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GULF TIMES   0 668039 136499 **WEDNESDAY Vol. XXXXVI No. 13312**
 March 12, 2025
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RAMADAN THOUGHT

And certainly, We shall test you with something of fear, hunger, loss of wealth, lives and fruits, but give glad tidings to As-Sabirun (the patient). (Qur'an 2: 155)

Prayer times

Fajr...4.30; Zuhr...11.44; Asr...3.08; Maghrib...5.44; Isha...7.14

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Amir holds Iftar banquet for officers of Armed Forces, Ministry of Interior



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani hosted yesterday at Lusail Palace an Iftar banquet in honour of commanders and ranking officers of the Armed Forces, the Ministry of Interior, and the various security apparatus of the state, on the occasion of the holy month of Ramadan. The banquet was attended by His Highness the Personal Representative of the Amir Sheikh Jassim bin Hamad al-Thani along with a number of Sheikhs, Ministers, and senior officials. (QNA) **Page 3**



80 Pakistan train passengers freed

Pakistani troops freed 80 train passengers taken hostage yesterday, with hundreds more still being held in an ongoing siege. Security sources said that heavy gunfire was ongoing between security forces and the militants. Gunmen forced the train to a halt in a remote, mountainous area of Balochistan province, in an assault that was immediately claimed by the Baloch Liberation Army. **Page 11**

No talks; do what you want, Iran tells Trump



President Masoud Pezeshkian said Iran would not negotiate with the US while being threatened, telling President Donald Trump to "do whatever the hell you want", Iranian state media reported yesterday. Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said on Saturday that Tehran would not be bullied into negotiations, a day after Trump said he had sent a letter urging Iran to engage in talks on a new nuclear deal. **Page 7**

Captain arrested in UK ship crash

British police yesterday arrested on suspicion of manslaughter the captain of a ship that crashed into a tanker in the North Sea, sparking a massive blaze and leaving one crew member missing, presumed dead. The UK Coastguard, which led the operation, rescued 36 people on Monday. **Page 9**

Ukraine accepts 30-day Russia ceasefire plan

Rubio says he will present offer to Moscow

Reuters Jeddah

The United States agreed yesterday to resume military aid and intelligence sharing with Ukraine immediately after talks in Saudi Arabia in which Kyiv voiced readiness to accept a US proposal for a 30-day ceasefire in its conflict with Russia, the countries said in a joint statement.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said he would now take the offer to the Russians, and that the ball is now in Moscow's court.

"The President wanted this war to end yesterday... So our hope is that the Russians will answer 'yes' as quickly as possible, so we can get to the second phase of this, which is real negotiations," Rubio told reporters, referring to US President Donald



US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, US National Security Adviser Mike Waltz, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha and Ukrainian Head of Presidential Office Andriy Yermak hold a meeting in the presence of Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan and National Security Adviser Mosaad bin Mohammed al-Aiban, in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, yesterday.

Trump, after the statement was issued.

Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelensky, who was in Saudi Arabia but did not participate in the talks, said the ceasefire was a "positive proposal," that covers the frontline in the conflict, not just fighting by air and sea.

The two sides also said Washington and Kyiv agreed to conclude as soon as possible a comprehensive agreement for developing Ukraine's critical

mineral resources, a deal that has been in the works for weeks and was thrown into limbo by an acrimonious White House meeting between Trump and Zelensky last week.

Zelensky said the two countries would work to finalise the minerals agreement.

A top aide to Zelensky said options for security guarantees to Ukraine were discussed with US officials. The aide did not detail the options.

Gaza ceasefire talks begin in Doha: Hamas

AFP Cairo

A senior Hamas official said that a fresh round of Gaza ceasefire talks began yesterday in the Qatari capital Doha, with the Palestinian resistance movement approaching the negotiations "positively and responsibly".

"A new round of ceasefire negotiations began today," Abdul Rahman Shadid said in a statement. "Our movement is dealing with these negotiations positively and responsibly."

Israel has also sent a team of negotiators for talks aimed at extending the fragile ceasefire in Gaza, but has so far not commented on the talks.

"We hope that the current round of negotiations leads to tangible progress toward beginning the second phase," Shadid said.

He also expressed hope that US Middle East envoy Steve Witkoff would help "initiate negotiations for the second phase of the ceasefire agreement".

"The US administration bears responsibility due to its unwaver-



Palestinians push a vehicle carrying a water tank past destroyed buildings in Jabalia city in the northern Gaza Strip yesterday.

ing support for the occupying (Israeli) government."

The first 42-day phase of the truce deal expired in early March without agreement on subsequent stages meant to secure a lasting end to the war.

There are differing views on how to proceed, with Hamas seeking immediate negotiations for the next phase, while Israel wants to extend the first phase.

Ahead of the current round of talks, Israel halted the supply of electricity to Gaza's only desalination plant.

Qatar's natural gas output to reach 244bcm in 2030: GECF

By Pratap John Business Editor

Qatar's natural gas production is expected to reach 244bcm in 2030 and grow to 300bcm by 2050, Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF) has said in its Global Gas Outlook 2050.

The focus on expansion and sustainability reflects Qatar's strategic approach to energy development, balancing growth with responsible resource management, Doha-

headquartered GECF said in its 'Global Gas Outlook 2050', which was released here on Monday.

Qatar's natural gas demand is projected to grow by 22bcm, reaching 71bcm by 2050, with an annual growth rate of 1.4%.

Expanding LNG export production capacity and energy sector-related needs primarily drive this increase, GECF said.

Qatar's production stood at 169bcm in 2023, adding 4bcm primarily from the Barzan project, GECF noted.

Qatar is also diversifying its gas use by investing in fertiliser production and low-carbon gas-based solutions, including the Ammonia-7 blue ammonia project, expected to begin operations in 2026

According to GECF, Qatar's strategy focuses on expanding its LNG capacity, with gas production projected to reach 300bcm by 2050. This significant growth requires massive investments toward the North Field Expansion Project, the world's largest natural gas reserve.

These efforts aim to solidify Qatar's position as a leading LNG exporter to Asia and Europe, strengthen its energy security, and align with global energy transition goals. Qatar's stable investment environment, strengthened by long-term contracts and established market access, further

supports its growth as a reliable supplier in global energy markets.

Qatar is also diversifying its gas use by investing in fertiliser production and low-carbon gas-based solutions, including the Ammonia-7 blue ammonia project, expected to begin operations in 2026.

However, gas demand in power generation is expected to see only modest growth, GECF noted.

Qatar aims to install 4GW of large-scale solar PV capacity by 2030, reflecting its commitment to renewable energy.

GECF noted the Middle East's long-term average annual growth rate is projected to reach 3% by 2050, reflecting a moderate slowdown compared to the historical average of 3.7% between 1996 and 2023.

This deceleration is influenced by the maturing economies of key oil and gas exporters, including Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, which are expected to collectively account for over 55% of the region's GDP through mid-century. **Business Page 1 To Page 6**

Hamad Trauma Centre gets WHO designation

Hamad Medical Corporation's (HMC) Hamad Trauma Centre has been designated as a World Health Organisation (WHO) Collaborating Centre on Trauma. This recognition sees the Hamad Trauma Centre become the third WHO Collaborating Centre at HMC, joining the WHO Collaborating Centre for Treating Tobacco Dependence (HMC's Tobacco Control Centre), and the WHO Collaborating Centre for Healthy Ageing and Dementia (HMC's Department of Geriatrics and Long-Term Care).



Dr Hassan al-Thani



Mohammed bin Khalifa al-Suwaidi

Established in 2007 at Hamad General Hospital as a Level 1 Trauma Centre based on the classification of the American College of Surgeons' Committee on Trauma, the Hamad Trauma Centre has evolved into a leading institution and the anchor of Qatar's national Trauma System.

Since 2014, HMC's Trauma System has held Trauma Distinction accreditation from Accreditation Canada International, the international accrediting body for trauma systems. Mohammed bin Khalifa al-Suwaidi, managing director of HMC, stated: "The designation of the Hamad Trauma Centre as an official WHO Collaborating Centre on Trauma is a testament to the excellence of HMC in the field of trauma care. This prestigious recognition

underscores our commitment to advancing trauma research, education, and clinical excellence, not only in Qatar but across the region and beyond.

Through this collaboration, we will continue to drive innovation, enhance patient outcomes, and contribute to the advancement of global trauma care."

The WHO Collaborating Centre on Trauma at HMC will focus on: Supporting WHO in evaluating, upgrading, and strengthening trauma referral pathways; assisting WHO in developing and disseminating training, educational tools, and standards for trauma management and contributing to WHO's efforts to establish a global community of practice on trauma care.

Dr Hassan al-Thani, head of Trauma and Vascular Services at

HMC, emphasised: "The designation as a WHO Collaborating Centre on Trauma is a milestone achievement for trauma care in the region.

This recognition will enable us to further strengthen trauma system leadership in the Eastern Mediterranean Region fostering an educational environment that equips healthcare professionals with essential leadership and management skills to build and lead trauma systems. Moreover, it will serve as a hub for multi-institutional and transnational collaboration in critical areas such as trauma systems credentialing, quality improvement, patient safety, injury surveillance, multi-institutional clinical research, and trauma care training, not only within the EMRO region but beyond."

Over 2mn gallons of accumulated rainwater removed in 36 hours

QNA
Doha

The Joint Committee for Rain Emergencies at the Ministry of Municipality has intensified its efforts to remove rainwater accumulations across the country. Specialised teams successfully extracted over 2.1mn gallons of water within 36 continuous hours, ensuring swift intervention to mitigate disruptions.

Teams from various municipalities, the Public Works Authority, and security agencies at the Ministry of Interior collaborated in the operations, aiming for a rapid and efficient response to water pooling. The water extraction process commenced at 6am on Sunday and continued until 6pm on Monday, involving 406 transfers using 82 tankers and 10 pumps. The operation was overseen by 219 workers who worked around the clock to facilitate smooth traffic flow and minimise the impact of water accumulation. Additionally, the teams

responded to 94 reports received through the Ministry of Municipality's unified call centre (184). Each report was promptly assessed and referred to the relevant authorities, ensuring swift action in record time. The committee utilises an advanced reporting mechanism through its main operations room at the unified call centre, in addition to receiving alerts via social media platforms. This approach enhances response speed and ensures that emergency cases are addressed with high efficiency.

on besieging the Palestinian people in Gaza and obstructing the delivery of humanitarian aid, ultimately seek to impose starvation and escalate tensions in the Strip. The ministry underscored the urgent need for the international community to take decisive action to ensure the protection

Qatar, WHO discuss regional co-operation



QNA
Doha

HE the Minister of Public Health, Mansoor bin Ebrahim al-Mahmoud, met with the visiting World Health Organisation (WHO) Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, Dr Hanan Hassan Balkhy. The meeting discussed enhancing co-operation between Qatar and WHO, as well as their joint action to support the countries of the region.

During the meeting, Dr Balkhy introduced the new Regional Strategic Operational Plan

that adapts WHO's 14th Global Programme of Work (GPW 14) to the regional context. To strengthen support to Member States, WHO's Regional Director has also launched flagship initiatives to accelerate progress in implementing the strategic operational plan and achieving the health-related Sustainable Development Goals.

The meeting also witnessed announcing the HMC's Trauma and Emergency Center as WHO Collaborating Center on Trauma, bringing the number of WHO Collaborating Centers in Qatar to four, including Hamad Medical Corporations

(HMC) Department of Geriatrics and Long-Term Care as a WHO Collaborating Center for Healthy Ageing and Dementia, Weill Cornell Medicine-Qatar as a WHO Collaborating Center for Disease Epidemiology Analytics on HIV/Aids and Hepatitis, and HMC's Tobacco Control Center as a WHO Collaborating Center for treating tobacco dependence.

WHO collaborating centres are institutions, which are designated by the Director-General to carry out activities in support of the Organisation's programmes. Currently there are over 800 WHO collaborating centres in over 80 Member States.

Qatar condemns Israeli occupation's electricity cutoff in Gaza

Qatar has strongly condemned the Israeli occupation's decision to cut electricity supplies to the Gaza Strip, describing it as a blatant violation of international humanitarian law. In a statement issued yesterday, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs emphasised that the Israeli occupation's policies, centred

on besieging the Palestinian people in Gaza and obstructing the delivery of humanitarian aid, ultimately seek to impose starvation and escalate tensions in the Strip. The ministry underscored the urgent need for the international community to take decisive action to ensure the protection

of the Palestinian people. The ministry also reaffirmed Qatar's steadfast position in support of the just Palestinian cause and the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, including their right to establish an independent state along the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. (QNA)

Meeting on dangerous animals' ownership law



The second meeting on the enforcement of the law on dangerous animals' ownership has been convened, the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change (MoECC) said yesterday. Representatives from the Police Canine Section at the Ministry of Interior, the Customs Policies Department at the General Authority of Customs, and the Zoo Section at the Ministry of Municipality attended the meeting. The discussions focused on the conditions and regulations related to owning and importing dogs classified as dangerous under the law, ensuring the effective implementation of the relevant regulatory measures. The meeting was a part of a series of co-ordination sessions aimed at ensuring the effective enforcement of the law's provisions and to enhance co-operation among the authorities concerned to achieve a balance between public safety and environmental diversity protection in line with best regulatory practices. The MoECC has urged owners of dogs classified as dangerous and other dangerous animals to complete their registration through the electronic service available on the ministry's website before the deadline, which ends on April 22, 2025. Besides, those who wish to hand over dangerous animals to the authorities concerned are requested to contact the ministry's hotline at 16066.

New book on environmental media launched

The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change has released a new book titled *Environmental Media and the Necessity of Development*. The official launch will be at the the Doha International Book Fair, taking place from May 8-17, 2025.

The book discusses the importance of media in addressing environmental issues and highlights the role of environmental media in raising awareness and promoting sustainability.

Authored by Ahmed Hussein al-Mutawa, the book explores the history and evolution of media in Qatar.

It also stresses the crucial role that both traditional and modern media should play in focusing on environmental issues to achieve sustainable development goals.

The author differentiates between the general media coverage of environmental topics and the



specialised environmental media that delve deeply into such issues. He underscores the importance of having dedicated environmental media, given the increasing local, regional, and global attention to environmental and sustainability matters.

The book highlights the need to establish effective environmental media that actively supports sus-

tainability, emphasising collaboration with initiatives, ideas, and innovations that align with this vision. A dedicated chapter explores environmental issues relevant to the Gulf region and the Arab countries, focusing on the challenges these nations face and the importance of developing innovative solutions to overcome them. This aspect adds significant value to the book in the broader context of strengthening environmental media efforts.

Al-Mutawa stresses the essential role of environmental media in advocating for environmental rights, whether through news coverage or awareness programmes. He highlights the importance of professional investigative journalism that addresses the human right to a healthy environment and contributes to raising public awareness about environmental issues.

Staffers of Dar Al Kutub Al Qatariya felicitated

HE the Minister of Culture Sheikh Abdulrahman bin Hamad al-Thani honoured the directors and staffers of the Dar Al Kutub Al Qatariya (Qatari Books House) who have been working there since its inception in 1962 until today. The honouring ceremony was held at the premises of the house in recognition of staffers' efforts in advancing the house.

