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BUSINESS | Page 2

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Qatar hails US-Iran talks held in Oman

Qatar has welcomed the talks held between the US and Iran in Muscat, mediated by Oman. Qatar commended the positive atmosphere of the talks, the statements made by both parties, and the constructive role played by Oman in this context. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs reaffirmed Qatar's full support for diplomacy and dialogue to resolve all outstanding issues between the US and Iran, within the framework of its firm belief in the importance of fostering security, stability, peace, and development at both regional and international levels. **(QNA)**

ICAO facilitation meeting held

The co-ordination meeting of the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) facilitation team experts commenced yesterday in Doha, with activities scheduled to continue over two days. The first day of the meeting addressed several topics related to updates on air transport facilitation and ways to enhance communication and co-ordination among teams working on passenger name data and data protection. The sessions also covered discussions on illegal migration within the framework of principles outlined in Annex 9 (Facilitation), as well as public health standards and recommendations issued by the World Health Organisation, with the possibility of integrating them into review programmes. **Page 4**

10th Social Sciences conference starts

The 10th Social Sciences and Humanities Conference, organised by the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, commenced yesterday and will run for four days, researching in social media platforms and the dialectics of information flow, freedom of expression, surveillance, and control. Researcher at the Arab Center and Chair of the conference committee Mohamed Hemchi stated that the selection of social media platforms as the theme of this edition reflects the centre's focus on studies related to these mediums and the digital space. **Page 4**

Computers, phones exempted from tariffs

President Donald Trump's administration granted exclusions from steep reciprocal tariffs to smartphones, computers and some other electronics imported largely from China, providing a big break to tech companies like Apple that rely on imported products. Trump's action also excludes the specified electronics from his 10% "baseline" tariffs on goods from most countries other than China, easing import costs for semiconductor from Taiwan and Apple iPhones produced in India. **Page 7**

Accord reached over tackling pandemics

World Health Organisation (WHO) members yesterday reached agreement over how to tackle future pandemics after three years of discussions. "We have an accord in principle" and the final version will have to be approved by the various member states, said Anne-Claire Amprou, the French ambassador for world health. Delegates will meet on Tuesday in Geneva to put the finishing touches to a landmark text on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response and give it their definitive seal of agreement, Amprou added. **Page 11**

Marc Marquez wins Qatar Grand Prix sprint race



Ducati's Spanish rider Marc Marquez kisses his medal on the podium after winning the Qatar MotoGP Grand Prix sprint race at the Lusail International Circuit yesterday. Marc Marquez's younger brother Alex finished second, while Franco Morbidelli was third. The main Grand Prix will be held today in Lusail at 8pm. **Sport Page 1**

Qatar beat Australia 11-7; to meet Morocco today in semi-finals



Camel Handball Championship: Qatar beat Australia 11-7 and qualified to face Morocco in the semi-finals today, while Somalia will face Iraq in the second semi-final. **Sport Page 3**

Iran, US hold 'positive' talks in Oman, agree to resume next week

QNA/Reuters

Iran and the US held "positive" and "constructive" talks in Oman yesterday and agreed to reconvene next week, both sides said, a dialogue meant to address Tehran's escalating nuclear programme with President Donald Trump threatening military action if there is no deal. "I think we are very close to a basis for negotiations and if we can conclude this basis next week, we'll have gone a long way and will be able to start real discussions based on that," Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi told state television.

Araqchi said the talks - a first between Iran and a Trump administration, including his first term in 2017-21 - took place in a "productive, calm and positive atmosphere".

"Both sides have agreed to continue the talks... probably next Saturday... Iran and the US side want an agreement in the short term. We do not want talks for (the sake of) talks," Araqchi added.



US envoy Steve Witkoff.



Araghchi meets with Omani Foreign Minister Sayyid Badr al-Busaidi in Muscat, Oman, yesterday.

A White House statement called the talks involving Trump's Middle East envoy Steven Witkoff, US ambassador to Oman Ana Escroginia, and Iran's Foreign Minister Dr Abbas Araqchi "very positive and constructive".

Trump made a surprise announcement on Monday that Washington and Tehran would begin talks in Oman, a Gulf state that has mediated between the West and the Islamic Republic before.

Saturday's exchanges were indirect and mediated by Oman,

as Iran had wanted, rather than face-to-face, as Trump had demanded. Each delegation had its separate room and exchanged messages via Oman's foreign minister, according to Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Es-mail Baghaei.

Oman's Foreign Minister, Badr bin Hamad al-Busaidi, said that Muscat hosted the meeting to facilitate a dialogue and negotiation process to reach a fair and binding agreement.

He added that the meeting took place in a friendly atmosphere.

Israel expands Gaza offensive; toll 50,933

AFP
Gaza City

Israel said yesterday it planned to expand its military offensive in Gaza after seizing a new corridor as part of a broader effort to take large parts of the war-battered Palestinian territory.

It also announced a sweeping evacuation order for tens of thousands of residents of Khan Younis and surrounding areas in southern Gaza.

Israeli defence minister Katz said the military was also taking over several areas in northern Gaza and the "security zone is being expanded, including in the Netzarim Corridor".

His announcement came as a Hamas official said the resistance group expected "real progress" towards a ceasefire deal to end the war, ahead of talks with Egyptian mediators in Cairo.

Yesterday Hamas released a video showing Israeli-American hostage Edan Alexander, in which he criticises Israel's government for failing to secure his release.

The Times of Israel reported that Egypt's proposal would involve the release of eight living hostages and eight bodies in exchange for a truce lasting between 40 and 70 days and a substantial



Mohammed Hanieh, a 13-year-old Palestinian boy who suffers from malnutrition, is carried by his father in the Bureij refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip yesterday.

release of Palestinian prisoners.

US President Donald Trump's envoy to the region, Steve Witkoff, was quoted by Israeli media as saying "a very serious deal is taking shape, it's a matter of days".

Gaza's health ministry said yesterday at least 1,563 Palestinians had been killed since March 18 when the ceasefire collapsed, taking the overall death toll since the war began to 50,933. **Page 6**

National initiative to bolster uveitis treatment launched

QNA
Doha

Qatar Society of Ophthalmology (QSO) has announced the launch of a national health initiative in collaboration with the uveitis team at Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC) to bolster specialised care in the diagnosis and treatment of uveitis, under the theme of "uveitis for all".

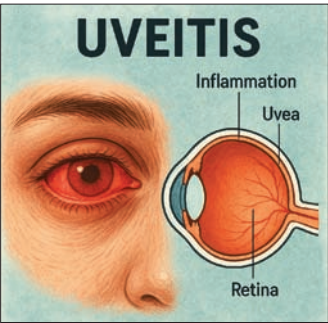
The official launch of the initiative is set to take place during the QSO's inaugural symposium on uveitis today. The event is a prominent scientific assembly aimed at advancing care and research pertaining to this complex inflamma-

tory condition, which poses a dire threat to vision if not diagnosed and managed early and with precision.

The initiative enjoys a broad-based backing from the HMC's ophthalmology team, in addition to multidisciplinary support from infectious disease specialists, endocrinologists, internists, and other relevant entities.

These teams perform a pivotal role in steering this nationally led project, which is spearheaded by an exceptional cadre of ophthalmologists in Qatar.

Organised by QSO, under the auspices of the Qatar Doctors Association, the symposium will feature a keynote address by Chair of the International Uveitis Study



(Image used for illustrative purpose)

Group, Professor Vishali Gupta, one of the world's top-rung experts in the field.

In addition, the event convenes a host of specialists in infec-

tious diseases and rheumatology, alongside senior healthcare leaders, to deliberate on the pressing need for standardised, accessible, and evidence-based care for uveitis patients in Qatar.

Speaking to Qatar News Agency (QNA), President of QSO and Senior Consultant in Ophthalmology at HMC, Dr Faisal Saud al-Naqadan, said the initiative primarily intends to close existing gaps in healthcare provision, embrace cutting-edge approaches to diagnosis and treatment, and foster strategic collaboration with key humanitarian and regulatory bodies, including HMC, the Ministry of Public Health, and the Primary Health Care Corporation.

This is in addition to eye care providers in the private sector and other relevant institutions such as Qatar Charity and the Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS), so as to ensure the provision of comprehensive and accessible eye health services for all patients.

The initiative is the onset of future initiatives that are poised to handle other complex and critical clinical cases that require effectively coordinated multidisciplinary healthcare, Dr al-Naqadan highlighted.

He indicated that the event is crucial to shed light on the latest advancements in the field of ophthalmology, particularly in the diagnosis and treatment of uveitis.

Deputy PM meets Indonesian defence minister

HE the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defence Affairs Sheikh Saud bin Abdulrahman bin Hassan bin Ali al-Thani met with the visiting Indonesian Minister of Defence Sjafrie Sjamsoeddin, and his accompanying delegation. The meeting discussed topics of common interest and ways to enhance and develop them. It was attended by a number of senior officials and officers from the both sides. **(QNA)**



Qatar-Indonesian relations strong, deep-rooted: diplomat

QNA
Jakarta

Al-Reem Hassan al-Ibrahim, Acting Charge d’Affaires at the Qatari embassy in Jakarta, affirmed that Qatari-Indonesian relations are strong and well-established, constantly evolving, and represent a distinguished model of bilateral co-operation based on mutual respect and shared interests. In remarks to Qatar News Agency (QNA), she said that bilateral relations have witnessed rapid development in recent years, expressing her expectation that the visit of Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto to Doha would further strengthen and expand these ties. She added that the visit presents a valuable opportunity to launch a new phase of strategic co-operation between the two countries and to deepen the existing partnership. It is expected to witness the signing of several new agreements and memorandums of understanding in various fields, including politics, culture, infrastructure, housing, renewable energy, and potentially food security, among other vital sectors. This aligns with Qatar National Vision 2030 and Indonesia Vision 2045, both of which emphasise eco-

The Qatari diplomat said that the visit by Indonesian president presents a valuable opportunity to launch a new phase of strategic co-operation between the two countries and to deepen the existing partnership

nomie diversification and investment in innovation. Regarding key areas of current co-operation, al-Ibrahim confirmed that they include political and diplomatic collaboration at both bilateral and international levels, as well as co-operation in the economic, commercial, cultural, and defence sectors. She highlighted Qatari investments in Indonesia in sectors such as energy, aviation, telecommunications, banking, housing, labour, education, training, tourism, and more. She added that the cultural aspect also receives significant attention, evident in ongoing cultural exchange and educational collaboration, particularly with a number of Indonesian students enrolled in Qatari universities, especially in Arabic and Islamic studies. She said that 2023 marked the launch of the Qatar-Indonesia Year of Culture, which focused on cultural, economic, and creative exchange. It featured successful cultural

events in both countries and reciprocal visits by cultural delegations, thereby enhancing understanding and closeness between the two friendly nations and peoples. Regarding the bilateral issues expected to be discussed during the President’s visit to Doha, she pointed out that the agenda will likely include economic co-operation, strengthening cultural and educational ties, signing new strategic agreements, supporting the participation of skilled Indonesian labour in the Qatari market, and enhancing co-operation in vocational training. Al-Ibrahim said that the visit is also expected to address the coordination of visions and positions on regional and international issues, particularly support for humanitarian causes, such as ending the war in Gaza and delivering humanitarian aid, as well as developments in Lebanon, Syria, and Afghanistan.

Indonesian president arrives in Doha

Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto arrived in Doha yesterday on an official visit to the country. He and the accompanying delegation were welcomed upon arrival at Hamad International Airport by HE the Minister of Culture Sheikh Abdulrahman bin Hamad al-Thani and Indonesian ambassador Ridwan Hassan. **(QNA)**



Qatar slams Israeli authorities’ closure of six UNRWA schools

Qatar has strongly condemned the decision by Israeli occupation authorities to shut down six schools operated by the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) in East Jerusalem, describing the deprivation of children from education as a new crime in the ongoing series of Israeli crimes in the occupied Palestinian territories. In a statement, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs emphasised that access to education is a fundamental human right enshrined in international law. It warned against the politicisation of education and voiced serious concern over efforts to diminish the role of UNRWA. The ministry called on the international community to take urgent and concrete measures to hold Israel accountable and to ensure its compliance with international legal obligations. Reaffirming Qatar’s unwavering support for the Palestinian cause, the statement underscored the country’s commitment to a just and lasting solution based on international legitimacy and the two-state framework, leading to the establishment of an independent Palestinian state on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. **(QNA)**

Minister visits universities in Beirut

HE the Minister of Education and Higher Education Lolwah bint Rashid AlKhater, along with her accompanying delegation, visited both Lebanese University and American University of Beirut as part of her official visit to Lebanon. During the visits, discussions were held on prospects for academic and research collaboration between Qatar and Lebanon, as well as ways to enhance and develop these partnerships. HE AlKhater toured the facilities of the universities, learning about their key scientific achievements and educational projects. **(QNA)**



Doha Forum at ADF, co-hosts strategic panel

QNA
Antalya

Doha Forum participated this week in the Antalya Diplomacy Forum (ADF), reaffirming its dedication to global diplomacy and multilateral efforts to address pressing humanitarian challenges. Led by Mubarak Ajlan al-Kuwari, Executive Director, and Maha al-Kuwari, General Manager, the Doha Forum delegation engaged with international leaders and experts throughout the fourth edition of the ADF, held under the patronage of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. As part of the strategic partnership with ADF, Doha Forum co-hosted a high-level panel titled ‘Humanitarian Response to Complex Crises’ on Friday. The panel featured distinguished international speakers including Chief Adviser to the Turkish President on Foreign Policy and Security, ambassador Akif Gagatay Kilic; Sudanese Foreign Minister Dr Ali Youssef Ahmed al-Sharif; Secretary-General of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red



Crescent Societies (IFRC), Jagan Chapagain; and Director of External Relations and Communications of UNRWA, Tamara Alrifai. It was moderated by Andrew Hopkins, Senior Correspondent at TRT World. The session explored the underlying causes of humanitarian crises, innovative approaches to coordination and response, and ways to enhance the effectiveness of global humanitarian systems. ‘We are honoured to collaborate with the Antalya Diplomacy Forum in co-hosting this vital discussion aimed at developing actionable solutions to alleviate the mounting pressures on the international humanitarian system,’ said the Executive Director of Doha Forum, al-Kuwari. ‘This panel reflects Doha Fo-

rum’s ongoing commitment to convening diplomatic leaders, humanitarian experts, and regional stakeholders to drive constructive outcomes in times of global crisis,’ he added. The Antalya Diplomacy Forum 2025 brought together global leaders, diplomats, and civil society representatives under the theme ‘Reclaiming Diplomacy in a Fragmented World! Doha Forum’s participation highlights its commitment to strengthening collaboration with international institutions addressing complex geopolitical and humanitarian challenges. It sets the stage for continued collaboration ahead of Doha Forum 2025, themed ‘Justice in Action: Beyond Promises to Progress,’ which will be held in Doha on Dec 6-7, 2025.



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Qatar holds UN event advocating sport for peace, development

The Permanent Mission of Qatar to the UN and the Permanent Mission of the Principality of Monaco to the UN, in their capacity as Co-Chairs of the Group of Friends of Sport for Development and Peace, organised an event in collaboration with the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA).

Held at the UN headquarters in New York, the event, themed *Leveling the Playing Field: Sport for Social Inclusion*, was intended to mark the International Day of Sport for Development and Peace 2025.

Addressing the event, UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, Li Junhua, underscored the unique capability of sport in bridging gaps and reinforcing integration, highlighting its role in beefing up job opportunities, combating discrimination, and building the abilities to adaptation, particularly in vulnerable communities.

