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BUSINESS | Page 1

Qatar banks remain profitable and benefit from strong capitalisation: S&P

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SCAN ME!

Amir felicitates new president of Lebanon

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani congratulated General Joseph Aoun on his election as the new President of Lebanon, stressing his country's consistent support for Lebanon and its people. In a post on his official X account, His Highness the Amir congratulated the new Lebanese president and also the Lebanese people, hoping that this step would constitute the beginning of a new phase of stability and prosperity. His Highness added that Qatar would always remain supportive of Lebanon and its people in their march toward a brighter future. **(QNA) Page 2**

Qatar in solidarity with the US over California wild fires

Qatar has expressed its solidarity with the United States in the face of the effects of the wildfires in California, which resulted in the death of a number of people and the destruction of hundreds of homes. In a statement yesterday, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed the sincere condolences of Qatar and its sympathy to the government and people of the US over the victims of the fires. **(QNA) Page 6**

New MoCI strategy targets 3.4% growth in non-hydrocarbon GDP, \$100bn FDI by 2030

By Peter Alagos
Business Reporter

Two key strategies launched yesterday aim to enhance Qatar National Vision 2030 by promoting sustainable economic growth, diversifying important economic sectors, and increasing the private sector's contribution to GDP.

HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani officially inaugurated the Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI) Strategy and the Qatar National Manufacturing Strategy 2024-2030, which carry the theme 'Achieving Sustainable Economic Growth'.

Speaking at the event, HE the Minister of Commerce and Industry Sheikh Faisal bin Thani bin Faisal al-Thani emphasised that the Ministry of Commerce and Industry Strategy aims to diversify economic sectors and achieve



HE the Minister of Commerce and Industry Sheikh Faisal bin Thani bin Faisal al-Thani delivering a speech during the event.

a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 3.4% for non-hydrocarbon GDP, with a target of attracting \$100bn in foreign direct investments by 2030.

These goals support the strategy's objectives of fostering innovation and entrepreneurship while improving the business environ-



HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani leading the official launch of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry's Strategy and the Qatar National Manufacturing Strategy 2024-2030 in the presence of ministers and top private sector officials in the country. **PICTURES:** Shaji Kayamkulam

ment to attract more international investments, he pointed out.

He noted that the strategy underscores the importance of supporting the role of small and medi-

um sized enterprises (SMEs) as key drivers of economic diversification. It also prioritises strategic partnerships and collaboration to expand Qatar's global trade relations, ac-

celerate digital transformation and smart technologies in industries, and ensure the integration of sustainable development practices across various sectors. **To Page 3**

Qatar reunites Gaza family in co-operation with Turkiye



Qatar, in co-operation with Turkiye, reunited one of the families of the wounded in the Gaza Strip with their relatives in Doha, as part of the initiative of His Highness the Amir to provide treatment for 1,500 Palestinians from the Strip. The family was received in Doha by HE Minister of State for International Co-operation Maryam bint Ali bin Nasser al-Misnad and Turkish ambassador Dr Mustafa Goksu. In a statement to Qatar News Agency, HE the Minister of State for International Co-operation expressed Qatar's appreciation of Turkiye for its co-operation in facilitating the process of reuniting the family with its relatives. **(QNA)**

Over 100 young leaders to attend GCC Youth Summit 2025 in Doha

QatarDebate Center, a member of the Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development (QF), is set to host the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) Youth Summit 2025 at Bin Jelmood House in Msheireb Downtown, Doha, from tomorrow, bringing together over 100 young leaders from across the GCC.

The summit is being organised in collaboration with the Ministry of Sports and Youth of Qatar, which serves as the strategic partner, and Msheireb Museums, the logistical partner, and aims to serve as a dynamic platform for dialogue and innovation, empowering the next generation to address key challenges and opportunities in the region.

Held under the theme "Dialogue and Visions", the summit will explore six key topics critical to the Gulfs progress including Technological Evolu-



tion, Health Futures, Sustainable Living, Cultural Horizons, Global Politics, and Economic Development. Guided by the themes, the participants will delve into challenges and opportunities unique to the GCC, collaborating on innovative solutions that align with the Gulf region's unique cultural identity and aspirations.

Commenting on the significance of the Summit, Abdulrahman al-Subaie, Program Director at QatarDebate Center,

said: "This summit embodies QatarDebates commitment towards empowering Gulf youth to become architects of a brighter future. By creating a space for meaningful dialogue, we aim to nurture visionary leaders who will shape the trajectory of our region and inspire bold ideas, strengthen cultural bonds, and build a united vision for the Gulf."

He further added: "We are grateful for the support of the Ministry of Sports and Youth and Msheireb Museums, which have been instrumental in making this event a reality. Their efforts reflect their firm commitment to fostering a generation that is aware, ambitious, and capable of leading the future with confidence and creativity."

Before the summit kicks off, a policy writing workshop will be held at QatarDebate Center, bringing together an elite group of writers. **To Page 3**

Children among 23 killed in new Israeli strikes

AFP/QNA
Gaza Strip

Gaza's civil defence agency said Israeli forces pounded the Palestinian territory yesterday, killing at least 23 people including three girls, 15 months into the war.

The latest strikes came as Qatar, Egypt, and the United States mediate negotiations in Doha between Israel and Hamas for a deal to end the fighting in Gaza and secure the release of hostages.

Three girls and their father were killed when an air strike hit their house in Nuseirat refugee camp in central Gaza, the civil defence agency reported.

Local paramedic Mahmud Awad said he helped transfer the bodies of two girls and their father, Mahmud Abu Kharuf to a hospital.

"Their bodies were found under the rubble of the house that



Palestinians inspect the site of an Israeli strike on a house in Nuseirat in the central Gaza Strip yesterday. **(Reuters)**

the occupation bombed in the Nuseirat camp," Awad told AFP. He added that the body of the third girl had been found earlier by residents.

In a separate strike, eight peo-

ple were killed when their house was struck in the town of Jabalia in northern Gaza, where the army has focused its offensive since October 6.

Several more were wounded in that

Pope slams 'shameful' situation as martyrs toll surges past 46,000

Pope Francis yesterday stepped up his recent criticisms of Israel's military campaign in Gaza, calling the humanitarian situation in the Palestinian enclave "very serious and shameful".

In a yearly address to diplomats delivered on his behalf by an aide, Pope Francis appeared to reference deaths caused by winter cold in Gaza, where there is almost no electricity. "We cannot in any way accept the bombing of civilians," the text said. "We cannot accept that children are freezing to death because hospitals have been

destroyed or a country's energy network has been hit." The death toll from the ongoing Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip since October 7, 2023, has risen to 46,006 martyrs, in addition to 109,378 wounded. In a statement, the Palestinian Ministry of Health in Gaza said that the occupation forces committed three massacres against families in the Strip over the past 24 hours, killing 70 and wounding 104, noting that there are many victims under the rubble as civil defence and ambulance crews were not able to reach them.

strike, the civil defence agency said.

Israeli air strikes and shelling continues across Gaza, even as mediators push on with their efforts to halt the fighting and secure

a deal for the release of hostages still held in Gaza.

On Wednesday, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in Paris that a ceasefire was "very close"

Mediators 'make some progress in peace talks'

US and Arab mediators have made some progress in their efforts to reach a ceasefire accord between Israel and Hamas in Gaza, but not enough to seal a deal, Palestinian sources close to the talks said yesterday.

Qatar, the US and Egypt are making a major push to reach a deal to halt fighting in the 15-month conflict and free remaining hostages held by Hamas before President Joe Biden leaves office.

President-elect Donald Trump has warned there will be "hell to pay" if the hostages are not released by his inauguration on January 20.

Yesterday, a Palestinian official close to the mediation effort said the absence of a deal so far did not mean the talks were going nowhere and this was the most serious attempt so far.

"There are extensive negotiations, mediators and negotiators are talking about every word and every detail.



PM meets Malta's FM, crown prince of Johor



HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani met yesterday with Minister for Foreign and European Affairs and Trade of the Republic of Malta Dr Ian Borg, who is visiting the country. They discussed co-operation between the two countries and ways to support and enhance it, the developments in the Gaza Strip and the occupied Palestinian territories, the updates in Syria, and a number of topics of common interest.



HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani met yesterday with Tunku Ismail Ibni Sultan Ibrahim, Regent and Crown Prince of Johor State in Malaysia, who is visiting the country. During the meeting, the two sides discussed co-operation between the two countries and ways to support and develop it, in addition to several topics of common interest. **(QNA)**

Official

Amir sends cables of congratulations to Lebanese president

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, His Highness the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani and HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani sent cables of congratulations to President General Joseph Aoun, on his election as the president of the Republic of Lebanon, wishing him success and the brotherly Lebanese people further progress and prosperity. **(QNA)**

Qatar welcomes election of General Joseph Aoun as Lebanon's president

Qatar welcomed the Lebanese Parliament's election of Army Commander, General Joseph Aoun, as the new president of the Republic of Lebanon. In a statement yesterday, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed the State of Qatar's wishes of success for the new Lebanese president in his duties and for further development and growth in the relations between the two brotherly countries. The ministry expressed Qatar's aspiration that ending the presidential vacancy would contribute to establishing security and stability in Lebanon, and achieving the aspirations of its people for progress, development and prosperity. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs affirmed that Qatar will continue to stand firmly by the brotherly Lebanese people and reiterated its supportive stance for the unity, sovereignty, security, and stability of the Republic of Lebanon. **(QNA)**

Qatar's ambassador attends election of president of Lebanon



Ambassador of the State of Qatar to the Republic of Lebanon Sheikh Saud bin Abdulrahman al-Thani attended yesterday the Lebanese Parliament's session during which the Commander of the Army, General Joseph Aoun, was elected as the new president of the Republic of Lebanon. The ambassador of Qatar extended his congratulations to the President-elect General Joseph Aoun and wished him success in his duties for the good of Lebanon and its brotherly people, and further progress and prosperity for bilateral relations. **(QNA)**



UN House in Doha event highlights multiple facets of Arabic language

The Unesco Regional Office for the Gulf States and Yemen organised a cultural event on the Arabic language at the UN House in Doha. Themed as forging communication between the Arab region and the world, especially Latin American countries through the Arabic language, the event was organised in partnership with the Ministry of Culture, the Qatar National Commission for Education, Culture and Science (QNCECS) and Green Zone Foundation (GZF) to mark World Arabic Language Day, which annually falls on Dec 18 and continues for many weeks.

The event highlighted numerous contributions of the Arabic language to human cultural and linguistic diversity. It discussed the significance of the Arabic language as an essential source for forging rapprochement with Latin American nations and peoples.

In his opening remarks, the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco) Representative for the Gulf States and Yemen and Director of the Unesco Regional Office in Doha, Salah El Din Zaki Khaled, said marking this day which coincides with the 51st anniversary of the Arabic language as one of the official languages of the UN, comes owing to the fact that it is the official language in nearly 25 nations and one of the most consequential pillars of human cultural diversity, as well as the language of Arab and Islamic civilisations.

He emphasised that the Arabic language is one of the most widely spoken languages in the world,



pointing out that celebrating this day is an opportunity to create a platform for conversation and shared understanding.

He stated that there is a commitment to fusing various voices and strengthening cultural ties in close collaboration with partners.

In his closing remarks, Salah El Din Zaki Khaled underscored that marking this day represents an invitation to echo the instrumental role of the Arabic language in connecting people through culture, science and literature, et al, in addition to highlighting the historic role of Arabic language in promoting knowledge, dialogue and peace, as a core part of QNCECS's keenness to reinforce cultural diversity, in general, and Arabic language in

particular. Cultural advisor at the Ministry of Culture, Jamal Fayeze, emphasised that the Arabic language with its powerful charm is a primary vehicle for forging communication, as long as it is the language of the Holy Qur'an, as well as sciences and discoveries upon which numerous civilisations in the Arab and Islamic regions were built whose beacons illuminated remote geographical territories.

The event theme signified the attendance of representatives of Latin American and Caribbean countries, as these nations have been historically and emotionally connected to the Arabic language through Arab migrations in various historical periods, highlighted Fayeze.

He emphasised that the Ministry of Culture is vested with the responsibility of paying attention to the Arabic language and promoting its stature through different bodies operating as an integrated system to hold diverse outstanding initiatives and programs in the areas of eloquence, literature, poetry, and Arabic calligraphy.

Dean of the Latin American and Caribbean Ambassadors and ambassador of Haiti to Qatar, Jean-Marie Francois Junior Guillaume, said that there is a significant percentage of Arab people in Latin America. However, the third and fourth generations have lost the language, with only a small percentage of them still speaking Arabic.

He hailed the initiatives that aim



to teach them their mother tongue, welcoming the GZF's initiative for teaching the Arabic language. Maha al-Shibani from GZF pointed out that, considering the accelerating global developments and challenges facing the Arabic language, GZF was entrusted with taking serious steps toward disseminating the Arabic language and promoting its teaching to meet the epochal

requirements. She highlighted that GZF took the first step to promote the Arabic language in numerous Latin American countries in coordination with professional universities and centres by upgrading innovative technologies to support teachers and scholars. **(QNA)**

Ummah Symposium discusses social reform in Third Cultural Season

Organised by the Department of Research and Islamic Studies at the Ministry of Endowments (Awqaf) and Islamic Affairs, academics from the College of Shariah and Islamic Studies at Qatar University (QU) discussed the topic of "Social Reform" during the second session of the Ummah Symposium.

In its third cultural season, the Ummah Symposium aimed at reviving the concept of Kifaya obligations and exploring ways to

address societal challenges and improve community development through collective responsibilities and initiatives.

Speaking on the occasion, Director of the Department of Research and Islamic Studies, Sheikh Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed bin Ghanim al-Thani emphasised that social reform is crucial for nation-building, unity, and intellectual advancement. He noted that the speakers would discuss the essential components of this reform and

how to activate them in society. In the first session of the symposium, Professor of Qur'anic Studies at QU, Dr Abdul Salam Muqbil al-Majidi, discussed the topic of collective obligations, explaining that they are required from all responsible individuals, and if some fulfil them, the others are exempt.

He highlighted that collective duties are fundamental to societal and state development, ensuring public interests, economic growth, and national security, and

emphasizing the importance of human dignity and development.

Professor of Jurisprudence at QU, Dr Turki Obaid al-Marri, discussed the challenges facing social work institutions, which play a vital role in supporting marginalised groups and achieving sustainable development. He suggested reforms through enhancing administrative efficiency, governance, transparency, and community awareness of these institutions' importance. **(QNA)**



Rawabi Hypermarket at Shafi Street launches exclusive ‘1 to 30 QAR Zone’



Rawabi Hypermarket Shafi Street unveiled its brand-new “1 to 30 QAR Zone” on the second floor, offering customers’ access to a wide range of high-quality products at unbeatable prices. The inauguration ceremony was graced by Kannu Baker, group general manager, Rawabi Group, along with de-

partment heads including Ismail V P, purchase manager; Shanavas R S, HR manager; Rahees, administration manager; Navas K P and Sabiq Ali, finance managers; Sajith E P, marketing manager; and Ansar P P, operations manager. This newly established area is designed to cater to the growing de-

mand for budget-friendly shopping, providing customers with access to essential products from a variety of categories, including fashion, luggage, footwear, household items, home furnishings, electronics accessories, mobile accessories and toys – all priced under QR30. At the inauguration, Kannu Bak-



er said: “This new zone represents our commitment to making shopping more affordable and accessible for our customers. By offering a dedicated space for high-quality products at competitive prices, we aim to enhance the shopping experience and meet the needs of every household in Qatar.”

The addition of the ‘1 to 30 QAR Zone’ complements Rawabi Hypermarket Shafi Street’s existing layout: Ground floor: supermarket featuring fresh categories and everyday essentials. First floor: department store offering a variety of clothing, accessories, and more.

Second floor: dedicated ‘1 to 30 QAR Zone’, providing unbeatable value across diverse product categories. “This expansion reflects Rawabi Hypermarket’s continuous efforts to deliver value-driven shopping solutions for its loyal customers,” a statement said.

Ooredoo announces Al Kass Channel as official broadcaster of Doha Marathon



Ooredoo announced yesterday that Al Kass Channel will be the official broadcaster of the ‘Doha Marathon by Ooredoo 2025’, which will be held on January 17 at the Sheraton Park along the Doha Corniche. Al Kass Channel’s live broadcast of the annual event is seen to enhance the marathon’s local and global audience reach, stated Ooredoo during a press conference. Over 15,000 runners from 140 nationalities and 1,300 international runners are set to participate in the event, it added.