Director General of Dar Al Kutub Al Qatariya, Ibrahim Al Buhashem al-Sayed, stated that the honorees had evident decades-long contri-

butions in advancing the house, who spent plenty of years in promoting it, stressing that honouring them by HE the Minister of Culture is intended to encourage those who are in charge of this house to proceed with giving and assiduousness.

The revamped house was inaugurated last week following an overall repair, during which it maintained its historic nature, with the addition of technological upgradation, underscoring the keenness to preserve the cultural

legacy of Qatar. By and large, the house is considered the oldest national library in the Arab Gulf states and one of the cultural institutions that has shouldered numerous cultural responsibilities since its establishment in 1962.

It has not merely served as a repository for books or a public library but has also functioned as a beacon of culture and a civilisational centre in the country, establishing its standing as the oldest book house in the Gulf region. (QNA)

GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY QATAR

20
CELEBRATING TWO DECADES IN QATAR

Carol Becker

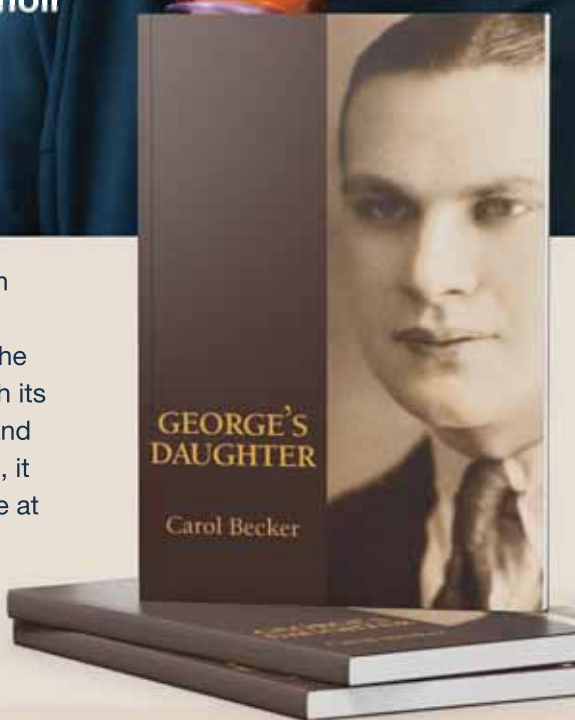
Distinguished Scholar-in-Residence
Georgetown University in Qatar

Talks about her new memoir

George's Daughter

George's Daughter, shifts from loss in death to the fractures that unfold in life, offering another perspective on the daughter-parent relationship. Through its exploration of devotion, resistance, and the weight of unspoken expectations, it reveals how finding oneself can come at the cost of losing another.

Carol Becker is Professor of the Arts and Dean Emerita of Columbia University School of the Arts.



Moderated by



Photo Credit: Alex von Tunzelmann

Kamila Shamsie

Inaugural Writer-in-Residence
Georgetown University in Qatar

Sunday, March 16
1:00 – 2:00 PM
Library, Georgetown University in Qatar



Amir holds Iftar banquet for officers of Armed Forces, Ministry of Interior



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani hosted yesterday at Lusail Palace an Iftar banquet in honour of commanders and ranking officers of the Armed Forces, the Ministry of Interior, and the various security apparatus of the state.

WCM-Q course leverages AI to enhance healthcare outcomes

Healthcare professionals from across the region gathered for a two-day course delivered by Weill Cornell Medicine-Qatar (WCM-Q) on ways to integrate advanced AI technologies into the healthcare system to improve patient outcomes.

The course featured a series of presentations, group discussions and practical workshops on the history of AI and machine learning, fundamental principles of the technologies, current and future applications for AI in healthcare, and challenges and ethical considerations related to using AI in healthcare settings.

There were also sessions on how to design healthcare research studies that utilise AI, the practical use of large language models to solve real-world problems and analyse data, and guidance on how to build a generative AI co-pilot – essentially a type of AI-powered virtual



Participants at the workshop.

assistant that helps users navigate complex tasks. The second day of the event featured presentations and practical workshops led by renowned AI expert and guest speaker Dr Faisal Farooq, senior director of artificial intelligence at the high-profile US image sharing

and social media platform Pinterest. Co-ordinated by the Division of Continuing Professional Development at WCM-Q, the workshop was directed and led by a team of highly experienced computer scientists from WCM-Q's AI Centre for Precision Health: Dr Arfan

Ahmed, assistant professor of research in population health sciences; Dr Alaa Abd-Alrazaq, assistant professor of research in population health sciences; Dr Rawan al-Saad, postdoctoral associate, and Ms Sarah Aziz, research specialist. Dr Ahmed said: "There is huge poten-

tial for advances in AI and machine learning to revolutionise healthcare and radically improve patient outcomes in many different ways, from offering predictive analytics, personalised medicine, efficient diagnosis and treatment methods, to optimising day-to-day clinical

workflows." "This course provides healthcare professionals with practical, hands-on guidance on how to successfully implement these new technologies to improve patient care while also safeguarding patient safety, privacy and other vital ethical considerations," he added.

Design Doha launches 'Marchitecture' to foster design, heritage dialogue

QNA
Doha

The biennial Design Doha announced the launch of Marchitecture 2025, an event running until March 25, aimed at fostering discussions that encourage idea-sharing and providing a platform for meaningful dialogue on design, heritage, and cultural sustainability.

Organised biennially by Qatar Museums, the event in Doha seeks to elevate the culture of design in the Middle East and North Africa, showcasing the vibrancy of Qatar's design scene on the global stage.

This year's Marchitecture 2025, themed 'Qatar's Cultural Treasures', highlights Qatar Museums' two-decade-long efforts to preserve the nation's heritage, share its stories with the public, and nurture innovation and creativity.

The programme includes vis-

its to museums, heritage sites, public art installations, creative incubators, and art collections, offering a unique opportunity to explore key milestones and achievements that have shaped Qatar's cultural landscape.

The schedule features guided tours throughout March to renowned museums, iconic heritage buildings, and contemporary creative spaces, as well as special film screenings showcasing Qatar Museums' cultural and historical contributions.

Additionally, the programme includes Suhoor evenings and dinner gatherings at selected venues, creating opportunities for networking within the design community in a relaxed, interactive atmosphere that blends cultural exploration with Ramadan traditions.

Highlights include a tour at the Museum of Islamic Art (MIA) Park to view public art installations, including "I Live Under Your Sky Too" by

Shilpa Gupta and "7" by Richard Serra. On Tuesday, March 18, participants can explore M7 and Liwan Design Studios and Labs, with an outdoor cinema screening following.

The next evening features a visit to Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art and "Al Mujadila: A Center and Mosque for Women."

Further events include a tour of the 3-2-1 Qatar Olympic and Sports Museum on Sunday, March 23, and a visit to the Al Zubarah Archaeological Site on Tuesday, March 25.

Marchitecture 2025 offers participants a dynamic journey through Qatar's vibrant design scene, uncovering intersections where cultural heritage preservation and creative innovation converge, shaping the architectural environment of the nation.

Notably, the programme was first launched in 2018 under the Qatar Museums initiative "Culture Pass."



VCUarts Qatar, Snap Inc empower next generation of AR talent

Dedicated to empowering the next generation of Augmented Reality (AR) innovators, Snap Inc teamed up with Virginia Commonwealth University School of Arts Qatar (VCUarts Qatar) to host an exclusive AR workshop for 50 Foundation year and Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) students at the recent Web Summit Qatar.

The 'Building a Snapchat Lens, Building Your Career', led by Joseph Darko, global head, AR Developer Relations, Snap Inc, was designed to showcase both the creative and

technical potential of AR technology.

Snap taught students how to build their own Snapchat Lens, while also introducing them to practical strategies for succeeding in the AR developer community.

"Augmented Reality is the next frontier in human connection, and the workshop showcased how AR can amplify creativity, drive innovation across industries, and create tangible career opportunities for aspiring developers," Darko said. Students who attended the workshop left with a deeper un-

derstanding of how AR is already reshaping industries like fashion, sports, tourism, culture and AI – sectors in which Snap is leading the charge in leveraging AR for branding and consumer engagement.

Lejla Niksic, director of strategic engagement at VCUarts Qatar, added: "This collaboration with Snap empowers our students to explore innovative technologies like AR, allowing them to bridge the gap between creativity and the rapidly evolving digital landscape, ensuring they are equipped to lead in a future driven by innovation."

LG unveils large capacity multi-door refrigerators

LG Electronics, has unveiled its latest range of large capacity multi-door refrigerators, which combine enhanced storage, cutting-edge technology, energy efficiency, and modern aesthetics, a statement said.

The new models GR-B34FFCDB and GR-X34FFCAB feature a spacious bottom-mount freezer, allowing users to keep frequently accessed fresh foods at eye level. The GR-X34FFCAB is equipped with InstaView Door-in-Door Technology that allows users to knock twice on the glass panel to see inside without opening the door. This reduces cold air loss significantly, ensuring energy savings while maintaining the freshness of stored food.

The GR-X34FFCAB also has smart features, including Wi-Fi connectivity and compatibility with LG's ThinQ App, enabling users to control and monitor their refrigerator remotely.

Both models also feature LG's Linear Cooling Technology, which keeps temperature fluctuations within $\pm 0.5^{\circ}\text{C}$, significantly extending food preservation. In addition, DoorCooling+ Technology provides faster and more even cooling throughout the refrigerator.

Another standout feature is the Hygiene Fresh+ System, which uses a multi-layered filter to eliminate bacteria, deodorise the interior, and keep food items hygienically stored. With a spacious layout and flexible storage options, the refrigerators can easily accommodate large items, making them ideal for busy families.



Speaking about the launch, C V Rappai, director and CEO of Video Home & Electronic Centre, said: "LG has always been at the forefront of innovation, and the new French Door refrigerators continue that legacy. We are proud to introduce these cutting-edge models to the Qatari market, catering to the needs of families seeking both functionality and aesthetic appeal in their kitchens." These refrigerators

feature LG's advanced Inverter Linear Compressor, which minimises noise, reduces energy consumption, and comes with a 10-year warranty. The GR-B34FFCDB and GR-X34FFCAB are now available at all LG Brand Shops, Jumbo Electronics stores & all leading hypermarkets and specialty electronics stores in Qatar. Customers have the option to buy online thru www.jumbosouq.com and other popular websites.

MSDF organises 'Inspirational Women of Qatar' talk session

The Ministry of Social Development and Family (MSDF), represented by the Family Development Department, in co-operation with the Family Counseling Center 'Wifaq', organised a dialogue session entitled 'Inspiring Women of Qatar', coinciding with International Women's Day. Director of the Family Development Department at the MSDF Dhabya al-Meqbali said that this event affirms the MSDF's keenness to support and empower women in various fields. She noted that it aims to build a network of support and encouragement among women, in addition to highlighting the role of Qatari women in achieving sustainable development and contributing effectively to the progress of society.

Al-Meqbali pointed out that such events play an important role in raising awareness of women's issues, and open the way for building social networks among women, which enhances opportunities for exchanging experiences due to the diversity of areas of participation.

The Director of the Family Development Department at the MSDF emphasised that the event is an incentive for ambitious young women to achieve their goals, in addition to shedding light on the challenges facing women in various fields and innovative solutions to address them, as well as enhancing the role of women in the family and profession. The dialogue session brought together a group of inspiring female figures in Qatar, who talked about their achievements and successful experiences in various fields. The session provided the women in attendance with the opportunity to benefit from the experiences of inspiring women in Qatari society, which contributes to enhancing the role of women in all aspects of social and economic life.

The session reviewed three main axes. The first was on Qatari Women: the journey of success and challenges, the second was on women and the future: building future generations, and the third focused on the balance between work and personal life. During the session, the participants talked about their experiences and the challenges they faced during their professional careers and how they overcame them, in addition to explaining how women can play a fundamental role in educating and guiding future generations, especially young women. (QNA)

'Liwan For Good' special charity event to be held today

Liwan Design Studios and Labs announced that it will hold 'Liwan For Good', a special charity event taking place during the holy month of Ramadan today.

The venue will transform into a magical bazaar setting where visitors can connect with local charities, businesses, and creatives.

"Liwan For Good embodies the spirit of Ramadan by bringing our community together in the act of giving," director of Liwan Design Studios and Labs, Aisha bint Nasser al-Sowaidi, said, adding, "as we enter the third year of this initiative, we are proud to see how it has grown into a meaningful tradition that celebrates both creativity and compassion. We welcome everyone to join us and be part of this special event dedicated to making a difference."

Al-Sowaidi said the event exemplifies Liwan's dedication to combining artistic excellence

with social impact, providing a platform for charitable organisations to raise awareness about their causes. Visitors can give back to local aid organisations such as the Ministry of Social Development and Family, where local families in need will sell homemade products, including food, crafts, and textiles under the umbrella of "homegrown". Qatar Charity will collect a portion of proceeds from sales at the event to be donated to their Palestine fundraiser, while Education Above All will have students selling handmade objects with proceeds supporting their initiatives.

Within the enchanting atmosphere of a nighttime bazaar, visitors can discover offerings from local businesses and creatives while supporting charitable causes. The event will feature several engaging workshops including candle-making by Candeel and ceramic painting by Ceramic Cube. Liwan's own

resident Norman Dipo will offer a special workshop from the Prototype Lab, while Design Doha will also host creative activities.

The evening will showcase local creatives and businesses including Venus Karma, The Bold Project, Cards Cult, Gloss N Glam, Fkrah, Cats Etc, Rebab Abdulla, Kaltham Pavillion Jewellery, Moamen Ghanem, Munannama Press, Infinite Thought, The Style Vault, and others. Food and beverages will be available from vendors including The Lemonade Guy, Red Tiger, Dream Cream, and Irtishar.

Guests will have opportunities to explore Liwan's studios, interact with members and residents, and learn about their creative processes, all while contributing to important social initiatives during this season of giving.

Liwan For Good will take place today from 20:30 to 23:30 and entry will be free of charge. (QNA)

Al-Misnad meets Palestinian education minister



HE the Minister of State for International Co-operation Maryam bint Ali bin Nasser al-Misnad met yesterday with the visiting Minister of Education and Higher Education of State of Palestine Dr Amjad Barham. During the meeting, the two sides discussed bilateral relations and the developments in the Gaza Strip and the occupied Palestinian territories. They also discussed ways to address the challenges facing the education sector in Palestine. (QNA)

EAA Foundation, Awqaf honour outstanding students in Qatar

Academic excellence of Qatar Scholarship Programme recipients celebrated

The Education Above All (EAA) Foundation and the General Directorate of Endowments at the Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs celebrated the academic achievements of recipients of the Qatar Scholarship Programme, during a ceremony held on the occasion.

The event witnessed the support of over 100 new scholarship recipients, honouring of 44 graduates, in addition to celebrating 57 students who excelled academically during the 2024-25 academic year. The event also highlighted achievements of 14 students from Gaza who received the scholarship in 2024 and achieved outstanding academic performance in the first semester.

The ceremony drew over 500 participants, including students, parents, and faculty members, in addition to representatives from educational and governmental institutions and partner organisations.