Executive Director of UN Women, Sima Bahous, noted the critical role that sport plays in empowering women, emphasising that sport helps break conventional strictures that could prevent women's empowerment.

The second part of the event featured the participation of a host of athletes who have differently contributed to backing the efforts aimed at promoting the role of sport in creating a positive change in the world and communities, chief amongst them being Sheikhha Asma al-Thani, the Qatari mountaineer and partner of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR); Jamal Hill, the American Paralympic swimmer and bronze medalist at the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games; Justin Morrow, the American professional soccer player, social justice advocate, and director of partnerships and sports programming at the University of South California's Race and Equity Centre;



Veronica Shiffi, the American basketball player at San Diego State University; and Tegla Loroupe, the Kenyan former long-distance runner and sprinter, and global advocate for peace and women's rights.

Sheikha Asma shared her personal experience, emphasising that sport has been a vehicle for self-expression, surmounting challenges, and inculcating the hope in women and girls in the region to have dreams and belief in their abilities.

She stressed the importance of families' support for girls to engage in sporting activities, noting the remarkable surge in the number of female mountaineers in Qatar and the Arab region, as a testament to the positive shift in societal norms.

In addition, Sheikhha Asma spoke about the role that sport plays in serving global issues, shining a spotlight on the profound symbolism of holding the UNHCR's flag aloft during her career as a message of solidarity with marginalised and displaced communities.

She commended Qatar's role in deepening sport diplomacy, highlighting the humanitarian and cultural legacy of major tournaments like the Football World Cup.

The participants deliberated on the profound role that sport plays in shaping their identities and expanding their social and humanitarian prospects, as the topics ranged from mental health, social justice, awareness about climate and water, to emerging generation empowerment.

They underscored the importance of international co-operation to capitalise on the transformative power of sport in building more inclusive societies, particularly for the benefit of youth, women, and marginalised groups, calling for sport to be positioned as a central pillar within the agenda of the Second World Summit for Social Development, scheduled to be convened in Doha in November.

Qatari team treats 37 Kyrgyz children with hearing impairments

The medical delegation by the Ministry of Endowments (Awqaf) and Islamic Affairs has treated 37 Kyrgyz children with hearing impairment.

According to an official statement from Awqaf, this was done as part of its ongoing humanitarian efforts, and with support from the Endowment Fund for Healthcare of the General Administration of Endowments.

The delegation performed 24 cochlear implant surgeries.

The delegation completed three surgical procedures to perform cochlear implants during the next visit.

The delegation also delivered 10 hearing aids to children whose medical examinations proved they don't require cochlear implants.

Abdullah al-Meer, chairman of the Cochlear Implant Support Committee, said that the project is the result of constructive co-operation and community partnership between Awqaf, the Ministry of

Public Health and Hamad Medical Corporation.

The project aims to provide advanced medical care for children with profound hearing loss and enable them to integrate into society through auditory and linguistic communication.

After its arrival in Bishkek, the medical delegation began medical examinations of patients eligible for surgery.

It was decided to perform surgical intervention and cochlear implants for children whose cases required surgery.

Three children were diagnosed with other ear conditions requiring surgery and 10 children were fitted with hearing aids as they did not require implants, highlighting the comprehensiveness of the programme in addressing various levels of hearing impairment.

Al-Meer and Cochlear Implant Support Committee vice-chairman of the Dr Abdulsalam al-Qahtani met the director of the Kyrgyz ministry of health's National Centre for Maternity and Child Care.

They discussed the programme's developments and future expansion plans, ensuring the project's sustainability and benefiting the largest possible number of children.

Al-Meer praised this purposeful medical initiative and the generous support from the donors in Qatar who endowed the Endowment



Fund for Healthcare at the General Directorate of Endowments.

"This support contributes effectively to improving healthcare for patients by providing treatment and purchasing medicines and medical equipment in addition to supporting and developing medical services and offering effective healthcare solutions for needy groups, including Kyrgyz children," he said.

Dr al-Qahtani expressed his sincere thanks to all donors who donated to the Endowment Fund for Healthcare.

The cochlear implant project in Kyrgyzstan benefited 194 children during previous visits.

These children are being rehabilitated in medical centres under the supervision of local medical teams with continuous monitoring from the Qatari side.

The cochlear implant project is one of the most prominent medical initiatives supported by Awqaf.

This project is a practical implementation of the donors' requirements to support children's healthcare and provide advanced medical solutions that contribute to improving their quality of life and enabling them to actively participate in society and education.

Sheikha Alya meets UN special envoy for Syria



Qatar's Permanent Representative to the UN HE Sheikhha Alya Ahmed bin Saif al-Thani met the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Syria, Geir Pedersen, at the Qatari mission's headquarters in New York. During the meeting, HE Sheikhha Alya reaffirmed Qatar's steadfast position in supporting the sovereignty, national unity, and territorial integrity of Syria, emphasising the importance of supporting the special envoy's efforts to fulfil the aspirations of the Syrian people for security and stability of the country. - QNA



HEC Paris, Doha and Mastercard officials at the signing ceremony.

HEC Paris, Doha collaborates with Mastercard

HEC Paris has entered into a strategic engagement with Mastercard, becoming the official academic collaborator for Mastercard's executive education programmes in Qatar.

The collaboration was officially marked by a signing ceremony at HEC Paris' Doha campus.

This collaboration combines HEC Paris' globally recognised academic expertise with Mastercard's industry leadership in payments technology, offering transformative learning experiences tailored for business leaders across Eastern Europe, Middle East, and Africa region.

The first programme to be delivered under this collaboration is the Mastercard Fellowship Programme in Artificial Intelligence

(AI), designed to equip executives and senior managers with deep, practical insights into AI applications within the payments, fintech, and broader financial sectors.

Future cohorts will include public sector leaders, reflecting AI's increasing impact across industries.

The programme will focus on practical and strategic aspects of AI, covering key topics such as digital transformation, fintech innovation, data governance, regulatory compliance, AI-powered cyber security and fraud detection, and the strategic implications of blockchain and cryptocurrency.

The collaboration will also see the rollout of the Mastercard Women's Leadership Pro-

gramme, which empowers women in business to excel in top-tier roles, amplify their influence, and expand their professional networks.

"True progress is driven by shared values and a steadfast commitment to shaping the future," said HEC Paris, Doha dean Dr Pablo Martin de Holan. "This collaboration is more than just a milestone - it reflects Qatar's dedication to innovation and global leadership."

"By uniting HEC Paris' legacy of academic excellence with Mastercard's industry expertise, we equip executives with the strategic vision and transformative knowledge to become better leaders and drive meaningful impact in an era of rapid technological change," he said.

VCUarts Qatar presents lecture, panel discussion on 'Design for Humanitarian Crisis Response'

Virginia Commonwealth University School of the Arts in Qatar (VCUarts Qatar) and Anthro-Tech Ateliers will host a public lecture and panel discussion on *Design for Humanitarian Crisis Response* tomorrow, at 4pm.

Held at VCUarts Qatar in collaboration with Sweden's embassy in Doha, the event will explore how design thinking and innovation can help communities affected by displacement, conflict, and environmental crises.

The session will begin with welcome remarks by VCUarts Qatar dean Amir Berbic, followed by a keynote lecture from Johan Karlsson, the managing director of Better Shelter, a humanitarian nonprofit developing temporary shelters for displaced people.

Karlsson (*pictured*) share insights from over a decade of work at the intersection of design, engineering, and humanitarian response.

"As designers, we have the unique responsibility not only to create beautiful and functional spaces but also to address the critical needs of those affected by disasters and conflict," Berbic said. "This panel discussion highlights the transformative power of design in humanitarian efforts, offering innovative solutions that can provide shelter, dignity, and hope to those in need during the most challenging times."



"Sweden has long championed innovation with purpose - where design, sustainability, and human rights go hand in hand," said Swedish ambassador to Qatar Gautam Bhattacharyya.

"This event reflects our strong belief in the power of creativity to solve real-world challenges," he said. "We are proud to support a conversation that brings together designers, academics, and humanitarian actors to co-create solutions that offer safety, restore agency, and rebuild lives in times of crisis."

The keynote will be followed by a panel discussion between Qatar Museums (QM) director Dr Alkindi Aljawabra and Karlsson, moderated by VCUarts Qatar professor of interior design Dr Johan Granberg.

This event aims to inspire dialogue around how designers, architects, and students can contribute to global humanitarian efforts through creative, scalable, and culturally responsive thinking and practice.

"At Better Shelter, we believe that thoughtful, human-centred design, developed in collaboration with humanitarian organisations, donors, and academia, can help restore a sense of agency and hope for people who have lost everything," Karlsson said. "I look forward to sharing our journey and learning from others working at the intersection of creativity and crisis."



Alfardan Automotive's Bodyshop wins award

Alfardan Automotive's Bodyshop has been awarded with the "Highly Commended Bodyshop of the Year, Passenger Cars" category at the 2024 Automechanika Dubai Awards.

According to a statement, this accolade underscores Alfardan Automotive's commitment to delivering excellence and its leadership in Qatar's automotive repair industry.

"As one of the top five finalists, Alfardan

Automotive's Bodyshop stood out for its state-of-the-art facilities, exceptional customer service, and adherence to global best practices," the statement added. "This recognition reinforces the Bodyshop's reputation as the go-to destination for premium automotive repair services in Qatar."

"This achievement highlights the dedication of the entire team at Alfardan Automotive Bodyshop to setting industry benchmarks and providing world-class repair

solutions for our esteemed clients," it continued. "Alfardan Automotive is honoured to receive this award and remain committed to maintaining the highest standards of quality and customer care."

"Located within the Alfardan Automotive Complex in Jery Al Samur, the Bodyshop is equipped with cutting-edge technology and staffed by highly skilled professionals," the statement said. "Just 12 minutes from Doha Festival City, the facility offers unpar-

alleled convenience to its clients while delivering exceptional repair and maintenance services for a wide range of premium automotive brands."

"Participation in the Automechanika Dubai Awards reflects Alfardan Automotive's focus on benchmarking its services against the best in the industry," it concluded. "The recognition serves as a testament to the company's continuous efforts to innovate and lead in the automotive sector."



Focus on social media at Social Sciences conference

The 10th Social Sciences and Humanities Conference, organised by the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, got underway yesterday and will run for four days, researching in social media platforms and the dialectics of information flow, freedom of expression, surveillance, and control.

On this occasion, Researcher at the Arab Center and Chair of the conference committee Mohamed Hemchi stated that the selection of social media platforms as the theme of this edition reflects the centre's focus on studies related to these mediums and the digital space. The aim is to provide a platform to showcase, scrutinise, and critique the findings of Arab research on this topic.

He expressed hope that Arab researchers interested in this field would use this opportunity for knowledge exchange and work collectively towards establishing a valuable and credible Arab contribution to the field.

In his speech, Hemchi highlighted the backdrop of the brutal war waged by Israel against Gaza, which he described as an ongoing genocide with no clear end in sight.



He noted that social media platforms have played a role in this conflict by being used to disseminate fabricated and misleading content through fake accounts that support

the Israeli narrative. Additionally, the platform-owning companies were criticised for suppressing the opposing narrative by banning accounts and limiting the reach of posts.

The conference's first session, chaired by President of the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies Dr Abdelwahab al-Effendi, explored surveillance studies and their trends, analysing published research and the cultural shift in surveillance studies and social media platforms.

The second session examined social media studies, focusing on the paradox of freedom and control, the public space in Gulf countries, and the impact of structure and agency on the contraction of Arab network activism. The third session addressed topics like ethics and politics on social media, AI challenges, and the surveillance and control mechanisms of these platforms. The conference will continue until Tuesday, featuring presentations from 41 researchers, culminating in the distribution of the "Arab Award for the Encouragement of Research in the Social and Human Sciences" at the closing ceremony. (QNA)

Illegal salt extraction spotted



The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Department of Wildlife Protection has spotted a violation involving the extraction of salt from the Sabkhat Al Zughain area in the central area of the country, which constitutes an illegal exploitation of the state's natural resources. Accordingly, the competent entities within the ministry have taken the necessary legal measures against the violators, as part of the ongoing efforts to protect the natural resources and maintain environmental balance in the country.

Banned fishing gear confiscated



The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change's Department of Marine Protection has seized a fishing vessel (motorised boat) during an inspection campaign, as it was found carrying banned fishing gear and nets. Accordingly, the necessary legal action was taken against the crew, and the confiscated items were held by the relevant department.



MANATEQ (Economic Zones Company) would like to invite competent local and/or international Companies for the following Open Tender.

MANATEQ

MANATEQ (Economic Zones Company) would like to invite competent local and/or international Companies for the following Open Tender.

رقم المناقصة Tender No.	موضوع المناقصة Tender Subject	قيمة التأمين الاقتصادي Tender Bond	رسوم المناقصة غير مستردة Tender Fee / Non-refundable	موعد الإغلاق Closing Date
TC/02/2025	ادارة خدمات تكنولوجيا المعلومات Manateq IT Infrastructure Managed Services	20,000.00 QR	500.00 QR	06 th May 2025 9:00am -12:00pm

Description of work :
Manateq wants a vendor to Manage Manateq services / network and security devices / platforms / applications / databases 24x7 in a real time in accordance with this tender.

Collection Date and Location:
Starting 13th April 2025 (09:00am to 02:00 pm)
MANATEQ - Small and Medium Industries Zone,
Jameel Khan - IT Support - T: +974 40323357
Email: j.khan@manateq.qa

موقع التسليم
أمين سر لجنة المناقصات - شركة المناطق الاقتصادية - منطقة الصناعات الصغيرة والمتوسطة ص.ب: 29000 الدوحة - قطر - هاتف: 40323333

تحتفظ شركة المناطق الاقتصادية بكامل حقوقها في تعديل شروط المناقصة في أي وقت بدون إيداع أسباب و/ أو إلغاء المناقصة بدون إيداع أسباب وبدون أدنى مسئولية عليها في هذا الصدد أين كان نوعها أو مصدرها
Economic Zones Company reserves its right in modifying terms of the tender at any time and/or cancelling the tender at any time without need of providing reasons and without any responsibility on its part whatever its kind

تدعو شركة مناطق الاقتصادية (مناطق) الشركات المحلية والعالمية للاشتراك بالمناقصة الآتية

MANATEQ (Economic Zones Company) would like to invite competent local and/or international Companies for the following Open Tender.

موقع الإغلاق
Closing Date

06th May 2025
9:00am -12:00pm

موضوع المناقصة
Tender Subject

ادارة خدمات تكنولوجيا المعلومات
Manateq IT Infrastructure Managed Services

قيمة التأمين الاقتصادي
Tender Bond

20,000.00 QR

رسوم المناقصة غير مستردة
Tender Fee / Non-refundable

500.00 QR

رقم المناقصة
Tender No.

TC/02/2025

وصف العمل:
ترغب شركة مناطق في مزود لإدارة الخدمات للعمل على إدارة / أجهزة الشبكات والأمن / المنصات / التطبيقات / قواعد البيانات على مدار الساعة طوال أيام الأسبوع وفقاً لهذه المناقصة.

