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PM opens 33rd Doha International Book Fair

HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani inaugurated yesterday the 33rd Doha International Book Fair. Themed 'Knowledge Builds Civilisations',

the event runs through May 19 at the Doha Exhibition and Convention Center.

Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth of the Sultanate of Oman Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al-Said attended the inauguration.

Also present were a number of Their Excellencies sheikhs, ministers, heads of diplomatic missions, senior officials, and guests of the exhibition.

HE the Prime Minister visited the exhibition pavilions and was briefed on the Qatari, Arab and foreign exhibitors, and the latest publications, books and manuscripts belonging to government agencies, Arab and international cultural institutions and embassies accredited to the state, especially the Sultanate of Oman, the guest of honour of this edition.

Oman's pavilion showcases a special and diverse cultural programme that highlights the authentic Omani heritage, intellectual and literary production, and presents a group of popular and artistic performances.

The PM also visited the Doha Children, which is spanning 2,400 square metres, and offers a range of workshops and activities for children, theatrical and cultural programmes, and booths for children's book publishers. (QNA) Page 12



Amir meets Omani minister



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani met at his office in Lusail Palace yesterday Minister of Culture, Sports, and Youth in the Sultanate of Oman Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al-Said and his accompanying delegation, following their visit to the country. At the outset of the meeting, the Omani minister conveyed the greetings of Sultan Haitham bin Tariq of the sisterly Sultanate of Oman, wishing His Highness good health and happiness, and the Qatari people continued progress, development and prosperity. HH the Amir entrusted the visiting minister to convey his greetings to Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, wishing him good health and happiness, and the Omani people further development and prosperity. The two sides discussed brotherly relations between the two countries, and ways to enhance and develop them. Several of Their Excellencies ministers and ranking officials attended the meeting. (QNA)

Israel ignores US, hits Rafah again

Two-day ceasefire talks in Cairo end without a result

AFP, Reuters
Rafah

Israeli warplanes struck Gaza's crowded southern city of Rafah yesterday after US President Joe Biden vowed to stop supplying artillery shells and other weapons to Israel if a full-scale assault goes ahead.

It was the starkest warning yet from the US, Israel's main military provider, over the civilian impact of its war actions.

An AFP correspondent and witnesses yesterday reported Israeli strikes on several parts of Rafah, where the United Nations said 1.4mn people were sheltering.

"The tanks and jets are striking," Tarek Bahlul said on a deserted Rafah street. "Every minute you hear a rocket and you don't know where it will land."

Israel has already defied international objections by sending in tanks and con-

ducting what it called "targeted raids" in the east of Rafah. The Hamas authorities' "emergency committee" in Rafah dismissed as "nothing but lies" Israel's description of its operation as "limited".

In an interview with CNN on Wednesday, Biden warned he would stop some US weapons supplies to Israel if it carried out its long-threatened ground assault. Biden said: "If they go into Rafah, I'm not supplying the weapons that have been used... to deal with the cities."

"We're not gonna supply the weapons and the artillery shells that have been used."

The fresh warning came after his administration paused delivery last week of 1,800 2,000-pound (907-kilo) bombs and 1,700 500-pound bombs as Israel appeared ready to attack Rafah.

"Civilians have been killed in Gaza as a consequence of those bombs," Biden said. "It's just wrong."

Ties between the allies have become increasingly strained as Biden and other top Washington officials criticise Israel over its conduct of the war.

The United Nations agency for Pal-



Palestinians flee Rafah after Israeli forces launched a ground and air operation in the eastern part of the southern Gaza city yesterday. (Reuters)

estinian refugees, UNRWA, said 80,000 people have fled Rafah since Monday, but "nowhere is safe". UNRWA chief Philippe

Lazzarini announced late yesterday that the agency was closing its east Jerusalem headquarters after the latest in a spate of attacks by "Israeli extremists" put its staff at "serious risk".

Lazzarini said the compound would remain closed "until proper security is restored".

Meanwhile, Israeli and Hamas negotiating teams left Cairo yesterday after what the Egyptian hosts described as a "two-day round" of indirect negotiations on the terms of a Gaza truce, Egypt's state-linked Al-Qahera News reported.

White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said the head of the US delegation, CIA director Bill Burns was also headed home. "That doesn't mean there aren't still ongoing discussions," Kirby said.

"We still believe that there's a path forward, but it's going to take some leadership on both sides."

The talks in Egypt's capital made some headway but no deal was reached, according to two Egyptian security sources.

Israel has said it is open to a truce, but has rejected demands for an end to the war.

Qatar condemns Israeli settlers' attack on UNRWA HQ

Qatar condemned, in the strongest terms, the attack by Israeli settlers on the headquarters of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in occupied Jerusalem, and considered it a blatant challenge to international law and blatant intimidation under the guise of freedom of expression.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs warned, in a statement yesterday, that the systematic Israeli targeting of UNRWA, which began with allegations of its lack of impartiality, ultimately aims to liquidate it and deprive millions of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon of its necessary services, especially with the continuation of the brutal war on the sector. In this context, the ministry stressed the need for the international community to stand firmly in line to confront this plan to avoid its disastrous humanitarian repercussions. (QNA)

COMMUNITY
See Page: 5

Sheikha Jowaher patronises QU female graduation ceremony



Her Highness the Consort of HH the Amir Sheikha Jowaher bint Hamad bin Suhaim al-Thani patronised the graduation ceremony of the 47th batch (Class of 2024) of Qatar University female students, held at QU Sports and Events Complex yesterday morning.

The ceremony was attended by a number of Their Excellencies Sheikhs and Ministers, along with members of the university's board of trustees, university vice-presidents, and the graduates' guardians. During the ceremony, Her Highness honoured the 478 outstanding students, while President of Qatar

University Dr Omar bin Mohamed al-Ansari handed the certificates to the 2,981 graduates in various disciplines. A film was also shown about the students' academic journey, in addition to the achievements and accomplishments of Qatar University and its role in

supporting students and its contributions in building the state and developing society. Dr Omar bin Mohamed al-Ansari gave a speech on the occasion, and student Hafsa Ahmed al-Ghayath delivered a speech on behalf of the graduates. (QNA) Page 2

Sheikha Jowaher honours graduates at QU female convocation ceremony



Her Highness the Consort of HH the Amir Sheikha Jowaher bint Hamad bin Suhaim al-Thani attended the graduation ceremony of the 47th batch (Class of 2024) of Qatar University female students, held at QU Sports and Events Complex yesterday. The ceremony was attended by a number of Sheikhs and Ministers, along with members of the university's board of trustees, university vice-presidents, and the graduates' guardians. Her Highness honoured the 478 outstanding students, while President of Qatar University Dr Omar bin Mohamed al-Ansari handed the certificates to the 2,981 graduates in various disciplines. (QNA)



'Qatar University offers high-quality education, research in support of national development'

QNA
Doha

President of Qatar University (QU) Dr Omar bin Mohamed al-Ansari said that the QU seeks to provide its students with high-quality education and its community with research that supports national development, in an effective institutional environment built on the principles of excellence, efficiency, and transparency.

In his speech during the graduation ceremony of its 47th batch of distinguished female students at the QU Sports and Events Complex yesterday, Dr al-Ansari added that the QU's role extends beyond

providing academic knowledge and degrees; it encompasses being a field for knowledge, development, research, innovation, and human empowerment.

He added that the QU is among the leading universities in the region in supporting and empowering women in both academic and societal environments, highlighting its commitment to providing educational, research, and extracurricular opportunities in an educational atmosphere that encourages female participation and enables them to achieve their full aspirations. He added, "The QU has achieved several local and international accomplishments, consistent with its distinction as an educational in-

stitution and a hub of expertise. It has obtained numerous academic chairs through partnerships and agreements with local, regional, and global institutions. "Several programmes and colleges have received academic accreditation from prestigious international accrediting institutions, some for the first time, such as the College of Medicine, while others have renewed previous accreditations.

In all cases, these accreditations serve as tangible evidence of the quality of the university's programmes, which are on par with those offered by the finest global universities. Dr al-Ansari called on female graduates "to continue learning and continuously develop your professional skills, drawing

knowledge from experts in various fields of work".

"Set your professional and personal goals and work diligently and passionately to achieve them, while focusing on reflection and enjoying the journey of learning through new experiences. I am reminded to emphasise that success is not limited to the professional path alone, but also includes the ability to find balance between personal and professional life," he added. He added that the QU aims to overcome any obstacles that women may face, seeking to develop their skills and enhance their personal, professional, leadership, and entrepreneurial capacities. "This is to enable them to positively contribute to realis-

ing the aspirations of society, its development, and to participate in building a sustainable future, all while maintaining a full awareness of the importance of preserving our values, identity, social fabric, and pride in our religious and national values."

The graduation ceremony for the Class of 2024 included graduates from the following degrees (bachelor's, diploma, master's, doctorate, and doctor of pharmacy) who completed the graduation requirements for the following academic terms: Summer 2023, Fall 2023 and Winter 2024, and those expected to graduate Spring 2024. A total of 3,742 female and male students graduate as part of the Class of 2024.

Official

Amir sends cable of condolences to Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, His Highness the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani and HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani sent cables of condolences to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz al-Saud of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, on the death of the mother of Prince Sultan bin Mohamed bin Abdulaziz al-Saud bin Faisal al-Saud.

Amir condoles with president of UAE

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, His Highness the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani and HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani sent cables of condolences to President of the United Arab Emirates Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed al-Nahyan on the death of Sheikh Hazza bin Sultan bin Zayed al-Nahyan.

Amir sends cables of condolences to Brazilian president

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, His Highness the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani and HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani sent cables of condolences to President of Brazil Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, on the victims of the floods that swept the south of the country, wishing the injured a speedy recovery. (QNA)

Iranian FM meets ambassador of Qatar



Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iran Hossein Amir-Abdollahian met yesterday with ambassador of Qatar to Iran Mohamed bin Hamad al-Hajri, on the occasion of the end of his tenure. During the meeting, the Iranian FM wished the Ambassador success in his future duties, and bilateral relations further development and prosperity. (QNA)

Shura Council chairs meeting of Gulf-European Parliamentary Committee's Team



The Shura Council chaired yesterday the first meeting of the team of the Gulf-European Parliamentary Committee, which was organised virtually by the Secretariat General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Member of the Shura Council Abdullah bin Nasser bin Turki al-Subaie represented the Shura Council at the meeting. In a statement, the Shura Council said that the Gulf-European Parliamentary Committee seeks to strengthen parliamentary co-operation between the GCC countries and the European Parliament. The team's first meeting discussed a wide range of topics related to health, water and food security, energy transitions, human rights, and tourism, in addition to co-operation in combating pandemics and reducing carbon dioxide emissions. (QNA)

Chief of staff in Turkiye meetings

HE the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces Staff Lieutenant General (Pilot) Salem bin Hamad al-Nabit met separately with Minister of National Defence of Turkiye Yasar Guler, Chief of the Turkish General Staff Metin Gurak during his visit to Turkiye. The two meetings dealt with issues of joint interest, and discussing bilateral military co-operation and ways to strengthen and develop it. The meeting was attended by a number of ranking officers at the Qatari Armed Forces. (QNA)



Complete pre-registration for smooth crossing at Abu Samra: Ministry

The Ministry of Interior (MoI) has reminded travellers to make use of the optional and free pre-registration service at Abu Samra port to get easy entry and exit procedures. The option is available for citizens, residents and visitors. In a video, posted on X account yesterday, MoI said the pre-registration service for Abu Samra port in the Metrash2 is an optional service that enables citizens and residents to complete travel procedures through the port easily and conveniently through the lane designated for pre-registered vehicles. The rest of the lanes operate in their usual manner. To complete pre-registration, citizens and residents can access the Metrash2 app and select 'Travel Service'. They can fill in the required information and a text message will be delivered upon the completion of the proceedings. Visitors can complete the proceedings through the Hayya platform. Travellers, who complete the pre-registration can head to the designated lane at Abu Samra. They will be asked to complete the procedures on the spot if the registration is incomplete. A team of trained General Authority of Customs officials are available to serve the travellers.

GCC Red Crescent Societies discuss ways to enhance joint co-operation

QNA
Doha

The 20th meeting of the committee of presidents of the GCC Red Crescent societies and associations was held in Doha yesterday. The meeting was chaired by Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS) President Yousuf bin Ali al-Khater.

In his speech, he praised the significant role of Red Crescent societies and associations in the GCC countries, highlighting them as leading institutions in the humanitarian field globally by providing support and assistance in various forms to victims of natural disasters, conflicts, and in promoting humanitarian work culture.

He expressed hope that this contribution would continue and achieve more excellence by ensuring effective recommendations are made. He emphasised the importance of adopting practical measures concerning memoranda

The QRCS president emphasised the importance of activating the provisions of the agreements with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the agreement with the Arab Red Crescent and Red Cross Organisation

of understanding and agreements that enhance the mission of these societies and associations in international forums.

In this context, the QRCS president emphasised the importance of activating the provisions of the agreements with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the agreement with the Arab Red Crescent and Red Cross Organisation.

He explained that humanitarian principles strengthen solidarity and co-operation. He also highlighted the nomination of Secretary-General of the Qatar Red Crescent Society Faisal Mohamed al-Emadi for membership in the permanent committee of

the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, calling for supporting his nomination.

In a statement to Qatar News Agency (QNA) al-Emadi emphasised the importance of the meeting in discussing various topics, including ways to enhance co-operation between the GCC societies, adding that joint GCC humanitarian co-operation is longstanding. Meanwhile, Vice-President of the Kuwaiti Red Crescent Society Anwar al-Hassawi told QNA that the meeting is significant in terms of discussing joint co-operation strategies in humanitarian fields and providing assistance during times of crises and disasters.

UDST triumph at first female university GCC sports event

The female athletes of University of Doha for Science and Technology (UDST) showcased outstanding talent and sportsmanship at the inaugural Female GCC Tournament, held at Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, a statement said.

The tournament, a significant milestone in promoting women's sports across the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC), witnessed participation from 11 universities in the region.

UDST athletes competed in badminton, futsal, volleyball, and tennis and emerged as the only participating university to secure a medal in each sport.

Mubarak al-Naimi won the gold medal in tennis. UDST teams won silver in volleyball and futsal, and bronze in badminton.

Dr Salem Al-Naemi, president of UDST, said: "We firmly believe that sport plays an integral role in the educational journey of our students. We are immensely proud of our female athletes, whose remarkable achievements stand as a testament to their great dedication and continuous efforts. UDST is committed to recognising and nurturing the unique strengths of each of our students.



