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Qatari Haj mission to return to Doha today

The Qatari official Haj mission will arrive in Doha today, returning from the Holy Lands after ensuring the safety of all the country's pilgrims, following up on them as they perform all the rituals, and completing the Haj's rituals easily and comfortably. The Deputy Head of the Qatari Haj Mission Ali Sultan al-Musaifri, has confirmed that this year's Haj season was distinguished and qualitative in all the services and facilities that the mission provided to the pilgrims of Qatar. **Page 2**

Temporary power cuts in Kuwait

Kuwait has announced temporary power cuts in some parts of the country during peak consumption hours, saying it is struggling to meet increased demand spurred by extreme summer heat. In a statement, Kuwait's Ministry of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy said the scheduled cuts would occur for up to two hours a day.

Election date betting probe in the UK

The campaign director for Rishi Sunak's ruling Conservatives has stepped aside following reports that he and his wife were under investigation for allegedly betting on the UK general election date. The Gambling Commission was looking into "a number of individuals".

Le Pen 'leading' in French elections

Marine Le Pen's far-right National Rally is seen leading the race ahead of France's parliamentary elections, two polls showed yesterday, ahead of the left-wing Popular Front and President Emmanuel Macron's centrists. **Page 9**

TikTok ban in US looks 'inevitable'

TikTok and Chinese parent ByteDance yesterday urged a US court to strike down a law they say will ban the popular short video app in the United States on Jan. 19, saying the US government refused to engage in any serious settlement talks after 2022. **Page 8**

COMMUNITY

See Page: 4

PM to head Qatar's delegation at first Qatari-Spanish strategic dialogue

● Inaugural session to be held in Madrid today

QNA
Doha

HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani will head Qatar's delegation to the opening of the inaugural Qatari-Spanish Strategic Dialogue, slated for today in Madrid, Spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) Dr Majid bin Mohamed al-Ansari said yesterday.

Speaking to Qatar News Agency (QNA), Dr al-Ansari said the 'Dialogue' aims to enhance co-operation relations between the two friendly countries, primarily in the fields of politics, defence, security, justice, trade, investment, education, culture and innovation.

He noted that the dialogue will also address developments in regional and international issues, especially the latest developments in the occupied Palestinian territories and the Gaza Strip, and the need to strengthen the efforts aimed at an immediate and permanent ceasefire in Gaza, as well as ensuring unhin-



HE Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani

dered and sustainable flow of humanitarian aid in all areas of the Strip.

The Spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stressed that the visit of the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Spain, Dr Pedro Sanchez to Doha last April contributed to strengthening bilateral relations, pointing that the strategic dialogue between the two countries is one of the visit's results.

Several outcomes will positively reflect on the future of co-operation between the two sides, he added.

National Archives to achieve goals on time



HE Abdullah bin Khalifa al-Attiyah, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Qatar National Archives (also known as Qatar Documentation House), reviewed the major role that the House plays in preserving the national memory and nourishing the cultural heritage of Qatar. HE Abdullah al-Attiyah stressed that preserving heritage and history is an imperative for every nation that cherishes its identity.

HE al-Attiyah said: "The house, thanks to the high patronage of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, is continuing to fulfil its noble mission of recording the history of Qatar and highlighting its rich heritage. As it represents a beacon by which the present is enlightened and inspired, the future aspirations are determined by it." His Excellency noted in a video broadcast by the House on its official account on the "X" platform that the Board of Trustees and all the House's members are confident of achieving the goals in a reasonable period. Since the House is at the founding stage, this is a kind of challenge for all of its staff who are young Qataris who have the necessary desire and ambition to contribute more for the nation. The next plan will focus on enhancing communication and co-operation with all government agencies, citizens, and some residents who have lived in the country for more than 40 years to help collect the legacy, HE the Chairman pointed out.

Qatar's luxury appeal draws visitors

By Joey Aguilar
Staff Reporter

Qatar's exceptional luxury offerings continue to attract regional and international visitors, particularly during festive periods such as the Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha holidays, an industry expert told *Gulf Times*.

"This trend is expected to persist throughout the summer months despite the rising temperatures," Outing Qatar founder and managing director Mosaad Moustafa Eleiwa expressed confidence.

He attributes this surge in

luxury travel to Qatar's five-star hotels and resorts, offering opulent accommodations, world-class amenities, and exceptional service. These facilities, coupled with the country's pristine beaches, create a haven not only for Qataris and nationals from neighbouring GCC countries but also for international visitors.

"We recently provided a luxury package for guests from Africa seeking curated experiences," Eleiwa said, in an exclusive interview, highlighting the growing appeal of Qatar to global travellers.

Beyond luxurious hospital-ity, Qatar's rapidly developing



Mosaad Moustafa Eleiwa

infrastructure has positioned itself as a premier leisure destination. He pointed out that the country has built a suitable environment that caters to

high-end travellers, especially families, seeking extravagant escapades.

Luxury hotels such as Raffles, Fairmont, Waldorf Astoria, and numerous other five-star resorts provide the perfect backdrop for these special occasions, Eleiwa said.

It is learnt that Doha's hotels, especially those offering beach access, have witnessed a surge in bookings from Saudi Arabian nationals during the Eid al-Adha break, a trend observed during the Eid al-Fitr holidays. This influx has also positively impacted major malls across Qatar, benefiting retail outlets and boutiques. **To Page 2**



Palestinians walk near destroyed houses, in Jabalia refugee camp, in the northern Gaza Strip.

Israel pounds central Gaza, deepens invasion of Rafah

Cairo
Reuters

Israeli forces pounded areas in the central Gaza Strip overnight, killing three people and wounding dozens of others, according to medics, while tanks deepened their invasion into Rafah in the south, residents said.

Israeli planes struck a house in Al-Nuseirat camp, killing two people and wounding 12 others, while tanks shelled areas in Al-Maghazi and Al-Bureij camps, wounding many other people, health officials said. Nuseirat, Maghazi, and Bureij are three of Gaza's eight historic refugee camps.

In Deir al-Balah, a city packed with displaced people in the central Gaza Strip, an Israeli air strike killed one Palestinian and wounded several others yesterday.

The Israeli military said on Wednesday forces were continuing their operations across the enclave targeting militants and military infrastructure in what it described as "precise, intelligence-based" activities.

More than eight months into the war in Gaza, Israel's advance is now focused

Israel-Hezbollah tensions drive wider war fears

Fears of a regional war rose yesterday after Lebanon's powerful Hezbollah movement said none of Israel would be spared in a full-blown conflict, and Israel said it had approved plans for a Lebanon offensive. Hezbollah said it fired dozens of rockets into northern Israel in retaliation for a deadly air strike in south Lebanon that Israel said killed a Hezbollah operative. In a televised address, Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah said "no place" in Israel would "be spared by our rockets" if a wider war began.

Massacre toll at 37,431

The health ministry in Hamas-run Gaza said yesterday that at least 37,431 people have been killed in the territory during more than eight months of war between Israel and Palestinian resistance movement Hamas. The toll includes at least 35 deaths since Wednesday, a ministry statement said, adding 85,653 people had been wounded in the Gaza Strip since the war began on October 7.

on the two last areas its forces had yet to storm: Rafah on Gaza's southern edge and the area surrounding Deir al-Balah in the centre.

In Rafah, near the border with Egypt, Israeli tanks stationed deep in the western and central areas of the city stepped up bombardment, forcing more families living in the far coastal areas to flee northward. Some residents said the pace of the raid has been accelerated in the past two days.

There has been no sign of let-up in the fighting as efforts by international mediators, backed by the US, have failed to persuade Israel and Hamas to agree to a ceasefire.

The US military's floating pier off Gaza has resumed bringing humanitarian aid into the Israeli-besieged Palestinian territory, the Pentagon said yesterday, even as aid continues to collect in a nearby marshalling area since the United Nations has not restarted transporting it to warehouses.

The pier had been re-attached to the shore on Wednesday after being temporarily removed last Friday due to poor sea conditions, the latest challenge to the effort that has been hampered by bad weather since it was put into place in May.

US President Joe Biden announced the pier in March for aid deliveries as Israel invaded and bombarded Gaza while also severely limiting aid through land routes, threatening famine conditions.

Qatar's role as honest mediator highlighted

Official Spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Majed bin Mohamed bin Hassan al-Ansari participated yesterday in the plenary session of the London conference titled "A leaderless world solving global crises in 2024," sponsored by Chatham House. The session discussed a number of crises that the world is currently witnessing, especially the war in Ukraine and Gaza, the conflict in Sudan, and their impact on the international system. Dr al-Ansari stressed the importance of mediators in resolving global disputes, noting in this context that Qatar has contributed to resolving a number of conflicts in different regions of the world, based on its firm belief in the necessity of resolving disputes through peaceful means, pointing out that it has become a reliable international mediator. Dr al-Ansari stressed the role of the mediator in reaching sustainable solutions to conflicts by addressing their root causes. **(QNA) Page 2**



Qatar key regional partner: US official

QNA
Doha

United States Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, Barbara Leaf, has said the Qatar's indispensable role in vital efforts to release prisoners, highlighting Doha as a key regional partner contributing to stability in the Middle East.

In an interview with *Al Sharq* newspaper published yesterday, Leaf emphasised diplomacy as the best approach to address regional issues, acknowledging that the current conflict significantly complicates efforts in the region. Leaf underscored Washington's commitment to ending the conflict and achieving sustainable security, coordinating closely with key partners to advance negotiations toward

Leaf noted a ceasefire in Gaza would represent a breakthrough towards resolving the Israel-Lebanon border tensions, expressing concern over the volatile situation along the Blue Line in Lebanon

a ceasefire agreement, in addition to discussing scenarios and perspectives related to post-war Gaza.

She highlighted Qatar's pivotal role as a vital mediation channel, where Qatari mediators are tirelessly working towards a prisoner release agreement. She emphasised the immense importance of Qatari mediation for the United States, noting Qatar's status as a highly trusted partner.

Leaf noted a ceasefire in Gaza would represent a breakthrough towards resolving the Israel-

Lebanon border tensions, expressing concern over the volatile situation along the Blue Line in Lebanon. She emphasised diplomacy as the sole path to a solution.

US Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, Barbara Leaf, noted Qatar's active engagement in intensive humanitarian efforts alongside US Special Envoy for Humanitarian Affairs David Satterfield in the Middle East, including facilitating humanitarian aid delivery, enabling the safe departure of foreign nationals from conflict zones, and easing restrictions for safe exits from areas of violence.

She added that Doha is engaged in political talks with Hamas leaders and Egypt to achieve humanitarian truces, in line with US President Joe Biden's internationally supported proposal for a ceasefire.

Qatar attends Chatham House conference



Official Spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Majed bin Mohamed bin Hassan al-Ansari participated yesterday in the plenary session of the London conference titled "A leaderless world solving global crises in 2024," sponsored by Chatham House. The session discussed a number of crises that the world is currently witnessing, especially the war in Ukraine and Gaza, the conflict in Sudan, and their impact on the international system. Dr al-Ansari stressed the importance of mediators in resolving global disputes, noting in this context that Qatar has contributed to resolving a number of conflicts in different regions of the world, based on its firm belief in the necessity of resolving disputes through peaceful means, pointing out that it has become a reliable international mediator. **(QNA)**

Qatar Haj Mission returns to Doha after successful season this year

Deputy Head of the Qatari Haj Mission Ali Sultan al-Musaifri has confirmed that this year's season was distinguished and qualitative in all the services and facilities provided to the pilgrims

QNA
Makkah Al-Mukarramah

The official Qatari Haj Mission will arrive in Doha today, returning from the Holy Lands after ensuring the safety of all the country's pilgrims, following up on them as they perform all the rituals, and completing the Haj's rituals easily and comfortably.

Deputy Head of the Qatari Haj Mission Ali Sultan al-Musaifri has confirmed that this year's Haj season was distinguished and qualitative in all the services and facilities that the mission provided to the pilgrims of Qatar, and that it prepared all conditions and all means for them to complete all the rituals with ease, indicating the keenness of the service and technical units supporting the mission accompany the country's pilgrims until the stoning of Jamarat and the conclusion of their rituals.

He explained that the Qatari



Deputy Head of the Qatari Haj Mission Ali Sultan al-Musaifri

Haj Mission will begin its work to prepare for the next season immediately after returning to the homeland, by setting programmes and development plans, working to benefit from any suggestions or visions by pilgrims and campaigns, and addressing any problems or obstacles that any of them faced, with the aim of providing better services, amenities and support for the country's pilgrims.

The Deputy Head of the Qatari Haj Mission said: The Haj work system and providing the best services to the country's pilgrims is a joint and integrated work between the mission and the Haj campaigns, noting that their tireless and continuous efforts in facilitating all services and ensuring comfort and safety for the pilgrims of Qatar have contributed greatly to achieving our common goals. It formed a true basis and standard for providing an exceptional and

qualitative Haj experience this year, he added.

He expressed his deep thanks and appreciation to the Qatari Haj campaigns for their positive and fruitful co-operation with the mission, the advisory committee, the heads of the administrative, service and technical support units, and all members of the Qatari Haj Mission participating in this year's Haj season, noting their effective and appreciated role in the success of this Haj season, as they all worked according to an integrated system, in a spirit of one team. The efforts of all units supporting the mission also combined to provide all equipment, services and facilities to the pilgrims of Qatar in all campaigns, which resulted in providing the finest services to the country's pilgrims and helping them perform their rituals to the fullest.

Al-Musaifri called on everyone



Officials of the Qatari Haj Mission.

to move forward in developing the services provided to the campaigns and the state's pilgrims in all the Holy Sites, and to maintain excellence and sophistication. He noted that this success and distinction, which was praised by the country's pilgrims, came through the solidarity of all members, mission officials and supporting units, and their dedication to providing the best services to the country's pilgrims.

Al-Musaifri also praised the great facilities and qualitative services that the pilgrims of Qatar had received this year, from their departure from the homeland to their reception at Jeddah Airport in the Holy Lands, and their arrival and continuous follow-up, whether in Makkah or in the Holy Sites, attributing this to many factors, the most important of which were that the Qatari Haj Mission took upon itself the largest role in managing the affairs of Qatar's pilgrims

through direct co-ordination with Ithra Al Khair Pilgrimage Services Company to fully equip the Mina, Arafat and Muzdalifah camps, with the best capabilities and highest quality standards, to provide all facilities and services to support the campaigns and help them devote themselves to service.