UDST innovations symposium looks at ways to achieve zero-waste future

University of Doha for Science and Technology (UDST) hosted the Sustainable Organic Waste Management and Zero-Waste Innovations Symposium in partnership with the UK Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). The event celebrated UDST’s transformative journey in advancing sustainable waste management solutions and showcased cutting-edge research and practical applications aimed at achieving a zero-waste future. The symposium brought together leading researchers, industry experts, and policymakers to discuss innovative approaches to waste management and sustainability. The event featured keynote speeches, presentations, and interactive sessions covering topics such as conventional composting, Bokashi fermentation,

machine-learning frameworks for compost maturity prediction and emission monitoring, and the integration of zero-waste policies in communities and institutions. President of UDST Dr Salem Al-Nuaemi said: “Hosting the Sustainable Organic Waste Management and Zero-Waste Innovations Symposium reflects UDST’s commitment to sustainability and innovation. We take great pride in being at the forefront of efforts that contribute to a greener future for Qatar and beyond. This event demonstrates how collaboration and innovative practices can address some of the most pressing environmental challenges of our time.” For his part, UK ambassador to Qatar Neerav Patel said: “Leveraging the power of AI, we are delighted to partner with UDST, and the University of Reading to pioneer smart waste management

solutions. The UK and Qatar are longstanding research partners, and we look forward to continued collaboration to turn science into positive policy and societal change as we progress towards a zero-waste future.” The symposium also highlighted UDST’s achievements since 2019, including research on food and farm waste composting, the introduction of Bokashi composting to Qatar, and the implementation of decentralized waste-to-compost systems. Attendees had the opportunity to explore these advancements and engage in discussions about their scalability and potential to support Qatar’s sustainability goals as part of National Vision 2030. UDST remains dedicated to driving impactful initiatives that contribute to a cleaner, greener future for communities locally and around the globe. (QNA)

New MoCI strategy targets \$100bn FDI by 2030

From Page 1
The new strategy comprises four main pillars: institutional excellence, improving the business and investment environment, developing local industries and trade exchange, and consumer protection and competition promotion. It also focuses on enhancing direct economic contributions, improving the competitiveness and productivity of priority sectors, empowering public-private partnerships, supporting SMEs, strengthening intellectual property protection, and contributing to national self-sufficiency. HE Sheikh Faisal noted that the ministry has outlined ambitious development plans comprising 216 projects and initiatives, backed by key performance indicators (KPIs), to ensure successful implementation and continuous evaluation. Similarly, the minister ex-

plained that the Qatar National Manufacturing Strategy 2024–2030 aims to strengthen the manufacturing sector’s capabilities, increase its gross output as a driver of development and innovation, and raise the sector’s value-added contribution to QR70.5bn. Additionally, it seeks to boost non-hydrocarbon exports to QR49bn and attract annual industrial investments of QR2.75bn by 2030. The strategy encompasses 15 initiatives and 60 projects, focusing on diversifying industries by 50%, increasing the private sector’s value-added contribution to QR36bn, and positioning Qatar among the top 40 countries in the Industrial Competitiveness Index. It also prioritises a transition toward smart and green industries and aims to foster research and development to boost productivity, align education outcomes with labour market needs, and increase the

participation of Qatar’s workforce in this vital sector. Sheikh Faisal stressed that the ministry’s new strategy builds on the achievements of its previous 2018–2022 strategy, which laid the groundwork for economic growth, local industry development, self-sufficiency, and non-hydrocarbon sector expansion. He noted that “significant progress had been made” and expressed confidence in overcoming any challenges that may arise to achieve Qatar’s ambitious goals. The minister reiterated that both strategies focus on enhancing the manufacturing sector and strengthening Qatar’s regional and global economic competitiveness. HE Sheikh Faisal also emphasised that the ministry’s strategy aligns with the Third National Development Strategy, which seeks to achieve sustainable economic growth within the framework of Qatar National Vision 2030.

Head of Libyan National Unity Govt meets Qatar’s diplomat



Head of the Government of National Unity of the State of Libya Abdul Hamid Mohammed al-Dbeiba met with ambassador of the State of Qatar to Libya Dr Khaled Mohammed bin Zabin al-Dosari. During the meeting, they discussed relations between the two countries. (QNA)

Law imposes fine up to QR10,000 for spitting in public places

Spitting in public places can draw a fine of up to QR10,000, the Ministry of Municipality has said while urging the public to keep public spaces clean. According to an earlier X post by the ministry, the violations will be penalised as per the Public Hygiene Law. “Our environment is our identity, and preserving it is evidence of our civilisation. Let us maintain the cleanliness of public facilities and reflect the most beautiful image of our country,” the ministry has said. According to the Public Hygiene Law, spitting in public places,

squares, roads, streets, passages, alleys, sidewalks, squares, gardens, public parks and beaches is prohibited. It’s also prohibited to urinate or defecate in places other than those designated for this purpose. The penalty is doubled in the event of recidivism. As per the law, anyone who commits a crime similar to a crime for which he was previously punished before the expiration of three years from the completion date of the execution of the sentence imposed or its lapse due to the passage of time is considered a recidivist. The ministry clarified that it

is prohibited to occupy squares, roads, streets, passages, alleys, sidewalks, squares and public parking lots with abandoned vehicles, equipment, machines, and temporary or permanent buildings without a license from the competent municipality. This can draw a fine of up to QR25,000. The punishment includes closing the shops, offices or facilities where the violation occurred for three months, deportation from the country for the non-Qatari violator and removal of the violation at the violator’s expense. The penalty shall be doubled in the event of recidivism.

Over 100 young leaders to attend GCC Youth Summit in Doha

From Page 1
The workshop will feature practical training and in-depth discussions, in preparation for the issuance of the Gulf Youth Summit 2025 report. Today will also witness an introductory visit to the Heenat Salma Farm, within the framework of enhancing communication and exchanging expertise among participating youth. As a continuation of the highly successful Oasis of Dialogue Forum first held in Oman in 2024, this year’s summit will feature engaging sessions, including fire-side chats with regional thought leaders, expert panels on global and regional issues, and interactive workshops. On the first day of the summit, experts will explore how modern technologies, and innova-

tion can shape the region’s future while preserving and enhancing its cultural identity during a session titled “The Khaleej in 2031: A Conversation with Experts on Our Digital and Cultural Future”. The second day will bring together a group of urban development experts during a session titled “The Future of Human-Centric Urbanism: A Conversation on Innovative and Sustainable Design in the Gulf” to discuss strategies for developing cities that meet the needs of future generations while safeguarding the social fabric, cultural identity, and relationship with the environment. The summit will conclude with a closing session titled “Our Cultural Identity in the Digital Age: New Horizons Await”, which will focus on Gulf initiatives in producing visual and written cultural

content, emphasising how to balance technological advancement with the preservation of authentic Gulf identity. A diverse group of participants will join the summit, including representatives from various academic institutions, government entities, technology innovation hubs, private organisations, and leading cultural organisations across the GCC. This diversity of participants ensures that the discussions and outcomes of the summit reflect a broad spectrum of perspectives and expertise. The summit seeks to deliver meaningful outcomes, including practical recommendations for decision-makers, the creation of policy papers on key thematic areas, and the formation of a vibrant network of future Gulf leaders. (QNA)



Qatar's strategic goals for green revolution



Sustainability is one of the main axes in Qatar's comprehensive development process, and includes environmental, economic, social, urban sustainability, and others.

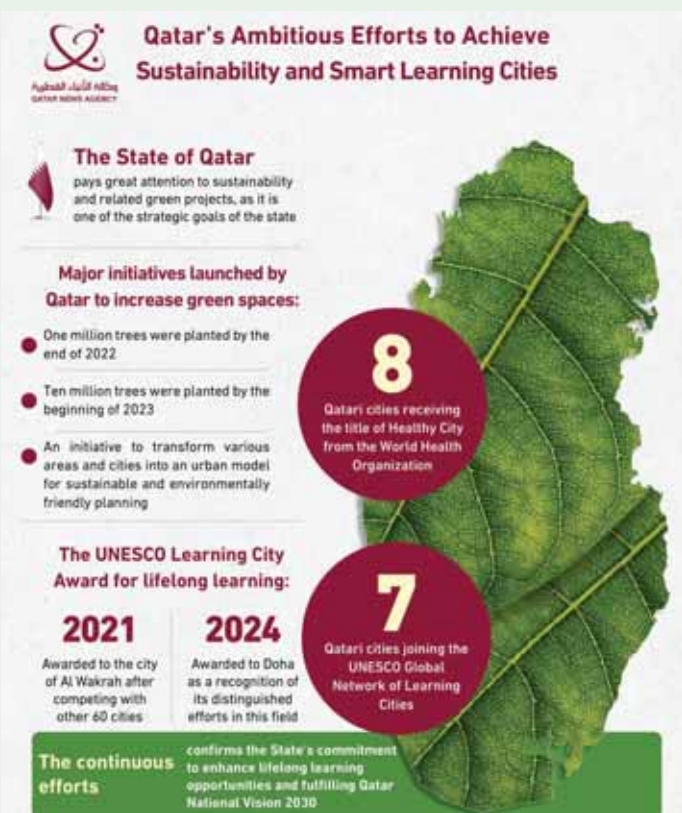
Qatar is keen to adopt the best international practices to ensure the sustainability of natural resources, in a way that serves current and future generations, in line with Qatar National Vision 2030.

From this standpoint, Qatar pays great attention to sustainability and related green projects, as it is one of the strategic goals of the state and a global issue that its importance is highlighted in every summit, conference, or meeting as well as its priority in any current or future sustainable development plans, projects, and programmes.

Qatar has stressed the importance and vitality of the issue of sustainability and the consolidation of its culture in society, by including it in its National Vision 2030, and making it a focus of attention for citizens and residents, and in different short, medium, and long-term development plans, initiatives, and programmes, including the provision of modern infrastructure and urban development, capable of meeting the needs and aspirations of current and future generations, by adopting the best practices to achieve the goal of sustainability in various fields, including urban sustainability, and the transformation into smart and environmentally-friendly learning cities.

Urban sustainability has received wide attention from countries and specialised organisations. This relates to the design and development of cities and communities in a way that achieves a balance between human needs and the preservation of the environment and natural resources, and the provision of a healthy, educational, and living environment for city residents to improve their quality of life.

In this context, Qatar has been keen to pay attention to this vital aspect in all its dimensions, and to launch several ambitious national initiatives that aim to increase green spaces, including planting 1mn trees by the end of 2022, and launching the initiative to plant 10mn trees by the beginning of 2023, in order to improve the quality of life in cities and achieve



Encouraging exercise in public parks.

sustainable development, as well as transforming various areas and cities into an urban model for sustainable and environmentally-friendly planning, while identifying environmental controls and basic indicators that should be taken into account when carrying out sustainable planning for green cities to ensure a healthy and sustainable environment.

In turn, all of this contributed to eight Qatari cities receiving the title of Healthy City from the World Health Organisation, as well as seven Qatari cities joining the Unesco Global Network of Learning Cities.

The Qatari cities that have successfully joined the Unesco Global

Network of Learning Cities include Al Wakra in 2017, Al Shamal in 2019, Al Sheehaniya in 2020, Doha, Al Rayyan, and Al Daayen in 2022 and finally Umm Salal in 2024. Work is currently underway on the eighth city, Al Khor and Al Thakhira.

The accession of Qatari cities to the Unesco Global Network of Learning Cities is a culmination of the state's efforts to adopt a strategy to spread the concepts of sustainability and integrate society into it by implementing programmes, projects, and initiatives in co-operation and partnership with civil society institutions, providing a suitable environment for current and future genera-

tions, contributing to the development of society, and spreading awareness of sustainability and green buildings.

The fact that seven Qatari cities have joined the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco) Global Network of Learning Cities under the umbrella of the Unesco Institute for Lifelong Learning demonstrates Qatar's endeavours, which were made possible thanks to the efforts of the Ministry of Municipality's strategy of promoting sustainability and involving the community by launching relevant programmes, projects, and initiatives.

This achievement was also the result of a collaboration and partnership fostered together with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, represented by the Qatar National Commission for Education, Culture and Science and civil society organisations, in line with the Qatar National Vision 2030, to provide future generations with a suitable environment, contribute to community development, and raise awareness about sustainability and green buildings.

Both Al Wakra and Doha won the Unesco Learning City Award; the former won it in 2021 after competing with 60 other cities and making it to a list of top 10 cities recognised for outstanding achievements in the field of lifelong learning, whereas Doha won it in 2024 during the 6th International Conference on Learning Cities held recently in Jubail, Saudi Arabia.

These global achievements reflect Qatar's strong commitment to promoting lifelong learning and its foresight with regards to education as being a fundamental tool for sustainable development and forming adaptable communities capable of facing future challenges, in addition to being a fulfilment of the Qatar National Vision 2030 and Sustainable Development Goals, namely Goal 4 on quality education for all and Goal 11 on building sustainable and resilient cities and communities.

Qatar gives special attention to infrastructure projects, investing in renewable energy, increasing green spaces in cities, improving waste management systems, recycling, and converting waste into energy, in line with global sustainability standards. (QNA)



Tensions high in Mozambique as opposition leader due home from exile

AFP
Maputo

Security forces prevented people from reaching the airport in Mozambique's capital yesterday as the opposition leader Venancio Mondlane was due to arrive home from exile to push his claim that he won presidential elections.

At one of several barriers erected around the airport, security forces shot and wounded one of hundreds of mostly young people wanting to reach the airport to welcome Mondlane home, an AFP reporter at the scene said. Mondlane announced last week that he would land at Maputo's international

airport at around 8am in a bid to continue his demand for "electoral truth" after the October vote.

He claims that the election was rigged in favour of the candidate of the ruling Frelimo party, Daniel Chapo, who is due to be sworn in on January 15. The election dispute has unleashed waves of violence that have left around 300 people dead, including protesters killed in a police crackdown, according to a tally by a local rights group.

Authorities say police have also been killed and there has been looting and vandalism. There are fears that the charismatic Mondlane could be arrested on his return, including on charges related to the weeks of protests by his supporters, many of them young Mo-

zambicans desperate for change after 50 years under Frelimo. Any government action against Mondlane could send Mozambique - still scarred by years of civil war - into a major crisis, analysts said.

"If the government arrests Venancio, there will be an international outcry and potentially very dangerous demonstrations," said Eric Morier-Genoud, an African history professor at Queen's University Belfast. "If they don't arrest him, he will occupy the centre and Frelimo will be weakened just a few days before the inauguration of the deputies and the president."

Mondlane's return gives people hope, said Fatima Pinto, 20, who trained as a general medical technician. "We young people are

here fighting for our tomorrow," she said, echoing a key complaint among the youth about not being able to find work that matches their qualifications.

Chapo, 48, takes over from President Filipe Nyusi, who bows out at the end of his two-term limit. Official results gave him 65% of the vote compared to 24% for Mondlane. But observers said they noted irregularities.

Since he went into hiding after the October 19 assassination of his lawyer, Mondlane has rallied his supporters via social media live addresses that have been joined by thousands. By returning, Mondlane will "reclaim the political initiative", Morier-Genoud said, with the population "more militant than

ever". The unrest has caused major losses to Mozambique's economy, stopping cross-border trade. Shipping, mining and industry has also been affected while thousands of people are reported to have fled to neighbouring countries. Mondlane's return "will either destabilise or resolve the current political crisis", said Tendai Mbanje, analyst at the Johannesburg-based African Centre for Governance.

With tensions running high, there are even fears he could be assassinated, as some of his supporters have been, Mbanje said. "He is the current hope and future of the youths: if his life is at risk or tampered with, that will be a source of unending instability," he said. "On the other hand, if Frelimo would

like to unite the country, it is time that they take his return as an opportunity for dialogue."

Any attempt to harm Mondlane would unleash a "big demonstration with unpredictable consequences", said Mozambican sociologist Joao Feijo. "We are talking about a population that has already tasted disobedience and is not afraid of anything else," he told AFP. Tailor Americo Bulule, 52, said he hoped that the security forces would allow people to go to the airport to welcome Venancio.

"There's already been a lot of bloodshed so I'd like his arrival not to be a problem and the police to give the population access and we can go there to receive him without weapons and tear gas," he said.

Attempt to storm into Chad presidential palace foiled

AFP
N'Djamena

Two dozen armed men tried to storm into Chad's presidential palace but 18 of the attackers and two soldiers were killed in the failed attack, the national prosecutor said yesterday. Heavy gunfire erupted near the presidential complex just before 8pm local time on Wednesday in the centre of N'Djamena, the capital of the military-ruled, central African country.

Roads leading to the presidential palace were blocked and tanks could be seen on the streets, an AFP reporter at the scene said at the time. Government spokesman and foreign minister Abderaman Koulamallah said a 24-member commando unit carrying "weapons, machetes and knives" attacked the guards of the presidential palace before being swiftly stopped.

They "shammed a car breakdown to attack the guards in front of the gates of the presidential palace," state prosecutor Oumar Kedelaye said. "They killed two soldiers and seriously wounded five others," he said, adding that 18 assailants were killed and six were wounded. President Mahamat Idriss Deby Itno was inside the palace at the time of the attack, the motive for which was still unclear.

Deby was propelled to power after rebels killed his father Idriss Deby in 2021. The older Deby had ruled Chad with an iron fist since a coup in the early 1990s.

