





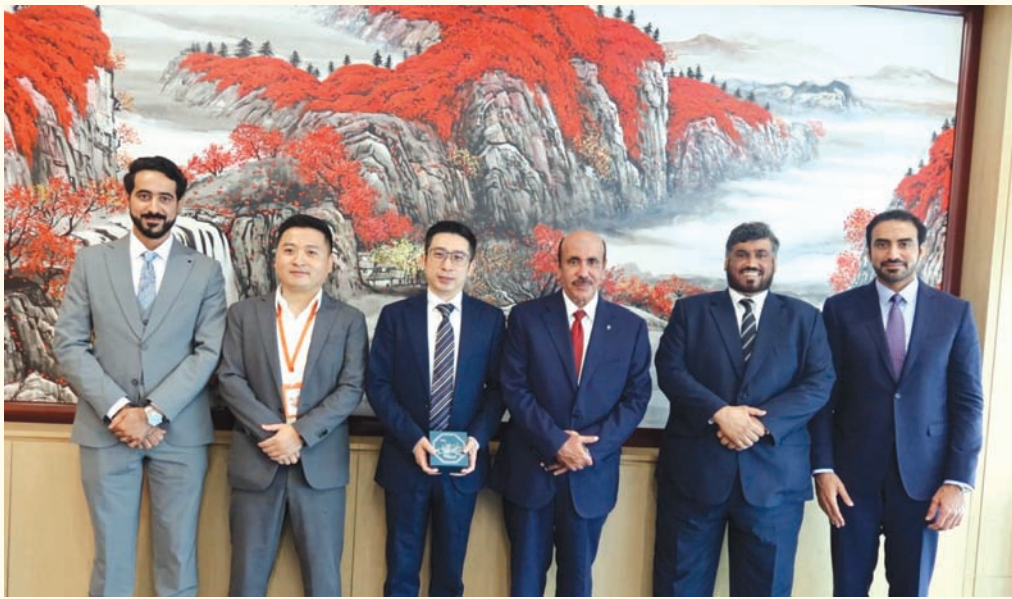


## AlKhater meets Maltese ambassador



HE the Minister of State for International Co-operation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Lolwah bint Rashid AlKhater met yesterday with Malta's ambassador to Qatar Simon Pullicino. The meeting discussed bilateral relations and ways to support and enhance them, as well as the latest developments in the Gaza Strip and the occupied Palestinian territories, especially in the humanitarian field, in addition to a number of topics of mutual interest. **(QNA)**

## Minister meets chief of Temu Group



HE the Minister of Transport Jassim Saif Ahmed al-Sulaiti met with Lorenzo Long, President of Temu Group, China's third and world's fifth largest online market. The meeting dealt with discussing co-operation relations and ways to enhance them, particularly in logistics fields for delivery through the country's transportation facilities. Temu e-commerce application yesterday added Qatar Post to its list of logistics shipping companies within Qatar Post's scope of work. **(QNA)**

# Medical units escorting Qatari Haj Mission arrive in holy lands

QNA  
Makkah

All members of the medical unit escorting the Qatari Haj Mission have arrived at the holy lands. The mission includes 36 medical practitioners, nurses, paramedics, and pharmacists so as to embark on providing comprehensive health care for the pilgrims of Qatar during their stay at the accommodation compounds in Makkah Al-Mukarramah and when they perform Haj rituals in the holy sites, namely Mina, Arafat and Muzdalifah.

The medical unit comprises a variety of specialisations, such as internal medicine, cardiology, communicable diseases, emergency, ear, nose, and throat, first-aid, and nursing. Also, the unit is escorted by a top-notch ambulance vehicle with world-class health capabilities.

The medical unit operates in collaboration with the professional health authorities in Saudi Arabia and is set to finalise the establishment of clinics in Mina, Arafat and Muzdalifah, during the coming days, to be in full swing to provide distinguished and comprehensive health care for the pilgrims of Qa-



tar. The unit will mobilise medical plans and personnel to provide health services in Muzdalifah and ensure that pilgrims are safe during the whole period of rites until the end of pilgrimage season.

Head of the medical mission, pharmacists and nursery unit have early arrived in the holy lands to embark on finalising all preparations and equipping the clinics at the mission's premises in Makkah, as well as Mina, Arafat and Muzdalifah. The task is conducted in collaboration with Qatar's Ministry of Public Health, Hamad Medical Corporation and Primary Health Care Corporation since they are operating lockstep

with the Qatar's Ministry of Endowments (Awqaf) and Islamic Affairs in providing services to the pilgrims of Qatar, in co-ordination with professional medical authorities in Saudi Arabia.

Additionally, the unit comprises isolation chambers and clinics for both genders in Makkah and the holy sites, in addition to providing all essential treatments around the clock for the pilgrims, since Qatar gives foremost priority to ensure high-class amenities for all pilgrims, as well as best health care and public safety.

The medical unit will operate in proximity with the mission's premises and escort the pilgrims

of Qatar during their movements starting from the first rites until the end of pilgrimage rituals to safeguard their safety and respond to their requests.

The medical centres of the Qatari Haj Mission had received the opening license a few days ago from the professional medical bodies at the Saudi Ministry of Health, following a visit made by a professional delegation from the Saudi Ministry of Health to the Qatari Haj Mission to ensure that these centres comply with all essential requirements to obtain the license. Also, all Qatari medical cadres received the licence to embark on their mission.

## Senegalese PM meets Qatar's ambassador



Senegalese Prime Minister Ousmane Sonko met with Qatar's ambassador in Dakar Youssef bin Shaaban al-Sada. The meeting discussed bilateral relations. **(QNA)**

## Qatar Airways resume Lisbon flights

Qatar Airways yesterday announced the return of its non-stop flights between Doha's Hamad International Airport and Lisbon's Humberto Delgado Airport. Addressing the high seasonal demand of the popular travel destination, Qatar Airways will operate to Lisbon year-round with six weekly flights during summer 2024, a statement said. Qatar Airways chief commercial officer, Thierry Antinori, said: "This addition reaffirms the airline's dedication to connecting people and places, making international travel more accessible and convenient across our global network." With scenic beaches, thriving cosmopolitan cities and several Unesco World Heritage Sites, Lisbon offers the perfect starting point for travellers eager to explore the rich tourism and cultural offerings of Portugal. As the latest addition to Qatar Airways' global network of more than 170 destinations, the resumed route is the 47th European destination served by the airline. Lisbon also opens up a new entry point for international travel from Europe to the Middle East, Africa, as well as the Indian subcontinent. Some of the most popular destinations for travellers from Lisbon include, Bali, Bangkok, Delhi, Denpasar, Kathmandu, and Male.



# Doha Forum tackles multiple issues at St Petersburg event

The Doha Forum, as one of the leading global forums concerned with international affairs, is participating in the St Petersburg International Economic Forum, which is being held from June 6-9, in St Petersburg, Russia.

As part of its continued development as a platform held annually under the slogan of diplomacy, dialogue and diversity, the Doha Forum took the opportunity of its participation in the St Petersburg International Economic Forum to officially welcome the RosCongress Foundation as an official content partner in this year's edition, and to sign a memorandum of understanding (MoU)

on the sidelines of the event. The Doha Forum, whose main event will be held between December 7-8, has announced the selection of 'The Imperative of Innovation' as its main theme for this year. The forum will address several issues, including geopolitics, economic development, emerging technologies, security, and cultural diplomacy, while it will serve as a platform to consider how to apply the power and principles of innovation to the most pressing issues in our world.

Commenting on the presence of the Doha Forum at the St Petersburg International Economic Forum, Director-General of the Doha Forum Maha al-Kuwari,

said that every year, the Doha Forum brings together thought leaders from around the world to attend our flagship event in Doha, which contributes to enhancing discussions and international co-operation.

The commitment to expanding global partnerships ensures that the Doha Forum remains a leading event in its field, she added. It is worth noting that the Doha Forum regularly participates in global discussions, as it recently participated in the Jeju Forum for Peace and Prosperity on Jeju Island, South Korea, which was held from May 29-31, where its partnerships expanded across East Asia, and

it welcomed the Jeju Peace Institute as an official content partner in this year's edition of the forum.

The St Petersburg International Economic Forum is an annual event for the economic sector, which has been held in St Petersburg, Russia, since 1997.

In recent years, and especially in 2021, Qatar, as an official guest at the forum, participated with a pavilion that included 51 organisations and 400 delegations in the field of co-operation in trade, investment, education, science, technology, culture and sports, where the Doha Forum was distinguished by its prominent presence at the event at that time.

## In brief

### Customs recovers narcotic pills from passenger's stomach

The Hamad International Airport Customs Department has foiled an attempt to smuggle narcotic substances to Qatar. According to a statement by the General Authority of Customs (GAC) on X, shabu and heroin were seized from a passenger at the airport. The narcotic substances were found after the passenger underwent a check by the officials on suspicion. When the passenger underwent body scanning, narcotic substances were found inside the stomach. As much as 80 capsules, weighing 610g, were recovered from his stomach.

## Dukhan Security Dept celebrates WED

The Ministry of Interior's Dukhan Security Department, in collaboration with Al Sheehaniya Municipality, celebrated World Environment Day (WED) by planting seedlings in various locations within the department's premises. A delegation from the municipality visited the department on the occasion. This year's theme is 'Our land. Our future. We are #GenerationRestoration'.



## New book on Qatar's flora to be key resource: author

Environmental activist and founder of Al Hanzab Environmental Initiative, Ali bin Talib al-Hanzab, has published his first book titled *Plants and Trees of Qatar's Environment*, local Arabic daily *Arrayah* reported.

Al-Hanzab explained that his book is the culmination of six years of environmental work. It is intended to serve as an environmental scientific reference targeting students and nature enthusiasts. The book includes 99 of the Qatari wild plants, alongside their local and scientific names, families, and planting time.

Further, the book includes more than 130 plants and trees from the wild flora found in the soil, sandy, or hilly areas, in addition to the coastal areas. Each plant and its family are mentioned. Al-Hanzab noted that this book would be a



Ali bin Talib al-Hanzab



resource book for all students and schools, and will be available to all enthusiasts in general to explore Qatar's environment.



## Nectar hunt



Ants are on a nectar hunt in a Doha garden. Similar to numerous other insects, ants enjoy eating energy-rich nectar and frequently visit flowers. Ants are also close relatives of bees and wasps which are important pollinators in most plant communities. **PICTURE:** *Gulf Times* news editor Bonnie James (Instagram: theexplorer7)

## More than 300 benefit from medical camp



More than 300 individuals, including a significant number of domestic workers, benefitted from a medical camp conducted by the Indian Cultural Centre (ICC)'s Women's Forum in association with Apollo Clinic Qatar. Indian ambassador Vipul inaugurated the camp and ICC

president A P Manikantan presided. Indian Sports Centre president E P Abdulrahman and other officials from ICC and Indian Community Benevolent Forum were present. Doha Healthcare Group director Louis J Moylan and medical operations head Dr Hythem Naser presented the privilege card that

offers discounts and offers on healthcare services to Women's Forum external events head Gargy Vaidya. Women's Forum general secretary Naveena Priya explained that an array of vital tests along with doctor consultations were offered to the participants. They were also presented with privilege cards.

## Reading, life skills in focus at IIS workshop

Ideal Indian School (IIS) conducted a two-day workshop for students of Grades 4 and 5 on reading, analysis and presentation, impromptu speaking abilities, goal-setting, life skill building and trivia. Life coach, mentor and author Sushma Harish was the resource person. Principal Shaik Shamim Saheb emphasised the benefits of reading and its impact on the students. He also spoke about how reading books will help stu-

dents to improve their vocabulary, communication and public speaking skills. Sushma Harish spoke to the students about the benefits of reading books. She focused on how to analyse a text and interpret the title of the book, its genre and illustrations. Students were introduced to the books of different genres written by famous authors. Students were encouraged to come forward and speak on the given topics in front of the au-

dience to boost their self-confidence. Fun-filled activities were conducted during the workshop. Interesting video clips focusing on the different qualities of a good reader also kept the young learners engaged. A quiz session was also conducted and handcrafted book-marks were given to the winners. The programme was compered by Sharon Soans, Nanthini and Sana Sayeed. Junior section headmaster Sajid Shamim co-ordinated the workshop.



## Mesis holds PHL award ceremony



The Principal's Honours List (PHL) award ceremony at MES Indian School, Abu Hamour branch (Mesis) feted students from Grades I-XI who scored A1 in all the subjects in the overall annual exams for the academic year 2023-24. The event was held in two sessions and parents were also invited to witness the event. The students of Grade IV-XI were felicitated by MES governing board academic director Ashraf Sharafudheen and those of Grade I, II and III by principal Pramila Kannan and vice-principal Annie Francis.



## DPS-MIS inter-house fest ends



DPS-Modern Indian School (DPS-MIS) wrapped up its month-long inter-house fest 'Rendezvous 2024-25' for classes VI-VIII on June 1. The festival was an excellent platform for the students to display their talents in a vibrant setting, providing them a day rich with healthy competition, creativity, and camaraderie. All the four houses - Rose, Lily, Tulip and Lotus - participated in the finals of the onstage and off-stage competitions. In all, 23 competitions were conducted, aimed at developing essential 21st-century skills in students. There were also compulsory events meant to provide equal opportunity to all students. The competitions were anchored by Rochelle Andrea Dsouza (VIII I), Tirth Piyush Kumar (VIII K), Diya Suresh Kumar (VII D) and Ankith Venkatesha Rao (VII D). The festival was co-ordinated by Maniksha Balodi under the guidance of principal Asna Nafees and higher secondary school vice principal and activities head Soma Bhattacharjee. The finals were also graced by vice principals Mary Cruz and Shifa Shaikh.