The country's pilgrims, and providing all means of comfort for them to perform their rituals easily and correctly, in addition to the mission's co-ordination and co-operation with the Ministry of Haj and Umrah, as well as the authorities and security agencies in Saudi Arabia, which provided all facilities and assistance to transport the pilgrims of Qatar on the Day of Tarwiya and during the escalation from Arafat and Nafra to Muzdalifah, then return to Mina and stoning the Jamarat on the days of Tashreeq.

He appreciated the great efforts made by Saudi Arabia to welcome

the pilgrims, harness all capabilities and create appropriate conditions to serve them. He expressed his deep appreciation to the government of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques and his Crown Prince, and all the authorities in the kingdom, for everything they have done to facilitate the pilgrims, serve them, and ensure their security, and their safety from the time of their arrival and reception in the Holy Lands, until they easily completed the rituals and Haj.

The Deputy Head of the Qatari Haj Mission praised the co-operation of the Saudi Ministry of Haj and Umrah and Ithra Al-Khair company for Haj services, and the great co-operation with the Qatari Haj Mission (Office for Pilgrims Affairs of the State of Qatar) in facilitating all matters related to the Haj season in Makkah, and in the holy sites in Mina, Arafat and Muzdalifah.

QPO to perform *West Side Story*

By Tawfik Lamari
Staff Reporter

The Qatar Philharmonic Orchestra (QPO) is to perform Bernstein's *West Side Story* symphony on June 22, from 7:30pm-9:30pm at the Qatar National Convention Centre (QNCC), Auditorium 3, it announced on its website.

The QPO will be conducted by Hossein Pishkar and featuring the philharmonic's own violinist Lionel Schmitt. Maurice Ravel's *Rapsodie Espagnole*, Tzigane - *Rapsodie De Concert*, Camille Saint-Saëns' *Introduction, Rondo Capriccioso in A Minor*, and Leonard Bernstein's *Symphonic Dances from West Side Story* are among the highlights. *(More information at <https://qatarphilharmonicorchestra.org/concert/bernsteins-west-side-story/>)*



tra.org/concert/bernsteins-west-side-story/

The orchestra recently presented a concert of the greatest pop songs, re-arranged by a group of musicians under the supervision of executive vice-president Dr Nasser

Suhaime al-Jassem, and under the leadership of the Grammy-nominated conductor, Alistair Willis. It also showcased local talents selected from the "Nagham" competition organised by the Music Affairs Center of the Ministry of Culture.

Qatari innovation: Strategy Hub's rise from Georgetown connections

The Georgetown University in Qatar (GU-Q), network has been instrumental in the success of initiatives such as Strategy Hub, an innovative Qatari consultancy, say the founders of the consultancy.

GU-Q alumni, Amna al-Thani and Haajerah Khan launched 'Strategy Hub' in 2022 to harness local expertise to solve Qatar's complex challenges.

Al-Thani, the company's CEO, says she learned about the importance of developing homegrown strategies during her study of international affairs at GU-Q.

"Having a nuanced understanding of the context of Qatar and a personal stake in the country's success leads to lasting solutions," she explained.

Al-Thani and Khan have assembled a talented team of GU-Q graduates and current students who share their passion for changing the world.

Al-Thani emphasised: "As a values-driven, women-led organisation, Strategy Hub's purpose is to create a positive impact on both public and private institutions in Qatar."

"We prioritise growth, learning, and upholding the highest standards of integrity and accountability."

According to Khan, Strategy Hub's managing director, the synergy within the team comes from a shared understanding of



Amna al-Thani and Haajerah Khan.

By combining global perspectives with local solutions, Strategy Hub fills a crucial gap in Qatar's consultancy market

excellence and service.

"We all have a very similar way of thinking, a similar way of identifying problems and solutions. It's a dynamic, fun environment. And we all want to help Qatar's development in any way we can."

By combining global perspectives with local solutions, Strat-

egy Hub fills a crucial gap in Qatar's consultancy market. Their expertise spans public policy, international affairs, sustainability, and communications, allowing them to deliver evidence-based solutions to high-profile clients.

Strategy Hub is cultivating a new generation of consultants in Qatar and helping to launch the careers of other Georgetown graduates.

GU-Q alumna, Leen al-Rabab, one of Strategy Hub's first employees, connected immediately with the company's mission: "Strategy Hub embodies the Georgetown spirit of combining ambition with the passion to contribute to the world and to be a part of global change."

Qatar's luxury appeal draws visitors

From Page 1

Eleiwa said Qatar's burgeoning culinary scene—with the presence of local and international offerings—further enhances its appeal.

With an increasing number of fine-dining restaurants and diverse culinary experiences, the country has established itself as a gastronomic destination, attracting local, regional, and international visitors.

Eleiwa said there are several

factors that contribute to Qatar's allure as a preferred leisure and luxury destination. He noted that its excellent reputation for safety and security, coupled with the convenient connectivity provided by Hamad International Airport, a global gateway, ensures seamless access for luxury travellers, including wedding guests from various countries.

He added that Qatar Airways, a world-class airline, guarantees

smooth connectivity to diverse international destinations, further enhancing accessibility.

He reiterated that innovative luxury experiences, including personalised tours, private desert safaris, extravagant spa treatments, and private yacht charters, add to the country's appeal.

"These bespoke offerings cater to the discerning traveller seeking unique and memorable experiences," Eleiwa added.

Ministry conducts inspection campaign on beaches, desert areas

QNA
Doha

The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change has, over the Eid holidays, conducted a comprehensive inspection campaign on several beaches and wild areas to promote environmental conservation among the community.

In a statement, the ministry stated that the campaign, organised by the Wildlife Protection Department and running until June 22, aims to raise awareness about sustainable practices and behaviours. Participants in the campaign will educate the public about environmental violations and the laws and regulations issued by the state to protect the local environment, contributing to the development of wildlife.

Director of the Wildlife Protection Department at the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change, Hamad Salem al-Nuaimi, explained that the campaign was planned for the Eid al-Adha holi-



day to inform beachgoers and visitors to wild areas about practices and violations that harm the local environment. He emphasised that maintaining the local environment's sustainability is a responsibility for all residents of Qatar, both citizens and residents.

He added that the campaign is

part of the ministry's efforts to preserve biodiversity achievements, with plants and animals flourishing and expanding in Qatar's wilderness, significantly increasing the green cover. He noted the efforts of the ministry's reserves sector in launching numerous projects and initiatives

aimed at protecting the local environment.

Regarding the campaign's implementation stages, the Director of the Wildlife Protection Department explained that the extensive campaign includes several smaller campaigns conducted simultaneously, each targeting a specific area



to raise awareness and inspect specific types of violations, thereby achieving the goals of each campaign. He further explained that the first campaign is dedicated to enforcing the ban on camel roaming in the Qatari wilderness, according to Ministerial Decision No. 23 of 2023, and to raising awareness about the harm of littering. The second campaign targets coastal areas frequented by the public during the holiday, focusing on cleaning the beaches of harmful waste. The third campaign aims to inspect and raise awareness about

violations on the northern coasts and their environmental impact, alongside an awareness and inspection campaign on crushers operating in various parts of the country.

Director of the Wildlife Protection Department at the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change, Hamad Salem al-Nuaimi, highlighted that the final awareness and inspection campaigns will target the Khor Al Adaid and Sealine areas, where teams will educate sea-goers about the key environmental protection laws in Qatar.

NU-Q student researchers at ICA 2024

Northwestern University in Qatar (NU-Q) will lead scholarly engagement on the Global South at the 74th annual conference of the International Communication Association (ICA), the largest of its kind, gathering more than 4,000 scholars from around the world, in Gold Coast, Australia.

Ten faculty and researchers from the Institute for Advanced Study in the Global South (#IAS_NUQ) will be featured at the five-day conference, contributing to a total of 13 sessions and securing 17 individual slots with their selected works.

Their presentations will revolve around the conference theme 'Communication and Global Human Rights' and focus on Global South media histories, politics, and other issues, including revolutionary Arab media and youth and digital infrastructure in Africa.

As part of the conference, the

university will organise a panel examining digital life, tools, and experiences across InterAsia, contributing to current debates on "Southern Digitalities," a research theme for #IAS_NUQ. It will also co-sponsor two pre-conferences: "Repressed Histories of Communication and Media Studies" and "Arab Communications Studies: Towards A Renewed Research Agenda."

Two student researchers, Abenezer Bekele and In'utu Imbuwa, are among the delegation. They will present their #IAS_NUQ undergraduate fellowship projects, "Exploring the Factors That Affect the Adoption of Artificial Intelligence (AI)" and "Watermelon Politics and Chitenge in Zambia," respectively.

Publications from #IAS_NUQ Press will also be featured in the #IAS_NUQ booth, where visitors can learn about the Institute's vision and mission and the programmes available for

scholars.

In addition, as chair of ICA fellows, NU-Q dean and CEO Marwan M Kraidy will preside over new fellows induction, fellows' panels, and fellows' breakfast. He will also present his paper "Democracy Dies in Dazzlement."

"The ICA conference is a platform for global knowledge sharing and, most importantly, for Northwestern Qatar, an opportunity to amplify the Global South perspective in media and communication studies, a field that has been historically dominated by Western paradigms," said Kraidy.

"We are pleased our faculty, researchers, and students will make a substantive scholarly contribution, including our two promising undergraduate students, Abenezer and In'utu, demonstrating the high level of scholarly acumen and creativity that we nurture."

Katara's Eid festivities conclude



Katara - Cultural Village concluded its four-day Eid al-Adha celebrations. The programme featured a rich and diverse array of cultural events, entertainment activities, artistic performances, alongside shows and traditional displays and spectacular fireworks. The activities attracted a large number of people from all age groups and walks of life, including Qataris, expatriates, and visitors.

Haj toll crosses 1,000 after extreme heat

AFP
Riyadh

The death toll from this year's Haj has exceeded 1,000, an AFP tally said yesterday, more than half unregistered worshippers who performed the pilgrimage in extreme heat in Saudi Arabia. The new deaths reported yesterday included 58 from Egypt, according to an Arab diplomat who provided a breakdown showing that of 658 Egyptians who died, 630 were unregistered pilgrims.

Around 10 countries have reported 1,081 deaths during the pilgrimage. The Haj, whose timing is determined by the lunar Islamic calendar, fell again this year during the oven-like Saudi summer. The national meteorological centre reported a high of 51.8C this week at the Grand Mosque in Makkah.

A Saudi study published last month said temperatures in the area are rising 0.4C each decade. Each year tens of thousands of pilgrims try to join the Haj through irregular channels as they cannot afford the often costly official permits. Saudi authorities reported clearing hundreds of thousands of unregistered pilgrims from Makkah this month, but it appears many still participated in the main rites which began last Friday.

This group was more vulnerable,

because without official permits they could not access air-conditioned spaces provided for the 1.8mn authorised pilgrims to cool down. "People were tired after being chased by security forces before Arafat day. They were exhausted," one Arab diplomat told AFP yesterday of Saturday's day-long outdoor prayers that marked the Haj's climax.

The diplomat said the main cause of death among Egyptian pilgrims was the heat, which triggered complications related to high blood pressure and other issues. Egyptian officials were visiting hospitals to obtain information and help Egyptian pilgrims get medical care, the foreign ministry said in a statement on Thursday.

"However, there are large numbers of Egyptian citizens who are not registered in Haj databases, which requires double the effort and a longer time to search for missing persons and find their relatives," it said. Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi has ordered that a "crisis cell" headed by the prime minister follow up on the deaths of the country's pilgrims.

Sisi stressed "the need for immediate co-ordination with the Saudi authorities to facilitate receiving the bodies of the deceased and streamline the process," said a statement from his office.

More fatalities were also con-



A departing Turkish pilgrim pours cold water from a bottle on her head to cool off as she waits in Saudi Arabia's holy city of Makkah.

firmed yesterday by Pakistan and Indonesia. Out of around 150,000 pilgrims, Pakistan has so far recorded 58 deaths, a diplomat told AFP. "I think given the number of people, given the weather, this is just natural," the diplomat said.

Indonesia, which had around 240,000 pilgrims, raised its death toll to 183, its religious affairs ministry said, compared with 313 deaths recorded last year. Deaths have also been confirmed by Malaysia, India, Jordan, Iran, Senegal, Tunisia, Sudan and Iraq's autonomous Kurdistan region. In many cases, authorities have not specified the cause.

Friends and relatives have been

searching for missing pilgrims, scouring hospitals and pleading online for news, fearing the worst. Two diplomats told AFP yesterday that Saudi authorities had begun the burial process for dead pilgrims, cleaning the bodies and putting them in white burial cloth and taking them to be interred.

"The burial is done by the Saudi authorities. They have their own system so we just follow that," said one diplomat, who said his country was working to notify loved ones as best it could. The other diplomat said that given the number of fatalities it would be impossible to notify many families ahead of time,

especially in Egypt which accounts for so many of the dead.

Saudi Arabia has not provided information on fatalities, though it reported more than 2,700 cases of "heat exhaustion" on Sunday alone.

Last year various countries reported more than 300 deaths during the Haj, mostly Indonesians. The timing of the Haj moves back about 11 days each year in the Gregorian calendar, meaning that next year it will take place earlier in June, potentially in cooler conditions.

A 2019 study by the journal Geophysical Research Letters said because of climate change, heat stress for Haj pilgrims will exceed the "extreme danger threshold" from 2047 to 2052 and 2079 to 2086, "with increasing frequency and intensity as the century progresses".

Hosting the Haj is a source of prestige for the Saudi royal family, and King Salman's official title includes the words "Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques," in Makkah and Madinah.

The Haj has seen a number of disasters over the years, most recently in 2015 when a stampede during the "stoning the devil" ritual killed up to 2,300 people.

Egypt forms crisis unit

Egypt formed a crisis unit yesterday to investigate the deaths of Egyptians taking part in the an-

nual Muslim pilgrimage to Makkah during extreme heat, after medical and security sources said at least 530 Egyptians had died and 31 were missing. In recent days hundreds of people from different countries have died in punishing conditions for the Haj pilgrimage in the Saudi Arabian city, where temperatures have at times exceeded 51C.

The medical source, who was with the official Egyptian Haj delegation, said the majority of those who died were not formally registered for the event with the authorities, which meant they could not access tents.

