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SPORT | Page 4

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Haniyeh to be buried today

The body of Hamas political chief Ismail Haniyeh has arrived in Qatar where it will be laid to rest following his assassination in Iran on Wednesday by Israel. A large crowd of mourners flooded Tehran's streets in the early hours yesterday during the funeral procession. Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei led the funeral prayers as thousands gathered at the Tehran University to bid farewell to the late Hamas official and his bodyguard, who was killed in the same attack. According to a statement by Palestinian resistance movement Hamas on Wednesday, Haniyeh's body will be buried in Doha today.

Major Russia-West prisoner swap held

US journalist Evan Gershkovich and ex-US Marine Paul Whelan were released by Russia yesterday as part of the biggest East-West prisoner exchange since the end of the Cold War, a complex deal negotiated in secrecy for more than a year. The White House said eight prisoners held in the West were being sent back to Russia. They included Vadim Krasikov, convicted of murdering an exiled dissident in Berlin. Turkiye, which co-ordinated the exchange, said 10 people, including two children, had been moved to Russia, 13 to Germany and three to the United States. Also involved in the swap were Poland, Slovenia, Norway and Belarus. **Page 8**

Gord supports launch of 'Solutions Lab'

The Gulf Organisation for Research and Development (Gord) announced its partnership with the United Nations Office for South-South Co-operation (UNOSSC) to launch the global South-South and Triangular Co-operation Solutions Lab. The initiative was unveiled at a well-attended virtual event, bringing together more than 200 delegates from UN agencies, member states, and stakeholders from both public and private sectors across various countries. **Page 3**

QF-EAA-IOC project to bolster societies through sports

As the Olympic Games Paris 2024 unfold, a new collaboration is to be launched by Qatar Foundation, Education Above All Foundation, and the International Olympic Committee that will harness the power of sports to nurture more equitable, inclusive, and educated communities across Asia and the Middle East and North Africa region. Outlined yesterday at the Team Qatar Reception in the French capital, the three-year project – part of the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) Olympism365 strategy to strengthen the role of sports and Olympism in achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals – will be focused on women and girls, people with disabilities, and people from marginalised communities, supporting the implementation of sports-for-good projects in over 10 countries, including Qatar, Sudan, and India. Through developing localised solutions – in sports, and through sports – tailored to each country's needs, challenges, and goals, the



HE Sheikha Hind bint Hamad al-Thani speaking at the Paris event yesterday.

project aims to reach up to 50,000 children and youth through community sports programmes, campaigns, policy and systems development, and partnerships that promote gender equality and inclusion. It will also train up to 5,000 coaches, teachers, and instructors to develop the capability to pro-

mote equality and inclusion through sports, with education-focused digital interventions reaching hundreds of thousands more young people around the world. Its immediate goals are to increase accessible, gender inclusive, safe, and sustainable opportunities for sporting participation;



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clusion, and education. Speaking at the Paris event, HE Sheikha Hind bint Hamad al-Thani, Vice-Chairperson and CEO of Qatar Foundation (QF), said: "At Qatar Foundation, we have always realised that sports is one of the rare tools that serves so many who are wanting to better their lives and gain a sense of personal fulfilment. "We believe everyone, regardless of their gender, ability, socio-economic status, or religious background, deserves equal opportunities to explore and share their potential with the world." **To Page 12**

Discount on traffic fines to end this month: MoI

By Shafeeq Alingal
Staff Reporter

The Ministry of Interior (MoI) has reminded the public to avail the grace period announced by the General Directorate of Traffic to pay fines. "Qatari citizens, residents, visitors and citizens of Gulf Co-operation Council countries are eligible for a 50% discount on traffic violation fines," MoI said in a X post yesterday. The grace period that started on June 1, 2024, will expire on August 31, 2024. The discount applies to violations recorded within a period not exceeding three years. In June, MoI announced that traffic law violators can't leave Qatar through any borders from September 1 without paying fines

and dues. The vehicles with pending fines and dues will not be allowed to cross land, air and sea borders. The fines and dues can be paid through the Metrash2 app, MoI website, traffic offices or unified service centres. These were announced as part of a set of new traffic rules and procedures by the General Director of Traffic. According to the new rules, a permit must be obtained from the General Directorate of Traffic for mechanical vehicles to exit Qatar as per the prescribed form and the following conditions: The vehicle must not have any outstanding traffic violations; the final destination (point of arrival) for the mechanical vehicle must be specified; the applicant for the permit must be the owner of the vehicle or present proof of the owner's consent for the vehicle to exit the country.

Hat-trick of wins for Qatar's Younousse and Tijan



Qatar Beach volleyball pair Cherif Younousse and Ahmed Tijan celebrate with fans after winning their final group stage at the Paris Olympic Games yesterday. The Tokyo Games bronze medallists eased past Australia's Mark Nicolaidis and Izac Carracher 21-14, 21-18 to make it three out of three wins. Younousse and Tijan will play their last 16 match on August 5. **Sport Page 1**

Iran, allies ready joint retaliation



Iranians take part in a funeral ceremony for late Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh, in Tehran, yesterday.

AFP
Tehran

Iran and its regional allies vowed retaliation yesterday for the deaths of Hamas and Hezbollah leaders, raising regional tensions as mourners filled Tehran's city centre calling for revenge. A public funeral was held

for Hamas's political chief Ismail Haniyeh in the Iranian capital where he was killed early Wednesday in an attack which Israel has not commented on. Haniyeh's body was then flown to Qatar, where he is to be laid to rest today, when his group called for a "day of furious rage" in the Palestinian territories and across the region. Hezbollah chief Hassan Nas-

rallah, addressing the funeral of the Lebanese group's top military commander, said Israel and "those who are behind it must await our inevitable response" to Fuad Shukur's and Haniyeh's killings within hours of each other. "You do not know what red lines you crossed," Nasrallah said, addressing Israel, a day after Shukur was killed in a strike in south Beirut. Israel, which said Shukur's assassination was a response to deadly rocket fire last week on the occupied Golan Heights, warned its adversaries yesterday they would "pay a very high price" for any "aggression". A source close to Hezbollah told AFP that Iranian officials met in Tehran on Wednesday with representatives of the so-called "axis of resistance", a loose alliance of Tehran-backed groups hostile to Israel, to discuss their next steps. "Two scenarios were discussed: a simultaneous response from Iran and its allies or a staggered response from each party," said the source who had been briefed on the meeting, requesting anonymity to discuss sensitive matters.

15 civilians massacred as Israel hits Gaza school

Agencies
Cairo/Gaza

Israeli forces hit a school in Shejaia in Gaza City yesterday, killing at least 15 people and wounding 29, Palestinian civil emergency services said, as fighting continued in various parts of the Gaza Strip. The Israeli occupation forces (IOF) have murdered more than 39,480 Palestinian civilians and injured 91,128 others (mostly children), since the beginning of the Israeli genocide in the Gaza Strip in October 2023.

Death of Deif 'confirmed'

The head of Hamas' military wing, Mohamed Deif, was killed in an Israeli airstrike in Gaza last month, the Israeli military said yesterday, a day after the group's political leader was assassinated in Tehran. Hamas neither confirmed nor denied the killing of Deif, but one

official, Ezzat Rashaq, said any word on deaths of its leaders was its responsibility alone. Israel also confirmed it killed a senior commander of the Lebanese Hezbollah movement in Beirut on Tuesday. The latest killings have raised concern of a further escalation in hostilities in the Middle East, with threats of revenge against Israel, which has said it does not seek regional war but that it would respond forcefully to any attack.

Hezbollah vows response

Hezbollah vowed yesterday a "definite" response to Israel's killing of its top military commander, saying the strike had crossed red lines and the decades-old rivalry between foes had entered a new phase. "The resistance cannot but respond. This is definite," said Hezbollah chief Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, speaking in a televised address to mark the funeral of the slain commander.



MoI top official meets Jordan's director of public security



Assistant Undersecretary of the Ministry of Interior for Security Affairs Sheikh Nayef bin Faleh al-Thani met yesterday with Director of Public Security of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan Major General Dr AbeidAllah Maaitah. During the meeting, they discussed aspects of joint co-operation in security fields. They also discussed ways to enhance the exchange of expertise and experiences to improve the security work system in the two fraternal countries. (QNA)

Official

Amir sends cables of congratulations to president of Swiss Confederation

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani and His Highness the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani sent cables of congratulations to President of the Swiss Confederation Viola Amherd on the occasion of her country's National Day. HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani also sent a similar cable to the Federal Chancellor of the Swiss Confederation Viktor Rossi on the occasion.

Amir sends cables of congratulations to president of Benin

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

QEWEC announces completion of reorganisation process

Qatar Electricity & Water Company (QEWEC), yesterday announced the completion of its reorganisation. As of July 2024, QEWEC has begun managing all commercial, administrative, and technical activities for Nebras Power through a services agreement. In this context, Nebras Power's personnel, associated business systems and

processes have been transferred to QEWEC, a statement said. "With guidance from HE the Minister of State for Energy Affairs and QEWEC board chairman Saad bin Sherida al-Kaabi, the reorganisation initiative reflects the commitment of the Board of Directors, to enhance the vital role played by QEWEC in supporting growth of the national

electricity and water sector and meeting the country's sector requirements with the highest efficiency. "As per the direction set by its Board of Directors, QEWEC aims at supporting the development of its subsidiaries to expand their business in Qatar and internationally. The optimisation of QEWEC activities will foster the contribu-

tion to important projects for the country's future and strengthen its global outreach." Commenting on the announcement, managing director and CEO Mohamed Nasser al-Hajri highlighted the importance of this change in achieving operational synergies, streamlining and harmonising internal business systems and processes

across the QEWEC Group. This ultimately will enable success in the future chapters of QEWEC's development. He confirmed that the transition comes with no impact on operations. Priority has been given to ensuring business continuity while preserving and honouring all existing engagements with stakeholders, al-Hajri added.

KMCC Qatar set to raise QR1mn to support Indian baby's treatment

By Shafeeq Alingal
Staff Reporter

Kerala Muslim Cultural Centre (KMCC) Qatar is set to raise QR1mn to support the treatment of Indian baby Malkha Rouhi, under the aegis of Qatar Charity (QC), through multiple drives.

"Our efforts are triumphing and the fund is about to reach QR800,000," KMCC state secretary Mohamed Sadik told *Gulf Times*, exuding confidence in achieving the goal soon.

Malkha has been diagnosed with Type 1 Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA), a genetic disorder that affects nerves and muscles, causing muscles to become increasingly weak.

Daughter of Risal Abdul Rasheed and Nihala Nizam, Malkha is undergoing treatment at Sidra Medicine. Doctors have suggested a gene replacement therapy and certain drugs which, according to Rasheed, are expensive and beyond the family's reach. KMCC's two phased Biriya-



Around 400 volunteers, comprising professionals, businessmen and drivers, worked for the successful implementation of the drive, distributing biriyani orders across the country.

ni Challenge initiative reached around 14,000 benefactors across Qatar while amassing around QR170,000.

Many benefactors also contributed money to QC upon the request made by the organisation.

"The Biriya Challenge evoked a good response with thousands of kindhearted persons making orders. Everything panned out as planned with enthusiastic volunteers tirelessly working to help the ailing girl," Sadik said. Around 400 volunteers, com-



KMCC Qatar leaders, members and volunteers during the Biriya Challenge.

prising professionals, businessmen and drivers, worked for the successful implementation of the drive, distributing biriyani orders across the country.

Sadik said the collected money is being handed over to QC under the supervision of a dedicated

KMCC team. The fundraising for Malkha is ongoing with organisations, individuals and institutions extending a helping hand. On its website, the QC has set a goal of QR11,654,028.75 with case number 206863 under licence: LC2023QTCH07-000032.

According to the latest figures on its website, QC has received a contribution of QR6,752,666.78 while reaching 58% of the total amount from 12,707 donors. Contributions can be made through the official website www.qch.qa/ Malkha

MoCI shuts 42 commercial facilities at Al Saliya market

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI) announced that it has shuttered 42 commercial facilities at Al Saliya Central Market, for not providing electronic payment services at sales outlets and violating the article No.18 of Law No. 5 of 2015, that regulates commercial, industrial and public facilities, as well as street vendors, in addition to the ministerial decision No.161 of 2017, on the public and private requirements these shop centres must comply with.

In a statement, MoCI explained that such a step is part of the intensive statewide campaign to surveil markets, identify violations of the enshrined laws on the part of those commercial, industrial and public facilities, along with the public requirements that must be met in these facilities. The ministry confirmed that it will resolutely face every single entity that shirks its duty in complying with the obligations enshrined in Law No. 5 of 2015, and the ministerial decision No.161 of 2016, pointing out that it regularly embarks on mounting inspection campaigns to detect infractions and taking all regulatory measures against violators of ministerial laws and decisions. — QNA

Police Academy celebrates graduation

QNA
Doha

Police Academy celebrated yesterday the graduation of students from the fifth and sixth groups of the Police Officers of Tomorrow programme in its fifth edition (Summer 2024), a total of a thousand graduates, in the presence of officers from the Ministry of Interior and parents.

The ceremony included sports and skill performances by the graduates, reflecting the qualita-



tive level of training within the framework of the Police Officers of Tomorrow, in addition to show-

ing a documentary film about the activities of the programme in its 5th edition, and another film about

the importance of awareness of the dangers of cybercrimes and cybersecurity.

A live presentation was also given on the role of security personnel in combating drugs and other segments.

The Police Officers of Tomorrow includes various military and sports exercises and training, including infantry, shooting, swimming, and self-defence, in addition to several educational lectures and field visits, in partnership with co-operating parties.

The programme, which this year

targeted those born in (2012-2015), aims to develop self-confidence among the youth, deepen national identity and authentic Arab and Islamic values, and enhance the spirit of loyalty and belonging, according to an integrated training and educational programme.

The 5th edition of the Police Officers of Tomorrow was launched on June 22, with the participation of around 2,500 students, who were divided into six groups. The graduation of the first four batches was celebrated over the past three weeks.



Malabar Group to donate relief aid worth INR30mn to Wayanad landslide victims



In response to the recent landslide disaster in the Wayanad district of Kerala, Malabar Group has pledged INR3 crores (30mn) in relief assistance to support the victims, a statement said yesterday.

Malabar Group chairman M P Ahammed announced the pledge, expressing confidence that all responsible citizens will come forward to assist in the rehabilitation

Malabar Group's relief package includes the urgent provision of food, medicines, and clothing to people in the affected areas

efforts following one of the worst natural disasters the state has experienced.

Malabar Group's relief package includes the urgent provision of food, medicines, and clothing to

people in the affected areas.

Additionally, the group will offer financial assistance to rebuild homes for those who have lost their residences.

As part of Malabar Group's CSR initiatives, the organisation had built homes for 15 families who were the victims of the Puthumala natural disaster which occurred in Wayanad in 2019, the statement added.

Gord supports launch of UNOSSC's Solutions Lab

QNA
Doha

The Gulf Organisation for Research and Development (Gord) announced its partnership with the United Nations Office for South-South Co-operation (UNOSSC) to launch the global South-South and Triangular Co-operation Solutions Lab.

The initiative was unveiled at a well-attended virtual event, bringing together more than 200 delegates from UN agencies, Member States, and stakeholders from both public and private sectors across various countries. The online event hosted a panel of distinguished experts who discussed the practical implementation of the lab, said Gord in a press release.

