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Amir holds phone call with Netherlands PM

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani received a phone call yesterday from Netherlands Prime Minister Mark Rutte. During the call, they discussed bilateral relations between the two countries and ways to enhance and develop them. In addition, they discussed a number of regional and international developments of common concern, especially developments in the Gaza Strip and the occupied Palestinian territories. (QNA)

Crown princess of Sweden, Qatar minister hold talks

Crown Princess of Sweden Princess Victoria Ingrid Alice Desiree met with HE the Minister of Social Development and Family Maryam bint Ali bin Nasser al-Misnad, who is currently visiting the country as part of an official working visit aimed at deepening means of bilateral co-operation between the two friendly countries in the field of social and development work. HE al-Misnad emphasised the importance of the visit in light of the distinguished relations between the two countries, expressing hope that its outcomes would contribute to strengthening bilateral co-operation in the humanitarian, social, and developmental sectors, for the benefit of both nations and their friendly peoples. Page 3

Hawksbill turtle nesting begins at Fuwairit

On the occasion of the start of this year's hawksbill sea turtle nesting, a campaign to clean and rehabilitate Fuwairit Beach was launched yesterday, in the presence of HE the Minister of Environment and Climate Change Dr Abdullah bin Turki al-Subaie and several officials from the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change (MoECC), along with representatives of participating entities and volunteers. Page 12

Pro-Palestinian US campus protests grow

Pro-Palestinian protests spread to more college campuses in the US yesterday as authorities appeared to be running out of patience and police carried out large-scale arrests. Students at some of the country's most prestigious universities have staged occupations over the growing human toll of Israel's war with Hamas. Sit-ins and boisterous demonstrations, including a new one that sprung up Wednesday at the University of California, Los Angeles, are calling for colleges to sever ties with Israel and with companies they say profit from the conflict. "For 201 days, the world has watched in silence as Israel has murdered over 30,000 Palestinians," said a message posted online by organisers of the UCLA protest.

Haiti prime minister Ariel Henry resigns

Haitian Prime Minister Ariel Henry yesterday resigned and a transitional council took power with the aim of returning stability to a country where gang violence has caused chaos and misery. Henry's former finance minister, Michel Patrick Boisvert, will be interim prime minister. "Today is an important day in the life of our dear republic, this day in effect opens a view to a solution... to the multidimensional crises the country faces," Boisvert said.

COMMUNITY
See Pages: 4 & 5

Baladna powdered milk project in Algeria to be world's largest

● The estimated \$3.5bn project aims to produce nearly 194,000 tonnes of powdered milk annually

QNA
Algiers

Chairman of the board of directors of Baladna Food Industries, Moutaz al-Khayyat, yesterday said that the project to produce powdered milk in Algeria, under the agreement signed with the Algerian ministry of agriculture and rural development, will be the largest of its kind in the world and the first-of-its-kind in Algeria.

In an interview with the Qatar News Agency (QNA), al-Khayyat said the project represents the beginning of Qatari co-operation with sisterly countries and all entities concerned with food security, aiming to achieve self-sufficiency, especially in vital food sectors like dairy products.

Baladna aims to transfer its accumulated knowledge and experience in the field, where Qatar managed to reduce its reliance on imported milk and dairy products and achieve self-sufficiency within just 12 months, he pointed out.

Al-Khayyat revealed that the massive project, with an estimated investment cost of \$3.5bn, aims to produce nearly 194,000 tonnes of powdered milk annually, covering an area of 117,000 hectares.

It includes three complexes, each consisting of comprising of a fodder and cattle farming operations, as well as a powdered milk manufacturing facility. By the ninth year of the project, the cattle herd is expected to reach around 270,000 heads, producing an estimated 1.7bn litres of milk annually. The project is anticipated to meet over 50% of Algeria's milk needs and will provide 5,000 job opportunities for Algerian nationals.

Al-Khayyat stressed the project represents an integrated agricultural-industrial system for milk production, which will not only reduce Algeria's dependence on milk imports but also contribute to cutting imports of all essential production needs such as fodder and other materials.

The project has been specifically designed to suit the Algerian environment, considering climate, soil nature, and utilising the latest global technologies in agriculture, irrigation, cattle breeding, milking, and manufacturing.

The project follows the best sustainability practices, minimising negative environmental impacts by conserving water, preserving the natural ecosystem, and adapting to climate conditions to enhance productivity efficiency while ensuring sustainability.

Al-Khayyat said the project will be implemented in phases, starting with land reclamation to meet grain and fodder needs, followed by designing a farm for 50,000 cattle, along with facilities meeting international standards and advanced production lines and techniques for powdered milk production.

Baladna aims to transfer its knowledge and experience in the field, where Qatar managed to reduce its reliance on imported milk and dairy products and achieve self-sufficiency within just 12 months

The company plans to expand the system by establishing complexes across Algeria, each featuring fodder farms, cattle farms, and milk and meat production facilities.

The primary goal of the project is to reduce Algeria's reliance on powdered milk imports and achieve self-sufficiency.

Al-Khayyat expressed hope that the success of the project will attract more direct foreign investments to Algeria.

He concluded by praising the support from the Algerian government and the spirit of co-operation, aiming to achieve more joint goals and projects. For foreign investors, this supportive and nurturing environment is a key driver for investment and launching more businesses al-Khayyat said. He expressed hope that the success of the project will lead to more projects in the future. (QNA)

Amir receives Bahrain foreign minister



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani yesterday received at his office in Lusail Palace Bahrain's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr Abdullatif bin Rashid al-Zayani, and the accompanying delegation, on the occasion of their visit to the country. Dr Abdullatif bin Rashid al-Zayani conveyed the greetings of Bahrain King Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifah, wishing His Highness the Amir good health and happiness, and the Qatari people continued progress, development and prosperity. His Highness the Amir entrusted the Bahraini Minister of Foreign Affairs to convey his greetings to King Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifah, wishing him good health and happiness, and the Bahraini people further development and prosperity. During the meeting, the two sides discussed brotherly relations between the two countries, and ways to enhance and develop them. HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani attended the meeting. (QNA)

Palestinians seek UN probe into Gaza mass graves

Reuters
Dubai

A Palestinian civil defence team yesterday called on the United Nations to investigate what it said were war crimes at a Gaza hospital, saying nearly 400 bodies were recovered from mass graves after Israeli soldiers departed the complex.

"There are cases of field execution of some patients while undergoing surgeries and wearing surgical gowns at the Nasser Medical Complex," the civil defence forces said at a press conference.

Palestinian authorities have this week reported finding hundreds of bodies in mass graves at Nasser hospital, the main medical facility in northern Gaza, after Israeli troops pulled out of the city of Khan Younis.

Bodies were also reported to have been found at the Al Shifa hospital in northern Gaza, which was targeted in an Israeli special forces operation.

UN rights chief Volker Turk said on Tuesday he was "horrified" by the destruction of the Nasser and Al Shifa medical facilities and by the reports of



A Palestinian woman carrying some belongings walks in a neighbourhood devastated by Israeli bombing in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday.

the mass graves, according to a spokesperson.

France yesterday called the reports "extremely worrying" and added its voice to growing calls for an independent investigation.

The Palestinian Civil Defence Team accused Israel of burying a number of bodies in the Nasser complex in plastic bags at a depth of 10ft, where they quickly decomposed concealing evidence of its "crimes", including torture, it said.

Meanwhile, Israel stepped up airstrikes on Rafah overnight af-

ter saying it would evacuate civilians from the southern Gazan city and launch an all-out assault despite allies' warnings this could cause mass casualties.

Medics in the besieged Palestinian enclave reported five Israeli airstrikes on Rafah early yesterday that hit at least three houses, killing at least six people including a local journalist.

"We are afraid of what will happen in Rafah. The level of alert is very high," Ibrahim Khraishi, the Palestinian ambassador to the United Nations, said yesterday.

'\$4tn needed annually' to solve global climate change problems

● Arab markets has potential to grow further: Iosco

By Santhosh V Perumal
Business Reporter

As much as \$4tn a year funding is required to solve the problems of climate change, which is mere 4% of the total global market capitalisation, and the Arab region's capital markets, which have had "significant" growth in the past decade, could play pivotal role, a top official of the International Organisation of Securities Commissions (Iosco) said here yesterday.

Addressing the Third Arab Capital Markets conference, organised by the Qatar Financial Market Authority (QFMA), in co-operation with the Union of Arab Securities Authorities (UASA) via videoconferencing, Iosco deputy secretary-



HE the Minister of Commerce and Industry Sheikh Mohamed bin Hamad bin Qassim al-Thani, Qatar Central Bank governor HE Sheikh Bandar bin Mohamed bin Saoud al-Thani and QFMA chief executive officer Dr Tamy bin Ahmad al-Binali, along with other dignitaries at the Third Arab Capital Markets conference.

PICTURES: Shaji Kayamkulam

general Tajinder Singh said under sustainable financing, which is able to solve the problems of climate change, the funding needed is in the range of \$4tn annually.

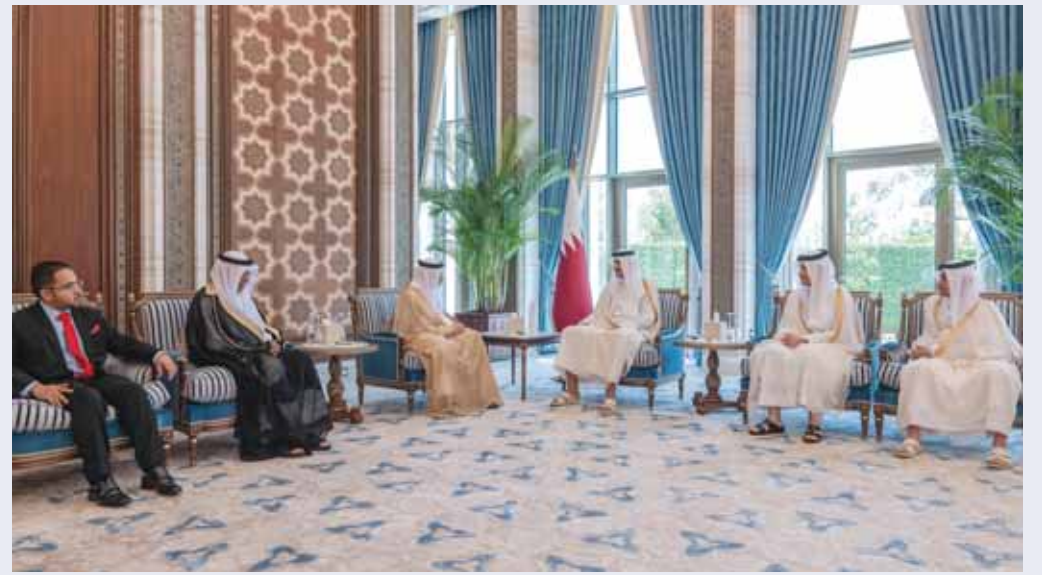
Highlighting the funding requirement accounts for just 4% of the global market capitalisation; he said "so if 4% of the global market capitalisation was to be directed to this area, then that would be able to help in solving this (climate change) problem." Asserting that capital markets could play an effective role in solving global problems; Singh said the markets in the Arab region have experienced "significant" growth over the past decade and have "considerable" potential for further growth due to the young and growing population, urbanisation and natural resources. To Page 12

PM meets Bahrain's FM



HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani met yesterday with Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bahrain Dr Abdullatif bin Rashid al-Zayani, during his visit to the country. During the meeting, they discussed co-operation relations between the two countries and ways to enhance and develop them. They also discussed the developments in the region and ways for de-escalation and calm, especially ending the war in the Gaza Strip. (QNA)

Amir meets Bahraini FM



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani received at his office in Lusail Palace yesterday Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bahrain Dr Abdullatif bin Rashid al-Zayani, and the accompanying delegation, on the occasion of their visit to the country. Dr al-Zayani conveyed the greetings of Bahrain King Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifah, wishing His Highness good health and happiness, and the Qatari people continued progress, development and prosperity. For his part, His Highness the Amir entrusted the Bahraini minister to convey his greetings to King Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifah, wishing him good health and happiness, and the Bahraini people further development and prosperity. During the meeting, the two sides discussed relations between the two countries, and ways to enhance and develop them. HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani attended the meeting. (QNA)

Bahraini FM leaves Doha



Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bahrain Dr Abdullatif bin Rashid al-Zayani left Doha yesterday afternoon after an official visit to Qatar. The minister and the accompanying delegation were seen off at Doha International Airport by Director of Department of Protocol at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ibrahim bin Yusef Fakhroo. (QNA)

Shura Council speaker meets vice-president of France-Qatar Parliamentary Friendship Group



HE the Speaker of the Shura Council Hassan bin Abdullah al-Ghanem met yesterday with Member of the Foreign Affairs Commission and Vice-President of France-Qatar Friendship Group in the French National Assembly (Parliament) Amelia Lakrifi, who is visiting the country. During the meeting, they discussed the existing bilateral relations between Qatar and France, especially parliamentary co-operation, and ways to enhance and develop them. They emphasised the importance of exchanging visits and meetings between the two friendship groups on both sides, which would contribute to strengthening co-operation relations and exchanging parliamentary experiences. The meeting was attended by HE the Deputy Speaker of the Shura Council Dr Hamda bint Hassan al-Sulaiti and Member of the Shura Council and Chairperson of the Internal and External Affairs Committee at the Council Yusef bin Ali al-Khater. The meeting was also attended by ambassador of the French Republic to the State of Qatar Jean-Baptiste Faivre. (QNA)

Dutch PM affirms support for Qatar's efforts to de-escalate in Gaza

Prime Minister of the Netherlands, Mark Rutte, expressed his country's support for the State of Qatar's important and effective role in preventing all forms of escalation in the Gaza Strip and the occupied Palestinian territories, and avoiding an expansion of the regional conflict. In a post on the social media platform X (formerly Twitter), he said that he spoke with His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani over the phone about the situation in the Gaza Strip. He wrote: "I expressed my strong support for the key role Qatar is playing in the efforts to help resolve this horrific conflict. There must be a ceasefire as soon as possible, followed by a lasting resolution. "It is necessary for far more humanitarian aid to be allowed into Gaza and for the hostages be released. Finally, everything must be done to prevent regional escalation". (QNA)

Labour minister participates in Saudi seminar on enhancing co-operation in combating trafficking



HE the Minister of Labour and Chairman of the National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking (NCCHT) Dr Ali bin Smaikh al-Marri, participated in a seminar entitled 'Enhancing Co-operation in the Field of Combating Trafficking in Persons' in Riyadh. The seminar reviewed the legislative and institutional frameworks and procedures aimed at combating trafficking in persons, how to benefit from best practices and global experiences and the challenges facing countries in combating trafficking in persons and ways to address them. HE the Minister of Labour Dr Ali bin Smaikh al-Marri also had a meeting with President of the Human Rights Commission (HRC) and Chair of the Committee for Combating Trafficking in Persons Dr Hala bint Mazyad al-Tuwajri. The meeting took place on the sidelines of a seminar where they discussed methods to share knowledge and expertise, particularly in the area of human trafficking prevention. (QNA)

Ministry holds talks session on driving students' future success

QNA
Doha

CEO of Qatar Credit Bureau Sheikha Maryam bint Khalifa al-Thani praised the significant role of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education in supporting the field of economics and business management by incorporating financial and banking concepts in its curriculums and establishing specialised schools in the field.