In a statement announcing the formation of the crisis unit on the orders of President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, Egypt's cabinet said 28 deaths had been confirmed from a group of 50,752 officially registered Egyptian pilgrims. It gave no toll for unregistered pilgrims, saying Egypt was seeking an accurate inventory of the dead and missing and was co-ordinating with Saudi counterparts to arrange for the transfer of bodies.

Companies that had facilitated travel for unregistered pilgrims would be investigated and penalised, the cabinet added.

Climate scientists have said rising temperatures pose a growing threat to the event, although heat-related deaths along the Haj are not new, and have been recorded back to the 1400s.

Weary Lebanese brace for war after new Hezbollah threats

Reuters
Beirut

Lebanese product designer Tara Tabet does not want to see her country pulled into a full-scale war with Israel, but like many of her compatriots is bracing for possible conflict after new threats by armed group Hezbollah against both Israel and Cyprus.

Hezbollah chief Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah surprised many on Wednesday when he said Cyprus - the EU member state closest to Lebanon - could be drawn into the group's conflict with Israel,

raging in parallel with the Gaza war. Cyprus has denied taking sides in any war.

The warning by Nasrallah, who also threatened Israel with widespread precision strikes, left many Lebanese resigned to preparing for a possible escalation. "Of course we don't want to go into a war with them - but if that's in solidarity with the people in Gaza, then so be it," Tabet, 32, told Reuters in Beirut yesterday.

Asked if the threat to Cyprus had worried her, Tabet said it could derail her plans for a civil marriage. In Lebanon, personal status laws are governed by the

courts of each religion - pushing many couples from different religious backgrounds to travel 40 minutes by plane to Cyprus to be married in court.

She said it was "stressful" to live with so much uncertainty, but that she had been trying to carry on "as if there's nothing - all of Beirut is like that". Many Lebanese see Hezbollah's eight-month conflict with Israel as the latest episode in a string of recent setbacks - from Covid-19 lockdowns to the 2020 Beirut blast and an economic crisis that crushed the local lira and wiped out bank savings.

Sami Masri, a 38-year-old businessman from the south who runs a coffeshop in Beirut, said Israeli strikes had kept him from taking his family to the rolling hills of southern Lebanon for weekends, as they usually did in summer. That meant spending more to access private beaches closer to Beirut - and even there, Masri said, he could not have fun.

"You're not happy because, you don't know, at any point - we have our passports ready, we have a suitcase ready, we have some food stocks ready," he told Reuters.

Already, some 90,000 Lebanese have fled their homes in the

south. Some left Lebanon, others are staying with relatives and the most vulnerable are in collective shelters, including in the port city of Sidon. Bana Baalbaki, a Sidon resident who spoke to Reuters in the city's market quarter, put on a brave face.

"No, I am not afraid because we are not better than the people of Gaza, nor the people of the south who were displaced," she told Reuters. But others - like shopkeeper Qassem Qarram - were more worried. "Of course everyone is afraid, and those who tell you they are not afraid will be lying to themselves," he said.



Bana Baalbaki at a market in the southern Lebanese port city of Sidon.

ISA Qatar organises seminar

Qatar Section of International Society of Automation (ISA), the largest worldwide professional body for Instrumentation and Control engineering professionals, recently organised its 113th seminar. The topic was 'Digitalisation in Oil & Gas Sectors'.

Kaushik Joshi, marketing and communication manager, Bartec, presented an introduction of 5G Technology for intrinsically safe

smart phone and scanner in hazardous area.

He emphasised that application of 5G smartphones for plant operation will ease the various operational requirement in digitalisation.

Sree Kumar, project manager, Bartec, highlighted the wireless connectivity solutions in the oil and gas industry. He also highlighted the use of automation cabinet of explosion proof type in oil and gas units.

Bartec's local representative Instrol's manager Sateesh also addressed the seminar presided by the chapter president Nilangshu Dey.

The attendees were instrumentation and control engineers of QatarEnergy, Qafac, QChem, Oryx GTL, Dolphin Energy, Qapco, Qasco, Qafco, Worley Parsons, Technip and other leading engineering and contracting companies of Qatar.





Educational trips for BPS tiny tots

Birla Public School's Kindergarten students went on educational field trips to Kidzmondo and Kidzania over two days recently. The hands-on learning experiences were designed to ignite their imagination and provide them with a deeper understanding of various professions and everyday life skills. They had the opportunity to step into the shoes of doctors, firefighters, chefs, and more, gaining insight into the responsibilities and joys of these professions. The students thoroughly enjoyed the trips, which helped develop their cognitive and social development, encouraging curiosity and fostering a love for lifelong learning.




131 donate blood at QITC event

The Qatar Indian Thowheed Center (QITC), a forum of Tamil-speaking Muslim expatriates active for 21 years, organised its 38th blood donation camp on June 14 in collaboration with Hamad Medical Corporation. A total of 131 members donated blood after meeting the health criteria. The camp was held from 8.30am to 4pm at the Qatar National Blood Donation Center.

TGS celebrates Telangana state formation day

The Telangana Gulf Samithi Qatar, an affiliated organisation of the Indian Community Benevolent Forum (ICBF) celebrated the 10th anniversary of India's youngest state Telangana.

Indian ambassador Vipul was the chief and ICBF vice-president Deepak Shetty the guest of honour.

Indian Cultural Centre presi-

dent A P Manikantan, vice-president Subramanya Hebbagelu, general secretary Mohan Kumar, advisory council member Nandini Abbagouni, ICBF managing committee members Zareena Ahad, Neelambaro Savardekar, Mohamed Kunhi, Shankar Goud, and Kulwinder Singh were the other guests.

Folk singer Lavanya Shivagouni and fusion singer Arun Kumar

Dasari, specially flown from India for the event, gave a memorable performance. The guests along with TGS president Madhukar Maidam and managing committee members Gaddi Raju, Saigiri Vamsi, Sandhya Rani, Priyanka Togiti, Goli Srinivas, Sagar, Azeem, Manohar, and Karam Maruthi paid tribute to Telangana activists who laid down their life for the separate state.



Qatar resident finalist in Indian pageant

Qatar resident Vinita Rathore was one of the top six finalists, out of the 46 contestants in the recent 'Mrs India International Queen' Beauty Pageant. "I am grateful for the opportunity and the support I have received," she said in a statement.



KSQ celebrates World Environment Day

The Karnataka Sangha Qatar (KSQ) celebrated World Environment Day with a two-day programme that featured planting saplings and a drawing competition in which 72 children took part.

Vaishnavi Shreenivasan and P N Baburajan were the guests. Vice-president Ramesh K S welcomed the gathering.

President Ravi Shetty in his address, emphasised the importance of preserving Mother Earth and urged everyone to plant trees whenever and wher-

ever they get an opportunity.

Mahesh Gowda, Subramanya Hebbagilu, Arun Kumar, V S Mannangi, H K Madhu, Dr Sanjay Kudari, and Milan Arun were among those present.

Joint secretary L G Patil proposed a vote of thanks.

Environment and logistics secretary Shashidhar H B anchored the closing ceremony and co-ordinated the event along with ladies and children co-ordinator Bhuvana Suraj, all managing committee members and volunteers.



District 116 Toastmasters hold annual conference

The District 116 Toastmasters Annual Conference, themed "Beyond Words," held over two days recently, united members from across Qatar, featuring competitions, keynote speeches, networking opportunities, and recognition ceremonies.

A welcome address by DTAC chair Hissa al-Mohannadi was followed by an inaugural address from Toastmasters International past president Lark Doley.

A banner parade was led by Mani Roy. Chief guest Munera al-Dosari delivered

a keynote on 'Failures Lead to Success.'

The competitions began with the evaluation contest chaired by Jithin Joseph Jacob, and continued with the Tamil and Malayalam speech contests.

The morning session concluded with the District Director Awards for 2022-23, presented by Rajesh V C.

The afternoon session included the humorous speech contest, chaired by Hanna Safardokht.

Doley's keynote on 'A Centennial Journey' highlighted Toastmasters In-

ternational's century-long journey. District director Ravishankar recognised the current term's leadership, followed by an address by past region adviser Rajeswar Sundaresan.

Day two featured table topics contest, chaired by Smitha Abraham, and a keynote on 'The Secret to Success in Toastmasters & Life' by Verity Price, World Champion of Public Speaking 2021.

The district club growth awards presented by Alar Mel Mangai, programme quality awards by Sabeena M K, and PR

awards by Sudhir Gujar were significant highlights.

The installation ceremony of the new district officers for 2024-2025 was conducted by Doley. The international speech contest (English), chaired by Maalika DeSilva, showcased top speaking talents, with the winner advancing to the region quarter-finals.

Verity Price delivered another keynote, 'Think Ahead of the Crowd.' Sabeena M K proposed a vote of thanks. The contest winners, in the order of

first, second and third places, respectively are : International speech - Nisha Shivram, Rukhsana Khan, Roshan Sukheja. Table topics - Tariro Dorcas Matibiri, Fawad Kasu, Pooja Saran. Humorous speech - Sheeja Anis, Chandrashekhara Dudhe, Rabi Lamichhane. Evaluation contest - Abhishek Chattopadhyay, Tariro Dorcas Matibiri, Nirlep P Bhatt. Malayalam speech - Mohamed Rafi, Gayathri Vijesh, Mohamed Jaisal. Tamil speech - Vasuki Sathiyababu, Imthisa Hassan, Mohamed Nizar.



Myanmar armed groups accuse junta of breaking ceasefire

AFP
Yangon

An alliance of Myanmar ethnic armed groups has accused the junta of repeatedly violating a China-brokered ceasefire in the north of the country this month and causing civilian casualties.

Beijing brokered a truce between the junta and the “Three Brotherhood Alliance” in January after months of fighting that displaced more than half a million people near China’s southern border.

The ceasefire allowed the alliance – made up of the Ta’ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), the Myanmar National Democratic

Alliance Army (MNDA) and the Arakan Army (AA) – to hold swaths of territory it had seized in northern Shan state. Junta troops launched an air strike on Wednesday on territory the TNLA holds near the ruby and gem-mining hub of Mogoke, the group said. “In this incident, one civilian was killed and three wounded including a 10-year-old child,” the

TNLA said in a statement posted to the alliance’s Telegram channel.

Junta troops had also launched a drone attack on Tuesday that killed one TNLA member and wounded four others. The attacks were the latest violation this month by the junta, which the TNLA said had shelled its positions and cut roads and restricted the flow of goods

to TNLA-controlled towns. Junta spokesman Zaw Min Tun accused the TNLA of being the “main group behind disturbances” in Shan state. TNLA fighters had fought alongside local “People’s Defence Forces” in recent fighting near the town of Pyin Oo Lwin, he said. Dozens of PDFs have sprung up since the 2021 coup and have surprised the mili-

tary with their effectiveness, according to analysts.

The “Three Brotherhood Alliance” launched a surprise offensive across northern Myanmar in October last year, seizing several towns and lucrative border hubs that are vital for trade with China, dealing a blow to the cash-strapped and isolated junta.

N Korea-Russia pact calls for prompt military aid if invaded

Reuters
Seoul

North Korea and Russia have agreed to provide immediate military assistance if either faces armed aggression, according to the full text of a landmark pact released yesterday by Pyongyang after a visit by Russian President Vladimir Putin.

South Korea responded by convening an emergency meeting of its national security council and said it would now consider sending arms to Ukraine, which it had previously ruled out.

Hours after Putin departed for Vietnam, North Korea’s state media published the ‘Treaty on Comprehensive Strategic Partnership’, which in effect revives a defunct mutual defence agreement from the 1960s.

The agreement, which Putin and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un signed on Wednesday and also included co-operation on nuclear energy, space exploration, food and energy security, is one of the highest-profile moves in Asia by Moscow in years. Putin visited China last month, soon after his

inauguration for a fifth term as president.

“In case any one of the two sides is put in a state of war by an armed invasion from an individual state or several states, the other side shall provide military and other assistance with all means in its possession without delay in accordance with Article 51 of the UN Charter and the laws of the DPRK and the Russian Federation,” Article 4 of the agreement says, using the initials of North Korea’s official name.

Article 51 of the UN Charter provides for the right of a member country to take individual or collective self-defence actions.

Kim echoed Putin’s statement explicitly linking their deepening ties to fighting the “hegemonic and imperialist” policies of the West and the US in particular, including its support for Ukraine.

Washington and Seoul have been increasingly alarmed by deepening military co-operation between Russia and the North, and have accused them of violating international laws by trading in arms for Russia to use against Ukraine. Ukrainian officials have said they have found North Korean missile debris inside their country.

Russia and North Korea deny any arms trade. Following a meeting of its national security council, South Korea said it would further strengthen security co-operation with the US and Japan. Seoul would add 243 new items to a list of goods banned from export to Russia bringing the total to 1,402, and would also review its position on arming Ukraine, the national security adviser, Chang Ho-jin, told a news conference.

Artyom Lukin, of Russia’s Far Eastern Federal University, said the pact with North Korea would be “Moscow’s first defence alliance outside the post-Soviet space”.

“It remains to be seen how far and how deep Russia and North Korea will go in their alliance relationship this time,” Lukin said. “Will North Korean troops appear in Ukraine? Will Russia provide military assistance to the North in possible North-South clashes over the disputed border in the Yellow Sea? Nothing is off the table now.”

Cho Han-bum, of the Korea Institute for National Unification in Seoul, said the agreement was a big win for Russia, laying a legal framework for North Korea’s support in the Ukraine war.



Russia’s President Vladimir Putin and Vietnam’s President To Lam take part in an event attended by the Vietnam Friendship Association and generations of Vietnamese alumni that studied in Russia at the Hanoi Opera House in Hanoi yesterday.

Putin in Vietnam seeks new ‘security architecture’

Reuters
Hanoi

Russian President Vladimir Putin said he wanted to build a “reliable security architecture” in the Asia-Pacific region during a state visit to Vietnam yesterday, part of a two-nation trip to Asia seen as show of defiance to the West.

A day after signing a mutual defence agreement with North Korea, Putin received a 21-gun salute at a military ceremony in Vietnam, was embraced by two of its Communist leaders and lavishly praised by one of them.

Putin’s visit has drawn criticism from the US and its allies, who treat the Russian leader as a pariah and have protested that he should not be given a stage on which to

defend Russia’s war in Ukraine.

Russia and Vietnam signed agreements on issues including energy, underlining Moscow’s pivot to Asia after the West imposed sanctions on Moscow over the conflict in Ukraine.