The UNOSSC lab aims to accelerate the development and implementation of innovative solutions through South-South and triangular co-operation. Integrated within the broader UNOSSC Strategic Framework 2022-2025, the lab is designed to foster knowledge exchange, capacity building, and technology transfer to address complex development challenges.

Founding Chairman of Gord, Dr Yousef Alhorr commented saying: "Over the years, Gord has attracted scientists, experts and specialists from around the world. They have worked tirelessly to build and equip all laboratories that house latest technologies and equipment in the region. Looking ahead, we are delighted to provide the necessary support to launch the global South-South and Triangular Cooperation Solutions Lab."



He added: "This partnership represents a significant opportunity for all stakeholders involved to leverage our collective expertise in developing innovative solutions to address climate change challenges, thus achieving sustainable development across regions."

For her part, UNOSSC Director Dima al-Khatib said: "One of the most important features of the Lab is its ambition not only to identify, unpack, and repack specific innovative solutions; but also, to generate more coherent portfolios of options for governments and the UN system."

"Partnerships are at the heart of the UNOSSC Solutions Lab," she emphasised, expressing the gratitude of the Office to the first cohort of partners, including the Gulf Organisation for Research and Development (Gord) for join-

ing in this crucial effort. According to Gord's press release, the key objectives of the UNOSSC Solutions Lab are ambitious and vital. These objectives include devising and implementing strategic policies tailored to meet emerging global challenges.

By fostering a systematic approach to innovation, collaboration, and strategic partnership among countries in the Global South and their triangular co-operation partners, the Lab aspires to drive significant advancements in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and fulfilling the 2030 Agenda.

This involves not only promoting innovative ideas and experiments but also enhancing the visibility and adoption of effective solutions through dynamic communication and robust advocacy strategies, said Gord. The Gulf Organisation for Research & De-

velopment (Gord) is a Research, Development, and Innovation (RDI) entity recognised among leading organizations in the global sustainability milieu.

Headquartered in Qatar Science and Technology Park, Gord drives the transformation of societies, industries, and the built environment by influencing corporate ethos, fostering innovation, and developing capacity to enable low-carbon sustainable growth for present and future generations.

The United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC) is a knowledge hub providing advisory and consulting services to all stakeholders on South-South and triangular cooperation. It enables developing countries to effectively face their development challenges and harness opportunities to address them.

Katara to host Suhail falcon exhibition in Sept

By Tawfik Lamari
Staff Reporter

The Cultural Village – Katara has announced the Suhail Hunting and Falconry Exhibition from September 10 to 14. It is the largest international exhibition specialising in falcons. Many events and activities will be held in it, including a falcon auction and exhibitions dedicated to falcons and hunting, in addition to many events.

The exhibition also allocates a wing for handicrafts related to hunting and bird supplies, and the best supplies in the world of weapons, hunting and travel. This year, Suhail provides, for the first time, the opportunity for owners of trademarks to announce themselves at the exhibition.

The new edition of Suhail includes extensive participation from many local and international companies, representing Qatar and



from different countries, including many Gulf participations, which reflects the tremendous success achieved by Suhail since its launch.

The exhibition increases its area every year to accommodate the increasing numbers and

wide participation of the most famous companies specialised in the field of hunting, falconry and camping from Qatar, the Gulf region and the world under one roof, as these areas are distributed over several regions, where the Suhail auction will be held, which will include the rarest types of falcons, especially the Saqer, in addition to displaying hunting supplies and equipment for hunting trips and camping, along with traditional industries and handicrafts related to hunting and falconry, in addition to the Souq Waqif Falcon Hospital pavilion.

The exhibition also includes scientific lectures and poetry seminars. The name "Suhail" was chosen for the exhibition, from the star closely associated with hunters, which they eagerly await every season, as its appearance marks the beginning of wilderness trips, hunting and fishing. August 24 of each year is the 1st of Suhail, and from its rising, the gradual change in climate begins, and temperatures begin to drop.

Hezbollah vows 'definite' response to Shukr's killing

Reuters
Beirut

Lebanon's powerful group Hezbollah vowed yesterday a "definite" response to Israel's killing of its top military commander, saying the strike had crossed red lines and the decades-old rivalry between foes had entered a new phase.

"The resistance cannot but respond. This is definite," said Hezbollah chief Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, speaking in a televised address to mark the funeral of the slain commander, attended by mourners clad in black waving the group's yellow-and-green flag.

"We are looking for a real response, not a performative response, and for real opportunities.

A studied response," Nasrallah said.

An Israeli strike on Hezbollah's stronghold in the southern suburb of Beirut on Tuesday killed Fuad Shukr, head of the group's military operations, along with an Iranian military adviser and five civilians. Just hours after Shukr's killing, the leader of Hamas, Ismail Haniyeh, was killed in the Iranian capital Tehran in an attack widely blamed on Israel but that Israel has not officially taken responsibility for.

Shukr's killing was the most serious blow to Hezbollah in nearly two decades and threatened to push the tit-for-tat fighting across Lebanon's southern border in parallel with the Gaza war into a full-blown regional conflict. It followed an ultimately-failed diplomatic effort aimed at pushing

Israel to avoid a hit on Beirut in the aftermath of a strike on the Israeli-occupied Golan last weekend that killed 12 children and that Israel blamed on Hezbollah.

Nasrallah said the group carried out an investigation that determined it was not responsible for the Golan strike.

He said Israel's attacks on Beirut and Tehran, coupled with a US strike in a province south of Baghdad, in the space of just a few hours showed the conflict had entered new phase of regional war on multiple fronts.

Nasrallah said some countries, which he did not name, had asked his group to retaliate in an "acceptable" way – or not at all. He denounced those attempts and outlined the response would be proportional to Israel's targeting

of a civilian building in the capital city's suburbs.

"There is no discussion on this point. The only things lying between us and you are the days, the nights and the battlefield," Nasrallah added in a threat to Israel. Ordinary operations against Israel – the near-daily drone and rocket strikes that have taken place since shortly after the eruption of the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza on Oct. 7 – would resume on Friday, he said.

The retaliation for Shukr's killing would come later. And those seeking to prevent a wider war should work on a Gaza ceasefire, Nasrallah said, instead of knocking on Hezbollah's door.

"There will be no solution except via stopping the aggression on Gaza," he said.

Nepal FM meets Qatar's diplomat



Minister for Foreign Affairs of Nepal Dr Arzu Rana Deuba met with ambassador of Qatar to Nepal Mishal bin Mohamed al-Ansari. During the meeting, the two sides discussed relations between the two countries and ways to support and develop them. (QNA)

QNL workshop to address combating illicit trafficking in heritage properties

Qatar National Library (QNL), in collaboration with the American, Italian, and French embassies in Doha, is to organise 'The Third Doha Workshop for Combating Illicit Traffic in Cultural Property'.

The event will be held from September 9-12 in Arabic and English, focusing on strengthening the legal and legislative framework for the protection of cultural heritage in the Arab region and Middle East.

The conference will serve as a unique platform to enhance institutional capacity and achieve more

effective regional co-operation. Regional and international experts will present and discuss key international conventions, laws, and bilateral agreements, with a special emphasis on developing and fortifying the legal infrastructure for the safeguarding of heritage properties.

The workshop targets individuals involved in the preservation of cultural legacy, officials responsible for formulating and implementing relevant policies and legislation, as well as representatives of government authorities from the Arab region and Middle East.



Qatar attends New York cybersecurity conference

Qatar is participating in the meeting of the closing session of the Ad Hoc Committee to Elaborate a Comprehensive International Convention on Countering the Use of Information and Communications Technologies for Criminal Purposes.

The meeting is currently held at the United Nations' headquarters in New York, and is set to run until Aug 9. Director of the Economic and Cyber Crimes Combating Department at the Ministry of Interior, Brig Ali Hassan Ali al-Kubaisi, is representing Qatar in the meeting.

The meeting discusses a range of topics on its agenda, pertaining to the aforementioned convention. (QNA)



Hezbollah fighters form a human barrier during the funeral procession of slain top Hezbollah commander Fuad Shukr in Beirut's southern suburbs. Hezbollah mourned Shukr, whose body was recovered from the rubble of a July 30 Israeli strike in south Beirut that also killed five civilians, three women and two children, and injured dozens, according to Lebanon's health ministry, as fears mounted of a wider conflict in the region.



Bomb attack in north Nigeria teahouse kills 19

AFP
Kano

A bombing at a teahouse in a village in northeast Nigeria has killed 19 people and wounded two dozen more, in the second major attack in a few weeks, security sources said Thursday.

The blast in Kawuri village in Borno State on Wednesday evening was one of the deadliest in recent years in northeast Nigeria, where violence from a grinding militant

conflict has been on the decline.

“There was an explosion at a tea joint in Kawuri around 8:00pm yesterday. We have recovered 19 dead bodies and 27 injured,” Ibrahim Liman, a member of an anti-terror militia that works with the army, told AFP.

Two other militiamen confirmed the toll in Kawuri, around 50km from the state capital Maiduguri. Another Kawuri militia commander, Kurmi Challume, said the attack was carried out by a suicide bomber and that at least

10 people had died.

No group has claimed responsibility for Wednesday’s blast, but the Boko Haram terror group and their rivals, the Islamic State West Africa Province, are both active in Borno.

Borno State’s governor on Thursday declared a 24-hour curfew after the attack, a police statement said.

The curfew was imposed as Nigerians demonstrated nationwide over a cost of living crisis, including in Maiduguri and the capital

Abuja. Militants still carry out ambushes, roadside bombings and kidnappings from rural hideouts, but bomb attacks in towns and villages are now less common in the northeast.

“Boko Haram struck in Kawuri last night. They took us all by surprise because it has been a while without such attacks,” Babakura Kolo, a militia commander, told AFP. The wounded were transported to hospitals in Maiduguri, he said. Nigeria’s military did not immediately respond to a request

for confirmation.

The Kawuri attack came just weeks after multiple suicide attackers killed 32 people in Borno State’s Gwoza area when they targeted a wedding, a hospital and a funeral.

Large bomb attacks have become rare since Nigeria’s army pushed militants back from territory they controlled at the height of the conflict in 2014, with Chadian forces helping to drive militants out.

Tackling insecurity was one of the priorities for President Bola

Ahmed Tinubu when he came to office more than a year ago. Nigeria’s armed forces are also fighting heavily armed gangs in the country’s northwest. More than 40,000 people have been killed by the terror conflict in the northeast and another two million displaced since 2009.

Hundreds of thousands of people have also been displaced in the northwest and central states of Nigeria, where gangs known locally as bandits target villages and farms for mass kidnapping for ransom.



Demonstrators react as Nigerian policemen fire tear gas canisters during the End Bad Governance protest in Abuja yesterday.



Nigeria police fire shots, tear gas to quell hardship protests, 3 dead

Agencies
Abuja

At least three protesters were killed in Nigeria’s Kaduna state yesterday, Reuters reporters and eyewitnesses said, as demonstrators rallied across the West African nation against rising cost of living and governance issues.

Nigerian security forces fired shots in the air and tear gas to break up protesters in the northern city of Kano and the capital Abuja as thousands joined rallies across the country against high costs of living.

Africa’s most populous country is struggling with soaring inflation and a sharply devalued naira after President Bola Ahmed Tinubu ended a costly fuel subsidy and liberalised the currency more than a year ago to improve the economy.

Tagged #EndBadGovernance in Nigeria, the protest movement won support with an online campaign, but officials had warned against attempts to replicate recent violent demonstrations in Kenya, where protesters forced the government to abandon new taxes.

Many Nigerians are struggling with high costs – food inflation is at 40% and fuel is triple the price from a year ago – but many people



were also wary about insecurity around protests.

In Kano, the country’s second-largest city, protesters set fire to tyres outside the state governor’s office and police responded with tear gas, forcing most of the demonstrators back, an AFP correspondent at the scene said. “We are hungry – even the police are hungry, the army are hungry,” said Jite Omoze, a 38-year-old factory worker. “I have two children and a wife, but I can’t feed them anymore,” he said, calling for the government to reduce fuel prices.

Protesters later torched and ransacked a digital centre of the Nigeria Communications Com-

mission near the Kano governor’s office and police fired shots in the air to disperse pockets of looters, an AFP reporter said. Police reported areas of looting and arson in the city and arrested 13 people. At a press conference, Governor Abba Kabir Yusuf later imposed a 24-hour curfew in Kano.

Officials in northern Yobe and Borno states also imposed 24-hour curfews. In Abuja, security forces blocked off roads leading to Eagle Square – one of the planned protest sites – and fired tear gas and set up barbed wire fencing to prevent several hundred protesters from reaching the park. Security forces also fired tear gas to



disperse crowds in Mararaba on the outskirts of the capital, an AFP reporter said.

Around 1,000 people marched peacefully in the mainland area of the economic capital Lagos, where they chanted “Tinubu Ole,” using the Yoruba language word for thief. Local media reported hundreds of protesters also came out in the northeastern city of Maiduguri, and several other states across the country. “Hunger has brought me out to protest,” said 24-year-old demonstrator Asamau Peace Adams outside the National Stadium in Abuja before tear gas was fired. “It’s all down to bad governance.”

On the eve of the protests, gov-

ernment officials urged young activists to reject rallies and allow time for Tinubu’s reforms to take hold and improve the economy. But protest leaders, a loose coalition of civil society groups, vowed to press on with rallies despite what they say were legal challenges trying to limit them to public parks and stadiums instead of marches.

By Thursday afternoon, most of the protests appeared to have dwindled except for small groups. “It’s not over,” said Damilare Adenola, 29, activist and leader of Take It Back group in Abuja. “If the crowd disperses today, we are coming tomorrow.”

The government on Wednes-

day listed aid it has offered to alleviate economic pain, including raising the minimum salary levels, delivering grains to states across the country and aid to the most needy. “The government of President Tinubu recognises the right to peaceful protest, but circum-spection and vigilance should be our watch words,” Secretary to the Federation of Government George Akume told reporters.

The last major protest in Nigeria was in 2020 when young activists rallied against the brutality of the SARS anti-robbery squad in demonstrations that evolved into some of the largest in Nigeria’s modern democracy. But the rallies ended in bloodshed in Lagos. Rights groups accused the army of opening fire on peaceful protesters, but the military said troops used blanks to break up a crowd defying a curfew. Amnesty International said at least 10 people died.

Nigeria’s protests come after Kenyan President William Ruto was forced to repeal new taxes and name a new cabinet following weeks of anti-government protests in the worst crisis in his almost two years in office. In Uganda, officials also arrested dozens last month after they took part in banned anti-corruption protests organised online by young activists inspired by Kenya’s rallies.

In brief

Togo president retains PM

Togo’s President Faure Gnassingbe has retained Victoire Sidemehou Tomegah-Dogbe as prime minister and a government will be formed in the coming days in line with a new constitution, the presidency said yesterday.

The new charter, adopted in March, has stoked tensions in the coastal West African nation with some opposition and civil society groups condemning what they say is Gnassingbe’s bid to extend his 19-year rule longer than previously expected. Tomegah-Dogbe, who has served as Togo’s first female prime minister since 2020, is a member of the ruling Union for the Republic party that won a sweeping majority in an April legislative election that was delayed twice due to the wrangling over the constitution. Togo has seen years of resistance to the Gnassingbe family’s rule.