We work diligently to enhance these qualities for the benefit of their personal and professional growth. This focus ensures that every student has the opportunity to succeed and thrive in their chosen field."

UDST takes pride in being the only FISU Platinum-certified healthy campus in the Mena region, further emphasising its dedication to fostering a supportive and conducive environment for student-athletes, the statement added.

PM sends message to Pakistani counterpart



HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani has sent a written message to Prime Minister of Pakistan Shehbaz Sharif, pertaining to bilateral relations and way to support and develop them. HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Mohamed bin Abdulaziz al-Khulaifi handed the message during his meeting with Pakistan's PM yesterday. During the meeting, they discussed the two countries' relations and the latest regional developments in addition to a host of topics of mutual interest. The Pakistani PM also voiced his country's appreciation for Qatar's efforts to promote peace and security in the region. (QNA)

Qatar chairs Arab conference of heads of traffic authorities in Tunisia



Qatar chaired the Arab Conference of Heads of Traffic Authorities held on May 8 and 9 at the headquarters of the General Secretariat of the Arab Interior Ministers Council in the Republic of Tunisia. The Ministry of Interior stated that Brigadier General Dr Mohamed Radhi al-Hajri headed Qatar's delegation to the conference. Chaired by Director General of Traffic Major General Abdulaziz bin Jassim al-Thani, the Arab Conference of Heads of Traffic Authorities addressed a number of topics on the agenda and appropriate decisions were taken regarding them. (QNA)

Pakistani FM meets Qatar minister



Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Pakistan Mohamed Ishaq Dar met yesterday with HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Mohamed bin Abdulaziz al-Khulaifi. Relations between Pakistan and Qatar were discussed at the meeting, in addition to topics of mutual interest. (QNA)

Police Academy concludes course on investigation

The Police Academy, represented by the Police Officers Institute, concluded yesterday a course on investigation through open sources for counter-terrorism. The workshop was organised by the Institute in co-operation with the National Counter-Terrorism Committee and the International Criminal Police Organisation (Interpol) at the headquarters of the Arab and International Police Communication Department. The last day was attended by the Secretary of the National Counter-Terrorism Committee Colonel Khalid Ali al-Kaabi and the Director of the Police Officers Institute Colonel Naif Mohamed al-Mannai. The week-long course featured 16 participants from various bodies and lectures were given by experts from the Counter-Terrorism Department of the Interpol. (QNA)



Police Officers Institute concludes course on communication skills

The Police Officers Institute concluded a four-day course on communication skills and working with VIPs. The Ministry of Interior (MoI) said in a statement that the course, which was organised at the Rescue Police Department (Al Fazaa) Hall, aimed to qualify and provide participants with the required skills to be involved in protocol departments and working with high-ranking dignitaries. Officers from the MoI's various departments took part in the course. At the conclusion of the course, Director of the Police Officers Institute, Colonel Naif Mohamed al-Mannai, handed certificates to the participants. Al-Mannai stressed the importance of the course as one of the specific courses that the Police Officers Institute was keen to organise due to its importance in qualifying officers in the field of protocol according to recognised scientific foundations. (QNA)

Police Academy wins Universities Debating Championship in Arabic



The Police Academy team, represented by the Police College, won the National Universities Debating Championship in Arabic after defeating the Qatar University team in the final round, which focused on discussing dramatic works involving historical figures and events. The winning team (Police College) of the championship, which was organised by QatarDebate Center at the Education City, included the students Ammer al-Ansari, Saeed al-Qahtani, and Mohamed al-Nasser. The Qatar University (QU) team, second placed, included the students Mohamed al-Yafei, Mohamed Farag, and Abdullah al-Shammari. In third place came the Qatar University team, which included the students Al Dana al-Hajri, Asmahan al-Kuwari, and Al Maha al-Badr. Shaima Abu Talib from Lusail University won the title of the best speaker of the championship, while Mohamed al-Yafei (QU) won the second best speaker, and Mohamed Abdulnabi Farag (QU) won the third best speaker. The National Universities Debating Championship in Arabic is part of the series of local leagues organised by QatarDebate between universities and comes in line with the mission of the centre, which seeks to diagnose pivotal issues and draw inspiring ideas and dialogue skills among students.

Ministry to auction abandoned vehicles, equipment

The Ministry of Municipality has announced the sale of 143 written-off government vehicles and equipment along with other 50 abandoned vehicles through a public auction. According to the ministry's X account the auction will be held at Al Rayyan Municipality Theatre on May 19 at 3.30pm and May 21 at 2.30pm. The government vehicles and equipment can be inspected at the scrapyards of the Mechanical Equipment Department of the Ministry of Municipality behind the Medical Commission at Abu Hamour. Other abandoned vehicles can be inspected at the scrapyards of the Ministry of Municipality at Al Mashaf. Buyers can check the vehicles until May 21, from 8am to 11am daily. For inquiries, buyers can contact the ministry's call centre 184.

Chinese books make debut at Doha International Book Fair



The 33rd Doha International Book Fair commenced on 9th May 2024, at the Doha Exhibition and Convention Center in Qatar. Beijing Zhongke Import & Export Ltd. took charge of coordinating the Chinese publishing delegation, marking the first official appearance of Chinese books at the Doha International Book Fair in many years.

Nearly 300 types of exquisite publications are showcased at the Chinese booth in three areas. The boutique books area focuses on XI JINPING: THE GOVERNANCE OF CHINA, XI JINPING: THE BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE, and other books in English and Arabic, introducing the Chinese path and Chinese experience in national governance and economic development.

The Science and Technology books area showcases the China's latest scientific and technological achievements in AI, new energy, and other fields. Among them, Big Data Terminology is the world's first multi-language intelligent professional thesaurus for the systematic study of big data terminology, with 20 language versions, and it is also the first debut at a book fair overseas. The Chinese

civilization area features the theme of the Great Wall, giant panda, and Chinese language learning, portraying China's distinctive culture.

During the book fair, the Chinese delegation will hold seminars on co-publishing, copyright trade, and digital product sales with Hamad bin Khalifa University Press, Digital Future Company of Lebanon, and other institutions. Activities will also be held with Hamad Bin Khalifa University, Overseas Chinese Association, and other organizations, to provide access for Qatari people to read Chinese books.

The presence of the Chinese publishing delegation at the Doha International Book Fair coincides with the 20th anniversary of the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum. This collaboration offers a significant platform for showcasing remarkable aspects of Chinese culture and advancements in science and technology. It not only provides readers with opportunities to engage with and comprehend Chinese culture, science, and technology but also plays a crucial role in fostering cultural exchanges and enhancing mutual understanding between China and Qatar, as well as between China and Arab countries.

Official MoFA spokesperson takes part in Swedish event on mediation in wars



Official spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Majed bin Mohamed al-Ansari participated in a public event organised by the Swedish Institute of International Affairs, titled 'Mediation in Wars - From Bosnia to Gaza.' Dr al-Ansari emphasised the importance of mediation in achieving sustainable solutions to conflicts amidst global polarisation. He also highlighted the significance of diversity in mediation, which enhances opportunities for achieving peace and stability at both regional and international levels. The spokesperson also discussed Qatar's mediation efforts in partnership with Egypt and the United States, aimed at reaching an immediate and permanent ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, releasing prisoners and detainees, and ensuring the delivery of more humanitarian aid to the Strip. **(QNA)**

Speaker of UAE Federal National Council meets Qatar ambassador



Speaker of the Federal National Council (FNC) of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) Saqr Ghobash met with ambassador of Qatar to the UAE Dr Sultan bin Salmeen al-Mansouri. Bilateral relations were discussed during the meeting. **(QNA)**

Qatar champions family cohesion: Ministry

QNA
Doha

Assistant Undersecretary for Family Affairs at the Ministry of Social Development and Family Sheikhha Sheikhha bint Jassim al-Thani reiterated Qatar's keenness on promoting family cohesion as well as upholding the value and role of the family in realising the pillars of community development.

In a research paper, she presented within the sessions of the 15 International Conference on Interfaith Dialogue on the central role of the family in education and upbringing, the assistant undersecretary said that the permanent constitution of the State of Qatar stipulates that "The family is the basis of the society. A Qatari family is founded on religion, ethics, and patriotism. The law shall regulate adequate means to protect the family, support its structure, strengthen its ties, and protect maternity, childhood, and old age."

She added that the Family Charter, which was launched by the Ministry of Social Development and Family, comes as an important step towards enhancing the role of the family in building a strong, sustainable society, which confirms the importance of the family as a basic unit in society, pointing out that the family is considered a source of values and education and contributes to building and developing the nation as a whole.

She noted that the Qatari Family Charter represents the societal framework that governs family relations in the State of Qatar, as this charter focuses on the rights and duties of individuals within the family, and seeks to achieve balance and justice in these relationships.

It also addresses many aspects, such as the financial and economic rights of individuals, as well as educational and health rights, in addition to protecting the rights of children and women and promoting the values of justice and mutual respect within the family.



She pointed out that the charter serves as a constitution for the family and a document that defines the values and principles that govern the family's relationships and interactions in society. It is classified as an implicit agreement between family members to manage expectations and define the decision-making process and responsibilities within the family, noting that this document is the first of its



kind in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

The vision of the Ministry of Social Development and Family aims to invite the Gulf states as well as the Arab and international community to join the charter in the future.

Through her paper, Sheikhha Sheikhha bint Jassim al-Thani pointed out that religions paid great attention to the family and laid spiritual, intellectual and moral foundations for it to rely on in establishing, surviving, developing, achieving cohesion and success, and also provided solutions to its social, educational and psychological problems.

The Ministry of Social Development and Family, represented by the Family Development Department, participated in the fifteenth International Conference on Interfaith Dialogue, which, over two days, addressed many topics that focused on the importance of the interaction between religious and educational values to build an interconnected and balanced family.

QU students visit STP



Exploring the most recent environmental solutions, students from the Department of Biological and Environmental Sciences at Qatar University visited the Doha West Sewage Treatment Plant (STP) of the Public Works Authority (Ashghal). The visit, according to a post by Ashghal on its X account, provided the students with firsthand exposure to the intricate procedures involved in wastewater treatment and environmental conservation. The students observed the initial treatment phases and gained insights into the subsequent biological and chemical processes. The students had also the opportunity to engage with professionals working in the field, learning about career opportunities in environmental science, engineering and related fields. Engineer Rashid Arqoub al-Khaldi, head of the Pumping Stations Section, emphasised Ashghal's adherence to strict environmental regulations and implementation of innovative technologies to ensure the efficient and sustainable operation of the STPs, the post added.



MoPH hosts seminar on antimicrobial resistance

QNA
Doha

The Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) hosted a public health seminar entitled 'Antimicrobial Resistance: A Growing Emergency for the Health System Worldwide. Response at the International and National Levels.'

The seminar was held under the framework of the Healthy Cities initiative. The initiative is a strategic project under the National Health Strategy's "Health in All Policies" (HiAP) approach, which utilises multi-sectoral collaboration to address and tackle the most pressing global health challenges of our time.

Assistant Minister for Health Affairs at MoPH, Dr Salih al-Marri underscored the urgency of addressing and raising awareness on antimicrobial resistance, stating, "We are honoured to host this seminar, bringing together experts and stakeholders to address the urgent issue of antimicrobial resistance at a time when antimicrobial resistance poses a significant threat to global health security, it is imperative that we join forces to develop innovative solutions and strategies. By fostering dialogue and collaboration among diverse stakeholders, we aim to not only raise awareness but also catalyse concrete actions to combat AMR and safeguard public health."

The seminar commenced with



an opening speech by renowned expert in antimicrobial resistance, Director of Programme Management-Acting Director of Communicable Disease Department of the World Health Organisation Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMRO) Dr Rana Hajjeh. "It is a pleasure to set the stage for this very timely initiative. Antimicrobial resistance is an important public health threat in our region and major efforts are still needed to come up with concrete solutions to accelerate the control of AMR, across the multiple sectors. It is inspiring to see the critical role played by our region in AMR, with Qatar leading on innovative 'One Health' approaches and our region hosting soon the 4th inter-ministerial meeting on AMR in KSA in November."

For his part, Deputy Chief Medical Officer at Hamad Medical Corporation Dr Abdullatif al-Khal presented on Qatar's response in

addressing the challenge posed by antimicrobial resistance. Dr al-Khal underscored that "Qatar, like the rest of the world, is affected by this growing threat, and the Ministry of Public Health has taken the initiative to combat it. By adopting the 'One Health' approach, which will need the active contribution and collaboration of multiple sectors, including human health, animal health, food production, agriculture, and the environment."

The seminar featured two distinguished speakers: Lord Ara Darzi, Co-Director of the Institute of Global Health Innovation at Imperial College London, who presented "Fleming Centre Initiative: Scaling up Solutions to Combat AMR," followed by Dr Abdullatif al-Khal, Deputy Chief Medical Officer at Hamad Medical Corporation, who presented "The Response of Qatar to Address the Challenge Posed by Antimicrobial Resistance."

Ashghal organises workshop for QOC staff

In order to build knowledge, exchange experiences and enhance co-operation between state institutions, the Public Works Authority (Ashghal) organised a two-day workshop for Qatar Olympic Committee's human resources staff to identify best practices and learn about the governance of Human Resources Department (HRD) procedures. Held at Ashghal's headquarters, the workshop featured presentations on multiple topics. The exercise concluded with tours to various sections of HRD, an Ashghal statement said.





QU concludes 7th annual ChemE Car Competition

Khalifa Secondary School, Omar Ibn Al-Khatib Secondary School, and Omar Ibn Abdelaziz Secondary School won the first, second and third places, respectively, in seventh annual ChemE Car Competition for High Schools, organised by Qatar University (QU)'s College of Engineering.

The competition, organised by the Department of Chemical Engineering in collaboration with the American Institute of Chemical Engineers (AIChE) student chapter, saw participation from 14 local high schools.

The aim was to foster creativity and innovation among stu-

dents and encourage them to pursue studies in chemical engineering.

The best poster award went to Qatar Science and Technology Secondary High School, and that for the best car design, to Ahmed bin Mohamed Al-Thani Secondary High School.

Participants were challenged to design and race small cars powered by chemical processes, carrying a water load of 100gm over 10m. The teams received details of the load amount and distance approximately two hours prior to the competition.

In preparation for the event,

which began in October 2023, the Department of Chemical Engineering provided multiple sessions to guide students and teachers through the competition's requirements, rules, and safety regulations, as well as the critical phases of car design and calibration.