## Ashrae chapter conducts workshop



The Qatar Oryx Chapter of Ashrae (American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers) held a workshop attended by about 150 engineering professionals. The topics were ultimate solutions for sanitary hot water and acoustic solution to mechanical noise suppression. The keynote speakers were Stathis Xarchis (Greece) and Arsalan (Dubai). Advisory board chairman Hassan Sultan

welcomed the gathering. Chapter president Kinan Fahs co-ordinated and conducted the event. Young Engineers at Ashrae chairperson Dharani Pillai was the master of ceremonies. Ashrae, founded in 1894, is a global society advancing human well-being through sustainable technology for the built environment. Ashrae has over 56,000 members with 183 chapters from 132 nations, divided into 15 regions.



## BPS triumphs in Nat'l Olympiad contest



**B**irla Public School (BPS) won the National Olympiad for Creativity in Mathematics, Science and Engineering (NIO) 2024 competition, organised under the Department of Mathematics/Department of Educational Guidance, Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE).

The BPS team, consisting of Riaan Jigar Shah, Harsha Kovvuri and Suhas, from the Senior Sec-

ondary, who came first among the 54 teams, were honoured along with the Department of Mathematics head Shibu P S, at a ceremony at the MoEHE.

Certificates were presented by Maha al-Rowali, assistant under-secretary for educational affairs and Maryam Noaman al-Emadi, director of Educational Supervision Department. BPS' project - Greenhouse with Remote Automation and Sensor

System typifies a remarkable development in agriculture technology, combining the efficiency of a geodesic dome and sensor systems to ensure ideal growth conditions and to deliver optimal growth conditions while minimising wastage.

The school management, principal, and the senior leadership congratulated the team for winning the coveted championship.

## BPS Primary campuses host investiture ceremony



**B**irla Public School (BPS)'s Primary I and II campuses organised the investiture ceremony 2024-25 and inducted the newly elected Student Council members.

Director C V Rappai, management representative Chindhu Antony, principal Dr Anand Nair, vice-principals Radhika Rele and Edna Fernandez, Primary headmistresses Anu Thomas and Shruti Boodle, and other officials were present.

The proceedings commenced with a prayer song by the Primary I Choir under the guidance of Gifita followed by Qatar and Indian national anthems.

The Primary II Choir performed a song by Gary Barlow and the commonwealth band under the guidance of Geneikam. The principal administered the oath to all new leaders of the Student Council who were invested by the board members and the school leadership team. The

parents of the Student Council Members were also invited.

The school captains, Vaiga Renjith and Sneha Narangoli highlighted the importance of leadership, emphasising values such as integrity, commitment and teamwork. They also shared their vision for the upcoming academic year. The programme culminated with the sports captains, Aarnav Premjith and Aaniya Arijum proposing a vote of thanks.

### BPS hosts training session for teachers



Birla Public School (BPS) hosted at its main campus a training session to empower teachers who manage students with diverse academic and behavioural needs. The resource persons were from the Qatar Institute for Speech and Hearing (Qish). Occupational therapist and clinical director Sathish Chandra Segar led a discussion on 'Neurological Ways of Understanding Academic Difficulties'. Clinical psychologist Fathima Fujira gave a presentation on 'Classroom Behaviour Management'.

### Tamil women forum celebrates anniversary

Qatar Singa Pengal, a community of Tamil women, celebrated their third anniversary, with a night of culture and festivity. Indian Cultural Centre (ICC)'s former chairperson Milan Arun was the guest of honour. Dr Zerine Rose and Thirukkural researcher Renganayaki Krishnamurthy were present. The programme featured dance, standup comedy, fashion show, orchestra and debate.



## Qatar toastmaster to receive Presidential Citation Award

**S**undaresan Rajeswar, a senior toastmaster from Qatar, has been selected to receive the Presidential Citation Award for 2024 at the 93rd International Convention in Anaheim, California, US, on August 15, 2024, a statement from District 116 Toastmasters in Qatar, said.

"I congratulate you on your outstanding contributions and

dedication to Toastmasters International," said Morag Mathieson, international president 2023-2024, in her letter to Rajeswar.

Since 1999, he has served in various leadership roles in the toastmaster community in the Middle East, including region adviser. As the first district director in 2018-19, he led Qatar as the number one district in the world.

"Rajeswar's exemplary leadership, coupled with professional achievements and international exposure, embodies the spirit of toastmasters. His ability to coach, mentor, and guide individuals and teams has set high standards. His dedication to fostering a multicultural environment and pursuit of excellence have positively impacted many globally," said Ravis-

## Prize distribution held as 'Aaravam' event concludes



**T**he annual Aaravam 24 event, organised by the Alumni Association of NSS College of Engineering (Anecx), concluded at the Aspire Dome and Birla Public School (BPS) with its Techfest.

Shantiniketan Indian School (SIS), BPS, and Delhi Public School (DPS) were crowned champions in various categories.

The science project competitions were categorised by themes. In the working model category, with the theme 'Sustainable Energy for Future World,' SIS was first and BPS second. The still model category, themed 'Green

Desert,' saw BPS first and Noble International School second. In the projects category, focusing on Pollution Control, SIS was first and Al Khor International School second. A quiz anchored by A R Renjith was a highlight.

The closing ceremony and prize distribution at BPS had Indian ambassador Vipul as the chief guest. Kahramaa's Conservation & Energy Efficiency Department manager engineer Rashid al-Rahimi, Indian Business and Professionals Council vice-president Hisham Abdul Raheem, Qatar Airways chief information officer T A Sreenivasan, and Birla

Public School director Dr Mohan Thomas were the other dignitaries.

Anecx president Dr engineer Abdul Hameed presided. Engineer Dileep B highlighted the competition's features. Ambassador Vipul lauded Anecx for fostering enthusiasm among the younger generation. Engineer al-Rahimi announced special gifts and certificates for the winners from Kahramaa and the Qatar Scientific Society, where he serves as executive director.

Aaravam chairman engineer Ashique Ahamed welcomed the attendees and engineer Aneesh proposed a vote of thanks.

### 'Regalia 2024' marked at MES



The Golden Jubilee Year Kids Festival, 'Regalia 2024' was marked at MES Indian School, celebrating 50 years of excellence in education and extracurricular activities. The competitions were tailored for the respective grades within the KG section. MES governing board members Faisal Mayan and A T Usman inaugurated the event in the presence of principal Dr Hameeda Kadar and other officials. The best performers were awarded.

### IIS duo win badminton prizes

Ideal Indian School (IIS) students Adlyn Mary Sojan (Class 8) and Andriya Reetha Sojan (Class 4) won prizes in the under-14 category of the CBSE Qatar cluster badminton tournament hosted by DPS Monarch International School. Suman Panwar was the coach and Ajanya S, the manager. Principal Shaik Shamim Saheb congratulated the achievers.



### Mother's Day celebration held at ICC



Song and dance performances marked the Mother's Day celebrations at Indian Cultural Centre (ICC), in association with Telangana Jagruthi Qatar (TJQ) on June 1. TJQ president Sudha welcomed the gathering and ICC's internal activities head Satyanarayana Malireddy proposed a vote of thanks. ICC president A P Manikantan thanked the community for the response to the cultural events and explained various initiatives being undertaken.



Sundaresan Rajeswar



## Palestinian support gatherings



Pro-Palestinian protesters demonstrate during the UN Climate Change Conference, amid the ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas, in Bonn, Germany, yesterday.



Demonstrators carry flags and signs during a protest in support of Palestinians in Gaza, amid the ongoing conflict, in Amman, Jordan, yesterday.

# Gaza town says mayor killed in Israeli strike on water station



A Palestinian worker checks a pipe at a water desalination plant that was hit during a strike in Nuseirat in the central Gaza Strip yesterday, as the ongoing conflict between Israel and the Palestinian Hamas group continues.

AFP  
Deir Al-Balah

A spokesman for the Nuseirat municipality in central Gaza said yesterday that the town's mayor, Iyad al-Maghari, had been killed in an Israeli strike while visiting a water pumping station.

Maghari had been at the water management facility that serves Nuseirat when an air strike hit it at around 10:30pm (1930 GMT) on Thursday, spokesman Mohamed al-Salhi said at the nearby Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital, where mourners gathered ahead of the funeral.

"We were surprised by a treacherous and cowardly attack on the mayor inside the plant, which led to the martyrdom of the mayor, Dr Iyad al-Maghari, and four members of his family,"

Salhi said. The Israeli army said it was aware of reports that Maghari had been killed in the strike and said he was a Hamas fighter.

AFP journalists at the water station yesterday said the facility was in tatters, with concrete strewn about, electrical equipment torn apart and bloodstains on the ground.

Workers were assessing the damage to the large pipes that transport water to Nuseirat's residents.

One resident, Ibrahim al-Hur, said: "We heard several explosions, and we were surprised that the explosions were right next to us, in the nearby water station."

"With just one missile, look what happened," he said, pointing to the demolished wall of the station behind him.

At the hospital, the mayor's body was wrapped in a white sheet adorned with a high-vis-

ibility vest, before it was loaded onto an ambulance on a stretcher. The Nuseirat municipality said it mourned "its mayor, who chose to fulfil his duty with dedication and devotion to serve our people in Nuseirat until his last moments".

The Hamas-run government media office said in a statement Maghari was "sincere and devoted to his work, serving his people and homeland".

The war broke out after Hamas' unprecedented October first week storming of Israel.

Israel's retaliatory offensive has killed at least 36,731 people in Gaza, also mostly civilians, according to the Hamas-run territory's health ministry.

The violence has left much of Gaza in ruins, and an Israeli siege on the territory has led to dire shortages of clean water and other basic needs.

## Sudan activists say about '40 dead' in shelling near Khartoum

AFP  
Port Sudan

Pro-democracy activists in Sudan reported yesterday about 40 dead in "violent artillery fire" the previous day when paramilitary forces targeted Omdurman, Khartoum's twin city.

Sudan has been ravaged by war since April 2023, when fighting broke out between the army, led by military chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), commanded by Burhan's former deputy Mohamed Hamdan Daglo. The Karari Resistance Committee, one of hundreds of grassroots pro-democracy groups that co-ordinate aid across Sudan, said the RSF was behind Thursday's deadly attack on Omdurman.

"So far, the death toll is estimated at 40 civilians and there are more than 50 injured, some seriously,"

the organisation posted on social media. "There is still no precise count of the number of victims," it said, adding that bodies were received by Al Nao university hospital and other private health facilities or were buried by relatives. The shelling came a day after the RSF was accused of killing more than 104 people, including 35 children, when they attacked the village of Wad al-Noura in Al-Jazira state, south of Khartoum. In just over a year, the war in Sudan has claimed thousands of lives, with some estimates putting the death toll as high as 150,000, according to the US envoy to Sudan, Tom Perriello.

Since the war began, more than 7mn people have fled their homes for other parts of Sudan, adding to 2.8mn already displaced from previous conflicts. Fighting continues daily, including in the capital, with both sides accused of war crimes including deliberately targeting civilians, indiscriminate shelling of residential areas and blocking humanitarian aid.

## Houthis detain Yemeni staff for UN, US organisations

Reuters  
Dubai

Houthi security forces have detained 11 United Nations personnel in Yemen over the past three days and the UN is seeking their safe and unconditional release as soon as possible, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said yesterday.

He said the UN was very concerned about the developments and was seeking clarification from the Houthis about why the Yemeni staff were detained. The two women and nine men work for five different UN agencies and the UN envoy for Yemen.

"We're pursuing all available channels to secure the safe and unconditional release of all of them as rapidly as possible," said Dujarric, adding that the UN also wanted access to the staff.

In a series of raids, armed Houthi intelligence officers detained at least nine UN employees, three employees of the US-funded pro-democracy group National Democratic Institute (NDI) and three employees of a local human rights group, three officials of Yemen's internationally recognised government told Reuters yesterday.

Intelligence officers of the Houthi group, which controls the capital Sanaa and large parts of the

north of the country, raided the homes and offices of these people, confiscating phones and computers. The internationally recognised government controls mostly southern parts of Yemen.

The NDI did not immediately respond to a Reuters request for confirmation or comment. A Houthi spokesperson did not immediately comment.

The Houthis, who are aligned to Iran, have attacked shipping in the Red Sea, drawing airstrikes from the United States and Britain. They have held around 20 Yemeni employees of the US embassy in Sanaa for the past three years. The embassy suspended operations in 2014.

## GCC condemns Israeli bombing of UNRWA school in Gaza

QNA  
Riyadh

The Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) has condemned, in the strongest terms, the bombing by the Israeli occupation forces of a school belonging to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) in the Nuseirat camp in the central Gaza Strip.

The GCC Secretary-General Jassim Mohamed al-Budaiwi, said in a statement that the Israeli bombing, which targeted a school housing displaced people and left dozens killed and injured, "constitutes compelling evidence of the brutality of the Israeli occupation forces and their blatant disregard for international conventions, agreements and treaties." The GCC chief called on the international community to assume its responsibilities and put



Members of a United Nations investigation team visit a school run by the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees which was hit during an Israeli army strike the day before, in the Nuseirat camp in the central Gaza Strip, yesterday, amid the ongoing conflict in the Palestinian territory.

pressure on the Israeli occupation forces to stop their gross and dangerous violations against the Palestinian people, stressing the need to take strict measures against the heinous crimes that contradict the most basic principles of international and humanitarian law.