“We are firmly committed to deepening the comprehensive strategic partnership with Vietnam, which remains among the priorities of Russia’s foreign policy,” Putin was quoted as saying by Russian media.

“We are ready to continue active joint work on a wide range of topics, including economic, scientific and technical ties, defence, security and humanitarian contacts.”

He was quoted by Russia’s TASS news agency as saying the two countries shared an interest in “developing a reliable security architecture” in the region based

on not using force and peacefully settling disputes with no room for “closed military-political blocs”.

The 11 pacts signed in Hanoi were not on the same level as the landmark agreement reached in North Korea.

But Putin’s warm welcome was an achievement for the Russian leader, who has an outstanding International Criminal Court arrest warrant against him over alleged war crimes in Ukraine, charges he denies. Russia and Vietnam are not members of the ICC.

“Putin’s triumphal reception in Hanoi will mark a counter-point to Russia’s recent setbacks,” said Carlyle Thayer, emeritus professor at the Australian Defence Force Academy, listing the recent Ukraine conference in Switzerland and new European Union sanctions on Russia.

Japan seeks more visitors despite overtourism woes

Japan’s tourism chief yesterday said its ambitious goal of luring 60mn foreign tourists a year – more than double the current level – is well within reach, despite surging overtourism concerns.

Japan last year attracted over 25mn tourists from abroad, in part buoyed by the lifting of pandemic-era border restrictions, from countries such as South Korea, Singapore and the US.

Ichiro Takahashi, head of Japan’s tourism agency, acknowledged the previously announced target of 60mn remains “tough”, but stressed it is within the realm of possibility. “It is a figure that we can very much achieve by making the right efforts”, Takahashi said in Tokyo.

“There are still many little-known places in Japan that are left unexplored by tourists from overseas – I believe Japan has infinite tourism resources,” Takahashi said.

Bangladesh flood situation worsens



The flood situation in Companiganj area of Sylhet district in Bangladesh worsened yesterday. In Sylhet, lashing rain and rivers swollen by flooding upstream in India swamped heavily populated areas. The Met office has forecast heavy to very heavy rainfall in the Sylhet division in the next 72 hours.

Rains lash China, more flooding feared

Reuters
Beijing

Days of torrential rain, flash floods and landslides across southern China forced authorities to step up emergency plans, as surging waters from swollen rivers threatened to disrupt the lives of millions.

As of yesterday, at least nine people had died in Guangdong province’s city of Meizhou and another six were missing there amid the worst floods on record on the Songyuan and Shiku rivers, state broadcaster CCTV reported.

Guangdong upgraded an emergency response plan for landslides, flooding and other disasters to the second-highest level, helping to co-ordinate and deploy resources across the

flood-stricken province.

Several other provinces have already activated a Level-IV emergency response. China’s flood control emergency response system has four levels, with Level-I being the most severe.

The annual flooding season started earlier in China this year, as southern provinces faced intense storms that have swept away bridges and destroyed low-rise homes, devastated agricultural output and submerged numerous cities.

Authorities in Guilin, a major city in Guangxi in southwest China, raised a “red” flood warning signal, the highest level, late on Wednesday when the water level of the Li River, which runs through the city, reached 3.61 metres above the warning line, *China Daily* reported yesterday.

China sailors wield knives in sea clash with Philippines

AFP
Manila

Chinese coast guard sailors brandished knives, an axe and other weapons in a clash with Philippine naval vessels near a strategic reef in the South China Sea, dramatic new footage released by Manila showed.

The clash took place Monday as Philippine forces attempted to re-supply marines stationed on a derelict warship that was deliberately grounded atop the disputed Second Thomas Shoal in 1999 to assert Manila’s territorial claims.

It was the latest in a series of esca-

lating confrontations between Chinese and Philippine ships in recent months as Beijing steps up efforts to push its claims to the disputed area.

Philippine military chief General Romeo Brawner said the “out-numbered” Filipino crew had been unarmed and had fought with their “bare hands”.

A Filipino sailor lost a thumb in the clash, in which the Chinese coast guard confiscated or destroyed Philippine equipment including guns, according to the Philippine military.

Fresh footage released by the Philippine military showed small boats crewed by Chinese sailors shouting, waving knives and using sticks to hit an inflatable boat as a siren blared.

A voice speaking Tagalog can be heard in one clip saying someone had “lost a finger”.

Manila’s footage of the clash stands in stark contrast to photos released by Beijing’s state media which did not show Chinese forces wielding weapons.

Asked about the videos yesterday, Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Lin Jian said Manila’s comments on the clash were “totally bogus accusations that confuse black with white”. He blamed the Philippines for the confrontation, saying they had “escalated tensions” and accused them of ramming Chinese boats. Lin said the Philippine boats had been trying “to sneak in building

materials, but also tried to smuggle in military equipment”.

Beijing has insisted that its coast guard behaved in a “professional and restrained” way and claimed “no direct measures” were taken against Philippine personnel.

But in a clip shared by Manila, a Chinese sailor standing on the deck of one of the boats can clearly be seen waving an axe.

Another shows a Chinese coast guard sailor striking the inflatable boat with a stick. A second man can also be seen stabbing the boat with a knife. The Philippines military said an axe-wielding sailor had “threatened to injure” a Filipino soldier, while others were “explicitly threat-

ening to harm” Filipino troops.

“The (Chinese coast guard) personnel then began hurling rocks and other objects at our personnel,” Manila said.

“They also slashed the (inflatable boats), rendering them inoperable.”

The Filipino sailors, wearing brown camouflage with helmets and vests, are not carrying weapons in the clips. “Amidst this violent confrontation, the CCG (Chinese coast guard) also deployed tear gas, intensifying the chaos and confusion, while continuously blaring sirens to further disrupt communication,” the caption said. Manila has accused Beijing of an “act of piracy” against its forces. It has also demanded the

return of items “looted” by the Chinese side, including seven guns, and reparations for damaged equipment.

Analysts say Beijing is escalating confrontations with the Philippines in a bid to push it out of the South China Sea.

Jay Batongbacal, director for the Institute for Maritime Affairs and Law of the Sea in Manila, said China’s forces could be poised to seize the grounded Philippine warship, the Sierra Madre. “The deployment of their forces at present around the Sierra Madre and then the many reefs around the Kalayaan island group is indicative that they’re ready to do it,” he said, referring to Manila-claimed areas in the Spratly Islands.

TRAGEDY

Heatwave kills dozens of homeless in Delhi, says group

The heatwave gripping northern India has killed nearly 200 homeless people in New Delhi over the last week, a group dedicated to helping the homeless said yesterday, as the country grapples with record high summer temperatures. As many as 52 bodies were brought to hospitals in the past two days, the *Times of India* reported yesterday, adding that most of them were poor people who lived and worked in the open. A total of 192 homeless people died in New Delhi between June 11 and June 19, according to government figures shared by non-profit organisation Centre for Holistic Development, higher than in previous years.

PEOPLE

French journalist leaves India after work permit refused

A French journalist yesterday said he had left India after more than 13 years because he was denied a work permit, a decision he called an act of “incomprehensible censorship”. Sebastien Farcis, who worked for Radio France Internationale and other major French-language media outlets, said he had left India earlier this week after having been informed in March that his routine journalist permit extension had been denied. “This work ban comes as a big shock,” he said. “It was communicated to me on the eve of the Indian general elections, which I was hence forbidden to cover. This appeared to me as an incomprehensible censorship.”

DEMONSTRATION

Climate protest targets private jets at UK airport

Climate activists yesterday gained access to a UK airport and sprayed private jets with orange paint. Environmental protest group Just Stop Oil claimed US pop star Taylor Swift’s private jet had landed at Stansted airport “mere hours earlier”. Taylor Swift has attracted criticism over her use of private jets. But Essex Police said her aircraft was not at the airport, northeast of London, at the time of the incident. Police said they had arrested two women aged 22 and 28 on suspicion of criminal damage and interference with national infrastructure. The pair used fire extinguishers filled with orange paint to spray two private jets, according to a statement.

LEGAL

Environmental activists win ruling over UK oil well plan

The UK’s highest court yesterday ruled that planners must look at the impact of emissions on global warming before granting approval for oil wells, in a landmark case that climate activists said makes it easier to block fossil fuel projects. Environmental campaigners had argued that planning permission to retain and expand an oil well site near London’s Gatwick Airport was flawed, because it had not considered the impact of greenhouse gas emissions from the use of the oil. Supreme Court judges agreed by a narrow three to two majority, quashing the planning approval, which they said was unlawful.



Family members weep near the bodies of victims who died after consuming illegal alcohol in Kallakurichi district of Tamil Nadu yesterday.

Moonshine claims 36 lives in India

Reuters
Chennai

At least 36 people died and more than 60 were being treated in hospitals after consuming moonshine in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu, a government spokesperson said yesterday. Since Wednesday over 100 people, suffering from vomiting, stomach ache and diarrhoea, have needed hospital treatment in the Kallakurichi district, 250km by road from the state capital Chennai, the spokesperson said. The state government said it had taken disciplinary action

against at least 10 officials, including the district’s chief administrator and its police chief. “I was shocked and saddened to hear the news ... Action has also been taken against the officials who failed to prevent it,” Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin said in a post on X. Police arrested four people over the sale of the item and seized 200 litres of the methanol-mixed drink, the state government said. Deaths from moonshine are a regular occurrence in India. The Tamil Nadu government said it was also taking steps to identify people involved in the production of methanol – a toxic chemical normally used for in-

dustrial purposes. A video from ANI showed healthcare officials carrying patients in ambulances into a hospital while another shot showed several people standing outside a mortuary in Kallakurichi. More than a dozen people died last year in a similar incident in a nearby district of Tamil Nadu. Meanwhile the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam general secretary Edappadi K Palaniswami demanded the resignation of the chief minister in the wake of the Kallakurichi tragedy. Palaniswami alleged the involvement of DMK functionaries in the incident.

Opposition leader Kejriwal granted bail in graft case

India opposition leader and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal was granted bail by a city court in a graft case yesterday, his party and lawyers said, following national elections in which opposition groups fared better than expected. India’s financial-crime fighting agency arrested Kejriwal in March in connection with corruption claims – allegations he has denied. He was granted temporary bail by India’s top court in May “because of the (national) elections”, enabling him to campaign for his Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and the I.N.D.I.A alliance of over two dozen opposition groups, of which AAP is a member. Kejriwal surrendered to prison authorities on June 1 as his temporary bail ended. “Tomorrow morning, the process for bail will be completed and he will be released from prison tomorrow afternoon,” Rishikesh Kumar, a member of Kejriwal’s legal team, said yesterday evening.

World Refugee Day marked



Supporters and members of refugee charities Safe Passage, Choose Love and Freedom from Torture gather to mark World Refugee Day on Parliament Square, central London, yesterday while calling on the next UK government to commit to a fair new plan for refugees, including scrapping the Rwanda scheme.

Modi criticised for exam irregularities

Reuters
Prayagraj, India

India’s opposition parties and the country’s students yesterday hit out at the new government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi for irregularities in recent government-run tests for college admissions and government teaching jobs. Modi surprisingly lost a parliamentary majority in a general election that ended this month partly because of joblessness, especially among the youth, exacerbated by frequent leaks of test papers for government jobs that are coveted by many Indians for the security. Having to rely on fickle allies to run his third government, Modi’s Bharatiya Janata Party next faces local elections in the states of Haryana and Maharashtra where it did badly in the national vote.

The government late on Wednesday cancelled an examination done earlier this week for university and college teachers as well as doctorate courses, based on early inputs from a government cyber-crime analysis team that the “integrity of the aforesaid examination may have been compromised”. It said in a statement the federal Central Bureau of Investigation would probe the matter. The ministry of education said it had also sought a report from police into “certain irregularities alleged” in running another test for admission in undergraduate medical programmes in May. The main opposition Congress party, on a high after its better-than-expected election result, said the “Modi government has ruined the country’s education and recruitment system”.

Hunt concedes Tory election win would be tough

Reuters
London

British Finance Minister Jeremy Hunt yesterday said it would be “very tough” for the Conservatives to win the July 4 election, after opinion polls predicted a landslide win for the opposition Labour Party. On another chaotic day for the governing party, its campaign director took a leave of absence, which media reports linked to an investigation around bets being placed on the date of the election before it was announced.

Polls indicate Britain is on course to elect a centre-left Labour government led by Keir Starmer, ending 14 years of rule by the Conservatives, whom many voters blame for political and economic turmoil that has lowered their living standards. Asked at a *Times* newspaper event whether the Conservatives could win the election, Hunt said: “It’s going to be very tough. “I don’t think any of us would pretend that is the most likely outcome. We can certainly do a lot better than the polls are suggesting and we are working very hard to do so.”

Starmer is set to walk into the prime minister’s office at 10 Downing Street with a 200-seat parliamentary majority, the biggest for any party for a century, according to the latest poll by YouGov. A separate poll predicted Rishi Sunak could become the first British prime minister in history to lose his own seat in a national election. Hunt’s seat is also under threat. Sunak’s party was already far behind in opinion polls when he called the election, hoping that an upturn in economic data would help it narrow the gap with Labour. But that has failed to materialise from a Conservative campaign be-

set by missteps, starting with Sunak’s bedraggled announcement of the election in pouring rain, and most notably his leaving D-Day commemorations in France earlier than other world leaders, for which he apologised. The latest embarrassment was a investigation into a second Conservative candidate over bets placed on the timing of the election. The BBC named the candidate as Laura Saunders and said her husband, campaign director Tony Lee, was also being investigated. “The director of campaigning took a leave of absence from CCHQ

yesterday,” the Conservative Party said in a statement. Neither Lee nor Saunders could immediately be reached for comment. Another candidate has already apologised. Sunak, Starmer and other leaders faced questions from an audience of voters on the BBC later yesterday. Starmer, who has pledged not to raise the main taxes paid by working people, has sought to manage expectations that a Labour government could have an immediate big impact on issues like the cost of living and standard of public services.

“There’s no magic wand that we can wave the day after the election and fix all the country’s problems. And nobody would believe us if we said there is,” he told ITV’s Peston programme. The Conservatives have sought to turn the spotlight onto tax, saying a Labour government would cost households more. Starmer said his focus would be on expanding the economy rather than on increasing taxes. “If all you do is tax the existing pie or cut the spending of the existing pie, which is ever-reducing, you are going round and round in circles,” he said.