The group was dressed in civilian clothing and came from a poor neighbourhood in the south of the city, Koulamallah said, describing them as drunken "Pieds Noirs" - a reference to a French comic featuring hapless crooks. He said they were high on alcohol



Chadian Foreign Minister Abderaman Koulamallah (right) addresses diplomats at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in N'Djamena yesterday.

and drugs. "The situation is completely under control... The destabilisation attempt was put down," he said, in a video posted on Facebook hours after the shooting, surrounded by soldiers and with a gun at his belt.

Questioned later on national television, Koulamallah said the attack was "probably not terrorist".

Beefed-up security and road blocks set up late on Wednesday had been lifted the following morning around the presidential palace, where traffic was back to normal, AFP journalists saw.

Chad faces recurring attacks by the militant group Boko Haram in the Lake Chad region and abruptly ended a military accord with former colonial power France in late November.

Like other former French colonies, Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger who have forced French forces to pull out of their countries, Chad has sought closer ties with Russia.

Moscow "strongly condemns" the attack in N'Djamena "directed against the legitimate leadership" of Chad, the Russian foreign min-

istry said in a statement yesterday. Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban, an ally of Moscow, in a message on X also voiced support for Chad after the attack.

Hours before the shootout, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi met Deby and other senior officials before leaving Chad to continue his tour of African countries in neighbouring Nigeria.

Videos circulating on social media claiming to have been filmed by soldiers at the entrance to the presidential palace showed security forces moving among bloodied corpses lying on the ground.

Other people could be seen alive and sitting on the ground, tied up. They all appeared to be young men in civilian clothes.

An opposition figure voiced doubts about the government's account of events. Max Kemkoye, spokesman for the Political Actors' Consultation Group (GCAP), spoke yesterday of an "unfortunate synopsis" and a "set up" orchestrated by those in power. The attack comes less than two weeks after Chad held a general election that the government hailed as a key



Issakha Maloua Djamous, Chadian minister of the armed forces arrives at the MNJTF Lake Sanity 2 medal parade, a military ceremony at the MNJTF Headquarters, in Farcha, Ville de Ndjamen, Chad.



Deby won a five-year presidential mandate last May in a vote

Kagame says DRC peace talks failed to address problems

AFP
Kigali

Rwanda's President Paul Kagame said yesterday that recent peace talks with DR Congo had been merely a photo opportunity for the leaders that failed to address root causes. Rwanda-backed rebels known as the March 23 Movement (M23) since 2021 have seized swathes of eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, displacing thousands and triggering a humanitarian crisis.

Rwanda says its key concern is to tackle the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), an armed group primarily composed of Hutu militants formed in the wake of the 1994 Rwandan genocide.

But it has also been accused by the DRC of seizing valuable mines in the region, which is known for its mineral riches.

A ceasefire in August failed to keep the peace, and talks between Kagame and DRC President Felix Tshisekedi broke down in December. "Wherever there were meetings to discuss how to end this problem, Rwanda was present," Kagame said in a press conference. "But in the end, even now as we speak, the (focus) is not on ending the problem, the (focus) is on the appearance, being photographed," he added.

"We have to have results built on addressing root causes," Rwanda denies reports by United Nations experts and others that it is directly supporting the M23. The Rwandan president has trodden a fine line, never admitting military involvement but saying the fighting cannot end until the FDLR is eliminated.

"The FDLR question has to be answered. There's no dodging it or circling around the problem endlessly. We have to find a solution," Kagame said.

Chinese FM pledges military aid

AFP
Abuja

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi yesterday pledged Beijing's full support and military aid for the world's poorest continent as he wrapped up his Africa tour in Nigeria. Wang began an Africa tour on January 6, visiting Namibia, the Republic of Congo and Chad before winding up his tour in Nigeria, where he held talks with Nigerian President Bola Ahmed Tinubu and Foreign Minister Yusuf Tuggar in the capital Abuja.

"China will firmly support Africans in addressing African issues in the African way, African people are the real masters of this continent," Wang said after talks with Tinubu. He pledged 1bn yuan (\$136mn) in military aid to Africa and said China would help train 6,000 troops and 1,000 police officers across the continent.

"China supports Nigeria in rallying countries in the region to achieve strength through unity, to build synergy through reconciliation, and to promote security through cooperation," Wang said Thursday. Wang on Wednesday visited the Chadian capital N'Djamena just hours before two dozen armed assailants tried to storm the presidential palace in a failed bid that left 20 dead.

One of China's key trade partners in sub-Saharan Africa, Nigeria exports gas and oil to Beijing



Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi shakes hands with Nigeria's Foreign Affairs Minister Yusuf Tuggar during Wang's diplomatic visit to Abuja yesterday.

and imports manufactured products from the country. Trade between the two nations amounted to \$22.6bn in 2023, according to Abuja. The geopolitical rivalry that has played out in Africa between former colonial rulers and nations like China, Russia and Turkey, has intensified since a wave of military coups toppled leaders in multiple West African countries in recent years. Many former French colonies have severed ties with Paris and looked increasingly towards Moscow, Beijing, Ankara and Tehran.

China is Africa's top business partner, with \$167.8bn worth of trade in the first quarter of 2024, official Chinese media reported. Beijing has sent hundreds of thousands of workers and engineers to

Africa and gained strategic access to its vast mineral riches including copper, gold and lithium. Chinese public bank loans have helped African nations finance construction projects and build infrastructure but the funds have led to deepening debt in some countries.

Chinese President Xi Jinping in September met with about 50 African leaders, including Nigeria's head of state, in a China-Africa co-operation summit during which he promised the continent \$50 billion in aid over three years. Analysts say Beijing's largesse towards Africa is being recalibrated in the face of economic trouble at home and that geopolitical concerns over a growing tussle with the United States may increasingly be driving policy.

ANC anniversary celebration



South African President and party leader of African National Congress, Cyril Ramaphosa, celebrates the ANC's 113 years of existence with supporters during a cake-cutting ceremony at the Athlone Civic Centre, in Cape Town, South Africa.

19 hippos die in Zimbabwe after severe drought

Nineteen hippos have died in Zimbabwe in the past three months most likely due to a lack of adequate food because of severe drought, the wildlife authority said yesterday. Samples from the dead animals showed no trace of abnormalities or anthrax poisoning, ZimParks said in a statement. However, an investigation found

that the hippos had moved 10km from their habitat in search of food, it said. The "findings strongly indicate that the majority of mortality cases up to this point are directly linked to severe nutritional deficits rather than infectious diseases," the statement added. Zimbabwe is among several southern African countries that

have been hit hard by drought over the past months. Rain had only started falling in recent days, ZimParks said. About half of the hippo population in the area, known as the mid-Zambezi region, was found to be in poor condition with pelvic bones and spines showing, which is a sign of malnutrition or lack of adequate food, it said. (AFP)

Major LA fires ‘0%’ contained as residents survey aftermath

AFP/Reuters
Los Angeles

S hell-shocked Los Angeles residents surveyed yesterday the devastation from fast-moving fires that have claimed at least five lives, as officials warned the largest blazes remained totally uncontained.

Swathes of the city lay eerily deserted due to the fires’ destruction and sweeping evacuation orders, with acrid smoke blanketing the sky.

A vast firefighting operation continued for a third day, bolstered by extra water-dropping helicopters thanks to a temporary lull in winds.

Amid the chaos, looting has broken out, with at least 20 arrests made so far, officials said.

The biggest fire, which has ripped through 17,000 acres (6,900 hectares) of the upscale Pacific Palisades neighbourhood, is “one of the most destructive natural disasters in the history of Los Angeles”, city fire chief Kristin Crowley told a press conference.

Another 10,000-acre fire in Altadena was also at “zero per cent containment”, although spreading had “significantly stopped” as wind gust reduced, county fire chief Anthony Marone said.

Judy Chu, the US congresswoman representing the region, visited an evacuation centre where 1,000 displaced residents sought shelter, and said Altadena was “just devastated”.

“They are numb. They don’t know what they will return to once this fire is contained,” she told local news KTLA.

Nearly 180,000 people were under evacuation orders, as officials and meteorologists warned that “critical” windy and dry conditions, though abated, were not over.

“The winds continue to be of a historic nature... this is absolutely an unprecedented, historic firestorm,” said Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass.

A National Weather Service (NWS) bulletin said “significant fire growth” remained likely “with ongoing or new fires” throughout the day into Friday.

However, there was some good news for Hollywood, the historic home of the movie industry, after evacuation orders prompted by the nearby “Sunset Fire” on Wednesday were lifted.

Fast-moving flames fanned by powerful winds have levelled more than 2,000 structures, many of them multi-million dollar homes, with aerial views on Thursday showing whole neighbourhoods burnt to the ground.

The homes of movie stars and celebrities were among those consumed by flames.

“We are heartbroken of course, but with the love of children and friends we will get through this,” said film star Billy Crystal and his wife Janice, announcing the Pacific Palisades home where they had lived since 1979 had been destroyed.

Media personality Paris Hilton said she was “heartbroken beyond words” after watching



The sun is seen behind smoke above charred structures after the passage of the Palisades Fire in Pacific Palisades, California. - AFP

her beachfront house in Malibu “burn to the ground on live TV”.

Millions of Angelinos have watched in horror as blazes have erupted around America’s second biggest city, sparking panic and fear.

Winds with gusts up to 100mph (160kph) spread the fire around the ritzy Pacific Palisades neighbourhood with lightning speed.

Crowley said a preliminary estimate of destroyed structures was “in the thousands”.

Around a thousand more buildings have been destroyed in Altadena, north of the city, where flames tore through suburban streets.

Officials pledged to crack down on looters hitting areas deserted due to the fires and evacuations.

A sunset-to-sunrise curfew has been declared in evacuated areas of the coastal city of Santa Monica.

Los Angeles County Sheriff Robert Luna said 20 arrests had been made so far, with that number expected to rise.

“It’s absolutely unacceptable,” he said.

Among those who died was 66-year-old Victor Shaw, whose sister said he had ignored pleas to leave as the fire swept through Altadena because he wanted to protect their home.

“When I went back in and yelled out his name, he didn’t reply back,” Shari Shaw said. “I had to get out because the embers were so big and flying like a firestorm that I had to save myself.”

Shaw’s body was found on the driveway of his razed home, a garden hose in his hand.

William Gonzales got out alive, but his Altadena home was gone.

“We have lost practically everything; the flames have consumed all our dreams,” he told AFP.

“I had just come from my family home where my mother lives that was burned to a crisp... and then I came up to my home and – same thing. It’s completely dust,” said Oliver Allnatt, 36, wearing ski goggles and a filtered face mask as he took pictures of the ruins. “Basically just a chimney stack and a pile of ash. I mean, it’s something out of a movie.”

Kevin Williams, at an evacuation centre in Pasadena, said he knew it was time to run when gas canisters at his neighbours’ homes began exploding under the heat.

“The wind whipped up, the flames were up about 30 or 40 feet high, and you hear ‘pop, pop, pop.’ It sounded like a war zone.”

President Joe Biden, who cancelled a trip to Italy this week over the crisis, is due to give public remarks about the fires later.

He was due to meet with top administration officials in the afternoon to discuss the federal response, the White House told reporters.

His incoming successor Donald Trump meanwhile blamed California Governor Gavin Newsom for the devastation and calling on the Democrat to resign.

“This is all his fault,” Trump said on his Truth social platform.

Wildfires are part of life in the US West and play a vital role in nature.

However, scientists say human-caused climate change is causing more severe weather patterns.

Southern California had two decades of drought that were followed by two exceptionally wet years, sparking furious vegetative growth.

That has left the region, which has had no significant rain for eight months, packed with fuel and primed to burn.

Trump’s attempt to halt hush money sentencing heads to Supreme Court

New York’s top court has rejected Donald Trump’s request to halt the president-elect’s sentencing for his conviction on criminal charges stemming from hush money paid to an adult entertainment actor, with a decision on a possible delay now in the hands of the US Supreme Court.

The state court’s decision was a setback for Trump, who now must pin his hopes of freezing the case on the nation’s top judicial body, where his lawyers have made a similar emergency bid to avoid the sentencing, set for today at 9.30am (1430 GMT) in a Manhattan court.

Manhattan prosecutors made a filing at the Supreme Court yesterday morning, opposing Trump’s bid for a stay.

“Defendant now asks this court to take the extraordinary step of intervening in a pending state criminal trial to prevent the scheduled sentencing from taking place – before final judgment has been entered by the trial court, and before any direct appellate review of defendant’s conviction. There is no basis for such intervention,” Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg’s office wrote in a filing.

The sentencing is set for 10 days before Trump is due to be sworn in for his second term as president.

Any substantial delay would likely mean Trump would not be sentenced before his January 20 inauguration.

The Supreme Court could place an administrative pause on Trump’s sentencing, which would give the nine justices additional time to consider his request to halt his case, or it could formally grant or deny his request.

It is also possible the justices do not act before the sentencing.

The trial judge in Trump’s case, Justice Juan Merchan, said last week that he was not inclined to sentence the Republican president-elect to prison and would likely grant him unconditional discharge.

This would place a guilty judgment on Trump’s record, but would not impose custody, a fine or probation.

Trump in a Supreme Court filing made public on Wednesday asked for proceedings in the case to stop as he seeks an appeal to resolve questions of presidential immunity following the

Supreme Court’s ruling last July that granted former presidents broad immunity from criminal prosecution for their official acts.

“This appeal will ultimately result in the dismissal of the District Attorney’s politically motivated prosecution that was flawed from the very beginning,” Trump’s lawyer John Sauer wrote in the filing.

Sauer is Trump’s pick to serve as US solicitor-general, the government’s chief lawyer at the Supreme Court.

Trump was found guilty last May of 34 counts of falsifying business records to cover up a \$130,000 payment to an adult entertainment actor in exchange for her silence before the 2016 US election about an encounter she has said she had with Trump a decade earlier, which he has denied.

Prosecutors have said the payment was designed to help Trump’s chances in the 2016 election, when he defeated Democrat Hillary Clinton.

Trump is the first former US president to be criminally prosecuted and the first former president convicted of a crime.

Trump’s lawyers contend that prosecutors improperly admitted evidence of Trump’s official acts during the trial.

They also argue that, as president-elect, Trump is immune from prosecution during the period between his November election victory and his inauguration.

In their filing yesterday to the Supreme Court, the New York prosecutors said that “all of the evidence defendant challenged in his post-trial motion either concerned unofficial conduct that is not subject to any immunity, or is a matter of public record that is not subject to preclusion, as the trial court correctly held”.

As to Trump’s argument that he is immune as president-elect, the prosecutors said this “extraordinary immunity claim is unsupported by any decision from any court”.

“It is axiomatic that there is only one president at a time,” they added.

Merchan in December rejected Trump’s immunity argument, finding that the hush money case dealt with Trump’s personal conduct, not his official acts as president. - Reuters

Former president Carter remembered for rising above politics

Reuters/AFP
Washington

Jimmy Carter, a US president who served only one term but was widely admired for his humanitarian work after leaving the White House, was remembered during his state funeral yesterday as a man who put honesty and kindness above partisan politics.

Hundreds of mourners including all five living current and former US presidents filed into the Washington National Cathedral, where Carter’s flag-draped coffin was attended by a military honour guard.

Fellow Democratic President Joe Biden eulogised the 39th president, who died on December 29 at the age of 100, saying that Carter’s life was “the story of a man who never let the tides of politics divert him from his mission to serve and shape the world”.

“The man had character,” Biden said. “He showed us how character and faith start with ourselves and then flow to others.”

Tens of thousands of Americans over the past two days filed through the Rotunda of the US Capitol to pay their respects to Carter, who was president from 1977-1981 and was burdened by an ailing economy and the Iran hostage crisis.

Many mourners hailed him as an example of decency and humility for today’s breed of highly partisan politicians.

Republican President-elect Donald Trump, who will return to office on January 20, was among the luminaries at the funeral, who included his predecessors in the White House.

It might have been an awkward affair, as Trump has denigrated most of the group in disputes of varying degrees of seriousness – and found himself sitting next to Barack Obama.

Trump launched his political career by pushing the racist and false “birther” conspiracy theory that his Democratic predecessor – the first and only black president – was lying about being a natural born American.

However, the pair appeared able to put their differences on hold as television images showed them exchanging cordial small talk, with Obama smiling and laughing.

It was also the first time since the election that Trump had been in the same room as his opponent Kamala Harris – whom he repeatedly accused of being mentally ill – and his first time in four years in close



From left to right, front row: US President Joe Biden, First Lady Jill Biden, Vice-President Kamla Harris, Second Gentleman Doug Emhoff. On the second row, from left are former president Bill Clinton, former secretary of state Hillary Clinton, former president George W Bush, his wife Laura Bush, former president Barack Obama, President-elect Donald Trump and his wife Melania Trump. - AFP



The remains of former US president Jimmy Carter are carried by an honour guard after a state funeral service at the Washington National Cathedral in Washington. - AFP

proximity to his estranged vice-president, Mike Pence.