South Africa records slight dip in rhino poaching after dehorning

AFP
Johannesburg

Rhino poaching in South Africa dipped in the first half of 2024, with a major drop noted following the launch of a dehorning programme in April, the government said yesterday.

Overall 229 rhinos were killed from January to June, two fewer than the same period in 2023, the environment department said in a statement.

There was a “significant drop” during May and June with national losses reported at 21 and 22 respectively, compared to 42 and 34 during the same period the previous year.

Environment minister Dion George attributed this to the dehorning of rhino populations in the eastern KwaZulu-Natal province and specifically in Hluhluwe



imfolozi Park, where over 1,000 rhinos have been dehorned since April.

South Africa is home to a large majority of the world’s rhinos making it a hotspot for poaching driven by demand from Asia, where horns are used in traditional medicine for their supposed thera-

peutic effect.

The southern African nation had 16,056 rhinos at the end of 2023, including 2,065 black and 13,991 white rhinos, the statement said. Black rhinos are listed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) as critically endangered.

The Kruger National Park, a tourist magnet bordering Mozambique, lost 45 rhinos in the first half of 2024 compared to 42 last year, a government statement said. As of 2023, the national parks authority requires new employees to take a lie detector test amid concerns that some workers might be in cahoots with poachers.

More than 60 people suspected of involvement in rhino poaching were arrested during the first half of 2024 while several convictions have been made and firearms recovered, the statement said. In a pioneering project aimed at curbing poaching, South African scientists in June injected radioactive material into the horns of live rhinos to make them easier to detect at border posts.

The environment ministry said that, despite poaching, the country’s rhino population has increased by 1,023 from 2021 to 2023.

World Bank approves \$1.5bn in financing for Ethiopia

The World Bank’s board has approved \$1.5bn in financing for its first-ever budget support lending to Ethiopia, the lender said as the east African nation tries to push ahead with a long-running debt restructuring.

Ethiopia secured a four-year, \$3.4bn programme from the International Monetary Fund on Monday, hours after its central bank floated its birr currency, paving the way for its debt overhaul to move forward. The World Bank will provide a grant of \$1bn and another \$500mn in a low interest credit line, part of the first ever direct budgetary support facility provided to Ethiopia, the global lender said.

“This policy operation supports home-grown reforms that will ultimately help the country transition to a more inclusive economy that allows the private sector to contribute more strongly to growth,” the World Bank said. The bank plans to “provide around \$6bn in new commitments over the next three fiscal years,” it said. — Reuters

Thailand’s \$14bn handout scheme suffers early snags

Reuters
Bangkok

The Thai government’s vaunted policy of giving away 10,000 baht (\$282) to most of its population had an early setback yesterday when millions rushed to sign up on the opening day and

crashed the registration system. By early afternoon, 10.5mn people had applied to join the scheme but millions more could not access the registration portal, many complaining they did not receive text message passcodes to complete the process. The government has bet heavily on its 500bn baht (\$14bn) “dig-

ital wallet” to stimulate an economy struggling from high household debt and weak spending, but the scheme has been delayed due to uncertainty over funding sources. Critics, including respected economists and some former central bank governors, have complained the scheme was short-sighted and fiscally risky, which the

government rejects. “It’s normal to have problems on the first day, but we are doing our best,” said Prime Minister Srettha Thavasin, the programme biggest advocate. The lower house late on Wednesday approved an additional 122bn baht for 2024’s fiscal year to help fund the digital wallet, but senate

and royal endorsement is still required. The programme will be launched in two months and entails transferring 10,000 baht of credit to users via a smartphone application, to be spent in their localities within six months. Millions of retailers are expected to apply and join the scheme,

from major malls and supermarket chains to noodle vendors and family-run convenience stores. The finance ministry expects the economy to grow 2.7%, this year, supported by tourism and exports, while the government believes the handout programme could add 1.2 to 1.8 percentage points to growth next year.

South Korea ready to offer flood relief to Pyongyang

Reuters
Seoul

South Korea is ready to provide North Korea with relief supplies for damage caused by recent heavy rainfall, South Korea’s Red Cross said yesterday, marking a rare outreach under the administration of President Yoon Suk-yeol to its neighbour.

Authorities in the South were ready to discuss the relief supplies needed, the scale of aid and how to transfer it and looked forward to a swift response from Pyongyang, the Red Cross said.

The statement was issued by the South’s unification ministry, which handles inter-Korean affairs. The Red Cross has taken the lead in carrying out projects between the rival Koreas in the past, including reunions of separated families and supply of aid. Heavy rains have hit the North’s northwestern areas in recent days, flooding more than 4,000 homes in the regions of Sinuiju and Uiju, North Korean state media have reported.

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un personally inspected the flooded areas and expressed grave concern over the damage, state media said on Monday.

The region has been affected by heavy rainfall from Tropical Storm Gaemi in recent days, which caused a landslide killing 12 people in southern China and

flash floods elsewhere. There is a possibility of “significant human casualties” in North Korea, a unification ministry official said yesterday. South Korea’s TV Chosun reported more than 1,100 people and as many as 1,500 people are dead or missing, citing an unnamed government official. The North’s state media yesterday said there was work under way in the capital to prevent the flooding of the Taedong River that flows through Pyongyang. The offer of help comes as relations between the two Koreas, which remain technically at war, have been particularly strained amid a headline stance towards the North by Yoon’s government. Since late May, the two sides have been locked in tensions over North Korea’s launch of balloons carrying trash to the South and Seoul responding with propaganda broadcasts at the border, which anger the North. It was not clear if Pyongyang would respond at all to the offer or agree to hold discussions. North Korea has cut off all lines of official communication with the South. Clear assessment of damage and casualties from disasters in the North is difficult, as there are no outside humanitarian monitors present in the reclusive state. More rain was forecast for Sinuiju early today, according to South Korea’s weather agency.



A woman walks during a hot day in Wuhan, central China’s Hubei province, yesterday.

30 dead, dozens missing after torrential rain in central China

AFP
Beijing

Torrential rains in China have killed at least 30 people and left dozens more missing, state media said yesterday, as the country grinds through another summer of extreme weather. Confirmation of the deaths came the same day that weather authorities said July was China’s hottest month since records began six decades ago. China is the world’s biggest emitter of the greenhouse gases that scientists say are driving climate change and making extreme weather more frequent and intense. Heatwaves this summer have scorched parts of northern China, while heavy rain has trig-

gered floods and landslides in central and southern areas. This week’s downpours were triggered by Typhoon Gaemi, which moved on from the Philippines and Taiwan to make landfall in eastern China a week ago, with hilly, landlocked Hunan province hit particularly hard. More than 11,000 people were evacuated from the city of Zixing after some areas endured record rainfall of 25 inches in just 24 hours, state news agency Xinhua said on Tuesday. Many roads connecting townships in the Zixing area were temporarily cut off, which also affected the power supply and communications infrastructure. State broadcaster CCTV said yesterday the disruption was mostly over. “Initial findings show that there have been 30 deaths and 35 are missing,” the report said,

adding that search and rescue efforts were still ongoing. Xinhua said on Tuesday four people had been killed and three people were missing in Zixing. Three people were killed in Hunan’s Yongxing county, Xinhua also said on Tuesday, while a landslide on Sunday killed 15 people elsewhere in the province. Last month was “the hottest July since complete observations began in 1961, and the hottest single month in the history of observation”, the national weather office said yesterday. It said the average July air temperature in China was 23.21 degrees Celsius, exceeding the previous record of 23.17C in 2017. The mean temperature in every province was also “higher than the average for previous years”, with the southwestern provinces of Guizhou and Yunnan logging their highest averages, the weather office said.

Airline cuts hot cup noodles in economy as turbulence rises

Korean Air will stop serving instant cup noodles, a popular snack in Korea known as ramyeon that requires boiling water, on its long-haul flights, part of changes in response to increased turbulence incidents. Concerns about turbulence on planes have heightened since a Singapore Airlines flight from London in May encountered a severe incident leading to one death and dozens of injuries. “This decision is part of proactive safety measures in response to increased turbulence, aimed at preventing burn accidents,” Korean Air said in a statement yesterday. The cup noodles are a popular part of the airline’s in-flight service, featuring heavily on social media. Korean Air last month said turbulence incidents were increasing and it would finish long and medium-haul cabin services 20 minutes earlier, wrapping up services 40 minutes before landing.

Vietnamese prime minister visits India



Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh inspects a guard of honour during his ceremonial reception at the forecourt of India’s Presidential Palace Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi, India, yesterday.

Japan store pulls ‘lazy dad’ kid clothes after backlash

AFP
Tokyo

A line of kids’ clothes featuring slogans about lazy, uninvolved fathers have been pulled from shelves in Japan after the designs sparked an online backlash. The items sold by the chain Birthday included a T-shirt saying “Daddy’s always sleeping” and baby socks that declared “Daddy doesn’t take care of me at all”. Some commentators called them an affront to hard-working fathers, while others said they highlighted the country’s childcare gender gap that weighs heavily on women. “We want to deeply apologise for the offensive phrases,” the brand said on social media platform X, adding that the products would no longer be sold.

The announcement fuelled a heated debate over the division of domestic labour, with some saying the levity had crossed the line. “You work hard all day, only to find your own kid is wearing clothes at home saying all you ever do is sleep, with your wife laughing at the sight of it... How is this supposed to make you happy?” one X user wrote. “This is discrimination against fathers,” another posted. Others saw the tongue-in-cheek clothing, which also included a headband saying “Daddy always comes home late”, were an accurate satire of inequality in Japan. Women in Japan spend 5.5 times longer than men doing unpaid work from chores to parenting, the highest gap among OECD countries, a 2020 government white paper said.

Bangladesh police release student leaders after unrest

AFP
Dhaka

Bangladesh police yesterday freed six student leaders whose campaign against civil service job quotas sparked deadly nationwide unrest, as the government looked to calm tensions and forestall fresh demonstrations. Students Against Discrimination staged nationwide rallies last month that ended in a police crackdown and the deaths of at least 206 people, according to an AFP count of police and hospital data. The group’s leadership were among thousands picked up in the

police dragnet that followed some of the worst unrest of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina’s 15-year tenure. “All six quota movement co-ordinators have been returned to their families,” deputy commissioner Junaed Alam Sarkar said. Principal leader Nahid Islam and two others were forcibly discharged from a hospital in the capital Dhaka last Friday by plainclothes detectives and taken to an unknown location. His father Badrul Islam confirmed that Nahid Islam had returned home early yesterday afternoon but did not give any more details. Three others were detained in the following days, with the gov-

ernment saying they had been held for their own safety. Justice Minister Anisul Huq said yesterday that all six had volunteered to be in police custody. “They came willingly. They said they wanted to go. They are allowed to return to their parents,” he said. Hasina’s government restored order after deploying troops, imposing a curfew and shutting down the mobile Internet network across the country of 170mn for 11 days. More than 10,000 people were arrested in the wake of the unrest, according to Bangladeshi media. Small and scattered protests resumed in cities around Bangladesh this week after other members of

Students Against Discrimination ended a moratorium on demonstrations. They vowed to restart their campaign after the government ignored a Monday deadline for their leaders to be freed. “Their detention was arbitrary and unlawful. There was growing national and international criticism,” University of Oslo researcher Mubashar Hasan said. He said the release of the student leaders signalled the government was looking to “de-escalate tensions” with the protest movement. Demonstrations broke out last month over the reintroduction of a quota scheme – since scaled back

by Bangladesh’s top court – that reserved more than half of all government jobs for certain groups. With around 18mn young Bangladeshis out of work, according to government figures, the move upset graduates facing an acute employment crisis. Critics say the quota system was used to stack public jobs with loyalists to the ruling Awami League. Hasina has ruled Bangladesh since 2009 and won her fourth consecutive election in January after a vote without genuine opposition. Her government is accused by rights groups of misusing state institutions to entrench its hold on

power and stamp out dissent, including the extrajudicial killing of opposition activists. Ministers accused opposition parties of stirring up unrest, which saw arson and vandalism attacks by crowds against government buildings and dozens of police posts. The government enacted a ban yesterday on Jamaat-e-Islami, Bangladesh’s largest Islamist party, that outlawed the organisation and prohibited it from staging any public gatherings. The protests last month had remained largely peaceful until attacks on demonstrators by police and pro-government student groups.



Members of the National Samsung Electronics Union (NSEU) gather during a protest outside the residence of Samsung Electronics Chairman Lee Jae-yong, while holding red placards of Lee that read “Labour union, what’s that? Samsung strike, what’s that?”, in Seoul yesterday.

Union pickets outside Samsung chief’s house

AFP
Seoul

Leaders of a South Korean union representing tens of thousands of workers at Samsung Electronics staged a protest yesterday outside the house of the company’s chairman and heir, after fresh negotiations failed.

Thousands of union members stopped working on July 8 for what was initially meant to be a three-day strike, part of a long-running battle over pay and benefits. The union subsequently extended the work stoppage “indefinitely”.

It is unclear exactly how many workers have downed tools, and Samsung has said the action is not affecting production, posting record growth and profits earlier this week for the second quarter.

“If a delay occurs in semiconductor processing, the effects won’t be immediate. It takes weeks or months,” Lee Hyun-kuk, vice-president of the National Samsung Electronics Union (NSEU), said.

The union engaged in eleventh-hour talks with management for three days, until

Wednesday, but has failed to reach an agreement.

Union executives gathered yesterday outside Samsung Chairman Lee Jae-yong’s house, holding pickets that read “Samsung Electronics’ strike, Lee Jae-yong should be accountable”.

Another displayed a picture of Lee holding a finger to his mouth with the caption, “Shh! Labour union, what’s that? Samsung strike, what’s that?”

A handful of police were deployed at the premises and the protest was interrupted by the police warning the union they were not allowed to chant.

“In the 25 days since the strike began, all Lee has done is attend the wedding of the son of Asia’s richest man and give out Samsung phones to Olympic athletes that are worth over 30bn won (\$22mn),” union member Kim Jae-won told reporters.

Lee was a guest at the wedding of Indian billionaire Mukesh Ambani’s youngest son Anant in July.

Last week he attended a banquet co-hosted by French President Emmanuel Macron and International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach at the Louvre Museum.

The union claimed that the

company was trying to break the strike with illegal means, including creating a “blacklist” of strike participants.

“We will publicise all of this,” Son Woo-mok, head of NSEU, said.

“Labour suppression, unfair labour practices, industrial accidents, the list continues.”

Samsung said on Wednesday it was “communicating and discussing to ensure that this labour union strike ends early”, adding there was “no problem with responding to our customer volume”.

The first labour union at Samsung Electronics was formed in the late 2010s.

The National Samsung Electronics Union, which has around 36,000 members, or nearly a quarter of the company’s total workforce, claims labour organising remains taboo at the company. Two years ago, the union staged a demonstration in front of Lee’s residence, successfully securing three additional holidays.

In 2020, former Samsung employees faced criticism for their unorthodox protest methods, which included drinking and strumming guitars outside Lee’s home.

N Korea wants to restart nuclear talks if Trump wins: ex-diplomat

Reuters
Seoul

North Korea wants to reopen nuclear talks with the US if Donald Trump is re-elected as president and is working to devise a new negotiating strategy, a senior North Korean diplomat who recently defected to South Korea said.

The escape of Ri Il Gyu from Cuba made headlines globally last month. He was the highest-ranking North Korean diplomat to defect to the South since 2016.