The statement reiterated the

firm positions of the Gulf Co-operation Council countries towards the Palestinian issue, as it is the central and first issue for Arabs and Muslims, and supported the establishment of an independent Palestinian state on the borders of June 4, 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

### US aid pier in Gaza re-established after storm damage

The US yesterday re-established a temporary pier to boost aid deliveries into Gaza after the structure suffered storm damage and underwent repairs in a nearby port, the country's military said, AFP reported from Washington. Gaza has been devastated by Israeli operations against Palestinian group Hamas that are now entering their ninth month, uprooting the coastal territory's population and leaving them in dire need of humanitarian assistance. "US Central

Command (Centcom) successfully re-established the temporary pier in Gaza, enabling the continued delivery of much-needed humanitarian aid to the people of Gaza," the military command responsible for the Middle East said in a social media post. Vice Admiral Brad Cooper, deputy head of Centcom, told journalists that "we expect to resume delivery of humanitarian assistance from the sea in the coming days."

## Unemployment rate nearly 80% in Gaza: UN

AFP  
Geneva

The war in Gaza has seen the unemployment rate in the besieged Palestinian territory surge to nearly 80%, the UN said yesterday.

The UN's labour agency said the Israeli war on Gaza had "caused loss of jobs and livelihoods on a massive scale", while gross domestic product has also plunged.

Since the war began in October last year, "the unemployment rate in the Gaza Strip has reached a staggering 79.1%", the International Labour Organisation said, citing a new brief by the ILO and the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics.

In the West Bank, unemployment has reached 32%, the ILO added. The average unemployment rate across the West Bank and Gaza combined stood at 50.8%, it said.

However, these figures "do not account for those who have left the labour force altogether as job prospects proved unattainable", it said.

"The actual number of those who have lost their jobs is therefore even higher than what the unemployment figures suggest."

The ILO said real GDP had contracted by 83.5% in the Gaza Strip and by 22.7% in the West Bank over the past eight months.

"Our new bulletin shows that the grim toll the war in the Gaza Strip has taken on human lives, and the desperate humanitarian

situation it has caused, are accompanied by widespread devastation of economic activities and livelihoods," said Ruba Jaradat, the ILO regional director for Arab states.

The ILO said that in the Gaza Strip almost all private sector establishments "have either completely ceased or significantly reduced production", with the sector shedding 85.8% of its production value – equivalent to \$810mn – during the first four months of the war.

Gaza's economy now represents 4.1% of the total Palestinian economy, down from 16.7% before the war.

The unemployment update comes as the ILO holds its annual International Labour Conference in Geneva from June 3-14.





# Nigeria to procure 3.5mn electricity meters in 2024 to raise revenue

Reuters  
Lagos

Nigeria said yesterday it plans to procure 3.5mn electricity meters before the end of year to improve revenue for its cash-strapped power sector, where more than half of the customers are billed by estimates.

The government signed an agreement last month with the Nigerian Sovereign Investment Authority to finance 10mn electricity meters for households and businesses at the cost of 1.325tn naira (\$946mn), within five years.

While power cuts are common in Nigeria, inadequate metering is partly blamed for low revenue at utilities which fail to recover a

third of all invoices issued. “This year 2mn meters would be procured plus the 1.5mn meters being procured with World Bank support. We are going to have 3.5mn meters installed by the year end,” Adebayo Adelabu, Nigeria’s minister of power said at an energy conference organised by a local newspaper, *BusinessDay*.

The minister said most of the

supply would be sourced from international vendors, while a small quantity is expected to come from local manufacturers due to their limited capacity. Chinese companies have often supplied meters to Nigeria. Poor metering is a contentious issue in Nigeria, where 7mn out of about 13mn customers are unmetered according to government data. Previous efforts to

meter all customers have run into problems.

Customers without meters have to pay a fixed, estimated charge regardless of how erratic the supply from the creaking grid. Last year, 57% of all complaints received were about disputed bills, the country’s energy regulator said in a report.

The minister said competitive

bidding for the first batch of 1.5mn meters has already been concluded and delivery is expected within months.

He also said the government has agreed to release 20bn naira to electricity distribution companies to procure meters for big users for whom tariffs were raised in April. This will ensure they are all metered by September.

# S African parties cool towards ANC’s broad coalition plan

AFP  
Johannesburg

Plans by South Africa’s ANC to form a government of national unity after last week’s general election met a cool reception yesterday, with some potential partners reserving judgement or appearing hostile to the idea.

President Cyril Ramaphosa’s African National Congress (ANC) won 40 percent of the vote - its lowest score ever - and for the first time since the advent of democracy in 1994 it needs the backing of other groups to govern.



ANC’s President Cyril Ramaphosa arrives ahead of the National Executive Committee meeting looking at options to form a new South African government.

The new parliament is to meet in about 10 days and one of its first tasks will be to elect a president to form a new government. After marathon ANC talks on Thursday, Ramaphosa said the party had decided to try to band together with a broad group of opposition parties, ranging from the far right to the hard left.

But Julius Malema, leader of the radical leftist Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), seemed unwilling to join hands with rivals holding radically different political views. “We can’t share power with the enemy,” Malema wrote on X, formerly known as Twitter. “You can’t dictate the way forward as if you have won elections. We are not desperate for anything, ours is a generational mission.”



ANC supporters hold placards protesting against partnering with the DA, outside the National Executive Committee talks in Boksburg, in the East of Johannesburg.

The ANC will have 159 members in the 400-seat National Assembly, down from 230 in 2019. Ramaphosa said negotiators already held talks with parties including EFF, the Zulu nationalist Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), the centre-right Democratic Alliance (DA) and the anti-immigrant Patriotic Alliance (PA).

The EFF, which secured 39 lawmakers supporting land redistribution and the nationalisation of key economic sectors, is ideologically at odds with the DA, which won 87 seats with a liberal, free-market agenda. Yet, analyst Sandile Swana noted the two parties have cooperated in the past and Malema’s outburst might be tactical.

“To get anything out of nego-

tiations you have to demand the maximum upfront. It’s a starting position,” he said.

A broad coalition could work if it focused “on the technocratic aspects rather than the ideological aspects”, he added. South Africa has had a government of national unity before. The first democratic administration led by late anti-apartheid hero Nelson Mandela included the ANC and its bitter rivals the National Party and the IFP.

Yesterday, the IFP, which won 17 seats last week, said that “in principle” it was not averse to a repeat.

“However, the devil is in the details, which will become clearer in the coming days thus enabling the IFP to make a well-considered decision,” said spokesman Mkhuleko Hlengwa. PA spokesman Charles Cilliers similarly told AFP that the party, which won nine seats, retained “an open mind”. “We will consider the ANC’s proposal and then make a decision,” he said.

Others, like the right-wing ActionSA party, had already said they had no interest in working with the ANC and would remain in opposition. The DA is yet to comment on the matter.



A man jumps into the Indian Ocean waters to join other revellers in Hamarweyne district of Mogadishu, Somalia.

# Kagame critic ‘disappointed’ after Rwanda bars election bid

AFP  
Kigali

A prominent opponent of Rwandan President Paul Kagame said yesterday she was “disappointed” after being barred from standing in next month’s vote to challenge his three-decade rule. Diane Rwigara, leader of the People Salvation Movement, unveiled her election bid in May and submitted her candidacy last week.

But her name was missing from the provisional list of candidates announced by the electoral commission on Thursday. “After all the time, work and effort I put in, I am very disappointed to hear I am not on the list of presidential candidates,” the 42-year-old, who was also disqualified from the 2017

election, said on X. “Paul Kagame, why won’t you let me run?”

The election commission said she had failed to provide a criminal record statement as required, and that she had not met the threshold of the requisite 600 supporting signatures from citizens. Only two other candidates - Frank Habineza of the Democratic Green Party and independent Philippe Mpayimana - were cleared to run against Kagame.

A final candidate list is due on June 14, a month before the presidential and parliamentary votes on July 15. Rwigara was barred from the 2017 race over accusations she forged supporters’ signatures for her application. She was arrested and charged with forgery and inciting insurrection, then held behind bars for more than a year.

Rwigara is the daughter of in-

dustrialist Assinapol Rwigara, a former major donor to Kagame’s ruling Rwandan Patriotic Front party before he fell out with its leaders. Kagame, Rwanda’s de facto ruler since the 1994 genocide and president since 2000, has won three elections with more than 90 percent of the vote and is widely expected to be victorious again in July.

He has been praised for putting the country on the path of economic transformation after the genocide but he faces frequent criticism over rights abuses and intolerance of the opposition. In the run-up to this year’s vote, Rwandan courts had already rejected appeals from prominent opposition figures Bernard Ntaganda and Victoire Ingabire to remove previous convictions that effectively barred them from standing.

# Benin arrests five Nigeriens in rumbling border row

Authorities have arrested five Nigeriens at a port in Benin, accusing them of entering the site fraudulently, the latest in a tit-for-tat row between the West African nations. The Nigeriens were arrested late on Wednesday at the port of Seme-Kpodji, which has become a flashpoint in relations between the neighbours.

Landlocked Niger runs a pipeline from its oilfields to the port on the Atlantic coast to export its crude. Under regional sanctions imposed on Niger after a July coup, Benin closed the border but has since reopened it. Niger’s military rulers

however have refused to reopen their side. Benin announced on national television on Wednesday that it was lifting a “blockade” on Nigerien oil, saying “the tap on the Benin-Niger pipeline is unblocked again”.

Prosecutors also announced that five Nigeriens had been arrested at the port and accused at least two of being “agents” of the Niger junta. “To justify this fraudulent entry onto the site, the interested parties indicated that they were all employees of WAPCO Niger whose badges they displayed,” financial crimes and terrorism prosecutor

Elonm Mario Metonou said in a statement. But “at least two of these people are Nigerian agents in the service of the National Council for the Safeguard of the Homeland (CNSP)” he said.

They “had fake WAPCO Niger employee badges made for the occasion”, the prosecutor added, referring to the Chinese company that operates the pipeline. An investigation is ongoing, the statement said. Niger says those arrested are the “deputy general director of WAPCO” Ibra Hadiza and “four engineers on a supervisory mission”. — **AFP**

# Ivory Coast bets on solar in clean energy drive

AFP  
Boundiali

The sun beats down from a cloudless sky on the town of Boundiali, where Ivory Coast’s first solar power plant embodies the drive to embrace clean energy without abandoning fossil fuels. Unlike the wetter, cloudier south, the climate in northern Ivory Coast bordering Burkina Faso and Mali is hot and dry for around eight months of the year.

“Irradiance is very high” in the region, plant engineer Franck Alain Yayo told AFP, referring to the intensity of the Sun’s energy. The Boundiali plant, which opened in June 2023, aims to improve the electricity supply to more than 430,000 households, the energy ministry said. Although Ivory Coast has about 10 smaller solar power plants serving villages at a local level, Boundiali is the first on the national grid.

The country, which already ex-

ports about 10 percent of its electricity to neighbours, aims to generate nearly half of its energy from renewable sources by 2030. The International Energy Agency (IEA) estimates that half the population of sub-Saharan Africa has no access to electricity.

And yet, it added in a recent report: “Africa is home to 60 percent of the best solar resources globally, yet only one percent of installed solar PV (photovoltaic) capacity.”

While the continent has doubled its capacity to produce clean energy in the last 10 years, African renewables still account for just two percent of global capacity. The northern Ivorian town has some 68,000 solar panels bought from China laid out in rows across 36 hectares (89 acres).

The panels convert sunlight, not heat, into electricity. By the end of next year, the aim is to have twice as many panels to reach a production capacity of 80MWp (Megawatt peak, a measure of the maximum potential output).



Franck Alain Yayo, operations engineer of the photovoltaic solar power plant, looks at the photovoltaic panels at the Boundiali solar power plant in Boundiali.

That would save some 60,000 tonnes of CO2 equivalent per year, say the authorities. The 75.6-mn-euro (\$82.1-mn) cost of building the solar power station was financed by Ivory Coast, a German loan and a European Union grant. “This is the result of the EU’s

long-standing commitment to the renewable energy sector, with almost 140mn euros since 2017,” EU ambassador to Ivory Coast Francesca Di Mauro told AFP.

However, international public funding to support sub-Saharan Africa’s transition towards clean

energy will not be enough. Last year, the IEA called for private investment to be stepped up to account for 60 percent of financing. Solar power is currently a small part of the Ivorian energy mix - the Boundiali plant contributes just one percent of national production. Nearly 70 percent of the country’s electricity comes from gas-fired thermal power plants, while hydro-electric power stations account for the rest, all located in the south.

By 2030, Ivory Coast has pledged to increase its share of renewable energy to 45 percent, including nine percent solar, and to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 30 percent. Fossil fuels however still play a key role. The West African nation recently discovered two huge oil and natural gas deposits.

One of them, the Calao field, “will eventually meet the country’s electricity production needs”, said Energy Minister Sangafowa Coulibaly. It may also help reduce electricity bills, which would be a welcome relief to householders

after prices rose by 10 percent in January. “Every day the sun shines on our heads” the cost of production is “very low”, plant engineer Yayo said.

Yayo, who learned his skills in Burkina Faso, regretted that his country had neither the technology nor the expertise to train people. Ivory Coast’s state-run company CI-Energies, which handles Boundiali plant’s infrastructure, temporarily subcontracts to French civil engineering firm Eiffage.

It is Eiffage which is training many of the employees, most of them local people. In this region of around 92,000 people, some 350 have been hired since construction of the plant began. Most were taken on with short-term contracts to install solar panels or carry out maintenance. Among them was Oumar Konate, who previously worked in farming as well as doing odd jobs in town. Employment in the rural area was hard to come by, he said. “I prefer to work here. The pay is better. I can feed my family”



## US Supreme Court justices disclose Bali hotel stay, Beyoncé tickets, book deals

US Supreme Court justices reported receiving gifts including a stay in a Bali hotel and tickets to a Beyoncé concert, as well as nearly \$1.6mn in book advances and royalties in annual financial disclosure forms for 2023 released yesterday.