Trump shook hands with Pence, who he had clashed with after Pence refused to go along with his attempts to overturn his 2020 election defeat.

To Obama’s right were Laura and George W Bush and Hillary and Bill Clinton.

Biden and First Lady Jill Biden walked hand in hand and took seats in the first row

next to Vice-President Kamala Harris and Second Gentleman Douglas Emhoff.

As the TV audience studied the presidents’ interactions, US media remarked on the added awkwardness of the leaders of Canada and Panama, two nations threatened recently by Trump, being sat less than 30’ (10), from the president-elect.

Carter was born a peanut farmer in Plains, Georgia.



Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, Britain’s Prince Edward and former UK prime minister Gordon Brown attend a service, on the day of the state funeral for former US president Jimmy Carter, at the Washington National Cathedral in Washington. - Reuters

He served as that state’s governor from 1971-75. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2002 for his humanitarian work.

One of his grandsons, Jason Carter, who serves is chair of the Carter Center Board of Trustees, said the man he called “Paw-paw” and his grandmother Rosalynn Carter, who died in 2023, remained humble and true to their values, choosing to remain in their modest home in Plains.



A black cloth hangs over the portrait of former president Jimmy Carter at the Jimmy Carter National Historical Park in Plains, Georgia. - AFP

“Yes, they spent four years in the governor’s mansion and four years in the White House but the other 92 years, they spent at home in Plains, Georgia,” Jason Carter said.

Carter will be buried in Plains.

“I never perceived a difference between his public face and his private one. He was the same person no matter who he was with or where he was, and for me, that’s the definition of integrity. That honesty was matched by love,” Jason Carter added.

Carter’s daughter, Amy, joined other family members at the funeral.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, Vice-President-elect JD Vance and Biden’s son Hunter were also among the mourners.

Former vice-presidents Al Gore and Pence sat side by side.

Carter won the White House by defeating Republican President Gerald Ford in the 1976 US election, in the years following Richard Nixon’s Watergate scandal.

The one-time political rivals went on to form a lasting friendship, and Carter eulogised Ford following his 2006 death.

Ford’s son, Steven, read a eulogy yesterday that his father had written for Carter.

“Jimmy and I respected each other as adversaries even before we cherished one another as dear friends,” Ford said in his father’s words. “Jimmy knew my political vulnerabilities and he successfully pointed them out. Now I didn’t like it, but little could I know that the outcome of that 1976 election would bring about one of my deepest and most enduring friendships”.

Mourners who earlier paid their respects to Carter at the US Capitol said they admired the late Southern Baptist who played a key role in the negotiation of the 1979 Egypt-Israel peace treaty as a gentle man, rather than a partisan combatant.

“We’ve come so far from where Jimmy Carter was as a person and it’s kinda sad,” said Dorian DeHaan, 67, who travelled some 275 miles (440km) from Sugar Loaf, New York, to pay her respects. “I hope that this will be a reminder to people of what we need to get back to – that it’s not about the power, it’s about the people”.

As she waited in the public viewing line outside the Capitol, DeHaan said her daughter married into the family of the president’s younger sister, Ruth, presenting the opportunity to meet the former president in Plains, Georgia.

“But it’s a sad moment,” DeHaan said. “It’s the end of an era and I think we kind of have lost this real belief in humanity, in our presidency”.

Search widens for Tibet quake survivors

Reuters
Beijing

Authorities moved more than 47,000 people to shelters in earthquake-hit Tibet, Chinese officials said yesterday, while rescuers widen a massive combing effort for survivors near the foothills of the Himalayas, despite slim survival odds. It is not yet clear how many are still missing after Tuesday's quake of magnitude 6.8 killed 126 and injured 188, but more than 48 hours later, experts say those trapped under rubble are likely to have died of hypothermia. Officials pledged to keep up their search for survivors, despite the dwindling odds

in temperatures that dropped as low as -18° Celsius (0° Fahrenheit) by night. "The first round of full-scale search and rescue work has concluded," one of them, Hao Tao, told a press conference yesterday. "Next, we will carry out large-scale search and rescue in depth and detail." Officials were still assessing the scope of the disaster, which damaged four reservoirs, as well as the scale of losses, Hao added, but did not elaborate. China sent 11,000 rescuers to the quake zone within hours of the first tremors, which were followed by more than 1,200 aftershocks. A vice-premier, Zhang Guoping, led the effort, going to the hardest-hit areas. The epicentre of the quake, one of the

region's strongest in years, was in the rural county of Tingri, with a population of about 60,000, located about 80km (50 miles) north of Mount Everest, the world's tallest peak. The quake, which shook buildings as far away as Nepal and India, reduced to rubble more than 3,600 homes in Tingri and damaged 27,000 more at an average elevation of more than 4,000m (13,000'), that presents a challenge for rescuers. While authorities have not updated Tuesday's tally of dead and injured in state media, the official Xinhua news agency said rescuers focused on 27 villages home to 7,000 people spread 20km (12 miles) around Tingri. The quake followed a northward com-

pression of the Indian tectonic plate, state media said yesterday, citing the China Earthquake Networks Centre. The plate, which collided with the Eurasian tectonic plate about 60mn years ago, continues to move 5cm (1.97") northeast each year. Tuesday's earthquake was so strong it caused part of the terrain around the epicentre to slip as much as 1.6m (5') over a distance of 80km (50 miles), an analysis by the United States Geological Survey (USGS) showed. About 47,500 people affected by the earthquake have been resettled at 187 sites in towns around the epicentre, as prefabricated homes go up to replace their tents. About 1,000 of the quake-proof, heated

homes can be set up in 10 minutes. There must be no slacking in the quake relief work, now at a critical stage, the Politburo Standing Committee, composed of China's highest-ranking officials, said at a meeting yesterday, according to Xinhua. It also emphasised ensuring social stability and improved housing and infrastructure to better tackle such disasters, it added. The region's last comparable earthquake, of magnitude 6.9, which hit eastern Mainling in November 2017, was the strongest in southern Tibet since 1950. It unleashed more than 300 aftershocks, affecting more than 12,000 people, injuring three and damaging nearly 3,000 homes.

Australia frets over Meta halt to US fact-checking

AFP
Sydney

Australia is deeply concerned by Meta's decision to scrap US fact-check operations on its Facebook and Instagram platforms, a senior minister said yesterday. The government - which has been at the forefront of efforts to rein in social media giants - was worried about a surge of false information spreading online, Treasurer Jim Chalmers said. "Misinformation and disinformation is very dangerous, and we've seen it really kind of explode in the last few years," Chalmers told national broadcaster ABC, adding: "And it's a very damaging development, damaging for our democracy." "It can be damaging for people's mental health to get the wrong in-

formation on social media, and so of course we are concerned about that." Meta chief executive Mark Zuckerberg announced on Tuesday that the group would "get rid of fact-checkers" and replace them with community-based posts, starting in the United States. Chalmers said the decision was "very concerning". The government had invested in trusted Australian news providers such as the ABC and national newswire AAP to ensure people had reliable sources for information, he said. Disinformation and misinformation had become "a bigger and bigger part of our media, particularly our social media", the treasurer said. Australia has frequently irked social media giants, notably Elon Musk's X, with its efforts to restrict the distribution of false

information or content it deems dangerous. Late last year, the country passed laws to ban under-16s from signing up for social media platforms. Offenders face fines of up to A\$50mn (32.5mn) for "systemic breaches". However, in November, a lack of support in parliament forced the government to ditch plans to fine social media companies if they fail to stem the spread of misinformation. Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said on Wednesday that he stood by the ban on children's access to social media because of the impact it had on their mental health. Asked about Meta's fact-checking retreat, Albanese told reporters: "I say to social media they have a social responsibility and they should fulfil it."

Australian group Digital Rights Watch said Meta had made a "terrible decision", accusing it of acting in clear deference to incoming US president Donald Trump. AFP currently works in 26 languages with Facebook's fact-checking programme. Facebook pays to use fact checks from around 80 organisations globally on the platform, as well as on WhatsApp and Instagram. Australian fact-checking operation AAP FactCheck said its contract with Meta in Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific was not impacted by the group's US decision. "Independent fact-checkers are a vital safeguard against the spread of harmful misinformation and disinformation that threatens to undermine free democratic debate in Australia and aims to manipulate public opinion," said AAP chief executive Lisa Davies.

Taiwan navy shows off its mettle with attack simulation

Reuters
Kaoshiung, Taiwan

Taiwan's navy simulated yesterday an effort to see off enemy ships as it wrapped up three days of New Year drills, sending two of its newest and most advanced warships to lead a flotilla into the Taiwan Strait. China, which views democratically governed Taiwan as its own territory, sends its air force and navy into the skies and waters near the island on a daily basis in what the government in Taipei calls a sustained pressure campaign. Last year China also held two rounds of major war games around Taiwan. At the Zuoying naval base in the southern city of Kaoshiung on the shores of the Strait, two Tuo Chiang-class corvettes accompanied four smaller Kuang Hua VI-class missile boats into the waters in a drill simulating the approach of enemy ships. "When we see a target at sea,

when it continues to approach us, this is how we react," navy Captain Chen Ming-feng told reporters at the base. The Taiwan-made Tuo Chiang corvettes have been dubbed the "aircraft carrier killer" by its navy, for their complement of anti-ship missiles. They can also carry Sky Sword anti-aircraft missiles. With a catamaran design, the state-of-the-art highly manoeuvrable stealth vessels, are intended to take out larger warships while operating close to Taiwan's shores. Taiwan's navy is dwarfed by that of China, which has three aircraft carriers, nuclear-powered submarines and hundreds of other warships. During the drills, which started on Tuesday, Taiwan's air force also demonstrated for reporters its Patriot ground-to-air missiles and Ching-kuo Indigenous Defence Fighters. Taiwan rejects Beijing's sovereignty claims and says only the island's people can decide their future.

Brazil's Lula calls Meta decision 'extremely serious'

Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva said yesterday that social media company Meta's decision to scrap its fact-checking programme in the US was "extremely serious", and that he would discuss the matter in a meeting with government officials. "I'm going to have a meeting today to discuss the Meta issue," the leftist leader told reporters in Brasilia. "I think it's extremely serious that people want digital communication to not have

the same responsibility as someone who commits a crime in the written press." Meta said on Tuesday that it would change its fact-checking programme in the US, leading Brazilian prosecutors to demand that it clarify whether the changes would also apply to the South American country. Meta, which declined to comment through its office in Brazil, was given 30 days to provide a response, a document seen by Reuters showed.

The prosecutors said the order for further details was related to an ongoing probe of the actions taken by social media platforms to combat misinformation and violence online in Brazil. Brazilian Justice Alexandre de Moraes, who led the Supreme Court decision that temporarily suspended social media platform X in the country last year, stressed on Wednesday that tech firms must comply with local laws to operate in Brazil. - **Reuters**

Princess of Wales turns 43 with tribute from husband Prince William

AFP
London

Catherine, Princess of Wales, turned 43 yesterday, with her husband Prince William praising her "strength" fighting cancer during the past year. Kate, as she is widely known, revealed last March that she had been diagnosed with an unspecified cancer and was undergoing chemotherapy. The announcement came weeks after her father-in-law, Britain's head of state King Charles III, disclosed that he too was receiving treatment for cancer. Both withdrew from public life for months in 2024 but have since returned to royal duties, on a more limited scale for Kate. Charles, 76, is reportedly continuing his treatment while Kate said in September that she had finished a course of chemotherapy but that her "path to healing and

full recovery is long". Kensington Palace has not said where the princess would mark the start of her 44th year. She usually spends it in Norfolk, eastern England, with her children - Prince George II, Princess Charlotte, nine, and six-year-old Prince Louis - and her husband, who is heir to the throne. Posting a photo of a smiling Kate on social media yesterday, William addressed his birthday message "to the most incredible wife and mother". "The strength you've shown over the last year has been remarkable. George, Charlotte, Louis and I are so proud of you. Happy Birthday, Catherine. We love you," he wrote. Charles's Buckingham Palace X account also posted "happy birthday to the Princess of Wales" and shared a photo of Kate smiling. She and William are set to make more appearances together in 2025 as they eye a return to normality,



Britain's Catherine, Princess of Wales.

with William suggesting that an overseas trip may even be on the cards. The princess has not taken part in an official foreign visit since she attended the Rugby World Cup in France in October 2023. She first resumed royal duties in October, visiting Southport in northwest England to meet

people affected by a knife attack that killed three young girls three months earlier. In November, she appeared at two remembrance events over consecutive days for Britons killed in the world wars and other conflicts, before also attending the Emir of Qatar's state visit to Britain in December.

Taliban say India is a 'significant regional partner' after meeting

The Taliban's foreign office said they saw India as a "significant regional and economic partner" after meeting with its most senior foreign ministry official, the highest level talks with Delhi since their takeover of Afghanistan in 2021. India's Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri met acting Taliban Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi in Dubai on Wednesday. Afghanistan's foreign ministry said in a statement that they had discussed expanding relations with Afghanistan and to boost trade through Chabahar Port in Iran, which India has been developing for goods to bypass the ports of Karachi and Gwadar in its rival Pakistan. "In line with Afghanistan's balanced and economy-focused foreign policy, the Islamic Emirate aims to strengthen political and economic ties with India as a significant regional and economic partner," the statement from Afghanistan's foreign ministry said late on Wednesday. India's foreign ministry said after the Dubai meeting that India is considering engaging in development projects in Afghanistan and looking to boost trade ties. No foreign government, including India, officially recognises the Taliban administration. However, India is one of several countries with a small mission in Kabul to facilitate trade, aid and medical support and has sent humanitarian aid to Afghanistan under the Taliban. Regional players including China and Russia have signalled they are willing to boost trade and investment in Afghanistan. The Delhi meeting could ruffle Pakistan, which borders both countries and has fought three wars in the past against India. Pakistan and Afghanistan also have a strained relationship, with Pakistan saying that militant attacks that have occurred in its country were launched from Afghan soil - a charge the Afghan Taliban denies. Earlier this week India's foreign office told journalists that they condemned air strikes conducted late last year by Pakistan on Afghan soil. - **Reuters**

Blue Origin's orbital launch is delayed

US space company Blue Origin is now aiming to launch its first orbital rocket on Sunday, it announced on X, because of rough seas in the Atlantic where it hopes to land the first stage booster on a ship. A three-hour window opens on Sunday at 1am (0600 GMT) from the Cape Canaveral Space Force Station in Florida. Standing 320' (98m) tall, New Glenn is named after astronaut John Glenn, the first American to orbit the Earth. The mission, designated NG-1, will carry a prototype of Blue Ring, a US Defense Department-funded spacecraft envisioned as a versatile satellite deployment platform, which will remain on board the rocket's second stage for the duration of the six-hour test flight. It will mark Blue Origin's long-awaited entry into the lucrative orbital launch market after years of suborbital flights. - **AFP**

Myanmar air strike kills 40: ethnic armed group, rescue worker

AFP
Yangon

Myanmar junta air strike killed at least 40 people in a village in western Rakhine state, a rescue worker and ethnic minority armed group told AFP yesterday. The Arakan Army (AA) is engaged in a fierce fight with the military for control of Rakhine, where it has seized swathes of territory in the past year, all but cutting off the capital Sittwe. The Rakhine conflict is one element of the bloody chaos that has engulfed Myan-

mar since the military ousted Aung San Suu Kyi's civilian government in a 2021 coup, sparking a widespread armed uprising. AA spokesperson Khaing Thu Kha told AFP that a military jet bombed Kyauk Ni Maw, on Ramree island, around 1.20pm (0650 GMT) on Wednesday, starting a fire which engulfed more than 500 houses. "According to initial reports, 40 innocent civilians were killed and 20 were wounded," he said. A member of a local rescue group whose team was helping people in the area told AFP that 41 were killed and 52 wounded. "At the moment, we don't even have enough betadine and methylated spirit to

treat them as the transportation is hard," the rescue worker said on condition of anonymity to protect their safety. Photos of the aftermath of the bombing showed residents walking through charred ruins, the ground littered with corrugated metal, trees stripped bare of leaves and buildings reduced to a few scraps of walls. AFP has attempted to contact the junta for comment, but calls were not answered. Ramree island is home to a planned China-backed deep sea port that when completed will serve as a gateway for Beijing to the Indian Ocean, though construction has been stalled by the unrest. The military is struggling to fight oppo-

sition to its rule on multiple fronts around the country and it has been regularly accused of using air and artillery strikes to hit civilian communities. As well as youth-led "People's Defence Forces" that emerged to oppose the coup, the military is also battling numerous long-established and well-armed ethnic minority armed groups, including the AA, which control large areas of territory along the country's borders. In November, the UN Development Programme (UNDP) warned that Rakhine was heading towards famine as fighting squeezed commerce and agricultural production.