She emphasised the importance of collaboration between the ministry and other banking sectors in the country to provide field visits for students and conduct workshops as these activities contribute to enhancing students' ability to identify their academic and career paths in line with their future aspirations.

During her participation in a

session organised by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education at Umm Ayman Secondary School for Girls, she delivered a message to the youth of the future, emphasising the necessity of persistence in achieving dreams and ambitions, regardless of the challenges they may face, highlighting that success requires determination, ambition, and strong will, with a focus on the importance of giving back to the nation and society on the path to success.

For her part, Assistant Secretary-General of Qatar National Archive Aisha al-Saad also highlighted the role and efforts of the Archive in supporting students. She stressed the importance for Qatari students to recognise the value of this heritage, take pride in it, and co-operate with schools in the country. She noted that such co-operation includes conducting

workshops to promote awareness of documentary heritage and organising field visits for students to explore the library and exhibition at the Archives.

She emphasised the importance of ethical values in the professional path, including fostering good ethics, sincerity in work, co-operation, justice, and tolerance. She noted that these values contribute to building trust among employees and enhance team spirit within the workplace. Furthermore, she highlighted that showing love for others plays a fundamental role in promoting positive attitudes and interactions in the study and work environment.

During the session, both Sheikha Maryam bint Khalifa al-Thani and Aisha al-Saad shared their educational and professional journeys, as well as their practical and executive experiences and achievements in this context.

Customs seize guns at Abu Samra border

The Land Customs Department at the General Authority of Customs (GAC) has foiled the attempt to smuggle firearms into Qatar. According to a post by GAC on X, the weapons were found concealed inside a vehicle coming through the Abu Samra border crossing. Upon arrival at the port, the vehicle was checked and three guns and 1,900 bullets were found hidden inside a door.



MoI begins awareness programme

The Ministry of Interior began its awareness programme targeted at school students under the supervision of the permanent committee for punitive and correctional institutions. The Ministries of Interior, Sports and Youth, Endowments (Awqaf) and Islamic Affairs, Education and Higher Education, Social Development and Family, and the Public Prosecution participate in the programme. The awareness programme aims to educate young people about the dangers of committing crimes and ways to prevent them as it focuses on religious, educational, security and legal awareness. The programme is done in 16 schools for boys and girls in the primary, preparatory and secondary levels. The lectures presented in the programme address many awareness topics aimed at creating a conscious and educated generation capable of assuming social responsibility. (QNA)





Crown Princess of Sweden Princess Victoria Ingrid Alice Desiree with HE the Minister of Social Development and Family Maryam bint Ali bin Nasser al-Misnad in Stockholm.



Crown princess of Sweden, Qatar minister enhance ties in social, humanitarian areas

QNA
Stockholm

Crown Princess of Sweden Princess Victoria Ingrid Alice Desiree met with HE the Minister of Social Development and Family Maryam bint Ali bin Nasser al-Misnad, who is currently visiting the country as part of an official working visit aimed at deepening means of bilateral co-operation between the two friendly countries in the field of social and development work.

HE al-Misnad emphasised the importance of the visit in light of the distinguished relations between the two countries, expressing hope that its outcomes would contribute to strengthening bilateral co-operation in the humanitarian, social, and developmental sectors, for the benefit of both nations and their friendly peoples.

HE the Minister of Social Development and Family also discussed with her Swedish counterpart Minister for Social Services Camilla Waltersson Gronvall, in

the presence of State Secretary to the Minister for Social Services Minna Ljunggren and ambassador of Qatar to Sweden Nadia bint Ahmed al-Sheebi, avenues of mutual co-operation and exchange of expertise regarding the development of social work mechanisms, as well as consulting on the latest developments in science and scientific research that serve those benefiting from security and social services programmes.

HE al-Misnad visited the headquarters of the National Board of Health and Welfare to learn about

the mechanisms of social services and child protection provided by the Board, discussing ways to exchange scientific and practical experiences in this regard. HE the Minister was accompanied by Minna Ljunggren, the Swedish State Secretary to the Minister for Social Services.

HE al-Misnad also invited her Swedish counterpart Camilla Waltersson Gronvall and Minister for Older People and Social Security Anna Tenje to visit Qatar to deepen discussion of ways and mechanisms for exchanging

experiences. The Qatari and Swedish sides discussed areas of co-operation between the two friendly countries as well as ways to enhance and develop them.

They also addressed the most prominent social issues of mutual interest, including social security, child and women protection, family preservation, support for persons with special needs, the elderly, and persons with disabilities in conflict and war zones.

HE the Minister of Social Development and Family and her

Swedish counterpart exchanged a declaration of intent to deepen bilateral relations and joint work, paving the way for the exchange of technical and legal expertise in the field of social work, which would lead to future agreements to enhance co-operation between the two countries in this field.

HE the Minister hailed the remarkable development of relations between Qatar and Sweden, especially with the annual political consultations since 2019, which reflects the similarity of visions regarding bilateral issues.

Qatar hosts delegation from Russia as part of family reunification efforts

QNA
Doha

Qatar hosted a delegation from Russia, led by Presidential Commissioner for Children's Rights Maria Lvova-Belova. This comes within the framework of Qatar's ongoing mediation efforts to reunite families separated by the Russian-Ukrainian conflict.

HE the Minister of State for International Co-operation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Lolwah bint Rashid AlKhatir, met with the Russian delegation. Accompanied by the delegation, HE AlKhatir welcomed the Russian families hosted by Qatar as part of the Health and Recovery Program, in the framework of enhancing trust and demonstrating the tangible positive results of the mediation process.

In addition, HE AlKhatir and Maria Lvova-Belova discussed further co-operation for humanitarian purposes, including the reunification of separated children with their parents and other close relatives. In a statement, HE the Minister of State for International Co-operation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed her gratitude towards the visiting Russian delegation. "We are profoundly thankful to Maria Lvova-Belova, and her team, for their pivotal role and ongoing commit-



ment to the reunification efforts," she remarked. "This visit not only strengthens our collaborative efforts, but also brings invaluable support to our shared goal of healing and restoring families affected by the conflict," she added.

"We are sincerely grateful to HE Lolwah bint Rashid AlKhatir for her attention to the well-being of Russian and Ukrainian children. At today's meeting, we discussed the current groups that we are working on and identified those who genuinely need assistance in reuniting with their families. They include 29 children who are currently in Russia, and we are working to reu-

nite them with their parents and loved ones in Ukraine. We also asked for assistance in reunifying 19 children in different countries with their families in Russia. Thank you to the State of Qatar for creating space for dialogue," said Maria Lvova-Belova.

Qatar is hosting 20 reunified families, including 37 children, from April 18th to April 27th. This comes as part of a programme that helps promote health recovery and stability, by focusing on the mental, physical and social health of each family member, thus enabling families to rebuild their lives with confidence and safety.

Qatar welcomes Ukrainian delegation

QNA
Doha

Qatar hosted a delegation from Ukraine led by Parliamentary Commissioner for Human Rights Dmytro Lubinets, as part of its continuous mediation efforts to reunite families affected by the ongoing conflict.

HE the Minister of State for International Co-operation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Lolwah bint Rashid AlKhatir held meetings with the Ukrainian delegation. Together, they also welcomed the Ukrainian families participating in Qatar's Health and Recovery Program. This initiative is aimed at building trust and showcasing the concrete benefits of the mediation efforts.

In her statement, HE Lolwah bint Rashid AlKhatir conveyed her appreciation for the Ukrainian delegation's involvement. "We are



deeply grateful to Dmytro Lubinets and his team for their crucial contributions to our reunification efforts," she stated. "This visit underscores the strengthening of our collaboration with Ukraine in promoting human rights and affirming our shared values, further cementing our commitment to these fundamental principles."

Qatar is hosting 20 reunified families, including 37 children, from April 18 to April 27. This comes as part of a programme that helps promote health recovery and stability, by focusing on the mental, physical and social health of each family member, thus enabling families to rebuild their lives with confidence and safety.



QF to host Autism Awareness Day event at Al Shaqab

Qatar Foundation (QF) will host its annual Autism Awareness Family Fun Day at Al Shaqab Longines Arena tomorrow. The event, in co-operation with Al Shaqab, a QF member, aims to raise awareness and foster understanding of autism through a variety of engaging and educational activities, workshops, and games, a statement said.

Part of a series of events throughout April, it is a collaborative effort coordinated by QF's Pre-University Education, alongside 27 partnering entities including Renad Academy, Awsaj Academy, The Learning Center, and the Ability Friendly Programme.

Lulwa al-Darwish, integration co-ordinator at Renad Academy, said: "As we mark Autism Awareness Day, let us celebrate the unique talents and abilities of individuals on the autism spectrum. This day is not just about raising awareness but also about fostering a deeper understanding and acceptance in our communities."

to challenge the stigma and misconceptions surrounding autism, highlighting the valuable contributions that individuals with autism make to society. She spoke about the importance of promoting inclusion and providing the necessary support to help those on the autism spectrum thrive.

"It is essential that we continue to educate ourselves and others about autism, recognising that every person, regardless of their abilities, has inherent value and deserves respect," she said. "Together, let us create a world where individuals with autism are embraced for who they are, where their strengths are celebrated, and where they are afforded every opportunity to shine."

Noof al-Mansoor, head of the Equestrian Institute at Al Shaqab, emphasised the importance of Autism Awareness Day, and noted its significant impact on children and their families. "As we come together to celebrate and honour Autism Awareness Day, we recognise the profound impact it holds



File picture from an earlier edition of QF's annual Autism Awareness Family Fun Day.

for children and their families," she explained.

"It's a day not just to raise awareness, but to challenge the prevailing stigma surrounding autism in society. Raising com-

munity awareness about Autism Awareness Day is crucial in building a more inclusive society," she continued.

"It's a call to action, urging us all to embrace diversity, dismantle

barriers, and champion acceptance, and acknowledge the unique abilities that children on the autism spectrum possess, talents that enrich our communities."

Al-Mansoor also mentioned

that by fostering understanding and acceptance, society can empower individuals on the autism spectrum to fully participate, bringing their valuable perspectives and creativity into the fabric of our community.

Remarking on the importance of educating the public about autism, and discussing how initiatives like Al Shaqab's Equine Assisted Therapy demonstrate the transformative power of support and inclusion, she said: "By providing innovative avenues for communication and growth, programs like these pave the way for individuals with autism to thrive and fulfil their potential."

This year celebrates the 17th anniversary of World Autism Awareness Day. Proposed by QF Chairperson Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, to the United Nations in 2007, it highlights QF's sustained commitment to promoting acceptance and inclusion within the community. The first World Autism Awareness Day was celebrated on 2 April 2008.

MES celebrates World Heritage Day

As a part of its 50th-year celebrations and with an objective to fostering a deeper appreciation for cultural heritage among students, MES Indian School observed 'World Heritage Day' on April 18, 2024. At special assemblies in all the sections, students were told about the true meaning of heritage, its importance and the need for its preservation. A programme at the conference hall featured a documentary video on World Heritage Day.

The students exhibited a colourful costume presentation on the theme, 'Discover and Experience Diversity' depicting the culture and tradition of various communities, showcasing the beauty and uniqueness of various heritage practices from around the world and fostering a spirit of inclusivity and appreciation for cultural differences.

Addressing the gathering principal Dr Hameeda Kadar, said: "Through education, and responsible stewardship, we can ensure that these priceless legacies of the world will continue to inspire and enrich lives for centuries to come?"

A quiz on World Heritage Day was conducted by Randeer K, teacher, department of social science.

Aryan Unnikrishnan, head prefect, spoke on the importance of safeguarding the shared heritage for the benefit of the present and future generations. Ahmad Faisal, head boy, welcomed the gathering and Lulwa, a student of class XI, proposed a vote of thanks.

Earlier, Tooba, also from class XI, gave an introductory speech.

Jahfar Niyyas Para, co-ordinator, department of social science, along with a team of teachers including the members of the school cultural committee co-ordinated the event.



Academic awards at DPS-MIS

DPS-Modern Indian School hosted the 2023-24 academic award ceremony for achievers from grades VIII, IX, and XI. Around 210 students were awarded trophies, badges, certificates, blue blazers and blue ties, silver medals, gold medals and special awards for their merit in academics.

President Yasir Nainar, the chief guest, appreciated the dedication and determination of the awardees and advised them to consider the wide array of career paths available globally.

He underscored that expertise in AI will give individuals a competitive edge and regarded the younger generation as key players in incorporating innovative techniques and bridging the technological gap among various age-groups.

Principal Asna Nafees lauded the achievers and highlighted the school's commitment to inclusive education.



She inspired the students to concentrate on acquiring hands-on skills, adhere to their academic goals, and become advocates of positive change.



Classical dance, music group performs at ICC

A renowned dance and singing troupe from India, comprising Esha Goswami, Chandralekha Dutta, Rudrava Niogi, Sahila Panja and Arnab Basu, performed recently at the Indian Cultural Centre in Doha as part of the 'ICC Wednesday Fiesta,' in association with Bangiya Parishad Qatar. ICC president A P Manikantan thanked the community for the response to the cultural events. Vice-president Subramanya Hebbagelu, general secretary Mohan Kumar and other officials were present. School activities head Shantanu Deshpande anchored the event proceedings. ICC secretary Abraham Joseph proposed a vote of thanks.



Ladies golf event

Doha Golf Club (DGC) and Mayfair Hospitality along with the ladies captain Cherehzade Boocha recently hosted an Individual Stableford event, welcoming ladies from the Royal Golf Club Bahrain, captained by Lauga Sigfusdotir. The event at DGC saw Rukkaiya Pachisa topping the chart with 41 points, representing the host. Around 20 ladies from DGC will visit Bahrain in May to participate in the Spring Cup (Ladies) featuring participants from the GCC countries.



Eid Milan gathering, Mushaira organised



Bazm e Urdu Qatar secretary-general Ahmed Ashfaq organised an Eid Milan get together and Mushaira. Renowned poet Azizi Nabeel presided. Bazm e Urdu president Ijaz Haider was the chief guest. Nadeem Mahir convened the Mushaira. Osama Shamsi recited verses from the Holy Qur'an. Tahir Jamil, Raqim Azmim, Ashfaq Deshmukh, Athar Azmi, Nadeem Gilani, Ahmed Ashfaq, Nadeem Mahir, Ijaz Haider and Azizi Nabeel presented their poetry.

VCUarts graphic design students support forum

Faculty and students from the Department of Graphic Design at Virginia Commonwealth University School of the Arts in Qatar - a Qatar Foundation (QF) partner university - were at the forefront of organising Education City's first Qatar Teaching and Learning Forum (QTLF) conference, recently.

Assistant professor Peter Martin led efforts at the event attended by more than 60 faculty members and students from seven Education City universities, and QF senior leadership including president of Higher Education, Francisco Marmolejo, who delivered the opening keynote to the gathering.

Titled 'Badir: Starting New Conversations on Teaching + Learning in Education City', the conference aimed to help teaching professionals and students share techniques, experiments, stories and conversations that lead to more effective teaching and learning methodologies.