The ceremony was also at-



tended by Director-General of the General Directorate of Endowments Eng Hassan bin Abdullah al-Marzouqi, Acting CEO of the EAA Foundation Mohammed al-Kubaisi, and a number of prominent figures, reflecting the level of support and co-operation enjoyed by the programme.

In his speech during the ceremony, Eng Hassan bin Abdullah al-Marzouqi stated: "Through its Endowment Fund for Scientific

and Cultural Development, educational opportunities are offered across various fields, underscoring our commitment to fostering knowledge and innovation. Our university scholarship project illustrates our dedication to education as the cornerstone of societal advancement, inspired by the historical role of endowments in supporting scholars."

Talal al-Hothal, director of the Al Fakhoora Programme, ex-

pressed his enthusiasm about the ongoing success of the Qatar Scholarship Programme in Qatar: "Tonight, we not only celebrate the academic achievements of our scholars, but also their resilience in overcoming challenges and determination to reach their educational goals. Each recipient represents a vital thread in the fabric of Qatar's future. This programme, in alignment with Qatar Vision 2030, is a testament to our com-

mitment to transforming education and empowering the youth of Qatar."

The Qatar Scholarship Programme in Qatar, launched in 2018 with support from the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs – General Administration of Awqaf, is implemented by EAA through its Al Fakhoora programme. It supports youth aged 17 to 25 who have spent most of their formative years in Qatar, providing them

with needs-based scholarships to attend prominent local universities, including Al Rayan International University College, Doha Institute, Global Studies Institute, Hamad Bin Khalifa University, Lusail University, Oryx Universal College, Qatar Finance and Business Academy, Qatar Foundation Universities, Qatar University, University of Calgary in Qatar, and University of Doha for Science and Technology. (QNA)

Qatar Charity extends food aid to Tunisia, Mali

Qatar Charity continues to distribute food aid to needy families in Tunisia and Mali, including orphans and individuals with special needs, as part of its Ramadan "Giving Lives On" campaign.

This initiative reflects the values of social solidarity and international co-operation, and involves various humanitarian projects aimed at the most vulnerable groups worldwide.

In Tunisia, through a strategic partnership with local authorities and official entities,

Qatar Charity has distributed 500 food baskets in Ben Arous Governorate, containing general food items. In Mali, Qatar Charity distributed approximately 813 food baskets as part of its "Fasting Breakfast" project, benefiting 4,065 individuals from orphan families, needy families, and individuals with special needs in Bamako and its suburbs. This effort contributes to alleviating their living burdens and enhancing the spirit of social solidarity. This initiative underscores Qatar Charity's

ongoing commitment to meeting the needs of its sponsored groups and mitigating their suffering, particularly with the advent of the holy month of Ramadan.

Qatar Charity launched its Ramadan "Giving Lives On" campaign for the current season 1446 AH / 2025 AD, which is expected to be implemented with the support of benevolent individuals in 40 countries worldwide, including Qatar, targeting 4.5mm needy beneficiaries. (QNA)



Qatari students get introduced to HBKU's engineering programmes

Hamad Bin Khalifa University (HBKU) yesterday held the inaugural Engineering Information Day for Qatari Students at the Education City.

The event was intended to introduce Qatari high school students and their parents to an array of scholarship and sponsorship opportunities relevant to the College of Science and Engineering's (CSE) Bachelor of Science programmes covering chemical engineering, mechanical engineering, computer engineering, and electrical engineering.

The proceedings commenced with welcome remarks from Vice-President for Student Affairs at

HBKU, Dr Maryam Hamad al-Mannai, followed by an overview of the admissions procedure for sponsorship and scholarships.

Guest speakers from the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Education and Higher Education, and QatarEnergy outlined their engagement in the application process and fielded questions from the audience.

In addition, the day featured presentations from course leads for the CSE's engineering programmes, as well as key insights and experiences from alumni and current sponsored students. A resource fair and supporting booths provided further opportunities for prospective students and parents

to obtain information and network with organisers, contributors, and fellow attendees.

The event wound up with Dr al-Mannai saying, "Today was a further reflection of our university's commitment to unlocking Qatar's full potential through enriching academic experiences and a vibrant research ecosystem. This increasingly applies to Qatari engineering students embarking upon undergraduate journeys in a discipline crucial to the achievement of Qatar National Vision 2030 and beyond. For many, scholarship and sponsorship opportunities not only provide valuable support for their studies but also influence their entire career trajectories." (QNA)



The Ramadan atmosphere at Katara attracts a large number of visitors daily.

Pregnant women advised to consult doctor before fasting

The Primary Health Care Corporation (PHCC) has emphasised that pregnant women should consult a specialist doctor before deciding to fast during the holy month of Ramadan, especially if they have health conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure, or anaemia.

PHCC dietician Hanan al-Saeed from Al Wakra Health Centre notes that in some cases, fasting may not be recommended.

However, if the health condition is stable, they may be able to fast while following proper dietary guidelines.

During Ramadan, it is crucial for pregnant women to focus on Suhoor, as it is the key to sustaining energy throughout the day.

A balanced Suhoor helps maintain energy levels during fasting hours.

It should include foods rich in proteins, fibre, and healthy fats, such as whole grains (oats or whole wheat bread) to provide long-lasting energy.

Additionally, consuming proteins like eggs, low-fat cheese, and yogurt helps reduce hunger, while fruits and vegetables such as cucumbers, tomatoes, and apples contribute to hydration and fibre intake.

Al-Saeed said that pregnant women should avoid salty foods and pickles to prevent excessive thirst during the day.



Hanan al-Saeed

She also recommends breaking the fast gradually to compensate for the body's nutritional deficits after long hours of fasting.

This can be achieved by dividing Iftar into two parts.

They may start with 1-3 dates and a cup of water or milk, and wait 10-15 minutes before eating the main meal.

They can then eat a meal that is rich in healthy carbohydrates – such as brown rice or potatoes, proteins – such as lean meat, skinless chicken, or fish, and cooked vegetables.

Fatty and fried foods should be avoided to prevent indigestion, heartburn, and unhealthy weight gain.

Hydration is extremely impor-

tant for both mother and baby – make sure to drink 8-10 cups of water between Iftar and Suhoor, and avoid caffeinated beverages like coffee and tea, as they increase fluid loss.

If they experience symptoms such as dizziness, severe headaches, nausea, or reduced foetal movement, al-Saeed cautioned, it is best to break the fast immediately by drinking water and having a light meal, as these symptoms may indicate low blood sugar or dehydration, which can be harmful to both the mother and the baby.

Pregnant women should continue taking prescribed supplements such as iron, calcium, and folic acid at their scheduled times.

They should limit the consumption of sweets and sugary drinks because excessive sugar intake can cause sudden spikes and crashes in blood sugar levels, leading to fatigue.

Heavy desserts may be replaced with healthier alternatives, such as low-fat milk pudding, low-fat yogurt with honey and fruits, or nuts.

Fasting is possible for pregnant women, al-Saeed said, but it requires awareness and special attention.

They should maintain a balanced diet, drink enough fluids, and “listen” to the body.

If they feel extreme fatigue, do not hesitate to break the fast after consulting a doctor.

Ramadan atmosphere at Katara combines spirituality, culture, and entertainment

Katara – the Cultural Village has transformed into an exceptional destination this Ramadan, seamlessly blending spirituality, culture, and entertainment.

Visitors are immersed in a unique Ramadan atmosphere that harmoniously combines tradition and modernity.

Tarawih prayers are held at the Katara Mosque, and the recitation of the Qur'an fills the air with tranquility.

Religious lectures, remembrance sessions, and Qur'an memorisation programmes for children further enhance the atmosphere of faith, reflecting the values of Islam.

Katara celebrates the holy month through a variety of cultural events that showcase Qatari and Arab heritage.

Among these are competitions, including the Katara Nabati and Classical Poetry Competitions on the Night of Power.

Entries are accepted until March 18, and participants can submit their verses – whether in classical or Nabati poetry – by commenting on the competition announcement tweet on Katara's X platform.

Winners will receive prizes, with first place awarded QR5,000, second place QR3,000, and third place QR2,000.

Katara also hosts the Katara Prize for Arabic Poetry, now in its fourth edition, which this year honours Umm Salama Hind bint Abi Umayya al-Makhzoumi, one of the mothers of the Believers and among the earliest converts to Islam.

Other notable events include the Katara Short Story Competition, themed around brotherhood, and the Katara Prize for Qur'an Recitation in its 8th edition, organised under the patronage of the Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs.



Beyond spiritual and cultural activities, Katara offers a range of entertainment and sports events.

These include the Katara Beach Volleyball Championship, the Katara Ramadan Chess Championship (an international event), the Katara Ramadan Fishing Competition for Qatari youth under 16, and the inaugural Katara Ramadan Football Championship for Katara employees.

The Ramadan Village, located in the southern part of Katara, provides a space for shopping and showcasing handicrafts in a charming heritage setting reminiscent of traditional Qatari neighbourhoods.

In collaboration with the Sheikh Abdullah bin Zaid Al Mahmoud Islamic Cultural Centre, Katara is hosting a virtual reality event titled “A Journey to Mecca Through Time” as part of the Katara Tech Forum.

This event runs until March 21 from 8pm to midnight, in the Ramadan Village.

Katara's Library for Arabic Novels in Building 48 hosts literary and intellectual sessions, offering book and knowledge enthusiasts the opportunity to engage with writers, critics, and specialists in literature and creativity.

Katara also continues to produce the beloved series *Tamour and Tamurah*, now in its fifth season.

Firing daily during Ramadan on Qatar TV at 2.45pm, the series – created in co-operation with Alecco – combines entertainment and education, highlighting values and principles in a way that appeals to all family members.

Among the most cherished Ramadan traditions at Katara are the Musaharati and the Iftar Cannon, both of which are revived annually.

The Musaharati adds a special touch to the Ramadan atmosphere, as children and families gather to enjoy this centuries-old heritage experience.



DCICAI officials with former Indian team player Sreesanth (fifth from left) at the fiesta.

DCICAI's 28th annual cricket fiesta concludes

The Doha Chapter of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (DCICAI) has concluded its 28th annual cricket fiesta.

The month-long tournament saw participation of about 300 members, along with their families, friends, and well-wishers.

Former Indian team player Sreesanth was the chief guest.

He shared insightful stories from his career, including his experience playing in the T20 World Cup Finals for India and his earlier league matches

in Qatar, which took place at the same venue. International Cricket Council (ICC) women's umpire Shivani Mishra supported the proceedings.

She also commended the organisers for including women's matches.

The tournament featured more than 120 participants across six men's teams and two women's teams.

In the women's final, Team Brunel won against Team Gant.

Apexa Shah was named the Woman of the Match.

The men's final was won by Morison Qatar against Papa John's.

Morison Qatar captain Mohit R Monga was named the player of the match and the man of the series.

DCICAI past president Gopal Balasubramaniam enlivened the proceedings with his live commentary. Chairperson Kishore Alex and the executive committee thanked all stakeholders for their support.

Special Suhoor menu at Coya

Coya, the Peruvian restaurant located at W Hotel & Residences, is offering a specially crafted menu for Suhoor during Ramadan, a statement said.

“Our team has worked diligently to create an experience that embodies the spirit of Ramadan with a unique menu,” said Coya general manager Saleem Farah.

The Suhoor menu begins with Medjool dates and mint-infused Laban, followed by Coya's signature cuacamole.

Guests can then choose between the Peruvian lamb and lentil soup or the spicy corn and potato soup.

The appetisers include Peruvian bean hummus, crispy and golden prawn tempura maki, chicken and beef cheek empanada, sweetcorn salad, chicken harees croquettes and king fish anticucho marinated in Peruvian spices.

The main course options include



miso chargrilled Chilean seabass rice, grilled baby chicken infused with spices, grilled sea bream, tender braised lamb shank, or mushroom rice.

Complementary sides include

potatoes “bravas” and Peruvian rice.

The desserts comprise pistachio baklava, glazed figs, Peruvian supergrain kiwicha, and pistachio ice cream.

لجنة المناقصات والمزايدات
مشروع توسعة مطار حمد الدولي
Tenders and Auctions Committee
HIA Expansion Project

NOTICE OF INVITATION FOR CONTRACTOR PRE-QUALIFICATION FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF CARGO TERMINAL 2 AT HAMAD INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT (PROJECT NO. HIAEP-0076)

INVITATION TO PRE-QUALIFY

The HIAE Tender Committee wishes to secure a shortlist of competent Contractors for a forthcoming Invitation to Tender for the construction of Cargo Terminal 2 (hereinafter the “Project”) at Hamad International Airport in Doha in the State of Qatar.

As part of this pre-qualification process, the Employer requires interested Contractors to demonstrate capability and experience in delivering similar material handling facilities and logistics facilities with a high-level of automation and interface management with materials handling systems. It is a necessary requirement that Contractors demonstrate relevant experience, capability, understanding and commitment to work with the Employer to achieve outstanding results in the delivery of the Project.

Accordingly, to successfully qualify, Contractors/Joint Ventures are required:

- To possess a Grade A Classification Certificate in Qatar, and
- To have executed a minimum of two (2) projects delivering material handling or logistics distribution facilities more than 100,000 square meters of built-up area in past eight (8) years, and
- To have executed a minimum of two (2) projects having supplied and erected a minimum of 15,000 tonnes of structural steel with a production/erection rate of 1,500 tonnes per month and a minimum of 150,000 cubic meters of concrete with a production/installation rate of 10,000 cubic meters per month in the past five (5) years, and
- To have executed and demonstrated strong capability for delivering a cool chain or similar refrigerated warehousing system within a material handling / logistic distribution facility, and
- To have executed a minimum of one (1) project in the last three (3) years, with a project value exceeding QAR 1.5 billion, and
- To demonstrate that the average workforce (direct employees) of the company exceeds 5,000 for at least three (3) of the previous five (5) years.

THE SCOPE OF THE REQUIREMENT:

Hamad International Airport is expanding its air cargo handling capacity by commissioning the construction of a new fully automated Air Cargo Terminal Facility with multiple levels of floor space totaling circa 260,000 square meters which will house a Material Handling System (by others) with overall handling capacity exceeding 3 million tons of transfer cargo per year. The Project also includes the provision of a 3,200 square meter/10,000ton cooling capacity expansion of the existing Central Utility Plant Facility, and all associated external infrastructure works within the Air Cargo Campus located within the midfield area of Hamad International Airport.

STEP 1 - PRE-QUALIFICATION DOCUMENTS - COLLECTION

Interested Contractors are invited to collect the Pre-Qualification Application Documentation from MATAR - Major Projects Department located at Ras Abu Aboud Road, Hamad International Airport, Doha, State of Qatar between the dates noted below and during the working hours of 9am to 3pm (Sunday to Thursday). Documents will be available for collection upon receipt of a non-refundable cheque payment (cash will not be accepted) in the amount of QAR 30,000 (Qatari Riyals Thirty Thousand only) payable to Qatar Airways.