موعد ومكان استلام وثائق المناقصة
بدءاً من 13 إبريل 2025 (9 صباحاً حتى الـ 2 ظهراً) مناطق- منطقة الصناعات الصغيرة والمتوسطة جميل خان | مساعد فني - هاتف: +974 40323357 البريد الإلكتروني: j.khan@manateq.qa

يتم دفع رسوم المناقصة من خلال شيك قابل للدفع باسم شركة المناطق الاقتصادية (مناطق) أو عن طريق تحويل بنكي للحساب التالي:

Account Name : Economic Zones Company - Manateq
Bank : Qatar National Bank
IBAN No. : QA19QNBA00000000013026499001

Account No. : 0013-026499-001
SWIFT CODE : QNBAQAQA

للتسجيل وثائق المناقصة يتعين الالتزام بما يلي:

- احضار تفويض لاستلام وثائق المناقصة.
- صورة من البطاقة الشخصية للمندوب الذي سوف يحصل على وثائق المناقصة.
- إيصاف ايداع رسوم وثائق المناقصة.

موقع التسليم
أمين سر لجنة المناقصات - شركة المناطق الاقتصادية - منطقة الصناعات الصغيرة والمتوسطة ص.ب: 29000 الدوحة - قطر - هاتف: 40323333

تحتفظ شركة المناطق الاقتصادية بكامل حقوقها في تعديل شروط المناقصة في أي وقت بدون إيداع أسباب و/ أو إلغاء المناقصة بدون إيداع أسباب وبدون أدنى مسئولية عليها في هذا الصدد أين كان نوعها أو مصدرها

Economic Zones Company reserves its right in modifying terms of the tender at any time and/or cancelling the tender at any time without need of providing reasons and without any responsibility on its part whatever its kind

ICAO facilitation experts' meeting begins in Doha

The Co-ordination Meeting of ICAO Facilitation Team Experts began yesterday.

The first day of the two-day meeting addressed several topics related to updates on air transport facilitation and ways to enhance communication and co-ordination among teams working on passenger name data and data protection.

The sessions also covered discussions on illegal migration within the framework of principles outlined in Annex 9 (Facilitation), as well as public health standards and recommendations issued by the World Health Organisation, with the possibility of integrating them into review programmes.

Participants reviewed reports from guidance-focused working groups and explored measures for providing sup-



port to victims of aircraft accidents and their families. The meeting also included preparations for the 2025 ICAO Facilitation Conference, which is set to

take place in Doha from April 14-17. The agenda also includes discussions on the ministerial declaration to be issued on the last day of the conference. (QNA)

AUCTION SALE OF VARIOUS NEW AND USED MATERIALS (As-Is Where-Is)

Black Cat Engineering and Construction W.L.L. announces the sale of various new and used materials, the details of which are listed below:

Serial No.	Description
1	Porta Cabins & Scrap Toilets
2	Containers
3	Cable Trays (Electrical & Instrument)
4	Piping Materials (Pipe, Fittings, Flanges, Bolt)
5	Consumables (Civil, Electrical & Mechanical)
6	Tools (Civil, Electrical & Mechanical)
7	Lifting Gears (Belt, Sling, Shackles, Chain Block)
8	Light Equipment (Cooler, Fan, BA Apparatus, Trolley)
9	Racks

Clarifications:

- Materials can be inspected at the company's site in Zekreet / Dukhan starting from Sunday 13/4/2025 until Thursday 17/04/2025 from 6 am to 12 pm.
- The entry of any person into the auction confirms that he has fully inspected the materials being auctioned and that he accepted it in that condition.
- Price offers must be submitted in a sealed envelope at the company's main office in Tornado Tower 9th Floor by latest Tuesday 22/04/2025.
- Applicants to bid must submit a temporary cash margin amounting to QAR 15,000 and the Company has the right to confiscate this amount if the winner of the bid withdraws.
- The bid envelopes will be opened on Thursday 24/04/2025, and then the concerned parties to whom the auction will be awarded will be addressed.
- When the auction is concluded, 20% of the sale value will be paid as a non-refundable deposit and the full sale price will be paid on the next day.
- If the buyer does not pay the full sale price within two working days of closing the auction, the Auction Committee may re-offer the materials for auction again or sell it to another buyer. It is not permissible to claim the advance sale price paid.
- The handover of materials will take place only after paying the full sale price.
- The ID card or company commercial registration must be presented when the auction is awarded to complete the sale procedures.
- For further inquiries and inspection purposes, please call 55376744 / 51014871.

Open Invitation **Black Cat Engineering and Construction W.L.L.**

Karwa to showcase inclusive mobility at conference

Mowasalat (Karwa) has announced its participation in the ICAO Facilitation Conference (FALC 2025), taking place in Qatar during the period from April 14-17. As the leading provider of transport solutions in the country, Karwa will highlight its commitment to accessibility and inclusive mobility for all passengers, according to an official statement. At its dedicated booth, the company will feature an interactive experience, including a digital question-and-answer game for visitors and a TV screen demonstrating how to book its services seamlessly. The company's primary focus at the event will be on accessibility showcasing its vans designed for people with special needs and the user-friendly booking process available through the Karwa app and call centre. Additionally, Karwa will highlight the accessibility features of its public buses and metrolink services, which are equipped with ramps to ensure a smooth travel experience for passengers with reduced mobility. As a trusted transportation provider, Karwa continues to align with Qatar's vision for an inclusive and efficient public transport system. Attendees of ICAO FALC 2025 are invited to visit the booth to explore these services and learn more about the company's initiatives in accessible transport.

ARPM Tender Committee announces the following Tender

Tender No.	(Tender Title) Scope of work	Tender Fee	Tender Bond QR.	Opening Date	Closing Date
ARPM/214/2025/TEN/DOH	Tender for Kitchen & Laundry Duct Cleaning Services at ARPM Hotels-3- Year Contract	500	10,000	13-Apr-25	04-May-25

- Interested parties can collect copies of the tender documents from ARPM Purchasing Department, via email to m.aseef@arpm.com.qa and L.cabral@arpm.com.qa during working hours 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. (Fri & Sat Closed)
- A payment of a non-refundable document's fees should be deposited in cash to:
 - Beneficiary Name:** Al-Rayyan Projects Management (ARPM)
 - Account No.** 0013-022375-004 (Qatar National Bank)
 - IBAN No.** QA86QNBA00000000013022375004

And the original deposit receipt should be submitted upon receiving of the terms and conditions.

- A tender bond (as stated above), issued by a bank operating in the State of Qatar and valid for 180 days from the closing date should accompany tenders. **The executed tender bond should be included with the technical offer.**
- All tenderers MUST collect their original bonds from ARPM – Purchasing department upon expiry of the Tender Bond, unless alternative instructions are issued by ARPM.
- Proposal to be submitted in sealed envelopes as per the RFP requirements in both HARD COPY & SOFT COPY on CD or USB.
- Copies of valid **Company Commercial Registration, Computer Card & Authorization Letter** must be submitted in order to collect the tender documents.
- The successful tenderer is required to submit a performance bond issued by a bank operating in the State of Qatar equivalent to 10% of the total contract sum and shall be valid for a period expiring 180 days after contract expiry.
- Offers should be valid for 180 days commencing from the closing date (as stated above).
- ARPM has the right to increase or decrease the scope of services by 20% with the same terms and conditions.
- ARPM is not bound to accept the lowest tender or any other tender and is under no obligation to show any reasons thereof.
- Bids should be submitted not later than 12:00 noon on the closing date and must be deposited into the Box, provided in the ARPM Purchasing office, located at the 9th Floor, ARPM, Head office and should be in sealed envelopes addressed to the Chairman - Tenderers Committee, quoting the Tender Number and Subject.
- Offers arriving thereafter may not be considered.

CHAIRMAN – TENDER COMMITTEE
TEL: 40341804



Qatar Charity signs pact with Djibouti to support health sector



Qatar Charity (QC) has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Djibouti's Ministry of Health to support the country's health sector.

Additionally, the organisation participated in the inauguration of a dialysis centre, which was equipped with the support of benevolent individuals in Qatar to enhance services for kidney failure patients.

This came during a visit to Djibouti by QC's Head of Humanitarian Intervention Ibrahim Abdulrahman al-Janahi to follow up on the implementation of humanitarian projects and assess the population's needs.

The MoU was signed by Secretary-General of Djibouti's Ministry of Health, Mohamed Ali Mohamed and Country Director of Qatar Charity's Djibouti branch, Ghada Eezedin Ahmed. The signing ceremony was attended by Djibouti's Minister of Health, Dr Ahmed Roblah Abdullah, and Qatar's ambassador to Djibouti, Dr Rashid bin Shafea al-Marri.

The MoU aims to establish a comprehensive framework for co-operation between Qatar Charity and the Ministry of Health across various health sectors. This co-operation includes providing medical equipment and supplies, constructing and renovating hospitals and health centres, organising specialised medical camps, and training medical personnel.

During his speech at the ceremony, Dr Abdullah emphasised the importance of this partnership. He expressed his gratitude



to Qatar for its significant support of health programmes and to Qatar Charity for its commitment to assisting Djibouti in addressing health challenges.

For his part, ambassador Dr al-Marri expressed his pleasure in strengthening co-operation between the two nations. He affirmed Qatar's commitment to supporting the Ministry of Health in its efforts to provide comprehensive and high-quality healthcare for all.

In turn, Ghada Eezedin Ahmed highlighted the organisation's impactful health initiatives, such as providing medical equipment and organising medical camps. She expressed hope that the MoU would further expand these efforts to achieve shared objectives. Following the signing of the MoU, Qatar Charity provided the Ministry of Health with a range of health products, including 250 blood pressure monitors and 70 wheelchairs,

to support health centres. Additionally, Qatar Charity inaugurated the newly renovated dialysis centre, equipping it with state-of-the-art medical devices. Its contribution included seven new dialysis machines, along with thorough maintenance and updated furnishings to ensure comfortable space for patients. Doctors at the centre thanked Qatar Charity, noting that this initiative would significantly improve their capacity to treat patients with chronic kidney diseases. They highlighted the urgent need for further support to Djibouti's health sector to address the growing demand for medical services.

Al-Janahi stated that the dialysis centre opening shows the organisation's commitment to improving the lives of patients with kidney failure. He thanked Qatar's generous donors and all who helped make the project a success. (QNA)

Qatar wins key roles in Arab Military Sports Federation



Qatar won the chairmanship of the Media Committee of the Arab Military Sports Federation, in addition to membership in the scientific and technical committees of the federation.

The election took place on Friday on the sidelines of the meetings of 39th General Assembly of the Arab Military Sports Federation, the 61st Executive Office, and the Federation's technical, media, and scientific auxiliary committees, hosted by Doha until April 13.

The Secretary-General of the Qatar Military Sports Federation, Brigadier General Majid Ahmed al-Nuaimi, was elected chairman of the media committee for a term extending until 2028. The election was attended by a number of official delegations and representatives of military bodies from various Arab countries.

Meanwhile, Lieutenant Colonel Mansour Hadi al-Shahwani was elected as a member of the Technical Committee, and Abdulqader al-Mughaisib was elected as a member of the Scientific Committee; a move that underscores the diverse expertise and competencies participating in the Federation's leader-



ship bodies. The selection came in recognition of Qatar's key role in supporting and developing sports at the regional and international levels, in addition to its remarkable media efforts in covering sporting events and promoting the concept of sports as a means of rapprochement and solidarity among people.

Qatar's representatives on the committees emphasised that this win reflects the great confidence Qatari talents enjoy in international sporting events and serves as an incentive to continue contributing and launching initiatives that serve the development of sports in the Arab and Islamic world.

The elections witnessed active participation across three main committees: the Media Committee, the Technical Committee,

and the Scientific Committee, in preparation for the next session, which aims to enhance Arab co-operation in the military, technical, and scientific fields.

Brigadier General Majid Ahmed al-Nuaimi expressed his pride in this assignment, emphasising the importance of strengthening joint Arab action.

He emphasised the need to build an effective and professional media system that keeps pace with developments in Arab military sports, complementing the work of the previous committee and highlighting its achievements. He also emphasised strengthening media partnerships and utilising digital media to disseminate the federation's sports and military message. (QNA)

Alaraby 2 channel launches Ashroun programme today

Alaraby 2 channel will launch its new weekly programme, *Ashroun* (Twenty) today, as part of the channel's ongoing effort to enrich Arab cultural content and celebrate creative achievements across the region.

The concept of the programme revolves around re-evaluating literary and artistic works through the eyes of specialists. It aims to provide a preliminary guide for the Arab audience during an era of content abundance.

Thirty critics and professionals from various fields will select the most outstanding works that uniquely combine artistic value with popular appeal, and which have deeply resonated with the Arab audience. The programme focuses on four main areas: literature, cinema, music, and visual arts.

Hosted by journalist and writer Maya al-Hajj, the hour-long programme takes viewers on a



Ashroun (Twenty) programme poster.

weekly journey through twenty significant cultural milestones in one of the four featured domains.

These include highlights from both the Arab world and the diaspora. The show tracks down contributors to these works, shedding light on their creation process through past media

interviews, behind-the-scenes insights, and memories from the initial release.

Commenting on the concept, Mohamed Osama, head of programmes at Alaraby 2, said: "The programme comes at a time when the Arab cultural scene is witnessing remarkable diversity and expansion in both production and distribution methods."

He added: "Through this production, we at Alaraby 2 seek to document evolving cultural phenomena and offer meaningful content that stimulates curiosity in the new generation while evoking special memories for the older one."

The first episode of *Ashroun* (Twenty) will air on today (April 13) at 10:00pm. It will continue to broadcast weekly at the same time with a new episode and topic, exclusively on Alaraby 2 and the Alaraby+ app.

Programme Promo: <https://youtu.be/Ye-rhJlqts>

Illegal fishing nets removed



The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change's Department of Marine Protection has spotted banned fishing nets that were in use by a fishing boat in the northern part of the country. Accordingly, these nets were removed to protect marine life and ensure sustainability within the local waters. Besides, the ministry has urged fishermen to comply with the law and refrain from using illegal fishing nets or fishing in environmentally sensitive areas, such as those near islands or the areas of coral reefs, where fish usually breed and multiply.

Action over trespassing of meadow, illegal waste disposal



The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Department of Wildlife Protection in the Al Kharara area has issued two environmental violations: one involving a vehicle driver trespassing on a meadow (Rawdat), and another involving a truck driver dumping his load in an undesignated site. Further, the violators have been referred to the relevant authorities for the necessary legal action. Meanwhile, the ministry urged visitors to desert and natural areas to adhere to the regulations, which include refraining from driving vehicles into Rawdat and nature reserves, and avoid the arbitrary disposal of waste in wild open areas.

خضتي ون إيسٲ
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مركز الخدمة للإلكترونيات
Electronics Service Centre

FIFTY ONE EAST ELECTRONICS SERVICE CENTRE
kindly invites its valued customers to collect all the units which they have deposited for repair before **December 31, 2024**, but didn't claim yet.

ALL UNITS WHICH ARE NOT CLAIMED BY **MAY 31, 2025**, WILL BE DISPOSED AND FIFTY ONE EAST SHALL NOT BE HELD RESPONSIBLE.

Thank you for your understanding and cooperation.

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Palestinian solidarity gathering in Bangladesh



People participate in a demonstration titled “March for Gaza” during a rally in Dhaka, yesterday, expressing solidarity with the Palestinians in Gaza.

Over 100 feared dead in Sudan paramilitary attacks in Darfur: UN

AFP
Port Sudan

More than 100 people, including 20 children, are now feared dead in Sudan following paramilitary attacks on the besieged Darfur city of El-Fasher and two nearby famine-hit camps, the United Nations said yesterday.

The Rapid Support Forces (RSF), at war with the regular army since April 2023, launched “co-ordinated ground and aerial assaults” on Friday on El-Fasher and the Zamzam and Abu Shouk displacement camps, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said.