In his first interview with international media, Ri said North Korea has set Russia, the US and Japan as its top foreign policy priorities for this year and beyond.

While bolstering relations with Russia, Pyongyang was keen to reopen nuclear negotiations if Trump – who engaged in both fiery brinkmanship and unprecedented diplomacy with North Korea during his previous term – won re-election in November, Ri said.

Pyongyang’s diplomats were mapping out a strategy for that scenario, with the goal of lifting of sanctions on its weapons programmes, removing its designation as a state sponsor of terrorism and eliciting economic aid, said Ri.

His comments signal a potential about-face from the North’s current stance after recent statements ditching the possibility of dialogue with the US and warning of armed confrontation.

A summit between North Korean leader Kim Jong-un and Trump in Vietnam in 2019 collapsed over sanctions, for which Ri partly blamed Kim’s decision to entrust “inexperienced, clueless” military commanders with nuclear diplomacy.

“Kim Jong-un doesn’t know much about international rela-

tions and diplomacy, or how to make strategic judgment,” he said.

“This time, the foreign ministry would definitely gain power and take charge, and it won’t be so easy for Trump to tie North Korea’s hands and feet again for four years without giving anything.”

By forging closer ties with Russia, North Korea received help with its missile technology and economy. But a bigger benefit could be to block additional sanctions and undercut existing ones, Ri said, adding it would raise Pyongyang’s bargaining power against Washington.

“The Russians got their own hands dirty by engaging in illicit transactions and, thanks to that, North Korea no longer needs to rely on the US to lift sanctions, which essentially means they stripped the US of one key bargaining chip,” he said.

In Tokyo, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida has said he wants to meet Kim, but the issue of Japanese nationals abducted by North Korea in the 1970s and 80s has long been a stumbling block.

According to Ri, Kim would seek to hold a summit with Japan, aiming to get economic assistance in return for concessions on the abductee issue.

Tokyo believes 17 of its citizens were abducted, five of whom returned to Japan in 2002. Pyongyang sees the issue as settled, having admitted to kidnapping 13 Japanese nationals and saying those unaccounted for had either died or their whereabouts were unknown.

Ri said Kim would be willing to change that position, established under his father Kim Jong-il, in order to obtain economic support.

“They’re saying that the issue was resolved, but that’s just to

boost negotiating power until he makes concessions at a summit,” he said.

Having studied at a French school in Algeria and lived in Cuba alongside his late father, who was a state media reporter, Ri says he had imagined a life in South Korea since his childhood, but never acted to flee until he was bullied by a diplomatic colleague for refusing his demand for bribes.

Then the defining moment came when Pyongyang instantly refused his request to get medical treatment in Mexico, at his own expense, for a ruptured disc in his neck.

“That exploded all the resentment I had been harbouring towards the regime,” he said.

The Covid-19 lockdown deepened hardships at home and for those stationed overseas, with most telephone lines to Pyongyang cut to prevent any information from spreading in the outside world, Ri said.

Financial troubles have also forced North Korea to shut down a dozen of its 54 diplomatic missions.

“When they began reopening and summoning those working abroad in early 2023, they asked to bring everything from used toothbrushes to spoons back home, saying there’s nothing there,” he said.

Ri had also witnessed – and in his job tried to impede – the launch of diplomatic relations between South Korea and Cuba, a Cold War-era ally of North Korea.

“I had done everything to block that from happening, but establishing relations with Cuba was the best thing South Korea had done since last year,” he said. “It was a model example of how the tides of history have turned, and where a normal civilisation of the international community is headed.”

Canadian warship sails through Taiwan Strait

Taiwan’s defence ministry yesterday said a Canadian warship sailed a day earlier through the Taiwan Strait, a sensitive waterway separating the island from China. China claims Taiwan as part of its territory and has stepped up military and political pressure as relations have plunged in recent years. The navies of the US and its Western allies, meanwhile, have increased “freedom of navigation” crossings through the strait to reinforce its status as an international waterway, angering Beijing. Taipei said yesterday that the Canadian ship’s transit took place on Wednesday, with the warship travelling “from north to south”. “The military has monitored the situation and no anomaly was detected in our surroundings,” the defence ministry statement said. Li Xi, a spokesman for the Chinese military’s Eastern Theater Command, condemned the passage.

Drought in Aceh Besar



A farmer, pulls out rice that failed to be harvested due to a prolonged drought in Aceh Besar, Indonesia

Australia struggling to better Indigenous livelihoods: govt

Reuters
Sydney

Australia is struggling to improve the lives of the country’s Indigenous population, with only five of 19 measures on course to meet targets, showed a government report.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make up 3.6% of Australia’s population of about 27mn but they track near the bottom in almost every economic and social indicator, and have disproportionately high rates of suicide and incarceration.

The government’s annual “Closing the Gap” report – the first since Australians last year rejected a motion to recognise the Indigenous population in the constitution – showed a rise in imprisonment and suicide and the number of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said governments at all levels had not “done good enough in

the past” to improve the lives of the Indigenous people.

“We’re committed to making a difference. The challenges are there. You can’t resolve intergenerational inequity overnight but what you can do is be committed to making a difference,” Albanese said during a media briefing yesterday. Australia has struggled for decades to reconcile with its Indigenous population. Their ancestors arrived on the continent some 50,000 years before British colonists yet were marginalised during colonial rule and are not mentioned in Australia’s 123-year-old constitution.

A referendum in 2023 to alter the constitution to create an Indigenous advisory body in parliament was rejected by 60% of voters who disagreed the advisory body was the right solution.

The report by the productivity commission said the Indigenous population’s life expectancy had improved but may not close the gap with the non-Indigenous group by 2031 as targeted.

Western Australian job losses dent govt’s green ambitions

Reuters
Melbourne

A downturn in the critical minerals sector that has triggered a wave of job losses in Australia’s top earning resources state has also struck a blow to the country’s hopes to build out a critical minerals processing sector.

Top lithium producer Albemarle yesterday announced around 300 redundancies at its lithium hydroxide plant in western Australia, where it paused an expansion as part of a “comprehensive review” of its cost and operating

structure, in the latest job cuts to the sector.

Australia is known for being the world’s largest iron ore exporter but it also supplies around half of the world’s seaborne lithium used in batteries and is a major supplier of other battery materials like nickel.

Miners have now announced job cuts equivalent to 2% of the sector’s state workforce in July alone, according to a Reuters tally, roughly doubling cuts announced in the first half combined. They have also mothballed or delayed plans for new projects that would feed into the energy transition.

“Australia’s critical miner-

als industry is in a critical state – energy costs, labour, productivity, red tape,” said analyst Daniel Morgan of investment bank Barrenjoey.

“It sounds good on paper but it’s not clear the settings are in place for it to work. All of this reinforces how uncompetitive Australia is in downstream processing.”

BHP Group, IGO, Albemarle and Fortescue have all been expected to benefit from Australia’s moves to shore up its economy for the green transition.

But they have been hurt by slower than expected electric vehicle take-up that has hit nickel and lithium prices, as well as per-

sistently high power and labour costs.

Australia has harboured big dreams to become a critical minerals and green energy powerhouse.

It in May released a budget centrepiece of A\$22.7bn (\$15bn) to boost domestic manufacturing and renewable energy, which included a A\$7bn investment in processing critical minerals under a “Future Made In Australia” banner.

The plan also included tax breaks for processors of critical minerals, which is set to start in 2027, and which the government is now considering bring-

ing forward, Resources Minister Madeleine King told ABC Radio in Perth yesterday.

“This is complex problem, and it is impacting international markets across the critical minerals sector globally,” she said separately in a statement.

Battery metals producer IGO said last month that given “prevailing market conditions” it would pause a study into developing a facility that would produce precursor battery chemicals near Perth. BHP said it is stopping battery chemicals output at its Kwinana nickel refinery, which was set to supply Tesla while Fortescue cut jobs amid concerns

it would not meet its green energy production targets.

“Australia’s mining sector is now at an inflection point as the energy transition and global decarbonisation efforts change the shape of overall demand,” BHP said in a submission to an Australian enquiry last week.

The cost of mining operations in Australia has increased “acutely” in the past few decades while labour productivity has remained flat. To boost competitiveness, the country needs to upskill its workforce, streamline permitting and support new projects by developing common infrastructure, it said.

After \$4bn Infosys demand, India ‘may target other IT majors’

Reuters
New Delhi

Indian authorities may issue notices soon to more major IT services firms in an investigation of alleged tax evasion related to work done by their overseas offices, a government source said

yesterday, a day after Infosys was slapped with a \$4bn tax demand. In serving its highest-ever tax demand on Infosys, the government accused India's second-largest tech services company of evading taxes and sought Rs320bn (\$3.8bn), or almost all its revenue for the quarter ended June 30. Infosys said it had received

“pre-show cause” notices from the tax authorities but believed the relevant taxes had been paid. The company said in a statement it had paid its dues and is in compliance with central and state regulations. Yet tax authorities are not confining their investigations to Infosys. “This is an industry-wide

issue,” a senior tax official with knowledge of the matter said, adding that notices were likely to be sent to some other IT companies. The source spoke on condition of anonymity as he was not authorised to speak to media. India's finance ministry did not immediately reply to an e-mail seeking comment.

Experts said more tax notices for the same alleged violations were likely to be in the offing. “Issuing such a substantial show-cause notice is likely to set a precedent, leading to similar notices being issued to other multinational companies, particularly in the IT sector,” said Rajat Mohan, director at accounting firm

MOORE Singhi. The overseas offices carry out projects for Indian IT firms and provide services to international clients, among other functions. Shares of Infosys were down 1% at Rs1,868.25 yesterday. Infosys may be in for a long and protracted battle, some tax experts said.

Heavy rains hit northern India, hundreds left stranded

Reuters
New Delhi

Torrential rain is causing heavy damage in northern India, killing at least 10 people and leaving hundreds stranded in the Himalayas, officials said yesterday. The capital Delhi was lashed by a bout of intense rain on Wednesday evening, with a total 5.8 inches recorded in eastern parts of the city and its suburbs by the India Meteorological Department (IMD).

At least five people died, according to local media.

Three people have died and parts of two bridges were washed away due to a cloudburst in Uttarakhand state, officials said, adding that bad weather in the hilly terrain was hampering communications. Earlier local media said four people were killed. Three hundred people were stranded in different locations on the Kedarnath route and a patch of the national highway was washed out, district official Saurabh Gaharwar said.

Uttarakhand, which is prone to flash floods and landslides, was ravaged by record rain in 2013, and nearly 6,000 went missing.

In neighbouring Himachal Pradesh state, two people died and nearly 50 people were missing after torrential rain led to floods, authorities said.

Visuals shared by the state chief minister showed rescue workers crossing streams by rope, as muddy water gushed through rocks between hills.

“The situation is quite bad there and we are trying to pull out people, dead bodies (if any) from the debris,” Jyoti Rana, a district official in the capital Shimla, said.

Torrential rains in the mountains of India and neighbouring Pakistan and Nepal over the past few years have been attributed to climate change by some experts.

In Delhi, water was seen leaking from the newly-constructed parliament building, according to a post on X by opposition leader Akhilesh Yadav. Delhi has experienced a series of extreme weather events in the past few months, from sizzling temperatures to floods and heavy rainfall that caused a roof collapse at the city's airport.

Meanwhile, a top weather official said India is set to receive monsoon rainfall that is above the average as a La Nina weather pattern forms in August and September. her forecast holds good.

The lifeblood of a nearly \$3.5tn economy, the annual monsoon brings almost 70% of the rain India needs to water farms and replenish reservoirs and aquifers.

Without irrigation, nearly half the farmland in the world's second-biggest producer of rice, wheat and sugar depends on the rains that usually run from June to September.

A La Nina weather pattern is likely to develop by the end of August or early September, bringing higher rainfall, said Mrutyunjay Mohapatra, director-general of the India Meteorological Department (IMD).



A makeshift bridge has been installed for the rescue operation after the landslides in Wayanad yesterday.

Soldiers build bridge to assist Kerala landslides’ relief work

Reuters
Chooralmala, India

Indian soldiers rushed to complete construction of a metal bridge yesterday to connect the worst affected area in the Kerala landslides as search continued for survivors and bodies after the disaster that has killed at least 182 people.

Heavy rain in the southern coastal state of Kerala, one of India's most popular tourist destinations, caused landslides in the hills of Wayanad district early on Tuesday, sending torrents of mud, water and tumbling boulders downhill and burying or sweeping people to their deaths as they slept.

Army engineers scrambled to build a 190-foot bridge to ferry heavy equipment from the nearest town of Chooralmala to the affected

area, Mundakkai, after rising water in a local river washed away a makeshift bridge on Wednesday.

The main bridge was washed away in the landslides on Tuesday, cutting off Mundakkai.

“Our bridge will be ready soon and once the bridge comes up, it will be a major change,” V T Mathew, a senior army official in charge of the rescue operations, said.

“We need to search the entire area with heavy equipment which can move on the bridge. It will speed up all rescue and retrieval efforts.”

People trapped in places like tea plantations have all been rescued, locals and rescue officials said.

Authorities said they were not expecting any more survivors and were looking to retrieve the bodies. There was no information on the number of tea-plantation work-

ers staying in makeshift houses made of clay, wood and tin that were completely flattened by the landslides.

Steady rain and lack of road access to affected areas have hampered rescue work over the last two days. Light rain continued yesterday as rescue workers shifted through the debris amid the mud and sludge.

Teachers at a nearly-destroyed local school in Chooralmala were seen trying to retrieve relevant documents and student records.

The disaster was the worst in Kerala since deadly floods in 2018. Experts said the area had received heavy rain in the last two weeks that softened the soil before extremely heavy rainfall on Monday triggered the landslides.

Authorities said 182 dead bodies have been recovered while 206 were still missing. The local Asianet news TV channel put the death toll at 281.

India govt summons Sri Lanka envoy to protest ship collision

India yesterday summoned the Sri Lankan envoy to protest following a collision between one of its fishing boats and a Sri Lankan naval vessel that killed a fisherman, with a second missing, authorities said. The collision took place five nautical miles north of Katchatheevu, an island at the focus of contention between the neighbours, although India ceded it to Sri Lanka 50 years ago. Indian fishermen are barred from the waters around the island. “The government of India has always emphasised the need to deal with issues pertaining to fishermen in a humane and humanitarian manner,” India's foreign ministry said. Sri Lanka did not want an escalation of the issue and was looking to work with India for a solution, Foreign Minister Ali Sabry said. “We understand this is about livelihoods and lives,” he added. “We would continue to talk to our Indian counterparts and find a permanent solution.”

Manipur protest



Internally displaced persons (IDPs), who are living in relief camps, hold a protest rally demanding their resettlement in their native places, in Imphal, Manipur, India, yesterday.

Family doctors in England to begin industrial action

Reuters
London

Family doctors in the state-funded National Health Service (NHS) in England will begin industrial action for the first time in 60 years after voting overwhelmingly in favour of doing so in a dispute over funding and contract changes.

The British Medical Association trade union said more than 8,500 general practitioners had taken part in the ballot with 98.3% voting in favour of collective action, which would begin immediately.