Sri Lanka court sentences firebrand monk to prison for insulting Islam

A Sri Lankan court jailed a politically influential, firebrand Buddhist monk yesterday, putting him behind bars for a second time for insulting Islam and stoking religious hatred in the island nation. Galagodaatte Gnanasara was sentenced yesterday to nine months for his anti-Muslim remarks, which date to 2016. He was previously jailed last year on a similar charge of disparaging Sri Lanka's minority Muslims, who account for

just over about 10% of the 22mn population. He was on bail while appealing that four-year sentence. The monk is an associate of former president Gotabaya Rajapaksa, who made him the head of a panel to reform Sri Lanka's legal system to ensure religious harmony in 2021. At the time, opposition lawmaker Shanakiyan Rasamanickam described Gnanasara's appointment as "the definition of irony".

In 2018, Gnanasara was also sentenced to six years for intimidating the wife of a missing cartoonist and contempt of court, but was freed nine months later after former president Maithripala Sirisena pardoned him. His patron Rajapaksa was forced to step down following months of protests over the country's unprecedented economic crisis in 2022 and Gnanasara once again fell from grace and faced prosecution. - **AFP**



Six killed in stampede at religious gathering

AFP
New Delhi

At least six people were crushed to death at a Hindu religious gathering in India, with several more injured, officials said yesterday.

A huge crowd of devotees had gathered to collect entrance tokens to visit the Sri Venkateswara Swamy Temple, located in the southern state of Andhra Pradesh, when the stampede broke out on Wednesday.

“The unfortunate incident... has claimed the lives of six devotees. I pray to god to give peace to the departed souls,” Prem Kumar Jain, spokesman of the state’s ruling Telugu Desam Party, told reporters.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi offered condolences to the families of the deceased.

“My thoughts are with those who have lost their near and dear ones,” his office said on social media platform X.

Accidents are common at places of worship in India during major festivals due to poor crowd management and safety lapses.

Wednesday’s incident comes days before the start of the Kumbh Mela, a six-week Hindu festival of prayer and sacred bathing expected to be the largest religious gathering in history.

Up to 400mn pilgrims are expected to attend, according to organisers.

Pope warns about AI, fake news and ‘manipulating minds’

AFP
Vatican City

Pope Francis warned yesterday of the dangers of misinformation and its spread via social media and artificial intelligence (AI), cautioning it could be “misused to manipulate minds”.

In his traditional New Year’s address to diplomats at the Vatican, Francis lamented the increasing polarisation of society, “aggravated by the continuous creation and spread of fake news, which not only distorts facts but also perceptions”.

“This phenomenon generates false images of reality, a climate of suspicion that

foments hate, undermines people’s sense of security and compromises civil coexistence and the stability of entire nations,” the 88-year-old pontiff said.

Francis regularly rails against fake news. However, his comments yesterday come two days after tech giant Meta – which owns Facebook – announced that it was ending its third-party fact-checking programme in the United States and adopting a crowd-sourced model to police misinformation similar to that of the Elon Musk-owned X.

In remarks directed at political leaders, the Pope said: “In our time, the denial of self-evident truths seems to have gained the upper hand.”

“These tendencies can be amplified by the modern communications media and by artificial intelligence; they can be misused to manipulate minds for economic, political and ideological ends,” the Pope added in his address.

Francis, who has been head of the world-wide Catholic Church since 2013, emphasised the need for media literacy education to promote critical thinking.

He did not deliver the speech himself, saying he had a cold, but it was read out on his behalf by a senior cleric.

In the address, the Pope also warned against “cancel culture”, which “tolerates no differences and focuses on individual rights to the detriments of duties towards

others, especially the weakest”.

He cited as “particularly worrying” attempts to “manipulate multilateral documents – by changing the meaning of terms or unilaterally reinterpreting the content of human rights treaties – in order to advance divisive ideologies”.

“In this regard, it is unacceptable, for example, to speak of an alleged ‘right to abortion’ that contradicts human rights, particularly the right to life,” he said.

Francis also cautioned that multilateral institutions risked becoming “like-minded clubs that only let in those who think in the same way” – and as such, said they “no longer seem capable of ensuring peace and stability”.

Greece lays to rest ‘noble’ ex-prime minister Simitis

AFP
Athens

Greek former prime minister Costas Simitis, the architect of the country’s eurozone entry, was laid to rest yesterday in a state funeral.

Simitis, who died on Sunday aged 88, received the full honours of an incumbent leader in a ceremony at the Athens Metropolitan Cathedral attended by top officials, and was interred at the Athens First Cemetery alongside other prominent Greeks.

Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said in an address at the funeral that Simitis will be remembered for “his unwavering belief in (Greece’s) European orientation and his constant effort for Greece to converge with the most developed, most dynamic states of our continent”.

He was a resistance fighter against the Greek dictatorship, a “worthy servant of democracy” and a “noble adversary”, said the conservative Mitsotakis.

“Today Greece bows before one of the greatest leaders of its modern history,” said the leader of the socialist Pasok party, Nikos

Androulakis, at the funeral.

A founding member and veteran minister of Pasok, Simitis succeeded historic leader Andreas Papandreu as prime minister and served two consecutive terms from 1996–2004, a seminal period in the country’s modern history.

In addition to overseeing Greece’s eurozone entry in 2001, Simitis’s reformist administration secured and managed the mammoth task of preparing for the 2004 Athens Olympic Games.

Under Simitis, Greece also held the 2003 European Union presidency that saw the bloc’s biggest enlargement to date, with the accession of 10 new EU states including its historic ally Cyprus.

“He was a leader who left a mark on history, a modest and progressive leader,” retiree Alexandra Kroupi told AFP.

A former law professor, Simitis is also remembered for clashing with Greece’s powerful Orthodox church to remove religious affiliation from state identity cards, a move hailed by rights groups.

Simitis left Greece “more confident and stronger than ever”, Androulakis said.

In later years, the legacy of Simitis’s gov-

ernments was dimmed by probes into a major stock bubble and corruption scandals that saw two of his former ministers jailed.

Tensions with neighbouring Türkiye also spiked dangerously on two occasions under Simitis’s administration.

In 1996, the historic rivals and North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato) allies nearly went to war over a cluster of uninhabited islets in the Aegean Sea.

A naval showdown in the area was averted after the United States intervened.

In early 1999, Greece was left red-faced when separatist Kurdish rebel leader Abdullah Ocalan was revealed to have been hiding at the Greek embassy in Kenya, and was snatched by Turkish commandos.

Three of Simitis’s ministers were forced to resign over the diplomatic debacle.

A few months later, both countries were hit by deadly earthquakes and rushed to each other’s aid.

Simitis used the opportunity to usher in a period of detente with Turkey under his foreign minister George Papandreu, which later became known as “quake diplomacy”.

He is survived by his wife and two daughters.

Venezuelan opposition leader Machado arrested after rally

AFP/Reuters
Caracas

Venezuelan opposition leader Maria Corina Machado was arrested yesterday after coming out of hiding to lead a protest against President Nicolas Maduro in Caracas, a member of her entourage told AFP.

Minutes earlier, her team had reported on X that Machado, 57, was “violently intercepted upon exiting the rally”, and claimed shots had been fired at her motorcycle convoy.

Machado, who last appeared in public in August, arrived at the Caracas protest on the back of a van, waving a Venezuelan flag.

“Today all Venezuela took to the street! We are not afraid!” she told the thousands-strong crowd.

Her highly-anticipated appearance marked the climax of rallies held across the country on the eve of Maduro’s swearing-in for a third consecutive six-year term after elections he is accused of having stolen.

Machado went into hiding shortly after the July 28 vote the

opposition says its candidate Edmundo Gonzalez Urrutia had won by a wide margin.

The opposition are protesting around the country in an eleventh-hour effort to put pressure on Maduro.

The opposition and the ruling party are locked in an ongoing dispute over last year’s presidential election, which they both claim to have won.

The country’s electoral authority and top court say Maduro, whose time in office has been marked by a deep economic and social crisis, won the July vote, though they have never published detailed tallies.

The government, who has accused the opposition of fomenting fascist plots against it, said it will arrest opposition leader Gonzalez Urrutia should he return to the country and has detained prominent opposition members and activists in the lead-up to the inauguration.

The opposition says Gonzalez, 75, won in a landslide.

It has published its own vote tallies as evidence, winning support from governments around



Venezuelan opposition leader Maria Corina Machado interacts with supporters at a protest ahead of today’s inauguration of President Nicolas Maduro for his third term, in Caracas. - Reuters

the world, including the United States, which consider Gonzalez the president-elect.

Machado, who is the country’s most popular opposition leader but who was barred from running in 2024, joined a protest in Chacao in eastern Caracas around 2.20pm local time (1820 GMT), dressed in a white shirt and blue jeans and waving a Venezuelan flag from the top of a truck.

“They lost the streets, which are ours, they are barricaded in Miraflores (presidential palace),” Machado told the crowd. “From today we are in a new phase.”

Machado, 57, urged protesters to peacefully flood the streets and repeatedly asked members of the police and military – who guarded polling stations during the election – to back Gonzalez’s victory.

Maduro, 62, has been in power

for more than a decade.

He has the vociferous support of leaders in the armed forces and the intelligence services, which are run by close allies of powerful Interior Minister Diosdado Cabello.

“I am convinced nothing will happen,” Cabello said on state television on Monday. “But that doesn’t mean we will lower our guard.”

Gonzalez Urrutia, who has been on a tour of the Americas this week and held a meeting with both US President Joe Biden and President-elect Donald Trump’s national security adviser, has repeatedly pledged to return to Venezuela but has not provided details about how.

An arrest warrant was issued for Gonzalez for alleged conspiracy, prompting his September flight to Spain.

Machado is being investigated by the attorney-general in at least two cases, but no warrant for her has been made public.

The government has detained several high-profile politicians and activists, including a former presidential candidate.

Montenegro mass shooting death toll rises to 13

AFP
Belgrade

One of the four people who were critically injured in a mass shooting in Montenegro on New Year’s Day died yesterday, medical officials said, taking the death toll to 13.

A 45-year-old man opened fire at a tavern in the southern town of Cetinje on January 1. Twelve people were pronounced dead at the scene, including two children. Four others were wounded.

“The 40-year-old patient succumbed to severe injuries sustained in the tragic event in Cetinje,” the Clinical Centre of Montenegro – the main hospital in the capital Podgorica – said in a statement.

The shooting has sparked public outrage and protests in the tiny Balkan country, with thou-

sands demonstrating in Cetinje and Podgorica in recent days.

Protesters have slammed the slow response time of law enforcement, after reports said the gunman moved unopposed across five different locations for over half an hour during the shooting spree.

The gunman was also known to have possessed illegal weapons, including firearms that were seized from him in 2022.

The assailant later died after shooting himself in the head when he was surrounded by authorities following an hours-long manhunt.

Montenegrin authorities have since introduced measures to curb the number of illegal weapons along with tougher penalties for unlawful possession of guns, stricter conditions for acquiring firearms, and a campaign encouraging owners to voluntarily surrender their illegal weapons.

According to the Small Arms Survey, there are approximately 245,000 firearms in circulation in Montenegro, which is home to just over 620,000 people.

Cetinje, with a population of around 13,000 people, is the site of the former royal capital and is situated in a mountainous valley that has largely stagnated economically.

In 2022, a man murdered 10 residents in Cetinje, including two children, in broad daylight before being killed, in one of the deadliest incidents to rock the country.

The area and its surroundings are also strongholds of organised criminal groups, with sporadic clashes erupting between rival mafia clans.

Organised crime has been a perennial issue in Montenegro, with authorities pledging to tackle the scourge as part of the country’s bid to join the European Union.

some 40,000 guided bombs in Ukraine, the air force said in its statement on the Telegram messaging app.

Regions in proximity to the frontlines as well as those bordering Russia are most regularly targeted with these weapons, Ukrainian officials say.

On Wednesday Russia fired two such bombs at a residential area in the southeastern city of Zaporizhzhia, killing at least 13 people

and injuring more than 110 in the deadliest attack so far this year, officials said.

Yesterday a guided bomb strike on residential buildings in the southern city of Kherson injured at least six people.

Ukrainian authorities say the most effective way to counteract guided bombs attacks is to target the warplanes carrying them and the airfields where they are stationed. - Reuters

12 miners feared dead after blast in Pakistan

AFP
Quetta

Twelve coal miners were feared dead after a gas explosion at a coal pit in southwestern Pakistan yesterday, officials said.

A local rescue team began the search for the workers in the private mine in Singidi, in Balochistan province, before being joined by two teams from the provincial capital Quetta.

“An accumulation of methane gas caused the blast,” said Abdullah Shawani, the head of the

province’s mining department.

“Twelve workers were inside a private mine when the whole mine caved in after an explosion,” added Abdul Ghani Baloch, a senior official in the department.

He said the rescue teams were slowed down because they could not find the mine entrance.

Pakistan’s mines are known to have hazardous working conditions and poor safety standards, and deadly incidents are not uncommon.

Twelve miners were killed in a gas explosion at the same mine in June last year.

Philippines reports outbreak of H5N2 bird flu among backyard ducks

The Philippines reported an outbreak of highly pathogenic H5N2 bird flu among backyard ducks, the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) said yesterday.

The virus was detected in 15 out of 428 backyard ducks in the Camarines Norte province, the Paris-based WOAH said in a report citing Philippine authorities.

The outbreak occurred in November and was confirmed in December. Highly pathogenic avian influenza, commonly called bird flu, has spread around the globe in the past years, leading to the culling of hundreds of millions of poultry. - Reuters

Innovations in the month of Rajab

Allah Almighty bestows favours and grants bounties upon His slaves, during all times, to help expiate their sins, elevate their ranks and make up for their shortcomings. Allah Almighty legislated for us a month during which we observe fasting, another which we perform pilgrimage in, and one or two extra days to fast during the remaining months. He also legislated prayer during the night and the *Witr* prayer, the *Ud'h'iyah* (Eid sacrifice), and the *'Aqeeqah*, (birth sacrifice) and many other virtuous deeds. All of these are ways of opening different channels for righteous deeds and methods to energise us by shifting from one form of worship to another, and therefore, not become weary, but continue to worship Allah Almighty. This is indeed a great favour from Allah upon us.

Moreover, we find that any act of worship which causes the people to come closer to Allah Almighty is mentioned in His Book or in the *Summah* of His Prophet, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam* (may Allah exalt his mention). The problem is in those people who try to come close to Allah and gain His reward by looking outside these two sources, and thus, divert from the right path.

The Prophet, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, said during his farewell pilgrimage, "I have left with you that, which if you adhere to, you will never go astray, the Book of Allah"

And Allah Says (what means): "... And whatever the Messenger has given you - take; and what he has forbidden you - refrain from. And fear Allah; indeed, Allah is severe in penalty." [Qur'an: 59:7]

Allah Almighty dispraised the Arabs during the pre-Islamic period because they interfered in that which they had no right in, and started changing what is lawful to unlawful, and what is unlawful to lawful, and recommending that which Allah Almighty did not. They used to shift around the times of the sacred months and change the names of the months because they did not want to wait for this long period to finish.

Ibn Katheer, may Allah have mercy upon him, said: "Dealing with the legislations of Allah with one's corrupt mind and reasoning, and changing the rulings of Allah according to their desires, and deeming lawful what is unlawful, were some of the things for which Allah dispraised the disbelievers."

The Arabs had also forbidden upon themselves slaughtering certain animals, by setting some laws which Allah



Almighty did not legislate, so Allah Almighty dispraised them for that. Thus we know that worshipping Allah Almighty is something which is not permitted except through that which He The Most High has legislated Himself and through His Messenger, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*. Anyone who wants to draw closer to Allah and gain His reward, love and pleasure through other channels, will get the contrary result, because Allah Almighty does not accept from people except that which He legislated for them.

During the month of Rajab, which is one of the sacred months, some Muslims make some wrong practices through which they intend to come closer to Allah Almighty and gain His forgiveness, love and pleasure. But they seek that through acts of worship which He did not permit nor legislate, and although they are seeking something good, they do not achieve it.

The point is not only in having a sincere and good intention, but the deed itself must be legitimate, or else it will be rejected. Who dare say that a deed is rejected by Allah Almighty? Who told him that

the deed is rejected? The one who told us this is the truthful Prophet Muhammad, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, who said: "He who introduces any deed into our matter (Islam) which is not from it then it is rejected." [Al-Bukhari and Muslim]

'Aa'ishah, may Allah be pleased with her, narrated that the Prophet, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, said: "He who performs any deed which is not according to what we are upon (i.e., the Prophet and his Companions) then it is rejected." [Muslim] Therefore, any deed which is not in accordance with what Islam has come with is rejected.