In recent weeks, the paramilitaries have stepped up their attacks on El-Fasher - the only state capital in Darfur still outside their control - after the army recaptured the national capital Khartoum last month.

Early reports from the local resistance committee, a volunteer aid group in El-Fasher, put Friday’s death toll at 57, with 32 civilians killed in El-Fasher and 25 in Zamzam.

However, the army said yesterday that 74 civilians were killed and 17 wounded in El-Fasher alone.

Activists said Friday the full extent of the damage in Zamzam remains unclear because of Internet shutdowns and communications disruptions.

The Sudanese Organisation for the Protection of Civilians said yesterday the dead included nine humanitarian workers operating a hospital in Zamzam, run by an international non-governmental organisation.

UN Resident and Humanitarian Co-ordinator in Sudan Clementine Nkweta-Salami condemned their deaths.

“The colleagues from an international non-governmental organisation were killed while operating one of the very few remaining health posts still operational in the camp,” she said in a statement.

“This represents yet another deadly and unacceptable escalation in a series of brutal attacks on displaced people and aid workers in Sudan since the onset of this conflict nearly two years ago.

“I strongly urge those commit-

ting such acts to immediately desist.”

In a statement yesterday, the RSF dismissed a video purportedly shared by activists showing civilians killed in Zamzam.

The paramilitary group condemned the footage as a fabricated production, labelling it a “desperate attempt to criminalise” its forces.

A local advocacy group, the Darfur General Coordination of Camps for the Displaced and Refugees, said the attack on Zamzam resumed yesterday morning, with clashes and heavy gunfire heard for hours.

The camp was the first part of Sudan where a UN-backed assessment declared famine last year.

By December, famine had also spread to two nearby camps - Abu Shouk and Al Salam - and is expected to hit El-Fasher itself by May.

The war has killed tens of thousands of people and uprooted more than 12mn since it broke out in April 2023. Both sides in the conflict have been accused of war crimes and breaches of international humanitarian law.

Syria seizes millions of captagon pills

AFP
Damascus

Syrian authorities yesterday announced the seizure of around 4mn pills of the illegal drug captagon that had been readied for export through the port of Latakia.

The interior ministry said the pills had been “professionally hidden inside 5,000 metal bars” and were seized from warehouses at the port.

“The pills were seized and the necessary legal procedures have begun,” the ministry’s anti-narcotics department posted on Telegram. Latakia is in the coastal

heartland of deposed president Bashar al-Assad’s Alawite minority. Under his rule, captagon became Syria’s largest export during the civil war that began in 2011.

Following Assad’s ouster last December, the new authorities discovered millions of captagon pills in warehouses and on military bases.

Gabon coup leader eyes seven-year mandate in presidential vote

Reuters
Libreville

Gabon’s coup leader Brice Oligui Nguema looked to cement his grip on power as the oil-producing Central African nation held a presidential election yesterday that analysts expected to be a one-sided affair.

Nineteen months after overthrowing President Ali Bongo, whose family ruled Gabon for more than half a century, Nguema, 50, has pitched himself as a change agent cracking down on the corrupt old guard.

Counting started shortly after 1700 GMT when many polling stations closed, though some stayed open for voters still queueing. The result was expected as soon as today, with the winner receiving a seven-year term, renewable once.

In the 2023 election, Bongo was declared winner of a third term, but the opposition denounced the process as fraudulent, and he was ousted in a coup right after the result was announced.

Casting his ballot yesterday at a



Voters queue to cast their ballots at the Louis Bigman polling station in Libreville, yesterday, during Gabon’s presidential election. **Right:** Presidential candidate Brice Oligui Nguema casts his vote during the presidential election at a polling station inside a school, in Libreville, Gabon, yesterday.

school in the Libreville city centre, Nguema called the voting transparent and said the line of people waiting to vote was evidence that “Gabonese have regained confidence in the election”.

Lionel Ekambou, a 28-year-old nurse, woke up early to vote for Nguema, who has been interim leader since spearheading the coup as an army general.

“His social project meets my expectations and, I am convinced,

will contribute to building a better future,” he said. Criss-crossing the country in a baseball cap bearing his “We Build Together” slogan, Nguema vowed to diversify the oil-reliant economy and promote agriculture, industry and tourism in a country where a third of the population of around 2.5mn lives in poverty.

Yet not everyone believes Nguema represents a genuine break with the past. He is a former aide-

de-camp for Ali Bongo’s father Omar Bongo, who was president for more than 40 years until his death in 2009.

“He sold us a dream,” Libaski Moussavou, 34, told Reuters before casting his ballot, accusing Nguema of surrounding himself with Bongo-era holdovers “whom the Gabonese people decried”.

Nguema’s main challenger was Alain Claude Blie By Nze, who was serving as prime minister un-

der Ali Bongo before the August 2023 coup, the eighth in West and Central Africa since 2020.

Nze, 57, voted in his hometown of Makokou. In a video sent to the media by his campaign, he expressed concern that unused voter cards left at polling stations could be used to stuff ballot boxes.

Nze has tried to distance himself from the Bongo family while challenging Nguema’s fitness for the presidency, telling Reuters this

Weeks since Israel imposed total Gaza blockade, last food is running out

Reuters
Cairo/Geneva/Gaza

The bombs still haven’t killed Rehab Akhras and her family. But if the checkpoints that Israel has sealed off since the start of March are not opened soon, she says hunger surely will.

More than six weeks since Israel completely cut off all supplies to the 2.3mn residents of the Gaza Strip, food stockpiled during a ceasefire at the start of the year has all but run out. Emergency meal distributions are ending, bakeries are closed, markets are empty.

On a spot of packed ground in a camp of plastic sheets where she lives with her displaced family in Khan Younis, Akhras, 64, used cardboard to light a fire and boil a can of beans. It is all they have left.

“We’re a family of 13 people, what will one can of fava beans do for us?” she said.

“We have survived the war and we survived the air strikes as we wake up and go to sleep. But we can’t survive the hunger, neither us nor our children.” To the north in Nuseirat, hundreds of Palestinians queued up for hot cooked rice at an outdoor emergency kitchen. Small children jammed the front of the queue, waving buckets to bring something home for their families.

Aid agencies that have been supplying those emergency meals say they will have to stop within days unless they can bring in more food.

The World Food Programme used to provide bread at 25 bakeries across the Gaza Strip. All of those bakeries are now shut. It will soon have to halt distribution of food parcels at reduced rations.

“All basic supplies are running out,” said Juliette Touma from UNRWA, the UN agency for Palestinian aid.



Palestinians gather to receive food cooked by a charity kitchen, in Nuseirat, central Gaza Strip.

“The prices of commodities have exponentially increased over the past one month plus since the Israeli authorities put the siege on the Gaza Strip.

“It means babies, children are going to bed hungry. Every day without these basic supplies, Gaza inches closer towards very, very deep hunger.”

Every Gazan can now quote the fantastical prices for the little food remaining in markets: a 25 kilo sack of flour that used to sell for \$6 now costs ten times as much. A litre of cooking oil, if you can find it, costs \$10 instead of \$1.50. The lucky few might stumble on a tin of sardines if they can afford \$5.

“Food distributions have almost stopped altogether, with remaining stocks now diverted to keep hot meal distributions going for a few more days, but that will soon finish too,” said Gavin Kelleher, an access manager for the Norwegian Refugee Council in Deir Al-Balah.

Medical charity Medicins sans Frontiers says it is encountering children and pregnant women with severe malnutrition. Lactating mothers are themselves too hungry to be able to breast

feed. Israel denies that Gaza is facing a hunger crisis. The military accuses the Hamas fighters who have run Gaza of exploiting aid, and says it must keep all supplies out to prevent the fighters from getting it.

“The IDF (Israeli Defence Forces) is acting in accordance with the directives of the political echelon. Israel is not transferring and will not transfer aid to the hands of fighters’ organisations,” the military said.

The ministry of foreign affairs said 25,000 aid trucks had entered Gaza in the 42 days of the ceasefire – before it shut the border at the start of March – and that Hamas had used the aid to rebuild its war machine.

Hamas denies exploiting aid and accuses Israel of using starvation as a military tactic.

In Nuseirat, Neama Farjalla goes out every day at 6:00am, trekking with her children across the war zone from soup kitchen to soup kitchen in the hope of a bowl of rice.

“If we don’t die of air strikes, we will die of hunger,” she said.

“When my young son tells me, ‘Mama I want a glass of milk; my heart breaks.’

Tanzania’s top opposition party ‘disqualified from polls’

Tanzania’s main opposition party CHADEMA has been disqualified from elections due later this year, a senior election commission official said yesterday, days after the party’s leader was charged with treason for allegedly seeking to disrupt the vote.

Ramadhani Kailima, director of elections at the Independent National Elections Commission, said CHADEMA had failed to sign a code of conduct document due yesterday, thereby nullifying its participation in the presidential and parliamentary elections expected to take place in October.

“Any party that did not sign the code of conduct will not participate in the general election,” he said, adding that the ban would also cover all

by-elections until 2030.

CHADEMA leader Tundu Lissu, a former presidential candidate, was charged with treason on Thursday. The decision to disqualify his party will intensify scrutiny of President Samia Suluhu Hassan’s record on rights as she seeks re-election.

Rights campaigners and opposition parties have accused Hassan’s government of a growing crackdown on political opponents, citing a string of unexplained abductions and killings. The government has denied the allegations and has opened an investigation into reported abductions.

Hassan’s party Chama cha Mapinduzi (CCM) has said in the past that the government respects human rights and has

denied any involvement in human rights violations.

CHADEMA did not immediately comment on the election commission’s decision. Earlier yesterday, the party said it would not participate in the election code of conduct signing ceremony, as part of a push it is making for reforms.

Prosecutors accused Lissu on Thursday of calling on the public to launch a rebellion and prevent the election from taking place. He was not allowed to enter a plea on the treason charge, which carries a death penalty.

CHADEMA had previously threatened to boycott the elections unless significant reforms are made to an electoral process it says favours the ruling party.

Saudi sets April 13 and 29 as final Umrah entry, exit dates

The Saudi Ministry of Haj and Umrah has designated April 13 as the final date for those performing Umrah to enter the country, with April 29 set as the deadline for departure in preparation for the upcoming Haj season.

Starting Wednesday, April 23, entry to the Holy City of Makkah will require a work permit, a resident ID

issued by the Holy City, or a valid Haj permit.

The ministry is suspending the issuance of Umrah permits through the Nusk platform from Tuesday, April 29 until June 10.

Entry or stay in the city of Makkah is prohibited for holders of all types of visas, except for those holding a Haj visa, effective Tuesday, April 29.

week that military men should “go back to their barracks”. Analysts say Nguema’s status as the front-runner comes from a sense that people were broadly happy with the coup and him being the most visible candidate during the campaign. Nze’s close ties to the old government also undermined his warning that Nguema poses a threat to Gabonese democracy, said Florence Bernault, a historian of Central Africa at Sciences Po.

“He doesn’t seem to be very well placed to criticise,” Bernault said.

The economy in Gabon, a densely forested and sparsely populated country, grew by 2.9% in 2024, up from 2.4% in 2023, driven in part by infrastructure projects and commodities such as oil, manganese and timber, according to the World Bank. But many voters told Reuters they were mostly concerned about basic services, citing power cuts that plague the capital.

“We talk about it every day,” said 40-year-old electrician Herve Regis Ossouami.

“I don’t know a Gabonese person who would say they don’t want water and electricity.”

Argentina sealed a \$20bn, 48-month Extended Fund Facility deal with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on Friday and, in a major policy move ahead of the deal, dismantled key parts of its years-long currency controls and loosened its grip on the peso.

The IMF will disburse \$12bn by Tuesday, while another \$2bn will become available by June.

The deal is expected to help Argentina “catalyse additional official multilateral and bilateral support, and a timely re-access to international capital markets”, the IMF said.

“Key pillars of the programme include maintaining a strong fiscal anchor, transitioning towards a more robust monetary and FX regime, with greater

Argentina seals \$20bn IMF deal

exchange rate flexibility,” it added in a statement.

Earlier, the South American nation’s central bank announced that it would undo a fixed currency peg from tomorrow, letting the peso freely fluctuate within a moving band between 1,000 and 1,400 pesos per dollar, versus 1,074 at the close on Friday.

Argentina will eliminate major parts of the so-called “cepo” capital controls that have restricted access to foreign currency, the central bank said in a statement.

Companies, from this year, will also

be able to repatriate profits out of the country, a key demand from businesses that could unlock more investment.

“As of Monday, we will be able to put an end to the foreign exchange restrictions which were imposed in 2019 and which limit the normal functioning of the economy,” Economy Ministry Luis Caputo said at a press conference.

Libertarian President Javier Milei addressed the nation in a televised speech on Friday night and stated that Argentina was “in a better position than ever to withstand external turbulences”.

However, an IMF staff report on the

\$20bn deal warned that “downside risks remain elevated” as programme implementation could be challenged by rising global trade tensions and, domestically, by the volatility added by the upcoming electoral cycle and fragile social conditions.

The new exchange rate system could allow the peso to weaken almost a third if the currency were to hit the weaker edge of the band, although the central bank is likely to have some tools to intervene.

The band will expand 1% each month, the bank said.

The policy move came ahead of the final IMF nod for what is the 23rd pro-

gramme in a long and mottled history between the grains-producing nation and the Washington-based lender.

Funds from the IMF deal will be used to recapitalise Argentina’s central bank and the government expects they will help usher in a healthier currency, reduce inflation and allow for tax cuts, Caputo said.

Other multi-year disbursements were also announced, including \$12bn from the World Bank and \$10bn from the Inter-American Development Bank.

Argentina needs the financial firepower to bolster depleted foreign currency reserves that are in the red on a net basis and have been falling in recent weeks, amid sticky inflation and a country risk index that has started to rise again. – **Reuters**

Trump in ‘very good shape’ after annual checkup

AFP/Reuters
Washington

Donald Trump (**pictured**) has said that he felt “in very good shape” after his first annual medical checkup since returning to the US presidency, an exam that puts the focus on the fitness of the oldest man ever elected to the White House.

Republican Trump, 78, has repeatedly boasted about his own vigour since starting a second term, while mocking his 82-year-old Democratic predecessor Joe Biden as decrepit and mentally unfit for office.

However, now it is Trump, who will also be 82 at the end of his presidency, under the stethoscope.

Trump, who turns 79 in June and likes fast food so much he staged a photo op at a McDonald’s during his campaign last year, spent hours being poked and prodded by the doctors at Walter Reed Medical Centre in Bethesda, Maryland.

“I felt I was in very good shape. Good heart,” Trump told reporters aboard Air Force One, adding that “I took a cognitive test. I don’t know what to tell you other than I got every answer right”.

The billionaire arrived at the Walter Reed military hospital in the Washington suburbs earlier in the day on Friday – after a delay due to talks on tariffs.

“I have never felt better, but nevertheless, these things must be done!” Trump said on Truth Social earlier this week.

Trump has repeatedly been accused of a lack of openness about his health despite huge interest in the wellbeing of America’s commander-in-chief.



Stating that he underwent both cardio and cognitive tests, Trump said a report would be released by his doctor today.

The White House said previously that presidential physician Sean Barbabella would give a readout of the physical and that “of course” it would provide the full report.

The physical could offer the first clear look at Trump’s condition since his ear was grazed by a bullet in an assassination attempt during a campaign rally in Butler, Pennsylvania, last July.

“I can confirm the president is in very good shape, as you see on a near daily basis,” Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt told reporters earlier.