Jörg Matthias Determann, PhD, professor of History, Liberal Arts and Sciences, VCUarts Qatar, gave a talk titled 'Globalise Your Pedagogy with Children's Books' at the forum.

The forum also provided an excellent opportunity for 11 students in the BFA Graphic Design programme's 'GDES 380.2 Multistudio 1' course, taught by Martin, to collaborate on a non-campus project.

'GDES 380.2 Multistudio 1' is dedicated to learning about the aspects, processes and skills for creative collaboration.

The students - Reem al-Mannai, Fatima al-Kuwari, Hissa al-Mahmoud, Maryam al-Mannai, Rahaf al-Mohannadi, Tuleen al-Naji, Shahd al-Shahwani, Aldana Alsulaiti, Lolwa AlMulla, Dayna Balough and Sufyan Shaikh - created branding for the venue and related artworks for digital and print platforms, and for participant giveaways.





Warming up



A flock of Great Cormorants warm on a breakwater in the afternoon sun during the recent winter months at Al Khor, about 50km from Doha. **PICTURE:** Gulf Times news editor Bonnie James.

Grand show of Kerala's cultural heritage



Samsmrithi not only celebrated Kerala's illustrious past but also illuminated the path forward, showcasing the vibrancy and dynamism of its contemporary cultural landscape

Southern Indian state of Kerala's cultural heritage was showcased by Sanskriti at a grand event titled *Samsmrithi*, which featured over 150 performers.

The event was held at the Indian Cultural Centre (ICC).

Orchestrated by Rathesh Mathradan and supported by Tejas Narayanan, the show was scripted by Biju P Mangalam and choreographed by Athira Arun

Lal; supported by Choorakudy Kalarai Sangam. Divya teacher and Pratheesh MV were the programme conveners.

Samsmrithi not only celebrated Kerala's illustrious past but also illuminated the path forward, showcasing the vibrancy and dynamism of its contemporary cultural landscape. From the legendary icons of yore to the emerging luminaries of today, the event provided

a platform for dialogue, exploration, and celebration, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of Kerala's cultural heritage.

Ramachandran Arsh, Sunni, Rakhi Vinod, and Devika Vinod, along with Nikhil Kumar, Fahad Ahmed and Jinen Mukundan managed the artists' co-ordination.

ICC president A P Manikantan inaugurated the public ceremony and San-

skriti Mansoura unit president Sabina Aziz presided.

Sanskriti president Ahmed Kutty, general secretary Jalil A K, Expatriates Welfare Board director E M Sudhir, Vanitavedhi secretary Jasita Chinduraj and others offered felicitations.

Mansoura unit joint secretary Fahad Ahmed welcomed the gathering and central committee member Biju P Mangalam proposed a vote of thanks.





Nepal media celebrates Amir's visit with comprehensive media coverage

QNA
Doha

The media in Nepal, including newspapers, television channels, and news websites, celebrated yesterday through comprehensive press coverage the visit of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani to Kathmandu, which concluded on Wednesday as part of an Asian tour.

The media in Nepal covered many aspects of the visit, reviewing the strategic importance and promising results from His Highness's visit to Nepal.

Nepalese television channels followed with great interest the news of the visit of His Highness the Amir, highlighting the outcomes that resulted from the signing of several agreements concerned with sports, arts, culture, and scientific research. In this context, a report by Kantipur TV (KTV) said that during the state visit of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani

to Nepal, the labour agreement between the two countries was discussed with great interest.

The report included in the news bulletin added that the visit of the the Amir of the State of Qatar culminated in the signing of six Memoranda of Understanding concerned with sports, arts, culture, scientific research, and news exchange.

For its part, *Republica* newspaper said in a report under the title 'Cabinet approves memoranda of understanding to be signed between Nepal and Qatar,' indicating that the Nepalese government approved the joint memoranda of understanding between Nepal and Qatar, adding that the agreements and memoranda of understanding include vital areas for bilateral co-operation relations and vary from the fields of education, culture, youth, sports, media, training, and co-operation in the field of diplomatic work.

It affirmed that the visit of the Amir to Kathmandu witnessed calls for investment in the tourism, agriculture, and hydro-



electric energy sectors in Nepal, highlighting the contribution of Nepalese workers to the development of Qatar. The newspaper added in a report entitled 'Prez Paudel solicits Qatar's investment in Nepal's water resources, agriculture and tourism sectors' and that informed officials believe that the discussions and agreement between the two countries on Wednesday would pave the way for new opportunities for Qatari investment in Ne-

pal's water resources, agriculture, and tourism sectors.

The officials expressed optimism that the visit would identify more areas of co-operation and strengthen relations between Qatar and Nepal, pointing out that the visit of His Highness the Amir of Qatar just before Nepal's investment conference, is expected to send a positive message about Nepal at the international level, the paper added. In turn, a Nepali TV correspondent said that the

visit of the Amir of the State of Qatar to Nepal gains its importance because it is the first visit by a Gulf ruler to Kathmandu on a historic state visit, indicating that Nepal celebrated the distinguished diplomatic relations with Qatar, and designated this visit as an honorary one when it declared on Tuesday a national holiday.

The correspondent added in an interview with the news bulletin that a large number of Nepalese workers live in the State of Qatar. Therefore, it is natural that the relationship between the two countries is so friendly, pointing out that the largest part of Nepalese economic revenues comes from the State of Qatar being one of the richest countries in the world, which makes remittances coming from this country very high, out of every five Nepalese families there is a family with an individual working in Doha.

For its part, Nepalese *The Kathmandu Post* newspaper said that the visit of the His Highness the Amir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani to the country is

the highest-level visit from Qatar after the two countries established diplomatic relations in 1977.

The newspaper said in its report that the Amir pledged to strengthen bilateral relations with Nepal and diversify the economic and social support provided to Nepal, adding that the Qatari side also expressed great interest in increasing investment in the hydroelectric sector in Nepal.

According to the newspaper, the two parties reached an understanding in areas such as hydropower, agriculture, tourism, water resource conservation, and climate change. The two sides are expected to discuss many issues of bilateral interest, including inviting Qatari investments in various sectors in Nepal and renewing the working agreement, it continued.

Nepal's Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal is likely to submit a request for Qatari investment in a major project, either building an international airport or a hydroelectric project, according to officials familiar with the meeting's agenda, the paper added.

Ashghal receives Chinese delegation



The Public Works Authority (Ashghal) has received a Chinese delegation from the Weifang Municipal Government, Changda Construction Group and Shandong Weifang Special Steel Group. According to a statement on X, the Chinese delegation led by Liu Yun, secretary of the CPC Weifang Municipal Committee was received by Ashghal's Project Affairs director Yousef al-Emadi and a number of officials. The meeting discussed areas of mutual interest and future collaboration between the two sides. Ashghal gave a presentation about its upcoming projects and its focus on the use of innovative technology and sustainability strategy. Changda Construction Group's presentation covered the company's organisation and wide experience in delivering projects aligned to Ashghal's workload and their use of the latest technology and methodologies.



MoI training course concludes



A training course by the the Permanent Committee for Ports Management at the Ministry of Interior (MoI) concluded yesterday. Under the title 'Understanding Security Systems for Maintaining Maritime Ports Security', the course was organised in collaboration with the Police Officers Institute at the Police Academy. The week-long course, according to a statement by MoI on X, was attended by 25 participants, including officers from the committee and various MoI departments as well as participants from other entities in the country. Maritime expert Dr Abdulameer al-Faraj from Kuwait was the resource person. The graduation ceremony was attended by Brig Dr Abdulhadi Mohamed Zaben al-Dosari, president of the Permanent Committee for Ports Management and Colonel Naif Mohamed Al-Mana'i, director of the Police Officers Institute.

OIC welcomes Jamaica's recognition of the State of Palestine

QNA
Jeddah

The Organisation of Islamic Co-operation (OIC) welcomed the decision of the Government of Jamaica to recognise the State of Palestine, considering such important step to be consistent with international law and relevant United Nations resolutions, as it contributes to enabling the Palestinian people to exercise their legitimate rights, including their right to return, and to establish their independent State on the 1967 borders with its capital in East Jerusalem.

The OIC also renewed its call on all countries of the world that have not yet recognised the State of Palestine to take the initiative to announce their recognition of the State of Palestine, in support of international efforts aimed at achieving peace and stability in the region on the basis of the two-state solution and the relevant resolu-

tions of international legitimacy.

The OIC welcomed the report issued by the Independent Review Committee (IRC) on United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), which concluded that the agency is committed to the humanitarian principle of neutrality, as well as the importance of its vital role in supporting relief and humanitarian efforts for millions of Palestinian refugees who are experiencing an unprecedented humanitarian crisis, especially in the Gaza Strip, as a result of the ongoing Israeli military aggression for more than six months.

The OIC indicated that the report's emphasis on the agency's adoption of effective mechanisms and procedures to promote UN values and humanitarian principles constitutes a clear response to what Israel, the occupying power, has continued to incite against UNRWA in an attempt to end its role and liquidate the Palestinian refugee issue. The organisation appreciated the positions of

the countries that announced new financial contributions, calling on all countries that announced the cessation of funding for UNRWA to review their decisions and resume their contributions in a way that ensures their continued responsibility towards providing basic services to millions of Palestinian refugees.

The organisation reiterated that the presence of UNRWA and the continuation of its role represents a top priority in humanitarian and relief terms, and constitutes a witness to the collective international commitment towards the rights of Palestinian refugees and an element of stability in the region. OIC renewed its commitment to fully support the role of UNRWA, based on its firm and supportive position for the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, including their right to return and self-determination, and embodying the establishment of their independent state on the 1967 borders with Jerusalem as its capital.

Doha Beach Club to host Qatar's first-ever Premier League Watch Party

Qatar Airways' Destination Management Company, Discover Qatar (DQ), will re-introduce B12 Beach Club as 'Doha Beach Club', and The Bistro by B12 as 'Beach House' as the two venues were re-branded recently.

Discover Qatar yesterday said Beach House and Doha Beach Club will host Qatar's first-ever 'Premier League Watch Party' in partnership with beIN Sports and sponsored by Qatar Airways. The action kicks-off tomorrow (April 27) at 2:30pm with West Ham vs Liverpool.

Beach House will then show three more League games on the large screen including Manchester United vs Burnley starting at 5pm, Everton vs Brentford at 7:30pm, ending with Aston Villa vs Chelsea at 10pm.

beIN Sports' accompanying pre- and post-match studios will be presented live from Doha Beach Club, hosted by beIN's presenters and broadcasting icons Rich-

ard Keys, Andy Gray and Nicky Crosby, with expert analysis from Premier League winners Peter Schmeichel and John Obi Mikel.

In addition to the exclusive event, Doha Beach Club delivers entertainment and activities for all, including DJ and live music over the weekend, and engaging activities for children.

The family-friendly beach club on West Bay's coastline now offers complimentary entry for children up to 15, the entrance charge for visitors 16 and above, on weekdays is QR75, and QR100 over the weekend. It also provides a combination beach and lunch deal on weekdays for only QR120 and brunch on weekends starting from QR280.

Doha Beach Club also introduces an exclusive Ladies-only area that features dedicated showers, changing rooms, and an all-female staff. Additionally, every Tuesday is 'Ladies Day' at Doha



Beach Club with complimentary entry for women.

Beach House bistro remains free to enter and welcomes everyone,

serving food and beverages.

The outdoor mega-screen, which was successful during the AFC Asian Cup, will remain in

place until the end May, broadcasting the exciting conclusion of the English Premier League, Champions League, F1 races from

Miami, Italy and Monaco and much more.

Qatar Airways senior vice-president (Discover Qatar) Steven Reynolds, said: "As the operator of the Doha Beach Club, Discover Qatar is excited to lead this new chapter of this beachfront venue."

Doha Beach Club and Beach House also offers panoramic views of the Arabian Sea, The Pearl, and Lusail.

Guests under the age of 16 must be accompanied by a guardian. Every Tuesday, the Beach House is offering a Pizza Night from 6pm to 8pm for QR99 for adults, and QR50 for children aged 7-15.

Through Qatar Airways Privilege Club, the airline's loyalty programme, members can now collect and spend their Avios at Doha Beach Club and Beach House by using the debit or credit cards linked to their membership account through the "Card-Linked Offers" platform.

LAW AND ORDER

Australian police charge five teens in cleric stabbing

Australian police yesterday said they have charged five teenagers with terrorism-related offences in investigations following the stabbing of a bishop while he was giving a livestreamed sermon earlier this month. The five boys were arrested on Wednesday in the Sydney region. Police said they were associates of a 16-year-old boy previously charged in the knifing of Bishop Mar Mari Emmanuel, who was injured in the attack on April 15 at his church. The latest charges included possessing violent extremist material, conspiring to prepare for a terrorist act and carrying a knife in public, New South Wales police said.

DECISION

Bangladesh repatriates Myanmar troops

Bangladesh yesterday sent home nearly 300 Myanmar troops and civil servants who fled across the border to escape attacks on their outposts near the frontier between the two countries. Myanmar has been roiled in conflict since the military seized power from a democratically elected government in a 2021 coup. Violent clashes between soldiers of the Arakan Army, an armed group belonging to an ethnic minority, and junta forces since late last year saw hundreds of fleeing troops cross into Bangladesh. Government officials said a ship carrying soldiers, police and civil servants departed from the river port of Naniarchar yesterday.

OFFBEAT

Japan karate practitioner kicks away bears

A pair of bears picked the wrong person to mess with in Japan when they approached a 50-year-old karate practitioner only to be kicked away, police and media said. Masato Fukuda was lightly injured in his encounter with the bears yesterday morning in Nayoro city. The man was visiting Nayoro's mountainous area when he chanced upon the two brown bears, the *Mainichi* newspaper reported. One of them came towards him - but unfortunately for the animal, Fukuda was experienced in karate. Fukuda kicked it in the face - twice - and in the process twisted his leg, but his attack swiftly scared away the hapless duo, reports said.

CRIME

Meta sued in Japan over celebrity investment scams

Four scam victims in Japan sued Facebook yesterday after being hoodwinked by fraudulent online investment ads that used images of celebrities without their consent. Online hoaxes posted on Facebook and other social media channels in Japan led to \$178mn in losses last year, according to the National Police Agency. The four filed the case with Kobe District Court demanding Facebook Japan, owned by US group Meta, pay \$148,000 in damages, according to their lawyer. The plaintiffs say they fell victim to adverts posted on Facebook offering high investment returns and which used images of wealthy celebrities like Japanese billionaire Yusaku Maezawa.

China must have confidence to talk to us: Taiwan's president-elect

Reuters
Taipei

China should have the confidence to talk to Taiwan's legally elected government, President-elect Lai Ching-te said yesterday as he appointed his new national security and diplomacy team amid what he called unprecedented challenges.

China, which views Taiwan as its own territory, over the island's strong objections, has ramped up military and political pressure against Taipei during the past four years as it seeks to press sovereignty claims.

Lai, who takes office on May 20, is particularly disliked by Beijing, which views him as a dangerous separatist.

Lai has repeatedly offered to talk with China but has been rebuffed.