Conservative Justice Clarence Thomas, who has come under criticism for failing to disclose gifts from businessman and Republican donor Harlan Crow, revised his 2019 form to acknowledge he accepted “food and lodging” at a Bali hotel and at a California club.

Liberal Justice Kentaji Brown Jackson said she received four concert tickets from music superstar Beyoncé Knowles-Carter valued at \$3,711.84.

And conservative Justice Samuel Alito, under fire for reports that flags associated with Donald Trump’s attempts to overturn his 2020 election defeat, got a 90-day extension on his filing.

The filings showed the justices’ outside income, gifts and investment transactions last year.

They are closely watched as the justices have faced increasing scrutiny over ethics following revelations that some of them failed to report luxury trips, including on private jets, and real estate transactions.

Thomas reported no trips last year after disclosing trips to Dallas, Texas and New York’s Adirondack Mountains in 2022.

He cited security concerns after a leak of the court’s 2022 decision to overturn the constitutional right to abortion to justify the need to travel privately.

The disclosures showed the lucrative nature of book publishing for members of the nation’s highest judicial body.

The advance for Jackson’s memoir *Lovely One*, set for release in September, was reported as \$893,750.

In addition to the Beyoncé tickets, Jackson said she received artwork for her chambers worth \$12,500.

Conservative Justice Brett Kavanaugh listed book “royalty income” from Javelin Group and Regnery Publishing for \$340,000.

News website Axios reported on

Thursday that he is writing a memoir, expected to be published in 2025 or 2026.

Conservative Justice Neil Gorsuch reported \$250,000 in book royalties, as did liberal Justice Sonia Sotomayor for nearly \$87,000.

The publishing proceeds supplement the justices’ salaries.

This year the eight associate justices will receive \$298,500, with Chief Justice John Roberts getting \$312,200.

Alito, a member of the court’s 6-3 conservative majority, is embroiled in ethics controversy after refusing to recuse himself from two pending cases related to the 2020 election and the January 6, 2021 attack on the US Capitol.

Alito said the flags were flown at his

homes by his wife and neither of them knew the flags were associated with Trump’s “Stop the Steal” movement.

Under pressure from the drumbeat of criticism over ethical standards, the justices in November adopted their first code of conduct.

Critics and some congressional Democrats have said that the ethics code does not go far enough to promote transparency, continuing to leave decisions to recuse from cases to the justices themselves and providing no mechanism of enforcement.

Democrats reiterated the need for legislation last month after Alito rejected their calls for recusal in the 2020 election cases. – **Reuters**

## California’s ‘wildfire pollution killed 52,000 in a decade’

Pollution from California wildfires killed more than 52,000 people in a decade, a new study claimed yesterday, as the western United States grinds for a hot summer that could bring more blazes.

Vast areas of forest and grassland are scorched every year in California and other parts of the country, causing millions of dollars of destruction and sometimes costing lives.

However, researchers say particular matter released by the fires has a devastating effect on local populations that far outweighs the number of deaths directly attributable to them.

A study led by Rachel Connolly of the University of California Los Angeles found these tiny airborne pollutants – known as PM2.5 because they are 2.5 micrometers or less – are killing large numbers of people.

The team looked at data from 2008-2018 and isolated the amount of PM2.5 released specifically by wildfires, as opposed to that generated by other sources, like transport and manufacturing.

They found at least 52,480 premature deaths could be attributed to this specific pollution.

The cost of treating people affected by the pollutants was calculated at \$432bn.

“The importance of wildfire management will only grow in the coming decades as aridification intensifies with climate change and more regions are susceptible to fires,” the researchers wrote in their paper, published yesterday by *Science Advances*, a peer-reviewed journal of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

“These findings have direct implications for California, a state at the forefront of climate policy development with many fire-prone regions and a diverse population to protect,” they added. “Growing the evidence base on health impacts from wildfires and other climate-related exposures is critical.”

The study comes as much of California and other parts of the American West are sweltering under the first heatwave of the year.

Temperatures as high as 120° Fahrenheit (49° Celsius) scorched Death Valley on Thursday, while Las Vegas was broiling under 111F heat.

The early summer heatwave has raised concerns that the fire season could be a fierce one in 2024 after two relatively benign years, thanks to wet winters.

For now, the blazes breaking out have tended to be grass fires, which are easier to control and do not burn as hot.

However, as the summer heats up and the larger shrubs and trees start to dry out, they become vulnerable to downed power lines or discarded cigarettes.

After around 20 years of drought, and in a climate that is slowly aridifying, California has seen an alarming number of megafires this century – 18 of the 20 biggest fires in the state’s recorded history have occurred in the last two decades.

Wildfires are a natural part of the life cycle of wilderness.

However, climate change, caused by humanity’s unchecked burning of fossil fuels that pumps greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, is making them bigger, hotter and more unpredictable. – **AFP**

## Final spin: Wheel of Fortune host signs off after 41 seasons

The longest-serving TV game show host in history signed off yesterday after presiding over US primetime hit *Wheel of Fortune* for 41 seasons.

Pat Sajak has been a fixture in American homes since 1981, hosting more than 8,000 editions of a show that has become part of early evenings for millions of households.

“Well, the time has come to say goodbye,” he told viewers in a clip from the pre-recorded fi-

nal show. “It’s been an incredible privilege to be invited into millions of homes night after night, year after year, decade after decade.”

Sajak, 77, has described the half-hour show as “a safe place for family fun. No social issues, no politics, nothing embarrassing I hope – just a game.”

“Thank you for allowing me into your lives.”

He was renowned for his low-key, unflappable style, asking contestants to choose a conso-

nant or buy a vowel in the word-guessing game.

With his suit and even tan, he chatted with guests and bantered with co-host Vanna White, who joined the show in 1982 just a year after Sajak.

In 2019, Guinness World Records awarded Sajak the title of the longest career as a game show host for the same show.

*American Idol* host Ryan Seacrest will take over the role, joining the veteran White. – **AFP**

# Biden apologises to Zelensky for congressional delays to US aid

Reuters  
Paris

US President Joe Biden met Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelensky in Paris yesterday, apologized for congressional delays in approving the latest US aid package, and announced a fresh \$225mn tranche on the sidelines of D-Day events.

The meeting was their first face-to-face encounter since Zelensky visited Washington in December, when the two pressed Republicans to overcome opposition in their party to more support for Ukraine.

They will meet again next week at a G7 summit in Italy, as rich Western nations discuss using Russian assets frozen after the Ukraine invasion to provide \$50bn for Ukraine.

Zelensky told Reuters last month that Western countries are taking too long to make decisions about aid.

“You haven’t bowed down, you haven’t yielded at all, you continue to fight in a way that is...just remarkable,” Biden told the Ukrainian leader at the start of their meeting yesterday. “We’re not going to walk away from you.”

Biden apologised to Zelensky for the delays before the last US aid package passed in Congress in April.

He confirmed that he was signing an additional tranche of \$225mn to help Ukraine reconstruct its electric grid.

“I apologise for...those weeks of not knowing” what’s going to happen in terms



Biden with Zelensky at their bilateral meeting at the Intercontinental Hotel in Paris.

of funding, the US president said. “Some of our very conservative members (of Congress) were holding it up. But we got it done, finally.”

“We’re still in, completely, totally,” Biden said.

Zelensky thanked Biden for US military, financial and humanitarian support.

“It’s very important that you stay with us. This bipartisan support with the Congress, it’s very important that in this unity, United States of America, all American people stay with Ukraine, like it was during World War II, how United States helped to

save human lives, to save Europe,” he said in English.

In remarks in Normandy, France, on Thursday, Biden drew a link between the World War II battle against tyranny and Ukraine’s war with Russia, referring to Russian President Vladimir Putin as a tyrant.

Ukraine has struggled to defend the Kharkiv region after an offensive launched by Moscow on May 10 overran some villages.

The new security package includes air defence interceptors, artillery systems and munitions, armoured vehicles, anti-tank

weapons, and other capabilities, and will also help strengthen Ukraine’s air defences and reinforce Ukrainian capabilities across the front lines, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a statement.

Last week Biden shifted his position and decided Ukraine could launch US-supplied weapons at military targets inside Russia that are supporting the Kharkiv offensive.

The United States is trying to catch up with Ukraine’s weaponry needs, deputy national security adviser Jon Finer said in Washington on Thursday.

“If there were two things that we could provide an infinite number of to the Ukrainians to try to turn the tide in this war, it would be artillery munitions and air defence interceptors”, but the US lacked supply, Finer told a forum by the Centre for a New American Security.

Outside the physical battlefield, the Russia-Ukraine war is “also a competition that takes place in our factories, the factories in Europe, the factories in Ukraine”, the official said.

Reaching consensus on the frozen assets has been complicated, Daleep Singh, the US administration’s deputy national security adviser for international economics, told the same group.

“We’re waist-deep in the sausage-making of trying to strike a deal,” said Singh, adding that he was heading back to Italy to continue the negotiations.

**Putin: Russia does not need to use nukes to beat Ukraine - Page 11**

## Hunter Biden’s daughter testifies at his criminal trial

Hunter Biden’s daughter testified in her father’s defence yesterday that he seemed to respond well to drug treatment in the weeks before he bought a gun that prosecutors say he obtained illegally by failing to disclose his addiction.

Hunter Biden, President Joe Biden’s son, has pleaded not guilty in federal court to felony charges that include lying about his addiction when he applied for the Colt Cobra revolver in 2018 and illegally possessing the weapon for 11 days.

His daughter Naomi Biden, 30, told the jury at his criminal trial she saw her father in California then and “He seemed really great.”

On cross-examination, Naomi Biden was shown that she had been messaging and calling her father and unable to reach him.

“I can’t take this,” she texted her father several days after he purchased the gun. “I miss you so much and I just want to hang out.”

Prosecutors introduced prior testimony and evidence that they said showed Hunter Biden was arranging to buy illegal drugs at the time.

Naomi Biden was the last witness yesterday.

The jury was dismissed until Monday when the defence will announce whether Hunter Biden, 54, will testify.

Testifying can be risky for criminal defendants because it exposes them to cross-examination.

The jury in the 5-day-old first-ever criminal trial of a US president’s child heard witnesses including Hunter Biden’s ex-wife, former girlfriend and sister-in-law testify about his use of illegal drugs.

His sister-in-law, Hallie Biden, on Thursday recounted finding the gun and throwing it away out of concern for the safety of Hunter Biden and her children.

Prosecutors said that there was overwhelming evidence that Hunter Biden was actively using drugs in the weeks before and after he bought the gun and that he lied by answering “no” on a government screening document when asked if he was a drug user.

Defence attorney Abbe Lowell has said Biden did not intend to deceive because he did not consider himself an addict when he purchased the gun.

Hunter Biden told the judge at a 2023 hearing that he had been sober since 2019.

Earlier, prosecutors rested their case and Hunter Biden’s team asked the judge overseeing the case to acquit him.

His lawyers said the evidence did not support a conviction.

US District Judge Maryellen Noreika did not immediately rule on the request which is routinely filed by defendants and often denied.

In addition to Naomi Biden, Lowell called as witnesses an employee and the owner of the gun shop to try to cast doubts about the accuracy of the background check form at the centre of the case.

The trial follows another historic first – last week’s criminal conviction of Donald Trump, the first US president to be found guilty of a felony.

Trump is the Republican challenger to Joe Biden, a Democrat, in the November 5 election.

Trump and some Republicans in Congress have accused Democrats of pursuing the case and three other criminal prosecutions to prevent Trump from regaining power in his rematch with the president.

Congressional Democrats have pointed to cases including the Hunter Biden prosecution as evidence that Joe Biden is not using the justice system for political or personal ends.

Joe Biden told ABC News on Thursday that he would not pardon his son if convicted.

The sentencing guidelines for the charges against Biden are 15-21 months, but legal experts say defendants in similar cases often get shorter sentences and are less likely to be incarcerated if they abide by the terms of their pretrial release. – **Reuters**



A drone view shows migrants from Colombia, Peru and Panama as they walk along the border wall after crossing the border into the US, in Jacumba Hot Springs, California, US, as seen from Mexico.

## Migrants crossing Panama’s perilous Darien Gap in increasing numbers

Reuters  
Panama City

Just over 170,000 migrants crossed the perilous Darien Gap that connects Panama to Colombia over the first five months of this year, Panama’s migration agency said on Thursday, suggesting 2024 could again break records.

This is 2% higher than the nearly 167,000 who made the crossing in the same period of last year, data from the National Migration Service (SNM) showed, as more people embark on the dangerous crossing, seeking better opportunities in the US.

Last year marked a record year for migration through the Darien, during which more than half a million people crossed the stretch of thick jungle – where migrants who trek on foot for days often face robbery, violence, human trafficking and sexual abuse.

The record numbers prompted Panamanian authorities to seek international help and harden their

border security, though numbers have kept rising.

A new government, due to come into power on July 1, is set to study tightening its southern border in a bid to halt migration, though it has not detailed its strategy.

While numbers were up through early 2024, SNM recorded a significant decline in April and May attributed to the start of the rainy season.

Authorities said people from Venezuela, a country facing an economic and political crisis, represented the largest group crossing the Darien Gap.

SNM said that a further 4,499 people has made the crossing in the first six days of June, 901 of whom were children.

This year’s upward trend may be impacted by a broad asylum ban imposed by US President Joe Biden this week that could deter migrants from making the journey.