She said Trump would not be having a general anaesthetic – which is normally used for procedures such as colonoscopies – but added there is “a lot that goes into it to make sure the president is accomplishing all of his goals”.

Trump is a prolific golfer who abstains from alcohol and cigarettes.

However, he is also known to indulge in fast food and famously enjoys well-done steaks, although he appears noticeably thinner than during his first term.

Trump’s personal and White House doctors have at times made outlandish claims about his health.

In 2015, during Trump’s first presidential run, his doctor Harold Bornstein released a letter saying that the tycoon “unequivocally, will be the healthiest individual ever elected to the presidency”.

Bornstein later told CNN that Trump himself “dictated that whole letter. I didn’t write that letter”.

The White House doctor in his first term, Ronny Jackson, said in 2018 that with a healthier diet Trump could “live to be 200 years old”.

Jackson’s report then suggested Trump should aim to lose 10-15 pounds but said he was generally in “excellent health”, adding that there were no signs of “any cognitive issues”.

A year later, an exam found the 6’ 3” (1.9m) Trump weighed 243 pounds (110kg), up seven pounds since shortly before taking office, making him technically obese.

It said he was taking medication to treat high cholesterol.

In 2020, Trump told Fox News that he aced a test for cognitive impairment by repeating the phrase “person, woman, man, camera, TV”.

Age became a major issue in the 2024 election when Trump and Biden faced off as the oldest major party candidates in history.

Biden was forced to drop out of the race after a stumbling performance in a TV debate against Trump in June that put concerns over his cognitive health to the top of the agenda.

Since returning to office Trump has repeatedly compared his own vigour to Biden’s, while the White House has accused the previous administration of covering up what it says was the Democrat’s decline.

US exempts tech imports from tariffs

Reuters/AFP
Washington

The US government has granted tariff exclusions for smartphones, computers and other electronics imported largely from China, sparing them from President Donald Trump’s steep 125% reciprocal duties.

In a notice to shippers, the US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agency published a list of tariff codes that will be excluded from the duties.

The exclusions are retroactive to 12.01am EDT (0401 GMT) on April 5.

The US CBP listed 20 product categories, including the very broad 8471 code for all computers, laptops, disc drives and automatic data processing.

It included semiconductor devices, equipment, memory chips and flat panel displays.

The notice did not provide an explanation for the Trump administration’s move, but the late-night exclusion provides welcome relief to major US technology firms, including Apple, Dell Technologies and many other importers.

Trump’s action also excludes the specified electronics from his 10% “baseline” tariffs on goods from most countries other than China, easing import costs for semiconductors from Taiwan and Apple iPhones produced in India.

For the Chinese imports, the exclusion only applies to Trump’s reciprocal tariffs, which climbed to 125% this week, according to a White House official.

Trump’s prior 20% duties on all Chinese imports that he said were related to the US fentanyl crisis remain in place.

However, the official said Trump will launch a new national security trade investigation into semiconductors soon that could lead to other new tariffs on the sector.

Separately, White House spokesperson Karoline Leavitt said in a statement that Trump has made it clear that the US cannot rely on China to manufacture critical technologies such as semiconductors, chips, smartphones, and laptops.

However, she said that at Trump’s direction, major tech firms, including Apple and chipmakers Nvidia and Taiwan Semiconductor “are hustling to onshore their manufacturing in the United States as soon as possible”.

The exemptions suggest an increasing awareness within the Trump administration of the pain that his tariffs had in store for inflation-weary consumers, especially on popular products such as smartphones, laptops and other electronics.

Even at a lower 54% tariff rate on Chinese imports, analysts predicted that the price of a top-end Apple iPhone could jump to \$2,300 from \$1,599.

At 125%, economists and analysts have said that US-China trade could largely halt.

Smartphones were the top US import from China in 2024, totalling \$41.7bn, while Chinese-built laptop computers were second, at \$33.1bn, according to US Census Bureau data.

Trump ran to win back the White House last year largely on a promise to bring down prices that, fuelled by inflation from the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic and Russia’s war in Ukraine, had rocketed and tarnished the economic reputation of former president Joe Biden and his Democratic allies.



This picture taken last year shows the Apple iPhone 16 on display during its launch at the Apple Store in New York. – **AFP**

However, Trump also promised as a candidate to impose the tariffs that have become a central part of his economic agenda, and the president has dismissed the turbulence in financial markets and expected price increases arising from the levies as a disturbance that was a necessary part of realigning the global economy and world trading order with his vision.

His so-called “reciprocal tariffs”, however, raised fears of a US recession and drew criticism from his fellow Republicans, who do not want to lose control of the US House of Representatives and Senate in next year’s congressional elections to Democrats, who have sharply attacked Trump’s policies.

Trump paused higher duty rates for 57 trading partners and the EU last week, leaving most countries with a 10% tariff as they seek to negotiate trade deals with Washington.

Trump, who is spending the weekend at his residence in Florida, told reporters on Friday that he was comfortable with the high tariffs on China but had a good relationship with President Xi Jinping and believed something positive would come out of the trade conflict between them.

However, financial markets were in turmoil again on Friday as China matched Trump’s latest tariff increase on US imports to 125%, raising the stakes in a trade war that threatens to upend global supply chains.

US stocks ended a volatile week higher, but the safe haven of gold hit a record high during the session and benchmark US 10-year government bond yields posted their biggest weekly increase since 2001 alongside a slump in the dollar, signalling a lack of confidence in the US.

Adding to the pressure on Trump, Wall Street billionaires – including a number of his own supporters – have openly criticised the whole tariff strategy as damaging and counter-productive.

Daniel Ives, senior equity analyst at Wedbush Securities, called the US exemptions the “best news possible” for tech investors.

The exclusions remove “a huge black cloud” that had threatened to take the US tech sector “back a decade” and significantly slow artificial intelligence (AI) development, Ives said in a note.

Many of the exempted products, including hard drives and computer processors, are not generally made in the United States and Trump argues tariffs are a way to bring domestic manufacturing back.

Ecuador imposes state of emergency before election

AFP
Quito

On the eve of a too-close-to-call presidential election, Ecuador declared a state of emergency yesterday in seven of its 24 provinces, including capital Quito, saying that it was needed to fight a dramatic rise in drug-linked violence.

The measure, set to last 60 days, took effect just before today’s election pitting incumbent Daniel Noboa against his leftist opponent Luisa Gonzalez, and after the country began the year with its bloodiest start ever, averaging a killing every hour.

The state of emergency applies to the coastal provinces of Guayas, Los Rios, Manabi, Santa Elena and El Oro, the Amazonian provinces

of Orellana and Sucumbios, as well as to Quito and the troubled mining town of Camilo Ponce Enrriquez.

It also applies to the nation’s prisons.

Noboa imposed the measure amid an “increase in violence, serious crime, and the intense unlawful activities of organized armed groups”, according to a decree he signed.

The order suspends the legal protection against unauthorised search and entry of homes and mail, as well as the freedom of assembly, and imposes a nightly curfew in the cities of Guayas, Los Rios, Orellana and Sucumbios, as well as Ponce Enriquez.

Noboa, in power since November 2023, has previously decreed states of emergency to combat the rise of drug gangs, who have waged



An Ecuadorian Navy soldier stands guard next electoral material to be distributed for the upcoming presidential runoff in Guayaquil. – **AFP**

bloody turf fights over control of the illicit trade, spreading terror among ordinary Ecuadorans.

As he pursued his “iron fist” policies, the country’s homicide rate fell from a record 47 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2023 to 38 in 2024, yet remained the highest in Latin America last year, according to the group Insight Crime.

Noboa last year declared Ecuador to be in an internal armed conflict, allowing him to keep troops in the streets to combat some 20 drug

gangs linked to international cartels the president brands as “terrorists”.

It was not immediately clear how the election-eve emergency measures would affect the voting process today, or the voters’ decisions.

However, crime has been a key issue between Noboa, 37, and his 47-year-old rival Gonzalez, as close to 14mn Ecuadorans prepare to decide who will run their nation for the next four years.

‘Hard on the body’: Canadian troops train for Arctic defence

By Daphne Lemelin
AFP

In normal conditions, Canadian Air Force helicopter pilot Jonathan Vokey uses the treeline to gauge his altitude.

However, in the Arctic, where the landing zone is an expanse of white snow, he has to adjust.

“Operating in the cold, it’s hard on the body, but it also can be challenging with the aircraft as well,” Vokey, an Air Force captain, told AFP during an exercise aimed at preparing Canadian troops to operate in the country’s extreme north, a region fast becoming a military priority.

Canada is making a significant push to boost its military strength in the Arctic, which accounts for 40% of its territory.

Arctic ice is melting as a result of climate change, opening up the region and increasing the risk of confrontation with rivals like Russia over the area’s natural resources, including minerals, oil and gas, as well as fresh water.

“If I was to boil it down: you can access the north now more easily than you have ever been able to. And I would say that that’s going to change even more drastically over the next 10, 20 years,” said Colonel Darren Turner, joint task force commander of Operation Nanook, the annual Arctic training exercise established in 2007.

“Once a route is opened, they will come. And that is something that we need to have an interest in. That is something that we need to have the capabilities to interdict, to stop,” he told AFP.

That requires training more troops to operate in the region’s extreme conditions and deploy to three Arctic military hubs that the government plans to build.

Operation Nanook – the word for “polar



Soldiers with the 5th Canadian Division set up camp during Operation Nanook, the Canadian Armed Forces’ annual Arctic training and sovereignty operation, in Inuvik, Northwest Territories, Canada. – **AFP**

bear” in an Inuit language – is central to that effort.

In a long tent pitched on a vast sheet of ice and snow, troops practised diving into frigid water.

In another location, teams worked on detecting hostile activity with infrared imaging, a particular challenge in the Arctic where the cold can obscure thermal signatures.

Dive team leader Jonathan Jacques Savoie said that managing the brutal weather is key.

“The main challenge on Op. Nanook in this location is the environment. The environment always dictates how we live, fight and move in the field,” he said, noting the day’s temperature of -26° Celsius (-14.8° Fahrenheit).

This year’s operation marked the first Arctic deployment for Corporal Cassidy Lambert, an infantry reservist.

She’s from the eastern province of Newfoundland and Labrador, where maritime At-

lantic weather creates wet, damp winters.

The Arctic, she conceded, is “going to be a little different”.

“I don’t handle the cold too well, but I think I’ve prepped myself well enough,” she said.

Steven Breau, a rifleman with New Brunswick’s North Shore regiment, said that troops are trained on a range of region-specific safety measures, like avoiding frostbite.

Sweat can also become a problem.

“It’s really important to stay dry, to take body heat into account. If you get too hot, you sweat. It gets wet, then it gets cold, then it freezes.”

The surrounding frozen tundra does not immediately look like the next frontline in a looming global conflict.

However, leaders in multiple countries have put a spotlight on the Arctic.

President Donald Trump has repeatedly threatened to annex Greenland, insisting that the United States needs the autonomous Danish territory for its security.

And days after taking over as Canada’s Prime Minister last month, Mark Carney visited Inuvik, in another part of the Canadian Arctic, to announce a multi-billion-dollar radar deal he said would be crucial to securing the nation’s sovereignty.

Briefing troops arriving for Operation Nanook, Major Andrew Melvin said that a direct confrontation with Chinese or Russian forces was “highly unlikely” during the exercise.

However, he added, “it is possible that either the PRC (People’s Republic of China) or the RF (Russian Federation) intelligence services will seek to collect intelligence during the conduct of Op Nanook”.

For Colonel Turner, protecting the Arctic from hostile actors means safeguarding a region that is inseparable from Canadian identity.

“It’s a part of our raison d’etre... from a sovereignty perspective.”

Ruins in Mandalay



People walk a damaged bridge in Mandalay yesterday following the devastating March 28 earthquake. The shallow 7.7-magnitude earthquake on March 28 flattened buildings across Myanmar, killing more than 3,400 people and making thousands more homeless.



People walk past a temporary mosque next to debris of the former mosque in Mandalay following the devastating March 28 earthquake.

Japan PM warns of divided world at World Expo opening ceremony

AFP
Osaka

Japan's prime minister urged the importance of unity in a world plagued by "divisions" at a futuristic but also tradition-steeped opening ceremony for the World Expo yesterday.

Everything from a Mars meteorite to a beating heart grown from stem cells will be showcased during the six-month event, which opens to the public today.

The vast waterfront site in Osaka will host more than 160 countries, regions and organisations.

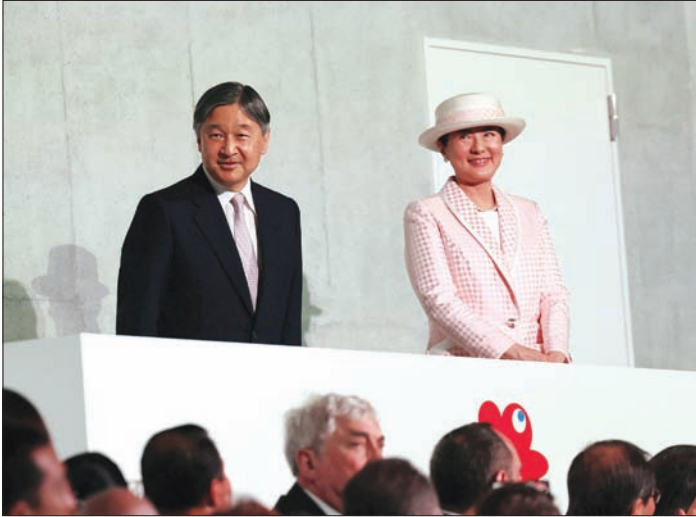
"Having overcome the Covid pandemic, the world now faces the crisis over many different divisions," Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba told the opening ceremony. "It is extremely significant that people from all over the world gather and face the question of life in this era, exposing ourselves to state-of-the-art technology and diverse cultures and ways of thinking," Ishiba said.

Expo is also known as a World's Fair and the phenomenon, which brought the Eiffel Tower to Paris, began with London's 1851 Crystal Palace exhibition and is held every five years.

Most pavilions - each more outlandishly designed than the last - are encircled by the world's largest wooden architectural structure, a towering latticed "Grand Ring" designed as a symbol of unity.

An array of colourful imagery symbolising life, birth and nature adorned a massive screen in a minutes-long video at yesterday's ceremony, with foreign dignitaries and Japan's royal family in attendance. The ceremony displayed a mix of technology, including its AI-powered "virtual human" master of ceremonies, and tradition that included Japanese kabuki dancing and taiko drums.

Emperor Naruhito said he hopes



Emperor Naruhito and Empress Masako of Japan are seen before the opening ceremony.



Prime Minister of Japan, Honorary Chairperson of Expo 2025, Shigeru Ishiba, speaks during the opening ceremony.

Expo 2025 will "serve as an opportunity for people worldwide to respect the lives not only of their own but also of others". Heightened security was put to the test hours before the ceremony when a suspicious box was found at the nearby Kyoto train station and reported to police.

A bomb squad was sent to the scene, causing train delays, but it was found that the box only contained "foreign-made sweets", according to Japanese media. Osaka last hosted the Expo in 1970, when Japan was booming and its technology was the envy of the world. It attracted 64mn



General view shows the official opening ceremony of the Expo 2025, a day before the event opens to the public, in Osaka, Japan, yesterday.

people, a record until Shanghai in 2010.

However, Expos have been criticised for their temporary nature, and Osaka's man-made island will be cleared to make way for a casino resort after October. Only 12.5 per cent of the Grand Ring will be re-used, according to Japanese media. Opinion polls also show low levels of enthusiasm for the Expo among the public.