Start date for document collection: **9 March 2025**

Last date for document collection: **23 March 2025**
(the last date and time will be strictly enforced)

STEP 2 - PRE-QUALIFICATION APPLICATION - SUBMISSION

The **Closing Date** for submitting the Pre-Qualification Application Documentation is **27 March 2025**, not later than 12:00 noon (Local Doha Time), GMT (+3:00) to:

Chairman of Tender Committee
Hamad International Airport Expansion Tender Committee (HIAETC)
Qatar Airways Group Q.C.S.C.
HIAEP Project Office, Ras Abu Aboud Road, Doha, State of Qatar

All enquiries are to be directed to: HIAETC
Telephone No.: +974 4467 9816
E-mail: hiaetc@hiaproject.gov.qa



AlKhatir meets Bosnia's Grand Mufti



HE the Minister of Education and Higher Education Lolwah bint Rashid AlKhatir met on Monday with Head of Muslim Scholars and Grand Mufti of Bosnia and Herzegovina Dr Husein Kavazovic. They discussed issues of common concern and ways to enhance bilateral relations between the two countries in the educational, cultural, and religious fields. - QNA

Qatar's hosting of Web Summit lauded by global startups

International startups have lauded Web Summit Qatar 2025, which concluded last month, attracting more than 25,000 attendees from over 120 countries, a statement said yesterday.

Building on last year's success, the event's second edition featured expanded reach and impact, setting new records particularly in startup participation.

Over 1,520 startups representing diverse industries took part, showcasing their cutting-edge solutions to investors and industry leaders from around the world.

Junaid Wahedna, founder of Wahed, a global fintech company specialising in Islamic investments, highlighted Qatar's supportive ecosystem.

"We had the ability to set up anywhere in the world, but we chose Qatar because of its strong support for fintech, research and Islamic finance," said Wahedna. "The alignment was really beautiful. It was perfect."

Martin Schulze, chief technology officer and co-founder of BlueBox, a German supply chain visibility startup, noted the region's potential.

"The market here offers a lot of opportunities," he said. "The region is quite dynamic, with many young people eager to innovate. I think that is sometimes underestimated in Europe, and it's something I will pursue here."

By Kids to Kids, a Finnish company originally founded in Brazil, showcased its platform that enables students to create their own learning content.

"We hadn't considered the Gulf market before, it was so distant from our reality, but we saw a great business opportunity here and said, 'Why not?'" business development director Alloma Moretti said.

Werner Botha, multimedia storyteller at Artfund, a South African art management technology company, highlighted the summit's networking opportunities.

"What I really like about this conference, for me personally, is meeting new people and seeing how well I operate in this environment," he said.

"The networking aspect alone is a gold mine. So far, I've bumped into a competitor and found out we're actually very good as partners," Botha said. "I also met someone working on virtual gallery tech-



nology, which makes them another potential partner, as well as a few people involved in organising the event."

For many startups, Web Summit Qatar 2025 served as a strategic gateway to the Mena (Middle East and North Africa) region.

The Startup Qatar pavilion emerged as a focal point for international entrepreneurs, offering immediate business registration and showcasing various initiatives, funding and resources.

A total of 1,634 companies registered to establish their offices in Qatar and 156 licences were issued.

Raiser Olwande, global products sales representative at Flick, a Nigerian open banking infrastructure startup, described the summit as a turning point.

"This summit has opened growth opportunities for us, and we've already started the paperwork to set up an entity here," he said. "The experience so far has been seamless, from travel to business registration."

Web Summit cemented Qatar's position as a tech and entrepreneurship leader, directly supporting its National Vision 2030 and Third National Development Strategy.

Year after year, the event demonstrates Qatar's strategic commitment to becoming a regional tech hub, fostering international business partnerships and technological advancement that will drive long-term economic diversification and innovation, the statement added.

Qatar's natural gas output to reach 244bcm in 2030

From Page 1

Long-term growth rates for these countries are forecast at 3%, 3.2%, and 3.4%, respectively, signalling a gradual easing of economic momentum as these economies transition from reliance on hydrocarbons to more diversified economic models.

According to the outlook, the Middle East is positioning itself as a global leader in blue hydrogen production, leveraging its proximity to extensive natural gas reserves.

This strategic focus not only enables the production of low-carbon hydrogen but also fosters the estab-

lishment and expansion of hydrogen markets.

By 2050, 14% of the total incremental gas use in the region is projected to be associated with low-carbon hydrogen production.

State-owned companies and government funding are driving the development of hydrogen projects, supported by advancements in CCUS (carbon capture, utilisation and storage) technologies.

These initiatives will ensure the long-term viability of the natural gas sector while contributing to global decarbonisation goals, the GECF noted.

Across the region, growing demand

for natural gas in industry and power generation is expected to account for 57% of the total growth, or an additional 163bcm by 2050.

As an energy source and feedstock, industrial gas use is set to play a pivotal role, adding 83bcm over the forecast period.

Expanding gas-to-chemicals, petrochemicals, fertiliser production, and light manufacturing industries will drive this growth.

"Natural gas is expected to remain integral to powering water desalination through cogeneration facilities or membrane technologies reliant on electricity," the GECF said.

Ramadan 'an opportunity to deepen understanding of Islamic civilisation'

The director of the Muhammad Bin Hamad Al Thani Centre for Muslim Contribution to Civilisation at Hamad Bin Khalifa University (HBKU), Dr Aisha Yusuf al-Mannai (pictured), has stressed that the holy month of Ramadan is an opportunity to deepen understanding of Islamic civilisation and its historical contributions, through lectures and seminars on the cultural and scientific heritage of Muslims.

In an interview with the Qatar News Agency (QNA), Dr al-Mannai said that the spiritual atmosphere that characterises the month of Ramadan provides an ideal environment to enhance awareness of the importance of Islamic heritage, and to present a comprehensive picture of Islamic civilisation, which has contributed with its scientific and intellectual achievements to the development of humanity throughout the ages.

The College of Islamic Studies professor said that the Muhammad Bin Hamad Al Thani Centre for Muslim Contribution to Civilisation was established in response to the urgent need to correct misconceptions about Islam, and to highlight the unique contributions made by Muslims in various fields of knowledge.

Dr al-Mannai added that Sheikh Mohammed bin Hamad al-Thani established the centre in 1983, when he was the minister of education, with the aim of translating the most important Islamic books into English, out of his belief in the importance of intellectual communication between peoples and cultures.

The centre was then transferred in 2010 to the College of Islamic Studies.

Dr al-Mannai said that the centre plays a pivotal role in preserving and disseminating Islamic heritage globally by translating Islamic works into different languages, organising scientific conferences and seminars, and supporting researchers in the fields of Islamic civilisation contributions.

She also spoke on the role of translation in spreading Islamic cultural knowledge.

Translation, Dr al-Mannai said, is one of the most prominent tools that contributed to conveying Islamic thought to the world.

She said that the centre works on translating books into major languages, such as English, French, German, Turkish, and Chinese, which helps in spreading Islamic knowledge on a wider scale and enhancing cultural dialogue between cultures.

Dr al-Mannai noted that the centre is also focused on verifying rare Islamic manuscripts, publishing summaries of key works on Islamic civilisation, and organising scientific conferences and seminars to foster knowledge exchange.

She also touched upon the centre's impact on correcting the stereotype of Islam and Muslims.

The centre's activities, Dr al-Mannai said, aim to correct misconceptions about Islam and reaffirm its role as a religion that contributes to building human civilisation.

She also noted that the centre seeks to instil confidence in Muslim youth about their faith and cultural heritage, viewing Islam as a religion that encompasses both material and spiritual life. - QNA



Ramadan talk show explores the use of AI to promote Islam

The third session of the Ramadan talk show *Wa Amenhum Min Khawf* organised by Ministry of Endowments (Awqaf) and Islamic Affairs, represented by the Department of Da'wah and Religious Guidance, discussed ways to utilise modern technologies to spread the correct image of Islam and how to optimally use artificial intelligence (AI).

Participants in the session, titled "Introducing Islam in the Age of Artificial Intelligence", reviewed the key challenges posed by modern technologies, particularly AI, with one of the main challenges being the lack of reliable sources for the information presented to the public.

They emphasised that these technologies need continuous updates, with input from experts and clients, particularly in the religious domain.

Professor at Qatar University (QU)'s College of Sharia and Islamic Studies, Dr Sultan al-Hashimi, emphasised the importance of collective institutional work, stating that individual efforts are not suitable in today's era.

He said that AI aims to create systems

and programs capable of simulating human intelligence, such as learning, thinking, decision-making, and problem-solving.

Dr al-Hashimi pointed out that AI is not all-knowing, and that no matter how advanced it becomes, there is always a need for religious scholars to achieve the desired goal.

He also stressed that it is crucial for information provided by AI platforms to be based on reliable sources and known scientific authorities, such as the Ministry of Awqaf and the Research Department, rather than individual sources.

The expert emphasised the importance of using certified electronic Mushafs issued by recognised regulatory authorities and relying on well-established sources when seeking specific religious information.

He called on the ministry to establish a specialised unit for AI to keep up with developments, monitor everything new, and provide information in a scientifically accurate manner, utilising the expertise of scholars and experts to avoid errors and inaccurate information encountered by users on AI platforms.



Dr Abdel Fattah Mohammed Saad, professor at Hamad Bin Khalifa University (HBKU)'s College of Islamic Studies, said that AI is one of the most important issues of our time, noting that modern communication technologies and programs present an opportunity to spread Islam, but emphasised the need for governance and control over these programs.

He spoke about the ethical challenges associated with the use of AI, saying that when AI programs address issues related to Islam, one must ask: "Who provided AI with information about Islam?"

"This is where the danger lies," Dr Saad said. "If AI is given incorrect information about Islam, it will transmit that incorrect information, which could distort the true message of Islam."

Dr Christian Tancredi, a preacher at Sheikh Abdullah Bin Zaid Al Mahmoud Islamic Cultural Centre, said that chatbots could answer questions from those with doubts about Islam, provided the programmer is a qualified Muslim and has been given correct sources and guidance.

He pointed out that pre-made content, such as books and articles, does not adapt to the participant.

"It is merely a tool," Dr Tancredi pointed out, and cautioned against placing complete trust in AI.

Dr Nour al-Din al-Khadimi, professor at the QU's College of Sharia, said that AI is a double-edged sword.

He questioned how AI could be used to "issue" legal opinions (fatwas) and whether it could deliver judgments in matters related to the conscience of a judge, especially in criminal cases involving the preservation of life. - QNA

ANNOUNCEMENT

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QID No. 29135611181

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Any objection, please contact
THE PERMANENT COMMITTEE FOR
NATIONALITY AFFAIRS
within 15 days from the publication of this notice.

Rush for Garangao goodies is on

By Shafeeq Alingal
Staff Reporter

Souqs, shops and malls are gearing up for Garangao, with nuts, sweets and toys outlets witnessing a large turnout of buyers ahead of the festival that falls on the night of March 14 this year.

Shop owners at Souq Waqif told *Gulf Times* that sales have gone up, with many Qataris and residents taking their children for shopping.

Garangao is considered one of the most important Ramadan occasions in Qatar, when children go from door to door, collecting nuts and sweets around their neighbourhood.

Clad in traditional clothing, children go around their neighbourhood in small groups with decorated gift bags and collecting treats, singing Garangao songs.

Events are organised by public and private entities to preserve the tradition and entertain the children, giving them gifts and encouraging them to fast during the month.

The idea is to reward children for their efforts to fast during the first half of Ramadan and encourage them to continue with the same spirit in the second half.

At Souq Waqif, according to the sellers, shops become busy in the evening and after *Taraweeh* prayers, when customers turn up in big numbers.

Shops have special Garangao packages on sale.



Shops at Souq Waqif have stocked a variety of Garangao kits. PICTURE: Thajudheen

Baskets decorated with traditional clothing for boys and girls are among the most in demand, as are goodies with messages and greetings on them.

The price starts from QR40 and varies according to the size of the kits, which typically consist of 10 types of nuts, clothes, toys and sweets.

There are special Garangao kits with the price going up to QR600.

Textile shops in Souq Waqif have also started to feel the rush, with many families buying traditional clothes for kids to celebrate the occasion.

The concern of deed's acceptance

We owe our ability to perform righteous deeds to the Favour of Allah, The Most Exalted.

Had Allah left us alone to depend on ourselves, we would have been inevitably doomed, because Satan is always attacking us hoping to misguide us.

Allah says (what means): "(Satan) said (to Allah Almighty), do You see this one (Adam) whom You honoured above me, If You delay me until the Day of Resurrection, I will surely destroy his descendants, except for a few." [Qur'an 17:62]

"(Satan) said, because You have put me in error, I will surely sit in wait for them, on your straight path. Then I will come to them from before them, and from behind them, and on their right and on their left and You will not find most of them grateful." [Qur'an 17:16-17]

However, Allah protected His sincere slaves, as He says (what means): "Indeed, My slaves - no authority will you have over them..." [Qur'an 15:42]

Allah is The One Who facilitated the means to do good and helped us utilise them.

He says (what means): "As for he who gives (in charity) and fears Allah, and believes in the best (reward), We will ease him toward Virtue. But as for he who withholds and considers himself free of need, and denies the best (reward), We will ease him toward Misery." [Qur'an 92:5-10]

If one utilises all means of good, seeking the help from Allah, trusting Him and knowing that there is no refuge except in Him, only then can he hope for good to result.

We must beware of committing things which might result in wasting our deeds, like showing off, arrogance and pride.

We must always remember that if it was not for the help of Allah, we would never have acted nor been guided to the Straight Path.

Allah says (what means): "And if it was not for the favour of Allah upon you and His mercy, you would have followed Satan except for a few." [Qur'an 4:83]

The more a believer is sincere in deeds, the better and more righteous they are.

A believer is never arrogant, and he fears that something might occur to put his deed to waste and make it useless.

Allah says (what means): "O you who have believed, obey Allah and obey the Messenger and do not invalidate your deeds." [Qur'an 47:33]

He, The Most Exalted, also says (what means): "And do not be like she who untwisted her spun thread after it was strong [by] taking your oaths as [means of] deceit between you because one community is more plentiful [in number or wealth] than another community. Allah only tries you thereby. And He will surely make clear to you on the Day of Resurrection that over which you used to differ." [Qur'an 16:92]

A believer's concern is to protect his deeds just as our Salaf (righteous predecessors), may Allah have mercy upon them, used to be, they were more concerned whether their deeds were accepted or not than the deed itself.

Some of them said: "Be more concerned about the deed's acceptance than performing the deed itself."

Allah says (what means): "Indeed, they who are apprehensive from fear of their Lord. And they who believe in the signs of their Lord. And they who do not associate anything with their Lord. And they who give what they give while their hearts are fearful because they will be returning to their Lord." [Qur'an 23:57-60]

They (the Salaf), may Allah have mercy upon them, performed the righteous deeds and feared that it might not be accepted from them, which reflects strength in their faith and their knowledge regarding their Lord. They feared they would fall into hypocrisy.

One of them said: "Only a believer would fear hypocrisy on himself, and only a hypocrite feared secured."

We have to ask our Lord that we end Ramadan in a good situation, and that He accept our deeds, because this is the objective and this is what we hope for.

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

Iran's president says will not negotiate while being threatened

Reuters
Tehran

President Masoud Pezeshkian said Iran would not negotiate with the US while being threatened, telling President Donald Trump to "do whatever you want", Iranian state media reported yesterday.

"It is unacceptable for us that they (the US) give orders and make threats. I won't even negotiate with you. Do whatever you want", state media quoted Pezeshkian as saying.

Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said on Saturday that Tehran would not be bullied into negotiations, a day after Trump said he had sent a letter urging Iran to engage in talks on a new nuclear deal.

While expressing openness to a deal with Tehran, Trump has reinstated the "maximum pressure" campaign he applied in his first term as president to isolate Iran from the global economy and drive its oil exports down towards zero. In an interview with Fox Business, Trump said last week, "There are two ways Iran

can be handled: militarily, or you make a deal" to prevent Tehran from acquiring nuclear weapons.

Iran has long denied wanting to develop a nuclear weapon. However, it is "dramatically" accelerating enrichment of uranium to up to 60% purity, close to the roughly 90% weapons-grade level, the IAEA has warned.

Iran has accelerated its nuclear work since 2019, a year after then-President Trump ditched Tehran's 2015 nuclear pact with six world powers and reimposed sanctions that have crippled the country's economy.



A man stands in a damaged building, near the site where a number of Palestinians were killed in an Israeli raid, in Jenin, in the occupied West Bank, yesterday.

Six killed in West Bank as Israeli troops clamp down

Reuters
Ramallah

Five Palestinians, including a 60-year-old woman, were killed by Israeli forces in Jenin over the past 24 hours, the Palestinian Authority said yesterday, adding to a growing toll from one of the largest operations seen in the West Bank in years.

Another man, who was wanted over previous incidents, was killed by Palestinian security forces, the PA said in a separate statement.

The latest incidents bring the number of Palestinians killed since January, when Israeli forces launched a major operation involving thousands of troops in cities and refugee camps in the north of the West Bank, to more than 30.

Many of those killed have been armed fighters from Palestinian groups, but numerous uninvolved civilians have also been killed.

Tens of thousands of Palestinians have fled their homes since the

West Bank operation began at the start of a ceasefire in Gaza. Troops have swept through refugee camps in Jenin and nearby cities, demolishing houses and infrastructure, including roads and water pipes.

Israel says the West Bank operation is aimed at hitting foreign-backed fighter groups, including Hamas and Islamic Jihad, that have made strongholds of the crowded townships built to house descendants of Palestinians who fled, or were forced from their homes in the 1948 Middle East war.

Countries including France and Germany and international groups including the UN have expressed alarm at the scale of the operation and called for restraint.

Yesterday, police special forces fought a gun battle with armed Palestinians barricaded in a house in Jenin, killing two and wounding another man, the Israeli military said.

In a separate incident, a man who opened fire on Israeli troops

was killed, it said. The PA said troops firing from a checkpoint also killed a 60-year-old woman. There was no immediate comment from the Israeli military.

The previous evening, a Palestinian man was killed when his motorcycle was hit by an Israeli army vehicle, the PA said.

The Authority also said its own security forces had killed a man wanted for opening fire on the headquarters of the security forces in Jenin on previous occasions, an incident that was condemned by the Hamas group, which warned of "serious repercussions".

Yesterday, as gun battles were fought around the city, troops detained 10 Palestinians and seized two vehicles filled with weapons, the military said.

In a separate incident yesterday, armed Israeli settlers attacked the village of Umm Safa, near the main city of Ramallah, about 100km south of Jenin, torching three vehicles, the head of the village council said.

Syrian committee for sectarian killings says no one above the law

Reuters
Damascus

A Syrian fact-finding committee investigating sectarian killings during clashes by rival groups during an insurgency by Bashar al-Assad loyalists said yesterday that no one was above the law and it would seek the arrest and prosecution of any perpetrators.

Pressure has been growing on Syria's government to investigate after reports by witnesses and a war monitor of the killing of hundreds of civilians in villages where the majority of the population are members of the ousted president's Alawite sect.

"No one is above the law, the committee will relay all the results to the entity that launched it, the presidency, and the judiciary," the committee's spokesperson Yasser Farhan said in a



Yasser Farhan, spokesperson of Syrian investigation committee responsible for investigating the violence, holds a press conference in Damascus, yesterday.

televised press conference.

The committee was preparing lists of witnesses to interview and potential perpetrators, and would refer any suspects with sufficient evidence against them to the judiciary, Farhan added.

The UN human rights office

said entire families including women and children were killed in the coastal region as part of a series of sectarian killings by rival groups during an insurgency by Bashar al-Assad loyalists.

Syria's interim president Ahmed al-Sharaa told Reuters in an interview on Monday that he could not yet say whether forces from Syria's defence ministry - which has incorporated former rebel factions under one structure - were involved in the sectarian killings.

Asked whether the committee would seek international help to document violations, Farhan said it was "open" to co-operation but would prefer using its own national mechanisms.

The violence began to spiral on Thursday, when the authorities said their forces in the coastal region came under attack from fighters aligned with the ousted Assad regime.

Meningitis outbreak kills 26 in northwest Nigeria, official says

Reuters
Abuja

At least 26 people have died from a meningitis outbreak in Nigeria's northwest Kebbi state, a local health official said yesterday.

Nigeria is one of the hotspots of

the deadly disease in Africa where at least 1,700 cases were reported last year, with more than 150 deaths recorded in seven states. Kebbi state Health Commissioner Musa Ismaila confirmed the outbreak, citing a surge in cases in three local government areas.

"We are saddled with the unfortunate situation of an out-

break with a rising number of cases," Ismaila said in a statement, detailing symptoms that include fever, severe headaches, and neck stiffness.

A total of 248 suspected cases have been line-listed, with 11 samples sent to the National Reference Laboratory in the capital Abuja.

Al Shabaab gunmen attack hotel in central Somalia, seven dead

Reuters
Mogadishu

Al Shabaab gunmen killed at least seven people in an attack yesterday at a hotel in a central Somali town where local elders and government officials were meeting to discuss how to act against the militant group, an elder said.

The Al Qaeda-linked group claimed responsibility for the attack in Beledweyne and said it had killed over 10 people. The attackers forced their way in by setting off explosives at the entrance, said a witness, shopkeeper Ali Suleiman.

Al Shabaab frequently launches bombings and gun attacks in the fragile Horn of Africa nation as it tries to topple the government and establish its own rule based on its strict interpretation of religious law.

"So far seven people, including clan elders and their guards, all of them my relatives, died in the hotel. Parts of the hotel are ablaze now and it is not clear if the operation is concluded or not," clan elder Abdullahi Fidorow told Reuters. "Some say the fighters are still fighting in nearby buildings. The death toll may rise because of the blasts and shooting by the fighters," he said.

Hours after the initial attack,

government forces were trying to flush out Al Shabaab fighters, some of whom had been killed in nearby alleys, said Dahir Amin Jesow, a federal lawmaker from the town, the capital of Hiraaan region.

In a separate incident, at least 10 people, including eight Al Shabaab fighters, were killed in fighting in a village in the Middle Shabelle region in southern Somalia, Ali Farah, a military officer in the village, told Reuters.

State-owned Somali National News Agency reported that President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud was at the airport in Mogadishu to receive the soldiers wounded in the fighting.

Boatless in Gaza: using old fridge doors to catch fish



A Palestinian men use the doors of refrigerators as makeshift rowing boats to catch fish at the port of Gaza City.

AFP
Gaza City

Balanced calmly on top of what was once a refrigerator door, fisherman Khaled Habib uses a makeshift paddle to propel himself through the waters of Gaza City's fishing port.

Israeli bombardment over more than 15 months of war between Israel and Hamas has destroyed most of the boats in the harbour, wrecking the fishermen's means of making a living.

"We're in a very difficult situation today, and struggling with the fishing. There are no fishing boats left. They've all been destroyed and tossed on the ground," Habib said.

"I made this 'boat' from re-

frigerator doors and cork - and thankfully it worked." So he could continue feeding his family, Habib came up with the idea of stuffing cork into old fridge doors to make them buoyant.

He covered one side with wood and the other with plastic sheeting to help make the makeshift paddleboard waterproof.

Habib also crafted a fishing cage out of wire because of the lack of nets, but admitted that his resulting catch was "small".

The UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation said in December that the conflict had taken Gaza's "once thriving fishing sector to the brink of collapse". "Gaza's average daily catch between October 2023 to April 2024 dropped to just 7.3% of 2022 levels, causing a \$17.5m production loss," the FAO said.

The war in Gaza was sparked by Palestinian group Hamas' October 2023 storming of Israel. Using dough as bait, Habib now fishes mainly inside the small port area.

Despite the fragile ceasefire that came into force on January 19, and which largely halted the fighting, Habib said that fishing outside the port is not allowed.

"If we go (outside the fishermen's harbour), the Israeli boats will shoot at us, and that's a problem we suffer from a lot." Habib said he catches enough fish to feed his family and tries to help others by selling the rest at an affordable price.

After dividing his catch into small plastic bags, the fisherman sells some at the harbour market where prices can be high.

Israel announced on March 2 that it was blocking aid deliveries to Gaza, where Palestinians say they fear food shortages and price hikes.

Several other fishermen, particularly the younger generation, have also taken to using the new makeshift floating platforms. Habib sees the home-made paddleboards as having a dual purpose.

"If we wanted to raise a new generation to learn how to swim, boats should be made for them from refrigerator doors, and then everyone would learn how to swim, row and sail," he said.

"Thank God, now they've learned how to swim," he added, looking out over the water at children trying to keep their balance.

South Africa bus crash toll climbs to 16

AFP
Ekurhuleni

A bus overturned in an area of Johannesburg near South Africa's main airport early yesterday, killing at least 16 people, city officials said, with dozens more injured.

The bus was carrying more than 50 people to work when it crashed on a busy road near Johannesburg's OR Tambo International Airport, officials said.

The Road Traffic Management

Corp (RTMC) said the crash "has so far claimed 16 lives". Twelve died at the scene and four more in hospital. The cause of the accident, which forced the closure of the highway leading to the airport, was not immediately known. Images from the scene showed the bus on its side.

Preliminary investigations showed that the vehicle swerved, rolled and landed facing the direction from which it came, RTMC spokesman Simon Zwane said.

Officials had earlier put the tally of people hurt at 45.

"We are lost for words. This is a disaster," Ekurhuleni city transport official Andile Mngwevu said.

A survivor of the accident told Newzroom Afrika television that the bus appeared to be speeding.

Despite sophisticated road networks, South Africa battles with a high rate of road deaths blamed mostly on speeding, reckless driving, unroadworthy vehicles and failure to use seat belts.

Four schoolchildren were killed on Monday and five others injured

when two vehicles collided around Ekurhuleni, which lies east of Johannesburg.

At least nine people, including a four-year-old child, were killed last week when their bus careered into a ditch in the eastern province of KwaZulu-Natal. The 82-seater bus was carrying congregants returning home from church.

More than 11,800 lives were lost on South African roads in 2023, most of them pedestrians, according to the latest data from RTMC.



Emergency personnel work at the scene of a fatal bus crash near OR Tambo International Airport, in Ekurhuleni, East of Johannesburg, South Africa, yesterday.



POLITICS

Singapore revises electoral boundaries ahead of polls

Singapore has revised its electoral boundaries, the elections department said yesterday, a move usually seen as a sign that the government is preparing to call a general election. The election due by November 2025, though Prime Minister Lawrence Wong can call it earlier, will be his first such test since taking over from long-time premier Lee Hsien Loong as leader of the People's Action Party in May 2024. Yesterday's report on new electoral boundaries, which were attributed to population shifts, is a closely watched event because past elections have followed months after the release of previous reports.

COMMENT

Lanka 'welcomes' investment opportunities from Adani

Sri Lanka has not changed its stance on doing business with India's Adani Group and welcomes investment opportunities from the conglomerate, the country's cabinet spokesperson said. Gautam Adani, chairman of the business group, and executives of Adani Green were indicted by US prosecutors for their alleged role in a \$265mn scheme to bribe Indian officials to secure deals. Adani and the executives have denied any wrongdoing. "But Lanka remains firm on negotiating purchasing costs of power generated from the wind power projects," the cabinet spokesperson said, referring to the two proposed wind power projects Adani has withdrawn from.

DEFENCE

No decision yet on buying BrahMos missiles: Indonesia

Indonesia has not yet made a decision on buying missiles from BrahMos Aerospace in India, a defence ministry spokesperson said. Multiple missile systems are being considered by Indonesia, not just those from BrahMos, spokesperson Frega Wenas said after Indonesia's defence minister met with his counterpart from Vietnam. In 2023, BrahMos, a company co-owned by the Indian and Russian governments, said it was in advanced discussions with Jakarta on a deal worth \$200mn to \$350mn. "For now it is one of our considerations to review, but I cannot give an official statement when there's no formal contract," Wenas said.

TRAGEDY

Australian surfer feared dead after shark attack

A surfer is feared to have died after being attacked by a shark in shallow water on a remote beach in western Australia, police said yesterday. A 30-year-old man from Melbourne was reported missing on Monday after witnesses saw a struggle and heard screams at Wharton Beach, a remote area around 800km from the state capital, Perth. A surfboard with bite marks was later recovered from the beach. Police believe the man was killed during the attack after failing to locate his body. Drone footage shot by a witness captured a shark swimming away from a large cloud of blood close to the shore, he added.

Ex-president Duterte bound for The Hague after ICC arrest

AFP
Manila

A plane carrying former Filipino president Rodrigo Duterte yesterday left the Philippine capital bound for The Hague following his arrest on an International Criminal Court warrant stemming from his deadly crackdown on drugs, Manila said.

The 79-year-old faces a charge of "the crime against humanity of murder" according to the ICC, for a crackdown that rights groups estimate killed tens of thousands of mostly poor men, often without proof they were linked to drugs.

President Ferdinand Marcos told a press briefing that the plane carrying his predecessor had departed at 11.03pm (1503GMT).

"The plane is en route to The Hague in the Netherlands allowing the former president to face charges of crimes against humanity in relation to his bloody war on drugs," said Marcos.

Duterte was arrested at Manila's international airport yesterday after "Interpol Manila received the official copy of the warrant of the arrest from the ICC", the presidential palace said.

His daughter, current Vice-President Sara Duterte, said he was be-

ing "forcibly taken to The Hague".

"This is not justice - this is oppression and persecution," she said in a statement.

Duterte had earlier taken to social media to say he believed the Philippine Supreme Court would step in and prevent his transfer.

"The Supreme Court will not agree to that. We do not have an extradition treaty," he said on Instagram live after his lawyers filed a petition. An ICC spokesman confirmed the arrest warrant yesterday and said an initial appearance hearing would be scheduled when Duterte was in court custody.

While supporters dubbed his arrest "unlawful", reactions from those who opposed Duterte's drug war were jubilant.

One group working to support mothers of those killed in the crackdown called the arrest a "very welcome development".

"The mothers whose husbands and children were killed because of the drug war are very happy because they have been waiting for this for a very long time," Rubilyn Litao, coordinator for Rise Up for Life and for Rights, said, while Philippine rights alliance Karapatan said his arrest was "long overdue".

Human Rights Watch also said the arrest was a "critical step for accountability in the Philippines".

China, however, warned the ICC against "politicisation" and "double standards" in the Duterte case, saying it was "closely monitoring the development of the situation".

Duterte's morning arrest at Manila's international airport followed a brief trip to Hong Kong.