Dr Mohamed al-Marri, head

of the Department of Chemical Engineering at QU, said almost 70 students participated in the competition this year. "One of the main goals of the competition is to see how students overcome the technical challenges they face as they prepare for the race," he added.

Symposium, book launch and Mushaira organised

A book titled, *To reform society and our responsibility*, based on a compilation of Dr Rahman's thoughts and ideas by Mahir, was released on the occasion

Anjuman e Mohibbane Urdu Hind Qatar (AMUHQ) organised a symposium on 'Educational awareness and social reform; book launch and Mushaira.

Renowned engineer and educationist Tariq Azeem from Malaysia and founder of Hira Public School, Azamgarh, India, presided.

Mustahsan Khan, a political leader and social worker was the guest of honour. The event started with a recitation from the Holy Qur'an by Qari Abu Hamza. Noted poet Aziz Nabeel convened the programme.

AMUHQ president Nadeem Mahir was the chief guest in place of Dr Sanaullah Abdul Rahman. A book titled, *To reform society and our responsibility*, based on a compilation of Dr Rahman's thoughts and ideas by Mahir, was released on the occasion.

The key speaker Tariq Azeem discussed in detail the topic, 'Educational awareness and social reform'.

The other speakers were Dr Nadeem Jilani, Shahid Khan, Qaisar Masood and Dr Attaur Rehman Nadvi.

Mahir read out a message from

Dr Rahman and launched the book.

The Mushaira featured local poets Asif Shafi, Raza Hussain Qaisar Masood, Athar Azmi, Ahmed Ashfaq and Azfar Gardezi.

Prominent among those who attended the programme were AMUHQ patron Ibrahim Khan, Khursheed Sherwani, Shakil Qadiri, engineer Amir, Dr Wasid, Dr Shahbuddin, Nadeem Jaffar, Tariq Faraz, Moeen Azmi, Dr Moeen Zameer, Bilal Khan, Mohamed Azeem, Zahid Khan, Osama Shamsi, Ali Imran, Asif Khan, Abu Talib, and Tahir Jamil.



Toastmasters Division E annual conference held

Toastmasters Division E annual conference was held with the theme 'Embracing Excellence' under the leadership of director Nirmala Raghuraman and chair Krishnamurthy Nair.

District director Ravishankar J, programme quality director Sabeena M K, club growth director Alarmel Mangai, past district director Manzoor Mohiddin and Rajeswar were present.

Special guest Fatima Sultan al-Kuwari in her keynote address concluded that "embracing excellence is not about what we achieve but what we become in the process and thereby motivat-

ing others to do the same. "The difference between ordinary and extraordinary is that little extra," she added.

The speech contests followed. The winners, in the order of first, second and third, respectively were: Evaluation - Amina Khanum, Mohamed Ajmal, Tariro Dorcas Matibiri; Humorous - Rabi Chandra Lamichhane, Shahinaz Kadavil, Vasuki Sathiyababu; Table Topics - Narendra Aryal, Thancy Ijas, Amina Khanum; International - Sonali Ghosh, Sudha Bhuvanawaran, Mohamed Nayeem.

The chief judges were Philip Cherian and Azeez Mohamed. The

contest chairs were: International - Area 19 director Jawed Ahmad; Evaluation - Area 20 director Pooja Malhotra; Humorous - Area 18 director Pradanya Umrani; Table topic - Area 17 director Priya Shembekar.

The first-place winner from each category will represent Division E in the District 116 Toastmasters Annual Conference in May 24 and 25 in Doha. Division newsletter, Echo, was released. A banner parade was conducted by Bindu Singh and Deepak Talreja.

Special awards were given to the individual contributors. The role players were recognised.



PISQ approved as Pearson Edexcel Centre



Pakistan International School Qatar (PISQ) is now an approved Pearson - Edexcel Centre. A delegation comprising Kathryn Booth (director, Pearson School Qualifications, Pearson Middle East, North Africa, Pakistan and Turkiye), Ameena Soysa (senior regional manager, Pearson School Qualifications - Pearson Middle East and Turkiye) and Andrea Romero Sureda (regional development manager- Schools Resources) visited PISQ to present a plaque from Pearson - Edexcel IGCSE accreditation. PISQ principal Syed Asif Ali Shah and vice-principal Alia Ejaz were present.

LABOUR DAY CELEBRATIONS

Assembly organised by MES students

To honour the tireless efforts of workers across various sectors while highlighting the importance of labour rights and dignity, the students of MES Indian School organised a Labour Day assembly on May 1.

Students delivered a series of performances and presentations right from exploring the historical roots of the labour movement to shedding light on contemporary challenges faced by workers globally, thus providing an insight into the significance of the day. They brought the essence of different professions to life through costumes representing various occupations. From doctors and engineers to farmers and firefighters, the campus was transformed into a vibrant tapestry of diverse vocations, showcasing the creativity and enthusiasm of the students.

In their costumes, students displayed placards carrying slogans including the rights of labour and workplace safety. These visual representations served as powerful reminders of the struggles faced by workers worldwide and underscored the students' dedication to social justice and equality.

Principal Dr Hameeda Kadar delivered a message, emphasising the importance of acknowledging and valuing the contributions of workers in shaping society. She urged students to embrace virtues of respect, empathy, and solidarity, championing fair working conditions and equal opportunities



for all. As a gesture of recognition, the Scouts team of the school extended their gratitude to the workers by presenting them with small tokens of appreciation. The assembly culminated with a solemn pledge taken by the students to uphold the rights of workers and actively contribute to building a

more just and equitable society. Jency George (in charge of Campus Care Force), Rajesh K S (in-charge of Scouts and Guides), along with other teachers Ashraf A, Sreejith K, Nizamudheen, Fency Pathrose, Balkees, Blessy, Jainsha, and Asha co-ordinated the event.



Cultural event staged by ICC



International Labour Day, celebrated on May 1, was observed with a cultural event by the Indian Cultural Centre, under the aegis of the embassy of India. Ambassador Vipul attended the event, held as part of 'ICC Wednesday Fiesta'. The envoy spoke highly of the contribution of workers to the growth of India. Cultural performances by community members were among the highlights. ICC president A P Manikantan thanked the workers for their response to the event. General secretary Mohan Kumar welcomed the gathering and vice-president Subramanya Hebbagelu proposed a vote of thanks. Head of school activities, Shantanu Deshpande co-ordinated the proceedings.





DATA

Philippine economy grows 5.7% in first quarter

The Philippine economy grew slightly less than expected in the first three months of the year, data showed, owing to persistent inflation and a widespread drought. The 5.7% expansion in January-March was well down from the 6.4% posted in the same period last year earlier but a slight improvement on the previous three months, national statistician Dennis Mapa said. The reading was also below the median analysts' forecast of 5.9%, which Ser Percival Reyes of the Ateneo Center for Economic Research and Development said was "quite disappointing". The agriculture sector grew 0.4%, a sharp slowdown from the 2.2% growth logged in the first quarter of 2023.

ACCIDENT

One dead, 200 evacuated after Thai gas storage tank fire

One person has died in a massive blaze on an industrial park housing a gas storage facility in eastern Thailand with hundreds ordered to evacuate, officials said yesterday. The fire in a gas storage tank at the Maptaphut Industrial Port in Rayong province started around 10.35am, according to officials. Four people were hurt in the blaze, with one person later dying of their injuries in hospital, the Industrial Estate Authority of Thailand (IEAT) said in a statement. Video shared by local media showed dense clouds of black smoke erupting from the storage tank, with the roaring flames leaving dark fumes hanging over the industrial park.

CRISIS

Thailand closes island after coral bleaching found

An island in southern Thailand was closed yesterday after the discovery of extensive coral bleaching, the national parks office said. Bleaching, which occurs when algae that live inside corals is expelled, is usually caused by higher than normal ocean temperatures and increased ultraviolet radiation. The closure comes after a deadly heatwave caused temperatures to soar across Thailand and Asia in recent weeks. The Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation (DNP) said Pling Island and the coral reefs around Sirinart National Park in Phuket would be temporarily closed due to extensive coral bleaching caused by rising seawater temperatures.

CLARIFICATION

Video of naval destroyer likely real, says Japan

Footage of a Japanese naval destroyer that circulated on Chinese social media is likely genuine, Tokyo's defence ministry said yesterday, after initial speculation the video may have been generated by artificial intelligence. No obvious military activity can be seen in the clip, which appears to show the docked Izumo helicopter destroyer. According to officials, footage "purportedly shot by a drone" was first uploaded to Chinese video-sharing platform Bilibili on March 26. It has since been viewed around 187,000 times on the platform, and has also proliferated on Douyin, China's version of TikTok, and on a Chinese-language X account.

South Korea president Yoon vows to focus on economy

Reuters
Seoul

South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol yesterday conceded that his ruling party's crushing election defeat last month reflected the government's failure to improve people's lives, and apologised for a scandal involving his wife.

He continued to reject calls by opposition lawmakers for a special probe into allegations that the First Lady had inappropriately accepted a pricey Christian Dior handbag as a gift last year, even as prosecutors begin investigating whether she broke any laws.

In his first press conference in 21 months, Yoon pledged instead to focus on improving the economy and tackling what he called the national emergency of flagging birth rates over the three years he has left in office.

"I think the important thing going forward is indeed the economy," he said. "Corporate growth and job creation are important too but what I think is more important is to try harder to look for what is inconvenient in the life of each and every person and to resolve them."

South Korea's economy beat most forecasts to grow 1.3% in the first three months of this year, though living costs have remained stubbornly high despite some progress in tackling inflation.

In a new policy push, a government ministry will be set up to tackle the record low birth rate and

fast-ageing population, Yoon said in opening remarks from his office, behind a plaque reading "The Buck Stops Here."

"This is not a matter we can take time to work on," he said.

South Korea's fertility rate, already the world's lowest, maintained its dramatic decline in 2023, as women cited concerns about bearing most of the burden of raising children, lost career opportunities, and the financial cost of raising children as reasons to delay child-birth or to not have babies.

Yoon's People Power Party suffered a heavy loss in an April 10 vote, which prompted calls for a change in his leadership style and policy direction to salvage a presidency not yet at the halfway mark.

"I think it reflects the public's evaluation that my administration's work is far short of what is needed," Yoon said when asked about his party's election defeat.

His comments included the first explicit apology for the controversy surrounding his wife. The issue is likely to weigh heavily on his attempts to win co-operation from the opposition-controlled parliament on policy priorities.

Yoon, who won the presidency in 2022 by a margin of less than one percentage point, has seen his support ratings plunge to a low of 21% in one public opinion poll.

Lawmaker Park Chan-dae, new floor leader of the main opposition Democratic Party, called Yoon's press conference and address "bitterly disappointing".

US-Philippines annual military drills



A Philippines Navy guided missile frigate launches a C-Star surface-to-surface anti-ship missile towards a mock enemy target during the maritime strike exercise as part of the joint US-Philippines annual military Balikatan drills in Laoag, on Luzon island's northwest coast.

China warplanes, ships detected around Taiwan

AFP
Taipei

Taiwanese defence and coast guard officials said yesterday dozens of Chinese warplanes and ships had been detected around the island, less than two weeks before Taiwan's inauguration for a new president.

China claims Taiwan as part of its territory and has said it will not rule out using force to bring the island under Beijing's control.

The Chinese military presence around the island announced by Taipei, which included

another 23 warplanes and five naval vessels in the 24 hours leading up to 6am, also came a day after a US warship sailed through the sensitive Taiwan Strait.

The Coast Guard in Taipei said late yesterday it had detected 12 Chinese ships around its outlying island of Kinmen.

Kinmen, administered by Taipei but located 5kms from the Chinese city of Xiamen, has seen heightened tensions in recent months, with Chinese coast guard ships maintaining a presence around it.

The Taiwan Coast Guard said a fleet of seven ships "belonging to China's maritime and

fishery departments entered our restricted waters" around 3pm local time (0700GMT), about 4 nautical miles southwest of Kinmen.

"We suspected the fleet, together with three Chinese fishing boats, were engaged in maritime exercises," it said.

Around the same time, "another fleet of four Chinese coast guard ships entered our prohibited and restricted waters... and another ship sailed outside our waters."

The vessels left about 90 minutes later, the coast guard said, noting that this was "the fourth formation of Chinese coast guard ships sailing in Kinmen waters" in May.

Mount Fuji barrier delayed

Tourists have a few more days to snap Mount Fuji at a popular vantage point after Japanese authorities yesterday said the construction of a barrier has been delayed. Fujikawaguchiko town is building the screen to deter people from taking pictures of Japan's most famous landmark from a pavement opposite a Lawson convenience store. Residents complain that the visitors cause traffic problems and behave badly in their desperation for the perfect Instagram post of the snow-capped volcano.

The barrier was originally scheduled to be in position last week, and then by mid-May, but a town official said yesterday that there were problems getting the required materials delivered. "We believe we should receive necessary parts on or around May 20 or later," the official said. The barrier made of netting is meant to measure eight by 65 feet and the requisite poles have been in place since early May.

Drone light show



A swarm of 1,000 drones form patterns in the night sky during a drone light show as part of the 2024 Korea Drone Expo in Incheon, South Korea, yesterday

Vietnam official linked to trade union reform held

Reuters
Hanoi

Police in Vietnam have arrested a senior official involved in talks with international organisations on labour reforms, state media said yesterday, adding that the action was linked to the alleged disclosure of classified information.

The detention of Nguyen Van Binh follows months of arrests of prominent experts and activists, in what some diplomats see as a further crackdown on civil society amid a major reshuffle of top political leaders in the country.

As director general of the labour ministry's legal affairs department, Binh, 51, was responsible for overseeing reforms to labour law on which he worked closely with the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the ministry

said on its website. Reuters could not immediately reach Binh, his family or other representatives for comment. The ILO's office in Vietnam said in a statement it was aware he had been detained.

"We are seeking further information in this regard and are unable to provide any additional comment at this time," it said.

Vietnam's labour ministry did not immediately reply to requests for comment on Binh's arrest.

Binh was detained on charges of intentionally revealing state secrets, the state-run Tuoi Tre newspaper said, adding that police were widening their investigation. His efforts with the ILO and international partners were aimed at possible ratification of Convention 87 on labour and trade union rights. If passed, this would guarantee workers the right to form independent trade unions without prior approval.

Two China cities lift home purchase curbs to woo buyers

Reuters
Beijing

Two Chinese provincial capitals yesterday lifted all home purchase restrictions to lure buyers and shore up their sagging real estate markets, raising the prospect of other megacities following suit.