The challenge the new national security team is facing is unprecedented, given the rise of authoritarianism, and China pressing closer all the time, Lai told reporters as he announced the teams, staffed by people in the current administration.

He also again offered to talk to Beijing.

"I am very much looking forward to China having the confidence to engage with the elected and legitimate government that the Taiwan people have entrusted. That is the right way for cross-strait exchange," he said.

Lai said Beijing would not get support from the Taiwanese pub-

lic if they are only willing to engage Taiwan's opposition with "political preconditions", in a veiled reference to the opposition Kuomintang (KMT) party, whose senior leaders have made frequent visits to China in recent months.

China's Taiwan Affairs Office referred Reuters to comments it made on January 17 after Lai won the election in which it said Lai did not represent mainstream public opinion, given he did not win a majority of all the votes cast, and that the result did not change the fact Taiwan is part of China.

Beijing has repeatedly said any talks can only take place if Taiwan's government accepts that both sides of the Taiwan Strait are part of "one China", which is supported by the KMT but rejected by Lai and President Tsai Ing-wen.

National Security Council secretary-general Wellington Koo, a lawyer by training, will take over as defence minister from Chiu Kuo-cheng, a former army commander, Lai said.

Koo said he was determined to discourage any Chinese adventurism over Taiwan with "co-ordinated actions" with allies in the region and show the world Taiwan's determination to defend itself by strengthening its combat capabilities.

"Our top aim is to complicate the other side of the strait's calculations to make a timetable for possible rash actions," he said, standing on stage with Lai and other incoming ministers.

China's Shenzhou-18 mission heads to space station



A crew of three astronauts from China's Shenzhou-18 mission took off on a rocket bound for the Tiangong space station yesterday, the latest mission in Beijing's space programme that aims to send astronauts to the Moon by 2030. The crew took off on a spaceship on top of a Long March-2F rocket from the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center in China's northwest at 8.59pm local time (1259 GMT). The mission is led by Ye Guangfu, a fighter pilot and astronaut who was previously part of the Shenzhou-13 crew in 2021. He is joined by astronauts Li Cong and Li Guangsu, who are heading into space for the first time.

Blinken calls for US, China to manage differences

AFP
Beijing

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken yesterday called on the US and China to manage their differences "responsibly" as he landed in Beijing for tough talks with the rival power's leaders.

Blinken is expected to address a range of thorny issues including Chinese support for Russia and its treatment of Taiwan, with China likely to raise trade concerns such as new US action against popular social media app TikTok.

Blinken headed straight to a closed-door

gathering with leading Chinese scholars yesterday. A full day of talks with China's political leadership is planned for today, including a possible meeting with President Xi Jinping.

Blinken arrived from Shanghai, where the top US diplomat attempted a charm offensive that saw him sample local food, watch a basketball game and stroll along the city's famous Bund promenade.

Visiting the local Communist Party leader in a room with sweeping views of the Shanghai skyline, Blinken said US President Joe Biden was committed to "direct and sustained" dialogue between the world's two largest economies after years of mounting tension.

"I think it's important to underscore the value

- in fact, the necessity - of direct engagement, of speaking to each other, laying out our differences, which are real, seeking to work through them," Blinken said.

"We have an obligation for our people - indeed an obligation to the world - to manage the relationship between our two countries responsibly."

The Chinese Communist Party secretary for Shanghai, Chen Jining, welcomed Blinken partly in English and spoke of the importance of US businesses to the city.

"Whether we choose cooperation or confrontation affects the well-being of both peoples, both countries and the future of humanity," Chen told him.

Vietnam court jails soft drinks tycoon in \$40mn scam case

Vietnam's top soft drinks tycoon was jailed for eight years yesterday in a \$40mn fraud case, the latest high-profile business figure snared in the country's sweeping crackdown on corruption. The communist nation's wide-ranging campaign to wipe out endemic graft has seen more than 4,400 people charged with criminal offences, including officials and senior business figures. A court in Ho Chi Minh City found Tran Qui Thanh and his two daughters guilty of scamming investors over loans issued in 2019 and 2020. Thanh, the 71-year-old chairman of beverage group Tan Hiep Phat, was ruled to have masterminded scams to appropriate assets put up as collateral against loans, state media reported. Even when the borrowers paid back the money with interest, Thanh would refuse to give back the assets on various pretexts, including claiming they had forfeited their repurchase rights due to contract breaches.

100 pilot whales stranded in Australia



Marine wildlife experts were frantically trying to rescue some 140 pilot whales stranded yesterday in the shallow waters of an estuary in the southwest of the state of Western Australia. The whales are stranded at Toby Inlet in Geographe Bay, the Western Australia Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions said. The area is near the town of Dunsborough in a region popular with tourists, and about 236km south of state capital Perth. "We understand there are four pods of up to 160 pilot whales in total spread across about 500 metres. Unfortunately, 26 whales that stranded on the beach have died," a department spokesperson said in a statement.

Manila court blocks GMO 'golden rice' production

AFP
Manila

A Philippine court has blocked the commercial propagation of genetically modified golden rice because it said conflicting scientific views gave rise to "severe" health and environmental safety concerns.

The Philippines was the first country in the world to approve golden rice, which is enriched with the Vitamin A precursor beta-carotene and has a bright yellow colour, in a bid to combat childhood blindness.

However, the Court of Appeals in Manila revoked a biosafety permit for commercial production of the rice granted by government regulators in 2021 after 14 opponents filed a challenge.

The court's ruling, issued on April 17, also applies to a geneti-

cally modified eggplant, BT eggplant, that is pest resistant.

"By reason of the conflicting scientific views and uncertainties on the risks and effects of Golden Rice and BT eggplant, potential severe and grave threats to the welfare of people and the environment arise," the court said.

Commercial propagation was not allowed "until such time that the concerned respondent government agencies submit proof of safety and compliance with all legal requirements", it said.

Experts hope the rice will help combat childhood blindness and save lives in the developing world.

World Health Organisation data show vitamin A deficiency causes up to 500,000 cases of childhood blindness every year, mostly in developing countries, with half of those dying within 12 months of losing their sight.

Heatstroke kills 30 in Thailand this year as southeast Asia bakes

AFP
Bangkok

Millions of people across south and southeast Asia sweltered through unusually hot weather yesterday, as the Thai government said heatstroke has already killed at least 30 people this year.

A wave of exceptionally hot weather has blasted the region this week, prompting thousands of schools across the Philippines to suspend in-person classes.

Even mountainous Nepal issued health warnings and put hospitals on alert yesterday as temperatures

soared in its southern plains.

Scientific research has shown climate change is causing heatwaves to be longer, more frequent and more intense.

The United Nations said this week Asia was the region most affected by climate and weather hazards in 2023, with floods and storms the chief causes of casualties and economic losses.

City authorities in Bangkok gave an extreme heat warning as the heat index was expected to rise above 52 degrees Celsius.

Temperatures in the concrete sprawl of the Thai capital hit 40.1C on Wednesday and similar levels were forecast for yesterday.

The heat index - a measure of what the temperature feels like taking into account humidity, wind speed and other factors - was at an "extremely dangerous" level in Bangkok, the city's environment department warned.

Authorities in Udonthani province, in the kingdom's rural northeast, also warned of blazing temperatures.

The health ministry said 30 people had died from heatstroke between January 1 and April 17, compared with 37 in the whole of 2023.

Direk Khampaen, deputy director-general of Thailand's Department of Disease Control, said officials were urging elderly people

and those with underlying medical conditions including obesity to stay indoors and drink water regularly.

The Philippines' state weather service said the heat index in 38 cities and municipalities, including Manila, were in the "danger" zone yesterday - feeling like 42-51C.

"Heat cramps and heat exhaustion are likely" in such conditions, the service warned earlier, and "heat stroke is probable with continued exposure", the service said.

In Nepal, temperatures were forecast to soar above 40C in two southern provinces, and the government ordered officials to prepare.

"We have already circulated messages to local bodies to be alert and asked hospitals to be on standby to serve more patients," Roshan Pokhrel, a secretary at the ministry of health and population, said.

Krishna Kumar Gupta, an official in southern Lumbini province, said incidences of wildfires have also gone up.

"On Wednesday it was 43 degrees Celsius and people have also started to feel sick. We are getting complaints of diarrhoea, dehydration and headaches," he said.

April is typically the hottest time of the year in Thailand and other countries in southeast Asia but conditions this year have been ex-

acerbated by the El Nino weather pattern.

There were record levels of heat stress across the globe last year, with the United Nations weather and climate agency saying Asia was warming at a particularly rapid pace.

Thailand has sweltered through a heatwave this week, with a temperature of 44.2C recorded in the northern province of Lampang on Monday - just shy of the all-time national record of 44.6C hit last year.

Across the border in Myanmar, the temperature reached a blazing 45.9C on Wednesday, with same yesterday.



TRAGEDY

Six people killed in fire at hotel in Patna: police

At least six people were killed in a fire that ripped through a hotel in eastern India yesterday, police said, with rescue teams still searching the wreckage for survivors. The fire broke out at the Pal Hotel in Patna, the capital of Bihar state, and soon spread to adjacent buildings before it was extinguished. "So far six people have been killed," a police officer said adding the toll was likely to go up as the rescue operation was still underway. At least 18 others were injured and were "battling for their lives" in a local hospital, the officer added. It took more than three hours for firefighters to extinguish the blaze, which began around noon.

HEALTH

2mn Britons suffer long Covid symptoms: survey

Two million people across England and Scotland are still suffering from long Covid symptoms, of whom 381,000 have had their day-to-day activities limited a lot, according to a study published. Britain's Office for National Statistics said 3.3% of people surveyed between February 6 and March 7 reported having Covid symptoms that had lasted more than four weeks since an initial infection and were not explained by another medical condition. This was up slightly from the 2.9% of people who reported long Covid in a similar ONS survey in March 2023 which covered the whole UK, although the ONS said the two surveys' methods were not comparable.

ASSURANCE

Labour pledges to renationalise UK railways

Britain's main Labour opposition yesterday vowed to renationalise the UK's much-maligned rail services within five years if it wins a general election due later this year. Private companies currently run many of the rail networks but Labour said it would fold them into a single, publicly owned body when their contracts expire. "We will establish Great British Railways - a single, directing mind to control our railways in the passenger interest," said Labour's transport spokeswoman Louise Haigh. Britain's railways have been hit by a wave of strikes in recent years caused by cost-of-living pressures.

OFFICIAL

UK Rwanda asylum legislation formally becomes law

Britain's King Charles has given his assent to legislation central to Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's plan to send asylum seekers to Rwanda. Royal assent is the final stage in the legislative process, and effectively rubber stamps the decision taken by parliament earlier this week to approve the bill after a long battle between the government and opponents of the plan. The Royal Assent was announced in the House of Lords yesterday, meaning the Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Bill will now become law. On Monday, Sunak said he expected the first flights to Rwanda to take off in 10 to 12 weeks after it was passed.

India 'plans curbs on suspect bank accounts to fight cyber fraud'

Reuters
New Delhi

India's central bank plans to soon change guidelines to permit banks to temporarily freeze accounts suspected of being used to commit cyber crimes, as it battles a rising wave of online crime, three sources said.

The plans come as internal government data shows individuals have lost funds of nearly \$1.26bn in financial institutions to cyber fraud since 2021, with one of the sources saying about 4,000 fraudulent accounts are opened every day.

Tens of thousands of Indians receive daily telephone calls seeking to defraud them by accessing their bank accounts and wallets to siphon off money that then accumulates in the scammers' accounts.

To fight back, the regulator, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), is likely to let banks suspend such accounts, freeing victims from first having to file police complaints, said two government sources and a third aware of the central bank's thinking.

India's finance ministry, home ministry and central bank did not immediately respond to Reuters' e-mails seeking comment.

While perpetrators can empty accounts within minutes, banks now freeze accounts only after police register a crime report, a procedure that sometimes takes days, given the number of crimes

law enforcers must tackle, the sources said.

The suspensions would target accounts frequently misused to transfer funds gained from cyber crime, both government sources said.

The banking regulator will amend its guidelines for banks based on information from the home ministry's cyber fraud fighting agency, the Indian Cybercrime Co-ordination Centre, one of the government sources said.

Agency data shows that in the last three months the government has suspended 250,000 accounts used to siphon off funds, one of the government sources added.

The agency compiles data on misused bank accounts, electronic devices, mobile connections and criminals on a portal accessible to banks, police, and telecom operators.

Yet thousands of such fraud accounts operate with impunity since the hands of regulators and banks are tied in the absence of police complaints having been registered, one of the government sources said.

Names and details of miscreant account holders will be used to uncover more accounts held in other banks, and suspend those too, one of the government sources said.

However, a new centralised body is needed to investigate cyber frauds, said the source aware of the central bank's thinking, without elaborating.

Second phase of voting in India elections today



Officials carry Electronic Voting Machines (EVM) to a polling station in Wayanad district of Kerala yesterday on the eve of the second phase of voting in India's general elections.

US human rights report 'deeply biased': India

Reuters
New Delhi

New Delhi yesterday said it does not attach any value to a US state department report critical of human rights in India, and called it deeply biased.

The annual human rights assessment released earlier this week found "significant" abuses in India's northeastern Manipur state last year and attacks on minorities, journalists and dissenting voices in the rest of the country.

Asked about it, Indian foreign ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal told journalists

yesterday that the report "as per our understanding, is deeply biased and reflects a very poor understanding of India."

"We attach no value to it and urge you to also do the same," Jaiswal said.

Responding to a question about the growing protests on US university campuses against Israel's offensive in Gaza that has killed more than 33,000 people, Jaiswal said that "there has to be the right balance between freedom of expression, sense of responsibility and public safety and order".

He added that "democracies in particular should display this understanding in regard to other fellow democracies, after all we are all

judged by what we do at home and not what we say abroad." While India and the US have a tight partnership, and Washington wants New Delhi to be a strategic counterweight to China, the relationship has encountered some minor bumps recently. In March New Delhi dismissed US concerns over the implementation of a contentious Indian citizenship law, calling them "misplaced" and "unwarranted", and objected to a US state department official's remarks over the arrest of a key opposition leader.

Last year Washington accused Indian agents of being involved in a failed assassination plot against a Sikh separatist leader in the US, and warned New Delhi about it.

Indian minister blames heat after fainting at poll rally

An Indian minister has blamed his fainting while addressing an election rally on hot weather as the country's weather bureau warned of a severe heatwave in parts of the country during the poll. Roads Minister Nitin Gadkari fainted during his speech on Wednesday at a small town in Maharashtra, where he was campaigning for the re-election of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government. Footage of the incident showed the minister falling unconscious and being carried off the stage by handlers. "I felt uncomfortable due to the heat during the rally," Gadkari wrote on social media platform X later that day. "But now I am completely healthy," he said, adding that he was going ahead with his election campaigning. The Indian Meteorological Department yesterday said severe heatwave conditions were likely to continue in at least nine eastern and southern states over the next five days.

Prince opens skills training centre



Britain's Prince William, Prince of Wales, meets a young mother and her baby during the official opening of a new employment skills training and community outreach centre for Betel UK, a charity for people affected by homelessness and addiction in Birmingham, yesterday.