One of the practices during the month of Rajab which was done during the pre-Islamic period, is to offer sacrifices and call it '*Far'a* and '*Ateerah*. The Muslims scholars may Allah have mercy upon them said Islam voided this practice. Abu Hurairah, may Allah be pleased with him, narrated that the Prophet, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, said: "No *Fara*? No '*At-eerah*." [Al-Bukhari and Muslim]

Ar-Raghaa'ib prayer is another thing which people innovated which was never

legislated by Allah nor His Messenger, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*. The scholars may Allah have mercy upon them said: "There is no authentic *Hadith* regarding a special prayer during the month of Rajab, and all the narrations concerning *Ar-Raghaa'ib* prayer are fabricated lies." They also said: "This prayer was innovated after the fourth century and was never known before that, and no one from the scholars during the first virtuous generations ever mentioned it."

People fast all the month of Rajab although there is no authentic *Hadith* in this regard and so this practice should be abandoned. On the other hand, those who are in the habit of fasting regularly, even in during other months, may fast. Moreover, the Prophet *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam* never fasted any month in full other than Ramadan, as narrated by 'Aa'ishah, may Allah be pleased with her, 'The Prophet, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, used to fast so much until we would think that he always fasts, and would stop fasting until we would think that he never fasts. I never saw the Prophet, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa*

sallam, fast a full month except during Ramadan, and he never fasted more than fasting during the month of Sha'baan.' [Al-Bukhari and Muslim]

It was narrated that 'Umar, may Allah be pleased with him, used to hit men's hands until they would start using them to eat during the month of Rajab, and he would say, 'What is the virtue of Rajab? It is a month which the people during the pre-Islamic period used to honor, but when Islam came, people gave this up.'

Abu Bakrah, may Allah be pleased with him, saw his household preparing during the month of Rajab, and said to them, 'Did you make Rajab like Ramadan? Then he threw the baskets and broke the cups.

Another innovation is what they call the Rajabiyyah, which is an 'Umrah during Rajab which has no evidence proving it. As a matter of fact, the only month during which 'Umrah would have a certain prescribed reward is the month of Ramadan. The Prophet, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, said: "'Umrah during Ramadan equals performing Haj', in another narration he said, "Equals Haj with me."

Therefore, anyone who performs 'Umrah during Rajab for the sake of Rajab has committed a mistake. Moreover, the Prophet, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, never performed 'Umrah during Rajab even though he has performed 'Umrah four times.

A Muslim should know that if he seeks the pleasure of Allah, and wants to adhere to obedience, he would find many acts to perform, so there is no need to add to what the Prophet, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, instructed us to do; let us perform what he, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, taught us, and he who does that, is guaranteed to succeed and prosper in this life and the Hereafter.

Ibn Mas'oud, may Allah be pleased with him, said: "Imitate and do not innovate (in religion)! Therefore, we should not add anything to the religion baselessly, and we should adhere to the *Sunnah* of the Prophet, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*. Some of the scholars said, 'Sunnah is like to Noah's Ark, anyone who sticks to it would be rescued.'"

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



Allah's Knowledge is infinite

One of the Divine Attributes Allah, The Most Exalted, Has is Infinite Knowledge that encompasses everything in the heavens and earth and what is in between them; in the worldly life and the Hereafter. Therefore, among His Divine Names is the All-Knowing. He, the Almighty says (what means): "Verily, He, only He, is the All-Hearer, the All-Knower" [Qur'an 26: 220]

Allah Almighty has called Himself by some other Names which reflect this attribute, such as *Al-Khabeer* (the All-Aware), which entails that He knows what will be before it happens; *Al-Hakeem* (the Wise), which entails that He knows the details of things; *Ash-Shaheed* (the Witness), which entails that He knows what is unseen and what is seen, i.e., that nothing is unknown to Him; and *Al-Muhsy* (the Reckoner), which entails that the fact that He knows so much does not distract Him from knowing the tiniest details, such as the light of the day and how strong the wind is, and when the leaves fall. He knows the numbers and the movements of each leaf.

His Knowledge encompasses generalities and minor details:

Some philosophers claim that Allah knows things in general terms, but He does not know minor details. This, no doubt, is a sheer lie. The

Knowledge of Allah, Glory is to Him, is comprehensive and all-encompassing, and nothing whatsoever is hidden from Him on earth or in the heavens. He knows every movement on land and in the depths of the sea, and there is no leaf that falls from a tree or a seed that is planted in the ground, or a small plant that cleaves the earth, or dries out or dies, but the Knowledge of Allah encompasses it. Allah Almighty says (what means): "...And He knows whatever there is in the land and in the sea; not a leaf falls, but He knows it. There is not a grain in the darkness of the earth, nor anything fresh or dry, but is written in a Clear Record." [Qur'an 6: 59]

Nothing of the innumerable animals, birds, insects, etc. is hidden from Allah, as stated in the verse (which means): "And no moving [living] creature is there on earth but its provision is due from Allah. And He knows its dwelling place and its deposit [in the uterus or grave]. All is in a Clear Book [the Preserved Tablet]." [Qur'an 11: 6]

There is nothing that goes down into the earth, or ascends from the earth to the heavens, but Allah encompasses it with His Infinite Knowledge. Allah says (what means): "He knows that which goes into

the earth and that which comes forth from it, and that which descends from the heaven and that which ascends to it. And He is the Most Merciful, the Oft-Forgiving." [Qur'an 34: 2]

Nothing of man is hidden from Allah, the All-Knowing, whatsoever. Allah's Knowledge of man is comprehensive, encompassing his apparent and visible actions, but He also knows what is hidden in the depths of his soul, as stated in the verse (which means): "Say [O Muhammad]: 'Whether you hide what is in your breasts or reveal it, Allah knows it...'" [Qur'an 3: 29]

And the verse (which means): "And He is Allah [to be worshipped Alone] in the heavens and on the earth; He Knows what you conceal and what you reveal..." [Qur'an 6: 3]

Nothing of the innumerable animals, birds, insects, etc. is hidden from Allah, as stated in the verse (which means): "And no moving [living] creature is there on earth but its provision is due from Allah. And He knows its dwelling place and its deposit [in the uterus or grave]. All is in a Clear Book [the Preserved Tablet]." [Qur'an 11: 6]

All the disasters and tribulations that happen on earth, or happen to the individual, or to his wealth or family, etc., were known to Allah before they happened. He has written them in the Preserved Tablet as He says (what means): "No disaster strikes upon the earth or among yourselves except that it is in a register before We bring it into being - indeed that, for Allah, is easy" [Qur'an 57:22]

Allah's Knowledge encompasses all the minor details of man's life. He, the All-Knowing says (what means): "Neither you [O Muhammad] do any deed nor recite any portion of the Qur'an, nor you [O mankind] do any deed [good or evil], but We are Witness thereof, when you are doing it..." [Qur'an 10: 61]

In the Noble Qur'an, Almighty Allah reports the invaluable advice which Luqmaan (a wise pious man) gave to his son in regards to pure faith in Allah, the Most Exalted. This is in the verse (which means):

"O my son! If it be [anything] equal to the weight of a grain of mustard seed, and though it be in a rock, or in the heavens or in the earth, Allah will bring it forth. Verily, Allah is Subtle [in bringing out that grain], Well-Aware [of its place]." [Qur'an 31: 16]

For the Knowledge of Allah, secret and open, small and great, unseen and seen, are all the same, as in the verse

(which means):

"Allah knows what every female carries and what the wombs lose [prematurely] or exceed. And everything with Him is by due measure.

[He is] (He is the) Knower of the unseen and the seen, the Grand, the Exalted. It is the same [to Him] concerning you whether one conceals [his] speech or one publicises it and whether one is hidden by night or conspicuous [among others] by day." [Qur'an 13: 8-10]

Allah, the Almighty, indeed spoke the truth when He said (what means): "... And nothing is hidden from your Lord [so much as] the weight of an atom [or small ant] on the earth or in the heaven. Not what is less than that or what is greater than that but is [written] in a Clear Record." [Qur'an 10: 61]

Allah's Knowledge: An excuse not to exert effort?

Some might raise a question like: "If Allah Knows or Decrees certain catastrophes or trials to happen, then why should I strive to avoid them?" Or, "If Allah destined that a given person will live as a disbeliever and later is to be doomed to Hell, why should He punish him?"

The answer to such a misconception is that Allah, the Most Exalted, has endowed man with ability, will and volition, and He has shown him the two ways: that of good and that of evil through His revelations to His Messengers may Allah exalt their mention. So, whoever chooses the way of good, Allah will guide him and grant him success and the opposite is true. Allah says (what means): "And (We, i.e. Allah) have shown him the two ways - of good and evil!" [Qur'an 90:10].

Allah also says (what means): "Whosoever desires (through his deeds) the reward of the Hereafter, We give him increase in his reward, and whosoever desires the reward of this world (through his deeds), We give him thereof (what is written for him), and he has no portion in the Hereafter." [Qur'an 42:20].

The abovementioned verses clarify that one has the volition and not obliged to do things against his will. For example, no one can deny that man has a volition concerning material affairs such as livelihood: he spares no effort to gain more and more although he knows that his livelihood is predestined.

Another example is that concerning one's seeking each and every remedy and means of safety to avoid harm.

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

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 favors 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 harbor 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

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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.

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GULF TIMES

X’s ‘Community Notes’: Is it a model for Meta?

Meta chief Mark Zuckerberg said on Tuesday that the group’s platforms including Facebook and Instagram would in future imitate rival X’s “Community Notes” feature rather than using professional fact-checkers.

The feature “empower(s) their community to decide when posts are potentially misleading” thanks to “people across a diverse range of perspectives,” Zuckerberg wrote in a blog post.

Facebook’s fact-checking programme currently operates in 26 languages, partnering with more than 80 media organisations worldwide including AFP.

When an X post has had a note appended, it is displayed to users with a small box titled “Readers added context”.

Usually short and factual, expanding on or contradicting the original post, most published notes also include a link to relevant source material. Introduced in January 2021 under the name Birdwatch, Community Notes were boosted by Elon Musk after he took over Twitter in late 2022 and renamed it X, and they now appear to users in 44 countries. The social network “needs to become by far the most accurate source of information about the world”, Musk posted at the time. Any willing X user can sign up to Community Notes.

Before writing notes of their own, they must first spend time rating other people’s suggested notes, contributing to the process that decides whether they are published. Even once allowed to write notes, users can lose the right if others consistently rate them unhelpful. X underscores that voting on notes is not by simple majority.

In his statement, CEO Zuckerberg said fact-checking had been ‘a program intended to inform (that) too often became a tool to censor’

of Community Notes’ effectiveness. One April 2024 paper published in the Journal of the American Medical Association found that a sample of notes on misinformation about Covid-19 vaccines “were accurate, cited moderate and high-credibility sources, and were attached to posts viewed hundreds of millions of times”.

But the authors did not study the notes’ impact on users. Meanwhile in a survey of notes posted on November 5 — US election day — Cornell University digital harm researcher Alexios Mantzarlis found that just 29 percent of “fact-checkable” tweets for which notes were suggested in fact displayed a note rated as helpful.

“If Community Notes had an impact on election information quality on X, it was marginal at best,” Mantzarlis wrote in an article for the Poynter Institute. Some experts AFP spoke to were confident that Community Notes could improve information quality on Meta platforms.

“Community notes as such is a very, very effective tool in content moderation if applied in an equitable way, we can see that on Wikimedia or Wikipedia,” said Katja Munoz of the Berlin-based think-tank DGAP.

Nevertheless, “the crowd may say something correct, but there can also be ill-intentioned people who are there to spread disinformation,” said Christine Balaguer, a professor at France’s Institut Mines-Telecom who studies the phenomenon. Eliminating fact-checking could set Meta up for a clash with the European Union if it expands the model outside the United States. The bloc’s Digital Services Act encourages platforms to fight misinformation with tools including professional fact-checkers. Zuckerberg’s move “is a major shock” that “announces the clashes that the tech platforms are going to be having with EU regulation in general”, Munoz said.

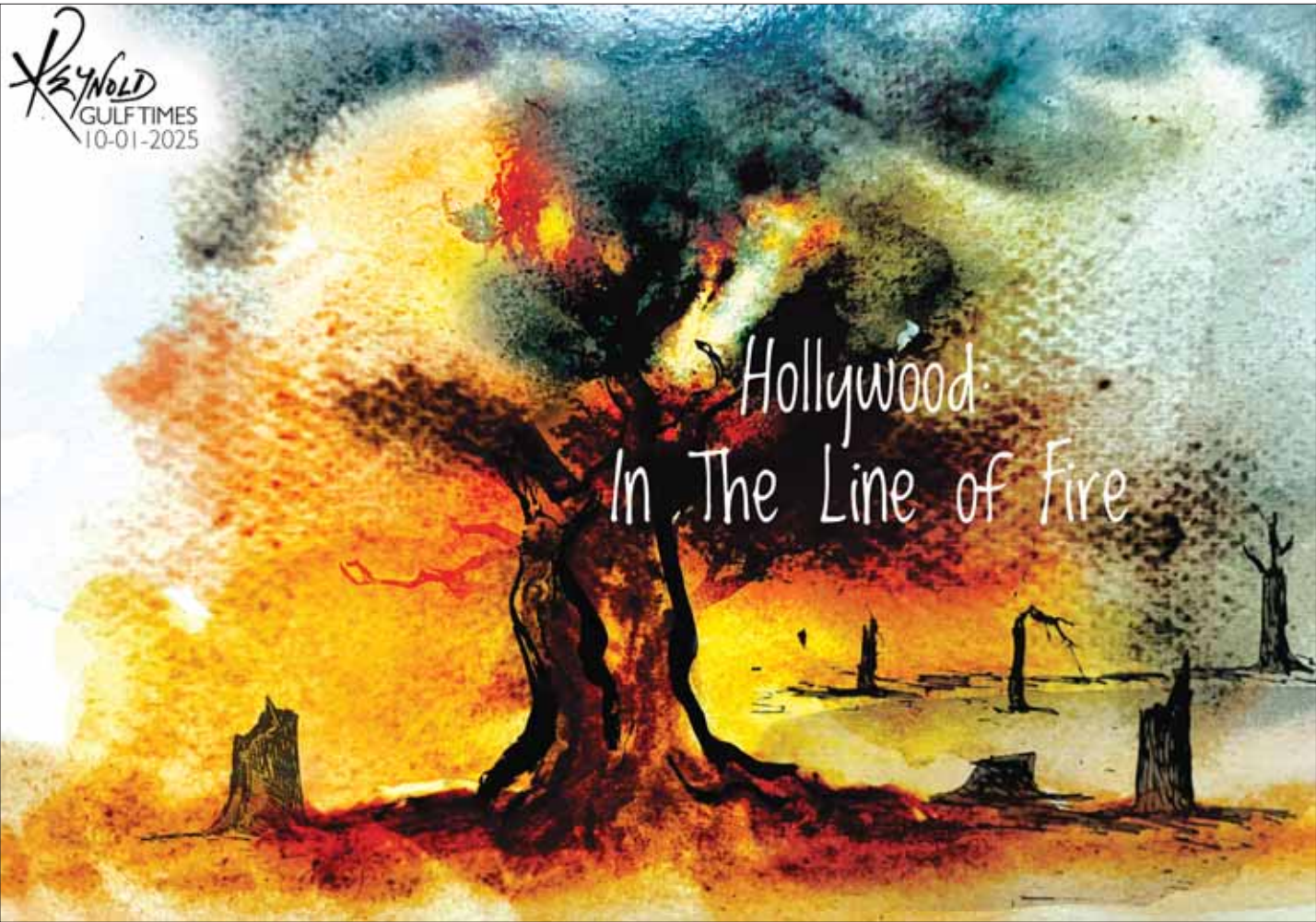
In his statement, Zuckerberg said fact-checking had been “a program intended to inform (that) too often became a tool to censor”.

“Fact-checkers weren’t censors,” said Bill Adair, a professor of journalism and public policy at Duke University and co-founder of the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN).

Those working with Meta “were signatories of a code of principles that requires they be transparent and nonpartisan”, he noted.

IFCN chief Angie Drobnic Holan also defended fact-checkers’ work, writing on X that Zuckerberg had faced “extreme political pressure from a new administration and its supporters”.

Trump said Tuesday that Meta’s move had “probably” been in response to his threats against the company and Zuckerberg. — AFP



How will global co-operation play out in the age of Trump

By George Papaconstantinou and Jean Pisani-Ferry
Paris

With Donald Trump’s presidential inauguration approaching, the mood in Brussels and across European capitals ranges from panic to resignation, with many hoping that a transactional modus vivendi might be found. But ad hoc dealmaking will not answer the big question hanging in the air: What will another Trump presidency mean for global co-operation? What hope is there for collective efforts to safeguard global public goods such as the climate and public health, and to preserve prosperity by upholding economic interdependence?

Trump’s election is undoubtedly bad news for those who believe that we all have a duty to the global commons, and that interdependence must be managed with clear, stable, and consistent rules. Trump is a die-hard nationalist who fundamentally regards global governance as an obstacle to American primacy. Rather than adhering to principles and rules, his approach is wholly transactional.