As of May 9, Hangzhou and Xian will no longer vet the eligibility of potential buyers, the cities' housing authorities said in separate notices, shedding requirements previously imposed to deter speculators and block buyers who are not legal residents of the cities or local

tax payers. The last round of China's property boom in many cities ended around 2020-21 due to the pandemic and also strict borrowing requirements imposed by regulators to contain the towering debts accrued by developers.

Declining home prices in markets, including traditionally hot locations such as Hangzhou, have since chilled buyer sentiment, hitting a sector that once accounted for a quarter of China's economic output.

Authorities have been ramping up measures to prop up the troubled sector, but many of the policies have been piecemeal in nature or have only a limited, short-term

impact. In Hangzhou, capital of wealthy Zhejiang province, new home prices edged up 1% year-on-year in March, the slowest pace in nearly six years, according to the latest data from China's statistics bureau.

In April, the city's new home sales stood at 310,000 square metres, slumping 75% year-on-year, a survey from real estate firm CRIC showed. Then, on April 30, a meeting of Communist Party leaders called for measures to support the property sector, saying it would improve policies to clear mounting housing inventories.

A day earlier, the southwestern city of Chengdu, home to 21.4mn

residents and capital of Sichuan province, dropped all home-buying limits.

Hangzhou is the first city to completely abolish purchase restrictions after that meeting, said analyst Yan Yuejin at E-house China Research and Development Institute, a private real estate service provider.

Hangzhou, a city of 12.5mn people, is also China's answer to Silicon Valley, being home to technology majors including Alibaba Group and NetEase. It has been a magnet for tech talent from all over China. The city's decision will be "very inspiring" for other cities that still have curbs, and a wave

of cities will see unprecedentedly large-scale policy easing starting in May, Yan predicted.

Authorities in Xian, a city of more than 13mn residents and capital of northwestern Shaanxi province, yesterday also allowed private companies and government-affiliated institutions to buy second-hand housing and newly-built apartments, in a move to reduce swelling housing inventories.

The initial reaction by analysts to the moves by Hangzhou and Xian was lacklustre.

"Relaxing purchase restrictions has proven ineffective at reviving demand," said Joe Peissel, an economic analyst at Trivium China.

"That's because there are massive excess supplies of housing - both new builds and second-hand units - that weigh on prices and deter buyers from re-entering the market."

Currently, only southern Hainan province, the northern city of Tianjin, the southern cities of Zhuhai and Hengqin, and China's four biggest cities - Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen - are still enforcing purchase restrictions.

"Except for the biggest cities of Beijing and Shanghai, easing the purchase restrictions in other cities are only symbolic," said Zhang Dawei, analyst at Centaline Property Agency.

Modi skips election in Kashmir as critics dispute integration claims

Reuters
Anantnag, India

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is criss-crossing India in a marathon election campaign but, for the first time since 1996, his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is not contesting in Kashmir.

for the three seats in the region are powerful local parties, the National Conference and the People's Democratic Party (PDP). They will contest against each other but both say they are opposed to the Hindu nationalist BJP and will align with the Congress party-led opposition alliance.

Analysts and opposition parties say the BJP decided to skip contesting the election because the out-

come is likely to contradict Modi's narrative of a peaceful, more integrated Kashmir since he removed the region's semi-autonomous status in 2019 and brought it under New Delhi's control.

The BJP, along with allies, is contesting in every other part of India and is tipped to win a majority of parliament's 543 seats.

"Why are they absent from the

election?" asked Omar Abdullah, a leader of the National Conference and a former chief minister of Jammu and Kashmir.

"Clearly there is a gap between what the BJP claims to have done and the reality on the ground," he said, speaking in his home in Kashmir's main city, Srinagar.

Modi says his 2019 decision brought normalcy to Kashmir af-

ter decades of bloodshed and that he will bring investments and jobs soon. The federal Home Minister Amit Shah backs up the government's position by claiming that youths now hold laptops in their hands instead of stones that they used to throw at security forces in the past.

As part of the move, Jammu and Kashmir state was split into two

federally ruled areas.

Ravinder Raina, the chief of the Kashmir unit of the BJP, said the party's decision to skip the election was part of a broader strategy, although he declined to give specifics. "The BJP will not fight, but support a candidate who will work for peace, happiness, brotherhood and democracy," in each of the three seats, he said.

India 'weighs delaying caps on UPI market share'

Reuters
Mumbai

India will again delay caps on market share for a popular digital payments method, two sources said, benefiting Google Pay and Walmart-backed PhonePe as the authorities prioritise growth over concerns about market concentration.

The National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), the quasi-regulator, will extend by as much as two years a year-end deadline to cap at 30% the market share of any company processing payments via the Unified Payment Interface (UPI), the sources with direct knowledge of the matter said.

PhonePe's share of UPI payments has risen to 48.3% from 37% in April 2020, while Google Pay's share has declined to 37.4% from 44%, according to NPCI data. The two processed a combined 11.5bn transactions in April, the data showed.

NPCI and Google Pay declined to comment. PhonePe did not respond to an e-mail seeking comment.

India launched UPI in 2016 but barred companies from charging for the instant digital payments service in an effort to promote online transactions and reduce the use of cash in Asia's third-largest economy.

Because they cannot charge for it, India's banks and others like Meta-owned WhatsApp and Amazon Pay have not pushed

UPI-based payments aggressively, leaving authorities worried about a concentration risk.

While their apps do not earn money from the payments, PhonePe and Google Pay have been able to use their UPI customer base to sell services such as loans and insurance.

NPCI, which has a regulatory mandate from the central bank, announced the 30% cap in 2020 but later extended the deadline by two years to the end of 2024.

The deadline will have to be extended again, said one of the sources, as it is not possible for PhonePe and Google Pay to reduce their market shares without hurting UPI payments growth.

A final decision on the extension will be communicated closer to the deadline, said the sources, who asked not to be identified because they are not allowed to speak to the media.

NPCI had hoped for more competition when WhatsApp was permitted to offer UPI-based payments in February 2020, but the company had just 0.2% market share as of April.

India's Paytm, with the third-highest share, has experienced a decline in payments processed through its platforms after regulators placed curbs on a group entity.

Payment firms want the market-share cap removed, asking NPCI to let them charge for UPI payments to encourage competition, said an official at a payment company.

Beating the heat



People on their scooters pass under a water sprinkler on a hot summer day in Ahmedabad, India, yesterday.

Air India cancels 85 budget flights after sick leave strike

AFP
Mumbai

Air India's budget carrier subsidiary cancelled 85 flights yesterday, a day after its operations were severely disrupted by dozens of cabin crew calling in sick at the last minute.

The airline was taken over by Indian conglomerate Tata Group in 2022 after a government effort to privatise the heavily indebted carrier. Under the new structure, the airline

is being merged with Vistara, while Air India Express merges with AirAsia India.

Media reports linked the sudden mass sick leave to simmering staff discontent over new policies on hiring and promotion imposed by its new ownership.

Air India Express said in a statement that it had made "every possible effort to minimise the inconvenience caused to our guests" but had been forced to cancel 85 flights yesterday.

"We urge our guests booked to fly with us to check if their flight is affected by the disruption before heading to the airport," it added.

More than 90 other flights had been "disrupted" since Tuesday by the resulting staff shortages, the airline said in a separate statement on Wednesday, without clarifying whether they had been delayed or cancelled.

Chief executive Alok Singh said on Wednesday that the airline had been forced to curtail its flight schedules over the coming days.

"Since last evening, over 100 of our cabin crew colleagues have reported sick prior to their rostered flight duty, at the last minute, severely disrupting our operations," Singh said.

India completes troop exit from Maldives

India has replaced some 80 soldiers on the Maldives with civilians after a demand by President Mohamed Muizzu who has pivoted the archipelago's ties towards China, New Delhi officials said yesterday.

The Indian troops supported two helicopters and an aircraft that were given by New Delhi and mainly used for marine surveillance, search-and-rescue and medical evacuation operations on the islands of about half a million people. "Both sides have been working together to ensure continued operation of Indian aviation platforms," India's foreign ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said.

"Accordingly, deputation of competent Indian technical personnel has taken place." The announcement coincided with a visit by Maldivian Foreign Minister Moosa Zameer to India, the first visit by a senior official since Muizzu took office in November last year.

King Charles visits army training base



Britain's King Charles visits the 3 Royal School of Military Engineering (RSME), the training base for the army's Royal Engineers, in Minley, Britain, yesterday.

UK 'refuses to sign' global vaccine treaty

Reuters
London

Britain is refusing to sign the World Health Organisation's (WHO) pandemic accord because the country says it would have to give away a fifth of its vaccines, the Telegraph reported.

According to a draft of the pandemic accord being negotiated at the WHO, richer countries should be asked to pull their weight in helping the world cope with pandemics, including reserving 20% of tests, treatments and vaccines for the WHO to distribute in poorer countries during emergencies.

"We will only support the adoption of the accord and accept it on behalf of the UK, if it is firmly in the UK national interest and respects national sovereignty," a spokesperson for Britain's department of health and social care said in a statement.

The spokesperson did not comment on the details of the specific proposals from the accord, adding that "no proposals have been agreed."

The WHO did not immediately respond to request for comment.

The new pact and a series of updates to existing rules for dealing with pandemics from the WHO are intended to shore up the world's defences against new pathogens after the Covid-19 pandemic killed millions of people. One of the main points of disagreement between wealthy countries and developing states is the vexed issue of sharing drugs and vaccines fairly.

Countries are due to finalise negotiations on the accord on May 10, with a view to adopting it at the WHO's annual meeting later this month.

WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said last week that countries need to agree to the accord within the deadline to help fight future pandemics.

UK girl's hearing restored after groundbreaking gene therapy

AFP
London

An 18-month-old British girl who was born completely deaf is believed to be the youngest person to have their hearing restored after undergoing groundbreaking new gene therapy. Several medical teams around the world including in China and the US have been trialling similar treatments with good results for hereditary deafness that focuses on a rare genetic mutation.

But UK ear surgeon Manohar Bance said the toddler, Opal, was the first person in the world to receive therapy developed by US biotech firm Regeneron and "the youngest globally that's been done to date as far as we know".

Opal was treated at Addenbrooke's Hospital in Cambridge, part of Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, in eastern England.

Bance called the results of Opal's surgery "spectacular - so close to normal hearing restoration. So we do hope it could be a potential cure".

He said it came on the back of decades of work and marked "a new era in the treatment of deafness".

The little girl, from Oxfordshire in south central England, has a genetic form of auditory neuropathy, which is caused by the disruption of nerve impulses travelling from the inner ear to the brain.

Auditory neuropathy can be caused by a fault in the OTOF gene, which is responsible for making a protein called otoferlin. This enables cells in the ear to communicate with the hearing nerve.

To overcome the fault, the "new era" gene therapy from Regeneron delivers a working copy of the gene to the ear.

Bance said that following surgery last September, Opal's hearing was now "close to normal" with further improvement expected.

A second child received the gene therapy in Cambridge with positive results seen six weeks after the surgery.

China has been working on targeting the same gene though Bance said theirs used a different tech-

nology and slightly different mode of delivery.

Medics in Philadelphia have also reported a good outcome with a type of gene therapy on an 11-year-old boy.

Opal was the first person to take part in a gene therapy trial being carried out in Cambridge by Bance.

The trial consists of three parts, with three deaf children, including Opal, receiving a low dose of gene therapy in one ear only.

A different set of three children will get a high dose on one side.

Then, if that is shown to be safe, more children will receive a dose in both ears at the same time.

Up to 18 youngsters from the UK, Spain and the US are being recruited to the trial and will be followed up for five years.

Bance said the current treatment for auditory neuropathy was implants.

"My entire life, gene therapy has been 'five years away'... to finally see something that actually worked in humans... It was quite spectacular and a bit awe-inspiring really," he said.



US container ship leaves Cyprus laden with aid for Gaza

AFP
Nicosia

A US container ship loaded with aid for Gaza left Cyprus yesterday in a new test of a maritime corridor to get relief into the besieged Palestinian territory, authorities said.

The US-flagged MV Sagamore left the port of Larnaca after being loaded with aid from Britain, Cyprus and the United States,

Cyprus government spokesperson Yiannis Antoniou told the official CNA news agency.

US military engineers have been assembling a temporary pier for installation on the Gaza coast to unload maritime aid deliveries.

The operation has been delayed by heavy seas off the Gaza coast which forced the sappers to assemble the jetty in the Israeli port of Ashdod before towing it to the Gaza landing site.

"The platform is expected to be

ready by the time the ship arrives in order for the aid to be unloaded and distributed to Palestinians in need," Antoniou said.

Donor governments have been scrambling to find alternative ways to get aid into Gaza after UN agencies warned of looming famine in the face of the dwindling land deliveries being allowed into the territory by Israel.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has said the pier will "significantly increase" the volume of

aid reaching Gaza but said it was not a "substitute" for greater land access via Israel.

The Spanish aid group Open Arms chartered the first vessel to arrive in Gaza from Cyprus, but its partner charity World Central Kitchen suspended its operation after Israeli air strikes killed seven of its staff as they unloaded a maritime delivery on April 1.

The Pentagon has said the pier project will cost at least \$320mn. UN agencies and humanitar-

ian aid groups have warned that maritime deliveries and airdrops cannot deliver aid in the quantities needed to avert famine.

Gaza has been devastated by the war which started with the events of October 7 in southern Israel that resulted in the deaths of about 1,170 people, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally of Israeli official figures.

Israel's retaliatory offensive has killed more than 34,000 people in Gaza.

US airman killed in police raid on the wrong flat

A black airman in the US Air Force was shot and killed in an "excessive" use of force by a Florida sheriff's deputy who burst into the wrong apartment, a lawyer retained by his family said yesterday.

Civil rights attorney Ben Crump, who has represented the families of other African American victims of police violence, demanded a full investigation into the May 3 death of Roger Fortson.

Sheriff Eric Aden of the Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office said the deputy was responding to reports of a "disturbance in progress" when the shooting occurred.

However, Crump, at a press conference, said "it wasn't Roger's apartment that had a disturbance".

"He was in his apartment, his sanctuary, his castle, where he had every right to be, and they forcefully entered into his apartment," Crump said, in an "excessive" use of force.

Crump said the 23-year-old Fortson was on FaceTime with his girlfriend, a nurse, when the shooting took place.

She "heard everything," starting with an "aggressive banging" at the door, he said.

"She talked about how he said 'Who is it' and he heard no response," Crump said, adding that Fortson looked through a peephole but didn't see anyone.

"He went and retrieved his legally registered gun," Crump said, adding that he was walking back when the door opened.

"And then she said that she just heard shots," he said. "He was shot six times."