India's IndiGo orders 30 Airbus A350 aircraft

Reuters
Bengaluru/New Delhi

IndiGo, India's top airline by market share, yesterday placed its first-ever order for wide-body aircraft as the low-cost carrier intensifies its efforts to take a bigger slice of the international travel business from dominant Gulf airlines.

IndiGo placed an order for 30 A350-900 aircraft and expects deliveries to begin in 2027. It also has purchase rights for an additional 70 Airbus A350 family planes. While Airbus no longer publishes prices, its latest deal with IndiGo's would be worth more than \$9bn, as per the last catalogue rates published in 2018. In practice, industry sources say airplanes are sold for less than half the listing price after typical discounts for bulk

orders. Indian carriers are trying to keep pace with the air traffic growth in the country, where demand for both domestic and international air travel has surged post-pandemic, even as plane manufacturers struggled to meet output goals.

The number of international air travellers in India is expected to grow to 160mn by 2030 from 64mn in 2019, according to industry and government data, but the bulk of the traffic still goes to foreign carriers.

Foreign airlines accounted for 55% of outbound international traffic from India in the final quarter of last year, according to latest government data.

IndiGo's new order will allow the airline to fly for the first time non-stop to destinations in Europe and North America, bypassing the Gulf, and as far afield as Australia to the Far East.

Scottish leader scraps coalition deal with Greens

AFP
Edinburgh

The leader of the pro-independence Scottish National Party yesterday ended a coalition deal with the Greens, leaving him facing fresh pressure as the head of a minority government in Edinburgh.

The announcement by First Minister Humza Yousaf came a week after the devolved government abandoned an ambitious climate pledge sparking tension with its junior partner.

It is the latest setback for the SNP, which has been hit by inter-

nal squabbling, resignations, fraud claims and a fall in support before this year's UK general election.

The leader of the opposition Scottish Conservatives, Douglas Ross, called Yousaf "a failed first minister", "weak" and "unfit for office".

He told members of the Scottish Parliament that he would lodge a vote of no-confidence in Yousaf.

Yousaf, who became the first Muslim leader of a government in western Europe when he took over from Nicola Sturgeon in March last year, earlier denied the end of the deal made him a lame duck.

Instead he insisted that it showed "leadership" to recognise it was no longer working.

"After careful consideration I believe that going forward... it's in the best interest of the people of Scotland to pursue a different arrangement," he said.

"I have terminated the Bute House Agreement with immediate effect," he said, admitting that ruling as a minority government would be "tough" but promising to work with all parties in parliament.

Green co-leader Lorna Slater called it "an act of political cowardice by the SNP, who are selling out future generations to appease the most reactionary forces in the country".

Scottish Labour leader Anas Sarwar, whose party stands to win the

most if SNP support dwindles further, said the situation showed that the SNP had "lost their way".

The SNP-Greens deal, known as the Bute House Agreement after the Scottish first minister's official residence in Edinburgh, was signed in 2021. It brought the Green Party into government for the first time anywhere in the UK, where devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have limited powers in areas such as environment, health, transport and social policy. It also gave the SNP a majority at the parliament at Holyrood when the votes of its members of the Scottish Parliament were combined with those of the seven Greens

members, crucially on independence.

The Scottish Greens also support breaking away from the rest of the United Kingdom. As part of the deal, Greens co-leaders Patrick Harvie and Slater were made junior ministers. The collapse of the deal comes after the Scottish government announced on April 18 that it would scrap its target to reduce carbon emissions by 75% by 2030 after the UK's climate change advisory committee described it as "beyond credible". The UK Climate Change Committee (CCC) last month sharply criticised Scotland for repeatedly failing to achieve its climate targets.

The required acceleration in

emissions reduction in Scotland is now "beyond what is credible", due to inadequate efforts in areas including home heating, transport, farming and nature restoration, it said.

Yousaf vowed that Scotland would still meet its target of reaching net zero by 2045.

At a UK-wide level, his SNP currently has 43 members of parliament at Westminster but is expected to lose several to a resurgent Labour party in Scotland, which is tipped to form the next UK government.

The SNP has a seven-point lead over Labour in voting intentions, according to the polling agency Ipsos, but that is down from 12 points a year ago.

Air traffic control strikes in France ground flights across Europe

Thousands of flights were cancelled in France and Europe yesterday as a strike by French air traffic controllers over pay caused stoppages not seen in two decades. Airlines cut more than half of their normal flight schedules at Paris's two main airports Orly and Roissy Charles-de-Gaulle, with many flights in the southern city of Marseille also grounded. Short and medium-haul flights were the worst affected, while long-haul services faced the least disruption. A total of around 2,600 flights arriving at or departing from French airports were forecast yesterday, down from 5,200 the day before, civil aviation authority DGAC told AFP. Across Europe, roughly 2,000 more flights were cancelled and another 1,000 forced to change routes to avoid French airspace, the Airlines for Europe trade body said. Cancellation numbers were at their highest "in 20 years", said Augustin de Romanet, chief executive of ADP, the company operating the capital's airports. Air traffic association IATA accused the French controllers of "blackmail" and of making exorbitant demands. Air traffic controllers have asked for, among other things, a 25% pay rise over five years. A decision by their biggest union, SNCTA, on Wednesday to withdraw their strike call after a deal with management came too late to alleviate the mayhem significantly, as the DGAC had already ordered airlines to cancel most of their flights. -AFP

Macron warns 'Europe could die'

Reuters/AFP
Paris

French President Emmanuel Macron has called for stronger, more integrated European defences as he outlined his vision for a more assertive European Union on the global stage. In a speech at the Sorbonne University in Paris, he also said the continent must not become a vassal of the United States. "There is a risk our Europe could die. We are not equipped to face the risks," Macron said. With just three years left of his second and final term in office, Macron, 46, wants to show his critics he retains the energy and fresh thinking that helped propel him into the presidency in 2017 and that he has not become a lame duck leader. In the speech lasting nearly two hours, he warned that military, economic and other pressures could weaken and fragment the 27-nation EU. Russia must not be allowed to win in Ukraine, he said, calling for a boost in Europe's cybersecurity capacity, closer defence ties with post-Brexit Britain, and the

creation of a European academy to train high-ranking military personnel. Europeans should give preference to buying European military equipment, he said. "We must produce more, we must produce faster, and we must produce as Europeans," Macron said. The speech won a positive response from Macron's main EU partner, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, with whom he has often clashed on defence and trade issues. "France and Germany want Europe to be strong," Scholz said in a post. "Your speech contains good ideas on how we can achieve this." Macron has long called for European "strategic autonomy" involving less reliance on the United States, a stance that has gained greater resonance in the face of Donald Trump's bid to return to the White House. Trump has often accused Europe of free-loading on defence at the United States' expense. Europe "must show that it is never a vassal of the United States and that it also knows how to talk to all the other regions of the world", Macron said. Many EU officials believe there is cur-

rently no credible alternative to the US military umbrella. Macron said Europe also risks falling behind economically as global free-trade rules are being challenged by major competitors. The European Central Bank should no longer just target inflation, but also growth and climate, he said. The EU should agree exemptions to its own competition rules so it can support firms in sectors such as artificial intelligence (AI) and green energy in the face of "oversubsidies" by the US and China, Macron said. Europe needs less fragmented markets for energy, telecoms and financial services, and must also cut red tape, he added. The French leader hopes his speech will have the same impact as a similar address at the Sorbonne he made seven years ago that prefigured some significant EU policy shifts. Since then, much has changed, with geopolitical challenges including the war in Gaza, Russia's invasion of Ukraine and disputes between China and the United States. Macron described Russia's behaviour after its invasion of Ukraine as "uninhibited"

and said it was no longer clear where Moscow's "limits" lay. Yesterday's speech was billed by his advisers as France's contribution to the EU's strategic agenda for the next five years. The agenda is due to be decided after the European elections. "Macron thinks that Europe's strategic fault lines are not just with illiberal assertive powers but also with the US" said Rym Momtaz of the International Institute for Strategic Studies in Paris. "He accuses (them) of espousing unfair competition practices similar to China, and consequently paralysing Europe's ability to assert itself as a real global power player." Macron is, after Brexit and the departure from power of German chancellor Angela Merkel, often seen by commentators as Europe's number one leader. However, his party is facing embarrassment in June's European elections, ranking well behind the far-right in opinion polls and even risking coming third behind the Socialists. Macron only made a brief explicit reference to the elections at the end of his speech, even though analysts say he is clearly seeking to wade into the campaign.

Haiti transitional council sworn in after months of chaos

Haitian Prime Minister Ariel Henry has resigned, his office said yesterday as a transitional council took power with the aim of returning stability to a country where gang violence has caused chaos and misery. Henry's finance minister, Michel Patrick Boisvert, will be interim prime minister, according to the nation's official gazette. "Today is an important day in the life of our dear republic, this day in effect opens a view to a solution ... to the multidimensional crises the country faces," Boisvert said after the formal swearing-in of the transitional council yesterday morning.

Images shared on social media showed the council members greeted with fanfare at the presidential palace in Port-au-Prince. There, they took the oath of office and later they were sworn in at the prime minister's office. Henry - who had promised in March to step down once a council was installed - thanked the Haitian people "for the opportunity to serve our country with integrity, wisdom and honour". Gang violence, which has been a problem in Haiti for years, escalated earlier this year. More than 2,500 people were killed or injured in gang violence from January through

March, recent data from the United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH) showed. The voting members of the transitional council are former central bank governor Fritz Alphonse Jean, former ambassador to the Dominican Republic Smith Augustin, barrister Emmanuel Vertilaire, former senate president Edgar Leblanc, ex-senator Louis Gerald Gilles, businessman Laurent Saint-Cyr, and Leslie Voltaire, a former diplomat. The non-voting observers are evangelical pastor Frinel Joseph and Regine Abraham, who previously worked for the World Bank and the country's environment ministry. -Reuters/AFP

Russian, Ukrainian strikes kill at least 10

Intense artillery, rocket and drone attacks either side of the Russia-Ukraine frontline left at least 10 people dead and more than a dozen wounded, regional officials said. Russian forces are pressing hard in the eastern Donetsk region ahead of May 9, when Moscow hails the Soviet Union's victory in World War II. Ukraine is desperately waiting for desperately needed US weapons promised as part of a new military aid package. Russian attacks killed at least six in the Donetsk region, Ukrainian officials said. Four people were killed in Russian-occupied parts of southern and eastern Ukraine, according to Moscow-installed authorities. In Ukrainian-held territory, a Russian strike on the village of Udachne, about 45km (28 miles) from the frontline killed three people, the region's governor Vadim Filashkin said. "The Russians struck the village this afternoon. The administrative building, a cultural centre, a coffee shop and about 20 private houses were damaged," he said in a post on Telegram. Another three people were killed in Kurakhivka, further south, the regional prosecutor's office said. In Russian-held territory, a Ukrainian drone attack killed two people in the southern region of Zaporizhzhia, the Russian-installed government head said. "A man and a woman were killed as a result of a strike on a civilian car. Their four young children were orphaned," Yevgeny Balitsky wrote on social media. Ukrainian artillery fire killed two more in the Russian-occupied part of the southern Kherson region, officials there said. The Kremlin claimed to have annexed the Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions in late 2022, though Russian forces are still battling to gain full control over them. The two frontline regions saw intense fighting in 2022 and the summer of 2023, when Ukraine launched a failed counteroffensive in the south. The brunt of the fighting has since moved to the Donetsk region, which is also claimed by Moscow as Russian territory. -AFP

Pakistan horror zoo is reborn as rehabilitation centre

By Shrouq Tariq
AFP

Before it was forced to close over its "intolerable" treatment of animals, the Islamabad Zoo was home to neglected elephants and underfed lions pacing back and forth behind the bars of their enclosures. Now, four years later, it is a rehabilitation centre for Pakistani wildlife, providing a refuge for motherless leopard cubs, tigers seized from owners who kept them as status symbols, and bears forced to dance - or fight - for the amusement of crowds. "The whole energy of the place has changed ever since the zoo was emptied. The care shows, look around," Rina Saeed, the head of Islamabad Wildlife Management Board (IWMB), told AFP. The zoo found international notoriety in 2016, when the singer Cher launched a campaign to remove its shackled Asian elephant Kaavan, the last in the country and dubbed the world's loneliest elephant. However, Kaavan's treatment was not an isolated incident - two lions died at the facility when zookeepers attempted to force them from their pen by setting fire to piles of hay. And over the years, hundreds of animals listed on the zoo's inventory simply "vanished". Pakistan's climate change ministry said it was "seriously concerned" about the "intolerable

and inhumane" treatment of animals at the zoo in 2020 - the same year the courts ordered it shut and Kaavan was moved to Cambodia. Within months of its closure, a small rescue centre began to take root at the facility, and now evidence of its past as a tourist attraction is fading - silence hangs over the empty, overgrown parking lot and the shabby ticket stand sits idle next to a swing set. "Now it is a proper rehabilitation centre with over 50 animals," Saeed said, adding that the team had rescued more than 380 animals. The IWMB team rescues animals from across the country, recently taking in two indigenous leopard cubs poached from their mother, bears once forced to fight dogs in underground competitions and monkeys made to dance for tips. Amir Khalil, a veterinarian who directs the global animal welfare organisation Four Paws, which oversaw Kaavan's relocation, recently made an emotional return to the zoo, saying that it "now holds hope". Vets from the Austria-based non-governmental organisation (NGO) had come to the centre to see after three black bears whose claws had been removed by their previous owners, treating them in the shadow of an abandoned Ferris wheel in the zoo's former cafe - now a makeshift clinic. "This place is unrecognisable," Khalil told AFP while inspecting one of the animals, an overweight



A wildlife ranger (left, partially concealed) takes care of a rescued leopard cub at the Margallah Wildlife rescue centre in Islamabad.

former dancing bear called Anila. Anila was also suffering from a nose infection from a ring pierced through her snout to help keep her under control. "We hope this place turns out to be a place for animals with a better future," Khalil said. Last year the IWMB seized a tiger cub with broken bones from a vet clinic in an upscale neighbourhood in the capital, later relocating the animal to South Africa. Owing a wild cat is a symbol of wealth in Pakistan even though it is illegal in some parts of the country.

"We think animals are toys," said Ali Sakhawat, deputy director of research and planning at the IWMB. The animals brought to the centre are not only physically injured but also mentally traumatised. "We keep them occupied to help them erase the memories of the trauma inflicted by poachers," Aneis Hussan, a wildlife ranger, told AFP as he played with Daboo, one of the rescued black bears. "The bears you've observed here exhibit signs of joy - roaming freely, climbing trees - a stark

contrast to the captivity that deprived them of happiness." Wildlife authorities are pushing for new laws targeting poachers and bear baiters who regularly trap and traffic wild animals. A new Islamabad Nature and Wildlife Management Act would strengthen animal protections, but Saeed says it still "needs the president's signature". The last presidential order on animal welfare - restricting bear baiting - was passed over 20 years ago by President Pervez Musharraf. "No one in the government listens, I have gotten old trying to make them understand how important this is," Safwan Ahmad, vice-chairman of the non-profit Pakistan Wildlife Foundation, told AFP. IWMB wants to establish a permanent sanctuary at the site of the rehabilitation centre, but the local authority that owns the land intends to reopen the facility as a public zoo. "There is one (zoo) in almost every city worldwide," said Irfan Khan Niazi of the environmental department of the Capital Development Authority, which oversees planning and development in Islamabad. "Just because rules were not followed once does not mean it would happen again." "No matter how many zoos we make for kids, this won't teach them that animals are to be taken care of," said IWMB's Sakhawat. "Wild animals are to be kept in the wild, not cages."