So far 8.7mn advance tickets have been sold, below the pre-sales target of 14mn.

Japan is also experiencing a record tourism boom, meaning accommodation in Osaka - near hotspot Kyoto, and home to the Universal Studios Japan theme park - is often fully booked with sky-high prices.



Dancers perform on stage during the official opening ceremony.

End of the line for Hong Kong's Democratic Party

AFP
Hong Kong

Under heavy skies, the minibus carrying Hong Kong politician Emily Lau rattles along a winding mountain road to Stanley Prison for a visit she finds all too familiar. Lau is the former chair of the Democratic Party, once the city's stalwart opposition force but now seatless and preparing to dissolve as some of its veterans languish in jail.

The party and its campaign for freer elections have withered under Beijing's years-long national security crackdown. After 2019 protests paralysed the financial hub, Beijing moved to further restrict elections and imprison democracy campaigners.

Lau listed off five party comrades behind bars, including her predecessor Albert Ho, who could be jailed for life on national security charges. Ho is "very, very patriotic", she said ahead of her visit to Stanley Prison. "Look at his fate".

The remaining members of the city's main democracy party will

meet on Sunday to discuss and possibly vote on shutting down, following procedures that began in February. At the time, party chair Lo Kin-hei cited the "political environment", but refused to say if there had been pressure from Beijing to dissolve.

Hong Kong's Democratic Party was founded in 1994, three years before the British colony was handed over to China. Its top concern was determining how the city would eventually elect its own leader and lawmakers through universal suffrage as promised in China's "One Country, Two Systems" model.

Lee Wing-tat, a founding member, was among those inspired to enter politics by Beijing's pledge of "Hong Kong people ruling Hong Kong". "When I got older I found out those slogans were fake, but it's hard to blame a young man in his twenties for being idealistic," said Lee, who now lives in the United Kingdom. The party's manifesto supported the 1997 handover and acknowledged Hong Kong as part of China, a tone set by heavyweights Szeto Wah and Martin Lee. Interviewees recalled the two leaders as yin and yang:



Hong Kong democrat Emily Lau posing at the Democratic Party headquarters in Hong Kong.

Szeto a po-faced strategist with patriotic roots, Lee a suave barrister dubbed the city's "Father of Democracy".

The party's moderate line meant that, for a time, it was "relatively easy" to communicate with Beijing, according to founding member Sin Chung-kai. In 2010, the party decided to send three members, including Emily Lau, to meet with Bei-

jing's representatives in Hong Kong to discuss electoral reform. "That was the first time and the only time that Beijing decided to negotiate with us," Lau recalled. "We said to the liaison officers, 'Well, you must continue to talk to us.' 'They never did'."

The 2010 meeting was divisive. Critics accused the Democratic Party of selling out at a time when

smaller, more radical groups were emerging in the opposition camp. Within the party, younger members called for a more assertive stance, recalled Ted Hui, who won his first seat in 2011. Hui saw a need to "break the rules of the game" in order to secure real democratic reform.

One early protest, which ended with him being tossed out of a District Council meeting, gained public sympathy but was considered "impulsive" by party elders. "The party needed a more comprehensive transformation, so it can move in sync with society," he said.

"We had to up our game."

By the time the massive democracy protests seized Hong Kong in 2019, Hui and other party figures had learned to tread a fine line, playing a peaceful yet defiant role during street clashes. The party more than doubled its seats at the District Council that year on swelling anti-government sentiment. But a Beijing-imposed national security law in 2020 was the beginning of the end. Authorities used that law to jail four Democratic Party ex-lawmakers, saying they were among 47 opposition figures who took part in an

informal primary election to subvert state power. Hui, who moved to Australia, was also accused of breaching the security law and became the target of a police bounty.

The Democratic Party holds no elected seats after its lawmakers resigned en masse in 2020 to protest Beijing's tightened grip. The wipeout was repeated at District Councils the following year. Ramon Yuen, a former party treasurer, said members were sometimes treated like outcasts - restaurants refused to host their banquets.

"Even normal social gatherings could not be held," he said. Yuen said he was in favour of dissolution and expected most of the 400 party members to agree.

"Hong Kong has discussed (universal suffrage) for so many years, but regrettably we don't know when we'll see it," he said. Outside Stanley Prison, Lau said she makes regular visits to let jailed democrats know "they have not been forgotten". The party's end should spur the public to ask hard questions, she added. "Why do we have to disband? What is going on? That's a question I want Hong Kong people to ask."

‘Slow travel’ startup launches cross-Channel crossings by sail

AFP
Dover

The crossing may be “a bit choppy”, Captain Andrew Simons warns a dozen of his passengers waiting in the French port of Boulogne to cross the Channel with only wind to get them to England.

Saillink is a British startup that aims to offer sailing as a low-carbon alternative to ferries. This week, it made its first paid crossings of the English Channel on its catamaran, a route that will soon become daily. Despite the swell and icy gusts on Thursday, Johan-

nes Schneider, 67, fully enjoyed the crossing in the catamaran. He paid £85 (€98) for the privilege, more expensive than a pedestrian ferry crossing. “Really interesting to really be able to live it, rather than being on a big ship, where you see nothing, or a plane where you see even less,” he said. Saillink’s catamaran is 17m (56ft) long and can carry up to 12 passengers.

To compensate for sometimes rough seas, the crew offers its passengers mint tea to combat motion sickness, and pastries and blankets in the cabin, where they can shelter from the spray. Saillink was born in the summer of 2019 when Simons, who was about to board a

ferry to England with his daughter, looked at the Cherbourg marina in northern France and wondered why its moored little boats could not be used instead for the crossing. He found ferries polluting and impractical with their out-of-the-way terminals. Simons imagined a new mode of cross-Channel transport “offering that experience of the sea to people who are not travelling with a car”. His initial idea of a co-navigation platform - a sort of BlaBlaCar for boats - proved too complex to implement.

So Simons modelled his approach on the existing ferries, offering pedestrians and cyclists a fixed, daily route with set sched-

ules. He had to raise €500,000 (\$560,000), including €350,000 to buy the boat, which he raised from a handful of private investors “who really believed in it”.

Sail passenger routes already exist in France. Sailcoop has run a route between Saint-Raphael on south coast to the Mediterranean island of Corsica since 2022. Another company, Iliens, has since 2021 run a route between Quiberon, on France’s Atlantic coast, to the little island of Belle-Ile-en-Mer. A few kilometres before reaching the English coast, a container ship blocked the catamaran’s way and Simons and his team had to briefly use a motor to move away.

Navigating one of the busiest seas in the world is no easy task, with about 700-800 commercial vessels and around 1,400 fishing boats using the strait every day.

Saillink still managed the crossing to Dover from Boulogne-sur-Mer in less than four hours. That is faster than the scheduled five hours, but much longer than the 1.5 hours ferry journey - excluding waiting time.

“It’s a new relationship with speed, a new relationship with the landscape,” appealing to fans of “slow travel”, said researcher Sylvain Roche, who saw “a direct link between the resurgence of sailing boats” and that of “night trains”.

While only marginal for the moment, sail-powered transport could grow in coming years.

Today, sailing is the only real alternative to fossil fuels, said Roche, as other technologies for decarbonising maritime transport, such as hydrogen, are currently “absolutely immature”.

Maritime transport accounts for nearly three percent of global greenhouse gas emissions, according to the International Maritime Organisation (IMO). But a ferry journey still emits almost three times less greenhouse gases per passenger than a plane, according to the European Environment Agency.

UK passes emergency law to save British Steel

AFP
London

The UK passed an emergency law on Saturday to stop the last British factory that can make steel from scratch shutting down, allowing the government to take control of the struggling Chinese-owned British Steel plant.

The site in northern England had faced imminent closure and Prime Minister Keir Starmer said urgent action was needed to prevent its blast furnaces going out and save what is left of the UK’s steel industry.

At a rare weekend session, parliament approved the legislation without opposition to take over the running of the Scunthorpe site, which employs several thousand people and produces steel crucial for UK industries including construction and rail transport.

The government saw its possible closure as a risk to Britain’s long-term economic security, given the decline of the UK’s once robust steel industry. As MPs debated in parliament, Starmer made a dash to the region where he told steelworkers gathered in a nearby village hall that the measure was “in the national interest”.

He said the “pretty unprecedented” move meant the government could secure “a future for steel” in Britain. “The most important thing is we’ve got control of the site, we can make the decisions about what happens, and that means that those blast furnaces will stay on,” he said. It came



Liberal Democrat president and MP Ed Davey speaking during a special Saturday session in the House of Commons, in London, yesterday.

after protests at the plant and reports that workers had stopped executives from the company’s Chinese owners Jingye accessing key areas of the steelworks on Saturday morning. The Times newspaper said British Steel workers had seen off a “delegation of Chinese executives” trying to enter critical parts of the works.

Police said officers attended the scene “following a suspected breach of the peace,” but no arrests were made. Facing questions about nationalisation, business and trade secretary Jonathan Reynolds told parliament that state ownership “remains on the table” and may well be the “likely option”. But he

said the scope of Saturday’s legislation was more limited - it “does not transfer ownership to the government,” he explained, saying this would have to be dealt with at a later stage.

Ministers have said no private company has been willing to invest in the plant. The Chinese owners have said it is no longer financially viable to run the two furnaces at the site, where up to 2,700 jobs have been at risk. Jingye bought British Steel in 2020 and says it has invested more than £1.2bn (\$1.5bn) to maintain operations but is losing around £700,000 a day.

Reynolds said “the effective market value of this company is

zero,” and that Jingye had wanted to maintain the operation in the UK but supply it with slab steel from China to keep it going. The Labour government came under fire from the opposition Conservative party for its handling of the negotiations and faced calls from some left-wing politicians to fully nationalise the plant.

Reynolds said the government had sought to buy raw materials to keep the furnaces running with “no losses whatsoever for Jingye,” but met with resistance. Instead Jingye demanded the UK “transfer hundreds of millions of pounds to them, without any conditions to stop that money and potentially



Independent MP Jeremy Corbyn making his point.



Labour MP Diane Abbott speaking during a special Saturday session.

other assets being immediately transferred to China,” he said. “They also refused a condition to keep the blast furnaces maintained.”

Saturday’s legislation allowed for criminal sanctions and gave the government powers to take over assets if executives fail to comply with instructions to keep blast furnaces open. MPs left for their Easter holidays on Tuesday and were not due to return to parliament until April 22.

MPs last sat on a Saturday recall of parliament at the start of the Falklands War between Britain and Argentina in 1982. Scunthorpe in northern England is Britain’s last

virgin steel plant - which produces steel from raw rather than recycled materials - after Tata’s Port Talbot shuttered its blast furnace last year.

British Steel has said US President Donald Trump’s tariffs on the sector were partly to blame for the Scunthorpe plant’s difficulties. However, fierce competition from cheaper Asian steel has heaped pressure on Europe’s beleaguered industry in recent years. British Steel has its roots as far back as the Industrial Revolution but took shape in 1967 when the Labour government nationalised the industry, which at the time employed nearly 270,000 people.

3 dead, 118 arrested in India protests over Waqf land bill

AFP
Kolkata

India deployed troops yesterday to quell deadly protests that have erupted in the state of West Bengal over legislation to change how Muslim-owned properties are managed.

Police fired tear gas at the thousands of demonstrators who gathered on Friday in the state’s Murshidabad district. Three people, including a child, were killed, police told AFP yesterday. “So far, 118 people have been arrested in connection with the violence,” said Jawed Shamim, a senior police official in the state, adding that at least 15 police officers were injured. The state’s High Court ordered federal troops to deploy. The Waqf amendment bill that set off the protests was passed earlier this month after heated debate.

According to the ruling Hindu nationalist government, it will boost transparency around land management by holding accountable powerful Waqf boards, which control properties gifted by Muslim charitable endowments. But the opposition has called the bill a polarising “attack” on India’s Muslim minority.

Cold winds sweep Beijing, disrupting travel, closing key sites

Reuters
Beijing

China’s capital hunkered down yesterday as rare typhoon-like gales swept northern regions, forcing the closure of historic sites and disrupting travel while bringing late snowfalls and hailstone showers in some areas.

Windows shook and trees crashed onto footpaths and cars, rocked by gusts of wind driven by a cold vortex from neighbouring Mongolia that sent temperatures plunging by more than 12C.

The winds, which started on Friday, are set to continue over the weekend, packing gusts of up to 150kph, the official Xinhua news agency said. They brought late snowfalls in Inner Mongolia and hailstones in southern China.

Beijing issued its second-highest gale alert this weekend, for the first time in a decade, warning 22mn residents to avoid non-essential travel as winds could po-



An emergency team member repairs cables following strong winds that damaged a power pole, in Beijing, yesterday.

tentially break April records dating from 1951. The winds dominated social media chats, with many people expressing concern for food delivery workers braving the conditions.

“In weather like this, we can choose not to order delivery - it’s too hard for them,” one Weibo user

wrote. By 11.30am, 838 flights had been cancelled at Beijing’s two major airports, the Flight Master tracking app showed, while the capital’s historic sights and parks were shut, with some old trees trimmed in preparation for the cold blast. The winds forced the postponement of a half-marathon



People walk amid strong winds in Beijing, yesterday.

set for Sunday featuring humanoid robots competing with humans in a bid to showcase China’s technological advances.

Sandstorms raging over a stretch from Inner Mongolia to the Yangtze River region crippled road travel in eight provinces, Xinhua and state broadcaster CCTV said.

Sandstorms were expected to impact Shanghai from Saturday afternoon through to Sunday morning.

Strong winds bringing sand and dust from Mongolia are routine in spring, but climate change has made weather events more extreme.

Bangladesh launches probe after effigy resembling Hasina burnt

AFP
Dhaka

An effigy said to resemble ousted Bangladesh prime minister Sheikh Hasina and titled “Face of Fascism” was torched ahead of a celebratory march in Dhaka, authorities said yesterday.

The cane-and-paper effigy was part of preparations being made at Dhaka University for Pohela Boishakh, a day symbolically con-

sidered as the start of the year by the Bengali community, on Monday.

The effigy portrayed a woman with a toothy grin, four horns on her head and a large nose, with many on social media believing it resembled Hasina.

Mohammed Azharul Islam Sheikh, dean of the university’s fine arts faculty, said it was set on fire by “unidentified persons” early on Saturday.

A complaint was raised with police and an investigation will

The effigy portrayed a woman with a toothy grin, four horns on her head and a large nose, with many on social media believing it resembled Hasina

be undertaken, he said. However, Bangladesh cultural affairs adviser Mostofa Sarwar Farooki accused “friends of Hasina” of setting fire to it.

“Those who have shown such reckless audacity... will be brought to justice,” he wrote

on his Facebook page. Another structure on the site, a dove representing peace, was also damaged in the fire.

Fire service and civil defence spokesperson Shahjahan Sikder told reporters that the cause of the fire was unknown. The an-

nual march has been organised by Dhaka University’s fine arts department since 1989 and was declared an “Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity” by Unesco in 2016.

Hasina is wanted on charges of crimes against humanity for the killing of hundreds of protesters during the unrest that toppled her government last August.

She has defied extradition requests from Bangladesh after she fled to old ally India as crowds stormed her palace.

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GULF TIMES

Tariffs war may have devastating impact on the vulnerable developing countries

The significant shift in US trade policy is expected to have far-reaching implications for the global economy, affecting various sectors and countries differently.

Following the earlier seismic changes to US trade policy, the White House on April 9 announced a 90-day pause on “reciprocal tariffs” for most countries with the exception of China.