This would see doctors stopping work they are not formally contracted to do as well as action such as pulling out of patient data sharing agreements. The NHS said it could include GPs limiting the number of patient appoint-

ments per day. “GPs are at the end of their tether. This is an act of desperation. For too long, we've been unable to provide the care we want to. We are witnessing general practice being broken,” Katie Bramall-Stainer, chair of BMA's GP committee for England, said.

“The era of the family doctor has been wiped out by recent consecutive governments and our patients are suffering.”

Matthew Taylor, chief executive of the NHS Confederation, said the decision was “disappointing”. The ballot for action opened before a July election at which the Conservative Party lost power after 14 years. The new Labour government said yesterday it would give doctors' surgeries greater freedom over hiring additional staff in order to recruit more than 1,000 newly-qualified GPs this year, a change the profession had been calling for.

UK charges teen with murder in Southport killings

Reuters
Southport, England/London

A 17-year-old boy appeared in an English court yesterday charged with the murder of three young girls in a knife attack at a summer dance class that has shocked the nation and sparked two nights of violent protests.

Axel Rudakubana first appeared at Liverpool Magistrates' Court yesterday over Monday's incident at a “Taylor Swift yoga and dance workshop” summer vacation event for children in the seaside town of Southport.

He is charged with three counts

of murder, 10 counts of attempted murder and one of possession of a bladed article.

His case was later heard at Liverpool Crown Court, where he sat in the dock covering his face with a grey sweatshirt and did not speak to confirm his name.

Judge Andrew Menary did not impose reporting restrictions on Rudakubana's identity, which had not previously been reported as he is under 18. Rudakubana was remanded in custody ahead of a further hearing in October.

Large disturbances broke out in Southport, a town in England's northwest, on Tuesday after false information was spread on social

media that the suspect in the stabbings was a radical Islamist migrant, with anti-immigrant protesters descending on Southport town from elsewhere.

Police have said the attack was not terrorism-related and that the suspect was born in Britain, quashing speculation on his origins.

As well as the killing of three girls aged six to nine, Monday's attack in the normally quiet town left eight other children with stab wounds.

Alder Hey Children's NHS Foundation Trust said in a statement that two of the children had been discharged from hospital.

“We continue to treat five children involved in the devastating incident in Southport on Monday, including one recently transferred to us from Aintree University Hospital,” the trust said. “All the children in our care are currently in a stable condition.”

In London on Wednesday, thousands gathered near the prime minister's Downing Street residence, shouting, “Save our kids”, “We want our country back” and “Stop the boats”, as well as English football chants. London's Metropolitan Police said yesterday 111 people had been arrested for offences including violent disorder and assaults on police officers.

“Whilst these charges are a significant milestone within this investigation, this remains very much a live investigation,” chief constable Serena Kennedy told a press conference shortly after midnight.

Prime Minister Keir Starmer has denounced as “violent thugs” those who clashed with police over the knife attack, saying they would “feel the full force of the law”.

More than 50 police officers were hurt in the protests in Southport on Tuesday, when demonstrators set police vans on fire and dismantled garden walls to hurl bricks at officers.

In London on Wednesday, protesters threw flares and smoke

canisters towards Downing Street. Local people in Southport have denounced the violence.

“What I saw last night was absolutely appalling....It was devastating and it's kind of taken away from actually what's gone on, which is the tragedy of those deaths,” resident David Burgess told Sky News.

Hundreds of people in the community have taken part in vigils to mourn the slain children, and laid bouquets of flowers at the site of the incident. Starmer, Britain's former chief prosecutor who was elected on July 4, met police leaders yesterday to offer them the government's full backing following the violence.



Andean glacier retreat unprecedented in human civilisation, study finds



Mountain guide Daniela Pagli holds a piece of melted ice from the Iver glacier, close to the El Plomo mountain summit, in the Andes mountain range of Chile's Santiago Metropolitan Region. - Reuters

Reuters
Santiago

Recent glacier retreat across the Andes is unprecedented in the history of human civilisation, according to a new study published in the *Science* journal yesterday.

The discovery shocked scientists, who initially planned to study the current state of glaciers and how they had varied throughout human civilisation.

"We thought this result was decades away," said Andrew Gorin, lead author of the study, who first

believed the initial results were a fluke, but were confirmed by later samples. "It goes to show you that this is happening faster than even those of us that think about this the most believed."

Gorin and the team of scientists carbon-dated bedrock that had been recently exposed by retreated glaciers by measuring beryllium-10 and carbon-14 nuclide levels and found that concentrations were nearly zero.

"Basically, if your rock can see the sky, it's accumulating these nuclides," Gorin said, adding that the decay rate of these nuclides show that the rock hadn't been

exposed during the Holocene Era, which dates back 11,700 years, but could go back even further.

"I would bet my whole life savings that in fact, these glaciers are smaller than they've been since the last interglacial period," which ended about 115,000 years ago, Gorin said.

The study collected data at four glaciers across the Andes, which comprises 99% of the world's tropical glaciers.

These glaciers are more susceptible to changing weather since they're consistently at or near freezing point.

"We think this is the canary

in the coal mine, that this is going to happen everywhere before long and maybe sooner than we thought," Gorin said.

A Reuters correspondent recently climbed multiple mountains across the Andes to see the changes mountaineers were witnessing first hand as glaciers retreated.

Many described increasingly dangerous conditions and changes unprecedented in their lifetimes. "I think that it's a sign that we're now departing the condition, the climatic conditions that we've been used to, that we've built our global civilisation, as we know it, in"

Bolivia battles record number of wildfires

Bolivia is grappling with a record number of fires in the first seven months of the year, satellite data showed yesterday, as the flames send villagers fleeing, kill wildlife and char the landscape.

Diesel shortages across the country are further complicating firefighting efforts by making it more difficult to reach remote areas and tackle the blazes.

Bolivia registered roughly 17,700 fire points from January through July, the most ever seen in that period in the country, according to data from Brazil's space research agency Inpe, which monitors fires in all of South America.

There have been a record number of monthly fire points in Bolivia for three consecutive months through July, according to Inpe.

The continent overall is bracing for an intense fire season, as a drought driven by climate change has dried out vegetation in much of the region.

The worst of the dry season lies ahead, with wildfires generally peaking this month and in September, Inpe data show.

Some of the largest fires so far have been in far eastern Bolivia, a region dominated by dry leaf forests and the Pantanal, the world's largest wetlands.

The scale of the fires in Bolivia vastly increased in July. Major blazes with emissions visible on satellite images began to break out on July 18, according to data compiled by nonprofit Amazon Conservation.

Climate change is causing the dry season - typically from July to October - to start earlier, said Natalia Calderon, director of non-profit Fundación Amigos de la Naturaleza (FAN-Bolivia).

Shifting rain patterns, high winds and the drought cause the blazes to spread faster and last longer, she said.

- Reuters

Three 9/11 suspects agree to plead guilty

The man accused of masterminding the September 11 attacks, Khalid Sheikh Mohamed, and two of his accomplices, held at the US military prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, have agreed to plead guilty, the Pentagon said on Wednesday.

The Pentagon did not elaborate.

A US official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the plea deals almost certainly involved guilty pleas in exchange for taking the death penalty off the table.

The official said the terms of the agreement had not been publicly disclosed but acknowledged a plea for a life sentence was possible.

Mohammed is the most well-known inmate at the detention facility in Guantanamo Bay, which was set up in 2002 by then-US president George W Bush to house foreign militant suspects following the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States.

Its population grew to a peak of about 800 inmates before it started to shrink. There are 30 inmates today.

Mohamed is accused of masterminding the plot to fly hijacked commercial passenger aircraft into the World Trade Centre in New York City and into the Pentagon.

The 9/11 attacks, as they're known, killed nearly 3,000 people and plunged the United States into what would become a two-decade-long war in Afghanistan.

Plea deals were also reached by two other detainees: Walid Mohamed Salih Mubarak bin 'Attash and Mustafa Ahmed Adam al-Hawsawi, according to a Pentagon statement.

The three men were initially charged jointly and arraigned on June 5, 2008, and then were again charged jointly and arraigned a second time on May 5, 2012, the Pentagon statement said.

- Reuters

26 released in major prisoner swap between Russia, West

AFP/Reuters
Washington/Moscow/Ankara

Jailed US journalist Evan Gershkovich and a Russian intelligence colonel jailed for a Berlin murder were among two dozen prisoners freed yesterday in the biggest East-West prisoner swap since the Cold War.

Turkiye, which co-ordinated the exchange, said 10 people, including two children, had been moved to Russia, 13 to Germany and three to the United States.

Also involved in the swap were Poland, Slovenia, Norway and Belarus.

"After the completion of the ratification procedures of the parties, the health checks ... the prisoners were placed on the planes of the countries to which they would be travelling with the approval and instructions of the MIT" the National Intelligence Agency (MIT) said in a statement.

A Reuters reporter saw a Russian government aircraft taking off from Ankara.

Overjoyed family members appeared in the White House alongside President Joe Biden, who said they'd been able to phone their freed loved ones from the Oval Office.

Hailing a "feat of diplomacy", Biden said US allies Germany, Poland, Slovenia, Norway and Turkiye "stood with us".

"They made bold and brave decisions" to release Russians held for espionage and other crimes in return for the Westerners and Russian dissidents and human rights activists, he said.

"This would not have been possible without our allies," Biden said, adding: "Today is a powerful example of why it's vital to have friends in this world."

"Some of these women and men have been unjustly held for years. All have endured unimaginable suffering and uncertainty. Today, their agony is over," he said.

Biden described their convictions in Russia as "show trials".

Dmitry Medvedev, a former Russian president and close ally of current leader Vladimir Putin, celebrated the return of Russians who he said had "worked for the Fatherland".

The *Wall Street Journal* said it was "overwhelmed with relief" at the release of Gershkovich, 32, who was detained in Russia in March 2023 and sentenced in July to 16 years in prison on spying charges that were denounced by the United States.

Editor-in-chief Emma Tucker posted an open letter on the X platform that read: "Today is a joyous day for the safe return of our colleague Evan Gershkovich, who left a Russian aircraft moments ago in Turkiye's capital, Ankara, as part of a prisoner swap with Russia."

"We are grateful to President Biden and his administration for working with persistence and determination to bring Evan home rather than see him shipped off to a Russian work camp for a crime he didn't commit."

Paul Whelan, a former US marine detained since 2018, also flew to Ankara.

Another American, Alsu Kurmasheva, and Vladimir Kara-Murza, a Russian with US residency, were likewise freed.

Opposition politician Ilya

Yashin and Vladimir Kara-Murza, a Russian-Briton with US residency, who had both been jailed for criticising Russia's invasion of Ukraine, were among the Kremlin opponents released.

Yashin will go to Germany with 11 other German nationals and Russians, according to the US administration. They included Rico Krieger, a German who was sentenced to death in Belarus on espionage charges before a reprieve this week.

Among those returned to Moscow was Vadim Krasikov, a Russian intelligence agent imprisoned in Germany for killing a former Chechen rebel commander in a brazen assassination.

The German government acknowledged that agreeing to free Krasikov had not been an "easy decision".

"Our duty of care to German citizens as well as solidarity with the



Biden holds the hand of the 12-year-old daughter of Aslu Kurmasheva as he speaks about the prisoner exchange with Russia, in the State Dining Room of the White House in Washington, DC. - AFP

USA were important factors" in the decision to send Krasikov home, said government spokesman Stefan Hebestreit.

This was the first exchange between Russia and the West since star US basketball player Brittney Griner returned home in return for convicted Russian arms dealer Viktor Bout in December 2022.

It was the biggest since 2010, when 14 alleged spies were exchanged.

They included double agent Sergei Skripal, who was sent by Moscow to Britain and undercover Russian agent Anna Chapman, sent by Washington to Russia.

Before then, major swaps involving more than a dozen people had only taken place during the Cold War, with Soviet and Western powers carrying out exchanges in 1985 and 1986.

White House National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan revealed that

an even more ambitious agreement had been on the cards with attempts to negotiate the release of Putin opponent Alexei Navalny.

"Unfortunately, he died" while incarcerated in February of this year, Sullivan noted.

Despite the rare moment of cooperation between Western capitals and Putin's Russia, Biden said "I don't need to speak" with the Kremlin leader.

Gershkovich was arrested in Yekaterinburg while on a reporting trip.

He, his employer and the US government all strongly denied the espionage allegations against him.

Media rights group Reporters Without Borders said it was "hugely relieved" at the release. But it slammed Moscow's "policy of state hostage-taking".

Amnesty International said in a statement the swap was a sign that Putin "is clearly instrumentalising the law in order to use political prisoners as pawns".

Washington had also been pressing for the release of Whelan, 54, who was arrested in 2018 in Moscow and charged with espionage.

Whelan was working in security for a US vehicle parts company when he was arrested, and has always asserted that the evidence against him was falsified.

Kara-Murza, a 42-year-old activist, was serving a 25-year sentence in Siberia after criticising the Ukraine war.

He suffers from a nerve disease and was moved to a prison hospital this month.

Adding to the intrigue was a case in Slovenia, where a court sentenced two Russians suspected of spying for Moscow to more than a year and a half in prison - but then ordered their expulsion from the country.



This combination of file pictures (left to right, top to bottom) US journalist Evan Gershkovich, former US Marine Paul Whelan, US-Russian journalist Alsu Kurmasheva, and Russian opposition activist Vladimir Kara-Murza. - AFP

Democrats begin voting to nominate Harris

AFP
Washington

Kamala Harris will be confirmed as the Democratic US presidential nominee in an electronic vote that started yesterday, replacing the fanfare of in-person balloting that usually kicks off the party's national convention.

Less than two weeks after Joe Biden ended his re-election bid, his 59-year-old vice-president is in full control of the party, having emerged as the only Democrat in the running to challenge Republican Donald Trump in November.

Just under 4,000 delegates - the grassroots activists and politicians allocated during the primary process - sent in signatures backing Harris to be on the ballot for the five-day electronic vote.

No other Democrats have stepped forward to challenge her elevation to the top of the ticket, making her confirmation as the first black and south Asian woman ever to secure a major party's nomination a formality.

She won the support of 99% of the delegates who signed petitions, the Democratic National Committee (DNC) said in a statement, while no one else met the qualifying threshold of 300 signatures.

"Our delegates have an important respon-



sibility - and opportunity - in the days ahead to cast their history-making ballots for Vice-President Harris, ensuring that she will be on the ballot in every state this November," said DNC chair Jaime Harrison. "Our party has met this unprecedented moment with a transparent, democratic and orderly process to unite behind a nominee with a proven record who will lead us in the fight ahead."

As well as the "pledged" delegates, there are around 700 so-called "superdelegates" who get

to vote because they hold elected office - such as state governors or members of the US Congress - or are party officials.

The roll call launched at 9am (1300 GMT) and delegates have until 6pm on Monday to return their votes via an online platform run by the DNC.

The announcement could come late on Monday, as Harris hits the campaign trail for a swing across seven crucial battleground states with her newly minted running mate, who has not yet been announced.

The DNC swapped to a virtual process, mirroring the pandemic-hit 2020 vote, because of Ohio's deadline - Wednesday next week - for major parties to submit the names of their certified candidates for the November election.

The DNC has not revealed if the vote will be livestreamed or if a rolling tally will be available to the public, and has not disclosed whether it would make the results public before the end of the voting period if they were available.

The virtual roll call marks the official beginning of the 2024 convention, although in practice the festivities get going when thousands of the party's grassroots activists descend on Chicago on August 19.