South African MP suspended over ‘hate’ video amid cabinet talks

AFP
Johannesburg

A key member of South Africa's newly formed coalition government suspended one of its lawmakers on Thursday, after an old video where the MP is seen using violent, racist language resurfaced online. The centre-right Democratic Alliance (DA) party said Renaldo Gouws, who was sworn into parliament last week after general elections on May 29, would face disciplinary charges

before the party's legal commission. "The DA has established that the video, in which Renaldo Gouws uses execrable language, is in fact genuine and not a fake as initially suspected," the party said. "The DA Federal Executive has therefore suspended Mr Gouws with immediate effect." The issue comes at a delicate political time. Last week, the DA struck a coalition deal with the long-ruling African National Congress (ANC) and several other smaller groups after the elections failed to pro-

duce an outright winner. Negotiations to form a cabinet are still ongoing. South Africa's second largest party, the free-market DA has long struggled to shake off an image of representing the white minority. Its inclusion in what the ANC – the party of the late Nelson Mandela – calls a government of national unity, has upset some within the former anti-apartheid movement. It has also drawn criticism from the left. The radical Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) shunned

the coalition because of it and former president Jacob Zuma's uMkhonto weSizwe (MK) denounced the government pact as a "white-led unholy alliance". South Africa's human rights watchdog said on Thursday it would institute proceedings against Gouws for "hate speech and/or harassment". "Given Mr Gouws' position as a Member of Parliament, his alleged actions carry even greater weight and responsibility," the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) said.

In the video, the lawmaker is heard calling for the killing of black South Africans and using racial slurs, while discussing a controversial anti-apartheid struggle song with the words "Kill the Boer". SAHRC said the clip was first published on Gouws' YouTube channel in 2010. Earlier this week, the 41-year-old "unreservedly" apologised for another old video where he is seen arguing that white South Africans suffer from reverse apartheid. "I refute any claims of racism

or being a racist. I can however see how my message was distorted in the way it was delivered by me and I take full responsibility for the actions of my younger and immature self," Gouws wrote on X, formerly known as Twitter. His suspension comes a day after President Cyril Ramaphosa was inaugurated for a second full term. He was re-elected by parliament with support from the DA, the Zulu nationalist Inkatha Freedom Party, the anti-immigration Patriotic Alliance and the small centre-left GOOD party.



Kenya mounted police officers patrol on horses during a demonstration against tax hikes.



Protesters react while talking to a Kenya police officer in downtown Nairobi.

Thousands of youth take to streets against tax hikes in Kenyan cities

AFP
Nairobi

Armed with smartphones and whistles, thousands of young Kenyans took to the streets across the country yesterday to protest tax hikes, livestreaming the demonstrations in a vivid show of anger by Gen-Z citizens against the government. Police in the capital Nairobi fired tear gas and water cannon against protesters near parliament, but apart from isolated scuffles earlier in the day and some groups setting fire to tyres and road signs around dusk, the demonstrations remained mostly peaceful. Led largely by young Kenyans, the demonstrations – dubbed "Occupy Parliament" – began in Nairobi on Tuesday before spreading nationwide on Thursday. They have galvanised widespread discontent over President William Ruto's economic policies in a country already grappling with a cost-of-living crisis. Protesters have turned to TikTok, Instagram and X to plan and livestream the demonstrations. Hours after Tuesday's action, which saw hundreds of youth face off against the police, the cash-



A damaged bus is seen during the riots.

strapped government agreed to roll back several of the tax hikes laid out in a new bill. But the government still intends to go ahead with some tax increases, defending the proposed levies as necessary for filling its coffers and cutting reliance on external borrowing. On Thursday, protests were held across Kenya, with thousands assembling across Nairobi, the Indian Ocean city of Mombasa, the Rift Valley city of Nakuru and the opposition bastion of Kisumu, ac-

cording to AFP journalists and images broadcast on TV. Isolated clashes broke out in Nairobi between protesters and police, who used tear gas and water cannon against demonstrators gathering near the parliament, which began debating the bill on Wednesday. Despite a heavy police presence and closures along several roads leading to parliament, thousands of protesters gathered in groups, blowing whistles and vuvuzelas, singing the national anthem and

chanting: "Ruto must go". Margaret, a 23-year-old jobseeker, told AFP that she was "tired of being lied to" and being dismissed as a "keyboard warrior" by those in power. "Gen-Z – we are the voice of the people. And that's something they are not used to, so we are just being called keyboard warriors but I guess they are also terrified of this," she said. Another first-time protester, Fidelis Njorge, said she went live on Instagram because she wanted to spread the word about the demonstrations. "The next time we come out, we will come out in bigger and bigger numbers," the university student told AFP. "We are here to do the right thing, we are not here to cause chaos, we are just here to be heard." The presidency on Tuesday announced the removal of proposed levies on bread purchases, car ownership as well as financial and mobile services, prompting a warning from the treasury of a 200-bn-shilling shortfall as a result of the budget cuts. The government has now targeted an increase in fuel prices and export taxes to fill the void left by the changes, a move critics say will make life more expensive in a country already battling high inflation. "They are just



A Kenya police officer fires a tear gas canister.

trying to lie to us, the taxes that they have removed on bread they have added somewhere else," 22-year-old protester Bella said, describing it as a tactic to "blindfold" citizens. "We are dying, we can't afford to have three meals a day. We don't eat three meals in a day. What benefits do we get from him? Why should we respect him? Ruto should go," 28-year-old Jack Ouma said. A parliament source told AFP that a final vote on the proposals was expected on June 27, three

days before the deadline for passing the bill. The taxes were projected to raise 346.7bn shillings (\$2.7bn), equivalent to 1.9% of GDP, and reduce the budget deficit from 5.7% to 3.3% of GDP. At least 335 people were arrested during Tuesday's protests in Nairobi, according to a consortium of lobby groups including the human rights commission, KNCHR, and Amnesty Kenya. Kenya is one of the most dynamic economies in East Africa but a third of its 51.5mn people live in poverty.

Over \$1bn pledged to create 'African vaccine market'

AFP
Paris

World leaders, health groups and pharmaceutical firms announced \$1.2bn in funding at a summit yesterday to produce vaccines in Africa, which is facing numerous health crises including rising cholera outbreaks. The African Vaccine Manufacturing Accelerator "will be an essential step towards a genuine African vaccine market," French President Emmanuel Macron said at the opening of the summit in the Paris. Three quarters of this funding will come from Europe, Macron told the summit, which was also attended by leaders from Botswana, Rwanda, Senegal, Ghana, as well as visiting ministers, health groups and pharmaceutical firms. Germany will contribute \$318bn to the scheme, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said in a video message. France put in \$100mn and the UK \$60mn, while other donors include the United States, Canada, Norway, Japan and the Gates Foundation. The scheme "could become a catalyst for promoting the phar-



maceutical industry in Africa and fostering collaboration between member states", African Union commission Moussa Faki Mahamat told the summit. Africa imports "99 percent of its vaccines at an exorbitant cost", he added. The Covid-19 pandemic shone a light on the unequal global distribution of vaccines, as wealthy countries home to big pharma firms snapped up most doses, leaving Africa far behind. The new scheme aims to move vaccine production to Africa to give the continent more sovereignty – and avoid history repeating. "When the next pandemic hits, even if our leaders in the rich Western countries are angels, the pressure to hold on to your own vaccines, for your own people, is always going to be irresistible," British Foreign Secretary David

Cameron told the summit. A recent resurgence of cholera in many parts of Africa has highlighted the need for more local vaccine producers. Only one firm in the world – South Korea's Eu-Biologics – makes the cheap and effective vaccine doses for the deadly disease. Macron called for cholera to be "consigned to the past", adding that outbreaks were now affecting "half of Africa". He announced a production chain for cholera vaccines to be launched in Africa by the South African biopharmaceutical firm Biovac. The Gavi vaccine alliance, which helps distribute jabs for more than 20 different diseases to poorer countries, was one of the organisers of Thursday's Global Forum for Vaccine Sovereignty and Innovation. At the forum, Gavi announced it is seeking to raise \$9bn to fund its vaccine programmes from 2036 to 2030. The US will contribute \$1.58bn to the Gavi effort, first lady Jill Biden said in a video message, with more commitments expected later Thursday. Gavi chair Jose Manuel Barroso said that "one million children vaccinated since 2000 is an incredible achievement".

Antibiotic-resistance in sub-Saharan Africa 'alarming'

Superbug infections are taking a disproportionate toll in sub-Saharan Africa where there is "extremely concerning" levels of multi-resistant bacterial strains among young children, two studies warned Thursday. The World Health Organisation has declared antimicrobial resistance, which occurs when bacteria become immune to antibiotics, a global health crisis. Analyses carried out by Geneva University Hospital (HUG) and the University of Geneva (UNIGE) concluded that the situation in sub-Saharan Africa was particularly "alarming". "We observed a strong proportion of antibiotic resistant bacteria, in particular those found in the blood of young patients," explained Noemie Wagner, at HUG's paediatric infectiousiology unit. Both analyses focused on Enterobacteria, which are found in the digestive tract and are known for their ability to develop antibiotic resistance. They are responsible for the most invasive infections in newborns in the region, researchers said. The first analysis evaluated antibiotic-resistant bacteria found in the blood of young children in the region during infections. The results suggested "a very high level of resistance to first-line and second-line antibiotics recommended for treating child sepsis", the researchers said in a statement. The most common strains identified were E.coli and Klebsiella spp, which showed considerable resistance to the first-line antibiotics recommended for sepsis – ampicillin and gentamicin. The analysis reviewed over 1,000 studies published since 2005 and conducting an in-depth meta-analysis on 122 of them. It found that 92.5% of E.coli found in the blood of children with infection were resistant to ampicillin and 42.7% to gentamicin. The Klebsiella spp strain is always resistant to ampicillin, and the study showed 77.6% were also resistant to gentamicin. The analysis indicated very high proportions of resistance to cephalosporin, a third-generation antibiotic considered a second-line treatment for sepsis in children. The aim of the second study was to estimate the prevalence of children "colonised" by cephalosporin-resistant Enterobacteria – meaning the bacteria is present in their stool when there is no infection. Following an analysis of 40 studies, representing more than 9,400 children, the researchers determined that nearly a third were carriers of Enterobacteria resistant to wide spectrum cephalosporins. — AFP



Four in five people want more climate action, UN poll finds

AFP
United Nations

Four in every five people want their country to strengthen its commitments to addressing climate change, according to a global poll of 75,000 participants published yesterday.

The survey by the UN Development Programme (UNDP), Oxford University and GeoPoll posed 15 questions by randomised telephone calls to people in 77 countries representing 87% of the world's population.

The key finding was that 80% of respondents want their governments to increase efforts to fight against global warming.

Poorer countries beat this drum the loudest, with 89% in favour, though appetite is also high in the wealthy G20 nations (76%), according to the survey.

Alberto weakens to tropical depression over north Mexico

Alberto, the first named storm of the 2024 Atlantic hurricane season, has weakened into a tropical depression as it moves inland over northeastern Mexico, bringing more heavy rains and flooding after leaving four dead, including three children.

The governor of Mexico's Nuevo Leon state told local media late on Wednesday that at least three people under 18 had died due to the storm.

By morning yesterday civil protection had reported a fourth death due to an electric shock, local media reported.

One of the victims was later identified by emergency services as a 15-year-old boy swept away by a current outside Monterrey, Mexico's third-biggest city.

In both Nuevo Leon, where Alberto filled up the Santa Catarina river, causing it to break its banks, and in the coastal Tamaulipas state, local authorities moved people into temporary shelters and paused public activities.

The storm, however, brought much-needed rain across swathes of Mexico, where some of its reservoirs had water levels as low as 8% due to an extended drought and summer heat wave.

Actor Donald Sutherland dead at age 88

Donald Sutherland, the enigmatic Canadian actor whose lengthy career encompassed films including *The Dirty Dozen*, *Kluge*, *Ordinary People* and *The Hunger Games*, has died, his son said yesterday. He was 88.

"With a heavy heart, I tell you that my father, Donald Sutherland, has passed away," actor Kiefer Sutherland wrote on X.

The elder Sutherland had a distinctive look – and piercing eyes – that brought a depth and mystery to the huge range of roles he essayed over half a century on the big screen.

He played dashing leading men as well as antiheroes and villains, most recently making a name among a new generation of fans as the evil President Snow in *The Hunger Games* franchise.

"I personally think (he was) one of the most important actors in the history of film. Never daunted by a role, good, bad or ugly. He loved what he did and did what he loved, and one can never ask for more than that. A life well lived," wrote Kiefer Sutherland.

After what he himself termed a "meandering" start to his acting career, Donald Sutherland came to prominence in Robert Aldrich's *The Dirty Dozen*, where 12 convicts are tasked with carrying out what appears to be a suicide mission in occupied France.

Starring alongside luminaries such as Charles Bronson, Lee Marvin and Telly Savalas, Sutherland's impish charms caught the attention of producers of *M*A*S*H*.

The sophisticated satire on the Vietnam War, in which he was cast opposite Elliott Gould, turned Sutherland into a household name in 1970s America, and opened the door to a durable career that would see him work with some of the biggest names in show business. – **AFP/Reuters**



View of the rising water of the Santa Catarina River in the city of Monterrey, Mexico. – **AFP**

Nuevo Leon state authorities said they would redirect water from La Boca dam as it neared its maximum capacity of around 40mn cu m due to Alberto, after water authorities said a day earlier it was just 35% full.

Brett Anderson, senior meteorologist at AccuWeather, said yesterday that due to climate change the types of extreme heat and drought conditions Mexico has experienced will become the new normal, trapping pollutants and drying up the water cycle.

Mexico has since March experienced temperatures 5.2° Celsius (9.4° Fahrenheit) above the historical average and received barely

over a third of the normal rainfall for this period, Anderson added.

"Climate change is clearly playing a role in enhancing this warming,"

Climate change is also expected to contribute to more storms over the Atlantic this hurricane season, as warmer ocean waters allow powerful storms to intensify more rapidly.

"The climate crisis is making extreme weather events such as hurricanes and tropical storms more frequent and severe," said Save the Children regional adviser Moa Cortobius.

Some 35mn children are living in exposed areas and are at risk this season in the Atlantic, she added.

The US National Hurricane Centre (NHC) said Alberto would continue to bring heavy rains and flooding across parts of northeastern Mexico, likely producing "considerable flash and urban flooding" and possibly life-threatening mudslides.

It warned that much of the Texas coastline could continue to see moderate flooding through the morning.