Already, there are fears that global trade could shrink by 3% as a result of the United States’ new tariff measures, which in the longer term, according to some economists, could reshape and boost as-yet untapped regional commercial links.

“Trade wars are extremely negative,” UN Secretary-General António Guterres said and noted that when it comes to trade wars, “nobody wins” and “everybody tends to lose”.

The UN chief said he was “particularly worried” at the impact rising tariffs could have on vulnerable developing countries, warning that it could be “devastating”.

“I sincerely hope that we will have no recession, because a recession will have dramatic consequences, especially for the poorest people in the world,” Guterres said.

His colleague, Pamela Coke-Hamilton, who is the head of the International Trade Centre (ITC), noted that exports from Mexico had already been “highly impacted” by earlier seismic changes to US trade policy.

“Countries like Mexico, China and Thailand, but also countries in southern Africa are among the most affected, alongside the US itself,” she said. While the 90-day pause on the so-called reciprocal tariffs applies to imports from most countries and brings down rates to a still

The effects of these tariffs will not be uniform across the globe, according to Oxford Economics

Canada, Brazil “and to a lesser extent, India”, the ITC chief insisted. Other countries have followed suit, including Vietnam, whose exports “are redirecting away from the US, Mexico and China” while “increasing substantially” towards the EU, Republic of Korea and others, said Coke-Hamilton, whose UN specialised agency offers assistance to developing countries.

The problem for emerging economies is that they are less well equipped to “pivot” when faced with “instabilities”, the ITC chief explained, since they often lack the manufacturing diversity and ability to add value to raw commodities of more industrialised nations.

Especially vulnerable trading partners of the US include Lesotho, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Madagascar and Myanmar that are “the most exposed”, she continued.

Confirming that the World Trade Organisation (WTO) had estimated that commerce between China and the US could drop by up to 80% if the highly unusual situation continues, the ITC official pointed out that they constituted only “three per cent to four per cent of world trade. So, there is 96% out there that is still trading and that will trade”.

Nonetheless, the impact of the “indeterminate extension of 90 days on and on” has not been good for global commerce and “does not necessarily lend itself to stability”, Coke-Hamilton noted.

“Irrespective of whether there is an extension, on and on, the fact that there is no stability, there is no predictability will affect trade and firms and decisions that are being made in real time.”

She added: “This would not be the first time that there have been tremors in the world economic system. We have seen it over the last 50 years in different dispensations. This one is probably a little harsher, a little more tremulous.”

The effects of these tariffs will not be uniform across the globe, according to Oxford Economics. Different countries and regions will experience varying levels of impact, with some economies more vulnerable due to their reliance on exports to the US.

As nations begin to announce retaliatory measures, the landscape of global trade is poised for upheaval.

“If these tariffs remain in place, we can expect a substantial downgrade in growth forecasts for both the US and the global economy. While a recession may be avoided, world trade volumes are likely to suffer significantly, affecting economic performance through 2025 and beyond,” Oxford Economics noted.

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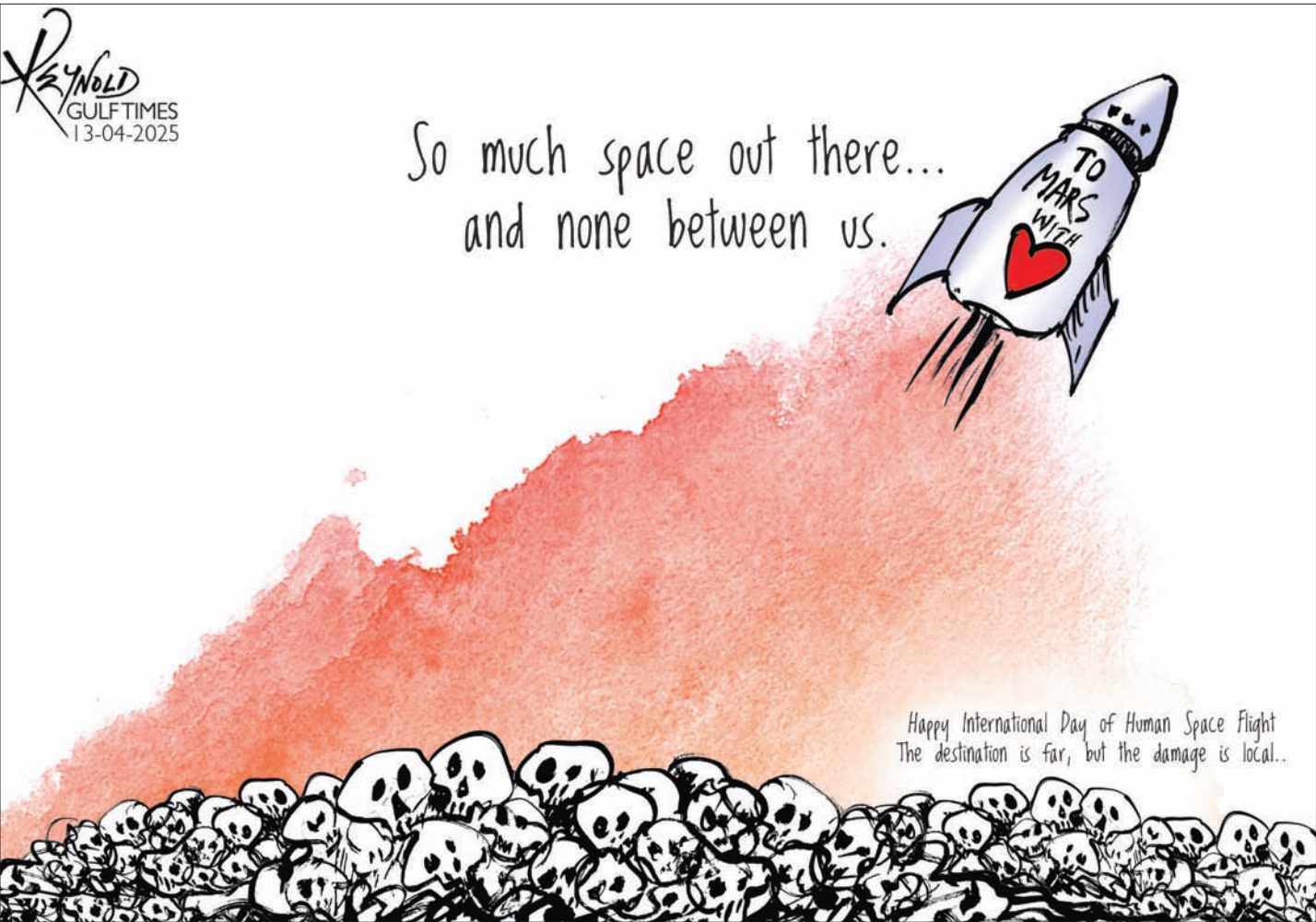
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Qatar, Indonesia deepen ties with strategic vision

QNA
Doha

Qatar and Indonesia share strong historical ties across all fields, with their relationship witnessing continuous growth since its establishment nearly half a century ago. This growth is driven by the shared commitment of both nations’ leaderships to elevate their relations toward strategic partnerships and a promising future of growth and prosperity, serving the interests and aspirations of their peoples.

In this context, the visit of Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto to Doha is significant. His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani will meet with the president at the Amiri Diwan to discuss bilateral relations and ways to enhance co-operation in various sectors. The visit is expected to provide a strong boost and open a new chapter in the relationship between the two countries, particularly in economic, trade, and investment fields.

Diplomatic relations between the two countries were established in 1976, with Qatar opening its embassy in Jakarta in 1996, and Indonesia inaugurating its embassy in Doha in 1999.

Since 1995, the two nations have engaged in numerous high-level visits and official exchanges. Notably, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani visited Indonesia in October 2017, where His Highness held official talks with then-president Joko Widodo at the Bogor Palace in Jakarta.

The discussions focused on strengthening bilateral relations and expanding co-operation in economy, energy, investment, tourism, and infrastructure, benefiting both nations and their peoples. The two leaders also exchanged views on regional and international developments.

In another high-level visit, His Highness the Father Amir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani visited Indonesia in 2009.

On the other hand, former Indonesian

president Joko Widodo visited Qatar in 2015, while former president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono visited Doha in May 2006. Former president Abdurrahman Wahid visited Qatar twice, in November 1999 and again in November 2000 to attend the OIC Summit.

In the context of ongoing consultations, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani received the Indonesian President-elect and then-Defence Minister Prabowo Subianto, along with Vice-President-elect Gibran Rakabuming Raka, and the delegation accompanying them, during their visit to Doha last May to participate in the Fourth Qatar Economic Forum. The meeting reviewed the strong bilateral relations and explored ways to enhance co-operation across various fields, alongside exchanging views on shared concerns.

In March, Indonesian Foreign Minister Sugiono visited Doha and met with HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani. The discussions focused on bilateral co-operation, developments in Gaza and the occupied Palestinian territories, efforts to maintain the ceasefire, and the delivery of humanitarian aid. Additionally, HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Mohammed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh al-Khulaifi held bilateral talks with the Indonesian Foreign Minister, addressing political, economic, investment, and developmental co-operation, as well as regional and international issues of mutual interest. Both sides emphasised the importance of co-ordination in the international and regional issues to support stability and development in the Middle East.

Indonesia and Qatar share a common vision for peace, stability, and building a more prosperous, just, and secure world. Their co-operation on regional and international issues is marked by close co-ordination and alignment in perspectives. The two nations’ joint membership in the Organisation of Islamic Co-operation (OIC) provides an important framework for collaboration on matters concerning the Islamic world.

Bilateral relations are governed by a

series of agreements and memorandums of understanding that reflect both countries’ commitment to expanding co-operation across multiple sectors. These agreements cover political, economic, social, educational, cultural, health, tourism, technology, maritime, agricultural, industrial, media, youth, sports, banking, financial services, aviation, mutual investment protection, double taxation avoidance, labour force regulations for Indonesian workers in Qatar, and visa waivers for holders of diplomatic and special passports.

Indonesia is a key trading partner for Qatar, with bilateral trade growing by over 150% in recent years, reaching approximately QR3.2bn in 2022, compared to QR1.26bn in 2017. Qatari investments in Indonesia have also seen remarkable growth, expanding into sectors such as telecommunications, banking, and energy.

Additionally, several Indonesian companies actively invest in the Qatari market in partnership with local firms across various industries. The Qatar-Indonesia 2023 Year of Culture celebrated the rich heritage of both nations, strengthening their historic ties through more than 50 programmes held in Qatar and Indonesia.

These initiatives focused on creative industries, social development, innovation, and cultural heritage.

Educational co-operation between Qatar and Indonesia continues to expand, with numerous agreements and partnerships aimed at enhancing student exchanges and joint research efforts.

Qatar plays a significant role in supporting development and humanitarian projects in Indonesia through investments in infrastructure and aid provided by various Qatari charitable organisations. These efforts include emergency relief for natural disasters, the construction of mosques, schools, and multi-purpose centres, well drilling for clean water access, funding income-generating projects for needy families, and supporting orphans. Meanwhile, the Indonesian community in Qatar actively contributes to the nation’s economic and social sectors.

Through wise leadership, Qatar has successfully positioned itself as a preferred destination for global investments. The country boasts an attractive investment climate supported by progressive laws and regulations, political and social stability, and a strategic geographic location.

Indonesia, located in Southeast Asia and Oceania, is the world’s largest archipelagic state, consisting of over 17,000 islands, around 6,000 of which are inhabited. As the largest country in Southeast Asia, Indonesia spans 1.9mn sq km and has a population of 285mn. The country serves as a bridge between Asia and Australia and is strategically positioned along key maritime trade routes, particularly the Malacca Strait.

Indonesia has emerged as a rising global economy, undergoing significant expansion across multiple sectors. The country presents a large, opportunity-filled market that attracts business interest and serves as a vital gateway to Southeast Asia. Its natural resources and investment opportunities span industries such as tourism, real estate development, mining, food security, halal trade, and various services.

Indonesia has maintained a relatively stable economic growth rate of around 5% in recent years, with its primary trade partners including China, Asean countries, the US, Japan, and India.

Indonesia’s major exports consist of commodities such as coke coal, palm oil, iron, and steel, alongside manufactured goods like textiles, leather products, footwear, and wooden items. Imports primarily include machinery and industrial equipment, fuel, chemicals, food products, electronics, and raw materials.



Trump returning world to great power dominance

By casting doubt on the world order, Donald Trump risks dragging the globe back into an era where great powers impose their imperial will on the weak, analysts warn.

Russia wants Ukraine, China demands Taiwan and now the US president seems to be following suit, whether by coveting Canada as the “51st US state”, insisting “we’ve got to have” Greenland or kicking Chinese interests out of the Panama Canal.

Where the United States once defended state sovereignty and international law, Trump’s disregard for his neighbours’ borders and expansionist ambitions mark a return to the days when the world was carved up into spheres of influence.

As recently as Wednesday, US defence secretary Pete Hegseth floated the idea of an American military base to secure the Panama Canal, a strategic waterway controlled by the United States until 1999 which Trump’s administration has vowed to “take back”.

Hegseth’s comments came nearly 35 years after the United States invaded to topple Panama’s dictator Manuel

Noriega, harking back to when successive US administrations viewed Latin America as “America’s backyard”.

“The Trump 2.0 administration is largely accepting the familiar great power claim to ‘spheres of influence,’” Professor Gregory O Hall, of the University of Kentucky, told AFP.

Indian diplomat Jawed Ashraf warned that by “speaking openly about Greenland, Canada, Panama Canal”, “the new administration may have accelerated the slide” towards a return to great power domination.

Since the end of the Cold War, the United States has posed as the custodian of an international order “based on the ideas of countries’ equal sovereignty and territorial integrity”, said American researcher Jeffrey Mankoff, of the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

But those principles run counter to how Russia and China see their own interests, according to the author of “Empires of Eurasia: how imperial legacies shape international security”.

Both countries are “themselves products of empires and continue to function in

many ways like empires”, seeking to throw their weight around for reasons of prestige, power or protection, Mankoff said.

That is not to say that spheres of influence disappeared with the fall of the Soviet Union.

“Even then, the US and Western allies sought to expand their sphere of influence eastward into what was the erstwhile Soviet and then the Russian sphere of influence,” Ashraf, a former adviser to Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, pointed out.

But until the return of Trump, the United States exploited its position as the “policeman of the world” to ward off imperial ambitions while pushing its own interests.

Now that Trump appears to view the cost of upholding a rules-based order challenged by its rivals and increasingly criticised in the rest of the world as too expensive, the United States is contributing to the cracks in the facade with Russia and China’s help.

And as the international order weakens, the great powers “see opportunities to

once again behave in an imperial way”, said Mankoff.

As at Yalta in 1945, when the United States and the Soviet Union divided the post-World War II world between their respective zones of influence, Washington, Beijing and Moscow could again agree to carve up the globe anew.

“Improved ties between the United States and its great-power rivals, Russia and China, appear to be imminent,” Derek Grossman, of the United States’ RAND Corporation think-tank, said in March.

But the haggling over who gets dominance over what and where would likely come at the expense of other countries.

“Today’s major powers are seeking to negotiate a new global order primarily with each other,” Monica Toft, professor of international relations at Tufts University in Massachusetts wrote in the journal Foreign Affairs.

“In a scenario in which the United States, China, and Russia all agree that they have a vital interest in avoiding a nuclear war, acknowledging each other’s spheres

of influence can serve as a mechanism to deter escalation,” Toft said.

If that were the case, “negotiations to end the war in Ukraine could resemble a new Yalta”, she added.