US Supreme Court weighs Trump claim of 'absolute immunity'

AFP
Washington

The US Supreme Court heard arguments yesterday on whether a former president is immune from criminal prosecution and appeared poised to issue a ruling that could further delay Donald Trump's trial on charges of conspiring to overturn the 2020 election. The historic case - the last in the court's current term - has far-reaching implications for executive power and Trump's multiple legal issues as he seeks the White House again. "We're writing a rule for the ages," said Justice Neil Gorsuch, one of three conservative justices appointed to the nation's highest court by the former Republican president. At least four, and possibly five, of the conservative justices on the nine-member court appeared to take issue with a lower court ruling that a former president does

not enjoy "absolute immunity" from criminal prosecution after leaving office. Chief Justice John Roberts, a conservative, told Michael Dreeben, representing Special Counsel Jack Smith, who brought the election conspiracy charges against Trump, that he had "concerns" with the lower court ruling. "As I read it, it says simply, 'a former president can be prosecuted because he's being prosecuted,'" Roberts said. "Why shouldn't we either send (the case) back to the Court of Appeals or issue an opinion making clear that that's not the law?" Sending the case back to the lower court for further review would almost certainly delay Trump's election conspiracy trial until after the November vote, when he is expected to face off once again against Democrat Joe Biden. Justice Samuel Alito, another conservative, asked why - without immunity - a president won't just "pardon themselves from anything that they might have been conceivably charged with committing?"

Justice Clarence Thomas, another conservative, asked Dreeben why there had not been any previous prosecutions of a former president. "The reason why there have not been prior or criminal prosecutions is that there were not crimes," Dreeben said. He said granting "absolute immunity" to former presidents would "immunise" them from criminal liability for "bribery, treason, sedition, murder" and, in Trump's case, "for conspiring to use fraud to overturn the results of an election and perpetuate himself in power". John Sauer, representing Trump, told the court that "without presidential immunity from criminal prosecution there can be no presidency as we know it". "Every current president will face de facto blackmail and extortion by his political rivals while he is still in office," Sauer said. The three liberals on the court - Sonia Sotomayor, Elena Kagan and Ketanji Brown Jackson - and to some extent conservative justice Amy Coney Barrett, pushed back

against blanket presidential immunity. "Wouldn't there be a significant risk that future presidents would be emboldened to commit crimes with abandon?" Jackson asked. Kagan asked whether a president who "sells nuclear secrets to a foreign adversary" should be immune from prosecution. "How about if a president orders the military to stage a coup?" Sauer responded that those hypotheticals "sound very bad" but "if it's an official act, there needs to be impeachment and conviction" by Congress before a president could be prosecuted. By taking the case, the Supreme Court has already significantly delayed the start of Trump's election conspiracy trial. Smith, the special counsel, filed the case against 77-year-old Trump in August and had pushed for a March trial start date. However, Trump's lawyers filed a blizzard of motions seeking to postpone the case against him, including the "absolute immunity" claim.

New York court overturns Weinstein conviction

New York's highest court has overturned disgraced Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein's 2020 conviction on sex crime charges. In its 4-3 decision, the Court of Appeals found the trial judge had erred in admitting the testimony of women who were not named in the charges brought against Weinstein, and ordered a new trial. The ruling doesn't affect a 16-year rape sentence, handed down in California in 2022, meaning he will remain behind bars. -AFP

European police smash rare book theft ring

European police said yesterday that they had busted a criminal gang suspected of snatching at least 170 rare books written by Russian literary greats such as Alexander Pushkin. The books were stolen in seven European countries and worth around €2.5mn, authorities said. Police arrested four Georgian citizens and raided 27 locations in Georgia and Latvia. Leading up to the raids, three suspects were arrested in Estonia, France and Lithuania. -AFP

Moulin Rouge's windmill sails fall

The sails of the windmill above the Moulin Rouge cabaret, one of the most famous landmarks in Paris, collapsed overnight, with its operator saying that there was no foul play. No one was hurt and the cabaret was expected to reopen in the evening. "The Moulin Rouge, in 135 years of history, has experienced many adventures but it is true that for the wings, this is the first time that this has happened," general manager Jean-Victor Clerico told reporters. While the reason for the accident was not yet known, the Moulin Rouge's Clerico said there was no sign of "foul play", adding the cause was "obviously a technical problem". The Moulin Rouge, with its distinctive red windmill sails built of wood and metal, is located in northern Paris and is one of the most visited landmarks in the city. -AFP



CHAIRMAN

Abdullah bin Khalifa al-Attiyah

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Faisal Abdulhameed al-Mudahka

Deputy Managing Editor

K T Chacko

- 📍 P.O.Box 2888, Doha, Qatar
- ✉ editor@gulf-times.com
- ☎ 44350478 (News),
- ☎ 44466404 (Sport),
- ☎ 44466636 (Home delivery)
- ☎ 44350474
- 📘 facebook.com/gulftimes
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GULF TIMES

AI holds the key to resilient cities

The cities that some 4.4bn people call home are increasingly at risk of catastrophic climate-driven events. Rising sea levels and flooding threaten coastal megacities like New York City and Jakarta, and extreme heat waves, like those that afflict cities across South Asia and the Middle East each year, are projected to become more frequent and severe.

While our built environments and infrastructure are being tested by unpredictable weather and changing populations, many urban communities are facing heightened climate-related health and economic risks. Dangers such as air pollution and natural disasters can be especially acute in developing countries, where they threaten to drive more people into poverty. At the same time, cities contribute disproportionately to the broader challenges we face today. Cities already account for an estimated 70% of global carbon dioxide emissions and 78% of energy consumption, and these figures could grow in an urbanising world. According to UN-Habitat, the share of people living in urban areas is expected to increase to 68% by 2050.

Clearly, cities will play a central role in how the world addresses climate change. One factor that could give cities much-needed support and unlock opportunities for building greater resilience is artificial intelligence. If developed and deployed responsibly and ethically, AI could potentially accelerate urban climate solutions, enable science-based and sustainable development, and deliver innovation at an unprecedented pace, allowing us to put the most vulnerable communities first.

But the first step is to improve our understanding of AI's many potential applications as a tool for resilient cities.

For example, the challenge of handling vast amounts of data is a major obstacle to modelling future climate scenarios accurately and making informed planning decisions. Fortunately, through the power of AI, foundation models and geospatial analytics could help us visualise our cities in a new way.

By embracing AI and putting it to work in the fight against climate change, we can help make our cities safer

Consider the metropolitan areas facing severe and changing weather patterns. With real-time and historical climate data and AI-powered predictive capabilities, governments could introduce new tools for disaster response and readiness. Everyone, from ordinary citizens to those tasked with protecting and maintaining critical infrastructure, could be better informed and prepared.

AI also has the potential to help make city operations more sustainable at every level, thus reducing cities' outsize emissions and environmental impact. Intelligent software applications could integrate AI to analyse buildings' energy usage, water consumption, and waste management, providing insights that allow communities and organisations to make more responsible decisions about sustainability. Moreover, with the addition of connected devices to drive in-depth data collection, safety measures such as urban infrastructure maintenance could be more effective and efficient than ever before. Think of all the bridges and roadways threatened by unprecedented weather events. When combined with AI, the uses of data extend far beyond basic monitoring and reporting.

Nor will AI's urban applications stop there. The technology has the potential to optimise public transportation and traffic planning to achieve more sustainable urban transit. It could help to identify the best locations for expanding much-needed green space, while also preserving urban biodiversity and natural resources. Governments, public-service providers, and non-profits alike have growing opportunities to access and explore AI tools, such as through requests for proposals and pro-bono programmes, like those offered by IBM. However, recent research shows that while 69% of cities are already exploring or testing the uses of generative AI, only 2% are implementing it.

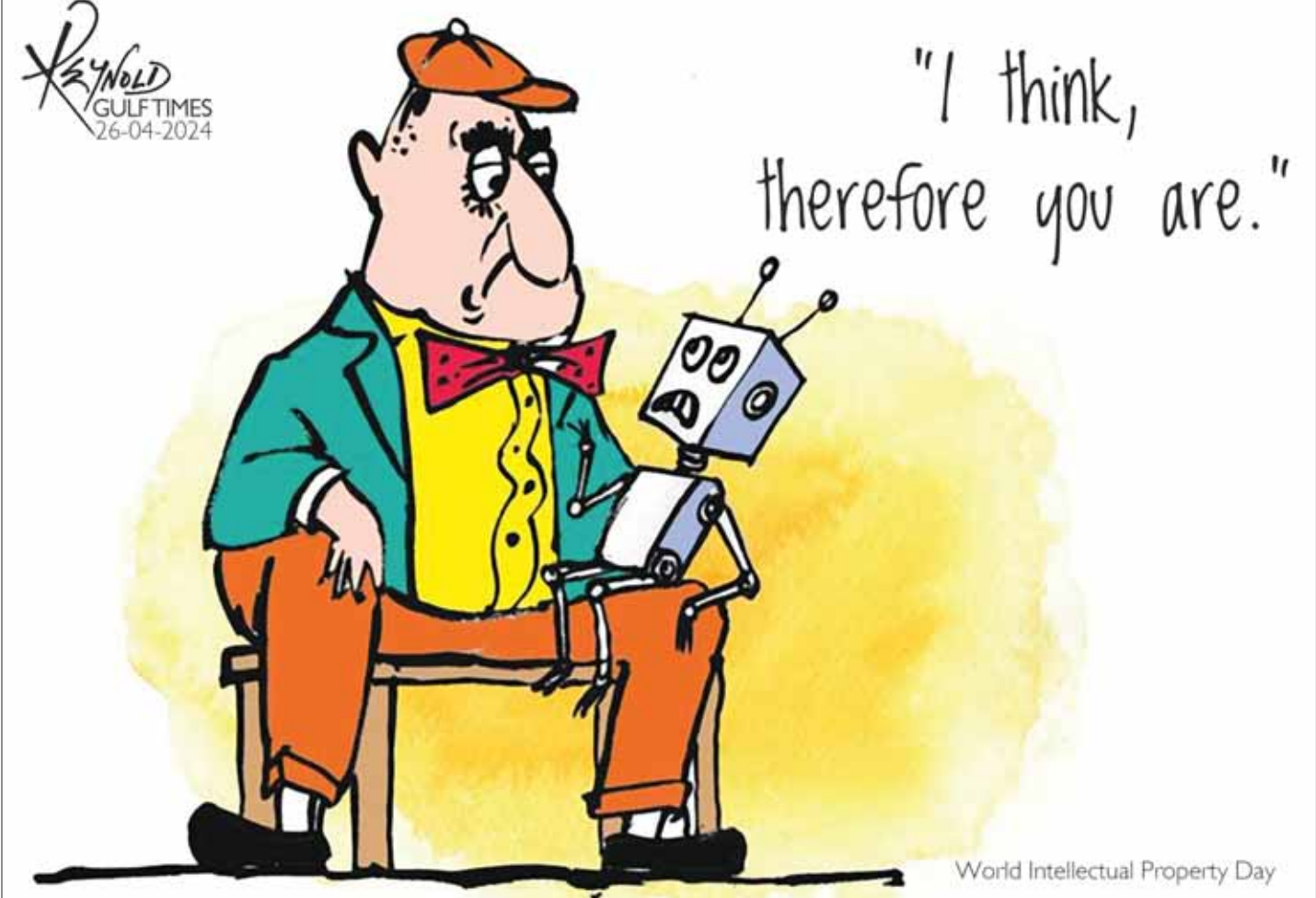
We know that access to technology and the skills required to use it effectively can be major obstacles to implementation. The need for greater access becomes all the more urgent when one considers the unequal distribution of climate-driven threats. Within our cities, problems like air pollution and a lack of access to clean energy disproportionately affect the poorest and most vulnerable residents. These are the communities that have the most to gain from AI.

We all have a responsibility to make AI solutions support vulnerable populations. That means providing equal access to climate tools, supporting training in AI and related skills, and creating programmes designed to respond to the specific needs of historically marginalised urban populations.

Upskilling, especially, will play a key role in accelerating vulnerable communities' adoption of climate-mitigation and adaptation tools. The private sector can do its part by forming partnerships with public agencies and working closely with organisations that are already engaged in supporting vulnerable communities.

By embracing AI and putting it to work in the fight against climate change, we can help make our cities safer, more adaptable, and more sustainable. The technology to give people the tools to anticipate, address, and recover from climate-driven events is here. — Project Syndicate

REYNOLD
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26-04-2024



World Intellectual Property Day

Brazil's plans to drill for Amazon oil hit stiff Indigenous resistance

By **Marta Nogueira and Fabio Teixeira**
Oiapoque

State-run energy firm Petrobras has hit growing resistance from Indigenous groups and government agencies to its premier exploration project, which would open the most promising part of Brazil's northern coast to oil drilling.

Environmental agency Ibama denied Petrobras a licence for exploratory drilling offshore in the Foz do Amazonas area last year, citing possible impacts on Indigenous groups and the sensitive coastal biome. But a Petrobras appeal for Ibama to reverse its decision has drawn powerful political backing.

President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva said in September that Brazil should be able to "research" the region's potential resources, given the national interest. Energy Minister Alexandre Silveira last week told journalists that it is "Brazil's right to know the potential" of the offshore fields.

That has bolstered bullish rhetoric from Petrobras about its chances of getting a licence to drill in the blocks off the coast of Amapa state.

"Get ready Amapa, because we are arriving," Petrobras CEO Jean Paul Prates told local politicians and oil executives at an event last month promoting offshore exploration along the northern coast in an area known as Equatorial Margin. He called it "perhaps the last frontier of the oil era for Brazil."

He has said he expects to start drilling in the second half of this year or sooner in the most promising part of the Equatorial Margin, named the Foz do Amazonas basin, for the mouth of the Amazon River several hundred kilometres away.

Foz de Amazonas shares geology with the coast of nearby Guyana, where Exxon is developing huge fields.

Ibama chief Rodrigo Agostinho said in November that a decision would be made in early 2024, although labour disputes at the agency have since slowed the pace of environmental licensing.

Visits to four Indigenous villages, interviews with over a dozen local leaders, and previously unreported documents show organised opposition mounting to Petrobras' attempt to reverse the halt on exploratory drilling.

Petrobras has drawn fresh government scrutiny. Indigenous affairs agency Funai asked Ibama regulators in December to run several more studies to assess impacts, according to a December 11 government memo from Funai to Ibama obtained in a freedom of information request. The proposed studies would have to be done before Ibama can decide whether to accept the Petrobras appeal.

In July 2022, the Council of Chiefs of the Indigenous People of Oiapoque (CCPIO), an umbrella group representing more than 60 Indigenous villages in the area, asked federal prosecutors to get involved, denouncing an alleged violation of their rights.

