Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage, demonstrating leadership in Arab initiatives through collaboration with the Arab League of Educational, Cultural, and Scientific Organisation.

In the past, Qatar pushed for the joint registration of Arab cultural assets, such as palm tree, Arabic calligraphy, and metal engraving art, with the latter poised for registration under an Iraqi-led initiative, with involvement from 14 Arab nations.

Reflecting on last year's World Heritage Day, the QM organised guided tours to Al Zubarah, underscoring Qatar's rich heritage amidst climate change challenges.

It is learnt that experts continue to address conservation efforts and sustainability concerns at the archaeological site, ensuring its legacy endures for future generations.



Ines Wein



Merve Bulun



The Cinemoon Ensemble

Mozart: A Musical Sitcom today

Day two of the Qatar Philharmonic Orchestra (QPO)'s 15-Year-Anniversary Festival today begins with a family concert titled *Mozart: A Musical Sitcom*, a musical experience filled with 18th century costumes and historical characters from Mozart's lifetime performed by the Cinemoon Ensemble and special guests.

The concert will take place at the Qatar National Convention Centre (QNCC)'s Auditorium (3) at 4.30pm.

The CineMoon Ensemble is a dynamic chamber orchestra based in Doha, and born within the QPO.

The ensemble was founded in 2013 by Merve Kenet-Bulun, who has been over-

seeing its artistic direction.

Co-founder Lorena Manescu leads the ensemble as concertmaster, and maestro Giovanni Pasin the director.

From their acclaimed debut in 2013 at the Museum of Islamic Art in Doha, the CineMoon Ensemble has continuously evolved, growing increasingly versatile and popular.

They have performed in numerous venues and presented in various configurations and settings, expanding to an orchestra of 40 musicians in its full formation, all selected members from within the QPO.

The ensemble is renowned for regularly performing a repertoire designed

to blend music, visuals, and storytelling. While its natural focus lies in film music, it is equally adept at exploring genres ranging from opera to musicals.

The final concert to close Day 2 of the 15-Year-Anniversary Festival, *Music from the Baroque courts*, invites the audience to the Royal courts of the Renaissance era to experience works from the Baroque period of classical music.

The concert will include compositions from several of Europe's most well-loved composers employed by a Baroque court,

such as Bach, Handel, Lully, and Corelli.

The QPO's Doha Baroque Ensemble, oboist German Diaz Blanco, bassoonist Daniel Hrinda, and the Qatar Concert Choir will perform alongside harpsichordist Christoph Teichner at the QNCC's Auditorium (3) at 7.30pm.

The Doha Baroque Ensemble was founded in 2011 by Ines Wein and Katrin Meingast.

It's described as the first and only ensemble of its kind in the Gulf region.

These musicians are baroque music

specialists and skilled in historical baroque music performance.

In partnership with the Qatar Concert Choir, the Ensemble also performs a long standing concert series titled *Baroque in Qatar*, showcasing the best of baroque music.

As well as performing music of the baroque period, the Ensemble aims to develop and explore interesting and innovative areas of fusion between eastern and western musical cultures, a statement added.