Uncertainty around the outcome of November’s election in the US, in which former Republican president Donald Trump is competing to return to the White House, could also impact migrant flows.



# UN ‘strongly condemns’ Myanmar military attacks on civilians

AFP  
United Nations, US

UN chief Antonio Guterres yesterday condemned recent attacks by Myanmar’s military that reportedly killed scores of civilians in western Rakhine state.

The Arakan Army (AA), an ethnic minority armed group, attacked junta forces in Rakhine in November, ending a ceasefire that had largely held since a military coup in 2021.

Guterres “strongly condemns the recent attacks by the Myanmar military that have reportedly killed scores of civilians, including

in Rakhine State,” his spokesman Stephane Dujarric said in a statement.

The AA says it is fighting for more autonomy for the ethnic Rakhine population in the western state, which is also home to around 600,000 members of the persecuted Rohingya Muslim minority.

This week the AA said junta troops had killed more than 70 civilians in a raid on Byain Phyu village, north of the state capital Sittwe. The junta said the claim was “propaganda”.

Phone and internet services have been all but cut off across Rakhine state, making it difficult to verify reports of violence.

Guterres also called for an end to the “ongoing persecution” of the Rohingya minority who find themselves trapped between the fighting between the junta and the AA.

Rohingya activists have accused the AA of forcibly displacing tens of thousands of members of their community, and burning and looting their homes.

They have also accused the junta of forcibly recruiting thousands of Rohingya to fight against the AA, as the military loses ground.

Hundreds of thousands of Rohingya fled Rakhine for neighbouring Bangladesh in 2017 during a crackdown by the military that is now the subject of a United Nations genocide court case.

# Two British judges quit Hong Kong’s top court

Reuters  
Hong Kong

Two British judges have resigned from Hong Kong’s top court, about a week after a landmark verdict that convicted 14 prominent democratic activists of subversion, amid a national security crackdown on dissent in the financial hub.

In a statement, the Hong Kong judiciary said two prominent British judges, Lawrence Collins and Jonathan Sumption, had tendered their resignations from the city’s Court of Final Appeal (CFA), where they served as non-permanent judges.

“I have resigned from the Court of Final Appeal because of the political situation in Hong Kong, but I continue to have the fullest confidence in the court and the total independence of its members,” Collins was quoted as telling the *Financial Times*.

Sumption confirmed he had resigned and said he would make a statement next week. Collins offered no immediate response to a request for comment.

The presence of top foreign jurists on Hong Kong’s top court has long been seen as a symbol of the rule of law that underpins the city’s international image.

Hong Kong’s chief justice Andrew Cheung said he noted the resignations with regret.

“All judges and judicial officers

will continue to abide by the judicial oath and administer justice in full accordance with the law, without fear or favour, self-interest or deceit,” Cheung said in a statement yesterday.

Cheung said the city’s top court now has four local non-permanent judges and eight non-permanent judges from other common law jurisdictions, including two overseas judges appointed last year and this May.

The Hong Kong Bar Association yesterday said it “strongly believes that their resignations will not affect the ability of our apex court in discharging its judicial functions”.

It also expressed “every confidence” in the independence of Hong Kong’s judicial system.

The resignations swell the number of British jurists who have severed ties to Hong Kong’s highest court amid a years-long crackdown on dissent under a China-imposed national security law in 2020 following mass pro-democracy protests. In a separate statement of regret at the resignations, Hong Kong’s chief executive, John Lee, said the new law had helped the city transition from “chaos to order”.

Robert Reed, who resigned from the CFA in 2022, said at the time his continuation would have appeared to endorse an administration “which has departed from values of political freedom and freedom of expression.”



Chinese Coast Guard personnel aboard their rigid inflatable boat, block a Philippine Coast Guard rigid inflatable boat carrying marine scientists in the waters of the South China Sea.

# Philippines accuses Chinese boats of ‘dangerous’ actions

AFP  
Manila

As two Philippine vessels meet on the high seas to transfer a sick Filipino soldier, China Coast Guard boats shadow, block and bump them, according to video released by the Philippine Coast Guard yesterday.

The incident happened last month during the medical evacuation of a soldier who was stationed on a grounded Philippine Navy vessel, the BRP Sierra Madre, on Second Thomas Shoal in the disputed South China Sea.

The Philippine Coast Guard said they had deployed a boat on May 19 to retrieve the soldier from a Philippine Navy speedboat, and had informed the China Coast Guard of the “humanitarian nature” of their mission.

In a series of videos released by the Philippine Coast Guard, a Chinese-flagged inflatable speedboat is seen bumping into the two stationary Philippine vessels as they prepare to transfer the patient.

Other boats - identified by the Philippines as belonging to the China Coast Guard - are also seen shadowing and blocking the path of the Philippine Coast Guard boat.

The Chinese boats “engaged in dangerous manoeuvres” and “intentionally rammed” the Philippine Navy vessel, Philippine Coast Guard spokesman for the West Philippine Sea Jay Tarriela said in a statement.

“The barbaric and inhumane behaviour displayed by the China Coast Guard has no place in our society,” Tarriela said.

“What should have been a simple medical evacuation operation was subjected to harassment,” he said. “Their actions clearly demonstrated their intention to prevent the sick personnel from receiving the proper medical attention he urgently needed.” China’s foreign ministry said in response to the accusation it could “allow” the Philippines to deliver “necessary supplies” and evacuate personnel from the Sierra Madre if Beijing were notified in advance.

“However, the Philippines should not use this as an excuse to ship construction materials to the deliberately grounded warship in an attempt to permanently occupy the Ren’ai Reef,” spokeswoman Mao Ning said, using China’s name for Second Thomas Shoal.

Beijing claims almost the entire waterway and there has been a series of confrontations involving Chinese and Philippine vessels near contested reefs, often around Second Thomas Shoal in the Spratly Islands.

Second Thomas Shoal is about 200km from the western Philippine island of Palawan and more than 1,000km from China’s nearest major landmass, Hainan island.

The Filipino soldier was eventually loaded onto the Philippine Coast Guard boat and taken to Palawan, where he received hospital treatment. The Philippines did not provide details of the soldier’s medical condition.

Other videos released by the Philippines yesterday showed China Coast Guard vessels shadowing three Philippine Coast Guard speedboats carrying marine scientists from the University of the Philippines this week.

The scientists were examining crushed coral found at two sandbars in Sabina Shoal, also in the Spratlys.

## New landslides in Papua New Guinea likely, warn experts

Further landslides will likely plague the area where part of a mountain collapsed onto a remote village in Papua New Guinea two weeks ago, New Zealand geological experts warned yesterday, as authorities ended search and rescue efforts. It remains unclear how many people died in the massive landslide in PNG’s Enga region on May 24, with the national government reporting more than 2,000 people have been buried alive and a UN estimate putting the death toll at around 670. Only 11 bodies have been recovered so far. New Zealand geotechnical engineers sent to Papua New Guinea released a report raising concerns about the stability of the ground not just in the landslide but also to either side of it. “We believe that there is real potential for further landslides to occur in the near or medium term,” Aaron Waterreus, the leader of the Fire and Emergency New Zealand (FENZ) team said.

## College entrance examination



Students enter a school on the first day of the national college entrance examination, known as “Gaokao”, in Wuhan, in central China’s Hubei province yesterday.

# Japan protests over China vessels near islands

AFP  
Tokyo

Tokyo lodged a protest with Beijing yesterday after four Chinese vessels that were believed to be armed approached Japan-controlled disputed islands in the East China Sea, the government’s top spokesman said.

The incident was “the first time four (Chinese) ships carrying what appear to be cannons entered Japanese territorial waters” around the Senkaku islands, Yoshimasa Hayashi told reporters.

The islets are also claimed by China, which calls them the Diaoyus, and the territorial dispute is a long-running sore point between the neighbours.

Relations suffered in 2012 when Tokyo “nationalised”

some of the remote islands, and Japanese officials regularly protest at the presence of Chinese coast guard and other vessels in the surrounding waters.

Yesterday morning, the four Chinese coast guard ships entered territorial waters controlled by Tokyo and left two hours later after repeated warnings from the Japanese coast guard, Hayashi said.

“The Chinese coast guard ships’ intrusion into our territorial waters is a violation of international laws, so we have lodged a strong protest through a diplomatic route,” he told reporters, adding the incident “can’t be tolerated”.

A Japanese coast guard spokesman confirmed it was the first time that all the ships in a group entering the waters were believed to have been equipped with such weapons.

# Samsung workers in South Korea stage first strike: union

AFP  
Seoul

Workers at tech giant Samsung Electronics in South Korea staged the first strike at the company yesterday, the head of a major union representing tens of thousands of people said.

Samsung Electronics is one of the world’s largest smartphone makers and also one of the only companies globally to produce high-end memory chips used for generative AI, including top-of-the-line artificial intelligence hardware from industry leaders such as Nvidia.

Management at the firm, the world’s biggest producer of memory chips, has been locked in negotiations with the union over wages and benefits since January but the two sides have failed to narrow their differences.

Lee Hyun-kuk, vice-president of the National Samsung Electronics Union, said yesterday’s collective action was “largely symbolic, but it’s a beginning”.

“We have plans for follow-up strikes if the management is not willing to communicate with us openly,” Lee said. “The union is not ruling out an all-out general strike.”

Union head Son Woo-mok added

that the “first strike at Samsung Electronics” was taking place through “the use of paid leave, and it is understood that many employees are participating”.

“It’s difficult to provide an exact number, but from what I’ve seen of the workplace attendance in the morning, there is a significant difference from the usual,” he said.

Samsung Electronics said it has been “diligently engaging in negotiations with the union and will continue to do so”, and that there is “no impact on production and business activities”.

The paid leave usage rate yesterday was “lower than that of June 5 last year”, which, like June 7, was

sandwiched between a public holiday and a weekend, the company said in a statement.

Around 10 workers held a protest in front of Samsung’s major office in Seoul yesterday, chanting, “Respect labour!”

Samsung Electronics is the flagship subsidiary of South Korean giant Samsung Group, by far the largest of the family-controlled conglomerates that dominate business in Asia’s fourth-largest economy.

The company has offered workers a pay hike of 5.1% this year.

The union said yesterday it “is willing to positively review” that offer if Samsung also provides an addi-

tional day of annual leave and transparent performance-based bonuses.

Taiwan-based market research firm TrendForce said that the strike would not impact DRAM and NAND Flash production, nor would it cause any shipment shortages.

Samsung accounts for a significant chunk of global output of the high-end chips, but the strike involves headquarters employees, not workers on the production lines, TrendForce said in a report.

“Finally, fabs rely heavily on automated production and require minimal human labour. Therefore, the strike will not have any substantial impact on the future

memory supply,” the report said.

Even so, the strike carries historical importance, “since Samsung resisted unionisation and engaged in union-busting for so long”, Vladimir Tikhonov, professor of Korean Studies at the University of Oslo, said.

He said the collective action showed that “there is a gradual tendency towards empowerment of labour in South Korea”.

Samsung Electronics avoided the unionisation of its employees for almost 50 years - sometimes adopting ferocious tactics, according to critics - while rising to become the world’s largest smartphone and semiconductor manufacturer.



# India’s central bank holds rates, raises growth outlook

Reuters  
Mumbai

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) kept its key interest rate unchanged yesterday in a widely expected move, saying robust economic growth will give it space to focus on bringing down

inflation towards its medium-term target of 4%.  
The central bank raised its economic growth outlook for the current year but kept its outlook on inflation unchanged, though it warned of persistent price pressures on food.  
Governor Shaktikanta Das said the RBI wants to ensure that infla-

tion aligns with its target on a sustained basis.  
The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC), which consists of three RBI and three external members, kept the repo rate unchanged at 6.50% for an eighth straight policy meeting.  
Four out of six MPC members voted in favour of the repo rate

decision. J R Varma and Ashima Goyal, both external members of the committee, voted for a 25 basis point cut in rates.  
India’s economy, Asia’s third-largest, grew faster than expected in the January-March quarter but a surprising outcome in the recently concluded national elections rattled markets. A weakened

mandate for the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party-led National Democratic Alliance has raised concerns about a slower pace of fiscal consolidation alongside higher welfare spending.  
All but one of 72 economists in a Reuters poll had expected the MPC to hold the repo rate steady at 6.50%. Most economists be-

lieve the 6.50% rate is the peak of the current cycle and are not expecting any move until the October-December quarter.  
The committee decided by a majority of four out of six votes to retain the ‘withdrawal of accommodation’ stance, with Varma and Goyal voting for a change in stance to ‘neutral’.