There will be ceremonial votes for Harris and her running mate in Illinois, in what is expected to be a raucous celebration of her rise from state politics to the top of the ticket.

Trump loses appeal of gag order in hush money criminal case

A New York state appeals court has rejected Donald Trump's challenge to a gag order in his hush money criminal case, where the former US president was convicted in May on charges stemming from hush money paid to an adult entertainment actor.



The decision by the Appellate Division in Manhattan means the Republican presidential nominee cannot comment publicly about individual prosecutors and others in the case until Justice Juan Merchan sentences him on September 18, seven weeks before the November 5 election.

Trump's lawyers have argued that the gag order violated Trump's constitutional free speech rights under the First Amendment.

Steven Cheung, a spokesperson for Trump's campaign, said Trump "continues to forcefully challenge" the gag order.

"The gag order is blatantly un-American as it continues to gag President Trump," Cheung said in a statement.

Merchan imposed the gag order a few weeks before the trial began on April 22, saying Trump's history of making threatening statements could undermine the proceedings.

The original order prevented Trump from commenting on prosecutors, court staff, witnesses and jurors.

A separate order against naming the anonymous jurors remains in effect.

Merchan lifted the restrictions on witnesses and jurors following Trump's May 30 conviction.

The Appellate Division, a mid-level appeals court, said threats that Bragg's staff received in the wake of the verdict continue to pose a "significant and immediate" threat.

- Reuters

Extreme heat claims 175,000 lives a year in Europe, says WHO

AFP
Copenhagen

Extreme heat kills more than 175,000 people a year in Europe, where temperatures are rising quicker than the rest of the globe, the World Health Organisation (WHO)'s European branch said yesterday.

Of the some 489,000 heat-related

deaths recorded each year by the WHO between 2000 and 2019, the European region accounts for 36%, or on average 176,040 deaths, the WHO said.

The health body noted that temperatures in the region are “rising at around twice the global average rate”.

The WHO's European region comprises 53 countries, including several in Central Asia.

“People are paying the ultimate price,”

Hans Kluge, the WHO's regional director for Europe, said in a statement.

According to the organisation, there has been a 30% increase in heat-related mortality in the region over the past two decades.

“Temperature extremes exacerbate chronic conditions, including cardiovascular, respiratory and cerebro-vascular diseases, mental health, and diabetes-related conditions,” Kluge said.

The regional director added that extreme heat can in particular be a problem for elderly people and be an “additional burden” for pregnant women.

The WHO noted that “heat stress” – which occurs when the human body is no longer able to maintain its temperature – “is the leading cause of climate-related death” in the region.

According to the WHO, the number of heat-related deaths is set to “soar” in the

coming years as a result of global warming.

“The three warmest years on record” for the region “have all occurred since 2020, and the 10 warmest years have been since 2007,” Kluge said.

On July 25, United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned that humanity was suffering from an “extreme heat epidemic”, and called for action to limit the impacts of heatwaves intensified by climate change.

Lahore hit by record rainfall

AFP
Lahore

Pakistan's second-largest city of Lahore was deluged with record-breaking rainfall yesterday, the national weather agency said, with hospitals flooded, power interrupted and streets in the metropolis submerged.

The eastern city was lashed by almost 360mm (14”) of rain in three hours, the Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD) said. “This was record-breaking rainfall,” the agency's deputy director Farooq Dar told AFP.

The previous record dates to July 1980, when 332mm fell over three hours.

“Look at all these buckets and how much water has accumulated. We're exhausted from trying to remove the water,” Sadam, a 32-year-old shopkeeper, told AFP as he took stock of his considerable losses.

The PMD had forecast a wetter-than-usual monsoon season this year for Pakistan, one of the countries experts say is most vulnerable to extreme weather being spurred by climate change.

Over the past three days, 24 people have been killed by rainfall in the country's mountainous northwestern province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the Provincial Disaster Management Authority said.

In Lahore, a city of 13mn in the

eastern Punjab province, one person was killed by electrocution as a result of yesterday's cloudburst, according to local police.

The city's commissioner declared an emergency and said offices and schools would be shut for the day.

Yasir Ali, a 26-year-old resident, said it was a “sad day for the nation”.

“For a poor person it is heart-breaking that he's been unable to go to work today,” he told AFP.

Two government hospitals in Lahore reported flooding in their wards, and there were intermittent power outages continuing into the afternoon.

Roads were also submerged, bringing traffic and businesses to a standstill.

Ahmed Khan, 48, who earns a daily wage, appealed to the government “to pay some attention here and resolve this water issue”.

Maryam Sharif, the chief minister of Punjab province, posted on X that “the entire government machinery is in the field” to drain the water.

The summer monsoon brings to South Asia about 70-80% of the region's annual rainfall between June and September.

It is vital for agriculture, but changing weather patterns that scientists attribute to climate change are putting both lives and livelihoods at risk.

Earlier this year Pakistan –



Girls wade through a flooded street in Lahore. - AFP

home to 240mn people – was hit by a succession of heatwaves and this April was the wettest since 1961.

At least 143 people died from lightning strikes and other storm-related incidents in April.

In neighbouring India, at least 160 people, most believed to be

labourers and their families, have been killed by torrential rains causing landslides in the southern coastal state of Kerala.

In 2022, a third of Pakistan was submerged by unprecedented monsoon rains that displaced millions of people and cost \$30bn, according to a World Bank estimate.

Brazil takes over Argentina, Peru embassies in Caracas

Reuters
Caracas

Brazil took over administration of the Argentine and Peruvian embassies in Venezuela yesterday after those countries' diplomats were expelled over their criticism of disputed election results showing President Nicolas Maduro won last weekend's election.

Brazil will mediate on issues regarding Argentine and Peruvian citizens in Venezuela, the main one being the status of six Venezuelan opposition figures who sought asylum in the Argentine embassy and now live in the ambassador's residence.

The Brazilian flag was raised at the Argentine ambassador's residence in Caracas, according to a Reuters witness, and subsequently taken down, though it was not clear why.

“I greatly appreciate Brazil's willingness to take charge of the custody of the embassy,” Argentine President Javier Milei wrote on X. “I have no doubt that we will soon reopen our embassy in a free and democratic Venezuela.”

Milei, a right-wing libertarian who has been critical of Maduro's socialist government, had previously said the Argentine diplomats had to leave Caracas due to “retaliation by the dictator Maduro

for our condemnation of the fraud they (Maduro's government) perpetrated last Sunday”.

Venezuela expelled diplomats from Argentina and five other countries – Chile, Costa Rica, Panama, the Dominican Republic and Uruguay over election-related criticism.

Caracas also severed relations with Peru after Lima recognised opposition leader Edmundo Gonzalez as Venezuela's elected president.

Venezuela's electoral council proclaimed Maduro, who has been in power since 2013, the winner of the July 28 election with 51% of the vote, but the opposition says its tally of about 90% of the votes shows Gonzalez received more than double the support of the incumbent president.

Many nations in the Western Hemisphere, including regional powerhouses Brazil and the US, are pressuring Maduro's government to release comprehensive vote totals, something his government has yet to do.

The disputed election has led to deadly, widespread protests that Maduro and his allies in the military have denounced as an attempted coup.

Human Rights Watch said on Wednesday that it had received reports of 20 deaths in post-election demonstrations.

Some Maduro allies have said



The Brazilian flag is raised at the Argentine embassy in Caracas, where Venezuelan opposition members have sought asylum since March, after Argentine diplomats were expelled from Venezuela. - Reuters

Gonzalez and high-profile opposition leader Maria Corina Machado should be arrested for their role in the anti-government protests, which also occurred in long-time ruling party strongholds.

Aides to Machado requested asylum at the Argentine embassy in March after a local prosecutor issued arrest warrants against them for conspiracy.

Machado, who has denied allegations of misconduct by her team, was blocked from being a candidate in Sunday's presidential election despite being the front-runner in polls.

Opposition calls on Venezuelans to ‘mobilise’

Venezuelan opposition leader Maria Corina Machado have called on supporters to “mobilise” after President Nicolas Maduro vowed to hold on to power following a widely disputed election.

Machado's message comes amid deep uncertainty in the country, after Maduro was declared the winner in Sunday's election but with electoral authorities failing to disclose detailed results to back up the claim.

Sixteen people have been killed in protests that erupted after the election, according to the opposition, which claims its candidate Edmundo Gonzalez Urrutia is the rightful victor.

The opposition has released a large set of voting data it says shows him defeating Maduro by a wide margin, as pre-election polls had suggested.

“We spent months building a robust platform that

could defend the vote and unquestionably demonstrate our triumph. WE SUCCEEDED,” Machado, who was barred from running in the election, said Wednesday evening on X. “Now it is up to ALL of us to assert the truth that we ALL know. Let's mobilise. WE WILL SUCCEED.”

Numerous nations, including Brazil and the United States, as well as the European Union, have demanded Venezuelan authorities release detailed voting data, with the White House warning on Wednesday that the international community's patience was running out.

Maduro said he was “ready to present 100% of the records” as he addressed journalists outside the Supreme Court of Justice, where he filed an appeal against what he termed an “attack against the electoral process”. - Reuters

New tourist limits get warm welcome in Venice

Reuters
Venice

Venetians and visitors alike welcomed new rules introduced yesterday to limit the size of tourist groups in the latest effort to reduce overcrowding.

Tourist parties will be capped at 25 people and guides will be barred from using loudspeakers to help the flow of pedestrians and make it more peaceful for residents.

“I think it's right,” said 81-year-old local Edie Rubert.

“It would be better to reduce it more. Because you can't walk along the narrow canalside streets when these groups are there,” she added, saying it was even worse when she needed to use her shopping trolley.

In April, Venice became the first city in the world to introduce a payment system for visitors in an experiment aimed at dissuading

daytrippers from arriving during peak periods.

Sebastian Fagarazzi, co-founder of the “Venezia Autentica” (Authentic Venice) Tourist Enterprise, said more action was needed.

“It's probably a good decision in that regard, but it's not going to be enough. Tourism in Venice has pushed out 72% of the inhabitants in the past 70 years, so 28% only remain today,” he said.

Venice's historic centre had more than 170,000 residents in 1954, according to city authorities.

Last year, they were down to just over 49,000.

“As a consequence, it's not enough to just make smaller groups or, for example, ask people to pay a small tourism tax. What must be done is to rethink tourism in order to support the local community,” added Fagarazzi, whose organisation aims to support more sustainable tourism.

The restrictions, which cover



Local police fines a tour guide on the day Venice municipality introduces a limit for tourist groups to 25 people to protect the fragile lagoon city and reduce the pressure of mass tourism. - Reuters

the city centre and also the islands of Murano, Burano and Torcello, got a thumbs-up from tourists.

“Yeah, I think it's good. I mean, it's very, very congested in a lot of places,” said Mark Kerr, visiting

from Scotland. “In particular, yesterday we were at the St Mark's Basilica and the queues were massive to get in, so I think there's a need to manage it, is probably the best way I can describe it.”

French cabbies seek payout for lost Olympics revenue

French taxi drivers have demanded government compensation for lost revenue during the Olympic Games as traffic disruptions and fewer regular clients weigh on demand.

In a letter to the transport ministry, taxi unions said that the Games had been “hugely disappointing” for the drivers of licensed taxis of which there are 20,000 in Paris alone.

“Demand is slowing and the entire profession is being prevented from simply doing their job because of these Games,” said the letter, seen by AFP.

The number of additional visitors drawn by the Olympics had failed to make up for “the impact of traffic restrictions, the closure of venues and the impact of usual customers staying away”, it said.

The unions demanded the creation of a “compensation fund” that they said should cover income lost for the seven-month period during which public spaces were being taken over for the Games.

Several venues in and around Paris, but also in Marseille, were blocked off for several weeks before the Games started on July 26.

In response to the letter, Transport Minister Patrice Vergriete said in a social media post that taxis and ride-hailing services would now be allowed to enter the so-called “red zones” around Olympics venues, which were previously off-limits for motor vehicles.

Now that the high-security opening ceremony was in the past, several safety measures had been lifted and traffic was becoming more fluid, the minister said.

The government has encouraged French residents to go on holiday or work remotely during the Games, further dampening demand and contributing to a sharp fall in business compared to the same period in 2023, the unions said. - AFP

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GULF TIMES

Liberal democracy hangs in the balance

For a while now, it has been clear that two elections – one on each side of the Atlantic – would decide the fate of liberal democracy in 2024: the June European Parliament elections and the November US presidential election. While fears that European elections would deliver a resounding victory to far-right anti-European Union parties were not borne out, liberal democracy is hardly in the clear, in Europe or the United States. Though the EU was spared the worst in the recent elections, far-right parties did make significant gains, especially in the two largest (economically) and most important (politically) member states, France and Germany. In Germany, the far-right Alternative für Deutschland took second place, while the centre-right Christian Democrats remained the strongest force. In France, the far-right National Rally came in first, leading President Emmanuel Macron to dissolve parliament and call a snap election.

That decision brought National Rally to the threshold of power, though a disaster was averted in the election's second round. The left, united under the umbrella of the New Popular Front, came in first, but fell well short of a majority. With a hung parliament, France will be paralysed, with fatal consequences for Europe. Germany alone cannot advance the bloc's objective of securing its sovereignty in a more dangerous world.

Meanwhile, across the Atlantic, a political hurricane is brewing. Following his poor debate performance in June, President Joe Biden has finally decided to drop out of the race and endorse his vice-president, Kamala Harris. But Donald Trump is at the gates. If polls are borne out, he could return to the White House in January, and that, too, would have far-reaching consequences for Europe (along with the rest of the West).