Brazilian prosecutors have a mandate to protect Indigenous peoples, often taking their side in disputes with firms or federal and state governments. In September 2022 they recommended that Ibama not issue the licence before a formal consultation of the local communities.

Records from the prosecutors' preliminary investigation show that in December 2023, CCPIO asked them to broker a 13-month formal consultation with Petrobras about Indigenous views on the project.

The consultation process, along with studies proposed by Funai, would push a decision into 2025 when Brazil will host the COP30 climate change summit in the Amazon city of Belem, which could make it more politically difficult to approve drilling, a person close to CCPIO said.

Minutes from a June 2023 meeting between Petrobras, CCPIO leaders and prosecutors show the company offered to consult local communities about eventual commercial oil production in the area, if Ibama requests it, but did not commit to a consultation before drilling exploratory wells. Asked about Indigenous leaders' calls for immediate consultations, Petrobras said in a statement that the time for such requests has passed.

"The definition of whether or not it is necessary to consult

Indigenous peoples and/or traditional communities takes place at the initial stage of the environmental licensing process," Petrobras said. Ibama has not yet replied to the recommendation by Indigenous affairs agency Funai late last year for more assessments of the effects of Petrobras' exploration plans, according to an April 3 Funai document.

Both agencies did not reply to requests for comment. CCPIO and prosecutors said a consultation must be made before Ibama issues a license to drill.

The drilling standoff has created a fault line in Lula's government, which is balancing his vows to protect the Amazon and its Indigenous people with the interests of Petrobras and political allies that stand to reap the benefits of a new oil-producing region.

Silveira, the energy minister, has said that a single Foz de Amazonas block off the coast of Amapa state could yield more than 5.6bn barrels of oil, which would be the company's biggest discovery in over a decade.

In its appeal to Ibama, the company said that exploration will have no negative impact on local communities.

"We ratify the understanding that there is no direct impact of the temporary activity of drilling a well 175km from the coast on Indigenous communities," Petrobras said.

Local people and some environmentalists warn that drilling could threaten coastal mangroves and vast wetlands rich with fish and plant life, while disrupting the lives of the 8,000 Indigenous people in Oiapoque, on Brazil's far northern coast.

The CCPIO, the highest Indigenous authority in Oiapoque, is composed of more than 60 caciques, or chiefs, representing over 8,000 people. They do not oppose the search for oil per se, but invoke what they say is a right to prior consultation by Petrobras, with supervision from the federal prosecutors' office and Funai. The International Labour Organisation convention 169, which Brazil signed, says that governments must consult Indigenous and tribal peoples through their representative institutions, whenever considering legislative or administrative

measures that may affect them directly. The plans to drill are already changing Oiapoque. Waves of migrant workers have arrived looking for jobs in an oil industry that does not yet exist, state lawmaker Inacio Monteiro said.

Monteiro said he meets often with Indigenous constituents, talking to them about the benefits that Petrobras could bring to Oiapoque, including jobs, tax revenue and social programmes.

Yet CCPIO and its allies have become increasingly vocal with their resistance as Petrobras garners support for its appeal, including at the COP28 climate summit in December, where Luene Karipuna told a panel that Petrobras and local politicians had tried to silence her people.

"Strategically, this prior consultation is our only safety net," 25-year-old Karipuna, who is studying to be a teacher, said near her home in the Santa Izabel village, where marshes fill with seawater at certain times of the year. When the rivers run low, tides bring in saltwater fish the villagers eat, but some fear it could just as easily bring oil spills.

Indigenous leaders said a full-court press from local politicians in support of Petrobras was on display at a May 2023 public hearing that Monteiro, the state lawmaker, called just days after Petrobras' licence was denied.

Amapa's political powerbrokers, including key Lula allies, rallied within days at Oiapoque's town hall for the hearing to promote Petrobras' plans to drill.

At the event, one man in a white polo shirt and a feathered headdress, Ramon Karipuna told the crowd that Indigenous people were in favour of drilling, according to minutes of the meeting.

Karipuna said he spoke for the co-ordinator of the CCPIO council of chiefs, who was absent for "health reasons."

Petrobras later cited Karipuna's endorsement in its appeal of the denied drilling licence and described him as a "CCPIO representative."

However, CCPIO co-ordinator Cacique Edmilson Oliveira said he was not sick that day. CCPIO had refused to take part in the hastily summoned event, according to a May 18 letter sent in response to Monteiro's invitation to the hearing.

"This is very concerning. That's why we are saying that we already feel threatened," Oliveira said, accusing Petrobras of distorting the views of Indigenous leaders. "We never sat down and reached an agreement for approval."

In a telephone interview, Karipuna confirmed he worked at the town hall and that he is not a member of CCPIO — even though Petrobras used his words as its main argument to Ibama that Indigenous representatives supported drilling. He also backed away from his comments in favour of drilling.

"To this day many people have doubts about this Petrobras business," he said.

Asked about its mischaracterisation of Karipuna, Petrobras cited the minutes of the May 2023 meeting, without elaborating. — Reuters



Children of Karipuna people play at the Uaha village on the Jumina Indigenous land, near the mouth of the Amazon in Oiapoque, State of Amapa, Brazil. (Reuters)

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How the Prophet cared for his daughters

The fruit of raising daughters righteously is reward in this life before reward in the Hereafter. This is proved by the fact that Allah rewarded the righteous man who raised his two daughters virtuously, the result being Him facilitating the marriage of one of them to the honourable Prophet Moosaa. The Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, would express his love for his daughters by, for example, making statements like "(My daughter) Faatimah is a part of me, so whoever angers her angers me." (Al-Bukhari & Muslim) 'Aa'ishah, may Allah be pleased with her, recounted that Faatimah, may Allah be pleased with her, once came walking in a manner identical to that of the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam. When she arrived, he stood up and exclaimed: "Welcome, my daughter!" Then, he seated her to his side and whispered into her ear, and what he had said caused her to cry; then, he whispered to her again, and she laughed. 'Aa'ishah later asked her: "What made you weep and then laugh?" She replied: "I will never expose a secret that the Prophet entrusted me with." After the death of the Prophet 'Aa'ishah

asked her the same questions again, so she answered: "First, he informed me that his death was near, so I cried. After that, he told me that I will be the leader of the ladies of Paradise, so I laughed." (Al-Bukhari & Muslim) 'Aa'ishah said: "I have not seen anyone closer in physical appearance and character to the Prophet than his daughter Faatimah ... Whenever she would enter into his presence, he would stand up and seat her in his place, and whenever he would enter into her presence, she would stand up, kiss him, and seat him in her place." This is how he, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, cared for his daughters. Zaynab who was another daughter of the Prophet sent for him due to her child being close to death, but the Prophet sent the messenger back to her, telling him to tell her: "Whatever Allah takes away or gives, belongs to Him, and everything with Him has a limited fixed term (in this world); and she should therefore be patient and anticipate Allah's reward." She sent for him again, pleading with him for the sake of Allah to come. Therefore, the Messenger of Allah, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam,

went, accompanied by Sa'd bin 'Ubaadah, Mu'aath bin Jabal, Ubayy bin Ka'b, Zayd bin Thaabit and others. The child was lifted up to the Messenger of Allah while breathing heavily, in the last moments before his death. Upon seeing this, the eyes of the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, streamed with tears as a result of compassion that Allah had placed in his heart. Due to this, Allah caused the boy to be cured, as Imam Ibn Hajar stated. The Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, would carry Umaamah during prayer whilst standing, and place her on the ground before prostrating. (Al-Bukhari) Once, Faatimah complained to him about suffering due to strenuous housework, and that it was causing her hands to roughen and develop marks; he therefore taught her to mention Allah before going to bed by uttering 'Subhaan-Allah' (i.e., glory be to Allah) and 'Alhamdulillah' (i.e., all praise be to Allah) thirty-three times each, and thirty-four times 'Allahu Akbar' (i.e., Allah is the Greatest); he told her that this would be better for her than the assistance of a servant. Faatimah was courageous and proud of

Islam. In the incident when her father, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, was praying in front of the Ka'bah and the disbelievers placed the guts of a camel on his head whilst he was prostrating and then laughed and mocked him, it was she who came, by herself, and screamed at the disbelievers and then removed the guts. (Muslim) This is how the life of the Prophet was regarding dealing with his daughters, so let us make it a guideline by which we live. Some people are truly hardhearted, to the point that they do not express any emotions toward their children. It is a disaster when a daughter is raised in such an emotional vacuum, because it is easy for any evil person to then affect her with his deceptive words and entice her into his trap, and this is how the calamity of fornication occurs. This is why we need to pay close attention to the issue of daughters and grant them their due consideration, especially when we live in an era where everything evil is available and within reach. It is indeed a great responsibility to satiate the emotions of our daughters with the love they need from the hearts of their merciful fathers, lest evil men do this

instead to achieve their vile objectives. We must also give the same level of attention to our sons in this regard, because the problems we hear regarding our young men are due to the negligence of their parents. What is our role? It is, as Allah says (what means): "O you who have believed! Protect yourselves and your families from a Fire whose fuel is people and stones, over which are [appointed] angels, harsh and severe; they do not disobey Allah in what He commands them but do what they are commanded." [Qur'an 66: 6] We must soften their hearts with a warm smile whenever we see them, and speak to them with merciful words. If we do not pay attention to this issue, a day will come when our communities will be just like the immoral and dissolute ones. We must raise our daughters upon obedience to Allah and His messenger and upon adherence to the Hijab; we must not wait till they reach the age of puberty to instruct them wear it, because it might then be too late for them to accept it.

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

Daughters in Islam

Allah Almighty says (what means): "To Allah belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth; He creates what He wills. He gives to whom He wills female [children], and He gives to whom He wills males. Or He makes them [both] males and females, and He renders whom He wills barren. Indeed, He is Knowing and Competent." [Qur'an 49:50] Allah is the One, based on His ultimate wisdom, who grants whomever He wills sons and daughters; He grants sons only to whomever He wills, and grants daughters only to whomever He wills, and if He so wills, He makes whomever He wills infertile. We notice in the above verse that the mention of daughters preceded that of sons, and the scholars commented on this saying: "This is to hearten daughters and encourage kindness towards them, because many fathers feel burdened by receiving a daughter. The common practice of the people during the pre-Islamic era was to hate receiving daughters, to the extent that they would bury them alive; therefore, it is as if Allah is saying to people: 'This inferior child in your estimation takes precedence in My scale.' He also mentions daughters first to indicate their weakness, and that they are therefore more deserving of care and attention." Such honouring of daughters is the complete opposite of how people were accustomed to dealing with females in the pre-Islamic era, when they would degrade women and consider them a part of their wealth, and if news of a baby girl would come to any of them, it would be as if he was hit by a thunderstorm; Allah says (what means): which means: "And when one of them is informed of [the birth of] a female, his face becomes dark, and he suppresses grief. He hides himself from the people because of the ill of which he has been informed. Should he keep it in humiliation or bury it in the ground? Unquestionably, evil is what they decide." [Qur'an 58:59]

It is said that some enemies of Qays ibn 'Aasim At-Tameemi, who was a pre-Islamic Arab, attacked his premises and captured his daughter. Later, one of these enemies married her. After some time, the clan of Qays and that of his enemies reconciled, so they gave this daughter of his the freedom to go back to her father or remain with her husband, and she preferred to stay with her husband. At that point, Qays took a pledge upon himself to bury alive any new daughter that he would receive, and the Arabs imitated him after that. It was, therefore, this man who introduced this evil practice, and thus he will shoulder his own sin as well as the sin of all those who did it thereafter. One of the Companions who had killed his daughter in the era that preceded Islam narrated his story: "We would worship idols in the pre-Islamic era and kill our daughters. I had a daughter, who, when she was old enough to comprehend and talk, would rejoice whenever she saw me and would immediately respond. One day, I called her and told her to follow me, so she did, until we reached a well that belonged to my tribe. I then took her by her hand and threw her in the well, and

the last thing I heard her cry was: 'O father! O father!'" (Ad-Daarimi) During the era that preceded Islam, there were two methods that people used to kill their daughters:

- At the time of the delivery of the child, a man would order his wife to give birth next to a hole dug in the ground; if the newborn was a male, she would return home with him, otherwise, she would throw her into the pit and bury her alive, or:
 - * When the daughter reached six years of age, the man would tell his wife to adorn and perfume her, then he would take her to a well in the desert and tell her to look down into the well; when she would do this, he would push her into it from behind. There were some men among these people who would forbid such acts, such as Sa'sa'ah ibn Naajiyah At-Tameemi, who would go to those attempting to kill their daughter offering money to ransom their lives. There are people nowadays who share these same pre-Islamic beliefs; if they are granted only girls, which is of course something decreed only by Allah, they become angry, discontent and grieved. With the advent of Islam, the darkness of that era vanished and Allah enjoined kindness, love and compassion towards girls. Taking good care of girls was encouraged, as was giving them special attention in the process of their upbringing. In fact, Islam has designated a special reward for raising them that is not granted for raising sons. Anas, may Allah be pleased with him, reported that the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "He who raises two daughters until their puberty will be with me in Paradise like this", and he symbolised the proximity by showing two of his fingers with a slight gap between them." (Muslim) 'Aa'ishah, may Allah be pleased with her, related: "A woman by the name of Jameelah came to me with her two daughters. She asked me for charity but found nothing with me except a date, which I gave her. She divided it between her two daughters and ate nothing herself; then, she got up and left. After this, the Messenger of Allah, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, came, so I narrated this story to him; he said: "He who is involved (in the responsibility) of (nurturing) daughters and is generous to them, will have them as a fortification for himself against the Hellfire." (Al-Bukhari & Muslim) In another narration of this incident, 'Aa'ishah, may Allah be pleased with her, related: "A poor woman came to me with her two daughters. I gave her three dates; she gave each of them a date and was about to eat the third one when one of her daughters asked her for it, so she divided it between her two daughters and ate nothing herself, and I liked what she did. After this, the Messenger of Allah, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, came, so I told him what she did, and he said: 'Allah obligated Paradise for her due to this date, and (also) freed her from Hell.'" (Muslim) Pay close attention to wording of the following narration: the Prophet said:

"He who is tested by (the guardianship) of daughters..." Why did he use the word: "...tested..."? He said it because raising them is a responsibility and a test from Allah to see how His slave would act: Will he be kind to them? Will he raise them correctly? The nature of this responsibility was further clarified in other narrations, such as: "If he patiently feeds them and endows them with clothing..." (Ibn Maajah), and: "...Provides for them and marries them off..." (At-Tabaraani), and: "...Properly raises them and fears Allah in the manner in which he deals with them." (At-Tirmithi) This is what is required when dealing with daughters: kindness, which results in Paradise, as the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "Whoever Allah has given two daughters and is kind towards them, will have them as a reason for him to be admitted into Paradise." And: "Whoever Allah has given three daughters and he perseveres through raising them, will have them as a shield for him from the Hellfire on the Day of Resurrection."