Crump demanded a transparent investigation to "do whatever justice will allow for a good man".

In his statement, Aden said a deputy had responded to "a call of a disturbance in progress where he encountered an armed man".

"The deputy shot the man, who later succumbed to his injuries," Aden said, adding that the Florida Department of Law Enforcement and state attorney's office would conduct an investigation.

The sheriff said the deputy reacted in self-defence after he encountered the 23-year-old.

The sheriff did not name Fortson in his statement.

The killing is reminiscent of an unannounced police raid in Louisville, Kentucky, in March 2020, when police burst into the apartment of Breonna Taylor, a black 26-year-old emergency medical technician, killing her.

Under questionable pretenses, police had obtained a "no knock" warrant to raid the apartment.

Taylor's death, along with the killing of George Floyd by Minneapolis police weeks later, set off a worldwide wave of protests against racism in law enforcement in the summer of 2020. - AFP/Reuters

Hunter Biden loses bid to dismiss gun charges

A federal appeals court panel has rejected a bid by US President Joe Biden's son to dismiss criminal gun charges, clearing the way for Hunter Biden's June 3 trial, a first for the child of a sitting president. A three-judge panel of the US Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit in Philadelphia said that Hunter Biden could not appeal because the lower court had not yet entered a final judgment in the case. Shortly after the appeals court ruled, US District Judge Maryellen Noreika ordered the trial of up to six days to begin June 3 in Wilmington, Delaware. - Reuters

Eurovision draws street protests against Israel's participation

AFP
Malmö

Thousands of demonstrators, including climate activist Greta Thunberg, marched through the streets of Malmö, Sweden yesterday to protest Israel's participation in Eurovision, an AFP journalist observed.

This year's Eurovision song contest opened in the southern city of Malmö on Tuesday, with the grand finale tomorrow, but the war in Gaza is looming over the festivities.

"I am a Eurovision fan and it breaks my heart but I'm boycotting. I can't have fun knowing that Israel is there participating when all those kids are dying. I think it's just wrong," 30-year-old protester Hilda, who did not want to provide her surname, told AFP.

The war in Gaza was sparked by the events of October 7 in Israel, which resulted in the deaths of more than 1,170 people, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally of Israeli official figures.

Israel in response vowed to crush Hamas and launched a military offensive that has killed more than 34,000 people in Gaza,



Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg at a pro-Palestine rally in Malmö, in protest against Israel's participation in the 68th edition of the Eurovision Song Contest.

mostly women and children, according to the Hamas-run territory's health ministry.

Militants also took about 250 hostages. Israel estimates 128 of them remain in Gaza,

including 36 who officials say are dead.

In 2022, Russia's state broadcaster was excluded from the European Broadcasting Union, which oversees Eurovision, in the

wake of the war in Ukraine.

"I feel like if they can remove Russia why can they not do it to Israel?" 29-year-old Margo Mustafa said. "The people are here for Eurovision trying to celebrate. There's nothing to celebrate. It's an ongoing war."

More than 5,000 people gathered yesterday afternoon in Malmö's main square, according to an AFP estimate.

Alongside signs that read: "Liberate Palestine", banners that said "EUR legitimises genocide" and "colonialism cannot be washed in pink" could be read in the crowd.

Israel's entry, *Hurricane* by singer Eden Golan, competed in the semi-final.

It has already been partially re-written and given a new title after Eurovision organisers deemed the original version to be too political.

Protester Cecilia Brudell told AFP: "At six and nine, my children are now at an age where they want to watch Eurovision but this year we are completely boycotting it."

Since the beginning of the year, several petitions have demanded Israel's exclusion from the 68th edition of the annual music competition.

At the end of March, contestants from nine countries, including Swiss favourite Nemo, called for a lasting ceasefire.

Lebanon judge opens proceedings in child trafficking case

A Lebanese judge has launched legal proceedings against alleged members of an international trafficking network, including three minors, who used video app TikTok to lure children, a judicial official said yesterday.

Last week, Lebanon's Internal Security Forces said several people had been arrested after children reported being "(abused) and photographed by members of an organised gang, and forced to use drugs in hotels", in a case that has sparked outcry.

The judge "has commenced proceedings against 12 members" of the alleged network, including three minors, a barber shop owner and a clothes shop owner living in Sweden, the official told AFP.

They are alleged to have formed "a criminal network for human trafficking and money laundering" and to have used "electronic applications, notably TikTok, with fake names, to lure children and minors", the official said.

The judge has requested the suspects be questioned and arrest warrants be issued against them, according to the official.

Proceedings were expected to begin imminently against more alleged members of the group, including a taxi driver who transported the children to locations where they were abused, as well as a lawyer, the official added.

Suspects outside Lebanon are in Switzerland, Sweden, the UAE and Türkiye, the official said, adding that Interpol would be notified once arrest warrants were issued.

The gang, including five suspects already in custody, is alleged to have abused the victims, threatening or attempting to kill some of them, according to the official.

It is also accused of making the children take drugs, taking images of them naked and distributing and selling the images, the official added.

A security official familiar with the investigation told AFP in early May that six children had testified so far and were lured through a "clothing shop account offering deals or promises of being featured in advertisements, or through a hair salon or fake social media accounts".

A judicial official told AFP last week the gang had recruited teenagers outside Lebanon "to lure children on TikTok", adding that 28 suspects had been identified in connection with the case. - AFP

Barron Trump to represent Florida at convention

Reuters/AFP
Washington

Donald Trump's youngest son, Barron Trump, will be one of the delegates representing Florida at the Republican National Convention in July, a notable move given that he has kept largely out of the public eye so far during the campaign.

The convention will see the official crowning of Trump as the Republican challenger to Democrat President Joe Biden, with delegates from each state designating their candidate for the November election.

A campaign official confirmed an earlier report from NBC that Barron Trump had been selected by the state party as a delegate from Florida.

Barron, 18, is "very interested in our nation's political process", said the official, who requested anonymity to discuss internal campaign matters.

Earlier this year he was seen towering over his family at his grandmother's funeral.

Barron lived in the White House as a child when his father was president, but was fiercely protected from public view by his mother Melania.

In Florida, presidential campaigns submit a list of proposed delegates to the state party, which in this case would have included Barron.

His selection underlines how deeply the Trump family has become involved in Republican politics.

Lara Trump, Trump's daughter-in-law, was named co-chair of the Republican National Committee in March.

Eric Trump and Donald Trump Jr, Barron's older brothers, have been active on the campaign trail.

Both are also on Florida's 41-person del-



This picture from 2020 shows (from right) Barron Trump, Melania Trump, Donald Trump, Tiffany Trump, Donald Trump Jr, and Kimberly Guilfoyle after the then-president delivered his acceptance speech for the Republican Party nomination for reelection during the final day of the Republican National Convention at the South Lawn of the White House in Washington, DC.

egate list for the convention in Milwaukee, the campaign official said, along with Tiffany Trump, Trump youngest daughter.

Ivanka Trump, Trump's older daughter, is the only child of the former president not on the delegate roster.

She served as senior adviser in his first presidency alongside her husband Jared Kushner.

Delegates are allocated following primary contests in each state.

While the rules are complex, delegates are typically assigned to represent a candidate

at the convention, where the nominee is officially selected.

Given Trump's domination of the Republican nominating contest, almost all delegates in Milwaukee will be supporting the former president.

Barron is due to graduate high school on May 17.

The judge overseeing Trump's criminal trial in New York for covering up a hush money payment to an adult entertainment actress has allowed the former president to take the day off to attend the graduation ceremony.

Deaths in Brazil floods rise to 107, horse rescued from rooftop

Reuters
Brasília

The death toll from flooding in southern Brazil has risen to 107, civil defence said yesterday, as rescue operations continued and authorities began to see the cost of recovering from the devastation in the state of Rio Grande do Sul.

In a dramatic symbol of the disaster, rescuers saved a horse that had been trapped precariously for two days on a rooftop in a badly flooded town.

More rains are forecast in the coming days, raising fears that water levels will rise further in the inundated state capital of Porto Alegre and nearby town where streets have turned into rivers.

At least 136 people are still missing and more than 165,000 have been displaced from flooded homes and rescued by boats and helicopters.

Television images showed the horse straddling the roof of a farmhouse on the outskirts of Canoas, a town north of Porto Alegre.

The animal was secured by firemen and loaded into a Zodiac inflatable boat to take it to safety.

The floods have destroyed infrastructure and bridges, blocking access to Porto Alegre, where supermarket shelves are empty and looting has been reported at night.

Governor Eduardo Leite said initial calculations indicate that Rio Grande do Sul will need at least 19bn reais (\$3.68bn) to rebuild from the damage, which has extended into farm areas around the capital. "The effect of the floods and the extent of the tragedy are devastating," he said on social media.

In Brasília, the federal government estimated the fiscal impact of the flooding at 7.7bn reais (\$1.49bn), mostly due to the injection of funds into a support programme for small businesses hit by the floods.

"This doesn't end here," President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva said at an event announcing steps to help the stricken state.

Lula said the full extent of Rio Grande do Sul's needs would be known only when the water recedes.



This handout picture released by the Rio Grande do Sul Firefighters Department shows firefighters rescuing a horse from the roof of a house in the city of Canoas, Rio Grande do Sul state, Brazil.

Scientists win World Food Prize for work on Global Seed Vault

By Juliette Michel
AFP

Scientists Geoffrey Hawtin and Cary Fowler, who received yesterday the prestigious World Food Prize for "their work to preserve the world's heritage of seeds", are on a mission. Their vocation is to safeguard as many seeds as possible so that one day the world can benefit from their genetic characteristics. Their work is all in the name of protecting global food security. Hawtin and Fowler helped set up a world reserve of seeds dug into a glacier on the Norwegian archipelago Svalbard in the Arctic - where 1.25mn samples are now stored for preservation in the cold. It was for this work they were named the 2024 winners of the World Food Prize, awarded to individuals who have increased the quality, quantity, or availability of food worldwide. The goal is always to conserve as many

agricultural seeds as possible, British-Canadian agronomist Hawtin said. "What actually changed a little bit since it opened in 2008 is the material going into it," he said. After mainly collecting seeds from "domesticated" plants like wheat and barley, the reserve is now welcoming more wild species that are more or less related to cultivated plants. The latter mainly "have genes that are particularly interesting with climate change", he said. The domestication of plants is "the result of thousands of years and countless experiments", said Fowler, a 74-year-old American seed specialist and the US Special Envoy for Global Food Security. It would be "arrogant" to think that current genetic engineering tools, even the most sophisticated, could reproduce those experiments, he added. That would be "a more expensive way of getting the diversity that we already have contained in the seeds in the seed banks". Hawtin, 75, said that while gene edit-

ing had a huge role to play, the "problem is what to edit". "There are tens of thousands, if not more, genes that in some way or another affect the plant's response to just the climate change, which could be heat, which can be cold, which can be drought, which can be flooding," he said. Hawtin said he doubted that even artificial intelligence (AI) could allow "the full level of understanding" needed for such an approach. He nevertheless predicts the rise of digital seed banks where more and more information detailing the genetic characteristics of plants will be stored. Both men began their careers in the 1970s. The aim then was not yet to adapt to climate change but to produce as much wheat, maize and rice as possible. "There were famines in Ethiopia and in India and, most of the concern then was for filling people's stomachs," Fowler said. To achieve this, experts at the time recommended concentrating on seeds with

the highest yields and making massive use of fertilisers and pesticides. Since then, they have understood the importance of developing more durable agricultural systems and enlarging the range of crops grown, said Fowler. As the Special Envoy for Global Food Security, he promotes the use of traditional crops in Africa. Often neglected by research programmes in favour of corn, wheat and rice, they are potentially more nutritious and better adapted to the environment. Hawtin began his career in the Middle East, meeting farmers and collecting vegetable seeds in Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Lebanon and Jordan and then cross-referencing them. Not wanting to just throw them away, he started to keep them. Three decades later, the war in Syria forced the Aleppo seed bank, where the agronomist had once worked, to "evacuate" its samples with urgency. Many of them went to the Svalbard seed bank.

Some, including vegetable seeds collected by Hawtin and his team, have already been withdrawn from the reserve to join collections in Morocco and Lebanon. "Two weeks ago, I was in Morocco, and I saw some of that material being planted out in the fields in Morocco and being tested for resistance to drought," Hawtin recounted. The fact that the global reserve was used up so quickly leaves the scientists with a hint of bitterness. "It's like an automobile insurance policy. You never want to be in a situation where you have to use it," Fowler said. "I'm sorry to say it, but I think there will be more situations of conflicts around the world and of natural disasters with, unfortunately, seed banks getting caught in the middle," he added. The World Food Prize, worth \$500,000, was set up in 1986 by Dr Norman E Borlaug who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1970 for his work in global agriculture. It is presented every year in Iowa, the United States.

Plane skids off runway in Senegal, injuring at least 11

Reuters/AFP
Dakar

A plane with dozens of passengers skidded off a runway before takeoff at Senegal's main airport yesterday, injuring at least 10 people and bringing the facility temporarily to a halt, the airport and Senegalese transport ministry said. The Blaise Diagne airport said an investigation was underway to determine the cause of the accident, which occurred

around 0100 GMT as the Transair-owned Boeing 737-300 chartered by Air Senegal (LAS) was preparing to fly to Mali. Videos shared on social media showed passengers running away from a plane. "Move forward, move forward please gentlemen," a woman tells a group of passengers in video footage verified by AFP of the aftermath of the incident, urging those in earshot above the noise of the engines to make themselves scarce. "It's crazy what's going on here," says a voice in another video.

The aircraft was at a standstill in long grass and had deployed its emergency slides as smoke billowed into the sky. Reuters was not immediately able to verify the videos, but Reuters reporters at the airport later saw a plane with the Transair logo in the grass by the runway, cordoned off with red and white tape. The airport said 78 passengers were on board and 11 people were wounded in the accident, including four serious injuries. The transport ministry said the plane was carrying 79 passengers and reported 10

people were wounded, including one of the plane's two pilots. The airport was closed immediately after the accident, but had reopened as of around 1100 GMT, the airport said in an online post. "The plane, at the end of the runway, was not able to take off. The pilot chose to take it off the runway onto the land alongside," said LAS director-general Askan Demir. "Personally I think he managed the situation well. The plane was not damaged too much."

Passenger plane's tyre bursts on landing in Turkiye

Reuters
Ankara

A Corendon Airlines Boeing 737 plane's front tyre burst upon landing at an airport in southern Turkiye yesterday, the Turkish transport minister said, adding there were no casualties and all 190 passengers and crew were evacuated.