The storm made landfall earlier yesterday near the Mexican city of Tampico and is churning west across the country at 18mph (30kph), packing maximum sustained winds of 35mph (55kph), the NHC said.

Higher than normal temperatures all summer in US: govt

Most of the United States will experience hotter than normal weather throughout the summer, from July to September, a US government agency has predicted, as a large part of the country sizzled in the first heatwave of the year.

"What we're predicting is generally that much of the US, excepting a few places, are forecast to be above normal," Johnna Infanti, a meteorologist for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), told a press conference.

However, the forecast does not offer any clues about possible extreme weather events during that time, she added.

The northeastern United States is in the midst of a major heatwave, just as summer officially gets under way.

About 95mn Americans are under some kind of heat warning or advisory, according to the government-run website www.heat.gov

Soaring temperatures were expected to last until the weekend, the National Weather Service (NWS) says.

"The early arrival of the heat in the summer season, persistence of heat over multiple days, and light winds and limited cloud cover will be aggravating factors in terms of overall heat

stress," the NWS said. "Those without access to reliable air conditioning are urged to find a way to cool down."

On Wednesday, the small town of Caribou, Maine tied its record high temperature of 96° Fahrenheit (35.5° Celsius).

The mercury in New York and Washington rocketed into the high 80s and low 90s yesterday, with more heat to come.

US President Joe Biden was briefed on the extreme heat, as well as the impact of Tropical Storm Alberto in Texas and New Mexico, and wildfires in the western United States, the White House said.

Last year was the hottest year on record and, according to the NOAA, 2024 has a 50% chance of topping that mark, and will certainly be among the five hottest years ever recorded.

Human-caused climate change is heating up the planet at an alarming rate, sparking repeated intense heat waves, the global scientific community agrees.

According to experts at the World Weather Attribution (WWA), deadly heat that blanketed the United States, Mexico and Central America in late May and early June was made 35 times more likely due to global warming. – **AFP**

Canadian provincial govt imposes partial fire ban

The Canadian Atlantic province of Newfoundland and Labrador has imposed a partial fire ban after an out-of-control blaze forced the evacuation of a town close to a huge underground power plant.

Several hundred people were forced to leave Churchill Falls late on Wednesday and take the only road out of town to Happy Valley-Goose Bay, some 300km (185 miles) to the east.

Churchill Falls is in Labrador, a remote and sparsely territory that has an area of around 300,000sq km (116,000sq miles).

The province includes the island of Newfoundland.

"The bulk of our assets are deployed in Labrador right now and as a result we want to make sure we don't have subsequent, other threats that could dilute efforts in fighting the fire," Premier Andrew Furey told reporters.

The ban covers all of Newfoundland and the more inhabited parts of Labrador.

Canada, which suffered its worst-ever year of wildfires in 2023, is likely to see more activity than normal in June and July, government officials said last week.

The Churchill Falls plant, with a generating capacity of 5,428MW, is the largest hydroelectric generating plant in the province and is the second largest underground hydroelectric plant in North America.

The provincial power generating company said the blaze was around 5km from the plant, which is operating normally.

"Forecasts are not favourable ... a small crew remains on site to operate the plant as long it is safe to do so," it said in a statement.

The plant also supplies electricity to neighbouring Quebec. – **Reuters**

RFK Jr misses deadline to join Biden-Trump debate

Reuters
Washington

Independent US presidential candidate Robert F Kennedy Jr is unlikely to participate in 2024's first US presidential debate after missing a deadline to meet criteria set by hosting news organisation CNN.

CNN, a division of Warner Bros Discovery and host of the June 27 debate, said that only President Joe Biden and Republican rival Donald Trump had met its conditions to take part ahead of a 12am ET (0400 GMT) deadline yesterday.

"Presidents Biden and Trump do not want me on the debate stage and CNN illegally agreed to their demand," Kennedy said in a statement.

"My exclusion by Presidents Biden and Trump from the debate is undemocratic, un-American, and cowardly."

The conditions included appearing on enough state ballots to potentially win the presidency and also garnering at least 15% voter support in four separate national polls.

Kennedy had received at least 15% in only three accepted polls to date and, by CNN's tally, had qualified for the ballot in just six states.

That would not be enough to win the presidency.

Kennedy had argued the TV network's standards were being applied unfairly and intended to keep him off the stage with candidates who



This picture take in May shows Robert F Kennedy Jr addressing the Libertarian Party's national convention. – **Reuters**

would prefer a one-on-one race.

The Kennedy campaign asked that the Federal Election Commission take action and keep CNN, Biden and Trump from holding the June 27 debate unless it makes changes.

The FEC declined to comment.

"If the debate goes forward without Mr Kennedy, the Kennedy campaign intends to pursue this issue for as long as it takes to obtain justice against these illegal acts," the campaign

said in a statement yesterday.

For the debate, Trump will get the final word, CNN reported, after a coin flip to determine podium placement and the order of closing statements.

Biden's campaign chose to select the right podium position, which means the Democratic president will be on the right side of television viewers' screens and his Republican rival will be on viewers' left, CNN said.

TikTok says US ban is inevitable without a court order blocking law

Reuters
Washington

TikTok and Chinese parent ByteDance has urged a US court to strike down a law they say will ban the popular short app in the United States on January 19, saying that the US government refused to engage in any serious settlement talks after 2022.

Legislation signed in April by President Joe Biden gives ByteDance until January 19 of next year to divest TikTok's US assets or face a ban on the app used by 170mn Americans.

ByteDance says a divestiture is "not

possible technologically, commercially, or legally".

The US Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia will hold oral arguments on lawsuits filed by TikTok and ByteDance along with TikTok users on September 16.

TikTok's future in the United States may rest on the outcome of the case which could impact how the US government uses its new authority to clamp down on foreign-owned apps.

"This law is a radical departure from this country's tradition of championing an open Internet, and sets a dangerous precedent allowing the political branches to target a disfavoured speech platform and force it to sell or be shut down," ByteDance

and TikTok argue in asking the court to strike down the law.

Driven by worries among US lawmakers that China could access data on Americans or spy on them with the app, the measure was passed overwhelmingly in Congress just weeks after being introduced.

TikTok says any divestiture or separation – even if technically possible – would take years and it argues that the law runs afoul of Americans' free speech rights.

Further, it says the law unfairly singles out TikTok for punitive treatment and "ignores many applications with substantial operations in China that collect large amounts of US user data, as well as the many US companies that develop software

and employ engineers in China".

ByteDance recounted lengthy negotiations between the company and the US government that it says abruptly ended in August 2022.

The company also made public a redacted version of a 100-plus page draft national security agreement to protect US TikTok user data and says it has spent more than \$2bn on the effort.

The draft agreement included giving the US government a "kill switch" to suspend TikTok in the United States at the government's sole discretion if the company did not comply with the agreement and says the US demanded that TikTok's source code be moved out of China.

In 2020, then-president Donald Trump was blocked by the courts in his bid to ban TikTok and Chinese-owned WeChat, a unit of Tencent in the United States.

The White House says it wants to see Chinese-based ownership ended on national security grounds, but not a ban on TikTok.

Earlier this month, Trump joined TikTok and has recently raised concerns about a potential ban.

The law prohibits app stores like those of Apple and Alphabet's Google from offering TikTok.

It also bars Internet hosting services from supporting TikTok unless it is divested by ByteDance.

Le Pen’s National Rally seen leading vote in French snap elections: polls

Marine Le Pen’s far-right National Rally is seen leading the race ahead of France’s parliamentary elections, three polls showed yesterday, ahead of the left-wing Popular Front and President Emmanuel Macron’s centrists. Pollster IFOP in a survey for broadcast-

ing group TF1 and *Le Figaro* said the National Rally (RN) would secure 34% of the vote, while the Popular Front would reach 29% and Macron’s Together bloc would get 22%. Another poll by Harris Interactive – conducted for RTL radio, M6 TV and

Challenges magazine – put the RN at 33%, while the left was seen at 26% and Macron’s camp at 21%. A third poll, published yesterday by OpinionWay on behalf of CNews TV, Europe 1 radio and the *Journal du Dimanche* paper, also put the RN in the lead with 35%

of the votes, ahead of the Popular Front which had 27% and Macron’s camp which had 20%. The simulation of the national popular vote does not allow for a direct forecast of the balance of power in France’s next National Assembly, as the election on June 30

and July 7 is held as a two-round majority vote in each district. The Harris poll, however, made rough seat projections and forecast 235-280 seats for RN and its allies, which would fall short of the 289 needed for an absolute majority but make it the largest bloc. – **Reuters**



This picture taken in April shows Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte and Nato Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg at the Alliance’s headquarters in Brussels. – **Reuters**

Rutte seals Nato top job after rival drops out

AFP/Reuters
Bucharest

Outgoing Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte has clinched the race to become the next head of Nato at a pivotal time for the alliance, after sole challenger Romanian President Klaus Iohannis pulled out.

The veteran politician, 57, is expected to be formally named by the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato)’s 32 nations in the coming days and should take over when chief Jens Stoltenberg’s term ends on October 1.

Rutte will come in at a perilous moment for the Western allies as Russia’s war in Ukraine drags on and Donald Trump battles to reclaim the presidency in the United States come November.

After staking his claim for the job last year following the collapse of his coalition, staunch Ukraine backer Rutte quickly won the support of heavyweights the United States, Britain, France and Germany.

However, he had to use all the diplomatic skills gleaned during almost 14 years in charge of the Netherlands to win over hold-outs led by Türkiye and Hungary.

Rutte overcame Turkish reticence with an April visit to Istanbul, before finally sealing a deal with Hungary’s Viktor Orban at a European Union summit this week.

That left the last sticking point as Iohannis, whose surprise bid had ruffled feathers among allies banking on a smooth appointment for Rutte ahead of a Nato summit in Washington next month.

Romania’s security council announced yesterday that Iohannis had formally withdrawn and that the country backed Rutte.

As it announced Iohannis’s decision, the council said it would donate one of the country’s two operational Patriot systems to Ukraine, responding to pleas from Kyiv to its allies for more air defence assistance.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said Romania’s decision “will bolster our air shield and help us better protect our people and critical infrastructure from Russian air terror”.

Diplomat and officials at Nato said a meeting of alliance ambassadors would likely be convened next week to approve Rutte’s appointment.

Rutte will have a lot on his plate when he takes the reins from Norway’s former premier Stoltenberg, who led the alliance through its most consequential decades since the end of the Cold War.

Just weeks after his four-year term is expected to start, voters in the United States will go to the polls in a crunch vote to choose between incumbent Joe Biden and Trump.

The prospect of the volatile former president returning to the Oval office has rattled allies fearful he could weaken super-

power Washington’s role as Europe’s ultimate security guarantor.

Trump fuelled those fears on the campaign trail by saying that he would encourage Russia to attack Nato countries not spending enough on their own defence.

Like Stoltenberg, Rutte won plaudits for his careful handling of Trump during his first term in power – when the ex-reality TV star reportedly even mullied pulling the United States out of Nato.

“I think Mark Rutte is a very strong candidate,” Stoltenberg said on a visit to Washington on Tuesday. “He has a lot of experience as prime minister. He’s a close friend and colleague.”

While Trump’s return could pose one major challenge – to Nato’s east Rutte will face the far more pressing menace from Russia’s President Vladimir Putin.

The Kremlin’s forces are currently on the front foot in Ukraine after more than two years of brutal conflict, and the Nato chief will have a key role marshalling aid from Kyiv’s weary backers.

At the same time Rutte will have to ensure the alliance is ready to defend against any potential future attack from Moscow – if, or more likely when, Putin is able to rebuild his forces.

Part of that will involve corralling European allies to spend more on defence – a key demand from Trump, and other US leaders.

This week Nato announced that 23 out of its 32 member countries had hit the alliance’s target of spending 2% of their gross domestic product on defence.

Dubbed “Teflon Mark” for his ability to remain in power for so long in the Netherlands, Rutte will become the fourth Dutchman to lead Nato since it emerged from the ashes of World War II to confront the Soviet Union.

The bicycling conservative threw his country’s economic weight behind Ukraine in the wake of Russia’s 2022 invasion – leading efforts to deliver F-16 fighter jets to Kyiv.

While Nato countries along the alliance’s eastern flank had pushed for one of their own to get the Nato job, Rutte’s backers insist that he is fully aware of the threat posed by Russia.

Among the most formative events during his time in charge of the Netherlands was the 2014 shooting down of Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 over Ukraine, with 196 Dutch among the 298 killed, which a tribunal found was carried out by Russia-backed fighters.

Stoltenberg oversaw Nato’s shift from an alliance mainly engaged in crisis management missions in far-off places such as Afghanistan back to its roots of defence against Russia.

Four countries have joined Nato since Stoltenberg took office – Montenegro, North Macedonia, Finland and Sweden.

Two beluga whales evacuated to Spain from Ukraine

Reuters/AFP
Madrid

Marine biologists have moved a pair of beluga whales from the Ukrainian city of Kharkiv – the target of daily shelling by Russian forces – to the eastern Spanish city of Valencia, in what they described as a long and risky international rescue operation.

The animals, 15-year-old male Plombir and 14-year-old female Miranda, arrived at Valencia’s famed Oceanografic complex late on Monday in a fragile state of health, according to a statement by the Spanish oceanarium.

They had endured a lengthy journey in fragile wooden crates that started with a 12-hour road trip from Kharkiv to the port city of Odesa.

There, the belugas’ Ukrainian keepers met a team of veterinarians from the Oceanografic as well as the Georgia Aquarium in Atlanta and SeaWorld theme parks.

After a quick check-up, they resumed the trip to the border with Moldova, which they crossed with the aid of the European Union’s Anti-Fraud Office. From Chisinau they boarded a five-hour flight to Valencia.

The regional leader of Valencia, Carlos Mazón, said the operation was “a historic feat of animal protection on a global level”.

The Oceanografic’s director of zoological operations, Daniel Garcia-Parraga, said that the whales’ condition had been “suboptimal to undertake this kind of journey, but if they had continued in Kharkiv, their chances of survival would have been very slim”.

Kharkiv’s NEMO dolphinarium was just 800m (2,600’) away from a site that was frequently shelled and the shockwaves caused severe stress on animals with such sensitive hearing.