A daughter is a great bounty and an honour granted by Allah. Imam Al-Hasan said: "Girls are a source of reward and sons are a blessing; rewards are in one's favour (on the Day of Judgement) whereas one will be held accountable for blessings." Thus, it is incorrect to believe that one has been humiliated by being granted a girl; rather it is an honour, a bounty and a gate towards Paradise. Daughters are a great responsibility to rear, and entail greater expenditure, and this is why the reward for raising them correctly is greater than that for a son. Once, one of the leaders of the believers was receiving people when a small daughter of his entered the room, so he kissed her; a Bedouin was also in attendance and saw this, so he mentioned daughters in a very evil manner. A wise man who was also present witnessed all of this and therefore said: "O leader of the believers! Do not listen to him. I swear by Allah, that it is they (i.e., girls) who stay up to care for the sick in the family, who show mercy towards the elders, and who stand next to men during hardships." A man was granted a baby girl, so he became angry and isolated himself from his wife for a long time, and after few months, he overheard his wife reciting the verse (what means): "...But perhaps you hate a thing and it is good for you; and perhaps you love a thing and it is bad for you..." [Qur'an 2:216] How many girls have been far more merciful and beneficial to their parents than their brothers? How many times has a son been a source of grief for his parents, to the point that they wished he was never born?

Why do we raise this topic now? It is due to the vicious attacks on the Muslims under the pretext of defending 'women's rights' which is in reality an evil attempt to play on the emotions of women so that they will become rebellious towards their fathers and husbands, and to encourage them to leave their homes and demand their 'freedom'. This is a gate towards evil and immorality which gradually attracts women and then traps them in prohibitions. One cause of girls falling into this is people neglecting their daughters and undermining their rights, which makes them easily fall into the traps of the hypocritical writers and columnists, male and female, who wish to see corruption prevail. It is enough of an honour for girls that the Prophets, may Allah exalt their mention, had daughters and that most of the children of our beloved Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, were daughters, namely: Zaynab, Ruqayyah, Umm Kalthoom and Faatimah.

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



Liberation or deception?

When Islam came, women were in a humiliated state; they led a painful, wretched life with no rights and obligations that surpassed their abilities. A woman would spend her entire life, from her cradle to the grave, in misery and suffering. If she happened to escape being a victim of female infanticide, as was the custom of the times, her life ahead was certain to be degrading, as women were often treated as worthless objects. Indeed, if females were not even guaranteed their birthright to live, what kind of life did they lead! Islam emerged and raised women from their appalling and disgraceful reality to a respectable life. In Islam, women are beloved, whether as pampered young daughters, endeared sisters, adored wives or honored mothers. However, enemies of Islam regard the westernisation of Muslim women to be a highly important goal, perhaps due to their primary role in raising the young generation and bringing them up according to the Islamic creed, manners, acts of worship and ethics. In order to achieve their goal, they lure women, promising their so-called liberation, empowerment and equality of sexes. It is saddening that many women in our Ummah are deceived by these slogans and believe in their false, vain claims, adopt their deviating notions and propagate them through different media. In blindly imitating the West, without stopping to contemplate their actions, such women prove themselves to be completely subordinate, intellectually, socially and behaviorally. Their situation is described by the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, who forewarned: "You will follow the ways of the nations before you, hand-span by hand-span and cubit by cubit so much so that even if they entered a hole of a mastigure, you would follow them." The Companions asked if the nations the Messenger, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam meant were the Jews and Christians; he replied: "Who else?" [Al-Bukhari and Muslim] Such women are ignorant of the fact that the social, legal and historical conditions that European women faced are utterly different from those of Muslim women. The subjugation they endured was due to manmade laws that they consequently revolted against, to win a fraction of their rights. On the other hand, Islam already grants women their full rights, according to a divine Shari'ah. Muslim women should hold their heads high, taking pride in the privileges they enjoy, that even their counterparts in most countries which claim to be civilised and developed, do not have. For though such people claim to want to liberate women, I swear by Allah The Almighty, their concern is to do away with

their chastity and honor, aiming to make them easy targets. If a woman pursues the path of deviation, the firm knot that connects her family together unravels, and the family members become scattered in the maze of life. The present campaign which is deliberately aimed at Muslim women, seems to be led in the same spirit as of the Jews who, during the lifetime of the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, conspired to yank off the veil of a Muslim woman in the market of Banu Qaynuqaah! The ashes of their war against the Hijab are still ignited, with the fire gradually intensifying. They know well that corrupting Muslim women means corrupting the whole Muslim society. However, there are among us who call themselves liberators of women; they were reared in the ideology of atheism. They pretend to be good Muslims, speaking like Muslims, whereas they hide their disbelief, as they toil to destroy the dignity of Muslim women, by making them give up their Hijab. Perhaps they consider their best approach to be to introduce the notion of women's liberation in an Islamic manner, justifying the intermingling of both sexes in the name of freedom and civilisation, and removing their Hijab in the name of development and culture, so that women would be tools they could operate. This is even though the Islamic directives they combat, can be traced back to the time of Moosa (Moses), may Allah exalt his mention, as in the story Allah The Almighty cited in the Qur'an, Saying (what means): {And when he came to the well of Madyan, he found there a crowd of people watering [their flocks], and he found aside from them two women driving back [their flocks]. He said, "What is your circumstance?" They said, "We do not water until the shepherds dispatch [their flocks]; and our father is an old man."} [Qur'an 28:23] Before Moosa, may Allah exalt his mention, was sent as a Prophet to his people and after escaping from the land where people were being oppressed by Pharaoh, he arrived in a remote region where he saw a group of people watering their herds and two women standing at a distance, looking at the crowd. When he inquired if there was a problem, they replied that they came to water their flock because their father was too old to work himself, and yet they waited until the men had dispersed to do so, so as not mix with them. Muslim women should re-evaluate their way of life, so as to discern the path to Paradise and deliverance from Hell, which is in imitating the wives of the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam.

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Hawksbill turtle nesting begins at Fuwairit Beach

On the occasion of the start of this year's hawksbill sea turtle nesting, a campaign to clean and rehabilitate Fuwairit Beach was launched yesterday, in the presence of HE the Minister of Environment and Climate Change Dr Abdullah bin Abdulaziz bin Turki al-Subaie and several officials from the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change (MoECC), along with representatives of participating entities and volunteers.

A statement from the MoECC said that the minister toured the area and checked the arrangements to protect the nests of the endangered hawksbill sea turtles.

He was also briefed about the progress of work related to protecting and preserving the terrestrial and marine environment in the area.

HE Dr al-Subaie recalled that the project to protect the hawksbill sea turtles was launched in 2003, in co-operation with Qatar Petroleum (now QatarEnergy) and Qatar University (QU).

"Over the past five years, the project has

released more than 50,000 baby turtles which will contribute to an increase in the numbers of these creatures in the Qatari marine environment," he said.

Regarding efforts to protect biodiversity in the country, the minister said that work is underway to launch a database, which "aims to preserve biodiversity data and information and create maps of the ecosystem to identify important sites for biodiversity in the country".

The project includes the establishment of a knowledge management platform, which allows partners and decision-makers to benefit from database information in national development and biodiversity processes, as part of the Qatar Digital Government Strategy 2023-2025.

HE Dr al-Subaie also honoured the entities participating in the campaign, such as QatarEnergy, the QU, the Qatar Red Crescent Society, Al Thakheera Youth Centre, and Seashore Group.

Dr Ibrahim Abdul Latif al-Muslimani, Assistant Undersecretary for Natural Re-



Snapshots from the launch of the campaign at Fuwairit Beach.

serves Affairs at the MoECC, said the hawksbill turtle protection project is one of the pioneering initiatives in promoting biodiversity and biological diversity in the country.

The project resulted in increasing the number of turtles and avoiding the risk of extinction.

Mohamed al-Khanji, director of the MoECC's Wildlife Development, said that the ministry gives great importance to the protection of biodiversity in the Qatari environment by launching projects and initiatives based on scientific research and the use of modern technology.

Each year, hawksbill turtles arrive to nest on a number of the northern beaches of the country, including Fuwairit, Ras Laffan, Al Maruna, Al Ghariya, Al Huwaila, Al Jassasiya, and Al Mafjar, as well as the islands of Umm Tais, Ras Rukn, Sharawah and Halul.

The season runs from early April to late June, while the hatching process takes place two months after the eggs are laid.



'\$4tn needed annually' to solve global climate change problems

From Page 1

The conference, which was inaugurated by the Qatar Central Bank governor HE Sheikh Bandar bin Mohamed bin Saoud al-Thani, brought together economic and financial officials and decision-makers, leaders of Arab, regional and international financial institutions, a group of experts and financial analysts and major investors, as well as university professors and experts in the field of artificial intelligence, in addition to representatives of Arab and international regulatory authorities, and financial markets.

In his keynote address, QFMA chief executive Dr Tamy bin Ahmad al-Binali said that the importance of capital markets is escalating "significantly" at the level of the international and national economy, due to their financing role and their effectiveness in attracting, redirecting and investing financial resources.

"Therefore, it is necessary to ensure the effectiveness of such markets, and work to develop their performance indicators, and this applies directly to the Arab capital markets, which face great challenges, and at the same time enjoy great opportunities for growth and development," he said.

Al-Binali said that the world is witnessing at this time rapid developments in various fields, especially in the high-tech sector, particularly in artificial intelligence (AI) and other technologies, which have left their direct and indirect effects on various aspects of economic activity and the financial sector in general and capital markets in particular.

"This led to the emergence of major opportunities to develop technologies and mechanisms of work in the capital markets, which will reflect positively on their financing role," he added.

However, at the same time, technological developments have imposed new challenges, which cannot be dealt with using the same traditional tools, so the Arab capital markets find themselves in a technological reality full of opportunities, challenges and risks, which al-Binali said requires working to invest opportunities and face challenges, which will positively reflect on the stability of capital markets and their ability to carry out their functions and reduce the risks they may face.



Iosco deputy secretary-general Tajinder Singh is seen in a video address outlining the scope of capital markets in solving the problems of climate change.



Key officials at the Third Arab Capital Markets conference yesterday (supplied picture).



More than 210 project ideas were received in the initial stage, which gradually narrowed down to 21 in the final stage.

QU's 'Innovators in Education Project' concludes 2023-2024 edition

The "Innovators in Education" project at Qatar University (QU), which aims to recognise and reward innovative approaches to teaching and learning, has been concluded.

The collaborative effort by the QU's College of Education, represented by the National Centre for Educational Development (NCED), the College of Engineering, and the Office of Strategic Innovation, Entrepreneurship, and Economic Development, was sponsored by ExxonMobil Qatar.

The participants were students in universities and colleges, and educators in schools, universities and colleges.

More than 210 projects of digital and non-digital teaching aids were received in the initial stage, out of which 130 were shortlisted and 21 reaching the final stage after a round of further eliminations.

The closing ceremony was attended by QU president Dr Omar al-Hasani, HE the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education Prof Ibrahim al-Nuaimi, and other dignitaries.

In a statement on the occasion, College of Education dean Prof Asmaa al-Attayah said that the project emerged from a vision to build capacities, instil an entrepreneurial spirit, create an educational environment that supports innovation and creativity, and build professional learning communities that achieve sustainable learning.

NCED director Dr Huda Salem al-Kubaisi said that the project provided a stimulating environment and a platform for the exchange of ideas and experiences between educators and university students, while promoting innovation in teaching aids.

College of Engineering dean Dr Khaled Kamal Naji said that such a project promotes intellectual development and constructive cooperation among members of the educational community.

"This project is one of the valuable initiatives that have worked to discover educational talents, through the Engineering Innovation and Education Unit at the College of Engineering," he said. "Educational curricula and assessment, assistive education, engineering education, and e-learning environments all stand to benefit through projects like this."

Dr Saeed al-Banna, director of the Centre of Entrepreneurship and Institutional Excellence at the College of Business and Economics, described the project as a creative platform for innovative products and technology supporting education, some of which can be transformed into nuclei for startups in educational technology.

Rashid al-Hajri, vice-president and Strategic Relations and Public and Government Affairs manager at ExxonMobil Qatar, said the company is supporting this programme for the second year running as it aligns with the objectives of Qatar National Vision 2030 and the Third Qatar National Development Strategy of building a more educated and motivated talent base essential for Qatar's future success.

"It also supports the development of innovation that will help drive economic growth through collaboration and quality education," he said.



Indoor adventures, transit tours for summer

By Joey Aguilar
Staff Reporter

As the summer season approaches, Visit Qatar has unveiled a variety of indoor experiences and activities to entice both residents and transit passengers.

With a blend of adrenaline-pumping thrills, serene retreats, and cultural experiences, the offerings promise something for different age groups seeking respite from the heat.

For those craving an adrenaline rush, Doha Oasis offers the indoor amusement park Doha Quest.

Housing several exhilarating rides, simulators, virtual reality (VR) experiences, arcade games, and bowling alleys, Visit Qatar said it guarantees endless entertainment for visitors of all ages.

At the Royal Plaza Mall lies the tranquil Salt Cave, offering a sanctuary for relaxation and rejuvenation.

Guests can unwind in the soothing ambience as they indulge in holistic therapies aimed at revitalising the body and mind.

The Sub Zero Cafe promises a frosty paradise with its intricately-carved ice sculptures and furniture, complemented by temperatures plunging to -9° Celsius.

Visitors can savour hot chocolate and warm



Doha Quest houses rides, simulators, VR experiences, arcade games, and bowling alleys. **Screengrab from Visit Qatar**

bites while sheltering themselves in Arabian "Farwas" for a cozy winter experience.

CurioCity at the Gate Mall invites exploration with its diverse districts brimming with imaginative activities. From dress-up sessions to city-building in the sandbox, the venue fosters creativity and curiosity among its patrons.

Despite the allure of indoor indulgences, outdoor adventures remain a staple for many, experienced during the recent Eid al-Fitr holidays.

Al Maha Island hosts the Lusail Winter Wonderland, offering a blend of fine-dining restaurants, coffee shops, and cafes against the picturesque backdrop of Lusail and Doha Skyline.

Katara - the Cultural Village continues to captivate tourists with its art galleries, luxury shopping centre, and culinary delights while The Pearl Island lures luxury-seekers with its stunning districts boasting cafes, restaurants, and shops.

In the heart of Old Doha Port, the Mina District stands out as an open art gallery, showcasing stunning murals and providing a scenic setting for leisurely strolls and activities.

The Gewan Golf Club serves as a haven for golf enthusiasts, catering to both beginners and seasoned players.

Nestled amidst natural lakes and lush



The Sub Zero Cafe promises a frosty paradise with its intricately-carved ice sculptures and furniture.



Gewan Golf Club boasts a floodlit par-3 golf course where families and avid golfers can tee off.

grasslands, the club boasts a floodlit par-3 golf course where families and avid golfers can tee off and enjoy the scenic surroundings.

Discover Qatar presents an array of transit tour packages for passengers designed to make the most of layovers in Doha, it is learnt.

From city tours to desert adventures, these curated experiences offer a glimpse into Qatar's rich heritage and natural wonders, ensuring a memorable stopover for travellers.

"We have made this as simple as possible for you, taking care of all arrangements for your transit," said Discover Qatar, stressing the convenience and accessibility of these tours for transit passengers.



Lusail Winter Wonderland offers a blend of fine-dining restaurants, coffee shops, and cafes against the picturesque backdrop of Lusail and Doha skyline.