The front landing gear strut was damaged on the Corendon Airlines plane, which was arriving from Cologne, Germany, as it landed at Alanya-Gazipasa airport in Antalya, Minister Abdulkadir Uraloglu said. "All our relevant units were on the field and were on alert. Thank God, there were no injuries to the 184 passengers and 6 crew," Uraloglu said on social media platform X, adding initial evaluations showed there was no damage to the runway, which was temporarily closed.

On Wednesday, Turkish authorities launched an investigation into a FedEx Airlines Boeing 767 cargo plane landing at Istanbul Airport without its front landing gear. After yesterday's incident, flights were diverted to the main Antalya airport and other nearby airports, the minister said. Corendon said in a statement the plane halted safely on the runway after the tyre burst. Experts say burst tyres on landing are relatively common and typically require minor repairs, but can trigger a search for tyre debris or in some cases a passenger evacuation. The plane involved, which has six wheels, is different from the larger 767 which made an emergency landing without its front landing gear on Wednesday.

Somalia seeks end to UN political mission

Somalia has asked the United Nations to end its political mission that has been present in the country for more than a decade when its mandate expires in October, according to a letter seen yesterday by AFP. UNSOM was established in 2013 by the UN Security Council to support Somali authorities in the transition to democracy and the rule of law after more than 20 years of conflict between militias, Islamist groups and criminal gangs. President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud is still seeking to extricate Somalia from chronic instability. In the letter to the Security Council, Somali Foreign Minister Ahmed Moallim Fiqi requested "the termination of the mandate of the United Nations assistance mission in Somalia (UNSOM), following a thorough consideration of our strategic priorities". - AFP

Pro-Trump lawyer, clerk charged over breach of Michigan voting system

A Michigan township clerk was charged with multiple felonies on Wednesday, the latest turn in a state inquiry into efforts by Donald Trump supporters to tamper with voting machines to prove his false claim that he lost the 2020 election due to fraud.

Michigan Attorney-General Dana Nessel said in a statement that former Adams Township Clerk Stephanie Scott, 52, has been charged with five felonies related to unauthorised use of a computer, concealing a voting machine, and misconduct in office, and one misdemeanour for disobeying the secretary of state. The most serious count carries a potential seven-year prison term. Nessel also added three felonies to the charges faced by Scott's attorney Stefanie Lambert, who was already facing multiple charges over allegations she accessed and tampered with voting machines in other incidents across the state. "When elected officials and their proxies use their positions to promote baseless conspiracies, show blatant disregard for voter privacy, and break the law in the process, it undermines the very essence of the democratic process," Nessel said in the statement.

Lambert's attorney, Daniel Hartman, said in a statement that his client violated no laws and was working to "bring powerful entities to account" and bring "transparency to the people's election data, processes and procedures". Scott did not respond to a request for comment.

Scott, a Republican, had overseen voting in rural Adams Township until the state revoked her authority over elections in 2021 for resisting state orders to allow testing and maintenance on the voting tabulator in her care, claiming that it would erase evidence of potential fraud.

Scott withheld a critical component of the tabulator until it was seized by state police, law enforcement records show.

In addition to disregarding orders from the state authorities regarding the tabulator, Nessel accused Scott and Lambert of providing a computer examiner unauthorised access to non-public voter information in violation of state law.

Reuters reported on the potential violation in 2022, detailing Scott's sharing of a file containing confidential voter data with Benjamin Cotton, an information-technology expert who had worked with voter-fraud conspiracists seeking unauthorised access to election systems in other states.

Scott and Lambert's actions were part of a national effort by lawyers, public officials and others seeking evidence of the former president's false stolen-election claims. - Reuters

Russia's nuclear forces are 'always' on alert, says Putin

AFP/Reuters
Moscow

President Vladimir Putin has warned that his nuclear forces were "always" on alert and added that Moscow would not tolerate any Western threats, in an address at the annual Victory Day parade.

In a defiant speech on Red Square before thousands of soldiers dressed in ceremonial attire, Putin heaped praise on his army fighting in Ukraine and accused "Western elites" of fomenting conflicts around the world.

"Russia will do everything to prevent a global clash, but at the same time we will not allow anyone to threaten us. Our strategic forces are always on alert," Putin told the crowd. "Russia is now going through a difficult, crucial period. The fate of the Motherland, its future depends on each of us."

The May 9 parade commemorates the Soviet Union's defeat of Nazi Germany in World War II and has become the Kremlin's most important public holiday as Putin puts the country firmly on a combat footing.

Putin has used nuclear rhetoric throughout the conflict but has grown increasingly belligerent since last year, pulling out of a nuclear test ban treaty and a key arms reduction agreement with the United States.

Earlier this week, he ordered the Russian military to hold nuclear drills involving the navy and troops based near Ukraine, raising fears he could use the powerful weapons on the battlefield.

Putin said that there was nothing unusual in a planned exercise involving the practice deployment of tactical nuclear weapons in southern Russia along with ally Belarus, as preparations for the drills have begun.

Russia said on Monday that it would practise the deployment of tactical nuclear weapons as part of a military exercise after what Moscow said were threats from France, Britain and the United States.

"There is nothing unusual here, this is planned work," state news agency Tass reported Putin



Spectators and officials, including Russian President Vladimir Putin, watch a military parade on Victory Day during a snowfall in Red Square in Moscow.

as saying. "It is training."

Russia's defence ministry, in its announcement on Monday, explicitly linked the nuclear exercise to "provocative statements and threats by certain Western officials against the Russian Federation".

In comments recorded on Tuesday but released by the Kremlin after the parade, Putin vowed to modernise his army's weaponry and said Russia would use whatever foreign parts it could get to make them.

"Modern military technology is changing very fast. If we want to be successful, we always have to be one step ahead," he said in a meeting with army commanders.

Putin has repeatedly framed the current fight against Ukraine as an existential battle against "Nazism", a message that he reiterated in his address yesterday.

"We bow our heads before the memory of civilians killed by barbaric shelling and terrorist attacks by neo-Nazis," he said, adding: "Those on the front line, on the line of contact - are our heroes. We bow before your steadfastness and self-sacrifice, selflessness. All Russia is with you."

Two women were killed yesterday by Ukrainian shelling of Russia's border regions, which have been regularly attacked by Ukraine since the conflict began.

Shelling on a village street in the Belgorod region close to the border killed one, Governor Vyacheslav Gladkov said.

Further west in the Kursk region, a woman was killed by a direct hit on a house in a village near the border, while another woman suffered shrapnel wounds, Governor Roman Starovoit wrote on Telegram.

An overnight aerial attack on the city of Belgorod, around 30km (20 miles) from Ukraine, injured 11, Gladkov said earlier.

Security in Moscow was tight ahead of this year's parade, amid repeated Ukrainian strikes on Russian territory and after an Islamic State group attack on a concert hall near the capital in March killed dozens.

Other parts of Russia including the western Kursk and Pskov regions cancelled their parades due to security concerns.

The Moscow parade featured columns of Russian military equipment but was notably scaled back compared to past years as Moscow mobilises its resources for the Ukrainian front.

"We come to see it every year," said 44-year-old Yelena Melikhova, who watched the procession of military equipment heading to Red Square. "It's very touching, very exciting."

Svetlana Sycheva, 48, said she was filled with "pride" while watching the parade.

"Even in such difficult times we have the opportunity to rejoice, and to feel the emotions that we have just experienced," she told AFP.

Russia often invites representatives from countries it

Gunmen in Pakistan kill seven labourers near Gwadar port

Gunmen shot and killed seven labourers near Pakistan's Gwadar port early yesterday, police said. "We are investigating the matter at the moment but apparently it looks like they were attacked because they were Punjabis," said Mohamed Mohsin, a senior police official in Gwadar, adding that six were killed and one was injured.

A second police official Zohaib Ahmad confirmed the death toll and said they were shot dead inside their home.

Mohsin said the gunmen stormed into a house some 25km (15 miles) east of the port city and shot and killed the labourers in their sleep.

The port city is located in troubled southwestern Balochistan province, which

borders Afghanistan and Iran.

No one has claimed responsibility. Baloch separatist militants have in the past targeted labourers from eastern Punjab province, like the ones in the latest shooting.

Last month, the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) claimed the killing of nine labourers from Punjab province, who were abducted

and then shot at close range after gunmen stopped a bus.

Balochistan is Pakistan's largest but poorest province.

Gwadar is the site of several Beijing-backed projects under the \$65bn China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) investment as part of the Belt and Road Initiative. - Reuters/AFP



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GULF TIMES

Fertilisers will not fix Africa's food crisis

The world is confronting an unprecedented food crisis, exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic, Russia's war against Ukraine, and worsening climate conditions. But the problem is most acute in Africa, where 61% of the population faced moderate or severe food insecurity in 2022. And at a moment when effective solutions are urgently needed, policymakers are once again coalescing around the misguided belief that increased use of mineral and synthetic fertiliser is the key to boosting agricultural productivity and ending hunger on the continent.

This approach can be traced back to the Abuja Declaration on Fertiliser for the Africa Green Revolution that African Union leaders endorsed in 2006. The goal was to reverse the continent's poor yields by boosting fertiliser use from eight to 50kg per hectare within a decade. Spearheading this effort was the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), an initiative backed by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and other major donors. Working closely with large agribusinesses like the Norwegian-based chemical company Yara, AGRA championed the idea that distributing synthetic nitrogen fertilisers would solve Africa's agricultural challenges.

But this singular focus on synthetic fertiliser use has failed to address the complex realities of farming in Africa. A recent assessment of AGRA's projects in Burkina Faso and Ghana found no evidence that providing chemical inputs and high-yield seeds resulted in increased

By promoting "green fertiliser" as a panacea, the industry is engaging in greenwashing

production and higher incomes for smallholder farmers. Instead, many are now more vulnerable and indebted after coming to rely on expensive synthetic pesticides and fertilisers, the prices of which soared following Russia's invasion. These farmers have become locked in a cycle of dependency, while companies like Yara reap substantial profits. Zambia is a good example. Despite being one

of the largest consumers of synthetic nitrogen fertiliser in Africa, the country has not experienced a corresponding reduction in hunger and malnutrition. The view that more fertiliser means less hunger fails to address the systemic barriers to food security, such as affordability, and exacerbates existing challenges, such as soil degradation. Specifically, synthetic nitrogen fertilisers disrupt the delicate balance of the soil ecosystem – the very foundation of sustainable agriculture. These inputs have been shown to reduce the abundance and diversity of beneficial microorganisms, such as mycorrhizal fungi, which are essential for nutrient cycling and plant health. When these symbiotic relationships are disrupted, soil resilience and fertility decline. According to the World Bank, Africa is already estimated to be losing around 3% of GDP per year due to nutrient depletion and general soil degradation.

In addition to undermining crop productivity, and thus dealing a devastating blow to the livelihoods and food security of millions of smallholder farmers, excessive fertiliser use also has far-reaching environmental consequences. It contributes to nitrogen pollution in water bodies, causing biodiversity loss in aquatic systems and pushing the planet past safe limits for humans. Perhaps most worryingly, research indicates that the production and application of synthetic nitrogen fertilisers accounts for roughly 2% of total global greenhouse-gas (GHG) emissions.

As a result, chemical companies like Yara are switching to "green fertilisers," which are produced using hydrogen derived from renewable-energy sources, rather than fossil fuel-based inputs. This allows them to continue advocating for the use of synthetic fertilisers as a solution to food insecurity in Africa (and, by extension, maintaining and expanding the market for their products), even as research points to the shortcomings of such an approach.

It is true that using green hydrogen to produce fertiliser can mitigate GHG emissions. But while the production process may be less carbon-intensive, it is still highly energy-intensive. And applying fertiliser can release huge surges of nitrous oxide – a potent GHG – into the atmosphere, and can still cause soil degradation and water pollution, regardless of how it is produced. By promoting "green fertiliser" as a panacea, the industry is engaging in greenwashing – using the veneer of sustainability to protect its interests.

This week, the AU's Africa Fertiliser and Soil Health Summit in Nairobi was to address soil degradation and food insecurity. The involvement of industry giants like Yara and organisations like AGRA suggests continued adherence to a flawed model that has consistently failed to alleviate hunger and malnutrition, a concern shared by the Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa, which represents more than 200mn stakeholders. But instead of focusing on boosting short-term soil fertility, substituting one chemical with the other, and thus endorsing the fertiliser industry's self-serving narratives, the summit should consider longer-term goals, such as improving soil health and soil life, strengthening the resilience of farming communities, and ensuring the sustainability of food systems. – Project Syndicate

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Lessons for Europe in German bid to clean up supply chains

By Maria Martinez and
 Riham Alkousaa
 Berlin

German engineering company BAUCH makes machines and engine components out of materials mined in China, Africa or South America that pass through multiple hands and processes before they reach its factories in southern Germany and China.

To comply with Germany's new Supply Chain Act, BAUCH, like other firms with more than 1,000 staff, must take due diligence procedures to monitor suppliers' human rights and environmental protection standards – a task which CEO Manfred Bauch says is almost impossible and threatens to rip apart his supply chain.

Many German small and medium enterprises say they have been struggling to meet the cost and bureaucratic burden of the law that took effect in January 2023, adding this harms their global competitiveness.

Their experience signals what industries throughout the European Union may soon face, after the European Parliament last week passed the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD) that will require larger companies operating in the bloc to check if their supply chains use forced labour or cause environmental damage and take action if they do.

Supporters say the legislation will foster responsible corporate behaviour and anchor human rights and environmental considerations in their operations. Some also point out the law will support companies as investors and consumers demand more sustainability.

Rights group Amnesty International has called the EU directive – which EU countries will have to incorporate as a law

in their own legislations – an opportunity to close a gap which allowed companies operating in the EU "to escape accountability for widespread rights abuses around the world."

But some German companies with global supply chains, and long lists of input materials say it is a struggle to obtain accurate information, and issues such as workers' rights are regulated by foreign laws outside of their control.

Strikingly, Germany failed to support the new EU law, as the pro-business Free Democrats (FDP), the smallest party in Germany's three-way coalition, said it would burden business with excessive bureaucracy.

"It is almost impossible to access a mine in Asia or Africa from Europe," Manfred Bauch told Reuters.

Whether a foreign mine has any ESG information available depends on its owner, with London-listed mining companies for example providing more information than privately-owned mines in China.

BAUCH's suppliers that deal with the mines directly don't always have the information to pass on or the clout to demand it from the mines themselves, Bauch added.

More than 5,000 German companies now submit a due-diligence report addressing issues such as workers' rights, child labour, and environmental protections. They must identify problems and devise a policy to mitigate risk through the supply chain.