# Rural vote fall cost Modi a decisive poll win

Reuters  
New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s party lost a third of its rural parliamentary constituencies in last month’s election, a voter analysis shows, reflecting discontent in the countryside over lack of jobs and high inflation.  
The Bharatiya Janata Party’s poor showing in the vast heartland cost the ruling party its majority in parliament, forcing Modi to depend on regional allies to muster the simple majority required to govern the world’s most populous country.  
The BJP, which held 201 rural constituencies in the 543-member parliament, retained only 126 of them in the mammoth election, the analysis showed.  
The seats do not include those in the regions of Assam, Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh, as a reorientation of constituencies there meant there is no direct comparison with data from the prior election.  
Rahul Verma, a political expert at the New Delhi-based Centre For Policy Research, said Modi’s party especially lost ground in the big heartland states of Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan, which have trailed more prosperous southern and western parts of India in the pace of economic development.  
“The rural distress would have played a factor,” he said.  
Under Modi, India has become one of the world’s fastest-growing economies, but there are too few jobs for the millions entering the workforce each year and growth has been uneven.  
Families in rural India, home to

60% of its 1.4bn people, have seen incomes halve as they also struggle to keep up with rising costs and fewer jobs.  
Modi campaigned on his track record of rapid growth, government programmes to help the poor and muscular Hindu nationalism aimed at the party’s conservative base.  
But the results showed the BJP ceding ground in the country’s 344 rural or semi-rural seats to the opposition that targeted employment, inflation and income disparity as core issues.  
“Perhaps BJP was confident before the elections, that’s why it did not make any major announcements for the rural parts in its interim budget, and that could have played a role,” Verma added.  
The unemployment rate rose to 8.1% in April from 7.4% in March, private think-tank Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy has said. The figure was at 6% before the Covid-19 pandemic.  
The BJP has acknowledged employment was a factor in the election and said “whatever best can be done is being done”.  
Its vote share in the 126 seats the BJP managed to retain dropped about three percentage points. Modi’s average margin of victory in those seats fell to 15.6% in this election from 22.9% in 2019.  
Meanwhile in 179 urban seats, the BJP managed to hold on to 78 of the 90 it had won in the last election.  
Voters were worried about inflation, unemployment, decreasing income and the government’s handling of corruption and fraud, according to the Lokniti-CSDS post-election survey published by the *Hindu* newspaper.



President Droupadi Murmu speaks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi after he was elected for his third term following the country’s general election, at the presidential palace, Rashtrapati Bhavan, in New Delhi.

# India PM Modi, ministers to be sworn in tomorrow


AFP  
New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be sworn in at the weekend after securing a third term in office following an unexpectedly close election that forced his party to rely on coalition partners to keep him in power.  
Modi and his ministers will take the oath of office tomorrow evening, a statement from President Droupadi Murmu’s office said yesterday.  
Modi’s Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) ruled outright for the past decade but failed to repeat its previous two landslide wins this time around, defying analyst expectations and exit polls.

He was instead forced into quick-fire talks with the 15-member National Democratic Alliance (NDA) coalition, which guaranteed him the parliamentary numbers to govern, although there are no indications yet of any concessions he may have had to offer in return.  
Modi presented signed letters of support showing his majority to President Murmu, who in turn invited him to form the next government.  
“I thank the people that they gave the NDA government a third chance to serve them,” Modi said yesterday evening.  
“This is the opportunity and will of the people and I thank them with my heart for this opportunity,” he said.  
Modi earlier addressed a meeting inside India’s parliament of nearly 300 lawmakers

forming his coalition and thanked them for unanimously supporting his leadership.  
The meeting was a formality after the leaders of each party guaranteed their backing this week. It was also an opportunity to demonstrate the concord between Modi and his new partners in government.  
“Modi has a vision and a zeal, and his execution is perfect, and he is executing all his policies with a true spirit,” said Chandrababu Naidu, the leader of the premier’s largest coalition party ally.  
“Today India has the right leader for the right time - that is, Narendra Modi.”  
Other party leaders adorned Modi with a garland of purple flowers, while Nitish Kumar, another key supporter, bent to touch the 73-year-old’s feet in a traditional gesture of respect.

**Four Indian students drown in Russian river**  
Four Indian medical students have drowned while swimming in a river in northwest Russia, officials said. The incident happened on Tuesday in the Volkhov river in the city of Veliky Novgorod, the regional investigative committee said. “The students were swimming...in an area where bathing is banned,” it said. “Two of them started being carried away by the current and two others jumped in to save them. After some time, all four went under water”. The Indian consulate in the city of Saint Petersburg said a fifth student “was saved,” adding that they were pursuing medical studies at the university in Veliky Novgorod. It said their families had been contacted and efforts were on to repatriate their bodies “as soon as possible”. Russian investigators said yesterday that two bodies had been recovered so far. Veliky Novgorod, one of the oldest cities in Russia, is around 150km south of Saint Petersburg. The Volkhov River flows through the city on the way to vast Lake Ladoga in northwestern Russia.

**Ireland elections**  
  
Sinn Féin president Mary Lou McDonald casts her vote in the European Union’s parliamentary and Ireland’s local elections, in Dublin, Ireland, yesterday.

# Court bails Gandhi in latest defamation case

AFP  
Bengaluru, India

An Indian court yesterday granted bail to opposition leader Rahul Gandhi in the latest of several defamation cases brought against him for accusing Prime Minister Narendra Modi or his party of corruption.  
Gandhi, 53, has faced numerous legal cases brought by members of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and was last year briefly disqualified from parliament after a criminal libel conviction.  
He is one of several top opposition leaders to face criminal proceedings in cases they claim are politically driven by Modi’s government.  
The latest case stems from advertisements published by Gandhi’s Congress party accusing the BJP of corruptly taking commis-

sions from infrastructure projects in southern Karnataka state.  
Gandhi, 53, has not spent any time in custody over the charge.  
He was granted bail in a five-minute procedural hearing held to determine if he should remain at liberty, Congress spokesperson Randeep Surjewala confirmed.  
Two other senior Congress figures in Karnataka state had already been bailed last week, neither of whom were in custody beforehand.  
Gandhi was sentenced to two years imprisonment last year in 2023 in a separate case in Gujarat but was not jailed after appealing with India’s top court.  
The sentence did, however, force his brief disqualification from parliament until the Supreme Court suspended his conviction.

# Sunak apologises for leaving D-Day events early

Reuters  
London

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, in a new setback to his election campaign, apologised yesterday for leaving D-Day commemorations early to give an interview in which he attacked the main opposition party.  
Sunak’s decision not to stay at the event in northern France alongside other world leaders on Thursday was met with dismay in his Conservative Party, which opinion polls suggest faces the prospect of a heavy defeat in the national election on July 4.

The leader of the opposition Labour Party, Keir Starmer, remained in Normandy for the duration of events marking the 80th anniversary of the D-Day landings and was seen talking to leaders including Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky.  
“On reflection, it was a mistake not to stay longer, and I’ve apologised for that, but I also don’t think it’s right to be political in the midst of D-Day commemorations,” Sunak told reporters. “The focus should rightly be on the veterans.”  
Sunak said his plans had been set long before the start of the election campaign.  
US President Joe Biden, Brit-

ain’s King Charles and other leaders gathered at the events in Normandy.  
Sunak spoke at a British-led event but delegated other duties to ministers including Foreign Secretary David Cameron, who was pictured with Biden, French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz.  
One usually loyal Conservative politician, who asked not to be identified, said: “I can’t explain it and I won’t.”  
The lawmaker said it could become the “Gillian Duffy moment” - a reference to 2010 when Gordon Brown, who was then prime minister, apologised for being caught

on tape calling a voter “a bigoted woman”, a moment seen as a turning point in a campaign he lost.  
Sunak’s Conservatives are lagging about 20 points behind Labour in opinion polls.  
His campaign had an inauspicious start last month when he announced the election date under a downpour of rain, competing to be heard against Labour supporters blaring a pop song associated with their party’s crushing 1997 election victory.  
In another blow, Brexit campaigner Nigel Farage took over leadership of the right-wing Reform UK party and said this week he would stand in the election.

Sunak has said he is the person best placed to look after Britain’s security and that he will introduce mandatory national service if he stays in power.  
But the wealthy former hedge fund executive has often been portrayed as out of touch with ordinary people during a campaign in which a cost-of-living crisis is a big issue, and he was asked repeatedly about the decision while campaigning yesterday.  
Chris Hopkins, political research director at the polling company Savanta, said Sunak’s “political misjudgement seems almost laser-guided in causing Rishi Sunak and the Conservative Party

as much political pain as humanly possible.”  
Senior Labour spokesman Jonathan Ashworth accused Sunak of “choosing to prioritise his own vanity TV appearances over our veterans,” and “it is yet more desperation, yet more chaos.”  
Liberal Democrat Leader Ed Davey accused Sunak of a “total dereliction of duty.”  
Farage said Sunak’s decision showed “he doesn’t care about this country or its history.”  
In the interview with ITV on Thursday, Sunak doubled down on assertions that Labour would raise taxes by £2,000 (\$2,500) per household if it took power.





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GULF TIMES

## ‘Modi premium’ in India’s financial markets set to erode after weak victory

Indian voters’ tepid endorsement of Prime Minister Narendra Modi leaves a weakened mandate for business-friendly reforms and has foreign money managers thinking twice about unleashing another wave of investment in the world’s fastest-growing economy.

Modi’s Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) secured a third term in government but without a majority of its own for the first time since sweeping to power a decade ago.

India’s stock market weathered its heaviest selling since the onset of the pandemic as the votes were tallied and net foreign selling was a record \$1.5bn on Tuesday. Stocks recovered some ground on Wednesday.

With the party losing most ground in rural areas, investors say land and labour reforms, that had been expected to unlock value and growth, will probably fall by the wayside while leaders focus on shoring up rural support which had faltered.

For global fund managers, who despite strong buying last year are generally underweight on India according to HSBC research, the uncertainty is reason enough for caution.

“You have the feeling that while the government was really geared towards business, there are other parts of the country that felt left behind,” said Alessia Berardi, head of emerging macro strategy at Amundi Investment Institute — the research arm of Europe’s biggest asset manager.

**“Over the past decade, India has been rewarded with a valuation premium for government stability”**

Bonds weakened as traders priced risks that welfare spending goes up and budget consolidation is delayed. The tightly-managed rupee skidded to a seven-week low.

“Over the past decade, India has been rewarded with a valuation premium for government stability...some of that valuation premium came out today,” said Vikas Pershad, who manages India and Asia equities portfolios for M&G Investments.

“I think priorities might shift a little in the short-term... so more benefits for the rural consumer, the rural working poor.”

Investors say the election outcome — with Modi’s alliance winning 293 of 543 lower-house seats — is unlikely to derail this trajectory, nor is India’s broadly stable currency and attractive debt market likely to be unduly ruffled.

“We’re still seeing strong growth coming from India...I think it’s a buying opportunity,” said Kristina Hooper, chief global market strategist at Invesco in New York.

But few are talking about adding overall exposure and many are adjusting their portfolio following the result.

Next year’s budget due in July is shaping as the next test of policy commitments, with expectations that India will use a recent windfall surplus from the central bank to reduce the deficit quicker below the targeted 5.1% for the year.

“Typically the budget is used to announce the five-year policies, so we should get a clearer idea of what the game plan is,” said Sonal Varma, chief economist for India at Nomura in Singapore.

Foreign money is also sensitive to relative market moves, and gushed into India last year as managers with mandates to invest in Asia took down positions in China’s tumbling markets and bought up in India — something that is beginning to reverse.

And uncertainty never helps. “I’m telling clients don’t be in a hurry to invest in India,” said Paul Christopher, head of global market strategy at Wells Fargo Investment Institute in St. Louis, Missouri. “It’s still a pretty chaotic place.” — Reuters

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# The enduring influence of Europe’s far-right

By Jan-Werner Mueller  
Paris

An all-too-familiar spectre is haunting Europe, one that reliably appears every five years. As citizens head to the polls to elect a new European Parliament, observers are once again asking whether far-right anti-European parties will gain ground and unite to destroy the European Union from within.

To be sure, sceptics of this doomsday scenario have always argued that the far-right will remain divided, because nationalist internationalism is a contradiction in terms. But it is more likely that specific policy disagreements — mainly over the Ukraine war — and drastically diverging political strategies will prevent Europe’s various far-right parties from forming a “supergroup.”

Before the last parliamentary elections in 2019, Europe was transfixed by the idea that Steve Bannon, an American political operative promoting himself and the dark arts of populism, was going to work his magic to unite the bloc’s far-right parties. But most observers failed to realise that the alliance envisaged by Bannon and his acolytes was, in fact, illegal. And while the far-right performed well at the polls that year, it remained split between two major groups in Parliament: Identity and Democracy (ID) and the slightly less Europhobic European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR). Predictions that the far-right would paralyse Parliament — similar to the Republicans who regularly threaten to shut down the US Congress — proved unfounded.

At the same time, the conventional wisdom that stridently nationalist parties cannot unite across borders reflects historical ignorance and political complacency. In the 19th century, anti-imperialist liberals from across Europe coalesced around the principle of national self-determination and helped one another in various struggles against the Habsburg and other empires.

True, if chauvinistic nationalism were ascendant in every EU member state, negotiations in Brussels would likely be harder than they already are. But far-right parties are converging on a vision of the EU itself and, after the debacle of Brexit, have disavowed plans to leave the bloc. Instead, they seek to



minimise the role of the European Commission, making its president into a mere “employee” of the member states, as Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban put it last year. This almost Gaullist vision of a “Europe of fatherlands” is far more acceptable to voters who fear that drastic measures like quitting the EU would lead to chaos.

But fundamental policy differences stand in the way of a unified far-right. Orban, who has been pushing for “occupying” rather than divorcing Brussels, is advocating an alliance between French opposition leader Marine Le Pen, whose National Rally party is the driving force behind the ID group, and Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, the heavyweight figure in the ECR. But Le Pen is infamously soft on Russian President Vladimir Putin, while Meloni has gained international standing by being a staunch supporter of Ukraine (which has blunted criticism of Meloni’s authoritarian domestic policies).

Furthermore, Orban, who withdrew his Fidesz party from the mainstream conservative European People’s Party (EPP) in 2021 to avoid being expelled, is closely aligned with Putin — more so than Le Pen. So, it is difficult to imagine Fidesz, which is eager to join the ECR after the elections, having a harmonious

relationship with Meloni and Poland’s stridently anti-Russian Law and Justice party.

There is also the problem of diverging political strategies. Le Pen, her sights set on the 2027 French presidential election, is continuing her strategy of dédialisation. To “de-demonise” her National Rally party — formerly called the National Front — and render it acceptable to the mainstream requires making it look more like a reputable centre-right party than a fringe nationalist movement (while simultaneously blaming the political chaos in the fractious French parliament on the far-left).