This handout picture taken and released by Valencia’s Oceanografic Oceanarium shows veterinary staff members taking care of one of the two belugas, Plombir and Miranda, from the Dolphinarium NEMO of Kharkiv, in Ukraine, after being rescued and transferred to Valencia through a risky international operation by land and by air. – **AFP**

Since Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, the NEMO Dolphinarium has evacuated several seals, sea lions and dolphins, but evacuating the belugas required months of preparations due to their size.

However, Garcia-Parraga said on Wednesday, the belugas were in much better shape than vets had initially expected and were adapting well to their new home.

Plombir was already eating – which in that

species is unusual right after transportation – but Miranda had yet to try her first bite, he added.

The Oceanografic is the largest aquarium in Europe and the only one that houses beluga whales.

The white-hued mammals live in chilly waters in the Arctic and sub-Arctic regions.

Males can reach a length of up to 5.5m and weigh up to 1.6 tonnes.

European lynx species rebounds from brink of extinction: IUCN

A species of lynx found in remote areas of Spain and Portugal has rebounded from near extinction, with its adult population growing more than tenfold since the start of the millennium.

Wildlife experts are calling the recovery of the Iberian Lynx unparalleled among felines in an age of extinction in which species are vanishing at a rate not seen in 10mn years due to climate change, pollution and habitat loss.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), which categorises species according to the level of risk they face in a “Red List” produced several times a year, bumped up the Iberian Lynx from “endangered” to “vulnerable” yesterday.

While the Iberian Lynx shares the yellow eyes and short black stumpy tail with other lynx species, it is much smaller than them and has a distinctive black “beard” of long hair around its chin.

There were just 62 adults scattered across Mediterranean forests in 2001 but the population jumped to around 648 in 2022, the IUCN said.

Today, the population has risen to more than 2,000, counting both young and adult lynxes across a range of thousands of



This picture taken in February shows male Iberian lynx Urki released with other four lynxes as part of the European project ‘Life LynxConnect’ to recover this species, in the Arana mountain range, in Iznalloz, near Granada, southern Spain. – **Reuters**

kilometres covering rocky mountainous areas and valleys.

Francisco Javier Salcedo Ortiz, co-ordinator of the LIFE LynxConnect project, which led the conservation action for the Iberian lynx, called it “the greatest recovery of a cat species ever achieved through conservation” and praised a range of actors including landowners, farmers, hunters and the European Union which provided financial and logistical support.

Efforts have focused on increasing the abundance of its

prey, a species of wild rabbit which is also endangered, programmes to free hundreds of captive lynxes and restoring scrublands and forests.

However, the IUCN warned that gains could be reversed and said that threats included diseases from domestic cats and among the European rabbit population it feeds on as well as poaching and road kill.

The IUCN is set to produce its broader Red List update which serves as a barometer of biodiversity next week. – **Reuters**

Cruise ship rescues 68 migrants off Spain’s Canary Islands

A cruise ship rescued 68 migrants from a fishing boat spotted adrift south of Spain’s Canary Islands with five bodies on board, Spanish authorities and the ship’s operator said yesterday.

Rescuers were alerted on Wednesday afternoon to the vessel drifting in the Atlantic 800km south of the island of Tenerife.

The cruise ship, the *Insignia*, was sailing in the area and was called on to head to the boat’s location to pick up the survivors, Spain’s maritime rescue service said in a statement.

It took on board 68 sub-Saharan African migrants, including three women and three minors, and recovered three bodies from the fishing boat.

However, “bad weather” prevented it from collecting the other two bodies, the statement said.

The migrant boat was left adrift with a locating device to make it easier for rescuers to find it, the maritime service said.

The 670-passenger capacity *Insignia*, owned by Miami-based Oceania Cruises, is currently on a 180-day trip around the world which began in January.

It is expected to reach Tenerife this morning.

An Oceania Cruises spokesperson said the 68 migrants were brought “onboard for medical assistance and provided food, drinks, clothing and a safe place to rest”.

“We have co-ordinated next steps with authorities in Tenerife, and they will be taking over the care of the rescued people. Safety of life at sea is of paramount importance for all seafarers,” the spokesperson added in a statement.

Spain is one of the main gateways for migrants seeking a better life in Europe, with the vast majority making the perilous journey to try and reach the Canary Islands which lie off the northwestern coast of Africa.

The Atlantic route is particularly dangerous due to strong currents, with migrants travelling in overloaded, often unseaworthy, boats without enough drinking water.

However, it has grown in popularity due to increased vigilance in the Mediterranean.

More than 5,000 migrants died while trying to reach Spain by sea in the first five months of this year, or the equivalent of 33 deaths per day, according to Caminando Fronteras, a Spanish charity. – **AFP**

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GULF TIMES

Airplanes won't solve Europe wildfire issue, but nature just might

As Europe braces for summer wildfires, it is putting some 550 firefighters and 32 aircraft on standby and plans to spend €600mn (\$644mn) on water-bombing planes, but experts warn the money could be better spent on prevention.

Last year's wildfire season in Europe was among the worst this century, the European Commission said. Fires burnt through more than half a million hectares, led to mass evacuations and killed at least 20 people in Greece.

But fighting fires is only part of the answer. "If we only invest in the response capacity, we will have to keep investing more and more and more, and will either run out of money or we will be overwhelmed because of the increase in disasters," EU Commissioner for Crisis Management Janez Lenarcic told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

As climate change brings more heatwaves and drought worldwide, the number of extreme wildfires is expected to increase by up to 30% by 2050, with bigger fires becoming tougher to put out, a 2022 United Nations report showed.

Climate change is already costing Europe tens of billions of euros per year, Lenarcic said, and the cost will rise if nothing is done to reduce emissions and invest in prevention.

But the potential costs of curbing the EU's CO2 emissions have already sparked a backlash from many farmers and other voters in a key electoral year and that risks undermining the EU's green transition plans.

Climate change is already costing Europe tens of billions of euros per year

Forest Fire Information System said, equivalent to nearly a third of all international aviation emissions in the EU in a year.

The fires also caused an estimated €4.8bn in damage according to Distrelec, a power sector firm which supplies early warning sensors for wildfires.

Last year, dry soil, low humidity and high winds combined to ignite mega fires that burn so intensely that traditional aerial firefighting techniques cannot cope, forestry experts said.

"Airplanes can help immensely to protect ground forces and properties," Joao Carlos Verde, an adviser at Portugal's integrated fire agency (AGIF), told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

But, he said, "there will come a point when you can have all the fleets you want of airplanes and that will still not solve your problem."

Perhaps, Verde said, the biggest obstacle to prevention was an image problem.

"The response is sexy. You see the lights, you hear the helicopters. Prevention isn't sexy. Nobody sees it. It's slow, but it bears fruit."

Wildfire experts have warned for years against the "firefighting trap", which privileges suppression, such as with water-bombing planes, over long-term prevention involving the protection and restoration of forests and peatlands.

Research from the World Bank and the European Commission estimates that €1 invested in wildfire prevention saves between €4 and €7 in damage but spending leans heavily towards detection and response. Spending by EU countries on fire protection — both suppression and prevention — has remained more or less stable since 2001 at 0.5% of total government spending, but research from WWF Greece showed that more than 80% of Greece's fire protection budget went towards suppression in 2022.

This sparked a spending review, and although the non-profit said the balance was now better, it said most spending still went towards suppression. Portugal, which experienced devastating wildfires in 2017, had achieved a 50:50 split in spending between prevention and suppression measures by 2019, AGIF said.

The agency streamlined its firefighting and conservation efforts to address the causes of fires, something Verde recommended for the EU. Bringing communities, particularly in rural areas, on board is key to successful prevention methods, said Verde.

"Make people feel they have an incentive to manage the land ... you will have less fires," he said.

This could prove challenging as EU climate policies, including nature restoration efforts to make forests more fire-resilient, have been criticised by farmers angry over the cost.

"Nature restoration has to be done," said Lenarcic, but he added that farmers should be supported financially.

"But the green transition is vital, of existential importance, also for them. — Thomson Reuters Foundation

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Europe: How the far-right gained traction with youth

By Sarah Marsh, Barbara Erling & David Latona
Berlin/Warsaw/Madrid

From Germany and France to Poland and Spain, the far-right made inroads into the youth vote in key states in this EU election — as a generation that has grown up amid constant crises seeks new answers and follows politicians fluent in TikTok and YouTube.

Young voters, traditionally perceived to be more left-wing, drove the wave of support for environmental parties at the last EU election in 2019, earning the nickname "Generation Greta" after the young Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg.

But following the pandemic, the Ukraine war and cost of living crisis, many shifted their support this year towards far-right populist parties that tapped into their concerns, fuelling their overall rise in the June 6-9 EU parliament poll.

With the leaders of Europe's often upstart ethno-nationalist, anti-establishment movements mastering new social media better than their mainstream counterparts, they are earning cachet as a subversive counterculture among some young people.

They appeal in particular to young men who feel left behind and censored by an increasingly "woke" mainstream, analysts say.

"Germany is not going in a good direction and they were the only party with a really clear message, on migration," said Christoph, 17, a trade school student in Berlin who declined to give his full name, who voted for the far-right Alternative for Germany.

Support for the AfD, which wants to curb migration and warns against what it calls the Islamisation of Germany, was up 11 percentage points to 16% among under-25 year olds, according to an exit poll by Infratest dimap — more than double the 5-point rise among the broader population.

The shift, which helped the AfD achieve a historic second place nationwide, was notable in that Germany's decision to allow 16-18 year-olds to vote for the first time had been

expected to favour left-leaning parties.

Though the far-right did not do well everywhere among young voters — and they are a relatively small category in a continent with an ageing population — the trend will still worry mainstream parties, who face a snap election later this month in France, and federal elections next year in Germany.

Economic concerns up, climate down

A recent survey of Germany's youth showed that young people were increasingly worried about inflation, expensive housing and social divisions, and less about climate change. The Greens won just 11% of the youth vote, down 23 percentage points.

"There is no longer a sense that if they just work hard then the future will be better, and they are disappointed by the parties in power," said study lead author Simon Schnetzer, noting that economic gloom was making them more receptive to the AfD's anti-migration rhetoric.

Christoph said his experiences led him to believe Germany's more recent immigrants were more prone to violence and unwilling to integrate.

In France, the far-right National Rally (RN) took a 25% share of the vote among 18-24 year olds, according to pollster Ipsos, up 10 percentage points compared with an around 8-point gain overall to 31.4%. To be sure, most of the youth in the EU's two top powers still back leftist parties, and many worry about the latest trend.

"It worries me because I saw the far-right wants to deport people even if they have German citizenship like me," said Ensar Adanur, 17, a German of Turkish origin. "But Germany is home for me."

In Poland, however, support for the far-right Confederation among 18-29 years old voters increased from 18.5% to 30.1%, making them the leading choice for that demographic.

Mainstream parties "no longer have any credibility for me, the previous government and the current one show it clearly", said Pawel Rurkowski, 30, an IT specialist who voted for the Confederation.

Slick on socials

Far-right parties' relative proficiency in young voters' preferred channels of communication — video apps such as TikTok and YouTube and messaging app Telegram — is a big factor behind their increasing success with that generation, analysts said.

The recent German youth study showed that 57% of young people get their news and politics through social media. But German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, like many mainstream politicians, only joined TikTok a few months ago.

"If you are not on young peoples' channels, you simply do not exist," said Schnetzer.

Meanwhile social media platforms algorithms favour controversial messages that generate engagement over serious content, said Ruediger Maas, founder of the Institute for Generational Research in Augsburg.

The AfD's lead candidate for the EU elections, Maximilian Krah, went viral on TikTok, for example, with dating tips for young men: "Don't watch porn, don't vote for the Greens, go out into the fresh air ... Real men are right-wing."

He has some 53,300 followers on TikTok, compared with just 11,000 and 2,652 respectively for the lead candidates for the centre-left Social Democrats and the Greens.

"My generation doesn't really know about politics but we hear about the AfD all the time," said AfD voter Christoph.

In Spain, social media influencer Alvisé Perez clinched 6.7% of the youth vote, compared with 4.6% of the overall vote, after conducting his anti-immigration and anti-corruption maverick campaign almost exclusively on Instagram and Telegram.

Far-right party Vox, meanwhile, which was strong on TikTok, garnered 12.4% of the vote among those under 25, compared with 9.6% overall.

"It seems to be the only party that really opposes the government when it comes to taboo subjects such as immigration or gender discourse," said Xavier, a 22-year-old university student who cast his vote for Vox. — Reuters



Alternative for Germany (AfD) party co-leaders Alice Weidel and Tino Chrupalla react to results after the polls closed in the European Parliament elections, in Berlin, Germany. (Reuters)



The dearest of all lands to Allah and His Messenger

The value of glorifying the Sacred City: The importance of values lies in the fact that they are the criterion by which people, ideologies, actions, positions and subjects can be judged and measured; moreover, values decide the identity of the community; the values in a given community have a direct effect and influence on the manners and conduct which the members of that community adopt.

Whenever the values of a community originate from the teachings of its faith, the behaviour and conduct of its people will reflect such a faith and they will certainly enjoy fine and fulfilling lives within their respective communities.

Strengthening the social values that Islam instructs and emphasises upon is the safety valve that protects and guards the community, and one of the greatest and most important of such values is to glorify the symbols of Allah. Indeed, such glorification results in lofty social customs and etiquette that guarantee the stability of the Muslim community and assures happiness in this life and the Life to come.

Allah Almighty has made this city a Sacred and Secure one and has honoured His House (the Ka'aba); He made glorifying this city one of the most honourable acts of worship by which a person draws close to Allah; He says (what means): "That [is so]. And whoever honours the symbols [i.e. rites] of Allah – indeed, it is from the piety of hearts." [Qur'an 22: 32]

Glorifying what Allah and His Messenger, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, have glorified results in establishing great social values that will yield countless benefits to the Muslims, and will reflect the unity of the Muslims - a nation that direct themselves to one *Qiblah* (direction during prayer towards Ka'aba), believe in one religion and harbour the same objectives and hopes, as if their hearts are that of a single person.

The Prophet, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, taught us how to build this value of glorifying Makkah - since his prophethood started in Makkah itself - in a practical manner that is away from fantasy and in a realistic manner that is easy to comprehend, and made it deeply rooted in the hearts in a way that guaranteed the continuity of such glorification by those who reside in the Sacred City and those who come to visit it.

He did so with great wisdom and with tender care which caused people to long to see

and glorify this Sacred City.