"Nothing unreasonable is expected of companies," said a spokesperson for the German labour ministry in response.

"They do not have to guarantee that their supply chains are free from violations of human rights or environmental damage." Rather, they must be able to show they have made checks.

"If this is not legally or actually possible – despite reasonable endeavours – a company has nevertheless fulfilled its due diligence obligations," the ministry added.

As de-industrialisation fears grow, German manufacturers say the Supply Chain Act further weakens the position of Europe's industrial powerhouse.

Industrial machinery manufacturer SMS group has 14,000 suppliers and has been preparing for the law for three years. Matthias Hedergott, Vice President Supply Chain Management, said the law leads to increased costs and a competitive disadvantage.

"Our non-European, Chinese or Indian competitors do not have these requirements" said Hedergott.

The logistics sector has protested that applying the law to companies that merely transport imported goods from ports within Germany was unreasonable.

"At the moment the economic situation is very tense ... Everyone is fighting for survival, and we have to do nonsense like this," said Harry Seifert, chairman of Seifert Logistics GmbH, of the law.

Berlin estimated the compliance costs at €43.5mn (\$47.05mn) per year, plus a one-off cost of €109.7mn, but business groups say they are much higher. A company violating the law could be fined up to €8mn or 2% of the company's annual revenue.

German gearbox manufacturer Flender, has 9,000 employees worldwide. Its suppliers include the ArcVac ForgeCast factory, in Hooghly district, in India's eastern state of West Bengal.

Hemant Sharma, sales head at ArcVac ForgeCast, said German customers are requesting sustainability compliances and they visit and audit the company. On challenging issues like reducing CO2 emissions, Flender guides them on how to act.

"Overall, it is our responsibility as a global citizen to comply with the new laws," he said.

Some smaller German enterprises say they are indirectly affected by the law because bigger companies lean on them to meet the reporting requirements.

"There is a cascade effect," said Achim Dercks, Deputy Chief Executive of the German Chamber of Commerce DIHK.

Vibra Maschinenfabrik Schultheis, a mechanical engineering company of 190 workers that supplies the chemical and food industries, is one of those indirectly affected. Its manager Manfred Schultheis said if 200 customers pass on due diligence questionnaires and they realistically need 3 hours for each, they face 600 hours of labour a year.

"It is a job for politics to monitor human rights and not an economic job for companies," he said.

Some 82% of companies in Germany with more than 250 employees said they were indirectly affected by the law, a survey by the German economic institute IW Koeln showed. Among mid-sized enterprises of 50 to 249 employees, it was 72%.

Germany's Federal Office of Economics and Export Control (BAFA) has warned, "the law does not allow companies to pass on their obligations to small and medium suppliers." But some SMEs say they feel forced to cooperate as they fear being replaced.

"SMEs cannot cope with the flood of different information requests," said Dercks, adding they usually do not have the capacity or market power to enforce standards among their own suppliers.

"This law came about because the Germans wanted to do something good for the employees in other countries," Bauch said. "But this law is pure bureaucracy, completely pointless." – Reuters



An employee moves forging red hot steel inside the ArcVac ForgeCast factory, in Hooghly district, in West Bengal, India. (Reuters)



The creation is in need for Allah

Man always looks for what benefits him and what protects him from harm. However, to accomplish this, man must be able to realise what is harmful. He must then know whom he should need, trust, and love so that he can attain what is beneficial as well as to feel good about his choice.

He also must know the proper and good approach that would make him achieve this goal. This latter condition requires that man:

1. Know about the harm
2. What ways can be used to drive the harm away?

Certainly, man can have no better guidance than that which comes from the One Who had perfected everything, and the One who has no deficiency in Himself and in His Attributes. The One Who is Ever-Living and Who does not die. There can be no One better than the One Who has no need for anything; the One Who is rich; the Giver; the One who, after all, controls man's soul. Man is so poor to Him. He is Allah, the True and only God. Man can bring harm to himself if he seeks other than Allah for help. Allah is the One Who can help man drive away any harm for it cannot occur without His Will and His Power.

Allah Almighty sent down His Books and chose His Messengers to guide man to:

1. Know His Lord as He Almighty had explained about Himself
2. Seek Him Alone while living in accordance with His plan

Knowing Allah's Names and Attributes liberates man from worshipping any form of creation because creation is weak and is in need of The Creator, Allah. The knowledge about Allah leads man to know that he is created to live according to Allah's way as revealed to His Messengers may Allah exalt their mention the final of whom was Messenger Muhammad, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam (may Allah exalt his mention).

This Revelation contains a complete code of life. Everything that is beneficial or harmful is established so that man can centre his life around this Revelation. If man commits wrong and knows that Allah is Oft-Forgiving he would turn to Him, and to Him alone, seeking His forgiveness; Allah Says (what means): "So know, [O Muhammad], that there is no deity except



Allah and ask forgiveness for your sin." [Qur'an 47:19]

It is wrong to think or believe that Allah created other 'gods' besides Him so that man turns to them for help; loves them or fear them, etc. He is the same God of all nations. He does not order that people should make of stars, sun, fire, 'Eesa (Jesus), Moosa (Moses), may Allah exalt their mention, and Muhammad, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, etc., as deities

besides Him. He, the Almighty cannot be "contradictory". He has one way (religion) that calls man to surrender his will only to Him.

He warned that if man (even Muhammad, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) would take partners with Him, then his work will fail and will be among losers; Allah Says (what means): "And verily, it had been revealed to you (O Muhammad) as has been revealed to those before you. If you join others in worship with Allah (then) surely

(all) your deeds will be in vain and you will certainly be among the losers. Nay! But worship Allah and be among grateful." [Qur'an 39:65-66]

Let us know what Muhammad, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, the Prophet, who knew Allah best, used to say: "O Allah, I seek refuge in You for Your Pleasure and against Your Wrath, and in Your Forgiveness and against Your Punishment and in You from You, I cannot Praise You as You can Praise Yourself." (Muslim, Abu Dawood, At-Tirmithi and Ibn Majah)

He, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, used to say also: "I have surrendered myself to You, I have directed my face to You, I have entrusted my affairs to You, I have compelled my back to refuge in You, in want and in fright of You, there is no resort nor survival from You except (in turning) to You. I have faith in Your book (i.e., the Qur'an) which You brought down and in the Prophet (Muhammad) you have sent." (Al-Bukhari & Muslim)

When we read the Qur'an we can see that Allah the Almighty Says (what means): "Whatever of Mercy (i.e. of good), Allah may grant to mankind, none can withhold it, and whatever He may withhold, none can grant it thereafter. And He is the All-Mighty, the All-Wise." [Qur'an 35:2]

"If Allah touches you with hurt, there is none can remove it but He; and if He intends any good for you, there is none who can repel His favor which He causes it to reach whomsoever of His slaves He will, and He is the Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful." [Qur'an 10:117]

We should be motivated to return to Him Alone at times of ease and at times of hardship. Allah Says (what means): "If Allah helps you none can overcome you, and if He forsakes you, who is there, after Him, that can help you. And in Allah (alone) let believers put their trust." [Qur'an 3:160]

The Qur'an, therefore, leads man to a true liberation from any false attachment. It brings peace to the heart. It helps the believer against hypocrisy and all forms of dishonesty.

Imagine, for example, a believer facing a problem at work. He sees wrong and faces unlawful practices. He does not fear rejecting what is wrong. He knows that the

job is only a means to gain his sustenance. While he may be unable to correct what is wrong, he knows well that Allah is the One Who provides. If he leaves his job for the sake of Allah, Allah will give him a better one. Allah Almighty Said (what means): "And whoever fears Allah - He will make for him a way out. And will provide for him from where he does not expect. And whoever relies upon Allah - then He is sufficient for him. Indeed, Allah will accomplish His purpose. Allah has already set for everything a [decreed] extent" [Qur'an 65:2-3]

The above texts, necessitates that man must depend upon Allah Almighty asking Him alone for assistance. It also requires that man must love Allah and worship Him alone to gain His pleasure and His help. Is it not true that the people who consider this life as the "Final Goal" end up worshipping many things in it? You see them so careful about "having it all". They torture themselves: pain, difficulty, constant worry, keeping their hands in the banks for loan after loan to keep up with the "demands of development". They are under the constant threat of foreclosure. They constantly see poverty in front of their eyes.

The Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "Allah says: 'Son of Adam: Fill your time with My worship and I will fill your heart with richness, and end off your poverty. But if you do not, I would make your hands fully busy (i.e., in worldly affairs) and I would not end off your poverty.'" (At-Tirmithi)

Our purpose of existence on earth is more meaningful than being slaves to worldly gains. There can be no meaningful life better than that prescribed by our Creator Allah. Every act done according to Allah's way is an act of worship. Man is the beneficiary and Allah is in no need. Allah Says (what means): "O mankind! It is you who stand in need of Allah, but Allah is Rich (Free of all wants and needs), Worthy of All Praise." [Qur'an 35:15]

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



A perfect example of moderation

Muhammad (sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam - may Allah exalt his mention) was a perfect example of moderation to his followers in every walk of life. In expenditure, he advised them to spend within their means, neither to be so lavish as to make themselves destitute, nor to hold back their wealth from those who had a claim on their resources. "Do not hold back altogether out of miserliness and render yourself blameworthy, nor spend without restraint and exhaust your wealth, thus becoming yourself destitute." [Qur'an 17:29]

He gave mankind a golden rule of moderation between the two extremes of lavish expenditure and miserliness; neither to be extravagant in ordinary spending as well as in charity, nor to be niggardly. The people who practice this rule in their lives are praised in these words "Who are neither extravagant nor miserly in their spending, but keep a just balance between the two extremes." [Qur'an 25:67]

He taught, by his own example, the same rule of moderation in eating, in dressing and in worship ('ibaadah). Abdullah ibn Amr ibn al-'Aas said that once he decided to engage himself in worship all the time; to fast during the day and read the whole Qur'an during the night. His father married him to a young woman. Once his father asked his wife about him, and she replied, "He is a very pious man and never comes to his bed for sleep nor keep any relationship with anyone." His father became very angry with him and said that he had married him to a very gentle woman and that he had kept her in suspense all this time. But in his enthusiasm for worship, he did not take notice of this. His father complained to Allah's Messenger (sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam), who said to him, "I have heard that you fast during the day and pray all night." He replied that that was right. Then Allah's Messenger (sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) said, "Don't do that, but instead fast sometimes and eat sometimes; pray during the night and sleep as well, for your body has a claim on you; your eyes have a claim on you; lack of sleep will weaken them; your wife and children and relatives have a claim on you, too!" Abdullah bin Amer tells that the Prophet said, "Allah likes to see the marks of His bounty on his servant."

A similar hadith is reported by Al-Bukhari. Some companions of Allah's Messenger (sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) resolved to engage in worship; one said that he would pray all night; another said that he would always fast and never stop; the third said that he would never marry and never have any relations with women. Allah's Messenger heard about them and said, "I swear by Allah that I fear Allah and realise my responsibilities to Him more than you, but this is my way: I fast sometimes and sometimes I do not fast; I pray during the night and sleep as well; and marry women. Anyone who does not like my way has no relation with me."

Anas reported Allah's Messenger (sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) as saying, "Don't be too cruel to yourselves, certain nations adopted severity towards themselves so Allah punished them. You can see their remnants in churches and monasteries." Muhammad forbade asceticism and renunciation of the normal pleasures of life, nor did he like perpetual and formal prayers in isolation. He told people to live the normal lives of ordinary human beings, for service to Allah was done through pure lives in the turmoil of this world. He wanted men to mix with other men, so that they could discipline themselves and learn resistance to evil and uphold the standard of Truth and Justice against heavy odds, wherever necessary.

Abu Hurairah reported Allah's Messenger (sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) as saying, "Religion is easy, but if anyone overdoes it, it gets the better of him, so keep to the right course, approximate to perfection and rejoice." Ibn Abbas reported Allah's Messenger (sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) as saying, "A good manner of conduct and moderation are a 25th part of Prophethood." Allah's Messenger is also reported to have said, "Moderation is the best of actions." He lived the moderate life of an ordinary person, though he was Allah's Messenger and ruler of a state. He enjoyed the ordinary pleasures of life, worked like an ordinary man in his house and in public, upheld the principles of Truth and Justice in his private well as public life and always abstained from the extremes of life. All his life, in Makkah as an ordi-

nary trader and in Madinah as a ruler, he led a simple life, avoiding extremes, and taught his followers by his personal example to live a similarly moderate life.

The following hadiths (Prophet sayings) are just examples of what Prophet Muhammad (sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) ordered the people to follow: 1. Narrated 'Aishah (radiallahu 'anhaa): The Prophet came in when a woman was sitting beside me. He asked me, "Who is she?" I said: "She is the one whose performance of Salat (prayer) has become the talk of the town." Addressing her, he (sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) said, (What is this!) You are required to take upon yourselves only what you can carry out easily. By Allah, Allah does not withhold His Mercy and forgiveness of you until you neglect and give up (good works). Allah likes the deeds best which a worshipper can carry out constantly." [Al-Bukhari and Muslim] Commentary: a. This Hadith prohibits 'ibaadah beyond one's capacity lest one gets tired and renounces it altogether. One should be, therefore, moderate in this respect. b. Allah likes that good action which is done regularly, even if it is a small one. Any deed, which is done continuously, will also have an everlasting reward. On the contrary, a good deed, which is done for a short period, will have a short return.

2. Narrated Anas (radiallahu 'anhu): Allah's Messenger (sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) came into the mosque and noticed a rope stretched between two poles. He enquired, "What is this rope for?" He was told: "This is Zainab's rope. When during her voluntary prayer, she begins to feel tired, she grasps it for support." Allah's Messenger said, "Untie it. You should offer prayers so long as you feel active. When you feel tired, you should go to sleep." [Al-Bukhari and Muslim] Commentary: This Hadith deals with the following three points: a. First, it forbids undue strictness and taking support of anything in the course of Salat. b. If anything forbidden can be checked by hand, it must be stopped immediately. c. One should be moderate in 'ibaadah and select such times for optional and voluntary prayers when one feels real pleasure in them.

3. Narrated Jabir Ibn Samurah (radiallahu 'anhu): I used to observe prayer with the Prophet (sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) and his Salat (prayer) was of a moderate length and his (Khutbah) sermon too was moderate in length. [Muslim] Commentary: This Hadith tells us that Imam should neither lengthen the Salat nor give long sermon in the congregational Salat because both these things are against the practice of the Prophet (sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam).