This would not just affect Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, Europe's fundamentally altered security situation, or the uncertain future of Nato. Rather, it concerns the core values and institutions that underpin Western democracy. If the US

The world as we know it in liberal Europe could cease to exist on the morning of November 6

is transformed from a liberal democracy to an "illiberal" one, there are many in Europe who will celebrate its new identity. Moreover, one should never underestimate the extent to which America can influence European affairs. Another Trump presidency would not be like the last one. Trump 2.0 would do everything he could to change America permanently

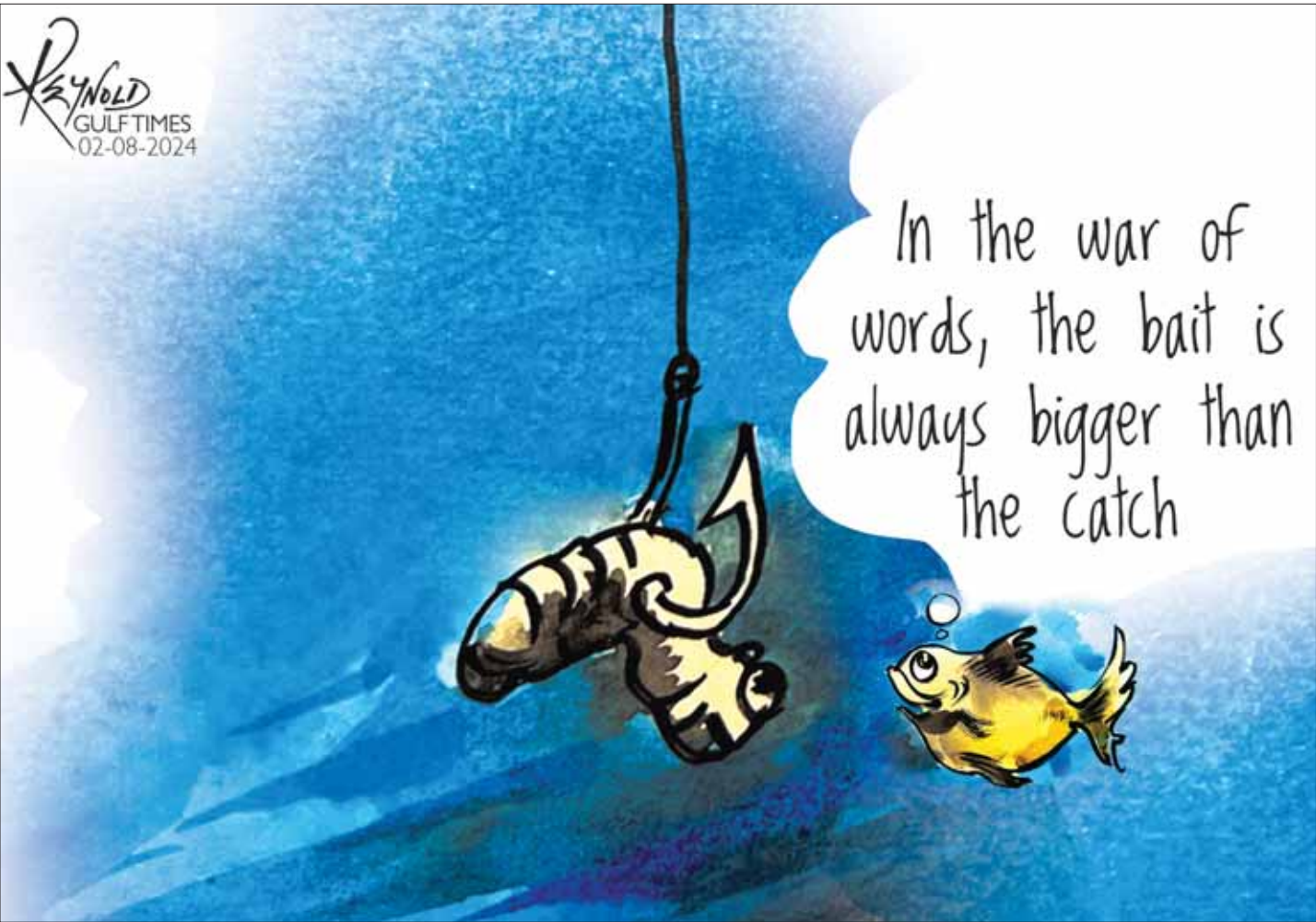
from a liberal democracy to one in which his own autocratic, authoritarian impulses would have free rein. He would show zero tolerance for his enemies and rivals, and no concern whatsoever for the separation of powers or the constitution. He already demonstrated how far he is willing to go on January 6, 2021, when he encouraged his supporters to storm the Capitol, following weeks of efforts to overturn the results of a free and fair election.

For this reason, Russian President Vladimir Putin is not the only one hoping for a Trump victory. All right-wing-nationalist and far-right parties are, because they long to usher in the same kinds of changes at home. Our current understanding of Western liberal democracy – featuring a separation of powers, free and fair elections, the rule of law, constitutional protections for minorities, freedom of expression, and other fundamental rights – is the result of America's victories in World War II and then the Cold War. If the US were to abdicate its role as the driving force and leading exemplar of this liberal form of democracy, the liberal West as a whole would be in danger, and liberal Europe even more so.

A Trump victory would strengthen and embolden far-right-nationalist parties across the continent, while bolstering Russia through a cessation of American support for Ukraine. With France already paralysed, the European project would be completely at the mercy of those who want to do away with it. For those who value the EU, it would be nothing short of a nightmare.

As the Ukraine crisis has shown, the transatlantic West cannot be defeated from the outside, but it can be weakened and pulled apart from within. If Europeans slide back into nationalism, we will have squandered our last chance to decide our own fate, and to ensure peace and freedom for our children and grandchildren.

Given the changing geopolitical environment – the rivalry between major powers, the rise of the Global South, the demographic weakness of advanced economies, and new technological revolutions – Europe will not get another chance to shape the world of tomorrow. A lot is at stake on November 5, 2024, when Americans go to the polls. The world as we know it here in liberal Europe could cease to exist on the morning of November 6. – Project Syndicate



Smart farming solution to climate crisis and co-operation with Qatar



By Song Miryung
Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs
Republic of Korea

The climate crisis poses another severe threat to agriculture. Climate change is making weather more extreme and less predictable. This aggravates the uncertainty of agricultural production and farm management, which in turn deters farmers from reinvesting profits back into production to become more competitive. Besides, the increasing uncertainty of running a farm feeds the perception among young people seeking stable jobs and high income that farming is not an easy choice to build a career.

The question is: "Is there a way for agriculture to overcome climate change and labour shortages, and then make a new leap forward?" The answer lies in smart farming. Advanced agricultural technologies applied to smart farming allow farmers to grow and harvest crops in a safe and efficient way, even under unfavourable environmental conditions in terms of soil fertility, sunlight, and climate.

In a recent survey of about 100 South Korean indoor farmers who equipped their farms with smart technologies such as environment monitoring and control systems, they reported that their incomes increased by an average of 40%, with a 7% saving in labour input in the first year of smart farming.

A few years ago, extreme weather events hit South Korea and triggered widespread tomato crop failures, which eventually led to a situation where fast-food restaurants in the country were forced to serve hamburgers without tomato slices.

To prevent similar situations in the future, big supermarket chains in South Korea have increased their purchases of fresh agricultural produce from smart farms by 20% this year. Also, young farmers, who received professional training in the 'Smart Farm Innovation Valley,' an industrial complex for smart farming innovation, have been selling out of their fresh-cut vegetable crops grown on smart farms, such as arugula and apple mint.

This is one example of how going "smart" in agricultural production and distribution can help tackle climate change. Now is the time for the government to create a policy to nurture and support 'smart' farmers so that they can turn their innovative ideas into a reality. As the first step of such efforts, the Act on Fostering and Supporting Smart Farming went into effect in South Korea from July 26 this year. The Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs of the Republic of Korea (MAFRA) will continue to work hard to support the development of the smart farming industry.

First, we will establish a medium- and long-term master plan to foster the smart farming industry in a systematic

way, and will work together with local governments to implement projects reflecting the characteristics of each rural community. Most of all, we will designate a special smart-farming district that houses smart farms as well as a full spectrum of forward- and backward-linked industries covering agricultural machinery, services, processing, distribution, etc. In the district, we will provide intensive policy support for smart farming, such as building a complex of lease-based smart farms, granting special admission to shared-use areas and facilities, and other forms of support.

Second, we will train people into smart-farming experts. To run a smart farm, farmers must be equipped with skills to analyse data and operate digital equipment and devices. Therefore, we will designate two academic institutions specialising in smart farming in August this year and then run vocational training courses there to produce smart farmers and smart-farming consultants. Next year, we will also introduce a qualification system for a smart farming manager, who provides farmers with on-site training, technical advice, and consulting services.

Third, we will step up our efforts to improve relevant policies and systems, as well as increase our investment to ensure development of innovative agricultural technologies. Vertical farms are growing in numbers around the world, but their growth in South Korea has been stunted by regulations prohibiting the erection of a vertical farm in any farmland or industrial district. To resolve the issue, we will amend a relevant law and relax the regulations on the siting of vertical farms by the end of this year.

Also, we will expand our

support for development of new smart farming technologies based on artificial intelligence, drones, and robotics, etc. Such support will also go to establishment of standards for smart-farming machinery and data formats, as well as to follow-up management and maintenance.

Last but not least, the Korean government will continue to pursue co-operation with Qatar and other countries in smart farming to contribute to overcoming global food crisis caused by the climate crisis. Importantly, through close co-operation with Qatar and other Middle Eastern countries, we will provide strong support for them to overcome the challenges of desert climate and enhance their food security.

South Korea has already been making good progress in co-operation with Qatar in smart farming. In February this year, both sides held the first meeting of the ROK-Qatar Smart Farm Co-operation Committee in Doha, Qatar and subsequently in May, the Qatari economic working group visited South Korea to further the discussion about co-operation in smart farming.

The climate crisis and agricultural crises are the challenges that the international community must overcome to ensure food security and human health. Smart farming is a clear-cut solution to those challenges. The Korean government will make its utmost effort to resolve such agricultural challenges and transform agriculture into an industry that will sustain hopes for a better future for our children and young people. To this end, we will give our all to foster the smart-farming industry and co-operate with the international community.



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Hypocrisy is internal destruction

Hypocrisy is a chronic disease and a dangerous moral deviation in the life of individuals, communities and nations. Its danger is great and the hypocrites are the cause of this great evil. This danger is clearly noticeable when the destructive consequences of hypocrisy afflict the entire *Ummah* (Muslim nation) and the charitable reform movements in particular, as the hypocrite causes their fatal internal destruction, whilst he is safe and unwatched. No one expects his slyness and plotting since he is considered a Muslim whose name, appearance and speech is like that of any other Muslim.

Scrutinising the essence of hypocrisy, you will find it a satanic combination that comprises severe cowardice, greed for the immediate pleasures of this worldly life, denial of truth and lying. Of course, one can imagine the evil effects of such a combination. The linguistic meaning of hypocrisy implies deception, cunning, showing outward goodness and concealing evil.

Forms of Hypocrisy

Many scholars mentioned that hypocrisy is divided into two types:

1- Hypocrisy in Belief: Some scholars call this form of hypocrisy “Major Hypocrisy”. Al- Hafith ibn Hajar, may Allah have mercy upon him, explained it as follows: “It is when the person shows his belief in Allah, His angels, His books, His messengers and the Last Day, but conceals what contradicts some or all of this.” He added: “This was the type of hypocrisy that prevailed during the time of the Prophet, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam* (may Allah exalt his mention). In the Qur’an, Allah The Exalted dispraises such hypocrites and brands them as disbelievers. The Qur’an also mentions that they will be destined to be in the lowest depths of Hell. Allah The Almighty Says (what means): [Indeed, the hypocrites will be in the lowest depths of the Fire - and never will you find for them a helper.] [Qur’an 4:145]”

2- Hypocrisy in Action: Some scholars call this form “Minor Hypocrisy”. It is when the person has some of the manners of the hypocrites such as lying and slackness in performing prayers; however, he still believes in Allah The Almighty, His Messenger, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, and the Last Day. It was narrated in a Hadith that the Prophet, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, said: “The signs of the hypocrite are three: Whenever he speaks, he tells lies; whenever he makes a promise, he breaks it; and whenever he is entrusted with something, he betrays the trust.” In another Hadith, it was narrated that the Prophet, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, said: “The most burdensome prayers for the hypocrites are the ‘Ishaa’ prayer and the Fajr prayer. If they were to know what these two prayers include [of goodness], they would come to them, even if they had to do so crawling!”



Dominant Characteristics of the Hypocrites

Hypocrites are known for many characteristics which we will only briefly mention as elaboration needs many books to expose their real qualities:

1- They say with their tongues what is not in their hearts, as Allah The Almighty Says (what means): [And of the people are some who say: “We believe in Allah and the Last Day,” but they are not believers.] [Qur’an 2:8]

2- They deceive the believers, as Allah The Almighty Says (what means): [They [think to] deceive Allah and those who believe, but they deceive not except themselves and perceive [it] not.] [Qur’an 2:9]

3- They cause corruption on earth by means of both their speech and their actions. Concerning this point Allah The Almighty Says (what means): [Unquestionably, it is they who are the corrupters, but they perceive [it] not.] [Qur’an 2:12]

4- They mock the believers. Allah The Almighty Says (what means): [And when they meet those who believe, they say: “We believe”; but when they are alone with their evil ones, they say: “Indeed, we are with you; we were only mockers.” But! Allah mocks them and prolongs them in their transgression [while] they wander blindly.] [Qur’an 2:14-15]

5- They falsely swear in order to conceal their crimes. Allah The Almighty Says (what means): [They have taken their oaths as a cover, so they averted [people] from the way of Allah. Indeed, it was evil that they were doing.] [Qur’an 63:2]

6- Having allegiance towards the disbelievers and supporting them against the believers. Allah The Almighty Says (what means):

[Give tidings to the hypocrites that there is for them a painful punishment - Those who take disbelievers as allies instead of the believers. Do they seek with them honour [through power]? But indeed, honour belongs to Allah entirely. And it has already come down to you in the Book that when you hear the verses of Allah [recited], they are denied [by them] and ridiculed; so do not sit with them until they enter into another conversation. Indeed, you would then be like them. Indeed Allah will gather the hypocrites and disbelievers in Hell all together][Qur’an 4:138-140]

[Have you not considered those who practise hypocrisy, saying to their brothers who have disbelieved among the People of the Scripture: “If you are expelled, we will surely leave with you, and we will not obey, in regard to you, anyone - ever; and if you are fought, we will surely aid you.” But Allah testifies that they are liars. If they

are expelled, they will not leave with them, and if they are fought, they will not aid them. And [even] if they should aid them, they will surely turn their backs; then [thereafter] they will not be aided.] [Qur’an 59:11-12]

7- Making efforts to dishearten and disappoint the believers. In this respect, Allah The Almighty Says (what means): [And [remember] when the hypocrites and those in whose hearts is disease said: “Allah and His Messenger did not promise us except delusion,” And when a faction of them said: “O people of Yathrib, there is no stability for you [here], so return [home].” And a party of them asked permission of the Prophet, saying: “Indeed, our houses are unprotected,” while they were not exposed. They did not intend except to flee. And if they had been entered upon from all its [surrounding] regions and *Fitnah* [tribulation] had been demanded of them, they would have done it and not hesitated over it except briefly. And they had already promised Allah before not to turn their backs and flee. And ever is the promise to Allah [that about which one will be] questioned. Say, [O Muhammad]: “Never will fleeing benefit you if you should flee from death or killing; and then [if you did], you would not be given enjoyment [of life] except for a little.” Say: “Who is it that can protect you from Allah if He intends for you an ill or intends for you a mercy?” And they will not find for themselves besides Allah any protector or any helper. Already Allah knows the hinderers among you and those [hypocrites] who say to their brothers: “Come to us,” and do not go to battle, except for a few.] [Qur’an 33:12-18]

8- Conspiring against the believers or participating in such matters. The books of history are full of incidents that show their plotting against the Muslim *Ummah*, and our current situation also proves this fact. The conspiracies of the hypocrites were also the cause of many Mujahids being captured by the disbelievers and the other enemies of Islam in Palestine, Chechnya or other places.