Speaking to thousands of overseas Filipino workers there Sunday, the former president decried the ICC investigation while saying he would "accept it" if an arrest were to be his fate.

The Philippines quit the ICC in 2019 on Duterte's instructions, but the tribunal maintained it had jurisdiction over killings before the pullout, as well as killings in the southern city of Davao when Duterte was mayor, years before he became president.

It launched a formal inquiry in September 2021, only to suspend it two months later after Manila said it was re-examining several hundred cases of drug operations that led to deaths at the hands of police, hitmen and vigilantes.

The case resumed in July 2023 after a five-judge panel rejected the Philippines' objection that the court lacked jurisdiction.

Since then, the Marcos government has on numerous instances said it would not co-operate with the investigation.

Japan marks tsunami anniversary

People release dove-shaped balloons in the air in remembrance in Natori, Miyagi Prefecture, yesterday to mark the 14th anniversary of the magnitude 9.0 earthquake which triggered a tsunami and nuclear disaster in Japan.

Kia denies responsibility for anti-Musk advert

AFP
Seoul

South Korean automaker Kia yesterday said it had not approved an advertising campaign that featured one of its electric vehicles with a bumper sticker denigrating rival Tesla owner Elon Musk.

The advertisement, posted last month on the social media accounts of Kia Norway, features the company's entry level electric car, the EV3, with a bumper sticker saying: "I bought this after Elon went crazy." The sticker

appears to riff on a viral trend of Tesla owners, unhappy with the world's richest man's recent foray into politics, slapping bumper stickers on their vehicles claiming they had purchased them "before Musk went crazy".

The advert was removed yesterday after the South Korean company was asked about the image.

"Kia Corporation is aware of a social media post by Kia Norway, which has since been removed," a company spokesperson said in a statement. "The post was an entirely independent local initiative that does not reflect

the position of Kia Europe or Kia Corporation," it added. Kia is an affiliate of South Korea's Hyundai, and combined they are the world's third-largest automaker by volume as of 2024, selling more than 7.2mn cars combined.

In recent years, Kia has rolled out a range of EVs, from the entry-level EV3 - Britain's 2025 car of the year - to the large SUV EV9.

Billionaire Musk, the boss of SpaceX and Tesla and owner of social media site X, has become a key backer of and adviser to US President Donald Trump.

UN reinstates aid to Rohingya refugees in Indonesia: official

The United Nations migration agency has reversed cuts to funding for Rohingya refugees in Indonesia, its top official in the country said yesterday, days after it slashed assistance because of US President Donald Trump's foreign aid funding freeze.

The mostly Muslim ethnic Rohingya are heavily persecuted in Myanmar and thousands risk their lives each year on long and dangerous sea journeys to reach Malaysia or Indonesia.

A letter dated February 28 from the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) said support was being cut for nearly 1,000 Rohingya refugees in Pekanbaru city on the western island of Sumatra.

But the IOM chief of mission in Indonesia said the cuts have been reversed, without a reason given. "Our largest programme to provide humanitarian assistance has been reinstated," Jeffrey Labovitz said.

Baby elephant rescued in Indonesia

Indonesian authorities rescued a critically endangered baby Sumatran elephant after it became separated from its mother at a palm oil plantation, a local official said yesterday. The two-month-old male calf was found at an oil palm plantation in Riau province on the western island of Sumatra after residents alerted authorities, local conservation agency official Ujang Holisudin said. "We suspect this elephant was left behind by his group or his mother," Ujang said, adding that the calf was alone when authorities found him. The baby elephant is in good health after medical checks and was brought to the conservation agency's elephant training centre near the provincial capital Pekanbaru, he said.

South Korean singer Wheesung found dead

AFP
Seoul

South Korean singer Wheesung was found dead at his residence, his management said yesterday, with police reportedly planning to conduct an autopsy to determine the 43-year-old's exact cause of death.

Wheesung, who had a string of hits in South Korea including a popular cover of British star Craig David's *Insomnia*, was found unconscious in his apartment by emergency responders after his mother called for help, local media reported.

Police told local media they had found no signs of foul play but warned that "a significant amount of time" had elapsed since he died, with an autopsy requested.

"Artist Wheesung has left us," his management agency Tajoy Entertainment said, adding agency staff and colleagues were "in deep sorrow".

He was scheduled to perform alongside singer KCM in the southeastern city of Daegu this coming Saturday.

In his final message on social media, Wheesung announced the upcoming concert and wrote: "Weight loss completed. See you on March 15".

Since his singing debut in 2002, Wheesung had been popular in the South with numerous hit songs, including chart-topping *With Me*, and was well-regarded for his soulful performances.

But his music career took a hit in 2021 when he was convicted and handed a suspended jail sentence for use of propofol - a surgical anaesthetic that is sometimes abused recreationally.

Infection keeps top China leader away from parliament session

Reuters
Beijing

The third-ranked leader of China's ruling Communist Party was yesterday absent from a key parliamentary session he had been due to open, with his stand-in attributing the absence to a respiratory infection.

Zhao Leji, 68, was not among the senior party leaders in the Great Hall of the People, marking the first time in almost two decades that a member of the Politburo Standing Committee, the party's top echelon, was not at the high-profile event.

"Chairman Zhao Leji requested

leave from yesterday afternoon's meeting due to a respiratory infection," said Li Hongzhong, vice-chairman of the National People's Congress Standing Committee, as he opened the plenary session in the Chinese capital.

"I was entrusted ... to preside," he told more than 2,000 delegates gathered in the hall's main auditorium for the parliamentary meetings, which concluded later yesterday.

The announcement was a departure from the Communist Party's customary secrecy regarding the health of senior leaders.

"It's certainly unusual for China's NPC speaker to miss the single most important occasion of

the year," said Wen-Ti Sung, an analyst of Chinese politics at the Atlantic Council's Global China Hub. "This kind of occurrence is extremely rare."

Zhao did not attend either the closing session of China's national political advisory body or the third meeting of the presidium of the National People's Congress (NPC), both on Monday, state media said, with no reason given for his absence.

Until then, Zhao, a trusted confidant of President Xi Jinping who served five years as the head of the Communist Party's anti-corruption watchdog, had attended all his scheduled public meetings, state media summaries showed.

Zhao's portrait still appears on the NPC website.

While there is no official suggestion that Zhao's absence is caused by anything other than illness, China's former foreign minister Qin Gang missed a 2023 diplomatic summit in Indonesia for unspecified "health reasons", a foreign ministry spokesperson said at the time. He was later ousted from his job after a mysterious one-month absence from duties.

Li, Zhao's deputy, was "entrusted" to chair the meeting of the presidium or executive committee on Monday, the official People's Daily newspaper said. Li, 68, sits on the 24-member Polit-

buro, the party's second-highest rung of power.

A member of the Politburo Standing Committee has not missed a major NPC plenary session since 2006, when former vice premier Huang Ju missed all the annual parliament sessions because he was ill in hospital, a government spokesperson said at the time.

Huang, who was China's sixth-ranking leader, died in 2007, but authorities gave no cause of death.

The Communist Party almost never divulges details of the health of top leaders or addresses concerns about their age, making it difficult for analysts to track political dynamics.

All leaders in the Politburo Standing Committee except Xi and Vice-Premier Ding Xuexiang, 62, are expected to retire in 2027, when the next Communist Party leadership reshuffle is due.

Zhao was absent from a January 2022 study session of the 24-member Politburo chaired by Xi, state media footage showed. No reason was given for his absence and state media did not list those who attended.

In 2022, Xi's immediate predecessor, Hu Jintao, was unexpectedly escorted out of the Great Hall of the People by two stewards during the closing ceremony of the previous Communist Party congress.

OFFICIAL

Armenia, India sign new co-operation agreements

Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan and his Indian counterpart Subrahmanyam Jaishankar discussed bilateral relations, regional and international issues in New Delhi. Mirzoyan stressed the strength of the centuries-old relations between Armenia and India, describing them as having reached a new level in recent years thanks to mutual efforts, according to Armenian News Agency. He also stressed the importance of maintaining the pace of high-level visits to strengthen co-operation in the economic, trade, and cultural spheres. The two sides signed two memoranda of understanding to enhance co-operation.

DEFENCE

India enters into deal with Russia for battle tank engines

India has signed a \$248mn contract with Russian state arms exporter Rosoboronexport to acquire more powerful engines for its Soviet-era battle tanks, the Indian defence ministry said. The T72 tank is the mainstay of the Indian army's fleet. It operates about 2,500 such tanks. The new acquisition of 1,000HP engines will replace engines of the existing fleet to "enhance the battlefield mobility and offensive capability of the Indian Army", the ministry said in a statement. The deal includes transfer of technology from Rosoboronexport to Indian state-owned Armoured Vehicles Nigam Ltd for licensed production of the engines.

PROPOSAL

India seeks parliament nod to spend additional \$5.9bn

The Indian government has sought parliament's approval to spend an additional Rs514.63bn (\$5.90bn) on a net basis for the current financial year ending March 31, according to a statement. India is seeking approval to spend Rs53.2bn to upgrade telecom networks in underserved areas, the statement said. The government has also sought approval to make a provision of Rs70bn rupees for the new Unified Pension Scheme for federal government employees that rolls out from April 1, 2025. While India would gross spend Rs6.79tn (\$77.84bn) for 2024-25, a majority of this would be met through unutilised expenditure by government departments.

DECISION

Non-bank lenders to tweak funding mix after RBI decision

Indian non-banking financial companies are likely to tweak their funding pattern, as the Reserve Bank of India's relaxation of some lending norms could nudge banks to increase funding. The RBI partially reversed tighter rules for bank loans to NBFCs, trimming risk weight requirements for banks on consumer microfinance loans by 25 percentage points to 100% and effectively reverting to the earlier risk weight requirements. This will "free up capital for banks, allowing them to lend more to NBFCs," said George Alexander Muthoot, managing director, Muthoot Finance, adding that this will also make bank funding more attractive for NBFCs.

Airtel, SpaceX sign deal to bring Starlink to India

Reuters
New Delhi

Elon Musk's Starlink has signed a deal with India's No. 2 telecoms company Airtel to bring Starlink's Internet services to the world's most populous country, intensifying rivalry with fellow billionaire Mukesh Ambani's telecom firm Reliance Jio.

The pact will allow the US satellite Internet giant to utilise Airtel's retail store network to distribute its devices throughout India, and is conditional upon Starlink obtaining government approval to begin operations in the country.

Airtel said yesterday the companies will look at using each other's network infrastructure to enhance coverage, but didn't provide details. Airtel will also explore offering Starlink services to its business and other customers.

"This is the first agreement to be signed in India," Airtel said in a statement.

The Starlink announcement comes weeks after Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi met with Elon Musk in Washington where they discussed issues including space, mobility, technology and innovation.

Starlink, which has long wanted to launch in India, has clashed recently with Ambani's telecom firm Reliance Jio over how the country

should grant spectrum for satellite services.

Reliance had urged an auction but the Indian government sided with Musk, who wanted it to be allocated administratively, in line with global trends. Analysts say an auction, requiring much more investment, would likely deter foreign rivals.

Ambani has been worried that his telecom company, which spent \$19bn in airwave auctions, risks losing broadband customers to Starlink and potentially even data and voice clients later.

Airtel has a similar distribution agreement with global satellite group Eutelsat, where its parent entity owns a stake.

Eutelsat's OneWeb and Reliance Jio have already won approvals from India's space regulator to launch commercial satellite broadband services in the country.

SpaceX chief operating officer Gwynne Shotwell said in a statement the company was "excited" to work with Airtel "... and unlock the transformative impact Starlink can bring to the people of India".

Musk's current business interest in India is limited to social media platform X, although electric vehicle maker Tesla is preparing to start selling its cars in the world's fifth-largest economy.

The auto firm began hiring in India last month, issuing job advertisements days after Modi met Musk, US President Donald Trump's senior adviser.

Modi arrives in Mauritius



India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi is received by his Mauritius counterpart Navin Ramgoolam during his state visit, at the Sir Seewoosagar Ramgoolam International Airport in Plaine Magnien, Mauritius, yesterday.

India says 'no commitments' to tariff cuts after Trump claims

AFP
New Delhi

India said it has not committed to slashing import duties on US products, days after President Donald Trump announced that New Delhi had agreed to "cut their tariffs way down". Only weeks into his second term, Trump has upended global trade, targeting friends and foes alike.

He has also blamed all trading partners of "unfair" practices, and has announced reciprocal tariffs on many countries, including India, to begin from next month.

Trump once again railed at India's "massive tariffs" last week. "You can't sell anything into India, it is almost restrictive," Trump said.

"They have agreed, by the way, they want to cut their tariffs way down now because somebody is finally exposing them for what they have done," he added. But the Indian

government told a parliamentary panel that "no commitments had been made to the US on the issue," a report in The Times of India newspaper said.

The government "has sought time until September to address the issue that is being repeatedly flagged by the American president," it added. India's commerce secretary Sunil Barthwal "said that India and the US were working towards a mutually beneficial bilateral trade agreement, focusing on long-term trade co-operation instead of merely seeking immediate tariffs adjustments".

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who visited the White House last month, has an acknowledged rapport with Trump, who said he shares a "special bond" with the Indian leader.

Modi said the world's largest and fifth-largest economies would work on a "mutually beneficial trade agreement" to be sealed "very soon".

While the US is a crucial market for India's information technology and services sec-

tors, Washington has made billions of dollars in new military hardware sales to New Delhi in recent years. Trump could visit India later this year for a summit of heads of state from the Quad - a four-way grouping of Australia, India, Japan and the US.

Meanwhile India is considering new incentives for its exporters amid global trade uncertainty and the potential impact of tariffs threatened by the Trump administration on shipments to the US, a government official said yesterday.

Pressure on Indian exporters is mounting due to aggressive policies being pursued by trade partners like the US and the European Union.

The government is expected to make a decision on providing incentives to exporters within a month and funding has already been allocated in the budget for the year beginning April 1, the official, speaking on the sidelines of an event, said.

India brings home 300 citizens rescued from scam centres

India has brought home nearly 300 of its nationals who were lured to various southeast Asian countries, including Myanmar, with fake job offers and made to engage in cybercrime and other fraudulent activities in scam compounds, the government said.

Thousands of people have been freed from cyber scam centres along the Thailand-Myanmar border this year as countries work together to crack down on the criminal networks.

China and Indonesia repatriated some of their citizens last month. "Indian embassies in Myanmar and Thailand have co-ordinated with local authorities to secure the repatriation of 283 Indian nationals by an IAF (Indian Air Force) aircraft from Mae Sot in Thailand," India's foreign ministry said.

Thailand arrested 100 people last week as a part of its crackdown on the scam centres.

William visits FA Referee Training Course



Britain's Prince William is welcomed by children upon his arrival for a visit at the FA Referee Training Course, at the Aspray Arena, in Willenhall, England, yesterday.

Irish premier faces balancing act at talks with US president

Reuters
Dublin

Irish Prime Minister Micheál Martin faces a diplomatic balancing act during talks with Donald Trump today, with Ireland among the countries most vulnerable to the US president's economic plans.

The annual White House meeting to mark St Patrick's Day is usually relatively straightforward for the country of 5.4mn.