Yet the thought of a Ukraine deemed by Trump to be in Russia’s sphere is likely to send shivers down the spines of many in Europe — not least in Ukraine itself.

“The success or failure of Ukraine to defend its sovereignty is going to have a lot of impact in terms of what the global system ends up looking like a generation from now,” Mankoff said.

“So it’s important for countries that have the ability and want to uphold an anti-imperial version of international order to assist Ukraine,” he added — pointing the finger at Europe.

“In Trump’s world, Europeans need their own sphere of influence,” said Rym Momtaz, a researcher at the Carnegie Endowment for Peace.

“For former imperial powers, Europeans seem strangely on the backfoot as nineteenth century spheres of influence come back as the organising principle of global affairs.”

German refinery plight prompts calls for return of Russian oil

AFP
Schwedt

No Russian oil has been delivered via the Druzhba pipeline to the PCK refinery in Germany in more than two years because of sanctions levied against Moscow following its full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

But with the plant in the town of Schwedt on the border with Poland struggling to adapt to processing other raw materials, calls are growing louder for a return to the good old days.

“Many people, especially in Schwedt, see it as conceivable and desirable that oil could once again flow via the pipeline,” the leader of the city council, Hans-Joachim Hoepfner, told AFP.

Having to accommodate different types of oil at the plant, which employs some 1,200 people, has made production less “effective”, said Hoepfner from the centre-right CDU.

The idea of reopening the door to the European market for Russia has up until now been firmly dismissed by officials in Berlin.

But the thaw in US relations with the Kremlin instigated by President Donald Trump since his return to office has raised hopes of a possible agreement on a ceasefire in the Ukraine war.

“If changes are happening in the relationship with Russia... then I think it is very possible that there is Russian oil,” said Hoepfner.

German sanctions on Russian oil brought a halt to deliveries of crude via the Druzhba pipeline — Russian for “friendship” — at the start of 2023.

Since then, the refinery in Schwedt has been drawing substitute supplies via a pipeline to Rostock, as well as small volumes through the Polish port of Gdansk and from Kazakhstan.

The changes have left the plant operating at around 80 per cent capacity and firmly “in the red”, said Danny Ruthenburg, head of the works council.

A “solution” is urgently needed to keep the refinery running and save jobs locally, said Ruthenburg — whether that means more oil from Rostock or via the Druzhba pipeline after an end to the war in Ukraine.

Dietmar Woidke, the Social Democrat leader of Brandenburg state, last month signalled that he may be open to the return of Russian oil.

“I would be pleased if we could return to normal economic relations with Russia,” said Woidke, describing the refinery as a “hugely important” player in the region’s economy.

Others have been more explicit in their demands.

“Lift the sanctions, because they only hurt us more than the Russians,” said Peggy Lindemann, a member of the works council and city councillor for the far-right Alternative for Germany.

When Russian oil was withdrawn from Schwedt, the government promised to prepare a switch to the production of hydrogen — but the plans have stalled, leaving the plant in limbo.

The situation is also complicated by the fact that the PCK refinery is majority-owned by Rosneft Deutschland, a local subsidiary of the Russian oil giant, and managed through a trusteeship by the German government.

Lavrov hails Trump’s understanding of Ukraine conflict

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov praised US President Donald Trump yesterday for what he said was a better understanding of the Ukraine conflict than any other Western leader.

“When we speak about eliminating root causes of any conflict, including the Ukrainian conflict, this is the only way to resolve the problem and to establish long-lasting peace. Remove root causes,” Lavrov said at the Antalya Diplomacy Forum in southern Turkey.

“President Trump was the first and so far, I think, almost the only one among the Western leaders who repeatedly, with conviction, several times stated that it was a huge mistake to pull Ukraine into Nato. And this is one of the root causes which we quoted so many times.”

President Vladimir Putin, who launched Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, has long cast Ukraine’s tilt to the West, including its desire to join Nato, as a threat to Russia.

Lavrov’s remarks followed talks in St Petersburg on Friday between Putin and Trump’s special envoy Steve Witkoff about the search for a peace deal.

Witkoff has emerged as a key figure in the on-off rapprochement between Moscow and Washington.

However, Friday’s talks took place at a time when US-Russia dialogue aimed at agreeing a ceasefire ahead of a possible peace deal appears to have stalled over disagreements around conditions for a full pause in hostilities.

Commenting on an agreement between Ukraine and Russia to pause strikes on each other’s energy facilities, Lavrov said that Moscow has been keeping its word and accused Kyiv of striking Russian energy infrastructure almost every day.

EU ministers positive on defence fund to ease debt concerns

Reuters
Brussels

European Union (EU) finance ministers expressed interest yesterday in the idea of a joint defence fund that would buy and own defence equipment, but some also said the EU should first look at existing financing options before creating new ones.

The discussion is part of a European effort to prepare for a potential attack from Russia as EU governments realise they can no longer fully rely on the United States for their security.

The ministers were discussing an idea, prepared by the Bruegel think tank, that a group of EU and non-EU countries could set up an intergovernmental fund, with paid-in capital, that would borrow on the market, and jointly buy and own expensive military gear.

The participation of non-EU countries is important to many in the bloc because it would allow for the involvement of defence powerhouse Britain, as well as Norway, Canada or Ukraine.

The fund, called the European Defence Mechanism, would be a way of addressing concerns of highly-indebted countries, because the debt incurred to pay for the equipment would be on the EDM’s books, rather than on national accounts.

“Most ministers were interested in the Bruegel paper,” said Polish Finance Minister Andrzej Domanski, who chaired the talks.

Some countries such as France, Germany and Belgium said, however, that the EU should first look at existing instruments, like the European Investment Bank, the European Defence Fund and the ReArm Europe plan before new instruments are created.

Under the ReArm Europe plan, the EU is looking to boost military spending by €800bn (\$876bn) over the next four years, via loosening fiscal rules on defence investment and joint borrowing for large defence projects against the EU budget.

Domanski said finalising work on the €800bn package was a priority, but that most finance ministers agreed additional tools could be needed — like the Bruegel proposal.

“The reaction to the Bruegel proposal was generally positive,” one senior EU finance official taking part in the meeting said. “There was recognition that ReArm needs to be approved ASAP and then to develop things more along the lines in the Bruegel paper,” the official said.

“But of course ironing out the details requires that we closely work with Ministries of Defence,” the official said.

Bruegel said the EDM fund could focus on “strategic enablers” — costly military infrastructure and equipment armies need to operate — now often pro-



vided by the United States.

These include joint command and control systems, satellite-based intelligence and communication, development of expensive new weapon systems such as fifth- or sixth-generation fighter jets, integrated weapon systems needed by multiple countries like strategic air defence, strategic large-scale air transport and maritime logistics, missiles and nuclear deterrence.

The EDM would also promote a single European market for defence equipment to lower costs and pool resources.

Defence procurement and production in the 27-nation EU is highly fragmented with at least seven different types of tanks, nine types of self-propelled howitzers and seven types of infantry fighting vehicles, which increases costs, reduces interoperability and hinders economies of scale.

The Bruegel paper on the EDM said Europe had a chance to reduce its military dependence on the US by 2030 only if it pooled procurement to the greatest extent possible and created a common European defence market including Britain as a major industrial defence player to boost competition.

Adding to the options, Spain proposed the creation of a temporary special purpose vehicle, financed by contributions from EU governments and open to non-EU members that could also issue joint European debt and have access to money in the European Stability Mechanism, the eurozone bailout fund.

The ministers also agreed that EU countries sharing a border with Russia and Belarus were more exposed to the threat of a Russian attack and therefore should benefit from a joint European effort to bolster defence capabilities.

“This is the time for European solidarity to support Ukraine and Eastern frontline countries. We need to invest together in defence, which is a genuinely European public good that benefits our citizens and bolsters our economic security,” said Spanish Finance Minister Carlos Cuerpo.

Accord ‘in principle’ over tackling future pandemics

World Health Organisation (WHO) members yesterday reached agreement over how to tackle future pandemics after three years of discussions, the co-chair of the negotiating body told AFP.

“We have an accord in principle” and the final version will have to be approved by the various member states, said Anne-Claire Amprou, the French ambassador for world health.

Delegates will meet on Tuesday in Geneva to put the finishing touches to a landmark text on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response and give it their definitive seal of agreement, Amprou added.

That text will require a final seal of approval from all World Health Organisation members at the World Health Assembly in Geneva at the end of May.

The breakthrough, which came after a marathon discussion session stretching for almost 24 hours, was welcomed by enthusiastic applause from the delegates lasting several minutes.

“This is a very good signal. You are part of an incredible history in the making,” said the WHO’s director-general, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus.

“This is a good gift to our children and our grandchildren,” said Tedros, who remained with delegates throughout the

night as they thrashed out an agreement.

“We’re very grateful for their commitment,” he said of the delegates’ marathon overnight session, in a post on X.

French President Emmanuel Macron also welcomed the agreement.

“With the agreement in principle for a pandemic treaty, the international community is creating a new system to better protect us,” he posted on X.

Several sources told AFP one of the main sticking points had been paragraph 11, which deals with technology transfer for production of health products related to pandemics — particularly to benefit developing countries.

Latin American countries are also pushing for facilitation of the transfer.

The issue had been a bone of contention in poorer countries during the Covid-19 pandemic, when they say rich nations hoarded vaccine doses and tests.

Several countries where the pharmaceutical industry is a major economic player oppose the idea of mandatory transfers and have insisted on it being voluntary.

One delegate said this point has been resolved, but the latest version of the text was not available as of Saturday afternoon.

US President Donald Trump in January



A World Health Organisation sign displayed at its headquarters in Geneva. (AFP)

slashed the international aid programme of what had been by far the world’s biggest donor nation.

The United States was absent from the talks, Trump having said on his return to the White House that his country would leave the WHO, which experts say will heighten risks to the global health risk surveillance system.

WHO members decided the agreement had to be drawn up in December 2021, two years after the start of the Covid outbreak, which killed millions across the globe and brought the world economy to its knees.

Yesterday’s text however did not match the scale of WHO member states’ initial ambitions, said James Packard Love,

executive director of Knowledge Ecology International, an advocacy group.

“The initial proposals put forward by the secretary were quite ambitious (but) that’s not the case now,” he told AFP.

“As the negotiations have dragged on, the trade people have come in, the industry, people have come in. And some people ask me, is the agreement so weak now that it’s not worth doing?” he added.

“I tell people that I think there’s a lot of upside for getting an agreement.”

“The pandemic agreement will not be perfect,” Michelle Childs, head of policy advocacy at the Drugs for Neglected Diseases Initiative (DNDI) told AFP.

“It is a product of compromise, and not all ambitions will be met,” she added.

“But it will create a crucial new baseline to build on to save lives during the next global health emergency. It is a floor, not a ceiling,” said Childs.

Warning signs of health risks remain, notably H5N1 bird flu, a virus which continues to infect new species, raising fears of possible transmission between humans.

Other risks include measles outbreaks in 58 countries resulting from insufficient vaccination rates due to mistrust of vaccines caused by misinformation, and mpox, which has been spreading in Africa.



Azerbaijan PM meets minister

Azerbaijan's Prime Minister Ali Asadov met in Baku yesterday with HE the Minister of Culture Sheikh Abdulrahman bin Hamad al-Thani on the sidelines of the Qatar Culture Days in Azerbaijan.

The meeting discussed aspects of cultural co-operation between the two countries and ways to support and develop them.

The discussions also touched on the significance of the Qatar Culture Days, which is currently being held in Azerbaijan, offering an opportunity for the residents and visitors of Baku to explore Qatari arts, culture, and heritage. – QNA



Qatar Culture Days in Baku draws enthusiastic visitors

The Qatar Culture Days event continues in Azerbaijan's capital Baku, drawing significant public attendance and interest.

Scheduled to conclude today, the event is part of the cultural co-operation between Qatar and Azerbaijan, and is aimed at spotlighting Qatari heritage and culture, building bridges of communication, and enhancing cultural exchange between the two countries.

The Qatar Culture Days encompasses a variety of cultural and heritage activities, such as a traditional market, structures inspired by Qatari architecture, the tent, the Qatari Majlis, and folk arts.

Authentic Qatari crafts, such as the making of wooden boxes, traditional garments, *bishts*, falconry, Al Sadu weaving, henna art, maritime heritage, traditional cuisine, art exhibitions, and Arabic calligraphy, are also featured.

Visitors can enjoy Qatari folk performances, sea songs, and traditional dances, providing a comprehensive depiction of Qatari heritage and culture.

This event reflects efforts to strengthen cultural ties between Qatar and Azerbaijan, showcasing their diversity and emphasising the close relationship between the two nations and their commitment to fostering collaboration in various cultural and artistic fields.

This event affirms the Qatar Ministry of Culture's dedication to enhancing the country's global cultural presence and showcasing the nation's civilisational identity through cultural diplomacy as a tool for human connection and mutual understanding.

The Qatar Culture Days event has witnessed enthusiastic public engagement, with visitors actively enjoying the diverse performances and activities. – QNA



Indian community bids farewell to embassy official

The Indian community in Qatar recently bid farewell to Sachin Dinkar Shankpal, first secretary (education and culture) at Indian Cultural Centre (ICC), Shankpal is moving to his next assignment after his tenure in Qatar. The farewell function was held at ICC Ashoka Hall. Indian ambassador Vipul addressed the gathering.



NMoQ to open 'Qatar close to my soul' exhibition on Saturday

By Tawfik Lamari
Staff Reporter

The National Museum of Qatar (NMoQ) is preparing to open the "Qatar close to my soul" exhibition on Saturday, on the development of modern and contemporary art in Qatar, based on the private art collection of Sheikh Abdullah bin Ali bin Saud al-Thani.

The exhibition is scheduled to run from April 19-August 9.

The "Qatar: Close to my soul: art from the Collection of Abdulla bin Ali al-Thani" exhibition presents works from the late 1960s onwards, providing a broad overview of Qatari art, artists,

movements, and ideas that have shaped modern and contemporary art from the country.

Modern and contemporary art in Qatar has emerged as a visual extension of the political, economic and sociocultural context of the country in the second half of the 20th century.

A poetic journey into the past and present, "Qatar: Close to my soul" is a testament to the diversity and development of the nation's visual culture.

Featuring a significant number of artists and artworks, the exhibition reveals the distinct thematic approaches that have emerged and converged over different generations.

The "Qatar close to my soul" exhibition



is divided into three thematic sections.

The first of these, "O'mri Qatar", explores how artists draw inspiration from

traditional architectural and natural landscape.

The second, "Dewdrops", features works portraying society, and the third, "Boundless Expanse", presents various experiments in abstraction and *hurruffiya*, an art form incorporating Arabic letterforms.

Through the exhibited works, texts and archival material, visitors will gain a deeper insight into the history of modern and contemporary art in Qatar.

The title and narrative of the exhibition are inspired by a well-known poem and song, titled *Allah Ya O'mri Qatar*.

It was written by Abdullah al-Hammadi in 1975 and was performed by Mohammed al-Saai in the following years.

The poem is widely regarded as a profoundly emotional expression of the poet's love for his homeland.

Since the late 1970s, the poem's simple yet demonstrative language has garnered widespread popularity, evoking nostalgic sentiments across all generations in Qatar.

This poem intertwines with Sheikh Abdulla bin Ali al-Thani's collecting practices, reflecting his discerning appreciation and passion for art.

It serves as a clear means of expressing his profound love for his homeland and his unwavering commitment to preserving Qatar's artistic legacy.

For tickets visit <https://mathaf.org.qa/en/calendar/qatar-close-to-my-soul/>