Words and actions that reflects its love: Imaam Al-Bukhari, may Allah have mercy upon him, reported on the authority of 'Aai'shah, may Allah be pleased with her, that she said: "When the Prophet *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam* came to Al-Madinah, both Abu Bakr and Bilaal became sick. Whenever fever attacked Abu Bakr, he would recite the following verses of poetry:

A person wakes up among his household-active he is

While death is in fact closer to him than his shoelaces

Whenever fever eased from Bilaal, he would recite the following verses of poetry:

Will I ever again go back to spend a night-only once

In the valley with Ith-khir and Jaleel (plants) in abundance?[1]

And will I one day again drink from the water of Mijannah? [2]

And will again see (the mountains of) Tafeel and Shaamah? [3]

Then he would say: 'O Alah! Curse Shaybah Ibn Rabee'ah and 'Utbah Ibn Rabee'ah and Umayyah Ibn Khalaf as they forced us from our land to a land full of diseases!'

Then the Prophet *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam* said: "O Allah! Make Al-Madinah dear to our hearts just like you made Makkah dear to our hearts, and even more so. O Allah! Bless our *Saa'* and our *Mudd* [4] and make it a healthy place for us, and move its fever to the area of Al-Juhfah."

Bilaal, may Allah be pleased with him, also said: "We arrived at Al-Madinah and it was a land full of diseases as the valley of Bathaan would have putrid water running through it."

Ibn 'Abbaas, may Allah be pleased with him, narrated: "The Prophet, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, said, addressing Makkah: "How good you are as a landand how dear you are to my heart! Had your people not forced me out of you, I would have never come out and left you and would have never resided in any other city but you?" [At-Tirmithi and Ibn Hibbaan]

Ibn 'Abbaas, may Allah be pleased with him, narrated: "When the Prophet, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, was forced to leave Makkah he headed out to a cave, turned around, and said, addressing Makkah: "You are the most beloved land to Allah, and you are the most beloved land to me. Had the polytheists not forced me out of you, I would never have come

out and left you. The worst enemy is the one who transgresses the sanctities of Allah, or kills a soul without due right or kills a soul as revenge from the era of pre-Islamic ignorance."

Then Allah revealed the following verse (which means): "And how many a city was stronger than your city [i.e. Makkah] which drove you out? We destroyed them; and there was no helper for them." [Qur'an 47:13]" [Ibn Jarer At-Tabari] Imaam al-Qurtubi, may Allah have mercy upon him, said: "This is an authentic narration."

Imaam At-Tirmithi, Ahmad and 'Abd bin Humayd, may Allah have mercy upon them, reported that 'Abdullaah bin 'Adiyy Ibn Al-Hamraa; may Allah be pleased with him, narrated: "I saw the Prophet, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, standing on a hillock [5] and addressing Makkah, saying: "I swear by Allah! You are the best of the lands of Allaah and you are the most beloved land to Allah, and had it not been that I was forced to leave you, I would have never left you."

Imaam al-Faakihi, may Allah have mercy upon him, reported on the authority of 'Amrbin Shu'ayb, who reported from his father who reported from his father that he ('Amr's grandfather) said: "The Prophet, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, sent 'Itaab bin Usayd as a leader for the people of Makkah and said to him: "Do you know where I am sending you? I am sending you to the people (dear to) Allah. There is no city dearer to Allah - the Almighty, the Glorified - and to myself than this city, and had it not been that its people forced me out of it, I would never have left it."

This is Makkah and this is its virtue. Will we win the honour of glorifying it and loving it with its due love and glorification?

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

Footnotes:

[1] Jaleel: a weak plant that the residents of Makkah would use in their homes.

[2] Mijannah: a place that was a few kilometres from Makkah which had a market.

[3] Shaamah and Tafel: Two mountains about 50km from Makkah.

[4] Saa' and Mudd: measures of weight for food

[5] This small hill was at the lower end of the market overlooking Makkah.

helps to brighten the eyesight, as well as treat eye-related ailments.

Reduces Acidity and Heartburn: The water is alkaline in nature which neutralises the excess acid formed in the stomach thus beneficial for hyperacidity and heartburn. Not only that, it can help prevent and heal stomach ulcers and other stomach disorders such as gastroparesis. These are just some of the scientifically proven facts about Zamzam.

The Prophet (*sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*) used to sprinkle Zamzam water over the sick and ill.

It helps to correct pronunciation of words therefore it is good for students, those who have speech impediments, and delayed speech.

It is cure of many diseases and disorders by the order of Allah, said Jabir bin Abdullah al-Ansari.

Zamzam Water Nutritional Facts

The nutritional value of the water in mg/L is as follows:

sodium (133), calcium (96), magnesium (38.88), potassium (43.3), bicarbonate (195.4), chloride (163.3), fluoride (0.72), nitrate (124.8), sulfate (124) and total dissolved alkanity (835)

Zamzam water: history and significance

Allah has made all living creatures out of water. People require water for almost everything; for agriculture, construction, transportation, and for cooling and heating. But not all water carries the same value and significance? Muslims refer to the water of Zamzam as something revered and unique. They crave this mysterious liquid and love to drink it whenever they can. And for those who managed to go to the Haj, they return home carrying it for thousands of miles as a prized possession and to give as special gift to their friends and families. So, what is so special about Zamzam water? In a word: Everything.

There is nothing ordinary about it. The miracle of how it came to being in the middle of the desert, its consistency throughout thousands of years, the beneficial qualities it has, the fact that it never dries up. This water is special.

The fact is, this small 5ft deep well is far away from any other source or body of water. It is self-replenishing. It is constantly replenishing itself in order to produce gallons upon gallons of water for consumption of thirsty pilgrims plus the additional amount that is bottled and also the amount that is taken as gifts distributed worldwide to millions. Zamzam water has scientifically been proven to possess healing qualities due to its higher content of calcium and magnesium salts and also the natural fluorides that encompass a germicidal action. It is also an established scientific fact that pools or water wells tend to grow vegetation such as algae - especially in warm climates. Amazingly this is not the case in the well of Zamzam. It has remained free from biological contaminants. From the time that Haajar wandered aimlessly through the desert in search of sustenance for her son and herself; to the moment that the well of Zamzam was born out of the great Mercy of Allah, Muslims have been drinking from it. What is more fascinating is that it has never once dried up. To Muslims this blessed water is special in significance and history.

A lofty history

Ibn 'Abbaas narrated that the Prophet, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, said: "When Ibrahim (Abraham) had differences with his wife, (because of her jealousy of Haajar, Isma'il's mother), he took Isma'il and his mother and went away. They had a water-skin with them containing some water, Isma'il's mother used to drink water from the water-skin so that her milk would increase for her child. When Ibrahim reached Makkah, he made her sit under a tree and afterwards returned home. Isma'il's mother followed him, and she called him from behind, 'O Ibrahim! To whom are you leaving us?' He replied, '(I am leaving you) to Allah's (Care).' She said, 'I am satisfied to be with Allah.' She returned to her place and started drinking water from the water-skin, and her milk increased for her child. When the water had all been used up, she said to herself, 'I would better go and look so that I may see somebody.' She ascended the hill of the Safaa and looked, hoping to see somebody, but in vain. When she came down to the valley, she ran till she reached the hill of the Marwah. She ran to and from (between the two hills) many times. Then she said to herself, 'I would better go and see the state of the child,' she went and found it in a state of one on the point of dying. She could not endure to watch her child dying and said (to herself), 'If I go and look, I may find somebody.' She went and ascended the hill of the Safaa and looked for a long while but could not see anybody. Thus she completed seven rounds (of running) between Safaa and Marwah. Again she said (to herself), 'I would better go back and see how the child is doing.' But all of a sudden she heard a voice, and she said to that strange voice, 'Help us if you can offer any help.' It was Gabriel (who had made the voice). Gabriel hit the earth with his heel like this (Ibn 'Abbaas hit the earth with his heel to illustrate it), and so the water gushed out. Isma'il's mother was astonished and started digging ... She started

drinking from the water and her milk increased for her child..." [Al-Bukhari]

In another narration of Ibn 'Abbaas, radhiallah 'anhu, the Prophet said: "May Allah be merciful to the mother of Isma'iii! If she had left the water of Zamzam (fountain) as it was, (without constructing a basin for keeping the water), it would have been a flowing stream. Jurhum (an ancient Arab tribe) came to Hagar and asked her, 'May we settle at your dwelling?' She said, 'Yes, but you have no right to possess the water.' They agreed." [Al-Bukhari]

It was thus how the dry and barren valley of Makkah became inhabited.

The Archangel Gabriel unearthed the water of Zamzam such that the life of Isma'il, the great grandfather of Prophet Muhammad, maybe saved. Hagar, the wife of Ibrahim the patriarch, restricted its flow and caused it to become a well. It is located next to the holiest of all holy places: the Ka'bah. Its water was the direct cause of Jurhum's settlement in Makkah, and hence the start of the Makkan era in the human history. No other water can claim this honour.

The Rebirth of Zamzam

With passage of time, the inhabitants of Makkah started to forego the ways of the pious ones. Jurhum, the core of the Makkan population, were driven out of Makkah when they became unjust and tyrannical. They, being fully aware of the importance of Zamzam, hideously plugged it to deny their conquerors its blessings. Zamzam was not reopened and henceforth was forgotten. Many generations passed in Makkah with Zamzam in complete oblivion, until Abdul-Muttalib (the paternal grandfather of the Prophet) resurrected the dead well. Abdul-Muttalib himself was oblivious to Zamzam. With the approaching of the last divine message, a sequence of significant preludes was in order; the rebirth of Zamzam was one.

It so happened that for three consecutive nights, Abdul-Muttalib had a very clear vision about digging a well. During each vision, the name of the well was different and no location was mentioned. On the fourth night, however, both Zamzam and its location were communicated to Abdul-Muttalib so clearly that he attended to the appointed task on the morning of the very fourth night.

To the utter disbelief of the Makkans who ridiculed the seemingly futile attempt at finding water in such an arid place, Abdul-Muttalib found water in an ancient buried well so close to the Ka'aba. And it was only natural that the Makkans claim a share in this, obviously, special well. Abdul-Muttalib gave no concessions and rejected any such claim.

The Makkans and Abdul-Muttalib's could not negotiate a middle ground, so both parties agreed to seek arbitration. They set out for a priestess whose judgment was accepted by both parties. On their way, and while crossing the desert, the caravan ran out of water. The companions of Abdul-Muttalib all but gave up any hope of salvation. And when all seemed lost, water sprang out from the ever so small notch that Abdul-Muttalib's camel made with its pad. Upon seeing this, the Makkans knew that He who saved Abdul-Muttalib from this eminent death on this very journey to settle the very question of Zamzam, had made Abdul-Muttalib the sole heir to this special water. The matter was settled and the family of the Prophet was ennobled with a mark of clearest distinction. It is of paramount importance to mention that Abdul-Muttalib's possession of Zamzam was not an act of ownership where he would deny its water to others. Being the sole heir to Zamzam meant that Abdul-Muttalib alone was to provide Zamzam water to the pilgrims; no one else (save his family of course) could partake in this most honorable privilege. [Taken from *Al-Jumu'ah* magazine]

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



Facts about Zamzam water

Zamzam water is a familiar object in a Muslim household. The distinctive refreshing water has miraculous origins and spiritual value.

The Messenger of Allah (*sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam* - peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: 'The water of Zamzam is for whatever purpose it is drunk for,' so, O Allah, I am drinking it (to quench) my thirst on the Day of Resurrection."

As much as it is a matter of belief, science actually backs up Zamzam's healing and nutritional benefits. Below are some of the scientifically recognised facts about the Zamzam water:

Best Water: The Prophet (*sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*) said that best water on the earth is Zamzam water. According to the Prophet (*sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*), it is just like as food and has the power to cure sickness.

Enhances Energy in Human Cells: The German scientist Dr Knut Pfeiffer, the head of the largest medical centre in Munich, has said that Zamzam water amazingly increased the energy levels in the cell systems of the body.

Free of Germs and Bacteria: Hardly any water body present in the world is free of germs and bacteria, except Zamzam. Dr Yahya Koshak, an expert on Zamzam, says that the water doesn't contain any contaminants. In fact, researches conducted on the water suggest that it is impossible to find bacteria in this revered water.

Highest Purity: It is the purest form of water on the Erath because of its containing of adequate amount of bicarbonates (366mg/l),

which is higher than what is found in the water on French Alps (bicarbonates-357mg/l).

Abundant with Minerals: Zamzam has healing characteristics. It is abundant in minerals like Calcium and Magnesium and also contains trace amounts of fluoride, which gives it its germicidal properties. It is also rich in iodine which makes it a cure for thyroid issues.

Increases Blood Platelets: Zamzam water helps to increase blood platelets, increases the immunity of the body, increases White Blood Cells, Red Blood Cells and detoxifies the body. This makes it a great tonic for people suffering from anemia.

Weight Loss: Drinking Zamzam water gives the feeling of satiety and fulfilment, thus reducing the appetite. This leads to weight loss and since the water is rich in minerals, it prevents weakness.

Helps with Weight Gain: This may sound contradictory to the previous point but it is not. Remember, "Zamzam is for whatever purpose it is drunk for." Zamzam is a nourishing drink. Regular intake of this amazing liquid helps to nourish the body and may also increase your body weight. When Abu Dhar Ghifari (radhiallah 'anhu) first came to visit the Prophet (*sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*), he wanted to remain hidden to avoid persecution of the Quraish. During that time he didn't have anything to eat so he only drank Zamzam water; he actually gained weight.

Increases Eyesight: Applying Zamzam water over your eyes and washing your eyes with it



Eid's all fun and games at Msheireb Galleria

Msheireb Galleria's festive atmosphere continues to attract throngs of visitors enjoying the Eid al-Adha holidays. One of the programme highlights features a colourfully dressed lady performer entertaining families and children with her tricks and illusions. From live stage performances and entertainment shows to interactive games and activities like face painting, balloon twisting, photo booth, and a thrilling treasure hunt, the Eid celebration at Msheireb Downtown Doha, set to conclude tomorrow, offers unforgettable moments of joy, discovery, and shared memories. **PICTURES:** Shaji Kayamkulam



Community police hold awareness activities



The Community Policing Department organised community awareness activities at Landmark Mall and Gulf Mall on the second and third days of Eid al-Adha, the Ministry of Interior (MoI) posted on X. The events were aimed at enhancing the spirit of co-operation between the police and the community, promoting awareness and positive values, and sharing the joy of Eid with children and their parents.