He has already threatened Canada and Mexico with trade tariffs unless they stop fentanyl and migrants from entering the United States, as well as warned the nine Brics countries that any attempt to create a rival to the dollar will be met with harsh retaliation and told Europe to buy more oil and gas from the US or face tariffs.

Worse, there is good reason to think that Trump is not a temporary aberration, as US President Joe Biden said in 2020, but rather an aberrant expression of a fundamental shift in US attitudes toward global leadership. With America tiring of its longstanding role at the helm of the international community, the world has come to a crossroads. Recall economic historian Charles Kindleberger’s

analysis of the Great Depression: the crisis reflected not only Britain’s relative loss of power but also America’s unwillingness to assume the mantle of global leadership.

Since World War II, however, the US has fully embraced that role — one that combines exorbitant privileges with outside duties. America reaps enormous benefits from the US dollar’s global supremacy — which provides international seigniorage revenues, among other things — while bearing responsibility for global monetary and financial stability. This implies providing dollar liquidity to partner central banks in times of monetary stress (as in 2008-10) and keeping the US goods market open when global demand is low.

But the US no longer accepts this implicit contract, and today’s world is too fragmented and diverse for any single country to dominate. Though America remains the sole financial superpower (with a near \$60tn stock-market capitalisation, against China’s \$9.5tn, and an even larger lead in innovative market segments), it no longer wants the obligations that come with leadership. Europe’s declining demographic and economic weight have effectively eliminated it from the running. And China is too inward-looking to become the next hegemon. It may be the world’s manufacturing superpower (accounting for 35% of global production), but it is a long way from assuming global responsibilities.

Fortunately, not all problems require leadership from a single dominant country. In the third decade of the twenty-first century, the world must move to new arrangements whereby global responsibilities are more widely distributed. In New World New Rules: Global Co-operation in a World of Geopolitical Rivalries, we analyse governance arrangements across a variety of policy domains — from the global commons to traditional economic interdependence and what we call “behind-the-border integration”

issues. In each case, the goal is to salvage collective action in a world defined by fragmentation and divergent preferences.

On climate, the most emblematic — even existential — global commons, the US is likely to repeat its withdrawal from the 2015 Paris agreement (which the Biden administration rejoined). But the US is a secondary player here, accounting for only 13% of global emissions, and many US state-level emissions-reduction efforts will continue. Moreover, the European Union and China could jointly provide the necessary leadership to rally big emerging economies, mobilise private financing toward net-zero targets, and galvanise civil society.

On international trade, the main channel of economic interdependence, Trump’s tariffs could be the final nail in the coffin of the multilateral rules-based regime. He will attempt to divide European countries by differentiating tariffs to punish or blackmail individual governments.

Still, Europe can resist by maintaining a united front (along with the United Kingdom). That would allow it to offer Trump a deal that includes energy and defence purchases, retaliate effectively, or form coalitions with third countries (hence the importance of the EU’s recent trade agreement with Latin America’s Mercosur countries).

In any case, it has become apparent that prevailing multilateral trade rules are too demanding for a fragmented world. The EU should liaise with key partners to distinguish behaviour that is truly unacceptable from behaviour that is merely undesirable.

On macro finance, the other main channel of international economic interdependence, the trend toward deglobalisation began some time ago. While the institutions at the core of the system (the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank) remain robust, Trump could use America’s veto power to change their policies on a range of

issues, not least climate mitigation and adaptation — which accounted for a whopping 44% of World Bank loans last year.

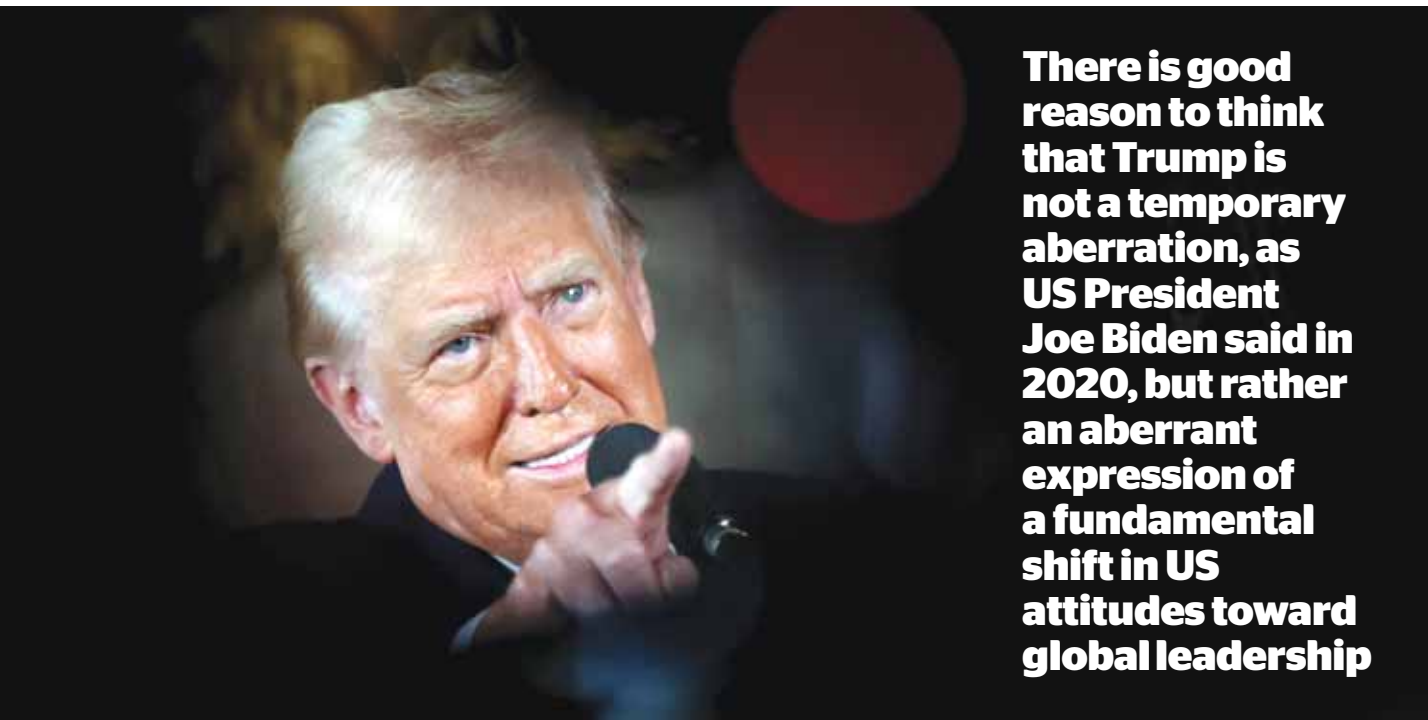
To preserve the international financial safety net, Europe should focus on the complementarities between regional institutions. But to foster constructive co-operation, it will need to accept that its role in the main global organisations should be diluted to accommodate the rise of China and various middle powers.

Beyond these core policy areas are behind-the-border integration matters such as competition, banking, and tax governance, where widespread acceptance of extraterritoriality and informal networks can produce desirable results even in the absence of hard rules. Tax co-operation seems unlikely to survive another Trump administration, at least as far as multinationals are concerned; but some technical discussions and processes could still continue below the radar. A more incremental, granular approach may be the best way to preserve the progress that has been made to date.

On all these issues and more, policymakers will have to adapt to a world in which no single power is in charge. That requires defining, for each field, which forms of global governance are best suited to an irreversibly more diverse and more fragmented terrain. — Project Syndicate

• George Papaconstantinou, a former finance minister of Greece who negotiated the country’s first bailout, is the author of Game Over: The Inside Story of the Greek Crisis and the co-author (with Jean Pisani-Ferry) of New World New Rules: Global Cooperation in a World of Geopolitical Rivalries.

• Jean Pisani-Ferry, a senior fellow at the Brussels-based think tank Bruegel and a senior non-resident fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics, is a professor at Sciences Po.



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By William Ralston
Bloomberg

Last December, a farmer was burning dry grape-vines in his vineyard in Deir Mar Moussa, a hill town a dozen miles east of Beirut known for its 18th century monastery and stands of pine forest. Usually this would be dangerous, given that Lebanon's hot and dry climate can quickly turn a spark into a conflagration.

But on this day the worst was avoided. A device made by a German startup “smelled” the smoke from the farmer's fire and sent out an alert, allowing authorities to prevent it from spreading. Given the recent explosion of global warming-fuelled wildfires across the planet, quick detection is needed more than ever. In this case, a device called Silvanet by Dryad Networks identified the unique gas patterns in the air which indicated something in Deir Mar Moussa was burning.

As the average global temperature rises and climate change advances, wildfires are becoming more catastrophic, ravaging communities and releasing vast amounts of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. Burning leaves and undergrowth can go undetected for hours, even days, until smoke is reported to authorities by bystanders or passing aircraft.

Since many forest fires smoulder long before flames erupt, there's an opening for a new generation of smoke detection equipment. Dryad's chief executive, Carsten Brinkschulte, calls his an electronic nose. “If you get to a wildfire when it's tiny, you have a lot more options that you can do than if you detect it when it's two, three, five hectares in size,” he says. “It's very hard to contain at that point.”

And as a logical extension of this, the nascent industry is already drawing up plans for squadrons of firefighting drones that someday may be permanently stationed among the trees, waiting for a signal to quench a fire before it can spread.

Annually, wildfires result in an additional 23,000 square miles of lost tree cover than was the case in 2001 — an area slightly bigger than Croatia. Hundreds die in such fires each year while almost a half-million more lose their homes or are displaced. Each wildfire releases dangerous chemicals into the atmosphere that can increase the chances of disease and death for people hundreds or even thousands of miles away. A study published in October estimated 10,000 more people died each year in the 2010s than in the 1960s as a result of wildfire smoke.

And of course the more smoke, the worse global warming becomes. According to a study published in the journal *Nature*, wildfires in Canada last year released about 640mn metric tonnes of carbon, more than the annual fossil fuel emissions of any country save China, the US and India.

Since 2001, carbon dioxide emissions from wildfires have surged by 60%. And if all of that isn't bad enough, the destruction they wreak on fauna and vegetation can have dire consequences for ecosystems and the scorched landscape left behind.

It was in 2018, a particularly bad year for wildfires, when



A firefighter battles the Palisades Fire as it burns during a windstorm on the west side of Los Angeles, California. **(Reuters)**

Brinkschulte — a veteran German telecommunications executive — says it occurred to him that existing detection methods weren't keeping up. Satellites can detect wildfires from space and cameras can survey areas susceptible to outbreaks, but in both cases fires must already be large enough to produce visible smoke plumes or flames that breach the forest canopy.

Brinkschulte says he wanted to create a system that senses fires before they escalate with “a scalable, sustainable business model.” Each of Dryad's Silvanet sensors is equipped with a metal oxide semiconductor layer that reacts with gases in the air. When hydrogen, carbon monoxide and other gases are present, as they are in the early stages of a fire, they alter the sensor's electrical resistance, creating a specific “fingerprint”, according to Brinkschulte. AI then analyses the gas composition in real time. Dryad says the system allows users to geolocate the origin of a fire down to a 320-foot radius of each device.

Dryad is by no means alone in this field. The US Department of Homeland Security has deployed sensors made by Rockville, Maryland-based N5. Called N5SHIELD, they're now situated across the Hawaiian island of Maui — which suffered a catastrophic fire last year. Dryad

meanwhile says it has raised €22.8mn (\$23.8mn), mainly through venture capital equity investments and grants from the European Union. Silvanet is its core product, with more than 20,000 sensors shipped to date. Each one sells for less than \$100 each, but customers must also pay a service fee for access to the company's cloud-based platform.

The company says it has more than 100 customers in 20 countries, with buyers being mostly local governments and municipalities. In the US, California's state fire prevention agency has been testing 400 of Dryad's sensors in the Jackson Demonstration State Forest, about 160 miles north of San Francisco.

One concern with sensor technology however is accuracy. If too sensitive, it may lead to false alerts. And while networks of individual detectors strapped to trees are useful along hiking paths and powerlines traversing wooded areas, where fires often begin, they are less effective elsewhere. To quickly detect small fires across broader areas, cameras are needed.

In Tourrettes-sur-Loup, a village in the south of France, special cameras developed by a Polish company called SmokeD were recently tested. The device takes pictures every few seconds, using AI to simultaneously compare each photo as part of a continuous monitoring system.



People embrace as they evacuate following powerful winds fuelling devastating wildfires in the Los Angeles area, at the Eaton Fire in Altadena, California, on Wednesday. **(Reuters)**

Cameras, however, require substantial infrastructure, like elevated mounting points and continuous power sources—all of which limit their scalability, especially in remote areas. And the equipment itself can be a fire hazard.

There is however new satellite technology coming online that may make orbiting platforms more useful in detecting hard-to-reach fires. Traditional satellite systems often struggle to detect wildfires in their early stages because geostationary satellite need to be tens of thousands of miles above the equator, limiting their ability to capture images with enough resolution. A low earth-orbiting satellite allows for high resolution imagery, but it's not going to scan the same spot of the earth frequently enough. What's needed is a large number of satellites that can acquire images of the same location down to a level that's useful, says Christopher Van Arsdale, climate & energy lead at Google Research.

In September, Van Arsdale's team announced FireSat, a purpose-built constellation of satellites designed to detect small-scale fires on a global scale. Groups including Google.org and the Moore Foundation are funding a non-profit called Earth Fire Alliance in order to launch them. By 2028, FireSat says it plans to have a constellation of

52 satellites in place, each with thermal infrared sensors that can identify potential fires in almost any weather conditions.

“It's not the detection that's the game changer, it's the ability to change how we manage the fires.”

The high-resolution imagery of the entire planet will refresh every 20 minutes, and the system will be able to capture a fire about as small as a school classroom anywhere within this time period, according to the company. The first satellite is scheduled to go up early next year.

Another German startup called OroraTech is working on a similar system. The company has already launched two satellites, according to Thomas Grübler, OroraTech's chief strategy officer and co-founder, and the goal is to launch 98 more before 2028. With 100 satellites, the company says it will be able to detect a 13-by-13 foot fire globally within 30 minutes or less.

In June, Greece's Ministry of Digital Governance awarded OroraTech a €20mn contract to use its satellite-based early warning system for wildfires. Grübler envisions a world where they combine data with FireSat, providing “even faster detection capabilities.”

Dryad hopes to move beyond detection to actual firefighting, launching autonomous drones that respond to fires like the one that almost happened in Deir

Mar Moussa. “We are in a unique position where we detect fires so early, so the drones have a chance of extinguishing them,” Brinkschulte says.

In areas where wildfires break out regularly, drones using new fire suppression technology could be stationed, ensuring a rapid, automated response. In October 2024, Dryad was awarded a €3.8mn grant from the European Regional Development Fund and raised an additional €2.5 million in funding from climate-tech investor First Imagine! to help it develop this new endeavour, called Florian.

The startups all seem to agree the best of all possible worlds is to use these various technologies together. According to Kate Dargan, a senior adviser for the Moore Foundation's Wildfire Resilience Initiative, the stream of data acquired from satellites can inform future mitigation and protection measures.

“It's not the detection that's the game changer, it's the ability to change how we manage the fires,” she says.

But Michael Wara, director of the climate and energy policy programme at Stanford University's Woods Institute for the Environment, cautions against focusing too much on fire detection technologies. While there's no question that early and accurate detection can help contain certain fires, it's only true if you have the resources to use the information effectively. And in the right conditions, like when it's windy, some fires will spread however early you detect them.

“No amount of rapid detection is going to change tactics or outcome on some fires,” he says.

And more broadly, Wara cautions that as detection technologies help extinguish slow-spreading fires, they may leave fast-spreading fires more vegetation to fuel their growth. If we're going to have these satellite technologies and cameras and sensors, we need to also invest in controlled burns, he says.

“The risk is that we focus too much on detection but we must not overlook mitigation and prevention,” Wara says.

What's the latest science telling us about climate change?

By Gloria Dickie
Reuters

After another record-breaking year for global temperatures in 2024, pressure is rising on policymakers to step up efforts to curb climate change. The last global scientific consensus on the phenomenon was released in 2021 through the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, but scientists say evidence shows global warming and its impacts have since been unfolding faster than expected.

Here is some of the latest climate research:

Critical point

The world may already have hit 1.5C (2.7F) of warming above the average pre-industrial temperature - a critical threshold beyond which it is at risk of irreversible and extreme climate change, scientists say.

A group of researchers made the suggestion in a study released in November based on an analysis of 2,000 years of atmospheric gases trapped in Antarctic ice cores.

Scientists have typically measured today's temperatures against a baseline temperature average for 1850-1900. By that measure, the world is now at nearly 1.3C (2.4F) of warming.

But the new data suggests a longer pre-industrial baseline, based on temperature



data spanning the year 13-1700, which put warming at 1.49C in 2023, the study published in the journal *Nature Geoscience* said.

Ocean changes

The warming of the Atlantic could hasten the collapse of a key current system, which scientists warn could already be sputtering.

The Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation (AMOC), which transports warm water from the tropics to the North Atlantic, has helped to keep European winters milder for centuries. Research in 2018 showed that AMOC has weakened

by about 15% since 1950, while research published in February 2024 in the journal *Science Advances* suggested it could be closer to a critical slowdown than previously thought. In addition, with the world in the throes of a fourth mass coral bleaching event - the largest on record - scientists fear the world's reefs have passed a point of no return.

Scientists will be studying bleached reefs from Australia to Brazil for signs of recovery over the next few years if temperatures fall.

Extreme weather

Ocean warming is not only fuelling

stronger Atlantic storms, it is also causing them to intensify more rapidly, with some jumping from a Category 1 to a Category 3 storm in just hours. Growing evidence shows this is true of other ocean basins. In October 2024 Hurricane Milton needed only one day in the Gulf of Mexico to go from tropical storm to the Gulf's second most powerful hurricane on record, slamming Florida's west coast. Warmer air can also hold more moisture, helping storms carry and eventually release more rain. As a result, hurricanes are delivering flooding even in mountain towns like Asheville, North Carolina, inundated in September 2024 by Hurricane Helene.

Forests and fires

Global warming is drying waterways and sapping moisture from forests, creating conditions for bigger and hotter wildfires from the US West and Canada to southern Europe and Russia's Far East. Research published in October in *Nature Climate Change* calculated that about 13% of deaths associated with toxic wildfire smoke during the 2010s could be attributed to the climate effect on wildfires. Brazil's Amazon in 2024 was in the grip of its worst and most widespread drought since records began in 1950. River levels sank to all-time lows last year, while fires ravaged the rainforest. That added concern to scientific findings earlier last year that between 10% and 47% of the Amazon

will face combined stresses of heat and drought from climate change, as well as other threats, by 2050.

That could push the Amazon past a tipping point, with the jungle no longer able to produce enough moisture to quench its own trees, at which point the ecosystem could transition to degraded forests or sandy savannas. Globally, forests appear to be struggling. A July 2024 study found that forests overall failed to absorb the year before as much carbon dioxide from the atmosphere as in the past, due largely to the Amazon drought and wildfires in Canada. That means a record amount of CO2 entered the atmosphere. In addition, scientists with the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration found in December 2024 that while the vast Arctic tundra has been a carbon sink for thousands of years, rising wildfire emissions mean the tundra is now releasing more carbon than it stores.

Volcanic surge

Scientists fear climate change could even boost volcanic eruptions. In Iceland, volcanoes appear to be responding to rapid glacier retreat. As ice melts, less pressure is exerted on the Earth's crust and mantle.

Volcanologists worry this could destabilise magma reservoirs and appears to be leading to more magma being created, building up pressure underground.

Qatar Leadership Centre announces National Leadership Programme for 2025

By Tawfik Lamari
Staff Reporter

The Qatar Leadership Centre announced the launch of the National Leadership Programme for 2025 during the introductory meeting week, which was held from January 5-9.

The programme is aimed at developing the leadership skills of cadres to support various sectors in the country, in line with Qatar National Vision 2030.

The introductory meeting week featured an intensive programme to introduce members to the Qatar Leadership Centre and its programmes, and to enhance communication between participants and members of the centre.

The programme included welcoming speeches by the centre's general manager



Abdullah Mohammed al-Binali and director of national programmes Sheikh Abdulrahman bin Fahad al-Thani.

They emphasised the importance of developing national competencies and provided an explanation of the three leadership programmes.

They noted the high turnout for the National Leadership Programme, with 1,357 candidates having applied, and 133 of them accepted to the programme.

The National Leadership Programme comprises the following:

☞ Executive Leadership Programme:

Targets Qatari professionals in middle and senior management positions, and is presented in English, with a focus on skills such as strategic thinking, innovation, and financial analysis.

☞ Future Leadership Programme: Dedicated to young leaders, and combines the-

oretical education with practical training to develop leadership skills such as adapting to change and decision-making.

☞ Government Leadership Programme: Offered in Arabic, and aims to empower public sector employees with strategic leadership and innovation skills.



Qatar World Coffee Expo 2025 from January 23

By Joey Aguilar
Staff Reporter

The Qatar World Coffee Expo 2025 is set to offer a rich blend of cutting-edge innovations, educational sessions, and vibrant coffee culture, bringing together 340 exhibitors and thousands of visitors at the Qatar National Convention Centre (QNCC) from January 23-25.

Organisers noted that this three-day event, marked in the Qatar Calendar tourism events, is poised to attract more than 12,000 visitors who will have the opportunity to explore a variety of experiences.

Hosted by the Qatar Specialty Coffee Association (Qatsca), this year's edition of the expo will host the Roasters Village, Brew & Espresso Bar, and Cupping Rooms, making it a premier gathering for the specialty coffee community.

The Qatar World Coffee Expo 2025, previously known as "Doha International Coffee Exhibition 2023", aims to connect coffee producers, manufacturers, retailers, and traders, fostering connections within the Middle East's flourishing coffee industry.

Attendees can explore a bustling trade show floor and engage in popular features such as the Roasters Village, showcasing the art of coffee roasting; the Brew & Espresso Bar, where expert baristas will be at work; and dedicated Cupping Rooms for professional tasting sessions.

The expo will also host the Doha's Best Coffee Roasters Award and a Best Booth Award, celebrating excellence within the industry.

A major highlight of this event is the National Championship, a platform where Qatar's coffee community unites to celebrate exceptional talent.

Rooted in the shared vision of the Specialty Coffee Association of America and the Specialty Coffee Association of Europe, these competitions will showcase Qatar's growing influence in the global coffee scene.

According to the organisers, three major competitions will take place at the expo.

First is the Qatar National Barista Championship, which promotes excellence in coffee preparation, advancing the barista profession and engaging a worldwide audience.

Second is the Qatar National Latte Art Championship, highlighting artistic expression while challenging baristas on their on-demand performance, judged on visual attributes, creativity, and pattern consistency.

Third is the Qatar National Cup Tasters Championship, a contest that tests the speed, skill, and accuracy of professional



coffee cuppers in distinguishing taste differences among specialty coffees.

Apart from the competitions, the Qatar World Coffee Expo 2025 will also offer lectures led by industry experts, digging deeper into the art and science of coffee.

Attendees can also participate in several

workshops to gain hands-on experience in brewing techniques and exploring the artistry behind every cup.

These interactive sessions are designed to ignite a passion for coffee and enhance skills, regardless of their level, from beginner to expert.



5th Katara International Exhibition for Kahraman ends today

The 5th Katara International Exhibition for Kahraman concludes today with participation of experts and artisans from 14 Arab and foreign countries, featuring 77 pavilions.

Visitors and exhibitors praised the outstanding organisation of the exhibition, which offers a unique experience combining culture and heritage, providing an opportunity for exchanging views between local and international enthusiasts and experts, and discussing the latest developments in the world of amber.

The exhibition showcases a variety of luxurious and rare types of amber, including Indian amber.

The exhibition also offers a chance to explore various cultures in amber craftsmanship, with a laboratory for examining quality of exhibits and pavilions displaying paintings and sculptures made from rare amber. - QNA



Ministry announces the results of 18th Education Excellence Award

The Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE) has announced the results of the 18th Education Excellence Award, with 79 participants out of 277 winning in the award's nine different categories.

In a press conference yesterday, Education Excellence Award executive director Maryam Abdullah al-Muhammadi (pictured) said that the award reflects the actual contribution to the development process and the achievement of Qatar's aspirations and meets the scientific ambitions of the participants.

She noted that the 18th edition of the award witnessed a large number of winners compared to the previous edition.

Al-Muhammadi indicated that the participants' applications were subject to arbitration by specialised committees and went through several stages until the final reports were issued.

The Education Excellence Day Award ceremony will be held on February 23.

The official said that the award comprises nine categories:

- The Education Excellence Award for primary school students
- The Education Excellence Award for preparatory school students
- The Education Excellence Award for high school students
- The Education Excellence Award for the distinguished University student category
- The Distinguished Scientific Research Award
- The Distinguished Teacher Award
- The Education Excellence Award for Master's degree holders
- The Education Excellence Award for PhD holders
- The Distinguished School Award.

Al-Muhammadi said that the award, since its launch in 2006, has seen 900 winners.

The Education Excellence Award (Platinum Medal) for primary school students, was won by Hamad Saad al-Mohannadi from Qatar Academy - Al Khor Branch, Khalifa Abdulaziz Sada from Amjad International Academy, Maryam Abdullah al-Shaibani from Amjad International Academy, Amna Abdulrahman al-Hammadi from Moza Bint Mohammed Primary School, Mohammed Hilal al-Mohannadi from Qatar Academy - Al Khor Branch, Sarah Ahmed al-Khulaifi from Al Markhiya Primary School, Sabah Nasser al-Thani from Qatar Academy - Al Wajba Branch, Tamadur Badr ba Khamis from First Al Bayan Girls Primary School, Fatima Khalid al-Kuwari from First Al Bayan Girls Primary



School, Maitha Ali al-Hajri from Al Khwarizmi Primary School for Girls, Sabah Bakhit al-Nuaimi from Qatar Academy - Al Khor Branch, and Rawda Saud al-Hammadi from First Al Bayan Girls Primary School.

The winners of the Education Excellence Award (Gold Medal) for primary school students, were Tamim Nader al-Odayani from Ahmed Mansour Primary School for Boys, Sarah Omair al-Hajri from Al Khwarizmi Primary School for Girls, Al Jouri Hassan al-Qahtani from Al Nahda Primary School for Girls, Ali Fahad al-Sulaiti from Tariq bin Ziyad Primary School, Sultan Hassan Ali al-Kaabi from Awfaz International School - Al Gharafa Branch, Al Jawhara Abdullah al-Yami from Al Khansa Primary School for Girls, Jassim Hamad alMudhahka from Qatar Academy - Al Khor Branch, Aisha Adnan Mohammed al-Emadi from Al Khansa Primary School for Girls, and Tamadur Bandar al-Shammari from Umm Salal Mohammed Primary School for Girls.

As for the Education Excellence Award for preparatory school students, the Platinum Medal was awarded to Ali Hassan al-Kaabi from Awfaz International School, Dima Abdulaziz al-Marri from Doha International Academy - Al Waab Branch, Ali Saeed Dahman from Hamza Bin Abdul Muttalib Preparatory School for Boys, Rasil Thanyan al-Mohannadi from Maria Al Qibtiyya School for Girls, Mohammed Bandar al-Shamri from Mohammed bin Jassim Preparatory School for Boys, and Maryam Mohammed al-Darham from Al Wakra Preparatory School for Girls.

The Gold Medal in the category of scientific excellence for preparatory school students was awarded to Maria Jassim al-Sumaiti from Sherborne Qatar School for Girls, Fatima Abdulaziz al-Mudhahka from Al Dhaayen Primary and Preparatory School for Girls, Haya Ahmed al-Alawi

from Al Bayan Preparatory School for Girls, Mubarak Mohammed al-Sulaiti from Al Andalus Preparatory School for Boys, Sarah Hassan al-Otaibi from Rufaida bint Kaab Preparatory School for Girls, Abdulrahman Ali al-Dabbagh from Qatar Academy - Doha.

The winners of Platinum Medal in Education Excellence Award for Secondary school students are: Abdulrahman Ali Al Khanji from Al Jazeera Academy, Sarah Ni'ma Al Ni'ma from Al Bayan Secondary School for Girls, Ali Jouri Khalifa Mohammed Jassim al-Thani from Qatar Academy for Science and Technology, and Saad Fahd al-Qahtani from Qatar Academy Doha.

In the Gold Medal category for high school students, the winners are Alanoud Ali al-Jalahma from Qatar Technical Secondary School for Girls, Rawda Mubarak Mohammed from Al Eman Secondary School for Girls, Haya Salem al-Sharafi from Umm Ayman Secondary School for Girls, and Najood Arhamah al-Kuwari from Al Bayan Secondary School for Girls.

The Platinum Medal in Education Excellence Award for Outstanding University Students went to Muneerah Amir Abdullah al-Baker from Carnegie Mellon University Qatar, Haya Nasr al-Jehani from Qatar University, Issa Mohammed al-Manaei from Ahmed Bin Mohammed Military College, and Dana Saad al-Kaabi from Qatar University.

The Gold Medal winners in the Outstanding University Student category included Abdullah Ahmed al-Sayed al-Sada from Qatar University, Yusuf Abdulrahman al-Mahmoud from Ahmed Bin Mohammed Military College, Jarallah Hamad al-Ghafari al-Marri from Ahmed Bin Mohammed Military College, Ali Issa al-Muhyath from Community College, Nasser Hamad al-Jabri from Ahmed Bin Mohammed Military College, Mohammed Thamer Mohammed Jaber al-Thani from Qatar University, Saud Salah al-Abdullah from Ahmed Bin Mohammed Military College, Ahmed Yusuf Abdullah from Ahmed Bin Mohammed Military College, Fatima Mahna al-Sulaiti from Qatar University, Abdullah Faleh al-Hajiri from Ahmed Bin Mohammed Military College, Mohammed Fahd al-Amadi from Qatar University, and Kaltham Yusuf al-Fakhro from Virginia Commonwealth University Qatar.

Other Gold Medal winners for Outstanding University Students were Abdulaziz Abdullah Shafi from Ahmed Bin Mohammed Military College, Fatima Badr al-Siddiqi from Virginia Commonwealth University Qatar, Majri Hizam al-Marri from

Ahmed Bin Mohammed Military College, Jaber Mohammed al-Mulla from University of Liverpool UK, Tamim Ali al-Kurbi from Ahmed Bin Mohammed Military College, Musalam Abdullah al-Nabit from Ahmed Bin Mohammed Military College, Amina Mohammed al-Manaei from Qatar University, Bakhit Ali Bakhit from Ahmed Bin Mohammed Military College, Mohammed Ahmed al-Abdullah from Ahmed Bin Mohammed Military College, Mansour Ajab al-Qahtani from Police Academy, and Mohammed Amer al-Jabri from Ahmed Bin Mohammed Military College.

The Gold Medal for Distinguished Scientific Research was awarded to Amina Amir al-Kaabi for her research titled "Designing Agricultural Technology Powered by Artificial Intelligence to Control Plant's Need for Essential Elements, from Al Kaaban Secondary School for Girls.

The winners of the Distinguished Teacher Award were (for Primary Stage) Moza Saeed al-Muraikhi from Al Khawarizmi Primary School for Girls, and (for Secondary Stage) Mariam Ali Luthen from Zubaida Secondary School for Girls and Aisha Hamad al-Kuwari from Al Risalah Secondary School for Girls.

The recipient of the Master's Degree Excellence Award in the Scientific Field was Khaled Amir al-Naimi from McGill University Canada, and in Literary Field, Abdulrahman Abdulaziz Mohammed from Qatar University.

The winners of Doctoral Degree Excellence Award in Scientific Field were Dr Abdulaziz Falah al-Dosari from Qatar University, and in Literary Field Dr Ali Shafi al-Hajri from Qatar University and Dr Mashal Jaber Mohammed Jaber al-Thani from Hamad Bin Khalifa University.

The winners of the Distinguished School Award were Mus'ab Bin Omair Secondary School for Boys, led by director Dakhil Salem al-Marri, and Umm Ayman Secondary School for Girls, led by director Al Jazi Saleh al-Qathani.

The Education Excellence Award, under the patronage of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, aims to honour and celebrate the country's top achievers in science, enhance the concept of excellence, and promote positive attitudes towards knowledge, scientific research, and innovation.

The award encourages students, researchers, and educational institutions to adopt the highest standards in their fields.

The MoEHE announced that electronic registration for the 18th Education Excellence Award opened in October. - QNA

Seven falcons qualify for final rounds of Haddad Al Tahadi

The competitions of the Haddad Al Tahadi championship continued as part of the activities of the Qatar Interna-



tional Falconry and Hunting Festival (Marmi 2025).

The lack of clear visibility, according to an official statement from Marmi organisers, led to the postponement of the competition of some groups in the Al Tala'a championship at the festival.

Marmi 2025, organised by the Al Gannas Qatari Society under the patronage HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani and supported by the Sports and Social Activities Support Fund (Daam), runs until February 1, featuring extensive

participation across various competitions with the participation of more than 2,000 falconers in various categories.

Marmi Festival chairman Metaib Mubarak al-Qahtani crowned the winning team that qualified for the final.

Seven contestants qualified for the final of Haddad Al Tahadi category.

Haddad Al Tahaddi Committee head Shawi al-Kaabi said the competitions of the last round of the tournament were characterised by

strong performance and a spirit of challenge.

Chairman of the Al Tala'a Committee Mohammed Mubarak al-Ali said that the committee's decision to postpone some competitions came due to high wind speed accompanied by dust.

The organising committee of the Marmi 2025 has announced the start of the shooting championships.

The shooting championship for juniors (14-21 years) will be held on January 11 at 9am.