As part of this effort, Le Pen has been distancing herself from the historical revisionism of her father, Jean-Marie Le Pen, the party’s previous leader who notoriously called the Nazi gas chambers a “detail” of history. So, when Maximilian Krah, the leading candidate for the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party, claimed that not everyone who wore a Nazi SS uniform was a criminal, it was a gift for Le Pen. By insisting on the AfD’s expulsion from the ID group, she could prove her party’s intolerance for revisionists.

But not every far-right party seeks de-demonisation. Politicians who bet on radicalisation usually want to draw the mainstream

closer to them, not the other way around. After all, conservatives and Christian Democrats have been increasingly willing to form coalitions with the far-right. Even those who refuse to work with these parties often adopt their rhetoric, giving legitimacy to their positions.

It seems unlikely that Europe’s far-right parties will unite (although if they did somehow manage it, their group would be the second-largest in the European Parliament). But the continued mainstreaming of the far-right means that these parties will almost surely remain influential. This reflects more the centre-right’s weakness and opportunism than the far-right’s strength. As the Dutch scholar Cas Mudde has emphasised, if the EPP’s right flank continues to court Meloni — or even threatens to abandon a mainstream coalition with Renew Europe and the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats — far-right parties might realise their goals, from abolishing asylum to weakening the European Green Deal, even if they never officially come to power. — Project Syndicate

• Jan-Werner Mueller, Professor of Politics at Princeton University, is the author, most recently, of Democracy Rules (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2021; Allen Lane, 2021).

## Europe needs a Green Deal 2.0

By Frans Timmermans  
Brussels

The European Union’s Green Deal is one of the bloc’s most successful and transformational policy frameworks, offering a clear path toward full sustainability by mid-century. But emerging challenges, such as an increasingly adversarial geopolitical landscape and rapidly escalating climate and biodiversity crises, call for recalibrating the Green Deal to ensure it can achieve its goals.

There are three ways to strengthen the framework. The first is to align the fight against climate change with the effort to make the EU more competitive. Europe’s energy prices, which have skyrocketed to unsustainable levels following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, are the root cause of the EU’s declining competitiveness. The invasion and subsequent disruption of Russian natural-gas supplies showed that the bloc’s continued dependence on fossil fuels both exacerbates climate change and poses an immediate risk to Europe’s economic future. Notably, EU member states currently pay twice as much for natural gas as the US and other countries do.

To remain competitive, European countries must accelerate the decarbonisation of their energy systems. The success of the EU’s RePowerEU plan, which rapidly reduced Europe’s dependence on Russian gas, shows that this is feasible. But without taking meaningful steps to reduce its reliance on large quantities of oil and liquefied natural gas, the EU risks achieving only partial decarbonisation, leaving it exposed to volatile energy prices.

By launching an EU-wide, decade-long effort to decarbonise Europe’s energy systems and industries, the



bloc’s competitiveness could be significantly improved. Building on the EU’s Fit for 55 initiative, especially the Emissions Trading System (ETS), would enable policymakers to establish the necessary regulatory and investment frameworks to accelerate the clean-energy transition while navigating the turbulent energy market in the coming years.

To be sure, this effort would require the EU’s 27 member states to overcome their preference for maintaining separate industrial policies. Under a Green Deal 2.0, member states’ political and financial power could be consolidated into a single European industrial transition plan.

For this transition plan to work, it must be extended to regions like the Mediterranean and Ukraine, which are crucial to providing sufficient amounts of low-carbon energy and raw materials. Regional energy co-operation could also help to address two other major challenges facing the EU: migration and Ukraine’s accession.

The second way to strengthen the European Green Deal is to foster a just transition to a low-carbon economy. In addition to accelerating the clean-energy shift,

policymakers must take measures to ensure that no one is left behind, especially amid high inflation and the ongoing cost-of-living crisis.

So far, the European Green Deal has successfully relied on redistributive mechanisms, such as income support and subsidies, to mitigate the higher inequality that typically accompanies economic transformations. But redistribution is not enough to ensure a just energy transition. A Green Deal 2.0 must emphasise solidarity and implement radical reforms in the housing and energy markets to enable low-income households and small and medium-size enterprises to participate fully in a rapidly decarbonising economy.

Pre-distributive policy instruments, such as education, job training, urban planning, and public transport, must play a central role in the next phase of Europe’s energy transition. After all, the European Green Deal is not just about income and wealth redistribution but also about the fair distribution of hope, opportunity, and well-being.

Lastly, the EU must reaffirm its commitment to biodiversity. The Green Deal’s biodiversity framework has faced significant

setbacks over the past few months, as increased fears of a farmers’ revolt impelled the European Commission to cancel or delay several regulations and provisions. Although the damage to the EU’s overall climate objectives has been limited, the ease with which essential measures were scrapped underscores the framework’s insufficient focus on biodiversity, especially compared to its climate and energy components.

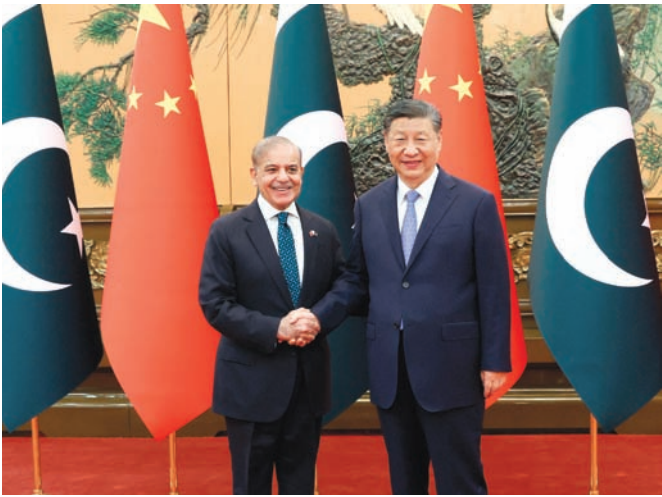
The Green Deal’s energy framework has not faced similar challenges, even amid rising living and capital costs. This is because the energy transition offers tangible economic benefits to society, businesses, and households, thanks to the ETS’s effective carbon-pricing mechanism. By contrast, preserving biodiversity lacks such an economic rationale and relies instead on limited political will.

But there is a strong economic argument for biodiversity. Simply put, the current way to monetise a tree is to cut it down and sell it. By assigning a monetary value to the carbon content stored by trees through the ETS, a Green Deal 2.0 could make afforestation profitable.

A thriving environment can play a pivotal role in climate mitigation and adaptation, and it should be valued accordingly. To this end, the European Commission is developing an ETS-type instrument for the land-use sectors using its Carbon Removal Certification framework, which a Green Deal 2.0 could facilitate. Once we recognise that preserving biodiversity is not just a moral and health imperative but also a smart business strategy, we will be able to start moving in the right direction. — Project Syndicate

• Frans Timmermans, a former executive vice president of the European Commission, is Co-Chair of the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy.





Chinese President Xi Jinping with Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing.

## PM Sharif meets China's Xi in Beijing ahead of IMF talks

China's President Xi Jinping met Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif in Beijing yesterday, Chinese state media reported, days before Pakistan presents its annual budget and applies for a new International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan.

Pakistan's location on the Arabian Sea gives it strategic importance for China, providing an overland route out towards the Gulf of Aden and onto the Suez Canal, and enabling Chinese ships to avoid the potential chokepoint of the Malacca Strait.

"China will, as always, firmly support Pakistan and safeguard its national sovereignty and territorial integrity," Xi told Sharif, adding that the two countries' "all-weather strategic partnership...had broad development prospects".

Xi also said that China would also help Pakistan with its economic and social development.

Pakistan is in the middle of a debt crisis.

As such, Sharif's government is expected to seek at least \$6bn under a new IMF programme after it presents its annual budget on June 12.

And the \$27bn or so that Pakistan owes China, according to World Bank data, is central to this next round of discussions with the fund.

In May the IMF opened discussions on the new loan after Islamabad completed a short-term \$3bn programme, which helped stave off a sovereign debt default last summer.

Pakistan owes China almost 13% of its total debt, which was taken on to pay for infrastructure projects over the years and other types of spending.

Beijing has lent Islamabad almost twice as much as its second- and third-ranked multilateral lenders, the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, to which Pakistan owes \$16.2bn and \$13.7bn respectively.

Chinese firms have also invested a further \$14bn in Pakistan since a new economic corridor connecting their countries was announced in the summer of 2013 as part of Xi's flagship Belt and Road Initiative, data from the American Enterprise Institute think tank shows.

Most of that investment was made by Chinese state-owned energy companies financing fossil-fuel and nuclear power plants, as well as logistics routes under construction connecting Gwadar Port in the Arabian Sea with the Xinjiang region in China's northwest.

Xi told Sharif that their two countries should focus on "promoting the joint construction of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor", and Chinese and Pakistani firms 31 memoranda of understanding covering technology, agriculture, trade, energy, coal and gasification, according to Pakistan's commerce ministry.

However, the Chinese leader also called on his guest to step up efforts to ensure the security of Chinese projects in the country.

In May, a suicide bomb attack killed five Chinese engineers working on a dam project in Pakistan's northwest. — **Reuters**

## Irish, Czechs cast EU votes with immigration front of mind

Irish and Czech voters picked up the baton in the EU's marathon elections yesterday, some driven by concerns about migration and others bent on countering the anti-immigrant far-right.

Both countries were voting in advance of tomorrow's main election day when most of the European Union's 27 nations — including powerhouses Germany and France — will vote to elect the bloc's next parliament.

Surveys point to election gains for anti-immigrant populists across the EU, and day one on Thursday saw a strong showing, though no knock-out blow, for the Dutch far-right.

Ireland's 37-year-old Prime Minister Simon Harris voted near his home in Delgany, a village south of Dublin, before hitting the road to canvass for both local and EU elections.

Keith O'Reilly, a 41-year-old IT worker, said that he admired Harris's "energy" but that his vote would not be going to the premier's centre-right Fine Gael.

"They're getting so many things wrong, the migration issue for one thing," he told AFP.

With around 20% of Ireland's population born outside the country and record levels of asylum-seekers, many candidates are running on an anti-immigration platform — one of the reasons that drove Trevor Gardiner to vote.

"The rise of the far-right jumping on immigration is really, really scary for us," said the 42-year-old finance worker, "because it's happening not just in mainland Europe but here in Ireland too".

Emily, a 21-year-old first-time voter who declined to give her full name, likewise said she "worried" about the far-right's rise.

"I think the others need to get their act together," she said. "It's incredible the type of anti-immigrant rhetoric that has become normalised here."

The EU vote comes at a time of geopolitical upheaval almost two-and-a-half years into Russia's war on Ukraine.

The far-right is looking to tap into grievances among the bloc's 370mn eligible voters, fatigued by a succession of crises from the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic to the fallout of Moscow's invasion. The contest in the Netherlands was seen as a bellwether for its strength — and exit polls showed gains for the Freedom Party (PVV) of firebrand Geert Wilders, in second place.

However, the Dutch result was tighter than expected, with a Green-left alliance set for first place, and could spell hope for centrists battling to maintain their majority.

That was the early assessment of Eurasia Group's managing director Mujtaba Rahman, who predicted "the centre will largely hold" even if the far-right takes a quarter of the EU's 720 parliament seats.

"There'll be lots of noise over next few days about



the far-right surge in EU. The reality is more boring," Rahman wrote on X.

The other country voting yesterday was the Czech Republic, where politicians face widespread apathy to the EU vote: the country had the second-lowest turnout last time around in 2019, at 28.72%.

Polls put the centrist ANO movement of billionaire former prime minister Andrej Babis in the lead.

At an elementary school in southern Prague, voters cast their ballots while children played nearby, many relishing the opportunity to stop and chat with neighbours.

Marek Cervený, a 45-year-old teacher and tour guide who voted accompanied by his daughter, said he "definitely" saw EU decisions "reflected in our lives": "What we can buy, how easily we can travel, how well we can live here."

Others like Vera Zazvorková, a 72-year-old economist, said she was voting for change, wanting fewer EU rules on the environment and tougher curbs on migration.

"The 'Green Deal' should change, that is, it should be restricted a lot, and the immigration policy should change too," she said.

The prospect of a rightward lurch has rattled the parliament's main groupings, the conservative European People's Party (EPP) and the leftist Socialists and Democrats.

They still look set to be the two biggest blocs but current European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen, of the EPP, may need support from part of the far-right to secure a second term.

With an eye on the horse-trading that may be needed, von der Leyen has been courting Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, who heads the post-fascist Brothers of Italy party.

Over the weekend, scrutiny will shift to the EU's bigger economies as they open polling stations.

Marine Le Pen's National Rally is predicted to come out on top in France, as is Meloni's party in Italy — which votes today — and Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's far-right Fidesz.

In Germany, the extreme-right AfD is polling second, behind the opposition conservatives. — **AFP**

# Russia does not need to use nukes to beat Ukraine: Putin

Reuters  
St Petersburg

President Vladimir Putin said yesterday that Russia had no need to use nuclear weapons to secure victory in Ukraine, the Kremlin's strongest signal to date that Europe's deadliest conflict since World War II will not escalate into a nuclear war.

Since Putin ordered troops into Ukraine in February 2022, he has said on several occasions that Russia would use such weapons if necessary to defend itself — comments the West says are sabre-rattling.

Asked at the plenary session of the St Petersburg International Economic Forum by moderator Sergei Karaganov, an influential Russian analyst, if Russia should hold a "nuclear pistol to the temple" of the West over Ukraine, Putin said he did not see the conditions for using such weapons.