9- Referring legislation to other than Allah and His Messenger, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, where Allah The Almighty Says (what means): [Have you not seen those who claim to have believed in what was revealed to you, [O Muhammad], and what was revealed before you? They wish to refer legislation to *Taghoot* [false judges] while they were commanded to reject it; and Satan wishes to lead them far astray. And when it is said to them: “Come to what Allah has revealed and to the Messenger,” you see the hypocrites turning away from you in aversion. So how [will it be] when disaster strikes them because of what their hands have put forth and then they come to you swearing by Allah: “We intended nothing but good conduct and accommodation.” Those are the ones of

whom Allah knows what is in their hearts, so turn away from them but admonish them and speak to them a far-reaching word.] [Qur’an 4:60-63]

Such is the state of the hypocrites when they reject the legislation of Allah and His Messenger, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, and their hypocrisy is revealed before others. When this happens, they invent false and fabricated excuses and falsely swear in order to acquit themselves. They say: “We did not intend to contradict the Messenger of Allah, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, in his judgment; we only meant to settle and reconcile the two parties and we wanted to be good to them both.” Strangely, when they find the judgment in their favor, they accept it; otherwise, they turn away. Allah The Almighty has informed us about this where He Says (what means): [But the hypocrites say: “We have believed in Allah and in the Messenger, and we obey”; then a party of them turns away after that. And those are not believers. And when they are called to [the words of] Allah and His Messenger to judge between them, at once a party of them turns aside [in refusal]. But if the right is theirs, they come to him in prompt obedience. Is there disease in their hearts? Or have they doubted? Or do they fear that Allah will be unjust to them, or His Messenger? Rather, it is they who are the wrongdoers.] [Qur’an 24:47-50]

10- Defaming the believers and doubting the intentions of the obedient is another of their sly characteristics. Allah The Almighty Says (what means): [Those who criticise the contributors among the believers concerning [their] charities and [criticise] the ones who find nothing [to spend] except their effort, so they ridicule them - Allah will ridicule them, and they will have a painful punishment.] [Qur’an 9:79]

They do not know sincerity or feel in their hearts the true meaning of worshipping Allah The Almighty. Therefore, they think that both the believers and the hypocrites are alike, and that their righteous deeds are only for the sake of worldly gains. In their view, an actress who repents must have received millions in return for this and the Mujahids are simply failures in life who choose to commit suicide.

Finally, it should be noted that the aforementioned characteristics of the hypocrites are just a few of the many other traits that could have been mentioned later. May Allah grant us all refuge against hypocrisy, and protect the *Ummah* (Nation) from the evil of the hypocrites.

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



The value of time in a Muslim’s life

The Qur’an and *Summah* both emphasise the importance of time in the life of a Muslim. Allah swears in the beginning of many *Surahs* (chapters) by time or moments in time, for example Allah Says (what means): “By the dawn and the ten nights (i.e. the first ten days of the month of Dhul -Hijjah)...” [Qur’an 89: 1-2]

And also Says (what means): “By the night when it covers, and by the day when it appears...” [Qur’an 92:1]

And also Says (what means): “By the morning brightness and by the night when it covers with darkness...” [Qur’an 93:1]

And also Says (what means): “By the time...” [Qur’an 103:1]

When Allah swears by something of His creation, it directs our attention to the benefit of that thing. The Prophet, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, further emphasised the value of time in many authentic *Hadiths*. For example, Mu’aath bin Jabal related that the Prophet, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, said: “The slave will not go forward on the Day of Judgment until he is asked four questions: about his age and how he spent it, about his youth and how he used it, about his wealth and how he acquired it and spent it, and about his knowledge and what he did with it.”

Youth is considered the peak stage in human life, because young people have the capacity and energy to accomplish many good deeds, but when they get older, they cannot do as much. These are stages of development as mentioned in the Qur’an, for example in *Surah Ar -Room* (The Romans), Allah Says (what means): “Allah is He Who created you in (a state of) weakness, then gave you strength after weakness, then after strength gave (you) weakness and grey hair ...” [Qur’an 30:54]

If we do not use our time effectively for something good, then we will definitely use it for something bad, which destroys our rewards and our lives. For example, if you do not make *Thikr* (mentioning Allah and praising Him), then you will be saying something else, perhaps backbiting or perhaps talking about your children, your work, your neighbours, your friends or your enemies. What counts for you is using the time for something useful, doing good deeds and saying good things.

Try to make a short revision at the end of each day about what you did during that day. Ask yourself: What did I do today? What did I do that was bad today? Make repentance for the bad things that you have done and said, sincerely determining not to repeat such things. With the good, determine to do it again, do it more often and do it in a better way.

Our lives are judged according to what we did, not according to how many years we lived. We know that life is very short,

and at the end of it comes death. We do not know when we are going to die, so we have to make sure that we do many good deeds before we pass into the next life and we are unable to return to repent from our bad deeds, or to do more good deeds. Time passes very quickly as Allah Says (what means): “The Day they see it, (it will be) as if they had not tarried (in this world) except an afternoon and a morning” [Qur’an 79:46]

And also Says (what means): “And on the Day when He shall gather (resurrect) them together, (it will be) as if they had not stayed (in the life of this world and graves, etc) but an hour of a day.” [Qur’an 10:45]

Time is very precious and if it passes, you cannot make use of it again. If yesterday passed without the performance of good deeds, then it is gone; you cannot reclaim any benefit from yesterday’s time. For example, if you came to travel from one city to another and you found that the airplane that you were supposed to travel on has already left, do you think that it will be back to pick you up? Or if you were travelling by train and you missed the train, do you think that the train will reverse to come back to get you?

If we do not use our time effectively for something good, then we will definitely use it for something bad, which destroys our rewards and our lives

When it is time for a person to die, he may ask for more time to do good deeds, as Allah Says (what means): “Therein they will cry: ‘Our Lord! Bring us out, we shall do righteous good deeds, not what we used to do!’ (Allah will reply): ‘Did We not give you long enough lives so that whosoever would receive admonition could receive it, and the warner came to you? So taste you (the evil of your deeds). For the wrongdoers, etc, there is no helper.’” [Qur’an 35:37]

We say that we are so busy with our work and our children, but Allah warns us against this saying (what means): “O you who believe! Let not your properties or your children divert you from the remembrance of Allah. And whoever does that, then they are the losers. And spend (in charity) of that which We have provided for you before death comes to one of you and he says: ‘My Lord! If only you would give me respite for a little while (i.e. return to the worldly life), then I should give

sadaqah (i.e. *Zakaah*) of my wealth, and be among the righteous (i.e. perform Hajj). And Allah grants respite to none when his appointed time (death) comes. And Allah is All-Aware of what you do.” [Qur’an 63: 9-11]

Many people before us used their time effectively by performing good deeds, teaching, doing something for the benefit of the Muslims, their families and their relatives, or by advising others to be good, and calling others to Allah and Islam, etc. They considered every day that passed which they did not use effectively for the sake of Allah as denying the favours of Allah.

Today we have those who “kill time.” These people gather to talk about things that are not related to Islam or the Muslims’ affairs; they play around or talk about others. These people are not killing time, but they are committing slow suicide because they are killing their time -- and their time is their lives! So they are slowly killing themselves and after they die, what good deeds have they done?

The Prophet, *sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam*, said: “There are two favours (or bounties) of Allah’s bounties, and in them many people are cheated (or deceived): health and free time.”

People underestimate the value of these two favours, and thus, they are cheated. This is like a person who has a house that he wants to sell. Someone comes and offers him \$50,000 for it. He isn’t sure of its value, so he hesitates. Finally, he agrees and sells it for that amount. Later he finds out that his house was actually worth a million dollars. Imagine how cheated he feels; imagine that feeling that if he had only known beforehand what it was really worth, he could have gotten more!

It is the same with our time. We underestimate its great value, and then when it is gone, we feel that we have been cheated because we didn’t get everything out of it that we could have. But just as the one who sold his house below its value cannot get it back and sell it at its true value, we also cannot go back and do more with the time that is already gone. At the end of our lives, we will not be able to go back and live our lives over again and we will not be given more time to do good deeds, to try to make up for the time we wasted.

So we must organise our time wisely, being very careful about what we use it for. We must treat the free time that we have, in which we could do good deeds as a precious resource, guarding it against waste or misuse.

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

The benefits of hoping for the best

Having hope in Allah The Almighty bears fruit to the following:

- It makes one strive more and exert greater effort in performing acts of worship.

- It makes one even more inclined to be constantly obedient to Allah The Almighty.

- It makes one enjoy drawing closer to Allah The Almighty, and makes one experience the thrill of supplicating to Him.

- It makes one express his servitude to and need for his Lord, and makes him realise that he cannot do without the favours and kindness of his Lord, even for a period that is as rapid as the blinking of an eye.

- Allah The Almighty loves that His slaves ask favours of Him and supplicate to Him; He is angered by those who shun supplicating and asking Him. The one with hope usually supplicates much more than others who are not, and Allah The Almighty is angry with those who do not harbour any hope in the mercy and kindness of Allah The Almighty. Thus having hope rescues one from the wrath of Allah The Almighty.

- Hope is what makes the person enjoy his journey towards Allah The Almighty and the Hereafter; it makes him steadfast upon the path because had it not been that people hoped for Paradise and that their rewards be multiplied, then nobody would have been able to continue on their path towards Allah The Almighty and the Hereafter.

- It makes one increase in his love for his Lord, because the more he gets what he asked and hoped for, the more his love for his Lord will increase and the more grateful he becomes to his Lord – which is one of the implications of the state of servitude.

- Hope makes one reach the state of being thankful; which is what servitude is all about.
- Hope makes one research more into the Names and Attributes of Allah The Almighty.

- Hope is interconnected with fear of Allah The Almighty, because the one who hopes for the mercy of Allah The Almighty and His Paradise will fear that he may not be doing enough to be worthy of them; this is indeed a wonderful relationship between the two different states of the believer’s heart: hope and fear.

- When one hopes for something and

Allah The Almighty grants it to him, this encourages him to ask for more and strive harder to please Allah The Almighty, which consequently increases his level of faith and brings him close to the All-Merciful.

- The more hope that slaves harbour during this life, the more they will rejoice when attaining what they have hoped for in the Hereafter, and the best and highest of all causes for rejoicing is seeing Allah The Almighty and attaining His pleasure.

Furthermore, Allah The Almighty wishes that His slaves fulfil the other ranks of servitude, such as humbling themselves before Him, relying on Him in everything, seeking His support, fearing Him, persevering through His decrees and thanking Him for His bounties. Thus, Allah The Almighty decreed that people sin in order for him to fulfil these ranks, so His slaves seek the forgiveness of Allah The Almighty and humble themselves before Him in order to be forgiven. If people did not sin, they would not feel the need to humble themselves before Him or seek His forgiveness, nor would they repent to Him; this is why Allah The Almighty tests people with these sins, in order to purify their hearts by this humility and seeking His pardon. Thus, a very important aspect of servitude is fulfilled.

After the slave sins, he humbles himself before Allah The Almighty, and then begins to have hope that Allah The Almighty will forgive his sin. This results in the slave’s heart becoming more attached to his Lord.

There are three types of hope, two of which are praised and one dispraised:

1. The hope of an obedient person who hopes for the reward from Allah The Almighty.

2. The hope of a sinful person who hopes for the forgiveness of Allah The Almighty.

3. The hope of a negligent person who continuously sins and then hopes for the forgiveness of Allah The Almighty, without exerting any effort to attain His forgiveness. This is a false hope and wishful thinking, which deceives no one but the one who harbours it; it is by no means considered to be real hope in Allah The Almighty.

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

Qatar Foundation-EAA-IOC project to bolster societies through sports



HE Sheikha Hind bint Hamad al-Thani at the Paris event yesterday.

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Highlighting the QF’s commitment and efforts to establish and expand platforms that ensure equitable access to sports for everyone, HE Sheikha Hind said: “Today, you can once again see this commitment in action, as Qatar Foundation comes together in collaboration with Education Above All Foundation and the International Olympic Committee to extend our collective efforts in harnessing the power of sports for justice and equality.”

“This collaboration will not only empower thousands of young people, but also serve as a catalyst for promoting inclusion and gender equality through sport,” said IOC President Thomas Bach. “With this initiative, we aim to demonstrate how innovative partnerships can help make significant strides in achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development

Goals, while creating a lasting impact on the lives of young people and helping to build a more inclusive and equal world.”

“Just like education, we believe that sports has the power to bring people together regardless of their socio-economic status, geographical location or financial ability for a more inclusive and equitable world,” said Education Above All Foundation (EAA) chief executive Fahad al-Sulaiti.

Working with stakeholders in each country it targets, and with key institutions that will bring their knowledge and expertise to its work, the project will incorporate sport into existing programmes and educational curricula; fund initiatives that use sports to advance accessibility and inclusion; encourage systemic behavioural change; and inform policy development through knowledge creation and evidence in relevant fields.

The regional delivery of the project, through programmes to the value of \$3mn, will be led by the EAA as it utilises its expertise in promoting equity and inclusion through innovation and education, and the IOC, whose global network supports, scales, and advocates for sports for development initiatives.

The QF will lead the project’s delivery in Qatar, including through building on its existing efforts and plans to expand inclusive sporting opportunities for women and girls.

Across three phases between 2024-2027, the ultimate goal of the collaboration is to improve the personal situations of those who participate in the project; change mindsets and social attitudes around inclusion, equity, education, and sports in the communities where it is delivered; and create impact including new policies and funding avenues in targeted countries, states, and provinces.



West Walk serves as one of the venues for the SkillFest exhibition.



Right: An array of handcrafted items on display at SkillFest at Msheireb Galleria. **PICTURES:** Shaji Kayamkulam and Joey Aguilar



Sustainable crafts thrive at SkillFest

By Joey Aguilar
Staff Reporter

Doha residents are increasingly embracing unique and sustainable toys and accessories, signalling a growing trend towards creative and hands-on activities in Qatar.

“Here in Doha, they (residents) are very interested in it, especially kids,” Filiz Cam, founder of Needle and Hook, and a participant at the SkillFest exhibition at Msheireb Galleria, told *Gulf Times*.

Cam, who recently moved to Qatar, is showcasing her crochet creations at the SkillFest exhibition, a month-long celebration of local arts and crafts.

She shines a spotlight on the growing enthusiasm for handcrafted and sustainable items, especially with yarn and a hook.

This sentiment, Cam said, reflects an expanding appeal among Doha residents to foster creativity in their children.

“It’s also safe, and there’s nothing artificial about it. They want their kids to be creative, not just glued to screens,” she said, noting that crochet allows them to create something tangible with their own hands.”

Cam’s workshop, which teaches children how to crochet blankets, is proof of this desire.

“They are very interested in crafting stuff – not just crochet, but painting, ceramics, and more. This is how they could be creative, they are creating something with yarn and hook with their



Filiz Cam

hands and I suggest everyone have such a hobby for their kids,” she said, highlighting a shift towards hands-on methods and active participation.

Cam’s story is an example of the entrepreneurial spirit fostered by Qatar’s burgeoning arts and crafts scene.

Her passion for crochet blossomed after leaving corporate life and she has quickly built a business by tapping into the market demand for handcrafted goods.

SkillFest, sponsored by Visit Qatar, is a key platform for showcasing this trend and has attracted a diverse crowd across various locations in Doha.

The event features a mix of workshops, performances, and exhibitions, all infused with a celebration of Qatar’s cultural heritage and local artistry.

SkillFest offers a comprehensive exploration of the country’s artistic landscape, from Arabic calligraphy to astronomy displays and marine life pavilions to Qatari photography exhibits.

The event also hosts artisan markets, featuring works by 24 local artists, and competitions for visitors with prizes.

The lively atmosphere at West Walk, one of the SkillFest locations, reflects the excitement surrounding the initiative.

“We’ve been receiving many visitors, mostly Qataris and families from the GCC countries, especially Saudi Arabia,” said a staff member. “They are eager to participate in the workshops and learn from our instructors and artisans.”

SkillFest exhibition is also being held at two indoor locations: Mall of Qatar and Place Vendome.