Recent meetings were with Trump's proudly Irish-American predecessor Joe Biden. This year's meeting with Trump entails more uncertainty, with many Irish jobs, tax revenue and exports directly dependent on a cluster of US multinational firms.

"I am very, very conscious that in a very challenging world,

thousands and thousands of jobs depend on the economic relationship between the US and Ireland," Martin, who plans to highlight the 115,000 people Irish firms employ in the US, said at the start of the six-day trip.

US firms have operated in Ireland for decades, attracted in large part by its low corporate tax rate. The mainly US-owned foreign multinational workforce totals 302,000, or 11% of all workers, and they contribute most of a corporate tax take that has handed Ireland large budget surpluses.

Top of Irish concerns is whether Trump will focus on the US goods trade deficit with Ireland, driven by drugs and pharmaceutical ingredients made in the European Union member state by US companies that are exported back to the US.

British police arrest man over tanker crash

Reuters
Withernsea, England

British police yesterday arrested a man on suspicion of gross negligence manslaughter after an unexplained collision at sea left a tanker carrying US army jet fuel with a gaping hole in its side and a charred container ship adrift.

The tanker, Stena Immaculate, which carries jet fuel for the US military, was at anchor on Monday when it was struck by the smaller Solong, causing huge fires and explosions, releasing fuel into the sea, and potentially posing a dan-

ger to wildlife. Neither vessel is now expected to sink, Transport Minister Heidi Alexander said in a statement after an earlier assessment had said the Solong was unlikely to remain afloat.

One crew member from the Portuguese-flagged Solong is assumed dead. Maritime Minister Mike Kane told parliament earlier. Thirty-six people were brought ashore following the incident and no others remain missing, the coastguard said.

"We have arrested a 59-year-old man on suspicion of gross negligence manslaughter in connection with the collision," police said in a statement.

Aerial video yesterday showed a gaping hole in Stena Immaculate's hull, with fire damage along its length, although the flames that engulfed it after the collision appeared to have subsided.

The Solong, which appeared badly burnt and smouldering in separate footage, had drifted south overnight, the coastguard said, adding that a 1km exclusion zone had been placed around both vessels.

"... early indications suggest that both vessels are now expected to stay afloat and that the Solong can be towed away from the shore, and salvage operations can get underway," Alexander said af-

ter a meeting with the coastguard agency.

Owners of the Solong said the vessel was not carrying sodium cyanide, contrary to an earlier report from maritime data provider Lloyd's List Intelligence, which cited the local coastguard, but conservation groups said the environmental impact from the spillage of jet fuel could prove wide reaching.

The Solong owners said they were monitoring four containers which had previously been used to store sodium cyanide.

The surrounding area is home to large colonies of protected seabirds including puffins and gannets as

well as a delicate coastal ecosystem.

Dutch marine provider Boskalis, appointed to salvage the Stena Immaculate tanker, said four ships carrying foam and extinguishing agents were heading to the scene.

Authorities are ready to deploy equipment to minimise pollution at sea, including spray dispersants for oil spills and containment booms, if required, the British government said.

The potential environmental impact remains under assessment.

Local lawmaker Graham Stuart said most of the spilled jet fuel appeared now to have burned off and

there was no sign of either ship leaking engine oil.

"Risks remain, however. It's possible that heavy engine oil could yet leak," Stuart said on X.

Conservation groups have warned of possible risks including the immediate poisoning of wildlife, damage to habitats on land, and the longer-term accumulation of toxins within food chains.

Authorities said the risk to public health was very low.

The operators of the vessels and maritime authorities have yet to offer an explanation of why multiple safety systems on board modern vessels failed to prevent Monday's collision.

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GULF TIMES

'US exceptionalism' on shaky ground amid downturn fears

Speculation is intensifying across the financial world that US President Donald Trump is willing to tolerate hardships in the US economy and markets in pursuit of his long-term goals involving tariffs and smaller government.

The threat of an economic downturn has weighed on the broader market, with the S&P 500 down nearly 9% from last month's record high.

Trump has said the US economy faces "a period of transition," deflecting concerns about the risks of a cooldown as his early focus on tariffs and federal job cuts causes market turmoil.

Asked whether he's expecting a recession, Trump said, "I hate to predict things like that. There is a period of transition, because what we're doing is very big."

Amid a historic global trade war, a proposed \$1.2tn European fiscal bazooka and the emergence of China as tech race leader, global flows of money are being upended, marking a potential turning point for investor capital away from the US.

China unlocked more stimulus last week and promised greater efforts to cushion the impact of an escalating US trade war. Earlier, Germany's likely next government agreed on the biggest overhaul to fiscal policy since the country's reunification.

Meanwhile, US economic data points to a weakening, and the trade war unleashed by US tariffs that kicked in last week is hurting sentiment inside and outside the world's biggest economy.

For most of the last three years, investors had bet on "US exceptionalism," with the country ahead of others in economic growth, stock prices, artificial intelligence and other areas.

"The world now sees the US model is changing, and saying — we need to adapt to that, the US is no longer as reliable as a trade partner, we have to take care of our own needs on defence," said Tim Graf, head of macro strategy for EMEA at State Street Global Markets.

The change in sentiment has fuelled a rare divergence in global stock markets.

The threat of an economic downturn has weighed on the broader US market, with the S&P 500 down nearly 9% from last month's record high

While the S&P 500 stock index is down this year, European shares are up almost 9% at a record high, and tech stocks in Hong Kong have surged almost 30%.

The euro shot to a four-month high above \$1.07 last week and a number of banks have raced to ditch their recent calls for a drop to parity against the dollar.

Investors have chopped their bullish bets on the dollar in half to around \$16bn since Trump's inauguration in January, based on weekly data from the Commodity Futures Trading Commission.

Tariffs and trade uncertainty are causing the US economy to lose steam, and companies more vulnerable to slower growth are starting to show the cracks.

An index of US banks lost 8% in the last month, while its European equivalent has jumped 15%.

One of the great US stock market draws has been its megacap tech shares. Nvidia, in particular, has become the poster-child of the AI investment revolution and one of the world's most valuable companies.

But the emergence of DeepSeek not only shattered assumptions about the cost and efficiency of the race to build out AI, but of how close behind Western companies China really was.

A chorus of Wall Street strategists is warning about rising volatility in the stock market.

Market forecasters at banks including JPMorgan Chase and RBC Capital Markets have tempered bullish calls for 2025 as Trump's tariffs stoke fears of slowing economic growth.

Citigroup strategists have downgraded their view on US stocks to neutral from overweight, saying the hegemony of US stocks is on pause, at least for now.

"US exceptionalism is at least pausing" for the coming few months, the strategists wrote. "The news flow from the US economy is likely to undershoot the rest of the world in coming months."

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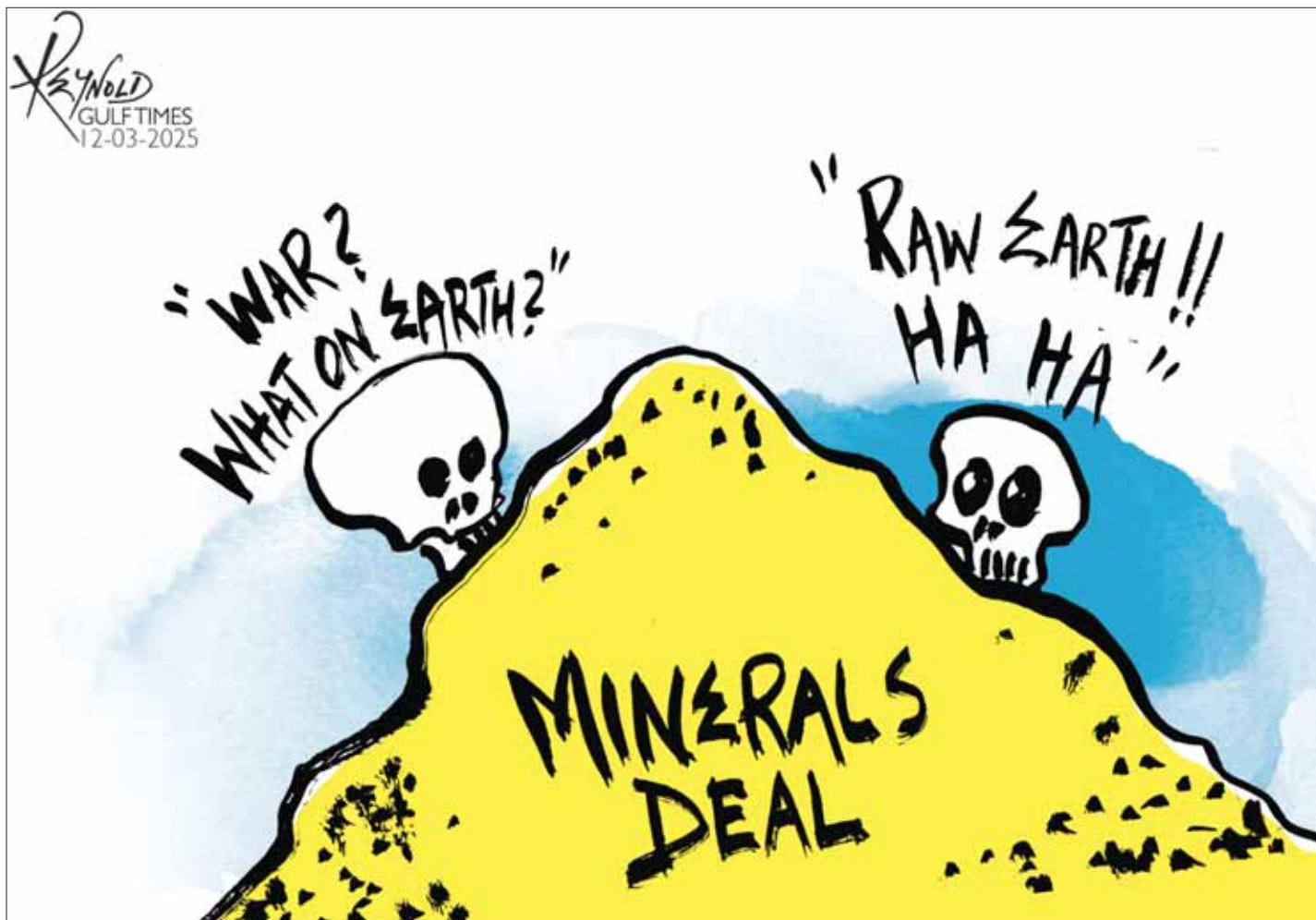
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Unlocking East Med energy prizes



By Roudi Baroudi

The East Mediterranean region has experienced far more than its share of crisis, conflict, and human suffering in recent years, but right now its governments have a rare opportunity to unlock a long list of prizes that would benefit everyone involved.

Specifically, the current relative lull in the region's perennial instability offers an opening through which the trio of Cyprus, Lebanon, and Syria might do each other — and their respective peoples — a series of long-lasting favours. And right now, all three are in need of some good news.

A new Syria is emerging after a lengthy civil war that killed at least half a million people and toppled a regime that had been in place for half a century. The nascent government in Damascus is still finding its way in terms of how it will approach relations with its neighbours and the rest of the outside world, so any dealings with it now could help set the tone for generations to come.

Long-suffering Lebanon has finally installed a new president, a new prime minister, and a new cabinet after almost two decades of continual dysfunction and constitutional paralysis, bookended by two wars with Israel and occasionally punctuated by bouts of domestic violence, too. The new leadership currently enjoys widespread popular support, but it faces a hefty host

of challenges, not least the need to avoid a resumption of hostilities with Israel while rebuilding an economy brought low by corruption and incompetence.

Cyprus remains an oasis of stability by comparison, but it also faces difficult conditions. Despite a strong economic performance last year, several setbacks have curbed growth forecasts, and while diplomacy is again underway, there remains the ever-present question of how to reunify the divided country.

Historically, Cyprus and Lebanon have struggled to ensure enough energy to meet domestic demand and accelerate economic development, a situation made even tougher by the ever-increasing prevalence of power-hungry information and communications technologies. Syria's experience has been better thanks to considerable onshore deposits of oil and natural gas, but its reserves are limited, and onshore production can't keep up with population growth.

More recently, the entire region has been excited about the prospect of significant offshore oil and gas deposits, but the path to locating and recovering that wealth has been strewn with obstacles. Safely extracting hydrocarbons from beneath the seabed is a complex and expensive undertaking, so much so that it typically requires partnering with one or more major international oil companies, and IOCs tend to avoid offshore areas where ownership is in dispute or soon could be. And therein lies the problem: even after the historic maritime boundary agreement struck by Lebanon and Israel in 2022, most of the maritime boundaries in the Eastern Mediterranean — including Cyprus-Lebanon, Lebanon-Syria, and Syria-Cyprus — remain unsettled.

As a result, while Israel and Egypt have been producing offshore gas for many years,

Cyprus is near start up like their neighbours, Lebanon, and Syria have made much less headway. IOC exploration has found some promising acreage offshore the south coast of Cyprus, but exploration in Lebanese waters is still in its infancy, and although Syria once pumped more than 600,000 barrels a day from onshore oilwells, the sector needs new investment — especially if it is to make significant moves offshore, and while Russian energy firms have carried out exploration in the past, most Western IOCs will be hesitant unless and until there is more clarity about who owns what.

Together, these facts mean that for once, the three countries in question have the power to take charge of their own destinies in a way that history rarely affords them. They can do this by working together to settle their maritime boundaries, thereby opening the way for international investment to help them to fully explore and responsibly exploit their respective exclusive economic zones. Natural gas is highly imperfect, but since it burns so much cleaner than other fossil fuels, it is generally accepted by most experts that it will be an indispensable bridging fuel as the global economy transitions to a low- or no-carbon future.

For each of Cyprus, Lebanon, and Syria, developing a safe offshore hydrocarbon sector would not only dramatically boost domestic energy security, but also offer a chance to earn significant export revenues. Those funds would permit historic investments in things like education, healthcare, and transportation, improving the lives of everyday people, making all three economies more competitive, and reducing the scope for disagreement among them.

From a technical perspective, settling the Cyprus-Lebanon, Lebanon-Syria, and Syria-

Cyprus maritime boundaries would not be difficult. The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) has published guidelines on how to draw such lines with pinpoint accuracy, maximum equity, and unquestionable fairness. It all comes down to science and the law, and provided the three governments approach the negotiations with goodwill, the process should be quite straightforward. For a variety of historical/ideological/political reasons, the former regime in Syria was widely seen as unlikely to make such a deal with Lebanon, but the new rulers in Damascus may be much more flexible.

Whatever the possible difficulties, the potential riches to be had are more than worth the effort, and regardless of where they are found, all three countries stand to benefit from working together to settle their maritime boundaries. Agreed borders would be a diplomatic breakthrough, but the exercise of negotiating them could be even more valuable by generating trust, goodwill, and the confidence to expand co-operation into other fields, from fisheries and marine protected areas to tourism, weather forecasting, and search & rescue.

As much of the East Med region tries to move on from its troubled past, nothing could be more helpful than forming new relationships among states, governments, and peoples. Doing so would not only spur faster economic recovery, but also broaden the basis for overall development and social stability. While the leaders who get this done will have earned the love and respect of their respective populations, I would submit that the rewards might go even further: by using energy to promote peace, they would set a sterling example by demonstrating that co-operation is always preferable to conflict.