"The use is possible in an exceptional case — in the event of a threat to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country. I don't think that such a case has come. There is no such need," Putin said.

Moscow considers Crimea — which it seized from Ukraine in 2014 — and four other Ukrainian regions now as integral parts of its own territory, raising the possibility of a nuclear strike if Kyiv appeared poised to retake them.

Ukraine has stepped up drone and missile attacks on Russian targets, including in Crimea, and has vowed to drive all Russian forces from its territory.



Putin: If necessary, we will conduct (nuclear weapons) tests. So far, there is no need for this.

Putin said he did not rule out changes to Russia's nuclear doctrine, which sets out the conditions under which such weapons could be used.

He also said that if necessary Russia could test a nuclear weapon, though he saw no need to do so at the present time.

The public debate about nuclear strikes on a stage at Russia's premier economic forum appeared to be a Kremlin attempt to reduce nuclear fears just as the Ukraine war escalates towards what both Russian and US diplomats say is its most dangerous phase yet.

Russia and the US hold nearly 90% of the world's nukes.

Last year Karaganov proposed a limited nuclear strike on a North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato) member in Europe to force the West to back off in the conflict over Ukraine and thus avert World War III.

Yesterday Karaganov invoked the Biblical story of how God destroyed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah for their wickedness as he pressed Putin on whether Russia should escalate in Ukraine to teach the West "a lesson".

Putin said he prayed that the world would never witness a nuclear confrontation, adding: "And we don't have that need. Because our armed forces are not just gaining experience, they are increasing their effectiveness."

Russian troops are advancing along the front line in Ukraine, Putin said, adding they had taken 880 square km of territory since the start of the year, including 47 villages and towns.

Putin said Russia had increased ammunition production by more than 20 times and was outproducing Ukraine and the West on a whole series of measures.

Russia's published 2020 nuclear

doctrine sets out the conditions under which a Russian president would consider using a nuclear weapon: broadly as a response to an attack using nuclear or other weapons of mass destruction, or to the use of conventional weapons against Russia "when the very existence of the state is put under threat".

"But this doctrine is a living tool and we are carefully watching what is happening in the world around us and do not exclude making some changes to this doctrine," Putin said. "This is also related to the testing of nuclear weapons."

"If necessary, we will conduct tests. So far, there is no need for this either," he added.

US President Joe Biden has relaxed some restrictions on Ukraine's use of US weaponry inside Russia, prompting warnings from Moscow of a potentially dangerous escalation in the conflict, now well into its third year.

The Russian president said on Wednesday that he could deploy conventional missiles within striking distance of the United States and its European allies if they allowed Ukraine to strike deeper into Russia with long-range Western weapons.

Biden, speaking in France yesterday where he has been attending celebrations of the 80th anniversary of the D-Day landings, reaffirmed the United States' commitment to support Ukraine and again drew a comparison between the fight against Nazi Germany and the threats posed by dictators today.

## Pakistan power crisis deepened by mountain tourism

By Nisar Ali  
AFP

In the mountainous valleys of Pakistan, 18-hour daily power cuts have meant local teacher Aniqah Bano uses her fridge as a cupboard for storing books and kitchen utensils.

Load shedding is typical across much of fuel-short Pakistan, but few areas consistently suffer the same prolonged outages as Skardu city.

A surge in mountain tourism, driven by climbers and Pakistanis looking to escape heatwaves, is rapidly depleting the limited energy supply at the gateway to ascend K2, the world's second-highest peak.

While higher-end hotels can supplement their supply with solar panels or fuel generators, many locals cannot afford such luxuries.

"We have to reinvent everything that once used electricity," said Bano.

"We no longer have an oven, we use a coal-heated iron for clothes," the 41-year-old teacher added. "When we come home tired from work, we cannot run a heater."

Skardu is the largest city in the region of Gilgit-Baltistan, where almost impossibly high peaks tower over the Old Silk Road, still visible from a highway transporting tourists between cherry orchards, glaciers and ice-blue lakes.

Normally home to around 200,000 people, Skardu becomes heavily bloated in summer when Pakistanis seek the relief of its cooler climate at 2,228m (7,310') above sea level.

The region hosted 880,000 domestic visitors in 2023, up from 50,000 in 2014.

As the country grapples with energy shortages — owing to dwindling forex reserves, mismanagement, rapid population growth and climate change — the tourism boom has proved too much for local power.

"Due to the increase in population and tourism activities, load shedding hours have increased," Mohamed Yunus, a senior engineer for the regional government's water and power department, told AFP.

There are up to 22 hours of load shedding in winter and between 18 and 20 hours in summer — an increase of around 10% each year for the past six years, according to the department.

Siddiqah, a tailor and handicraft maker who goes by one name, has seen her earnings fall alongside the number of hours of electricity.

"When we started this busi-

ness in 2014, there was no issue of power," she told AFP. "Now, I have replaced all the electric machines and brought hand sewing machines."

"In the presence of light, we could prepare 10 to 12 suits every three days. Now, to prepare a single suit, it can take 10 to 15 days," Siddiqah lamented.

The tourism flow does not appear to be letting up any time soon. There are up to 15 domestic flights a week to the region and, since March, international flights began landing from Dubai.

In Skardu alone, the number of hotels has increased more than fourfold since 2014, according to the tourism department.

Owing to its remoteness, Gilgit-Baltistan is not connected to the national grid, so it relies on its own power generation from dozens of hydro and thermal plants.

However, Pakistan's 7,000 glaciers — more than anywhere outside the poles — are rapidly melting.

This can temporarily increase the availability of water for energy production, but the glaciers' long-term ability to store and release water gradually decreases, affecting energy production.

"The availability of water for hydroelectric plants is becoming unpredictable," said Salar Ali, head of the University of Baltistan's Department of Environmental Science.

Damage to energy infrastructure is also a regular setback.

Record heatwaves in 2022 caused dozens of glacial lakes to burst their banks, washing away more than 20 power plants, 50 bridges and countless homes.

Inadequate planning and mismanagement of the power sector can also play a role, engineers have said.

The Satpara dam on the edge of Skardu city, completed in 2008 for \$26mn of aid funding, was supposed to supply 40,000 homes with power.

However, it generates just a fraction of its potential after plans to divert a river were halted, government engineers admit.

"It has been full only once since its formation," said Yunus, the engineer in Skardu.

Without a reliable energy supply, Wajahat Hussain, a 36-year-old carpenter, uses a fuel generator to keep his business in operation — puffing out emissions that contribute to global warming.

"We run the generator to fulfil the demands," he told AFP. "There is no work without the generator."



# QM, Venice municipality sign accord

Qatar Museums (QM) and the Municipality of Venice announced yesterday that they have signed a Protocol of Co-operation, agreeing to strengthen their existing relationships and enhance collaboration in the cultural and socio-economic fields.

The agreement coincides with the announcement by Qatar Airways that it will resume direct flights between Doha and Venice on June 12, and as the Floating City celebrates the opening of the Art for Tomorrow conference, presented by The Democracy & Culture Foundation alongside Founding Partner QM.

In recognition of their shared interests, the QM and Venice will pursue activities that add value to their cultural heritage, improve the conditions of knowledge, and mutually encourage business investment.

Examples of possible activities include the development of exhibitions and seminars exploring

the historical links between Italian and Islamic art and architecture; the participation by their artists in international festivals and exhibitions; scholarly collaborations, such as producing art publications and co-organising research visits by librarians, archivists, and historians; the promotion of connections between sporting organisations; the exhibition of collections and the joint organisation of thematic seminars; and mutual co-operation for the protection and regeneration of cultural heritage, including the exchange of information and the implementation of structural interventions aimed at restoring some symbolic parts of the City of Venice.

“On the occasion of the re-launch of Doha-to-Venice direct flights, we are happy to convene the art world here in Venice,” QM Chairperson HE Sheikhha Al Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani said. “Art for Tomorrow is an on-going partnership between



Officials at the ceremony. Seen here are (from left) QM chief executive Mohamed al-Rumaihi, Venice municipality director-general Morris Ceron, HE Sheikhha Al Mayassa bint Hamad al-Thani, Venice Mayor Luigi Brugnaro, Qatar’s ambassador to Italy Khalid bin Youssef al-Sada, and Qatar Airways chief executive Badr Mohamed al-Meer at Ca’ Farsetti in Venice yesterday.



The QM and Venice will pursue activities that add value to their cultural heritage, improve the conditions of knowledge, and mutually encourage business investment, particularly in the fields of art, preservation, sport, and entertainment.



Qatar Museums and The Democracy & Culture Foundation that brings thinkers, artists and creatives together.”

“This year, as we use Venice as a cultural backdrop, we are happy to continue to explore closer relationships between our two cities, and our nations as a whole,” she said. “We look forward to welcoming Venetians to Qatar, and invite Qataris to visit Venice’s cultural offerings.”

“The celebrations for the 700th anniversary of Marco Polo’s death are an opportunity for international relations and meetings to relaunch the centrality of Venice,

in terms of diplomacy and trade, just as it was in the history of the Serenissima, making it available to the Italian country system,” said Venice mayor Luigi Brugnaro.

“This partnership, defined on my trip to Doha last February and perfected today, will keep both Venice and Qatar at the forefront of creative, academic, economic and

social exchange around the world, building first and foremost networks and relationships between people, in mutual respect,” he said.

“Along with direct flights via Qatar Airways between Doha and Venice, this agreement, which was concluded between Qatar Museums and the Municipality of Venice, is another advanced step in the process of excellent bilateral relations linking our two friendly countries,” said Qatar’s ambassador to Italy Khalid bin Youssef al-Sada said.

“It is another testament to the extended horizons of cooperation in all fields, such as the economy, trade, culture, scientific and artistic exchange, security and military co-operation, environmental security, investments, tourism, and sports,” he said.

The Protocol of Co-operation will be effective for five years, through the end of 2029, and may be extended beyond that date by mutual agreement.

Details of the activities to be undertaken by the two parties will be announced as they become available.

# Porsche Centre Doha welcomes third-generation Panamera

VIP guests and prospective customers of Porsche in Qatar welcomed the latest edition of the Panamera luxury sports saloon with a glamorous evening’s entertainment at the Porsche Centre Doha Showroom at Medina Centrale, The Pearl.

The third-generation Panamera luxury sedan emphasises its sporting character with even more powerful drive systems.

The profile is enhanced by a fundamentally modernised operating concept and technology, including the new Porsche Active Ride suspension system, which combines a significantly higher level of comfort with the sporting driving characteristics for which Porsche is famous.

The exclusive event was themed in amber gold to symbolise one of the dramatic new colours being introduced with the Panamera, the warm, Amber colour tone of Madeira Gold Metallic that evokes a autumn richness and set the perfect tone for an evening of lavish entertainment.

“The Porsche Panamera has always been an important and much-loved model for Qataris with its exclusive mix of Porsche performance in a luxurious and spacious, four-door saloon shape,” Porsche Centre Doha chairman and chief executive Salman Jassem al-Darwish said.

“The third-generation Panamera introduces important new technologies that not only contribute to improved road holding with a new state-of-the-art active air suspension but also delivers more power and torque than ever before with the option of four E-Hybrid powertrains that deliver greater efficiency and an improved range,” he added.

The technical yet elegant, dynamic design of the new Panamera gives the model line’s proportions a fresh update.

A fundamentally redesigned, driver-centred interior enhances the driving experience.

“The new Panamera has further refined the model’s original intentions, to deliver sports car performance that Porsche has always been renowned for, along with ultimate luxury and everyday usability of a sedan for urban and highway conditions,”



Porsche Centre Doha’s brand manager Ahmed Dawood said.

The new Panamera comes with dual-chamber two-valve air suspension with Porsche Active Suspension Management as standard.

The Porsche Active Ride active suspension system is available as an option for the E-Hybrid models of the new Panamera.

This system surpasses other suspension concepts in all relevant parameters and offers an unprecedented range between driving comfort and driving dynamics.

Porsche offers a total of four efficient E-Hybrid powertrains for the new Panamera, in response to the high demand for this type of drive system.

All E-Hybrid variants benefit from greater performance, range and efficiency. The Panamera Turbo E-Hybrid is ready at market launch.

The heart of its powertrain is a fundamentally revised four-litre V8 turbo engine. The output of the newly developed electric motor is 140kW (190 PS). Together, they create a system output of 500kW (680 PS).

The Porsche Driver Experience cockpit concept features the ideal balance be-

The third-generation Panamera luxury sedan emphasises its sporting character with even more powerful drive systems. **PICTURES:** Shaji Kayamkulam



Salman Jassem al-Darwish at the unveiling of the all-new, third-generation Porsche Panamera in Doha.



Porsche offers a total of four efficient E-Hybrid powertrains for the new Panamera.

tween digital and analogue control elements and positions the input and output elements essential for driving along the driver’s axis.

Model variants bearing the Turbo name enjoy a special position at Porsche as the performance flagships.

Porsche is also equipping the Panamera

with standard Matrix LED headlights.

The high-resolution HD Matrix LED lighting system, which has more than 32,000 pixels per headlight, is available as an option.

The new Porsche Panamera is available to order now.

It offers extended standard equipment compared to its predecessor with two-valve dual-chamber air suspension, LED matrix headlights, ParkAssist, driving mode switch on the steering wheel, a cooled smartphone compartment with inductive charging function and an improved fine dust filter with GPS-supported, automatic air-recirculation function.

“The interest from this evening’s event has, not surprisingly, been incredible, with the order books for test drives at Porsche Centre Doha filling fast,” Dawood said.

“With a starting price of QR390,800, we are also taking orders for purchase as well,” he added.