4. Narrated Ibn 'Abbas (radiallahu 'anhuma): While the Prophet (sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) was delivering Khutbah (religious talk), he noticed a man who was standing, so he asked about him and was told that he was Abu Israel who had taken a vow to remain standing and not sit, or go into the shade, or speak while observing fasting. Thereupon Allah's Messenger said, "Command him to speak, to go into the shade, to sit and to complete his fast." [Al-Bukhari] Commentary: a. This Hadith makes it abundantly clear that one cannot attain the Pleasure of Allah by means of self-invented methods. It can only be achieved by ways and means prescribed in the Qur'an and Sunnah. b. One should never vow for anything which is smeared with sin or which is not permitted by religion. An instance of this is quoted in the above mentioned Hadith. c. The majority of 'Ulama' (religious scholars) who do not think the expiation of such vows necessary, quote this Hadith in support of their view. They argue that the Prophet (May Allah Exalt His Mention) has not prescribed expiation in such cases as is evident from this Hadith.

At the time the Prophet (sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) ordered the people to perform acts of worship, he warned them against going to extremes (in practising religion). He did so in order to prevent them from harming themselves physically or spiritually and from neglecting their other responsibilities and activities. The Prophet (sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) asked people to do good actions regularly, no matter how small. He said, Allah likes the deeds best, even if it is a small, which a worshipper can carry out constantly. If the Prophet saw any one of his companions being immoderate, he would be displeased and would then instruct him to moderation.

Pondering on Allah's signs

In the Qur'an, it is mentioned that the unbelievers are the people who do not recognise and appreciate the signs of Allah. The significance of a believer is his ability to see those signs and proofs. They know that these are not created in vain; they can realise the power and great art of Allah everywhere and find ways to appraise Him. About such people Allah Almighty says (what means): "Who remember Allah while standing or sitting or [lying] on their sides and give thought to the creation of the heavens and the earth, [saying], 'Our Lord, You did not create this aimlessly; exalted are You [above such a thing]; then protect us from the punishment of the Fire.'" [Qur'an 3:191]

Many times in the Qur'an, there are expressions like "will you not take heed?" "...there is a sign for thinking men" which emphasise the importance of pondering on the signs of Allah. Allah has created an endless list of things to be the subjects of pondering. Everything we see and sense is indeed a manifestation and sign of Allah; so all those in heavens and in earth and in between may be a means of pondering for us. Allah says (what means): "He causes to grow for you thereby the crops, olives, palm trees, grapevines, and from all the fruits. Indeed in that is a sign for a people who give thought." [Qur'an 16: 11]

Let's think for a while of one of the items mentioned in the above verse; for instance, the "date-tree, as well known, grows up from a seed out of the earth. From this tiny seed (a seed is not even 1 cm3 in size), an enormous wooden mass of several metres long and hundreds of kilograms of weight, forms. The only thing that seed can use while constituting this great mass is the earth in which it is buried. How can a seed know how to constitute a tree? How does it know how to decompose the necessary substances in the soil to form food? How can it predict the required shape and structure? This last question is especially important, because it is not an ordinary wooden piece that emerges out from the seed. The seed develops a complex living organism with roots for assimilating substances from the earth, with veins in itself and with branches that are perfectly organised. A human being has difficulty while drawing even a picture of a tree, but on the other hand a simple seed can produce that extremely complex object using the substances in the soil.

This observation concludes that a seed is extremely intelligent and wise, even more than us. Or better to say, there is an amazing intelligence in what a seed does. But what is the source of that intelligence? How can it be possible for a seed to have such an intelligence and memory like a computer "chip"? The chips are produced by people who have intelligence and knowledge. Just like a seed which is created by Allah with the ability to develop a tree. Every seed on earth is encompassed by Allah and grows within His knowledge. He Almighty says (what means): "Indeed, Allah is the cleaver of grain and date seeds. He brings the living out of the dead and brings the dead out of the living. That is Allah; so how are you deluded?" [Qur'an 6: 95]

A seed is merely one of the numerous signs that Allah has created in the universe. If men begin to think with not only their minds but also with their hearts, asking the question

of 'why' and 'how' to themselves, they can understand that all the universe is a proof of the existence and power of Allah, the Most Exalted.

However, the unbelievers cannot understand such things, since they don't have the ability to "see" this purpose: as the Qur'an expresses (what means): "...They have eyes with which they do not see..." [Qur'an 7: 179] i.e., they do not have the wisdom and comprehension to realise the important reality with their materialistic vision.

On the other hand, believers are different than this 'blind' group, because they realize and accept that the whole universe is created by Allah with a certain aim and wisdom. This belief is the first step of faith. As faith and wisdom, both of which are in parallel, increase, they will start to identify every detail of Allah's creation. One of the things to be done to identify the details of Allah's Creation is to be careful and observant. Because the ability to see the signs of Allah and not to be "blind" like the unbelievers, require a high concentration. Allah Almighty says (what means):

"Unquestionably, to Allah belongs whatever is in the heavens and earth. Already He knows that upon which you [stand] and [knows] the Day when they will be returned to Him and He will inform them of what they have done. And Allah is Knowing of all things." [Qur'an 24: 64]

"Unquestionably, they are in doubt about the meeting with their Lord. Unquestionably He is, of all things, encompassing." [Qur'an 41:54]

One should train himself to recognize the signs of Allah and should always keep this in mind. Otherwise, mind will start to wander, jumping from one topic to another, wasting time thinking about useless things. Mind is like water; unless it is directed which way to flow, it spreads away, to the places that you would not want it to flow. This is a kind of unconsciousness; you can not control your mind. You can not focus and concentrate on a subject. Actually, you can not conceive the truth behind the events happening and also can not ever have the competence to interfere in them. On the contrary, your mind gets directed by those events. You are "bewildered" all the time, which is not an attribute of a believer, but the unbelievers, as Allah Almighty Says (what means): "...And he who associates with Allah - it is as though he had fallen from the sky and was snatched by the birds or the wind carried him down into a remote place." [Qur'an 22: 31]

Believers, on the other hand, are the ones who direct their minds, try to better perceive Allah, and who try to better serve His religion. The believers are the ones "who turn away from ill speech" [Qur'an 23:3]. They free their minds from any useless thoughts and whenever they realise the appeal of Satan, they rescue themselves just like Allah Almighty Says in the Qur'an (what means): "Indeed, those who fear Allah - when an impulse touches them from Satan, they remember [Him] and at once they have insight." [Qur'an 7: 201]

Therefore, the believers should be careful to keep their minds free of useless thoughts and ponder only on useful things that serve them in their life and keep them close to the Mighty Creator.

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

A grand opening

The 33rd edition of the Doha International Book Fair (DIBF) kicked off yesterday under theme for this year's event, *Knowledge Builds Civilisations*.

The event is being held at the Doha Exhibition and Convention Centre (DECC) until May 18.

This year's fair is witnessing the largest international participation ever, with more than 515 publishing houses from 42 countries showcasing over 180,000 new titles across various fields of knowledge and sciences.

Additionally, there is broader cultural participation from embassies in Qatar.

Oman is the guest of honour of this edition, presenting a special pavilion and a cultural programme highlighting Omani heritage, intellectual production, and literature, along with various popular and artistic presentations.

A number of dignitaries and officials have expressed their admiration for the fair, affirming that it reinforces Qatar's position on the map of Arab and international culture.

HE the Minister of Transport Jassim bin Saif al-Sulaiti told the Qatar News Agency (QNA) on the sidelines of the fair that the continuous evolution year after year in terms of participation size, organisation, and creativity in designs at the fair indicates that books hold a significant place in Qatar.

He added that readers eagerly seek knowledge from original sources, which solidifies the country's cultural standing regionally and internationally.

HE the Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Ibrahim bin Ali al-Mohannadi told the QNA that the fair underscores Qatar's interest in culture, creativity, and intellectual development through books, which he said remain the most noble sources of knowledge and sciences.

Said bin Sultan al-Busaidi,



Scenes from the opening day of the 33rd Doha International Book Fair (DIBF) at the Doha International Exhibition Centre (DECC) yesterday. **PICTURES:** Noushad Thekkayil

the undersecretary for culture at Oman's ministry of culture, sports and youth, described relations between Qatar and Oman as deep-rooted, emphasising that the cultural co-operation between the two concerned parties has been substantial and continuous for decades.

He noted that Oman's selection as the guest of honour this year crowns these strong relations.

A number of ambassadors also expressed their admiration for the exhibition.

Kuwait's ambassador to Qatar Khaled Badr al-Mutairi said that the fair provides an annual opportunity to showcase the cultural inventory of different countries.

Yemen's ambassador to Qatar Rajeh Badi commended the DIBF as a distinguished cultural and educational event, praising the splendid opening of the fair, which has become an annual landmark and a cultural beacon not only at the national level, but across the entire region.

Turkiye's ambassador to Qatar Dr Mustafa Goksu highlighted



the significant development and diversity in the organisation and content of the DIBF, noting that the fair enriches the literary scene and cultural diversity.

The 33rd DIBF features great participation from Qatari publishers as part of efforts to support the publishing and creativity industries.

Among the participating publishers are Roza Publishing House, Dar Al Watad for Publishing and



Distribution, Qatar University Press, Katara Publishing House, HBKU Press, Dar Al Sharq For Printing, Publishing, and Distribution, Dar Al Thaqafa for Printing, Press, Publishing, and Distribution, Dar Nabja for Publishing and Distribution, Dar Nawa, Lusail University Press and the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, and Qatar Museums, with their publications.

The exhibition also enjoys Gulf,



Arab and international participation, represented by Kuwait's National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters, Oman's Ministry of Heritage and Culture, the Sharjah Book Authority, the Abu Dhabi Arabic Language Centre, Saudi Arabia's Institute of Public Administration and Taibah University.

Also among the exhibitors will be the ministries of culture in Morocco, Algeria, Yemen and Egypt, China and Azerbaijan, and

a number of publishers unions in Mauritania, Jordan and Turkiye, along with US and UK publishers.

Eight bookstores from the historic Azbakeya Book Wall are also participating in the exhibitions activities.

The 32nd edition of the DIBF had featured bookstores from Iraq's Al Mutanabbi Street.

The exhibition opens daily from 9am to 10pm, except on Fridays from 3pm to 10pm. - QNA

Qatar Press Center debuts at the Doha International Book Fair

By Tawfik Lamari
Staff Reporter



المركز القطري للصحافة
QATAR PRESS CENTER

The Qatar Press Center (QPC) is participating in the activities of the 33rd Doha International Book Fair (DIBF), which opened yesterday at the Doha Exhibition and Convention Centre (DECC) under the theme *With knowledge, civilisations are built*.

The QPC is displaying its publications in the Dar Al Sharq pavilion H1-70, as part of an

agreement with the latter.

The QPC's publications include works on sports, cultural and social journalism.

"We are pleased to participate for the first time in the DIBF, in its 33rd session, which is scheduled to witness the largest international participation in the history of the fair," QPC director-general Sadiq Mohamed al-Amari said. "We highlight the sporting and cultural heritage from a journalistic perspective."

"The DIBF is an international platform through which we communicate with those

interested in journalism, whether authors or journalistic writers, as well as the public," he said.

Among the QPC's publications is *The World Cup Feather*, which features caricatures published in newspapers during the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022.

Other works include *Sunday Morning - Part Three* by writer and journalist Mubarak bin Jaham al-Kuwari, and *On the Saif of the East* by Prof Sultan al-Jassem, which includes an album of rare old photos of local and sporting events in the 1950s and 60s.



Sadiq Mohamed al-Amari

Embassies showcase cultural and literary wealth

By Joey Aguilar
Staff Reporter

Several embassies in Qatar, including that of Japan, the US, Indonesia, and South Korea, have converged to unveil a treasure trove of cultural riches at the 2024 Doha International Book Fair (DIBF), which opened yesterday at the Doha Exhibition and Convention Centre (DECC).

From an array of literary works and artefacts, these booths create a collage of diversity, encouraging visitors to embark on a journey through the vibrant landscapes of their respective cultures.

Speaking to *Gulf Times*, Kazuto Matsuda, researcher and adviser at the Japanese embassy, highlighted the unique nature of their participation this year, saying: "What's special about our booth this year is that we have Japanese calligraphy and origami, offering various activities where visitors can have their names beautifully inscribed in Japanese by a skilled calligrapher."

He said that origami enthusiasts can



marvel at creations ranging from different vehicles to beloved anime and video game characters like Pikachu, among other objects.

Matsuda noted that their main aim is to promote Japanese culture while also fostering an interest in Japanese tourism, language, and literature.

"Every year, more and more people in

Indonesian ambassador Ridwan Hassan (second left) with Maryam Hammadi, director for International Co-operation at Qatar's Ministry of Culture, and other embassy officials (supplied picture).

Right: The US embassy booth offers an array of literary works.

Qatar are expressing interest in studying Japanese language or visiting Japan," he said, underscoring the growing popularity of Japan in Qatar and the region.

Themed *Knowledge Builds Civilisations*, this year's DIBF will continue its celebration of literature until May 18.

The event features an array of literary treasures, with more than 180,000 titles showcased by 515 publishing houses from 42 countries.

Another regular participant is the US embassy in Qatar, which curated an extensive collection of literary works by



renowned American authors and publishers.

It aims to enhance English language proficiency and inspire readers to explore a diverse array of literature.

US ambassador Timmy Davis expressed his enthusiasm, inviting attendees to explore the vast array of books, saying: "I'm thrilled to announce the US embassy's participation in this year's Doha International Book Fair. We wel-

come you to read, learn, and grow across America by exploring the thousands of books in our booth."

"Our set of collections covers themes such as STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) education, sustainability and more," he said. "We are excited to share stories with book lovers in Qatar and promote literacy across cultural and academic exchanges in our countries."

Indonesian ambassador Ridwan Hassan stressed the key role of books in fostering understanding and tolerance.

"For the Indonesian embassy, participating in the Doha International Book Fair is always our priority," he said. "Why? Because we believe that book plays an important role in building understanding and tolerance among the society with different backgrounds."

"Thanks to the Ministry of Culture, which always gives Indonesia a chance to be part of this excellent event," Hassan added. "In this edition of the Book Fair, we are also proud to bring two Indonesian speakers."

Similarly, the South Korean embassy has returned to the fair with a captivating display of literary works, showcasing the richness of Korean culture and tourism.



The South Korean embassy is taking part in the book fair with a captivating display of literary works.



Matsuda with volunteers at the Japan booth at the Doha International Book Fair yesterday. **PICTURES:** Joey Aguilar