To my mind, at least, that example should earn them consideration for the Nobel Peace Prize, not least for the powerful symbolism involved: instead of going to war over resources, they will have turned much of history on its head by proffering access to resources as an inducement to build and maintain peaceful, co-operative relationships.

In the final analysis, the East Med region has within its grasp a truly historic treasure chest, one containing not only lucre and energy security, but also a veritable new era of peace and stability, one in which relations among states are conducted according to the rule of (international) law. This is the very purpose for which the United Nations was founded, and although that organisation has frequently been prevented from carrying out its mission in this and other parts of the world, what would be more appropriate than to have member states adhere to the very principles that the Security Council cannot or will not uphold?



Syria's interim President Ahmed al-Sharaa attends an interview with Reuters at the presidential palace, in Damascus, Syria on Monday. (Reuters)

Greenland votes under shadow of Trump threat

AFP
Nuuk

Greenland voted yesterday in legislative elections that could yield a timeline for independence for the Danish self-governing territory coveted by US President Donald Trump.

Trump, determined to take control of the vast Arctic island "one way or the other", tried until the last minute to influence the vote, sparking astonishment, rejection, and, to a small degree, enthusiasm among the 57,000 Greenlanders, most of whom favour independence.

After waiting in a long queue with other voters, Greenland's outgoing Prime Minister Mute Egede — who celebrated his 38th birthday yesterday — cast his ballot shortly after polling stations opened in Nuuk, the capital.

"Our country is in the eye of the storm," he said in a video posted to Facebook just hours before the vote.

"The international community is watching us closely, and we have recently seen how much they are trying to influence our country," said Egede, leader of the left-green party Inuit Ataqatigiit (IA).

Polling stations closed at 8pm and first results are expected several hours later.

The lead-up to the election to choose the 31-seat parliament, the Inatsisartut, was mostly marked by debates on health-care, education and future ties with Den-



People queue to cast their votes outside the polling station during general election in Nuuk yesterday. (Reuters)

mark, which still controls the island's foreign, defence and monetary policy.

Greenland's inhabitants — almost 90% of whom are Inuits — say they are tired of being treated like second-class citizens by their former colonial power, which they accuse of having historically suppressed their culture, carried out forced sterilisations and removed children from their families.

All of Greenland's main political parties back independence but disagree on the timeframe. Some, such as the nationalist Naleraq party — the main opposition faction — want to seek independence quickly.

Others prefer to wait until the island is financially independent, including the two parties that make up the outgoing coalition, IA and the social democratic Siumut.

The island, covered 80% by ice, depends on its fisheries sector, which accounts for almost all of its exports, and annual Danish subsidies of more than \$565mn, equivalent to a fifth of its GDP.

The most impatient independence backers believe Greenland soon will be able to stand on its own thanks to untapped mineral reserves, including rare earths crucial to the green transition.

But the mining sector is still in its embryonic stages, hampered by high costs due to Greenland's harsh climate and lack of infrastructure.

"We are about to make a huge change towards Greenland's independence and the fight for who we are as Inuit," influencer Qupanuk Olsen, a mining engineer standing for the Naleraq party, told AFP before she cast her ballot.

Trump floated the idea of buying Greenland during his first mandate, a bid swiftly rejected by Danish and Greenlandic authorities.

Again in the White House, he has circled back on the ambition with greater fervour, refusing to rule out the use of force and invoking US national security, amid rising Chinese and Russian interest in the Arctic region.

Late on Sunday, Trump invited Greenlanders "to be a part of the Greatest Nation anywhere in the World, the United States of America", promising to make them "rich".

The most recent polling on the is-

sue, published in January, shows 85% of Greenlanders are opposed to Trump's idea. "I've had enough of his empty threats," Anders Martinson, a 27-year-old tax service employee, told AFP.

"There are a lot of Greenlanders who see the US differently with Trump as president, who are a little less inclined to co-operate even if that's what they would really want to do," he said.

"To keep our country for ourselves, that's what I'm most anxious about," said another voter, Lars Fredsbo.

The statements by Trump — whom Egede has described as "unpredictable" — sent a jolt through the election campaign.

Naleraq's nationalists say his remarks have given them leverage ahead of independence negotiations with Denmark.

But the comments have also chilled some independence supporters, making continued ties with Copenhagen more attractive to them, at least for now.

"Staying with Denmark is more important than ever right now because I think Denmark has mostly been good to us," said one voter who identified himself only as Ittukusuk.

"If we become independent, then Trump might get too aggressive and that's what scares me."

Political analysts say Trump's meddling in the election contributed to a more polarised debate by reinforcing each side's convictions, but overall it was not expected to influence the result.

Termez hub joins UN Global Supply Network

A grand ceremony was held on February 11 to mark the inclusion of the International Multifunctional Transport and Logistics Hub in Termez as part of the Global Supply Network of the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR). The event was attended by Ismatulla Irgashev, Special Representative of the President of Uzbekistan for Afghanistan; I. Ratwate, Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Afghanistan; S. Mahl, UN Resident Co-ordinator in Uzbekistan; D. Lipkanu, Acting Regional Representative of UNHCR; A. Jamal, Head of Afghan UNHCR, along with leaders and representatives from Surkhandarya regional administration, Uzbekistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Customs, and Border Services. Established in 2022 under the initiative of the President of Uzbekistan, the hub was created to centralise and streamline the delivery of humanitarian aid from the UN, international organisations, and foreign governments to Afghanistan and other countries, with the support of "Termez Cargo Center" LLC. Speaking at the 78th session of the UN General Assembly, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev of Uzbekistan emphasised the importance of global unity in addressing Afghanistan's challenges and underscored that humanitarian assistance to the Afghan people must not diminish. The UNHCR Global Supply Network comprises seven logistics hubs located in Amman (Jordan), Dubai (UAE), Nairobi (Kenya), Accra (Ghana), Douala (Cameroon), Copenhagen (Denmark), and Panama City (Panama). These hubs handle over \$500mn worth of essential supplies annually — such as tents, blankets, kitchen sets, and medicines — ensuring timely responses to humanitarian crises worldwide. Amid rising global challenges and an increasing number of vulnerable populations in need, the UN and its agencies strive to maintain sufficient reserves of essential resources. In this context, Termez's strategic location at the crossroads of Central and South Asia, its well-developed transportation and energy infrastructure, and its skilled workforce were pivotal in its integration into the UN network.

With this development, the Termez hub becomes the eighth international warehouse in the UNHCR Global Supply Network, confirming its critical role in efficiently distributing humanitarian supplies on a global scale. During the ceremony, Ismatulla Irgashev highlighted that the Termez hub symbolises international collaboration, reliability, and efficiency. It not only strengthens humanitarian supply chains but also contributes to regional development by creating new opportunities and jobs. I. Ratwate expressed his gratitude to Uzbekistan for its active efforts in providing humanitarian aid to Afghanistan and other nations, as well as for its close cooperation with UN agencies. He praised the infrastructure in Termez, which enhances the UN's readiness for emergencies while reducing operational costs and risks. "We are committed to continuing our partnership with Uzbekistan to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, leaving no one behind," he remarked. S. Mahl, the UN Resident Co-ordinator in Uzbekistan, underscored that the ceremony demonstrated the republic's commitment to multilateral co-operation and reinforced its role as an active participant in international humanitarian initiatives. She noted that thanks to Uzbekistan's efforts, millions of people affected by emergencies will receive vital aid. D. Lipkanu, Acting Representative of UNHCR for Central Asia, highlighted the strategic advantages of the Termez hub, stating that its integration into the UNHCR Global Network will maximise its infrastructure and logistical capabilities to assist displaced people effectively. A. Jamal, UNHCR Representative in Afghanistan, noted that Afghanistan stands to benefit significantly from the expansion of UNHCR's emergency supply system via the Termez hub. "Moreover, the significance of this hub extends far beyond Afghanistan. It will enhance global emergency response measures, strengthen regional co-operation, and advance efforts to combat climate change through environmentally friendly technologies," he concluded.

Over 100 hostages freed in deadly Pakistan train siege

■ Armed militants attack train carrying over 450 passengers
■ 3, including driver, killed; how many still onboard unclear

AFP
Mach

Three people were killed and around a hundred hostages freed by Pakistani troops yesterday after armed militants attacked a train carrying over 450 passengers in the country's southwestern Balochistan province.

It was not immediately clear how many people remained on board the train as security forces continued operations overnight. Before seizing the train yesterday afternoon, militants blew up the railway track, forcing it to a halt in a remote area.

"People began hiding under the seats in panic. The militants separated the men from the women. They allowed me and my family to go because I told them I'm a heart patient," 49-year-old Allahditta told AFP from a makeshift hospital at the train station in Mach.

"I was on the train with my father and brother when militants took us hostage. They let me go but they are still there," added a 32-year-old woman, who asked not to be named.

Interior minister Mohsin Naqvi said security forces had rescued over 100 people, adding that 16 "terrorists" had been killed.

Security sources told AFP that the "clearance operation is ongoing", after reporting heavy gunfire between militants and security



Paramedics treat an injured passenger at the Mach railway station, which has been turned into a makeshift hospital after the militant ambush in remote Mach, southwestern Balochistan, yesterday. (AFP)

forces. The assault was immediately claimed by the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA), a separatist group behind rising violence in the province which borders Afghanistan and Iran.

Muhammad Kashif, a senior railway government official in Quetta, the capital of the province, earlier told AFP that "over 450 passengers onboard" had been taken hostage.

Some of the passengers were freed by the militants and walked for hours to reach the nearest railway station, from which they boarded other trains to Mach.

The driver of the train, a police officer and soldier were killed in

the assault, according to paramedic Nazim Farooq and railway official Muhammad Aslam, both at Mach railway station.

In a statement, the BLA said gunmen bombed the railway track before storming aboard the train.

"The militants swiftly took control of the train and have taken all passengers hostage," said the statement released to media.

The incident happened around 1pm in rural Sibi district, near to a city station where the train had been due to stop.

The train had left Quetta for Peshawar, in northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa — a more than 30-hour journey — at around 9am.

The area is a mountainous region making it easier for militants to have hideouts and plan attacks.

Security forces have been battling a decades-long insurgency in impoverished Balochistan, which militant groups claim is being exploited by outsiders, with wealth from its natural resources siphoned off with little benefit to the local population.

But violence has soared in the western border regions with Afghanistan, from north to south, since the Taliban took back power in 2021.

Pakistan accuses the Taliban government in Kabul of offering safe haven to militants to plan attacks. The Taliban government denies the charge. The BLA have launched larger scale attacks in recent months, including holding a motorway overnight and identifying travellers from outside the province and shooting them dead.

BLA militants also killed seven Punjabi travellers in February after they were ordered off a bus. In November, the BLA claimed responsibility for a bombing at Quetta's main railway station that killed 26 people, including 14 soldiers.

Last year was the deadliest year in almost a decade, with more than 1,600 people killed in attacks in Pakistan, mostly in the border regions, according to the Center for Research and Security Studies, an Islamabad-based analysis group.

Ukraine in largest drone barrage

Ukrainian drones smashed into high-rise apartment blocks on the outskirts of Moscow in the early hours yesterday, in what both sides called the largest attack targeting the Russian capital of the three-year conflict.

The Kremlin condemned the strikes, which came hours before top US and Ukrainian officials sat down for talks in Saudi Arabia.

Three people were killed and several more wounded, while Russian oil supplies to Hungary were suspended after pipeline infrastructure was hit and dozens of flights had to be rerouted as Moscow airports were closed.

Kyiv said the strikes should push Russian President Vladimir Putin to accept its call for a halt to long-range aerial attacks, a proposal Moscow has previously ruled out. Ukrainian and US diplomats were meeting for talks on ending the conflict, with Kyiv saying it would try to get Washington — which has resumed talks with Moscow under President Donald Trump — on board with the idea. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov denounced Kyiv for targeting "residential houses", claiming Russia's own forces only hit military infrastructure, despite near daily attacks on Ukraine's civilian areas and thousands of Ukrainian civilians killed by its offensive.

Trump may rethink plans to double Canada steel, aluminium tariffs

AFP
Washington

US President Donald Trump said yesterday he would "probably" reconsider doubling planned tariffs on Canadian steel and aluminium, hours after announcing the sharp hike.

Trump's step up to 50% levies initially came after the Canadian province of Ontario imposed an electricity surcharge on three US states who buy it — but Ontario has suspended this decision after talks with Washington.

Asked if the change would influence his decision on Canada tariffs, Trump told reporters: "I'm looking at that, but probably so."

Trump's threats came shortly before a midnight deadline for ramping up a globe-spanning trade offensive with 25% levies on steel and aluminium imports.

The US dollar fell sharply yesterday, particularly against the euro, while markets fluctuated in volatile trading.

Canadian Prime Minister-

elect Mark Carney earlier vowed that his incoming administration would hit back with "maximum impact."

But Ontario has since agreed to halt the 25% fee on electricity exports to Michigan, Minnesota and New York after premier Doug Ford said he held "productive" talks with US Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick.

Ford, Lutnick and US Trade Representative Jamieens Greer will meet in Washington tomorrow "to discuss a renewed USMCA ahead of the April 2 reciprocal tariff deadline," said a US-Canada joint statement, referring to the North American trade pact.

The upcoming steel and aluminium levies, which currently contain no exceptions, threaten to affect everything from electronics to vehicles and construction equipment — and have manufacturers scrambling to find cost-effective domestic suppliers.

Canada, historically among the closest US allies, had been facing the most aggressive action and has been the target of Trump's ire on trade — and unprecedented questioning of and

threats to its sovereignty.

Canada supplies half of US aluminium imports and 20% of US steel imports, says industry consultant EY-Parthenon.

Trump said his supercharged tariffs were in response to Ontario's electricity surcharge.

He added on Truth Social that if Canada uses electricity as a bargaining chip "they will pay a financial price for this so big that it will be read about in History Books for many years to come!"

He also threatened to boost tariffs on cars from April 2, saying this would "essentially, permanently shut down the automobile manufacturing business in Canada."

Trump has vowed reciprocal levies as soon as April 2 to remedy trade practices Washington deems unfair, raising the potential for more products and trading partners to be specifically targeted.

Reacting to Trump's announcement on MSNBC, Ontario Premier Doug Ford said the US president made "an unprovoked attack on our country, on families, on jobs."

Portugal govt loses confidence vote

Portugal's parliament rejected yesterday a motion of confidence in the centre-right minority government, provoking its collapse after only 11 months in office that is likely to trigger an early election, the country's third in just over three years. Lawmakers voted 142-88, with zero abstentions, against the motion that was presented last Thursday by Prime Minister Luis Montenegro, after the opposition questioned his integrity over the dealings of a consultancy firm he founded which is now run by his sons. His administration now assumes a caretaker role. Montenegro has denied wrongdoing or any ethical shortcomings by the firm, which has contracts with private companies. "The insinuation that I mixed my business and political activity is completely abusive, and even insulting. A repeated falsehood does not become the truth, but it contaminates the political environment... this is what populism feeds on," he told parliament before the vote. It is now up to President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa whether to call a new parliamentary election after a round of consultations that are likely to take place in the next few days. He has said a new ballot could be held in mid-May.

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